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THE DEVALUATION OF LANGUAGE IN AVANT-GARDE DRAMA

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

LINDA BEN-ZVI

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THE DEVALUATION OF LANGUAGE IN AVANT-GARDE DRAMA

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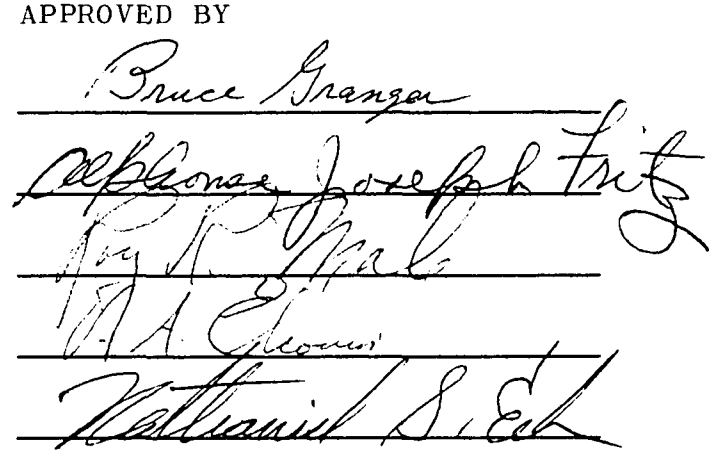

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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PREFACE

In an age of ironies one of the best concerns the number of words being written about the devaluation and dissolution of language. Never before in history have words been used to say so much about the inability to say anything. The very proliferation of words decrying language indicates the predicament in which contemporary man finds himself. He understands that words no longer express his thoughts. Enervated by extended misuse, they have ceased to function as communicative agents. Yet man has no other means at his disposal to express this realization than words themselves. Samuel Beckett, perhaps better than any other writer today, has touched on this irony. Clov in Endgame speaks the frustration of all men when he says, "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent."[1]

George Steiner, whose books Language and Silence and Extraterritorial have studied the failure of language, explains the two alternatives stated by Clov. "To a writer who feels that the condition of language is in question

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[1]Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 44.

. . . two essential courses are available: he may seek to render his own idiom representative of the general crisis, to convey through it the precariousness and vulnerability of the communicative act; or he may choose the suicidal rhetoric of silence."[2]

Two men--Mallarmé and Rimbaud--have become contemporary symbols of the alternatives open to the artist. The former attempted to forge a personalistic idiom divorced from the confines of denotatively charged meaning. The latter, despairing of the possibility of ever purifying language, lapsed into silence. The two positions, immersion in words and retreat from words, are not as far apart as might be imagined. To the degree that a personalistic language borders on incomprehensibility it moves perilously close to silence as well. The contemporary artist who would challenge language finds himself occupying a narrow space bordered on either side by silence.

Contemporary drama, in its desire to transcend the limitations of words, has experimented with both silence and revolutionary forms of expression exclusive of words. Whereas poetry and the novel cannot reject language totally and still exist, the drama has recourse to communicative agents outside the verbal matrix. A poem without words is a blank piece of paper; a play without words may be a moving

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[2]George Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967), pp. 49-50.

viable work of art. This idea that plays need not be yoked to words, that they have unique languages of their own with which to communicate, was expressed by Antonin Artaud: He believed that the theatre was not limited to a language of words.

> Dialogue--a thing written and spoken--does not belong specifically to the stage, it belongs to books. . . . I say that the stage is a concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language to speak. I say that this concrete language intended for the senses and independent of speech, has first to satisfy the senses, that there is a poetry of the senses as there is a poetry of language, and that this concrete physical language to which I refer is truly theatrical only to the degree that the thoughts it expresses are beyond the reach of the spoken language.[3]

This notion that drama could have its own language, no longer totally dependent on words, lies at the heart of the movement known as Theatre of the Absurd.

I use the term Theatre of the Absurd throughout this study, recognizing, however, that the term is a misleading generic label. Ionesco, Beckett, and Pinter are unique playwrights, and the attempt to categorize them under any umbrella term, no matter how wide it is, is dishonest. Martin Esslin, in light of the widespread and uncritical acceptance of his classification, felt compelled in an essay entitled "Theatre of the Absurd Revisited," to say,

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[3]Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 37.

"It is a basic mistake to assume that all the works that somehow come under this label are the same, or even very similar, and it is nonsense to try to attach a value judgment to the whole category."[4] What he does indicate, and what I have taken to be the most important function of the term, justifying its use, is not its implied existential position but rather an inherent attitude toward language. Ionesco emphasizes the verbal basis of Absurdist Theatre. "What is sometimes labeled the absurd," he noted, "is only the denunciation of the ridiculous nature of a language which is empty of substance, made up of cliches and slogans."[5]

Esslin agrees that the most lasting effect of the movement will not be its articulation of a metaphysical position, but rather the dramatic form this articulation takes. "What is far more important to the concept of the Theatre of the Absurd is the form in which this sense of bewilderment and mystery expresses itself: the devaluation and even downright dissolution of language, the disintegration of plot, characterization, and final solution which had hitherto been the hallmark of drama, and the substitution of new elements of form--concrete stage imagery, repetition or intensification, a whole new stage

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[4]Martin Esslin, "The Theatre of the Absurd Revisited," Reflections (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1941), p. 180.

[5]Eugène Ionesco, "The Avant-Garde Theatre," Tulane Drama Review, 5, No. 3 (December, 1960), p. 48.

language."[6] Experimentation with new forms of language divorced from denotative words has been the most important contribution of the Theatre of the Absurd. Most critics, however, have failed to concentrate on the importance of the form and have chosen to discuss the metaphysical arguments within the Absurdist plays.

This study is an attempt to indicate the nature of the new stage language the Absurdists created. The use of the term language is somewhat confusing. As used in this study it refers not to words but to "the method of expressing thoughts, feelings, wants, etc. other than by words."[7] The major types of language discussed are the Language of Silence and the Language of Poetry.

The Language of Silence will illustrate the rhetorical function of silence as it is used both as a protest against verbal language and as a directly communicative agent in its own right. The three aspects of silence discussed are (1) Silence as Babble, (2) Silence as Metaphysical Anguish, and (3) Silence as Communication.

The Language of Poetry, appropriating Jean Cocteau's term la poesie de théâtre, indicates those elements which create a poetic impression outside of the confines of denotative and discursive words. The three major sources of theatre poetry to be discussed are (1) Poetry of Space,

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[6] Esslin, p. 180.

[7] Oxford English Dictionary, VI (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 57.

(2) Poetry of Movement, and (3) Poetry of Imagery.

One important point must be made. The movement toward devaluation of language has not been an arbitrary one on the part of the playwrights studied. They have reacted to the debasement of language in the society. It has not been their intention to destroy the traditional verbal basis of theatre, as it was the goal of Artaud and much of the post-Absurdist movement discussed in Part Three of this study. What Ionesco, Beckett, and Pinter have sought is a recreation of language, purged of its artistic and communicative limitations. As Ionesco explains:

> Since Picasso, painting has been trying to free itself from all that is not painting; literature, anecdotes, history, photography. Since Picasso, therefore, painters have been trying to rediscover the fundamental schemas of painting, pure forms, color used as color. And here it is not a question of aestheticism or of what today is called, somewhat incorrectly, formalism, but rather of reality expressed pictorially, in a language as revealing as that of words or sounds. If we thought at first that there was a certain disintegration of pictorial language we have discovered since that basically it was a question of an asepsis, a purification, the rejection of a parasitic language. Similarly, it is after having disarticulated theatrical elements, after having rejected false theatre language, that we must try as painters have done, to rearticulate them, purified and reduced to their essence. The theatre can only be theatre. . . .[8]

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[8]Eugène Ionesco, "Discovering the Theatre," trans. Leonard Pronko in Theatre in the Twentieth Century, ed. Robert Corrigan (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 91.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DECLINE OF WORDS

In the introduction to Four in America Gertrude Stein makes the following observation:

> Now listen! Can't you see that when the language was new--as it was with Chaucer and Homer--the poet could use the name of a thing and the thing was really there? He could say 'O moon,' 'O sea,' 'O love,' and the moon and the sea and love were really there. And can't you see that after hundreds of years had gone by and thousands of poems had been written, he could call on those words and find that they were worn out literary words? The excitingness of pure being had withdrawn from them; they were just rather stale literary words. Now the poet has to work in the excitingness of pure being; he has to get back that intensity into the language. We all know that it's hard to write poetry in a late age; and we know that you have to put some strangeness, something unexpected, into the structure of the sentence in order to bring back vitality to the noun. Now it's not enough to be bizarre; the strangeness in the sentence structure has to come from the poetic gift, too. That's why it's doubly hard to be a poet in a late age. Now you all have seen hundreds of poems about roses and you know in your bones the rose is not there. . . . Now listen: I'm no fool. I know that in daily life we won't go around saying 'is a . . . is a . . . is a . . . .' Yes, I'm no fool; but I think that in that line the

> rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years.[1]

All artists, whatever their medium, destined to work "in a late age," have shared with Stein the perplexing problem of conveying "the excitingness of pure being" in their art. Cubism, abstract expressionism, imagist poetry, minimal sculpture, and modern dance were attempts to find a form that would capture the multiplicity of contemporary experience in a way that would render the art form and the experience vital and immediate by severing it from the enervated forms of the past.

For those artists whose medium is language the attempt to find a new form has been complicated by the peculiar nature of words. David Lodge, in The Language of Fiction, notes that "the writer's medium differs from the media of most other arts--pigment, stone, musical notes, etc.--in that it is never virgin: words come to the writer already violated by other men, impressed with meanings derived from the world of common experience."[2]

This violation of words has gone even beyond the literary failure that Gertrude Stein illustrated in the 1940's. It has become the central problem and consideration of all areas of contemporary speculation. Ludwig Wittgenstein, one

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[1]Gertrude Stein, Four in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), p. 43.

[2]David Lodge, Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 47.

of the foremost philosophers of the century, placed the failure of language at the heart of his philosophical discussions. "Philosophy," he said, "is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language."[3] His early philosophical inquiries were really attempts to refine the language tool. "The results of philosophy," he noted, "are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language."[4] The Tractatus ends with the cryptic statement, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."[5] Philosophical Investigations goes beyond this stricture to include, in the realm of the unsayable, all metaphysical speculations themselves. Description, based on empirical observation, was the only function that language could have, Wittgenstein finally felt. "We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place."[6] Since metaphysics is speculative rather than experiential, it too becomes ultimately impossible.

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[3]Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Ascombe (New York: Macmillan Co., 1953), p. 47e.

[4]Wittgenstein, p. 48e.

[5]Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus. logico-philosophicus, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinnes (London: Routledge & Paul, 1963), p. 131.

[6]Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 47e.

Wittengenstein places the limits of verbal referential experience in what he terms language games. Within the context of a particular situation, in the use made of language derived from its function in the situation, comes whatever meaning language can verifiably offer.[7] Yet even within language games, the problem of relating personal experience limits the functioning of language. "The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own exemplar, but that nobody knows whether people also have this or something else.[8]

Eric Heller makes an interesting comparison between Wittgenstein and the other great philosopher who has influenced avant-garde art forms--Friedrich Nietzsche.[9] Both came to the realization that there is no verifiable way man may hold on to his traditional notions of existence, and both stood ready to renounce metaphysical speculations. To Wittgenstein the impossibility lay in the failure of language, to Nietzsche in the absence of absolutes. They shared, Heller notes, "the creative distrust of all those

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[7]The relation between Wittgenstein's language games and the games which form the basic structure for so many Absurdist plays will be discussed briefly in Part II, Section II: "Poetry as Gesture." More study needs to be done on the relation between Wittgenstein's concept of language and Absurdist drama.

[8]Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 95e.

[9]Eric Heller, "Ludwig Wittgenstein," Encounter, No. 72 (September, 1959), p. 44.

categorical certainties that, as if they were an inherited anatomy, have been allowed to determine the body of traditional thought."[10] It has been this distrust and the shattering of form and content that has permeated all avant-garde art forms of expression.

"L'ere sans parole" is the critic Maurice Blanchot's way of describing this modern sceptical era, where words no longer convey meaning and there is no meaning to convey. The art forms that have emerged in this milieu have certain predictable characteristics. First, there is an emphasis on sensory communication at the expense of intellectual understanding. Since facts are questionable and verification impossible in a relativistic world, the intellect can no longer be trusted to serve as the prime medium of apprehension. The senses, limited though they sometimes are, have the advantage of transmitting an empirical truth, the only truth of which one can be reasonably certain. The art work ceases to be a vehicle for the meaning but, rather, incorporates the meaning in its very physical existence. Surface technique takes precedence over ideas or facts traditionally thought of as the raison d'etre of the art work. The simple execution of the work rather than the degree of faithfulness to some representational form becomes the standard for judgment. For example, the

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[10]Heller, p. 45.

subject matter of an abstract expressionist painting is actually itself: its color, texture, size, and total visual composition. When dealing with language the same emphasis on "thereness" is also possible. As Roland Barthes says about the novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet, surface description "constitutes an object without heredity, without associations, and without references, an object rigorously confined to the order of its components, and refusing with all the stubbornness of its thereness to involve the reader in an elsewhere whether functional or substantial."[11] The reader, if he is to become involved in a Robbe-Grillet novel must do so of his own volition since there is no verbal prodding on the part of the author. All there is is an opaque scene where one may or may not enter.

The same idea of being which is synonymous with meaning is stated by John Cage, a leader in the movement toward a new form in music:

> CONTEMPORARY MUSIC IS NOT THE MUSIC OF THE FUTURE
> NOR MUSIC OF THE PAST BUT SIMPLY
> MUSIC PRESENT WITH US: THIS MOMENT NOW,
> THIS NOW MOMENT.[12]

These works defy reduction into easily comprehensible forms. The form can be described but not totally explained or understood. As Susan Sontag points out in her essay

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[11]Roland Barthes, "Objective Literature: An Introductory Essay," Two Novels by Alain Robbe-Grillet: Jealousy and In the Labyrinth, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 14.

[12]John Cage, Silence (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 43.

"Against Interpretation," where form and content are interrelated by virtue of the extension of the existential position from one to the other, the attempt to reduce the work to a definition of intention is rendered useless, for its intention is its being.[13]

Most contemporary art works embody the inexplicable elements of life within their form. Veracity requires that contemporary works present divergent ideas as they exist in the society---unsynthesized and contradictory. Fragmentation is caught, not reduced, in the art object. In Seven Types of Ambiguity, William Empson described this occurrence "when two or more meanings of a statement do not agree among themselves, but combine to make clear a more complicated state of mind in the author."[14] This state of mind defies simple reduction, and the art that such a state of mind gives rise to is one that is elusive and ultimately untranslatable.

To summarize, the climate in which the contemporary artist works is characterized by fragmentation in attitudes and by decay of traditional forms of expression, particularly words. Such a climate requires art which will address itself to the problems of existence, but will not shirk from the necessity of presenting in its form the mirror

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[13]Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation and Other Essays (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1966).

[14]William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity (New York: New Directions, 1946), p. 14.

image of the dissonant elements in contemporary life. In the absence of a unifying mythos, the contemporary artist has taken upon himself the role of testifier and observer. Madeline says in Ionesco's Victims of Duty, "There are always things to say. Since the modern world is in a state of decomposition, you can be a witness to decomposition."[15] An art portraying decomposition need not be a decaying art itself. It is a matter of distinguishing the content which describes decomposition from a form which may in itself be vital and fresh. In other words, the portrayal of chaos need not imply a chaotic art. Samuel Beckett tried to explain this difference in an interview with Tom Driver: "What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. . . . To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist."[16]

In painting the artist visually recreated "the mess" by filling his canvas with the colors, dots, and splotches that captured the swirling world of man's consciousness

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[15]Eugène Ionesco, Victims of Duty in Three Plays; Amedee, The New Tenant, and Victims of Duty, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 162.

[16]Samuel Beckett as quoted by Tom Driver, "Beckett by the Madeline," Columbia University Forum, 4 (Summer, 1961), p. 23.

and society's chaos. One has only to think of a Jackson Pollock canvas to see that the form and content of the modern milieu had found an expressive form. The atonal music of Robert Schumann or John Cage achieved the same effect. In media which rely on words, the search for an adequate form to capture unsynthesized experience has been more difficult. The following discussion will trace the slow emergence of such a form in drama.

The Movement Away from Language in Drama

Drama, Eugène Ionesco notes, is always twenty or thirty years behind poetry. This tardiness may explain why the revolution in dramatic form did not occur until the nineteen fifties while similar experiments in poetry occurred in the early twenties. What Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane were attempting to do--each in his own way--was to break the sterile poetic manners of expression of the past and to offer new, fresh angles of vision. Emphasis on texture, rhythm, and sound replaced the earlier preoccupation with scenery, ideas and discursive arguments that characterized much didactic and representational poetry forms. A poem, they argued, was not a painting. It had a character of its own and required an audience to meet it on its own terms. These terms were most significantly related to sound. Likewise, the theatrical avant-gardists of the past two decades have attempted a revision of form which called attention to the unique

characteristics of the medium in which they were working. But, whereas the medium of poetry was limited to a language of words, that of the theatre had available to it other communicative agents: lighting, gesture, costumes, dance, props, scenery.

Although the theatre is perhaps the most eclectic of art forms, encompassing as it does so many different media, until the Theatre of the Absurd little had been done to wrench drama from its position as a form of literary expression. This is not to say that playwrights such as Ionesco, Beckett, and Pinter were the first to offer a new dramatic scope. There were experiments in this direction over the past hundred years. Although they failed to foster any ongoing theatrical movement, these experiments with form should be noted, for the seeds they spread may well have been germinating and, directly or indirectly, may have been responsible for the flourishing of dramatic experimentation in the last twenty years.

It can be argued that the beginning of the modern dramatic epoch predates that of poetry. In 1827 Victor Hugo made the following challenge: "Let us take the hammer to theories and poetic systems. Let us throw down the old plastering that conceals the facade of art. There are neither rules or models; or, rather, there are no other rules than the general rules of nature, which soar above the whole field of art, and the special rules which result

from the conditions appropriate to the subject of each composition."[17] As John Gassner notes in Directions in Modern Theatre, it was this cry for freedom, as much as anything else, that ushered in the modern period.[18] Hugo's call for the overthrow of rules and models allowed later playwrights to work unencumbered by regulations when they attempted to reinterpret nature as that which existed even beyond the observable forms which Hugo had in mind.

In 1873, Emile Zola called for a freedom of expression in his Preface to Thérèse Raquin. He called for a theatre that would mirror the wider considerations of the age: "the author's very obvious desire /is/ to bring the theatre into closer relation with the great movement toward truth and experimental science which has since the last century been on the increase in every manifestation of human intellect."[19] Zola's insistence on the interrelatedness of man and his environment, and his desire to move away from the artificiality of historical, romantic plays and toward a form that would go to life itself for its inspiration is a step toward modernism. "Of course the past is

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[17]Victor Hugo, Preface to Cromwell, quoted by Barrett H. Clark, European Theories of the Drama, rev. ed. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1965), p. 368.

[18]John Gassner, Directions in Modern Theater and Drama (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), p. 9.

[19]Emile Zola, "Preface to Thérèse Raquin," quoted by Barrett H. Clark, European Theories of the Drama, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1965), p. 377.

dead. We must look to the future, and the future will have to do with the human problem studied in the framework of reality. . . . The decayed scaffoldings of the drama of yesterday will fall of their own accord. We must clear the ground."[20]

Twenty-three years later someone else was crying for destruction of the scaffoldings. This someone was Ubu, who declared, "We won't have demolished anything at all if we don't demolish even the ruins."[21] And who was Ubu? He was a foolish, coarse, bloated man carrying a toilet brush as a scapter and menacing the world with it. There are many who feel that his first entrance on the stage on the evening of December 10, 1896 heralded the beginning of the avant-garde theatre movement. Ubu Roi begins:

> Pa Ubu. Pschitt! (Merde)
>
> Ma Ubu. Ooh! What a nasty word. Pa Ubu, you're a dirty old man.
>
> Pa Ubu. Watch out I don't bash yer nut in, Ma Ubu.[22]

Merde, le mot d' Ubu, was more than just profanity: it was a direct challenge to tradition and propriety that had dictated what constituted art in the past. As George Wellwarth notes, "The word shocked propriety. But the

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[20]Zola, Preface to Thérèse Raquin, p. 378.

[21]Alfred Jarry, Ubu Roi, as quoted by Gassner, p. 329.

[22]Alfred Jarry, The Ubu Plays, edited with an introduction by Simon Watson Taylor (London: Metheun Co., 1968), p. 21.

rebellion implicit in the utterance of the word on a public stage was a rebellion against all society and, indeed, all life. It was an evocation of disgust so deep that conventional language was powerless to express it, and at the same time the very unconventionality of the word was a gesture of defiance in itself."[23] The use of obscenity was also a way of indicating the inability of ordinary language to shock and a way of revitalizing language.

The reverberations of Ubu are still being felt. "Ah, but the premiere of Ubu Roi was a grand evening, and historical indeed. Since then literature, art, politics have been saturated with Ubu; the scent of Ubu is everywhere,"[24] Herbert Blau reports in The Impossible Theatre. This scent was not just shock; it was indignation. Jarry was protesting against the stupidity of the society, by turning his primitive mirror on Ubu, the grossest element in the society. Audiences, however, assumed that the author supported Ubu, since they considered the character to be a persona for the playwright. Jarry explains his intention: "And what no one seemed to have understood--it was made clear enough, though, and constantly recalled by Ma Ubu's continually repeated: 'What an idiotic man! . . . What

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[23]George Wellwarth, The Theater of Protest and Paradox: Developments in the Avant-Garde Drama, rev. ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 4.

[24]Herbert Blau, The Impossible Theatre: A Manifesto (New York: Macmillian Co., 1964), p. 29.

a sorry imbecile!'--is that Ubu's speeches were not meant to be full of witticisms, as various little ubuists claimed, but of stupid remarks, uttered with all the authority of the Ape."[25]

Like later playwrights, Jarry felt he was misunderstood because his satire was aimed at those very members of the audience that failed to recognize themselves when they were ridiculed. In placing himself in opposition to the majority of the audience, and in using his play as a verbal assault on the audience, Jarry displayed the tendency that would be manifested in all art forms in the next century: the hostility of the artist toward his bourgeois audience. "It is because the public are a mass--inert, obtuse, and passive," Jarry says, "that they need to be shaken up from time to time so that we can tell from their bearlike grunts where they are--and also where they stand. They are pretty harmless, in spite of their numbers, because they are fighting against intelligence."[26]

There are other innovations in Ubu that relate to form, and emerge in later works. There is the use of nonsense based on sound patterns that plays such an important role in Absurdist plays. For example: "Just as the poppy and the dandelion are scythed down in the flower of their youth

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[25]Alfred Jarry, "On Theatre," Encore, 7, No. 2 (March/April, 1965), p. 14.

[26]Jarry, Encore, p. 14.

by the pitiless scythe of the pitiless scyther who pitilessly scythes their pitiful art--he fought gallantly, but there were just too many Russians around."[27] And there are also the verbal misunderstandings that will emerge in Absurdist plays as illustrative of the failure of language. The following exchange has all the verbal anarchy of a Marx Brothers movie routine and will become a standard verbal technique in the Absurdist theatre:

> Captain: Haul down the main jib, take a reel in the top saile.
>
> Pa Ubu: That's a good one. That's not bad at all. Did you get that, Mister Crew: Boil down the main rib, roast beef and oxtails.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Heads: Beware of Satan and all pomps and vanities.
>
> Pa Ubu: That's right, beware of sitting under pumps, it's insanitary.[28]

If audiences were shocked by Ubu, they were soon allowed to return again to a more comfortable state. Not until twenty years later, with the introduction of Surrealism did audiences again find themselves assaulted to such a degree by a theatre form. The first use of the word Surrealism was in the Introduction to Les Mamelles de Tirésias by Guilliame Apollinaire, written in 1903 but not produced until 1917: "To attempt, if not a renovation of

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[27] Jarry, Ubu, p. 59.

[28] Jarry, Ubu, p. 72.

the theatre, at least a personal effort, I thought it necessary to return to nature itself, but without imitating it in the manner of photographers. When man wanted to imitate walking he created the wheel, which does not resemble a leg. He thus practiced Surrealism without knowing it."[29]

Central to Surrealism was a renovation of words. For André Breton, the acknowledged leader of the movement, the goal was, above all things, to put language in "a state of effervescence."[30] Anna Balakian in her book Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute describes this attitude toward language: "The words serving as stimuli or irritants to the senses were to produce their own images. Language was to be endowed with a benzedrine-like quality and, if expertly used, could grant pleasures beyond those induced by narcotics."[31] Yet the Surrealists did not rely merely on words. Apollinaire in Les Mamelles de Tirésias has the Director of the Company say:

> For the theatre should not be an imitation of reality
> It is right that the dramatist should use
> All the illusions at his disposal. . . .
> It is right that he should let crowds speak, or inanimate objects if he so pleases

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[29]Guilliame Apollinaire, "Preface to Les Mamelles de Tirésias" as quoted by Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, rev. ed. (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 314.

[30]André Breton as quoted by Anna Balakian, Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute (New York: Noonday Press, 1959), p. 113.

[31]Balakian, p. 116.

> And that he no longer has to reckon
> With time and space
> His universe is the play
> Within which he is God the Creator
> Who disposes at will
> Of sounds, gestures, movements, masses, colors
> Not merely in order
> To photograph what is called a slice of life
> But to bring forth life itself and all its truths.[32]

The extension of reality to include dreams, thoughts, and states of cognition that could not be communicated by words is the most important contribution to the Surrealist movement as it applies to drama. The Surrealists, by expanding the definition of reality beyond the traditional representational forms, allowed a latitude that could embrace such movements as psychoanalysis, which would gain popularity later. The movement was avant-garde in the true sense of the word: it served as an advance guard to tell the main troops what lay ahead. Perhaps the most visionary man of this movement, although he was later to break with it, was Antonin Artaud.

Artaud--poet, critic, actor, director, and theoretician--is, in many ways, the contemporary Everyman, arrived thirty years before his time. In his personal suffering with language and means of communication in both theatre and personal life, he gave voice to many of the complaints of the contemporary man. "There's no correlation for me

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[32]Apollinaire, Les Mamelles de Tirésias, p. 315.

between words and the exact states of my being,"[33] Artaud said. This dislocation between man and his words is at the heart of the contemporary dilemma. Therefore when Artaud, in his first anguished appeal to Jacques Rivière, the man who was to become his literary and personal confidant, describes the malady that plagued him and that later culminated in a twelve-year stay in mental institutions, he is articulating more than a personal psychic disorder. He is describing the disorder of society at large. "I suffer from a frightful disease of the mind. My thoughts abandon me at all stages. From the simple act of thinking to the external act of its materialization in words. Words, forms of phrases, inner directions of thinking, simple reactions of the mind--I am in constant pursuit of my intellectual being."[34] Artaud recognized that his problem with language was not a personal aberration alone, but mirrored the inability of words to capture the true nature of man. He expresses this idea in the following poem:

Ci-gît

Tout vrai langage,
est incomprehensible,
comme la claque
du claque-dents;
ou le claque (bordel)
du demur a dents (en sang)

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[33]Antonin Artaud, "Here Is Someone," trans. Marc Estrin in Artaud Anthology, ed. Jack Hirschman, 2nd rev. ed. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965), p. 37.

[34]Artaud, "Letter to Jacques Rivière, June 5, 1923," as quoted by Hirschman, p. 7.

(All true language
is incomprehensible
like the clack
of chattering teeth
or the clack (whorehouse)
of the toothy femur (bloody))[35]

One of the difficulties in dealing with the ideas of Artaud lies in the misunderstanding concerning the word language. When, as he does in the preceding poem, Artaud says, "all true language is incomprehensible," he is using language in its nonverbal form. It is often forgotten that the word may mean more than: (1) "the body of words and of methods of combination of words used by a nation. . . ." It may also mean the "method of expressing thoughts, feelings, wants, etc. other than by words."[36] As an example of this second usage, the Oxford English Dictionary gives the following example taken from Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida (IV.v.55): "Ther's a language in her eye, her checke, her lip." Language, then, can mean that which communicates by means other than the spoken word. It is to these means that Artaud turns in his writings on the theatre. To break the tyranny of the word, Artaud asks for revolution which will institute the true language of theatre. The Theatre and Its Double is the book in which Artaud most clearly states his ideas for a new theatre.

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[35]Antonin Artaud, Ci-gît as quoted by Naomi Greene, Antonin Artaud: Poet Without Words (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 169.

[36]Oxford English Dictionary, VI (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 57.

The book is definitely positive in tone. In the preface he states, "We need to live first of all; to believe in what makes us live and that something makes us live."[37] The impediment to an understanding of life, Artaud believes, is, specifically the language of words. "If confusion is a sign of the times, I see at the root of this confusion a rupture between things and words, between things and the ideas and signs that are their representations."[38] To Artaud theatre is a means of renewing man's sense of life; but theatre can only function as a cleansing agent if it is a theatre divorced from words. "To break through language in order to touch life is to create or recreate the theatre."[39] Artaud believes that rather than merely instructing or moralizing, the theatre has the power to purge by offering to dredge up the basic, primitive darkness that underlies society and human intercourse. To make his point compelling Artaud in the first essay in Theatre and Its Double graphically likens the role of theatre to that of the plague: both let loose man's primitive, instinctual dark side by the very scope and awesomeness of their horror. "The theatre, like the plague . . . releases conflicts, disengages powers, liberates possibilities, and if these possibilities and powers are dark, it is the fault not of the

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[37]Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 7.

[38]Artaud, p. 7.

[39]Artaud, p. 13.

plague nor of the theater, but of life."[40] Artaud's use of the term Theater of Cruelty stems from this belief that in man resides a dark side and that if theatre is to help man it must mirror, must be a "double," of the inner darkness that man hides from himself. Confronted with the double of his own interior, man, Artaud believes, would be cleansed and not, as many have wrongly attributed to such a theory, tempted into darkness. As Artaud says of the plague, theatre causes the truth to emerge "after which nothing remains except death or an extreme purification."[41] Theatre, again like the plague, is beneficial in that it impels "men to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world; it shakes off the asphyxiating inertia of matter which invades even the clearest testimony of the senses; and in revealing to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force, it invites them to take, in the face of destiny, a superior and heroic attitude they would never have assumed without it."[42] To accomplish this task Artaud puts primary emphasis on revitalizing the form of theatre.

Central to this revitalization is the shift from denotative to sensory charged language. "In our present

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[40] Artaud, p. 31.

[41] Artaud, p. 31.

[42] Artaud, p. 31.

state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds."[43] The kind of theatre that would be sensorially apprehended would be one in which language was no longer confined to words.

> In the theater as we conceive it, the text is everything. It is understood and definitely admitted, and has passed into our habits and thinking, it is an established spiritual value that the language of words is the major language. But it must be admitted even from the Occidental point of view that speech becomes ossified and that words, all words, are frozen and cramped in their meanings, in a restricted schematic terminology. For the theater as it is practiced here, a written word has as much value as the same word spoken. To certain amateurs this means that a play read affords just as definite and as great a satisfaction as the same play performed. Everything concerning the particular enunciation of a word and the vibration it can set up in space escapes them, and consequently, everything that is capable of adding to the thought. A word thus understood has little more than a discursive, i.e., elucidative, value. And it is not an exaggeration to say that in view of its very definite and limited terminology the word is used only to sidestep thought; it encircles it, but terminates it; it is only a conclusion.[44]

One of Artaud's most important contributions to theatre criticism has been his insistence that drama exists only in production. What one obtains from reading the text of a play while it may be pleasurable, may even be moving and uplifting, is not dramatic. Artaud argues that what gave theatre the unique place it had in society was its ability to enthrall, and this ability was not only dependent on literary techniques.

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[43] Artaud, p. 99.

[44] Artaud, pp. 117-118.

Theatre required a totally new language, one suited to its form. This language, Artaud says, "consists of everything that occupies the stage, everything that can be manifested and expressed materially on a stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind as in the language of words."[45]

His actual description of the type of language he intended is not entirely consistent, but to summarize, these are its important characteristics:

(1) It will appeal to the senses not the mind.

(2) It will make use of lighting, scenery, and all those things usually considered part of the mise-en-scene: "the substitution for a poetry of language, of a poetry in space which will be resolved precisely in the domain which does not belong to words."[46]

(3) The living actor will translate his gestures into a sort of "animated hieroglyphs"[47] much like those employed by the Oriental theatre where gestures represent formal, understandable units of meaning,

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[45] Artaud, p. 38.

[46] Artaud, p. 55.

[47] Artaud, p. 54.

"a sort of spiritual architecture, created out of gesture and mime."[48]

(4) Words, when used, will be used for their evocative sound. Their denotative associations will be obliterated and their articulation will be pure and unadulterated by definition.

Much of Artaud's scheme for a new stage language is vague, and he does not attempt to offer a specific program. He does try to show that the language of words is not the only language and that theatre, because of its multiplicity of forms, can and must go beyond it:

> Here is what is really going to happen. It is simply a matter of changing the point of departure of artistic creation and of overturning the customary laws of the theatre. It is a matter of substituting for the spoken language a different language of nature, whose expressive possibilities will be equal to verbal language, but whose source will be tapped at a point still deeper, more remote from thought.
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> The grammar of this new language is still to be found. Gesture is its material and its wits . . . its alpha and omega. It springs from the NECESSITY of speech more than from speech already formed. But finding an impasse in speech it returns spontaneously to gesture. . . . It retraces poetically the path that has culminated in the creation of language.[49]

Artaud, then, while not creating the new language himself, offered the idea of what it could be. In the Théâtre Alfred Jarry, which he named after the creator of Ubu, he produced

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[48]Artaud, p. 55.

[49]Artaud, p. 110.

virtually nothing. He left few scripts himself. Yet he is probably one of the most influential forces in contemporary theatre.

To end this part of the discussion and to introduce the sections to come, it might be helpful to call attention to a quotation that appears at the beginning of Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations. It comes from St. Augustine's Confessions and illustrates the movement away from the language of words that Artaud discusses and that Wittgenstein illustrates. Its emphasis is on the primary of physical communication, the basis of Wittengenstein's language games, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, and Esslin's Theatre of the Absurd.

> When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shown by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all people: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified, and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my desires.[50]

St. Augustine says that he learned through repetition to distinguish words by connecting sounds to the objects

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[50]St. Augustine, Confessions as quoted by Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 2e.

they signified. In an age where language has become debased and words no longer denote the physical, sensate world they were designed to signify, one solution--advocated by philosophers and artists alike--is to return to prelingual states in order to find the primal connections between this sensate world and the signs which were constructed to represent it. The intention in this movement back to a more primitive state is not to destroy language or to advocate illiteracy, as some critics have suspected. It is, rather, to find a foundation on which to reconstruct a communicative form that will allow man to better articulate his experience.

A return to a nonverbal state may take three forms. It may be represented by silence, by physical action--what St. Augustine has described as the child's state prior to learning words where gesture and movement suffice for communication, or it may exist as sound rhythmically appealing through its repetitive form prior to its taking on discursive meaning.

The theatre, unlike other art forms which are confronted with the failure of the Language of Words, can turn to these other states of communication. Poetry and the novel cannot do this. Even thoughts require some form of language in order to take shape. As the poet Osip Mandelstam says:

> I have forgotten the
> word I intended to say, and
> my thought, unembodied,
> returns to the realm of
> shadows.[51]

A play, however, can present living man forgetting the word he intended to say. He may be silent, he may mutely gesture, or he may utter documents and words divorced from sense, but in all cases he is able to convey a meaning and an idea that may be as eloquent and expressive as if he had articulated it in words.

The following study is an attempt to illustrate how contemporary theatre has utilized silence, physical presence, and poetic language to circumvent the limiting nature of the Language of Words. By raising silence, space, movement and poetry to the status of language, contemporary dramatists have provided viable alternatives to words. At the same time, by retracing the steps between the word and sensate world, dramatists have laid the foundation for a renovation of words to their previous state of clarity and comprehensibility by showing their clearly physical basis.

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[51]Osip Mandlestam, quoted by Lev Vygotskii, Thought and Language, ed. and trans. Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1962), p. 111.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LANGUAGE OF SILENCE

Ionesco's The Killer, Pinter's A Slight Ache, and Beckett's Act Without Words I and II have a central point in common: silence. In the first two the protagonist never says a word; in the last two the play itself has been reduced to a pantomime in which no words are spoken. These plays are only the furthest extension of the use of silence made by the Theatre of the Absurd. Silence as a communicative agent is certainly one of the most important contributions of the Absurdists. Until the movement, it would have been inconceivable to imagine a major portion of a drama being given over to intentional silence as Pinter, for example, does in Act I of The Homecoming, with 119 pauses and silence cues.

In other areas outside drama, silence has always been used as a mode of expression. In religion, for instance, it has had a two-fold life. It has been used to indicate chaos and incomprehensibility. It has also been used to indicate evanescence, or passage into a more perfect state than that which words can describe. Darkness and light, therefore, stand at antithetical poles in the realm of

silence. "The rest is silence," may imply the nothingness of chaos or the transcendence of understanding.

Artists, particularly poets, have long flirted with silence. As Mario Praz indicates in his book The Romantic Agony, "The essence of Romanticism comes to consist in that which cannot be described. . . . The Romantic exalts the artist who does not give a material form to his dreams--the poet ecstatic in front of a forever blank page, the musician who listens to the prodigious concerts of his soul without attempting to translate them into notes. It is romantic to consider concrete expression as a decadence, a contamination."[1]

John Keats' "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter," perhaps best expresses this mood. Basically Platonic, it indicates a view that the art work is only an imitation of a more perfect form. Accepting the limitations of perception, artists up until the contemporary era have continued to create "heard melodies" even if they acknowledge the inferiority of art to the Platonic model. Keats continued to write poems; Rimbaud did not.

George Steiner, in his books Language and Silence and Extraterritorial, tries to trace this movement toward silence. "The revaluation of silence . . . is one of the most original characteristic acts of the modern spirit," he notes. "The

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[1]Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony (New York: Noonday Press, 1956), p. 14.

concept of the word unspoken, of the music unheard and therefore richer is, in Keats, a local paradox, a neo-Platonic ornament. In much modern poetry silence represents the claims of the ideal: to speak is to say less."[2]

The great proliferation of critical writings about the phenomenon of silence indicates its importance in contemporary arts. Susan Sontag has written an essay entitled "The Aesthetics of Silence." In it she attempts to describe the rhetorical nature of silence and explain its function and implications in contemporary art. "Silence," she says, "is the furthest extension of that reluctance to communicate, that ambivalence about making contact with the audience which is a leading motif of modern art. . . . Silence is the artist's ultimate other-worldly gesture: by silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world, which appears as patron, client, consumer, antagonist, arbiter, and distorter of his work."[3] Sontag, however, argues that the silence of the contemporary artist is not a petulance on his part, not even a romantic posture; it is rather a reaction to the times. "To describe silence as a rhetorical term is, of course, not to condemn this rhetoric as fraudulent or in bad faith. In my opinion, the myths of silence and emptiness are about as nourishing and viable as might be devised in an 'unwholesome'

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[2]George Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 48.

[3]Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," in Styles of Radical Will (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969), p. 6.

time--which is, of necessity, a time in which 'unwholesome' psychic states furnish the energies for most superior work in the arts. Yet one cannot deny the pathos of these myths."[4]

Roland Barthes also sees silence at the heart of the movement known as nouvelle roman, particularly in the works of Alain Robbe-Grillet. Barthes, in his book, Writing Degree Zero, describes this form of silence. "The word, dissociated from the husk of habitual cliches, and from the technical reflexes of the writer, is then freed from responsibility in relation to all possible context; it appears in one brief act, which, being devoid of reflections, declares its solitude, and therefore its innocence. This art has the very structure of suicide: in it, silence is a homogeneous poetic time which traps the word between two layers and sets it off, less a fragment of a cryptogram than as a light, a void, a murder, a freedom."[5]

This concept of silence that Beckett labels "the frail partition between the ill-concealed and the ill-revealed" is also seen by Ihab Hassan as central to literature. In the book The Literature of Silence, Hassan notes, that "silence develops as the metaphor of a new attitude that literature has chosen to adopt toward itself. This attitude puts into

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[4]Sontag, p. 11.

[5]Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, trans. Annett Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p. 75.

question the peculiar power, the ancient excellence, of literary discourse--and challenges the assumptions of our civilization."[6]

All the artists that Sontag, Barthes, and Hassan describe still use words; yet, by their words they show disgust with language and the power and truth of silence. Hassan points out what might otherwise seem a contradiction: the duality of chatter and silence. "Language is indeed best suited to undermine language. Language expresses the fullness of silence best."[7]

The Theatre of the Absurd is still a theatre based on a Language of Words. The words, however, serve to point out the presence of silence in everyday life. In the following discussion it will be noted that a Language of Silence does not depend on actual silences as much as it does on meaningless words which convey even more effectively the core of silence at the heart of contemporary life.

There is a danger in using the term silence to describe much of what goes on in an Absurdist play. With the Language of Poetry and the Language of Space, the generality of the concepts allowed for an obvious disparity in their modes of expression. Silence, somehow, implies a more

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[6]Ihab Hassan, The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967), p. 15.

[7]Hassan, p. 21.

literal translation. A warning should be made, therefore, against the tendency to think that silence in the works of Ionesco, Pinter, and Beckett will be static and, thus, similar. Each of the three playwrights has his own silence, as distinct as the words which often project it, and each uses silence for a different purpose.

In Ionesco silence is talkative. It is achieved by the destruction of the Language of Words through their proliferation. The purpose of this destruction is to recreate a new language. Silence, therefore, becomes a critical yardstick against which to measure the shortcomings of words and a means of rearticulating them.

In Pinter silence is psychological in nature. It is an indication of the areas of consciousness where reality actually resides. Its use serves to dispel the long held myth that ordinary people, when portrayed on the stage, are verbal. The state of silent anguish is more typical than the state of verbal dexterity in the average man. Pinter is one of the first playwrights to insist on this state. In so doing he gives up the long cherished prerogative of language manipulation, so dear to the playwright; but his characters gain an authenticity that allows them to live, as Pinter says, even beyond the playwright's control.

The silence of Beckett is a metaphysical silence. It is a silence that comes from the recognition that life and the words which describe life are meaningless. Beckett's

people babble the way Ionesco's and Pinter's do; the difference is that they know they are merely camouflaging silence; the others do not.

Of the three, Beckett is the only one who has taken his silences to the artistic extreme, and has ceased to write. Pinter, however, seems to be moving close to silence in his latest play Old Times. Only Ionesco has moved away from silence. After his persona Berenger confronts it and is defeated by it in the last act of The Killer, Ionesco has sought less rigorous and dangerous courses in Exit the King and A Stroll in the Air.

The important thing that the following discussion hopes to illustrate is the innovative use of silence as a communicative agent in drama. The silences described in the following plays are all different, achieved differently and for different ends. One thing they have in common is their dramatic power. Used by a skilled writer, silence can be as arresting and as exciting as words. Perhaps the power of silence comes from the fact that always lurking in the background is the threat that all will remain silent. Total silence is feared much as death is, yet there is a fascination in the danger of skirting it. The ability to walk a line that leads perilously close is applauded. To cross over the line, however, would be to end all. These playwrights know it and so even when they use silence, they are careful to remain on this side of it. As W. H. Auden

explains, "We are afraid of pain but more afraid of silence/ for no nightmare of hostile objects could be as terrible as this void."[8]

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[8] W. H. Auden, For the Time Being (New York: Random House, 1944), p. 1.

I. Eugène Ionesco: Silence as Babble

Ionesco in his critical essays, journals and books has consistently stated his belief that words "stop silence from speaking."[1] He does not love silence; he sees it, however, as an alternative to the empty chatter of words.

"Words are only noise stripped of all meaning. These houses, the sky are only facades of nothingness; people seem to evaporate, everything is threatened, including myself by an imminent, silent sinking into I know not what abyss."[2] This silent sinking into an abyss constitutes the real action in the early Ionesco plays. It is an action that goes on undetected by the characters involved. While they speak, often unendingly, of houses, sky, Bobby Watsons, the surface below them slips away. It is as if each word uttered in such plays had a certain weight and volume. As each falls, it quickly fills a space suffocating the speaker and finally dragging him and his whole world into the void. The stage directions at the end of The Future Is in Eggs could apply to all these early plays: "A trap-door may or may not open; or perhaps the stage may or may not slowly collapse, and the characters--all unwittingly--gently sink and disappear without interrupting their actions--or just

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[1]Eugène Ionesco, Fragments of a Journal, trans. Jean Stewart (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 73.

[2]Eugène Ionesco as quoted by Richard Schechner, "The Inner and the Outer Reality," Tulane Drama Review, 7, No. 3 (Spring, 1963), p. 92.

quite simply carry on, according to the technical facilities available."[2] Whether they actually disappear or continue again as in The Bald Soprano, the effect of collapse is the same, and the silence of destruction is invoked.

Preceding this sinking, and set in contrapuntal fashion to it, is the din of words. It may be the repetition of "chat" at the end of Jack or The Submission, the shouts in unison at the end of The Bald Soprano, or the scraping of chairs and muffled coughs that greet the mute in The Chairs. All these endings point to the silence present throughout the play but covered until the end by the chatter of words. "The word prevents silence from speaking," Ionesco notes. "The word deafens. Instead of being action, it consoles you as best it can for failing to act. The word exhausts and damages thought."[3]

Ionesco's silence, therefore, is a silence that lies covered by "the noise of babble." Ihab Hassan uses this phrase in his book The Literature of Silence to describe Henry Miller.[4] For Miller, as for Ionesco, silence is the ever present area of truth that exists simultaneously with the world of words. In an attempt to reach this silence,

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[2]Eugène Ionesco, The Future Is in Eggs or It Takes All Sorts to Make a World, in Rhinoceros and Other Plays, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Evergreen Press, 1960), p. 141.

[3]Eugène Ionesco, "Journal," Encounter, 26, No. 2 (February 1966), p. 14.

[4]Ihab Hassan, The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967), pp. 3-110.

such writers disclose the facade of words for what it is and, thereby, point to what lies in the untranslatable silence beyond. Ionesco's anti-plays have the same shattering effect that Miller's writing has: they become "gobs of spit in the face of art."[5] For Ionesco, as for Miller, "Words no longer demonstrate: they chatter. Words are literary. They are an escape. They stop silence from speaking. They deafen you. Instead of being action, they comfort you as best they can for your inaction. Words wear out thought, they maim it."[6]

The Bald Soprano, Ionesco's first play, illustrates this attitude by its use of silence. The silence originates from Ionesco's experience with a primer designed to teach English. "The text of The Bald Soprano, or the Manual for Learning English consisting as it did of ready-made expressions and the most threadbare cliches, revealed to me all that is automatic in the language and behavior of people: 'talking for the sake of talking,' talking because there is nothing personal to say, the absence of any life within, the mechanical routine of everyday life, man sunk in his social background, no longer able to distinguish himself from it."[7] The Smiths and the Martins act as animated

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[5]Henry Miller, The Tropic of Cancer (Paris: Obelisk Press, 1954), p. 1.

[6]Eugène Ionesco, Fragments of a Journal, trans. Jean Stewart (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 73.

[7]Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counternotes: Writings on the Theatre, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 180.

illustrations of this state of meaninglessness. The words they utter become as flat as the phrases in an English primer. The play opens on a domestic scene in the Smith house:

> Mrs. Smith: There, it's nine o'clock. We've drunk the soup and eaten the fish and chips, and the English salad. The children have drunk the English water. We've eaten well this evening. That's because we live in the suburbs of London and because our name is Smith.
>
> Mr. Smith (continues to read, clicks his tongue.)[8]

It is interesting to compare this opening with a similar one in Harold Pinter's The Room:

> Rose. Here you are. This'll keep the cold out. It's very cold out, I can tell you. It's murder. That's right. You eat that. You'll need it. You can feel it in here. Still, the room keeps warm. It's better than the basement, anyway. I don't know how they live down there. It's asking for trouble. Go on. Eat it up. It'll do you good.[9]

Both women are greeted with silence. In the former speech the flatness of the language makes obvious the automaton like quality of the Smiths and reflects on the mundane conversations they are made to parody. In Pinter's speech, the very naturalism of the dialogue speaks directly of the silence at the heart of everyday communication. The distinction is important because in order to understand the

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[8]Eugène Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, in Four Plays: The Bald Soprano/The Lesson/Jack, or The Submission/The Chairs, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 91.

[9]Harold Pinter, The Room in The Birthday Party and The Room (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 91.

theatre of Ionesco, it is necessary to see that his comic figures with their cartoon like stances and conversations are as human and as pathetic in their ineptitudes with language as the more empathetic characters in Pinter's plays. The silence that greets Mrs. Smith is, therefore, as oppressive as that which greets Rose, despite the difference in the words and tone that set it off.

The lack of communication between the Smiths is paralleled when the Martins enter. Their celebrated "conversation" is one of the masterpieces of Ionesco's theatre. Here for four pages of dialogue, they go through the process of determining who they are in relation to each other:

> Mr. Martin: Excuse me, madam, but it seems to me, unless I'm mistaken, that I've met you somewhere before.
> Mrs. Martin: I, too, sir. It seems to me that I've met you somewhere before.[10]

What follows is one of the funniest dialogues in Ionesco's plays. Through a process of elimination, punctuated by such phrases as "how bizarre," "how curious it is," "what a coincidence," they reach the conclusion that they are man and wife. Here Ionesco is mocking not only the traditional word game that new acquaintances fall into but the silence that can often exist between husband and wife. Both the monologue of Mrs. Smith at the beginning, and the conversation of the Martins establish this silence in marital

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[10]Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, p. 10.

relations. When the two couples are brought together, Ionesco has another opportunity to point out silence, this time the silence that exists between friends or acquaintances. Using actual silence as a foil, he sets it against meaningless, disjointed words. Thus by the meaninglessness of the vocal parts, he emphasizes not only the silence but the inanity of what usually fills the awkward silences.

> Mr. Smith: Hm. (Silence.)
>
> Mrs. Smith: Hm, hm. (Silence.)
>
> Mrs. Martin: Hm, hm, hm. (Silence.)
>
> Mr. Martin: Hm, hm, hm, hm. (Silence.)[11]

Following this, Ionesco has his characters use words, but the words convey nothing more than the "hms," and serve the same function: to illustrate the vacuousness of conversation and the presence of silence.

> Mrs. Smith: Oh, but definitely. (Silence.)
>
> Mr. Martin: We all have colds. (Silence.)
>
> Mr. Smith: Nevertheless, it's not chilly. (Silence.)
>
> Mrs. Smith: There's no draft. (Silence.)
>
> Mr. Martin: Oh no, fortunately. (Silence.)[12]

As the conversation continues, the form of it parallels a realistic conversation. There is a movement toward comprehensibility. Mrs. Smith is to tell something important.

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[11]Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, p. 20.

[12]Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, p. 20.

> Mrs. Smith: Today I witnessed something extraordinary. Something quite incredible.[13]

Using all the familiar platitudes that greet such assertions in typical social intercourse, Ionesco has Mrs. Smith, after twenty-four lines, say, "He was tying his shoe lace which had come undone."[14] The nonsequitur destroys the illusion of sense and parodies the familiarity of such social discourse. Within the context of the play nonsense is sense; conversely, Ionesco suggests, within life itself sense is often only nonsense. Throughout Ionesco's work this distinction is made.

The silences which are the result of social breakdowns in communication are one type of silence in an Ionesco play. There are also the silences caused by the failure in language itself. The following are only a few examples: (1) Aphorisms that are hollow, no longer mean anything and could easily be inverted or other phrases could be substituted: "He who steals an ox today will have an egg tomorrow."[15] (2) Pure sound taking precedence over denotative sense: "I prefer a bird in the bush to a sparrow in a

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[13]Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, p. 21.

[14]Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, p. 22.

[15]Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, p. 38.

barrow."[16] (3) Exchanges where total nonsense is spoken but reacted to as if it were information appropriate to the context:

> Fire chief: ". . . a young woman asphyxiated herself last week--she left the gas on.
>
> Mrs. Martin: Had she forgotten it?
>
> Fire Chief: No, but she thought it was her comb.
>
> Mrs. Smith: These confusions are always dangerous![17]

The fire chief's stories have no point. They are used by Ionesco to signal the failure of language to communicate, and the reactions to them signal the failure of people to listen or question what they hear.

As language becomes increasingly more empty, the play dissolves into almost pure sound. It is as close as Ionesco gets to an Artaud theatre where sounds have their own sensory nature removed from meaning. Ionesco says:

> Unfortunately the wise and elementary truths they exchanged, when strung together, had gone mad, the language had become disjointed, the characters distorted; words, now absurd, had been emptied of their content and it all ended with a quarrel the cause of which it was impossible to discover, for my heroes and heroines hurled into one another's faces not lines of dialogue, not even scraps of sentences, not words, but syllables or consonants or vowels! . . . For me what had happened was a kind of collapse of reality. The words had turned into sounding shells devoid of meaning.[18]

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[16] Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, p. 38.

[17] Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, p. 28.

[18] Ionesco, Notes and Counternotes, p. 179.

In the final exchanges the two couples repeat sounds over and over:

> Mr. Smith: Cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos, cockatoos.

Mrs. Smith answers by repeating "Such caca" and Mr. Martin says, "Such cascades of cacas."[19] This is close to a total nonverbal conversation where sound itself transfers from one to the other and allows for variations of the motif. That is not to overlook the obviously denotative suggestions made from the choice of the sound patterns. The sounds intensify as the couples lose themselves in a frenzy of words, all removed from denotative associations. The couples move from repetition of vowels to imitation of trains to frenzied shouts of one word, recognizable, but having no more meaning than the nonsense that preceded.

What Ionesco has done is make language virtually explode. It is as close as a theatre of words can come to obliterating words. As J. S. Doubrovsky points out, Ionesco's "accumulation of puns, spoonerisms, equivocations, misunderstandings and a thousand and one other nonsensical drolleries, down to outright disintegration of articulate language into onomatopoeias, brayings and belchings, does not merely betray a childish or diseased inclination, on the

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[19]Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, p. 40.

part of the author, for verbal fireworks; it is a perpetually renewed act of accusation against language. . . . Instead of men using language to think, we have language thinking for men."[20]

The Lesson also has a paroxysm or explosion of language, but here the violence, not merely the inanity, is stressed. Domination by words is the theme. A young girl, active and alert at the beginning of the play, is gradually drained of her stamina and her will by a professor. His weapon is language. The maid warns, "Philology leads to calamity."[21] True to her prediction, the end of the play finds the professor using his verbal control of the situation to literally destroy the girl.

The lesson itself illustrates academic double-talk. It comes from the same school of nonsense as Lucky's monologue in Waiting for Godot. From such questions as "Paris is the capital city of . . ." it progresses to a discussion of "the neo-Spanish languages" and the ways one would say "The roses of my grandmother are as yellow as my grandfather who was an asiatic" in various languages. With each question the professor moves further and further away from any semblance of logic. Sound soon becomes more important than sense, as the professor himself explains:

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[20] J. S. Doubrovsky, "Ionesco and the Comic of Absurdity," Yale French Studies, No. 23 (1959), p. 8.

[21] Ionesco, The Lesson, in Four Plays, p. 115.

> If you utter several sounds at an accelerated speed, they will automatically cling to each other, constituting thus syllables, words, even sentences, that is to say groupings of various importance, purely irrational assemblages of sounds, denuded of all sense, but for that very reason the more capable of maintaining themselves without danger at a high altitude in the air. By themselves, words charged with significance will fall, weighted down by their meanings, and in the end they always collapse, fall. . . .[22]

The bombardment of sound and verbal nonsense, as illustrated above, produces a physical reaction in the girl. She develops a toothache. Interestingly, in Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein also uses the example of a toothache to discuss the problems of the failure of words to convey abstract or non-empirical ideas. Wittgenstein observes: "When philosophers use a word--'knowledge,' 'being,' 'object,' 'I,' 'proposition,' 'name,'--and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home."[23] The professor moves in precisely the opposite direction, removing all experiential notions from the answers he offers. The girls's reaction is to retreat to her own physical, empirically understandable world; therefore, her repetition of "I've got a toothache." The professor becomes steadily angrier as the girl keeps reiterating the idea of her physical pain. The following exchange

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[22]Ionesco, The Lesson, p. 63.

[23]Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Ascombe (New York: Macmillan Co., 1953), p. 48e.

illustrates the rejection of empirical data by the professor:

> Professor: How do you account for the fact that, in speaking without knowing which language they speak, or even while each of them believes that he is speaking another, the common people understand each other at all?
> Pupil: I wonder.
> Professor: It is simply one of the inexplicable curiosities of the vulgar empiricism of the common people--not to be confused with experience!--a paradox, a non-sense, one of the aberrations of human nature, it is purely and simply instinct--to put it in a nutshell. . . . That's what is involved here.[24]

The professor takes Wittgenstein's theory that the only valid meanings can be taken from empirical situations and turns it on its head. Since the professor, by virtue of his title, has the power to assign meanings to words, he defeats the girl. For Ionesco, the investiture of meaning is an act of dominance, requiring, as it does, an acquiescence on the part of the passive recipient. As a sign of this dominance Ionesco has the professor use the word knife over and over at the end of the play. By this time his control over the girl and over the language of the lesson is complete. His "knife" can do whatever he chooses, for it is his word. The repetition of the word becomes a stab and an assault that kills.

This reduction of action to concretized words is also used in Jack or The Submission. At the end of the play Jack and his fiancée Roberte II reduce all communication to one word "chat," and it in turn becomes one with the obscene

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[24] Ionesco, The Lesson, p. 71.

lovemaking that accompanies it.

Claude Bonnefoy, in an interview with Ionesco, asked him whether this shrinking of language to one word could be taken for a sign of the desire for a universal language. Ionesco answered, "It's rather an absence of language, non-differentiation; everything is on the same level, it's the abdication of lucidity and liberty, when faced with the organic world."[25]

In the same interview Bonnefoy asked Ionesco whether every writer feels the temptation of silence. Ionesco's answer was, "There's silence and silence. In Jacques it's a question of what I might call an inferior silence. There is another silence, a luminous silence. There is in Jacques, I think, one of those two states that I experience alternately, of heaviness and weightlessness, light and darkness. On the other side of the silence of light there lies the silence of mud."[26]

Ionesco may acknowledge the possibility of the silence of luminosity, but in none of his plays does he use silence in this way. There are, however, many examples of the other silence, that of darkness. Probably the two best examples are the silence of the mute at the end of The Chairs, and the silence of the killer at the end of The Killer.

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[25]Eugène Ionesco quoted by Claude Bonnefoy in Conversations with Eugene Ionesco, trans. Jan Dawson (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), p. 136.

[26]Ionesco in Conversations, p. 136.

In a note to The Chairs, Ionesco tries to describe what he intended to convey in the play: "To express the void by means of language, gesture, acting and props. To express absence. To express remorse and regret. The unreality of the real. Original chaos. The voices at the end, the noises of the world, mutterings, the world in ruins, the world going up in smoke, in sounds and colors that fade away, the last foundations collapse or rather break up."[27] The play deals with two old people, inhabitants of a lighthouse. The husband wishes, before he dies, to articulate his views of life. Rather than do so himself, he engages a speaker. Throughout the play, guests arrive, and the couple scurry for sufficient numbers of chairs to seat them before the speaker arrives. Ionesco's great theatrical coup is to make the guests invisible. Only the chairs are seen. He stretches silence to its limits by doing away with people altogether. The old man and old woman talk to no one. They are answered by no one. Only the chairs fill the stage. These objects echo the silence by their numbers and their uselessness in the situation. To carry the idea of silence even beyond this point, Ionesco has the speaker appear after the couple have jumped out the windows of their lighthouse leaving only the empty chairs behind. The speaker, thus, is addressing no one. When he begins to talk, the irony is

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[27]Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, p. 192.

complete. He too is silent. Before her exit, the old woman had said, "It is in talking that one finds ideas, words, and then ourselves in our own words, and also the town and the garden, maybe one finds everything again and is an orphan no more."[28] The end of the play illustrates the impossibility of salvation through language and the irony of her hope for language.

Perhaps the best example of the power of silence is in the last scene of The Killer. Bérenger, Ionesco's Everyman, has been searching for the killer who has caused death in the Radiant city. Finally stalking him and cornering him, Bérenger delivers a verbal assault against the silent killer. Marshalling every argument possible, he tries to talk the killer out of attacking. The speech runs to eleven printed pages. During the entire speech the killer merely chuckles. Bérenger becomes progressively more desperate as he confronts this silence. He finally runs out of words, and stands nearly mute. It is a victory of silence over words:

> Oh . . . how weak my strength is against your cold determination, your ruthlessness! And what good are bullets even, against the resistance of an infinitely stubborn will! (With a start:) But I'll get you, I'll get you. . . .
> (Then, still in front of the Killer whose knife is raised and who is chuckling and quite motionless, Berenger slowly lowers his two old-fashioned pistols, lays them on the ground, bends his head and then, on his knees with his head down and

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[28] Ionesco, The Chairs, in Four Plays, pp. 120-121.

> his arms hanging at his side, he stammers:) Oh God! There's nothing we can do. What can we do. . . . What can we do. . . .
> (While the killer draws nearer, still chuckling, but very, very softly).[29]

With Bérenger's back against the wall, finally mute in front of the ultimate silence of the killer--be he death, the void, or Bérenger's own self--Ionesco seems to reach a turning point in his use of silence. He has reached the ultimate extension of silence in a verbal theatre. From this point there are only three courses open: he can lapse into literal silence and cease to write; he can break with verbal theatre and use nonverbal forms, as do those who come after him; or he can retrace his steps and find some strength in verbalization. He takes the latter path.

Ionesco in his later plays seems to indicate that words can serve to communicate his ideas. He no longer seems ready to destroy the verbal medium; rather he is inclined to refine it. In Exit the King, a character says of life, "It was like a brisk walk through a flowery lane, a promise that's broken, a smile that fades." Had this line been uttered in The Bald Soprano it would have been cause for ridicule and parody. In the later play, it is an attempt at lyricism.

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[29]Eugène Ionesco, The Killer, in Plays: Vol. 3, trans. Donald Watson (London: John Calder, 1960), p. 108.

[30]Eugène Ionesco, Exit the King, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 45.

The frustration with language, and the necessity for seeking out silence is still there; but the impetus is not the meaninglessness of life nor the impossibility of communication, but rather the lack of skill. Death, Ionesco seems to say in Exit the King, could be confronted if one could find the words: "I'm dying," the King shouts, "you hear, I'm trying to tell you I'm dying, but I can't express it, unless I talk like a book and make literature out of it."[31] The doctor replies: "It's not worth recording his words. Nothing new. . . . And that's the way it goes on, to the bitter end. As long as we live we turn everything into literature."[32]

The silence of the play, then, is a silence that occurs through a lack of means and not merely a lack of desire. The result--the silence--is the same, however. It begins in the failure of language. The difference here is that the paroxysm that occurs through verbal disintegration in the earlier plays, occurs through death in this play. And instead of words creating chaos, death is described as the destroyer:

> Doctor: When kings die, they clutch at the walls, the trees, the fountains, the moon. They pull themselves up. . . .
>
> Marguerite: But it all crashes down.

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[31]Ionesco, Exit the King, p. 53.

[32]Ionesco, Exit the King, p. 53.

Guard: And disintegrates.

Doctor: It melts and evaporates, till there's not a drop left, not a speck of dust, not the faintest shadow.

Juliette: He drags it all with him into the abyss.[33]

In A Stroll in the Air Ionesco is even more didactic. It is ironic that the opinions of Bérenger, the dramatist hero vacationing in England, are so similar to those of Artaud for the style of the work is as far from Artaud as Ionesco has been. When asked by a journalist to discuss theatre, Berenger replies:

> Sometimes too I wonder whether literature and the theater can ever give a full account of reality, it's so complex, so overwhelming. And I wonder if, nowadays, anyone can get a clear image of other people or of himself. We are living a horrible nightmare. Literature has never been so powerful, so vivid, or so intense as life. And certainly not today. If it wants to be compared with life, literature ought to be a thousand times more cruel and terrifying than it is.[34]

Bérenger's "stroll in the air," where he--surrealist fashion--floats temporarily away, results in the final revelations of the play, which sound very much like Artaud:

> I saw whole continents of Paradise all in flames.
> And all the Blessed were being burned alive.
> . . . . . .

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[33]Ionesco, Exit the King, p. 79.

[34]Eugène Ionesco, A Stroll in the Air, in A Stroll in the Air and Frenzy for Two, or More, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 22.

> I saw some knives, I saw some graves. . . .
> . . . . . .
> In another place, the earth was cracking . . .
> the mountains were caving in and there were oceans
> of blood . . . of mud and blood and mud. . . .[35]

Yet the mood evoked is not apocalyptic, and the language is definitely earth bound. When the journalist, in response to Bérenger's comment that literature can't capture reality, notes, "I now put on record that it can no longer be recorded," he seems to be expressing the idea that Ionesco has in mind and the tone as well. The acknowledgment of the silence that must result from the impossibility of reading is a silence that is accepted, not tortured over. Bérenger's apocalyptic visions are tempered: "I could never resist a loving gesture. Ah! Life would be possible and we'd even die peacefully, without regrets. If you live happily, you can die happily. We always ought to love one another."[36] And Marthe responds: "You must love people. If you love them, they won't be strangers to you any more. If you stop being afraid of them, they won't be monsters any more. Deep down in their shells, they're frightened too. Love them. Then hell will exist no more."[37]

The humanism expressed here contrasts with the absolute lack of it in The Bald Soprano. Love, then, seems to be what the later Ionesco feels will humanize even the Smiths

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[35]Ionesco, A Stroll in the Air, p. 113.

[36]Ionesco, A Stroll in the Air, p. 58.

[37]Ionesco, A Stroll in the Air, p. 94.

and the Martins. Silence, therefore, becomes finally a problem of human relations, assuaged, if not entirely overcome, by love and understanding.

II. Samuel Beckett: Silence as Anguish

Perhaps the best way to distinguish the different uses made of silence by Ionesco, Pinter, and Beckett is to discuss the differences in point of view between each author and his work. For Ionesco, the relationship between him and his characters is that of critic to subject. He presents them as examples of the folly of man and the failure of language. When they are silent, or when the nonsense they speak is reduced to an equivalent silence, Ionesco seems to be there holding up the pointer as if to say: See how they mean nothing, see how they sink into a void that they don't even see. It is true that Bérenger in Rhinoceros and The Killer is a man aware of the limitations of language; but it is his blind naivete rather than his steady awareness of the situation that helps him to continue fighting rhinoceritis and killers. When Bérenger at last runs out of words in The Killer, he is no closer to a recognition of his predicament than he was when he first visited the radiant city. His silence is one of exhaustion; it bears no metaphysical awareness of his situation. Ionesco's world is always viewed from the outside. Ionesco knows where his characters fail and he can point out the blind spots to us by means of language tricks and verbal dexterity.

With Pinter the emphasis shifts. As Pinter goes to lengths to explain, he is not sure of the nature of his

people. They appear as if by their own volition, and he follows them through to some end over which he has no control. Pinter, therefore, can not censure or point out lack of communication; he can just record the surface tensions that such failures produce. His silences, then, are not calculated to underline the language breakdown so much as to underline the area of the drama which exists beyond the control--and the understanding--of Pinter himself.

In the theatre of Beckett, the playwright ceases to exist altogether. He cannot ridicule, he cannot describe, he can only create. The characters themselves are totally aware of the predicament they are in; therefore, comment by the playwright--Ionesco-fashion--would be the worst redundancy and insult to the humanity of the characters. To describe the baffling inexplicable relationships of the characters, as Pinter does, without seeming to understand their dilemma, would be a lie and a forfeiting of the metaphysical position that Beckett and his characters hold in common. The world of Beckett's characters and the world of Beckett are one. The power of this world that Beckett has given us comes precisely from the fact that it is the playwright's world and the world of all men. And it is a world that is totally comprehensible. The situation of Didi and Gogo is obvious from the start. They are waiting for someone who will, probably, never come. Their lives have been reduced to this waiting. The waiting is measured by silence

which may be filled but which is always present. It helps explain why, as Martin Esslin recorded at the beginning of The Theatre of the Absurd, the inmates of San Quentin prison could respond directly to the play.[1] There is a universal appeal to Waiting for Godot and there is a direct empathy with the characters because each man superimposes his own experiences of futility and waiting.[2] Audiences may feel that the tensions of Pinter's world are disturbingly familiar, but they do not feel the immediate recognition that they experience with a Beckett play. In the same way, audiences may find the characters in the Ionesco menagerie funny; but to the degree that the audience laughs at the antics, they retreat from empathizing with the characters, since ridicule lessens the probability of empathetic association with the brunt of the ridicule.

In Beckett, silence comes from the constant awareness of the futility of speaking. Silence is always there as the viable option, and the characters unlike those of Ionesco and Pinter know it. The speaker in The Unnamable says,

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[1]Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, 2nd ed. (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1969), pp. 1-2.

[2]I have found in the classes I have taught, particularly in experimental classes of minority group students, a direct understanding of the plays of Beckett and other Theatre of the Absurd playwrights. Their thoughtful, often profound, comments about the plays bear out Artaud's view that theatre can often be intuitively apprehended and that such understanding may exceed intellectual analysis.

"Talking of speaking, what if I went silent?"[3] Yet to stop talking would be to end the game of life; and as painful as the game is, it is better than nothing. Silence takes courage; it is the most sensible way out. The act of talking itself is nothing more than a movement toward silence: "The search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue."[4] And yet, the characters hold on to speech as they do to life; for silence is a form of suicide. Mirroring this ambiguity between the futility of speaking and the need to continue Beckett writes at the end of The Unnamable:

> I must continue, I can't continue, I must continue, so I am going to continue, I must say some words, as long as there are any, I must say them, until they find me, until they say to me, strange punishment, strange crime, I must continue, perhaps it is already done, perhaps they have already told me, perhaps they have brought me to the threshold of my story, before the door which opens on my story, it would surprise me if it opens, it is going to be me, it is going to be silence, there where I am, I don't know, I shall never know, in silence one doesn't know, I must continue, I am going to continue.[5]

The Unnamable ends with the desire for silence, but with the determination to continue speaking until the game is played out. The entire novel is an illustration of this persistence in speaking when there is nothing to say. On

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[3]Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable in Three Novels (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 307.

[4]Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 299.

[5]Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 414.

the very first page Beckett has announced this dilemma: "The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more interesting, but also that I, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I forget, no matter. And at the same time I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never."[6]

Two attitudes have been taken toward this silence of Beckett. Some critics believe that since Beckett places the end of all endeavors at the doorstep of silence he is articulating a view of life at once terrifying and cruel. These critics, like George Wellwarth, call Beckett "the prophet of negation and sterility. He holds out no hope to humanity, only a picture of unrelieved blackness; and those who profess to see in Beckett signs of a Christian approach or signs of compassion are simply refusing to see what is there."[7] There are other critics like C. Michael Wells who liken the silence of Beckett not to despair but to a transcendence much like that obtained by Buddhist teachers, where cessation is contentment or nirvana.[8] Ihab Hassan in The Literature of Silence agrees with this latter assessment.

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[6]Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 291.

[7]George Wellwarth, The Theater of Protest and Paradox: Development in the Avant-Garde Drama, rev. ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 56.

[8]C. Michael Wells, "The Transcendence of Life: The Positive Dimension in Samuel Beckett," Diss. University of New Mexico, 1968.

"Samuel Beckett may be considered the author who wants to seal the lips of the Muse. Yet his silence, despite its grim, satiric note, has something in common with the silence of holy men who, after knowing the pain and outrage, reach for a peace beyond human understanding."[9]

The question revolves around the idea of whether the persistence in speaking when there is nothing to say is affirmative or negative. In either case the unquestionable presence of silence--as total annihilation or transcendence, as defeat or victory--lies at the heart of Beckett's world. That Beckett can make a literature out of silence is a testament to his ability. It is he more than any other contemporary playwright who has given shape to the silence that lies at the heart of human experience; he has artistically captured an ineffable force. Beckett, himself, acknowledges that it is the shape of things which interests him: "I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. . . . 'Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved; do not presume: one of the thieves was damned.' That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters."[10]

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[9]Ihab Hassan, The Literature of Silence: Studies in Language and Literature (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967), p. 82.

[10]Samuel Beckett quoted by Hugh Kenner in Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 100.

Silence has sound as well as shape. As John Cage explains about his musical composition in which no notes are sounded: "There is no such thing as silence, get thee to an anechoic chamber and hear there thy nervous system in operation and hear there thy blood in circulation."[11]

It is these primordial sounds that Beckett captures. He has the same problem as a writer that Cage does as a composer, making a form out of formlessness or a sound out of cacophony. As Cage explains:

> The disintegration of harmonic structure is commonly known as atonality. All that is meant is that two necessary elements in harmonic structure--the cadence, and modulating means--have lost their edge. Increasingly, they have become ambiguous, whereas their very existence as structural elements demands clarity (singleness of reference). Atonality is the simple maintenance of an ambiguous tonal state of affairs. It is the denial of harmony as a structural means. The problem of a composer in a musical world in this state is to supply another structural means just as in a bombed-out city the opportunity to build again exists.[12]

In Beckett's bombed-out city, the technique employed is to call direct attention to the structure or lack of structure by making it the object of the play instead of supportive of a subject itself. Beckett's characters, since they are totally aware of their predicament, are obsessed with talking about it. They blabber about the necessity

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[11]John Cage, Silence (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 51.

[12]Cage, p. 63.

for silence and their own inability to remain silent. The new form which Beckett offers is one which makes out of meaninglessness or, to use the musical terminology, dissonance a new atonal form. Krapp has said, "Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool."[13] Beckett has caught the sound of the squeak. This squeak has taken on a metaphysical life of its own: I squeak therefore I am. His form marries the squeak of Krapp with the silence of the spool.

Language used to call attention to itself is employed by Pinter as well as Beckett. For instance, in The Dumbwaiter the two hired killers Gus and Ben go through a protracted debate about whether one says "Light the kettle" or "Light the gas."[14] The difference between Pinter's use of language as object and Beckett's is that Gus and Ben would never say, as Didi does, "This is really getting insignificant."[15] Pinter's characters are never as analytical as Didi and Gogo:

> Estragon: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
> Vladimir: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
> Estragon: It's so we won't think.[16]

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[13]Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 25.

[14]Harold Pinter, The Dumbwaiter in The Caretaker and The Dumbwaiter (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 97.

[15]Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 44.

[16]Beckett, p. 40.

The audience is never allowed to forget that the tramps are playing at filling time. They themselves summarize what has transpired in the action up to a certain point so that they can know how to continue.

> Vladimir: What was I saying, we could go on from there.
> Estragon: What were you saying when?
> Vladimir: At the very beginning.
> Estragon: The very beginning of WHAT?
> Vladimir: This evening . . . I was saying. . . .
> Estragon: I'm not a historian.
> Vladimir: Wait . . . we embraced . . . we were happy . . . happy . . . what do we do now that we're happy . . . go on waiting . . . waiting . . . let me think . . . it's coming . . . go on waiting . . . now that we're happy . . . let me see . . .[17]

Whenever the two run out of words, there is an agonizing silence. This silence is equated with the recognition of their situation. As they admit they speak "so we won't think." Anything, no matter how trivial, is acceptable as long as they don't have to think, or in other words, to go silent.

> Long silence.
> Vladimir: Say something!
> Estragon: I'm trying.
> Long silence.
> Vladimir: (in anguish) Say anything at all!
> Estragon: What do we do now?
> Vladimir: Wait for Godot.
> Estragon: Ah!
> Silence.[18]

There is never any question in Waiting for Godot and in

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[17] Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 42.

[18] Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 41.

Endgame which follows it, that what is said is anything more than a filler for the silence. After an extended exchange Hamm in Endgame says, "We're not beginning to . . . to . . . mean something?" Clov replies, "Mean something! You and I, mean something! Ah, that's a good one."[19]

The art of Beckett, then, is measured by the ingenuity with which he has his characters fill silence. He employs all the puns, word games, neologisms that Ionesco uses. Here, however, these word games are not a cause of derision, but merely an amusing pastime.

Estragon: That's the idea, let's abuse each other.
(They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.)
Vladimir: Morom!
Estragon: Vermin!
Vladimir: Abortion!
Estragon: Morpion!
Vladimir: Sewer-rat!
Estragon: Curate!
Vladimir: Cretin!
Estragon: (with finality) Critic!
Vladimir: Oh!
(He wilts, vanquished, and turns away.)
Estragon: Now let's make it up.
Vladimir: Gogo!
Estragon: Didi!
Vladimir: `our hand!
Estragon: Take it!
Vladimir: Come to my arms!
Estragon: Your arms?
Vladimir: My breast!
Estragon: Off we go!
They embrace. They separate. Silence.
Vladimir: How time flies when one has fun!
Silence.

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[19]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 42.

Estragon: What do we do now?
Vladimir: While waiting
Estragon: While waiting.[20]

When talk stops, the silence takes over once more, and thought returns: the thought about waiting. The entrances of Pozzo and Lucky allow Didi and Gogo for once to stop talking and listen to others. Yet the speech of Pozzo and the dance and speech of Lucky serve only to act as a variation on silence. Both extended monologues are interesting because Pozzo's shows the hollowness of form while Lucky's--that virtuoso piece of nonsense--shows the hollowness of content. The important point seems to be in Lucky's speech that even if "the public works of Puncher and Wattmann" were serious and did mean something, the basic situation of waiting and meaninglessness would be unchanged. As the two clowns remark after Pozzo and Lucky go:

Vladimir: That passed the time.
Estragon: It would have passed in any case.[21]

Throughout Waiting for Godot, there is the feeling that nothing will ever change, that the dialogue will continue forever--sometimes fast and sometimes slow--with no end. In Endgame, the same stasis is shown, but at a more advanced stage. Fin de Partie, as the play is called in French, is the term in chess which designates the beginning of the third and last part of the game, when the king is

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[20] Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove Press, 1958), pp. 32-33.

[21] Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 49.

about to be cornered. It is the beginning of the end. The play begins with Clov saying:

> Clov (fixed gaze, tonelessly): Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.[22]

The language here is interesting. The finality of the past participle gives way to a progressive modification. The four verb phrases move from absolute certainty to a questioning of the irrevocability of the end. Just as The Unnamable is about to, but never does, lapse into silence throughout the book, Clov is about to, but never does seem to finish the game. Even the end of the play is ambiguous; one is never sure if Clov has departed forever or not.

A metaphoric aid in understanding the action of the play is mentioned by Clov within the same opening speech: "Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap."[23] Richard Coe, in his book Beckett explains that the reference is to a dialectical demonstration illustrated by Zeno's heap of millet: "Take any finite quantity of millet, and pour half of it into a heap. Then, half of the remaining quantity again . . . and so on. In an infinite universe, the heap could be completed; in a finite universe, never, for the nearer it gets to the

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[22]Beckett, Endgame, p. 1.

[23]Beckett, Endgame, p. 1.

totality, the slower in increases."[24] The completion of the heap of millet is another way of describing the silence that lies beyond words--at the end of the game. In an infinite universe the void or the total silence which it will precipitate will finally be achieved. But in the finite universe, there will be talk as long as the dialogue is not totally exhausted. At the end of this play there is still talk. Endgame, however, is a larger "heap" and, therefore, a quieter play than Waiting for Godot.

Hamm, the "king" in the game, reinforces the desire for cessation of speech and the reticence to see the game ended:

> Enough, it's time it ended, in the shelter too.
> (Pause.)
> And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to . . . to end.
> Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I
> hesitate to---[25]

What the it stands for is of lesser importance than the idea that an end is desired but feared and that, though there is talk of endings, the talk will continue.

It is a desolate picture that Beckett points to in Endgame. Hamm is blind and unable to move, totally dependent on Clov. Clov, unable to sit, spends his time in his kitchen watching "my light dying."[26] The other inhabitants of "the shelter" are Nell and Nag, Hamm's parents. They are

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[24]Richard Coe, Beckett (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), pp. 89-90.

[25]Beckett, Endgame, p. 3.

[26]Beckett, Endgame, p. 12.

confined to dustbins and only appear when Clov removes their covers. All are on the verge of extinction--Nell actually dies during the course of the play--yet they keep up the talk. The central question seems to be, "Have you not had enough?"[27] The question itself does not seem new. Clov says, "All life long the same questions, the same answers."[28] Any comfort to be gained from language, comes from the familiarity that repetition gives.

The formality of discussion seems to replace concrete action here as in Godot. The idea of the game makes the play a perfect example of what Wittgenstein had in mind when he said in Philosophical Investigations that language can finally be defined only in the language games in which it is used. The words of Hamm and Clov gain meaning through the ritual game that they play with each other.

> Hamm: Why do you stay with me?
> Clov: Why do you keep me?
> Hamm: There's no one else.
> Clov: There's nowhere else.
> (Pause)[29]

There is nothing said or done in Endgame that has not been repeated before until the very end when Clov, looking in ritual fashion out the window at the desolation of the earth, actually sees a living boy. Of course, even here we are not

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[27]Beckett, Endgame, p. 3.

[28]Beckett, Endgame, p. 5.

[29]Beckett, Endgame, p. 6.

sure that the boy is not part of the same overall game that includes Hamm telling his story every night, like the couple in Ionesco's The Chairs, and Clov dispensing pain killer to Hamm and food to the others. All is prescribed. "Something is taking its course."[30]

The relation between the repetition of action and the prevailing silence may be seen in a comment made by Nell. "Yes, it's like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh any more."[31] To illustrate the effect Beckett has Nagg tell a joke about the tailor who takes so long making a pair of pants that the irate customer finally says: "'God damn you to hell, Sir, no, it's indecent, there are limits. In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world. Yes Sir, no less Sir, the WORLD! And you are not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months!' 'But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look--at the world--and look at my trousers.'"[32] The exaggerated effort that goes into telling the tale extenuates the silence which greets it. This technique is central to Beckett.

In their constant discussions about silence Hamm resembles Didi, while Clov is a more cynical Gogo. Clov plays the servant to Hamm's master, an almost Caliban/Prospero dichotomy. Clov's frustrated cry, "I use the

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[30]Beckett, Endgame. p. 13.

[31]Beckett, Endgame, p. 19.

[32]Beckett, Endgame, pp. 22-23.

ords you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, each me others. Or let me be silent,"[33] is reminiscent of Caliban's telling Prospero, "You taught me language; and my profit on't is, I know how to curse; the red plague rid you for learning me your language." (Tempest I.ii.363)[34]

Clov continues the conversation as he continues his duties: wheeling Hamm around the circumference of their circumscribed world, feeding Nell and Nagg, looking out the windows that face the earth and the sea. Yet his desire to leave seems coupled with his desire to go silent: "I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust."[35] Existence, this suffering, seems tied with words. To go silent would be an escape.

Hamm holds this same idea of silence, but in his case it is overshadowed by the fear of the total cessation of speech.

> It will be the end and there I'll be, wondering what can have brought it on and wondering what can have . . .
> (he hesitates)
> the end and there I'll be, wondering what can have why it was so long coming.
> Pause
> There I'll be, in the old shelter, alone against the silence and . . .
> (he hesitates)
> the stillness. If I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over with sound, and motion, all over and done with.[36]

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[33]Beckett, Endgame, p. 44.

[34]For a discussion comparing The Tempest to Endgame see Michael Robinson, The Long Sonata of the Dead: A Study of Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1969), pp. 266-269.

[35]Beckett, Endgame, p. 57.

[36]Beckett, Endgame, p. 69.

As Hamm continues in the speech the fear of the loneliness, of the silence is evident. "Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark."[37] Faced with the meaninglessness of existence, the best that Hamm can do is hold on to the dialogue. When at the end Clov leaves, or begins to leave, we see a still Hamm, bloody kerchief on face. And yet it is to the act of speaking that Hamm clings before Clov departs:

> Hamm: Before you go
> (Clov halts near door)
> Say something.
> Clov: There is nothing to say.
> Hamm: A few words to ponder in my heart.[38]

Clov's last speech is one that paints the darkest picture of a hopeless existence:

> Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes, I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand, that either. I ask the words that remain--sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say. Pause
> I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit.[39]

Hamm remains, presumably alone, still talking. The last play still in the process of being played. The heap of millet still not, but almost completed, the words still coming.

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[37]Beckett, Endgame, p. 70.

[38]Beckett, Endgame, p. 80.

[39]Beckett, Endgame, p. 81.

"Since that's the way we're playing it . . . let's play it that way . . . and speak no more about it . . . speak no more. Old stancher! You remain."[40]

Winnie in Happy Days is the female equivalent to Didi, Clov and Hamm. She is playing an endgame and she also knows it. But, rather than complain, she is determined to make the best of it. Aided by the contents of her bag, she finds ways of passing the day. Yet she too is not self sufficient. "If only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away with not a soul to hear."[41] The necessity of continuing the dialogue is essential to her as it was to the other Beckett characters. Willie, her husband, whom she can barely see in Act I when she is buried up to her shoulders and whom she can not see at all in Act II when she is buried up to her neck, acts as listener. It is he who determines Winnie's Happy Days:

> Not that I flatter myself you hear much, no Willie, God forbid. (Pause.) Days perhaps when you hear nothing. (Pause.) But days too when you answer. (Pause.) So that I may say at all times, even when you do not answer and perhaps hear nothing, Something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do--for any length of time. (Pause.) That is what enables me to go on, go on talking that is.[42]

In all these plays, there is this emphasis on the assuaging quality of human relationships. As buffers against

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[40]Beckett, Endgame, p. 84.

[41]Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove Press, 1961), pp. 20-21.

[42]Beckett, Happy Days, p. 21.

the cruel and meaningless world, the friendship of Didi and Gogo, and the repartee of Hamm and Clov and even Winnie and Willy are all there is. Winnie describes what would be left if conversation stopped: "Simply gaze before me with compressed lips. Not another word as long as I drew breath, nothing to break the silence of this place."[43]

In Krapp's Last Tape, Beckett shows that dialogue does not depend only on another person. By using a tape recorder, he has his only character Krapp actually conversing with himself. So altered is the old Krapp who listens to the younger, recorded Krapp, that it is as if two separate individuals were actually communicating. The technique of silence gains a special eminence in this play. Beckett's utilization of the tape recorder allows him to use words freed from the confines of specific time. The present Krapp plays a recording of a younger Krapp discussing a Krapp even further in the past. The tapes may be stopped, rewound, replayed. The otherwise straight monologue takes on all the multiplicity of an intricate dialogue. Yet here, too, the end is silence as the stage directions at the end of the play indicate: "Krapp motionless staring before him. The tapes run on in silence."[44]

There is also far more actual silence in this play than in any of the previous plays. Krapp says less than almost any other Beckett character. In fact the present Krapp is nearly

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[43]Beckett, Happy Days, p. 21.

[44]Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, p. 28.

inaudible. It is the Krapp of thirty-nine who does most of the talking. The present Krapp can hardly understand what the younger says. He must resort to a dictionary to understand his younger self. What is left of language to the old Krapp is mere sound: "Spooool. box three spool five." "Viduity," a word used in the past takes on the fascination of a foreign word. The recurring theme of love that the young Krapp relates intrigues the older man: "We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! (pause) I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side."[45] The experiences of a lifetime are reduced by the use of tapes to a few words spoken in the voice, and with the words, of a stranger.

Besides his plays for the theatre, Beckett has written four plays for radio. It is interesting that both he and Harold Pinter should write for radio. Radio would seem the least likely medium for a playwright committed to the ultimate silence. And yet it is because of the heightened awareness that the radio brings to language, creating a disembodied effect, confronting the listener with pure sound, that the radio seems to fascinate both Beckett and Pinter. It requires skill to be able to conjure up bleakness and despair not with sets as in Endgame, Godot, or Happy Days but

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[45]Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, p. 23.

with the words themselves. Artaud said that the resonance of the voice could be a palpable thing in itself. In radio it is possible to use the voice in its total range.

The four Beckett radio scripts are quite different. All That Fall is the most dense and verbally traditional of the Beckett plays. It opens out beyond the road of Godot or the room of Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape. Nature, in the sounds of animals, and technology, in the sounds of the bicycle, the cart, the car, the train, are heard as the action centers on Mrs. Rooney, old and fat, who drags herself to the station to meet her blind husband and escorts him home on his birthday. There is a peculiar effect created in the play. All the discourse allows the listener to see a world more populated than any other Beckett world, yet in many respects a world more confined. Mrs. Rooney suffers the worst kind of silence, that which comes in the company of people and while in the actual act of discourse.

> Mrs. Rooney: . . . How is your poor wife?
> Christy: No better, Ma'am.
> Mrs. Rooney: Your daughter then?
> Christy: No worse, Ma'am.
> Silence
> Mrs. Rooney: Why do you halt: (pause) But why do I halt?
> Silence
> Christy: Nice day for the races, Ma'am.
> Mrs. Rooney: No doubt it is (pause) But will it hold up? (pause with emotion) Will it hold up?
> Silence.[46]

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[46]Samuel Beckett, All That Fall in Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces, p. 34.

The pregnant silences surrounding what superficially seem to be common pleasantries achieve a grotesque burlesque of social amenities by stressing the silences which they temporarily fill. As Pinter will do later, Beckett here superimposes on this scene another level by making Mrs. Rooney feel the artificiality of the words she uses: "Do you find anything . . . bizarre about my way of speaking? (pause) No, I mean the words. (Pause. More to herself.) I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very . . . bizarre."[47] Throughout the play, whenever Mrs. Rooney speaks the listener is conscious almost of an echo--a bizarreness which stems from the hollowness of the words. As a motto for his film Film Beckett writes: "Esse est percipi: To be is to be perceived."[48] In Mrs. Rooney's case the sense of bizarreness stems from the fact that no one seems to perceive her and she perceives no one else because all are caught in their own self-conscious revery: "How can I go on, I cannot. Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again!"[49] Her pathetic conversations with the various people that she encounters on her walk illustrate that all are as inescapable as she of

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[47]Beckett, All That Fall, p. 35.

[48]Samuel Beckett, Film (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 11.

[49]Beckett, All That Fall, p. 37.

breaking out of their personal reverie:

> Mrs. Rooney: It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home, Mr. Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution. Now we are white with dust from head to foot. I beg your pardon?
> Mr. Tyler: Nothing, Mrs. Rooney, nothing, I was merely cursing, under my breath, God, and man, under my breath, and the wet Saturday afternoon of my conception. My back tire has gone down again. I pumped it hard as iron before I set out. And now I am on the rim.
> Mrs. Rooney: Oh what a shame!
> Mr. Tyler: Now if it were the front I should not so much mind. But the back. The back! The chain! The oil! The grease! The hub! The brakes! The gear! No! It is too much![50]

The futility of life is reduced to the conventional images of daily life and hidden beneath the situations of the commonplace. Talk does not even touch on the physical objects named. Even between husband and wife, the silence of self-dramatization makes communication impossible:

> Mr. Rooney: You have ceased to care. I speak--and you listen to the wind.
> Mrs. Rooney: No, I am agog, tell me all then we shall press on and never pause, never pause, till we come safe to haven.
> Pause.
> Mr. Rooney: Never pause . . . safe to haven. . . . Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language.
> Mrs. Rooney: Yes indeed, Dan, I know full well what you mean, I often have that feeling it is unspeakably excruciating.
> Mr. Rooney: I confess I have it sometimes myself, when I happen to overhear what I am saying.[51]

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[50]Beckett, All That Fall, pp. 39-40.

[51]Beckett, All That Fall, p. 80.

In order to illustrate the deadness of conventional language, Beckett has tried to make Mrs. Rooney's conversation as artificial as possible. In his other radio plays--Embers, Cascando, and Words and Music--he totally disintegrates language and even uses music to indicate an area where words fail completely. Artistically, by creating such abstract word pictures, he is able to create a complex world using only pure sounds emanating from radio.

Among the radio plays Embers has the most recognizable form. A man named Henry sits by the sea musing about his father, wife, daughter and some story that has to do with a Bolting and a Holloway. The effect here is very similar to the one achieved by Robbe-Grillet in his novels. The present, containing memories and repetitive scenes, is flattened out into a pastiche which blurs what was and what might have been. All is fragmentized. The sound of this revery is paced by the sound of the sea. The play begins with the simultaneous sounds of a voice and the sea: "Henry: On. (Sea. Voice louder.) On! (He moves on. Boots on shingle. As he goes.) Stop. (Boots on shingle. As he goes, louder.) Stop! (He halts. Sea a little louder.)"[52] The sea acts to fill the sense of silence, much in the way music will do in Cascando and Words and Music. It is as if language were coming up from the sea, becoming more

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[52]Samuel Beckett, Embers in Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces, p. 95.

concretized as it breaks through memory, and gradually returning to the sea and silence. After reliving memories of his wife and daughter, Henry is left with the following plea:

> . . . Please! Please! (Pause.) Begging. (Pause.) Of the poor. (Pause.) Ada! (Pause.) Father! (Pause.) Christ! (Pause.). . . . (Pause. Shingle as he gets up. He goes towards sea. Boots on shingle. He halts. Pause. Sea a little louder.) On. (Pause. He moves on. Boots on shingle. He halts at water's edge. Pause. Sea a little louder.) Little book. (Pause.) This evening . . . (Pause.) Nothing this evening. (Pause.) Tomorrow . . . tomorrow . . . plumber at nine, then nothing. (Pause. Puzzled.) Plumber at nine? (Pause.) Ah yes, the waste. (Pause.) Words. (Pause.) Saturday . . . nothing. Sunday . . . . Sunday . . . nothing all day. (Pause.) Nothing, all day nothing. (Pause.) All day all night nothing. (Pause.) Not a sound.[53]

Despite the abstract style, the loneliness of Henry and his silence is as poignant as that of Mrs. Rooney in her world crowded with people. With just the quickest of strokes--for instance the mention of a plumber coming at nine, a tangible event from the everyday world that makes up all that is left of the world of reality--Beckett can capture loneliness and emptiness.

Economy of words does not hamper him from making the same points that he does in Godot and other fully articulated plays. Come and Go has only 121 words, yet it is able to say a great deal about aging, friendship, and the relations

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[53]Beckett, Embers, p. 121.

between people.[54] In the same way, Cascando and Words and Music, moving into even more abstract realms, are still able to convey the emptiness of words and the silence that exists below them. In Words and Music, the words are concretized: they are given the name Joe. Joe and music are both subject to the orders of Croak. It is he who employs them to fill out his reveries about "the face on the stairs." And yet they cannot capture what Croak wishes. Both words and music are seen as separate agents from the thought of Croak. Each mode of expression gets carried away with itself not taking into account the idea they are supposed to be conveying.[55]

Having shown the total failure of words, as well as music, to capture meaning, Beckett moves into the furthest extreme for a writer: a play without words. In Act Without Words I Beckett extends the pantomime which he used to open Waiting for Godot. Instead of having a character struggle with a shoe that won't fit, he has his character struggle with various physical properties which keep thwarting him and ultimately defeat him. A pitcher with water comes down from above, but it is too high to reach. Blocks appear for him to stand on, but they are not tall enough for him to

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[54] Samuel Beckett, Come and Go: A Dramaticule (London: Caldus and Boyars, 1967).

[55] Samuel Beckett, Words and Music, printed in Evergreen Review, 6, No. 27 (November/December, 1962), pp. 34-43.

reach the water. Repeatedly, at the signal of a whistle the figure attempts to reach out for material comfort. At each attempt he is thwarted. But he continues. At the end he sits without moving.[56] But here as in Endgame and other Beckett plays, one is not sure that the whistle won't sound again and the game be repeated. The heap of millet still is not complete and silence still is not reached. Krapp, after all, may turn off his tape recorder and begin again.

Beckett has said, "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else."[57] Silence in Beckett becomes a sound. In his later works the sound finally gives way to the silence. Whether Didi and Gogo and friends finally ran out of the dialogue or are just taking their breath, it is hard to say. For the purposes of this study, an important point should be made. Once words have stopped pointing the way to silence, two things are possible: (1) nothing more is presented, as in the case of Beckett who has not written a new play since 1967, or (2) a new form, accepting the absence of the word, but no longer in despair because of this absence, emerges. What, after all, can follow Act Without Words? If theatre is to exist after total silence, it has to find nonverbal means and use them not to call attention to the failure of

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[56]Samuel Beckett, Act Without Words I, in Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces, pp. 125-133.

[57]Samuel Beckett, "Letters on Endgame," Village Voice (March 19, 1958).

language, but to create a new language. The emphasis is important: the Absurdists had the responsibility of proving the case against language. The next generation of theatre people could accept the results and move on from there.

III. Harold Pinter: Silence as Communication

Although both Ionesco and Beckett have used silence as methods of communication in their plays, neither has developed the full potential of silence as a dramatic device. They have used it as a form of protest against the inadequacies of language, or as a sign for the inexplicable nature of experience which man cannot fathom. Above all, Beckett's characters say, they must keep talking. As the speaker in The Unnamable puts it, "And all these questions I ask myself. It is not in a spirit of curiosity. I cannot be silent. About myself I need know nothing. Here all is clear. No, all is not clear. But the discourse must go on. So one invents obscurities."[1]

Pinter does not try to fill the silences that exist at the heart of human experience. Instead he underlines them, orchestrates them, and fashions out of them a dramatic mode of expression. The following exchange between two brothers in The Caretaker is an example of the emphasis Pinter places on silence:

> Silence.
> A drip sounds in the bucket. They all look up.
> Silence.
> Mick. You still got that leak.
> Ashton. Yes.
> Pause.
> It's coming from the roof.

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[1]Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable in Three Novels: Molloy/ Malone Dies/and The Unnamable (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 294.

Mick. From the roof, eh?
Ashton. Yes.
Pause.
I'll have to tar it over.
Mick. You're going to tar it over?
Ashton. Yes.
Mick. What?
Ashton. The cracks.
Pause.
Mick. You'll be tarring over the cracks on the roof.
Ashton. Yes.
Pause.
Mick. Think that'll do it?
Ashton. It'll do it, for the time being.
Mick. Uh.[2]

It is this kind of exchange that has led Pinter to be ridiculed by many critics. The banality of the exchange, the lack of dramatic action it indicates, and the easily parodied style have led many to call it meaningless. Seen as merely a cover for the actual conversation that is going on in silence, such an exchange has purpose. Evidently there is a strong reaction that sets in when the brothers confront each other. The viewer can only speculate on why Mick is reduced to monosyllables when Ashton appears. What the relation between the brothers is is not as important as the establishment of the tension that exists between the two and the immediate effect it has on Mick.

At first glance the conversation could be seen as a parallel to the innocuous discourse that filled Waiting for Godot. There is something funny about the cursory answers and the repetitions. Yet the passage falls just short of

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[2]Pinter, The Caretaker, p. 37.

producing laughter because there is something familiar about the dialogue. People actually do talk that way. Whereas in Godot people can easily disassociate themselves from the word games in which Didi and Gogo engage. The audience can assure themselves that they do not talk that way. In Pinter's plays, however, they recognize a more familiar tone. And if the audiences don't know exactly what to make of many of Pinter's characters, they nevertheless recognize that the conversations have a disturbing ring of familiarity to them. If the audience laughs at the banality of the conversations, Pinter believes that they are really using their laughter to cover this recognition.

> Certainly I laughed myself while writing The Caretaker but not all the time, not 'indiscriminately.' An element of the absurd is, I think, one of the features of the play, but at the same time I did not intend it to be merely a laughable farce. If there hadn't been other issues at stake the play would not have been written. Audience reaction can't be regulated, and no one would want it to be; nor is it easy to analyze. But where the comic and the tragic (for want of a better word) are closely interwoven, certain members of an audience will always give emphasis to the comic as opposed to the other, for by so doing they rationalize the other out of existence.[3]

Silence is a means of conveying an attitude toward life, that balances between comedy and tragedy, and that cannot be captured adequately in words. Rather than make the attempt, Pinter allows the silences themselves to speak. By placing

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[3]Harold Pinter as quoted by Arthur Hinchliffe, Harold Pinter (New York: Twayne Publishing Co., 1967), p. 95.

so much emphasis on silence, Pinter has been able to fashion an entirely new dramatic form. No playwright before him acknowledged that real human beings do not always speak eloquently of their fears, hopes, and desires. Pinter has recognized that a character who can eloquently articulate his fears is not afraid. The greatest fears are precisely those which elude verbal reduction.

Silence in Pinter's plays is not confined just to the absence of words. It exists even when words are spoken. It becomes, in most discourse, the actual referent of language, since Pinter believes that what masks as conversation is, in most cases, only an avoidance of communication or itself a form of verbal silence.

> There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with the echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.[4]

To Pinter, then, all is silence: both words and the avoidance of words. The Pinter play is built on the premise that the real interests and lives of the characters have their roots in the nonverbal world. They take shape and

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[4]Harold Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre," Evergreen Review, 8, No. 33 (August/September 1964), p. 82.

become perceivable through the medium of language. But language in no way explains them; it merely points to them by calling the viewer's attention to the silences where the real action takes place.

Pinter has mastered a difficult dramatic art: to give form to the silence that lies at the heart of human relations. His technique is to weave, along with the thread of everyday, object-centered discourse, threads from the nether side of life, encapsulated in the same flat, everyday jargon but having as referent not the sensate world but the inner world of individual experience.

The plays of Pinter in many ways resemble a French nouvelle roman such as one by Alain Robbe-Grillet. In the novels as in Pinter's plays, surface details defy reduction. They exist and have meaning in their physical context, what Roland Barthes has called "Writing Degree Zero."[5] As Robbe-Grillet describes this writing: "Instead of this universe of 'signification' (psychological, social, functional) we must try, then, to construct a world both more solid and more immediate. Let it be first of all by their presence that objects and gestures establish themselves, and let this presence continue to prevail over whatever explanatory theory that may try to enclose them in a system of references, whether emotional, sociological, Freudian,

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[5]Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968).

or metaphysical."[6]

Pinter, like Robbe-Grillet, does not explain what is going on in his writing; he merely presents a scene which by its physical existence gains an authenticity that cannot be further reduced. Robbe-Grillet says, "The world is neither significant nor absurd. It is, quite simply."[7] Pinter seems to imply this same attitude when he describes his point of departure in a play: "I have usually begun a play in quite a simple manner, found a couple of characters in a particular context, thrown them together and listened to what they said, keeping my nose to the ground. The context has always been, for me, concrete and particular, and the characters concrete also."[8]

If the characters are concrete, the situations they are in may not seem to be to the audience. Pinter's argument is that these characters are as communicative as any characters one would meet in everyday conversations.

> My characters tell me so much and no more with reference to their experience, their aspirations, their motives, their history. Between my lack of biographical data about them and the ambiguity of what they say there lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore. You and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the

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[6]Alain Robbe-Grillet, For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 21.

[7]Robbe-Grillet, For a New Novel, p. 19.

[8]Pinter, Evergreen Review, p. 80.

> time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. A language . . . where, under what is said another thing is being said.[9]

Silence, then, indicates in Pinter's plays the area of this new language where people actually confront each other. It is the equivalent to the area below surface detail in a nouvelle roman where the drama is actually situated though the novelist may declare total ignorance of its nature. If the art form is to approximate life, then comprehension of human motivations can never totally be understood. Pinter has declared that his characters are as real as any man is when seen from the outside without hints as to his background. In most exchanges between people, Pinter argues, there is only observation. Calling cards are not worn to identify where a person, encountered on a street for instance, came from, who he is, and whether he loves his wife. The viewer must through his imagination supply the details if he chooses to. To illustrate the point, Martin Esslin in his book about Pinter entitled The Peopled Wound, relates the following anecdote:

> When Pinter received a letter which read: 'DEAR SIR: I should be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your play The Birthday Party. These are the points which I do not understand: 1. Who are the two men? 2. Where did Stanley come from? 3. Were they all supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers

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[9]Pinter, Evergreen Review, p. 82.

> to my questions I cannot fully understand your plan.' Pinter is said to have replied as follows: 'DEAR MADAM: I would be obliged if you would likely explain to me the meaning of your letter. These are the points which I do not understand: 1. Who are you? 2. Where do you come from? 3. Are you supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to your questions I cannot fully understand your letter.[10]

Pinter's point is well made. Audiences expect of theatre what they never have in real life: complete verification. Instead of artificial verification, contrived by the playwright, Pinter actually presents the inarticulate quality of expression that exists between men. Pinter does not interpret silences and fill them the way playwrights traditionally have. Instead, he leaves them intact. He merely transcribes them in their two most common forms: literal silence and the babble of words that reduces to silence.

Pinter's earliest preoccupation seems to have been with the former, the literal manifestation of silence. One of the earliest pieces of writing done by Pinter was the short story, The Examination, published in 1959 before Pinter's first play The Room was written. The story told in the first person describes an encounter between two people, one of whom is the examiner and the other the examinee. Like an inverse illustration of Ionesco's The Lesson, the examiner gradually loses dominance and is finally subjugated by the examinee.

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[10]Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound: The Work of Harold Pinter (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 30.

Whereas the student is assaulted by words in The Lesson, the teacher is defeated by silence in The Examination. The difference is important. For Pinter, it is silence, more than words which can be used as a weapon of domination. The professor in the Ionesco play was able to triumph because he held the key to definition. Kullus, the examinee in the Pinter story, is able to triumph because it is he who controls the silences which are, to Pinter, more threatening than any words.

At the beginning of the story the examiner explains how he grants Kullus, the student, "intervals" of silence between questioning. The examiner actually gains a source of pride in his ability to control these silences. "When Kullus was disposed to silence I invariably acquiesced, and prided myself on those occasions with tactical acumen."[11] Still in control of the situation, the examiner does, however, remark: "Kullus' silence, where he was entitled to silence, was compounded of numerous characteristics, the which I duly noted. But I could not always follow his courses, and where I could not follow, I was no longer his dominant."[12] The speaker acknowledges that the one who can control the silence has the power of dominance. Yet, the speaker says, "I was naturally dominant, by virtue of my

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[11]Harold Pinter, The Examination in The Collection and The Lover (London: Methuen and Co., 1964), p. 87.

[12]Pinter, The Examination, p. 88.

owning the room; he having entered through the door I now close."[13] Physical territory, Pinter indicates, can offer a substitute sense of dominance in the face of silence. Yet as silence gains precedence it is followed by the usurpation of the room as well. If one is unaware of his surroundings, he is free of the subservience that the physical environment requires of him. Kullus, in his silence, never comments on the room: whether there is a fire in the grate, on the placement of the chair. The dominance achieved by having a territorial advantage is, therefore, negated. Moving in areas beyond speech, Kullus eludes total subjugation. "He did so by deepening the intensity of his silence, and by taking courses I could by no means follow, so that I remained isolated, and outside his silence, and thus of negligible influence."[14] The influence of the examiner continues to diminish until he notes:

> And so the time came when Kullus initiated intervals at his own inclination, and pursued his courses at will, and I was able to remark some consistency in his behaviour. For now I followed him in his courses without difficulty. . . . My devotion was actual and unequivocal, I extended my voluntary co-operation, and made no objection to procedure. . . . And when Kullus remarked the absence of a flame in the gate, I was bound to acknowledge this. And when he remarked the presence of the stool I was equally bound. And when he removed the blackboard, I

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[13]Pinter, The Examination, p. 89.

[14]Pinter, The Examination, p. 91.

> offered no criticism. And when he closed the curtains I did not object.
> For we were now in Kullus' room.[15]

Silence becomes a sign of power for it allows the silent person to elude psychological control. The effect of silence on a weak character is also important to note. In the face of no communication, the hidden fears of a character may come to the surface and fill the gaps in conversation.

An example of the power of silence can be seen in Pinter's play A Slight Ache. In the play, as in The Examination, the antagonist triumphs because his silence proves to be inpenetrable, and it succeeds in breaking down the person who confronts it. The play involves three people: a couple, Edward and Flora, and a matchseller who is silent throughout the play. For two months prior to the beginning of the play, the matchseller has been standing on the road behind the couple's house. Finally Edward is unable to control his anxiety at the sight of the figure and invites him in in order to question him more closely. In a series of actions similar in intention to those in The Examination, Edward loses control of the situation as he desperately tries to penetrate and, thereby, control the silence that confronts him. Edward, like the examiner, believes that he can dominate the figure if he deals with him on familiar territory. He tells his wife: "I'll invite

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[15]Pinter, The Examination, p. 92.

him in here. Into my study. Then we'll . . . get to the bottom of it."[16] The "my" indicates the comfort that characters in Pinter plays get from the sense of ownership.

Edward admits the matchseller to his study and attempts to dominate him by using a form of verbal attack. Edward uses the specialized language of the scientist to impress and thereby subjugate the silent matchseller: "Now and again I jot a few observations on certain tropical phenomena--not from the same standpoint, of course. (Silent pause.) Yes Africa, now. Africa's always been my happy hunting ground. Fascinating country. Do you know it? I get the impression that you've been around a bit. Do you by any chance know the Membunza Mountains? Great range south of Katambaloo. French Equatorial Africa, if my memory serves me right."[17]

When he gets no response, Edward starts bombarding the matchseller with his knowledge of wine. It is another attempt to establish a verbal territory where he may dominate. "Now look, what will you have to drink? A glass of ale: Curaco Fockink Orange? Ginger Beer? Tia Maria? A wachenheimer Fuchsmantel Reisling Beeren Auslese? Gin and it? Chateauneuf-du-Pape? A little Asti Spumante? Or what do you say to a straightforward Piersporter Goldtropfschen Feine Auslese (Reichsgraf von Kesselstaff)? Any

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[16]Harold Pinter, A Slight Ache in A Slight Ache and Other Plays (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 19.

[17]Pinter, A Slight Ache, p. 23.

preference."[18] Unsuccessful, Edward continues to push the advantage gained by fighting on his own territory. "You're on my blasted house, on my territory, drinking my wine, eating my duck! Now you've had your fill you sit like a hump, a mouldering heap. In my room. My den. . . ."[19] Edward, like the examiner, loses control of the situation because he is unable to penetrate the matchseller's silence. His failure is represented by a slight ache in his eyes. This link between the loss of dominance and the loss of eyesight is central to Pinter. As a character feels his grasp of a situation diminish he begins to suffer eye trouble. In The Room, Rose loses her sight completely when she confronts Riley, the figure from her past. In The Birthday Party, Stanley has his glasses broken by McCann and Goldberg during their interrogation of him. In The Tea-party, Disson lapses into a complete catatonic state at the tea party meant to honor him. All these characters lose control of the territory they deem necessary for their survival. Either they confront a silent force or they are terrorized by the silence lurking behind words. Just when they finally "see" their inner fears seemingly materialized they lose their physical sight. Blindness becomes a physical sign, Oedipus fashion, of having seen what they assume to be the truth of the silences. Edward is finally

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[18]Pinter, A Slight Ache, p. 25.

[19]Pinter, A Slight Ache, pp. 34-35.

broken by the indomitable silence. What seems to have defeated him is the silent fears that he himself grafted on to the silence. Confronted with a void, the inclination is to fill it. Pinter's characters fill it with their own fears and are thereby destroyed by them.

Ionesco has touched on the same theme in The Killer. Bérenger at the end of the play confronts the silent killer and is defeated by the inpenetrable silence. Whether the killer and Pinter's matchseller represent death, time, or the exteriorization of fear is unimportant. The silence need not be reduced to a specific metaphorical meaning. The effect it has on the protagonist is what is important. Bérenger in the Ionesco play makes an attempt to understand the silence that confronts him, "Why can't you answer me, answer me! Oh! Argument's impossible with you! Listen, you'll make me angry, I warn you! No . . . no . . . I mustn't lose my self control. I must understand you."[20] But understanding of the inexplicable is ultimately impossible, as Bérenger finally realizes. "Oh . . . how weak my strength is against your cold determination, your ruthlessness! And what good are bullets even, against the resistance of an infinitely stubborn will! . . . . Oh God! There's nothing we can do. What can we do . . . What can we do . . ."[21]

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[20]Eugene Ionesco, The Killer in Plays, III (London: John Calder, 1960), p. 103.

[21]Ionesco, pp. 108-109.

In A Slight Ache Edward, too, is interested in understanding the silence that greets him. He asks questions, an act that proves dangerous to other Pinter characters. As Arnold Hinchcliffe notes, "The act of questioning appearances, motives, or consequences invites catastrophe." Once a man begins to question the world around him, he finds that he is confronted with incomprehensibility, in the face of which he stands suddenly afraid. Edward, like Bérenger, makes a vain attempt to fill the void. But what he succeeds in doing is merely exposing his own fears.[22]

Edward's final speeches reveal a man's progressive exposure in the face of silence.

> (Briskly) Come, come, stop it. Be a man. Blow your nose for goodness sake. Pull Yourself together.
>
> He sneezes
>
> Ah.
>
> He rises. Sneezes.
>
> Ah fever. Excuse me.
>
> He blows his nose.
>
> I've caught a cold. A germ. In my eyes. It was this morning. In my eyes. My eyes.
>
> Pause. He falls to the floor.
>
> Not that I had any difficulty in seeing you, no, no it was not so much my sight, my sight is excellent--in winter I run about with nothing on but a pair of polo shorts--no it was not so much any deficiency in my sight as the airs between me and my object . . . don't weep . . . the change of air, the currents obtaining in the space between me and my object, the shades they make, the shapes they take, the quivering, the eternal quivering . . . Sometimes, of course I would take shelter, shelter to compose myself. Yes I would seek a tree, a cranny of bushes, erect my canopy and so make shelter. And rest.

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[22]Arnold Hinchcliffe, Harold Pinter, p. 69.

> (Low murmur) And then I no longer heard the wind or saw the sun. Nothing entered, nothing left my nook. I lay on my side in my polo shorts, my fingers lightly in contact with the blades of grass, the earthflowers . . . then I said nothing, I remarked nothing, things happened upon me, then in my times of shelter the shades, the petals, carried themselves, carried their bodies upon me, and nothing entered my nook, nothing left it. But then the time came. I saw the wind . . . (slowly in horror) You are laughing. You're laughing . . . (overwhelming nausea and horror) Rocking . . . gasping . . . rocking . . . shaking . . . rocking . . . heaving . . . rocking . . . You're laughing at me! Aaaaahhhh![23]

A point has been reached where a character actually does reveal something about himself. Having admitted the matchseller into his most private dreams, Edward stands totally exposed, and naked. Pinter has said, "I have found that there invariably does come a moment when this [disclosure] happens, where he says something, perhaps, which he never said before. And where this happens what he says is irrevocable, and can never be taken back."[24] Rather than finding a strength in revelation, Pinter's characters are broken by it. The confrontation between their exterior self and their inner fears does not free them or elevate them as it does in classical tragedy. They are not wiser for their fall. They are merely fallen. The blind Oedipus "sees" as he has never seen before; he is noble in his defeat. The blind Pinter characters are broken, facing

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[23]Pinter, A Slight Ache, pp. 39-40.

[24]Harold Pinter quoted by Martin Esslin, The People Wound (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 42.

nothing but expulsion from their comforting surroundings. Edward in this play silently picks up the matchsellers box and takes his place; Rose goes blind at the end of The Room. A silent Stanley is led away at the end of The Birthday Party. Pinter seems to be saying that a confrontation with silence or the void does not benefit man; it destroys what little hold on life he has. The illusions that man fashions for himself are essential if he is to go on living. Silence is deadly for it exposes the lie.

Not all Pinter characters are undone by exposure to silence. Often they are destroyed by the fears themselves which never are articulated, but which take a material shape. In The Room Rose fears something from her past, though she never indicates directly of what she is afraid. The room in which she lives acts as a protection against the expressed fear. It represents a defense against the outside and against the silent terror that lurks beyond the confines of the room.

She makes small talk to her husband who remains silent throughout most of the play. She addresses herself to him, but she is actually carrying on a monologue of her own. Here the silence does not mirror the hidden conversation that goes on between people but rather the silent fears that exist within each person. Words, in this situation, keep individual characters from hearing the silence of their own fears. She talks to Bert about the weather, their room and the

basement, but all the time she is silently talking about some fear about which the audience never learns but which it can feel. The words she chooses give a clue to this dual conversation, if not to the nature of it:

> Rose: I've never seen who it is. Who is it? Who lives down there? I'll have to ask. I mean, you might as well know, Bert. But whoever it is, it can't be too cosy.[25]

The "I" which changes to "you" reveals the avoidance of confrontation which Pinter spoke about: the stratagem to cover nakedness. Rose in her discussion, like Meg in The Birthday Party, reveals the fears that she herself will not acknowledge. The basement, with its running walls and the unnamed person who lives down there, becomes the verbal personification of hidden fears for her. What is striking about the technique is how ordinary the conversation is: a wife prattling to her silent husband, repeating herself, speaking of what both know, of the routine of every day, but revealing in this mundane jargon the underlying fear that is present. The popularity of Pinter may well reside in the recognition of the fears of the audience in the all too familiar discourse of Meg or Rose.

Sometimes the words slip, and true conversation is revealed. Rose tells Bert, "If they ever ask you, Bert, I'm quite happy where I am."[26] The "they" is never

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[25]Harold Pinter, The Room in The Birthday Party and The Room (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 92.

[26]Pinter, The Room, p. 93.

explained, but it seems to refer to the fear that Rose has of being dispossessed of her room. In another speech, presumably directed at Bert, she makes clear her association between the room as her salvation and the basement as her nemesis: "This is a good room. You've got a chance in a place like this. I look after you, don't I, Bert? Like when they offered us the basement here I said no straight off. The ceiling right on top of you. No, you've got a window here, you can move yourself, you can come home at night, if you have to go out, you can do your job, you can come home, you're all right. And I'm here. You stand a chance."[27]

When Riley, the man who has been staying in the basement, finally arrives, he is a blind, black man. And rather than taking the silent form of the matchseller, he speaks to Rose of her past, and of the hidden fears that she has not succeeded in suppressing. After a stream-of-consciousness monologue in which she seems to return to some unspecified experiences of her past, she turns to Riley and says:

> What message? Who have you got a message from? Who?
> Riley. Your father wants you to come home.
> Pause.
> Rose. Home? Go now. Come on. It's late. It's late.
> Riley. To come home.

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[27]Pinter, The Room, p. 95.

> Rose. Stop it. I can't take it. What do you want? What do you want?
> Riley. Come home, Sal.[28]

The Room is Pinter's first play. Rather than leave the breakdown of his character to a silence force, he has given the force a shape and a voice. Riley expresses what Rose fears: a mention of her father and of a life she had before marrying Bert and moving into her room. The name Sal, not denied by Rose, indicates that she has lived another life and that it is the fear of its reemergence that has kept her locked within her room.

In the play, it is not Riley but Bert who precipitates the final destruction of Rose. Bert, who has been absent throughout most of the action of the play, returns home to find Riley. At first he seems to ignore his presence, since he is intent on relating how he has driven his lorry through the wet, cold night. The sudden extended description comes as a surprise since Bert had been silent in his earlier appearance. When he finishes he turns and inexplicably kills Riley. The last line of the play is Rose's. After Bert has murdered Riley she screams, "Can't see. I can't see. I can't see."[29] Much like Edward, she has finally been forced to confront her fears. The actual dread has materially appeared in the form of Riley. Yet when it is vanquished brutally by Bert, there is no deliverance, but

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[28]Pinter, The Room, p. 114.

[29]Pinter, The Room, p. 116.

rather blindness. The destruction of Riley seems to leave Rose with nothing, for it has been the fear that has been the central preoccupation of her life. Having confronted it, and having seen it destroyed, she is left with Bert who evidently from the change in him, will no longer play the passive role he has assumed in the past. Another possible interpretation of the ending is to see Bert's actions as a physical manifestation of the violence with which Rose herself rejects the intrusive force of Riley. The important point is that what had been silent--that is, the fear of the past--has now been exteriorized and superimposed on the present. Thus any comfort gained by the flimsy refuge of lies and subterfuge that the present life has given Rose collapses and leaves her defenseless and blinded by the recognition of the impossibility of escape.

The sense of mystery in a Pinter play comes from the fact that one is never quite sure if a particular action literally takes place or is a visual approximation of a state of mind. Where actual events stop and mental states start is never demarcated in Pinter. This overlapping causes the world of a Pinter play to be familiar but at the same time terrifyingly unreal. The terror stems from the friction created by superimposing inner mental states on mundane, external actions. Pinter says:

> I suggest there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A

> thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false. A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things. The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression.[30]

A good example of this interaction between surface or traditional reality and subconscious Pinter realism which focuses on silent communication is seen in Act I of The Homecoming, where Lenny meets his sister-in-law for the first time. After rambling monologues he says:

> Excuse me, shall I take this ashtray out of your way?
> Ruth. It's not in my way.
> Lenny. It seems to be in the way of your glass. The glass was about to fall. Or the ashtray. I'm rather worried about the carpet. It's not me, it's my father. He's obsessed with order and clarity. He doesn't like mess. So, as I don't believe you're smoking at the moment, I'm sure you won't object if I move the ashtray.
> (he does so)
> And now perhaps, I'll relieve you of your glass.
> Ruth. I haven't quite finished.
> Lenny. You've consumed quite enough, in my opinion.
> Ruth. No, I haven't.
> Lenny. Quite sufficient, in my opinion.
> Ruth. Not in mine, Leonard.
> Pause.
> Lenny. Don't call me that, please.
> Ruth. Why not?
> Lenny. That's the name my mother gave me.
> Pause.
> Just give me the glass.
> Ruth. No.
> Pause.
> Lenny. I'll take it, then.

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[30]Pinter, Evergreen Review, pp. 80-81.

Ruth. If you take the glass . . . I'll take you.
Pause.
Lenny. You're joking.
Pause.
You're in love, anyway, with another man.
You've had a secret liaison with another man.
His family didn't even know. Then you come here without a word of warning and start to make trouble.
(She picks up the glass and lifts it towards him.)
Ruth. Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass.
(He is still.)
Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip.
(She pats her lap. Pause.
She stands, moves to him with the glass.)
Put your head back and open your mouth.
Lenny. Take that glass away from me.
Ruth. Lie on the floor. Go on. I'll pour it down your throat.
Lenny. What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal?
(She laughs shortly, drains the glass.)[31]

Early critics placed Pinter in the realistic/naturalistic school of writing. Yet the first question that comes into mind after reading the preceding dialogue is: Would a brother-in-law and sister-in-law actually converse like that in real life? Do such exchanges actually occur? To answer such questions is, I believe, to get to the heart of the Pinter technique. And the answer lies in the areas of silence. Between Lenny and Ruth there is tension from the beginning. It is not verbalized, just as such tension finds no verbal outlet in realistic theatre. The words spoken between the two, however, are words whose referent is this

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[31] Harold Pinter, The Homecoming (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 33-34.

hostility and battle for dominance. In this particular exchange the ashtray, glass of water, and use of the name Leonard are the external weapons used in the battle. Lenny's insistence on moving first the ashtray then the glass show his need to establish his authority over his new sister-in-law. Having acquiesced to the removal of the ashtray, she is taking her stand on the glass. The chatter before the first pause indicates a sparring. "Quite enough," and "in my opinion" with the later addition of "own" become actions in themselves. When Ruth uses the name Leonard, the battle turns. The pause, therefore, following immediately afterward points to the real "dialogue" between the two: who will dominate whom. It is in the silence that the actual communication takes place. The nakedness that the words cover is exposed. The next exchanges after the pause are new parries with Lenny on the defensive, resorting to more overt challenges while Ruth gains strength as indicated in her adamant "No" in answer to Lenny's obviously threatening "I'll take it, then." The culmination of this exchange is Ruth's ultimate challenge, "I'll take you." The dots before it, indicating a short silence, show a gap in the covering so that following words can emerge from the usually hidden silent dialogue.

Progressively after this real exchange the actions move from the polite surface reality of a conventional dialogue and become more primitive, basic. The glass of

water in Ruth's hand becomes as menacing as a lethal weapon. Once Lenny has stopped being the aggressor and shown himself to be unsure--"You're in love, anyway, with another man"--Ruth can take full command. She refers to the glass as "my glass," and the "my" is echoed in the suggestion that Lenny sit "on my lap." After approaching with the water, her final stroke is to say, "I'll pour it down your throat." In this context the words are as violent as those spoken by the killers in The Dumbwaiter or by Goldberg and McCann in The Birthday Party. They smack of all sorts of hidden power and retreat. Yet--and this is the important part--they are flat and innocuous in themselves. They exist on the surface level.

Alain Robbe-Grillet in talking about his own novels says that "gestures and objects will be there before being something; and they will still be there afterwards, hard, unalterable, eternally present, mocking their own 'meaning.'"[32] The same is true of surface objects and gestures in Pinter. In the silence, the communication might be about sex, aggression, fear, but in the surface realism, the ever present context still concerns drinking and glasses.

Obviously, there is a temptation to see the whole scene realistically. Many critics when dealing with The Homecoming felt compelled to show that it was realistically possible for Ruth to remain with her husband's family and become a

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[32]Alain Robbe-Grillet, p. 21.

prostitute to pay her way. These critics go to elaborate lengths to make their cases, failing to take into account Pinter's own comment that what actually occurs and what may only have been imagined are equally important. Pinter, himself, contends that he is not sure of where words stop and where silence speaks.

This desire to deal with the plays realistically, disregarding the silences that defy reduction, is coupled with the equally misleading tendency to deal with the plays symbolically as Katherine Burkman does in her book The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter.[33] But to do so is to superimpose an awkward and extraneous convention on the plays. Worse, it is to deny the actual silent communications that are being acted out by reducing them to preestablished symbolic patterns. It is against this tendency of critics to offer their prepackaged meanings to surface reality that Robbe-Grillet rebels against with his objectified writing. Pinter, likewise, condemns it: "I feel very strongly about the particular, not about symbolism. People watching plays tend to make characters into symbols and put them on the shelf like fossils. It's a damned sight easier to deal with them that way."[34]

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[33]Katherine Burkman, The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter: Its Basis in Ritual (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971).

[34]Harold Pinter, quoted by Lois Gordon, Stratagems to Uncover Nakedness (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 2.

One has the feeling that to offer excuses for the actions of Pinter's characters is the same as to offer plausible excuses for the presence of three noses or four eyes in Picasso's women. Picasso obviously is grafting on the surface the inner character of his subjects. The only way he can show inner states is to alter the actual physical appearance. While viewers recognize that the figure in question does not actually look the way Picasso has depicted her, they also recognize that the figure is the way Picasso has visually described her. In much the same way Pinter has presented actions which may not actually have taken place, but which are indications of the desired actions of the characters. Ruth may not literally have gone upstairs and made love to her brother-in-law, but her desire to or her capability of doing so make the actual act meaningless. Because the action in Pinter's plays is so realistic, the idea that certain actions are actually manifestations of states of mind is confusing. The note of mystery, or what John Russell Brown has called "menace and muddle," comes precisely from the splicing of the explicable with the inexplicable.

Pinter has repeatedly mentioned that he has an aversion to words and that he wishes that he could use fewer to indicate the dramatic situation.

> I have mixed feelings about words myself. Moving among them, sorting them out, watching them appear on the page, from this I derive considerable pleasure. But at the same time I have another strong feeling about words

> which amounts to nothing less than nausea. . . . Given this nausea, it's very easy to be overcome by it and step back into paralysis. I imagine most writers know something of this kind of paralysis. But if it is possible to confront this nausea, to follow it to its hilt, to move through it and out of it, then it is possible to say that something has occurred, that something has been achieved.[35]

This movement through the nausea of words toward an ever increasing silence can be plotted from The Room through Old Times. The latter play borders on total silence. There is only a minimum of conversation, which takes the form of rambling memories. It is too early to say whether Pinter, like Ionesco in The Killer and Beckett in Act Without Words has reached an impasse or whether he has found a new highly poetic form on the other side of the nausea of language. Old Times, which will be discussed at length in the next Part, is a successful play which appears as a poetic testimony to the richness of expression that can still exist on the borders of total silence. The area in which the play takes place, however, is narrow, facing out on silence. Whether there is enough room left in the area of the verbal to admit other plays is unsure. If Pinter does succeed in writing more plays which hang so perilously close to complete silence, he will have succeeded where Ionesco and Beckett have failed. He will prove that silence is not the defeat of drama but is an element which can sustain dramatic situations.

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[35]Pinter, Evergreen Review, p. 81.

For the most part, however, silence has its limitations as a device to circumvent the failure of language. Its main shortcoming is that it robs the play of its dramatic quality. Where dialogue is a form of action, silence threatens to bring the drama to a standstill. The next Part of this discussion, will, therefore, touch on those elements which can stand in place of words but which convey action and dramatic intensity.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY

The term poetry, when it is applied to the theatre, has traditionally meant verse drama. The type of poetry to be discussed in this section, however, relates to the nature of poetry rather than its form. It includes those elements which are capable of creating a poetic impression on the stage.

Ionesco uses the word poetry in the general sense in which it will be used in this study. "Plays are a form of poetry," he said, "just as poems are poetry, just as novels are poetry. Poetry means creation, etymologically. Where there's creation, there is poetry. The label 'poetic theatre' has often been applied to plays written according to certain rules or stylistic fashions that passed for poetic at particular times. But wherever you find the creation of a world and of characters, characters who are at once imaginary and real, there you have poetry."[1]

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[1]Claude Bonnefoy, Conversations with Eugène Ionesco, trans. Jan Dawson (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston), p. 165.

Ionesco's use of the word is so broad as to almost render the term useless, since it leaves little that is not poetry. However, it does point to the basic idea that poetry need not be confined to a specific genre; what captures life is poetic. It is a particular type of creativity, however, that transcends the level of life that is wholly explicable and deals instead with the dual world of the oneiric and the concrete which cannot be reducible to a simplistic reality.

Robin Skelton observes that "we cannot call a piece of writing poetry on any evidence save our own positive belief in its having a quality which we cannot define."[2] This quality, he goes on to say, produces a certain effect, and it is the effect which is recognizable. Skelton describes this effect as the "arousing [of] one's sense of life in such a way that the newly revalued pattern sets in motion and re-orders all those other patterns of one's own inner jig-saw puzzle of thought, emotion, memory, and vision."[3]

The English poet Ted Hughes, in the following example, illustrates the difficulty in determining the nature of poetry and also the difficulty of embodying in

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[2]Robin Skelton, The Poetic Pattern (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 6.

[3]Skelton, p. 7.

poetry the nature of experience.

> A short time ago, a tramp came to our door and asked for money. I gave him something and watched him walk away. That would seem to be a simple enough experience, watching a tramp walk away. But how could I begin to describe what I saw? Words seem suddenly a bit thin. It is not enough to say, 'The tramp walked away' or even 'The tramp went away with a slinking sort of shuffle, as if he wished he were running full speed for the nearest corner.' In ordinary descriptive writing such phrases have to suffice, simply because the writer has to economize on time, and if he set down everything that is to be seen in a man's walk, he would never get on to the next thing, there would be no room, he would have written a whole biography, that would be a book. And even then . . . he would have missed the most important factor: that what he saw, he saw and understood in one flash, a single 1,000 volt shock, that lit up everything and drove it into his bones, whereas in such words and phrases he is dribbling it out over pages in tinglings that can only just be felt.[4]

Hughes is writing about the difficulty in offering any outlet for experience which, like the impression one gets from viewing a tramp walking, is never totally clear, is instantaneous and related to time, and is unable to be translated in words even if the experience were clearly understood. Written poetry, he says, can only capture

> something of the deep complexity that makes us precisely the way we are . . . Something of the inaudible music that moves us along in our bodies from moment to moment like water in a river. . . . Something of the duplicity and relativity and the merely fleeting quality of all this. Something of the almighty importance of it and something of

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[4]Ted Hughes, Poetry Is (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1970), pp. 3-4.

> the utter meaninglessness. And when words can manage something of this, and manage it in a moment of time, and in that same moment make out of it all the vital signature of a human being--not of an atom, or of a geometrical diagram, or of a heap of lenses--but a human being, we call it poetry.[5]

Hughes, like Ionesco, believes that the recreation of man is the essential poetic act. A play, therefore, because it actually can offer the experience of the tramp walking away has the possibility of capturing all of the complex experience to which Hughes refers, not merely something of it. The human actor who stands in front of the audience and offers himself in the guise of a particular character is able to create a poetry that is not dependent on words, but gets its impetus from the physical presence it offers. True, the extent of the poetic experience will depend on the abilities of the person playing the tramp, on the sensibilities of the audience experiencing the tramp walking, and on the playwright who has furnished the context within which the tramp will walk.

Yet, despite these limitations, the drama is the form that potentially can create the most profound poetry because it is the form that presents living man. It is also the form that embraces many other communicative media in its presentation and thus has recourse to various means of materializing its content. Unlike poetry and the novel,

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[5]Hughes, p. 8.

it is not dependent on words alone. However, considering the many elements involved in a theatrical production--music, lighting, costumes, physical movement, scenery, props--it is interesting that words have superseded all the other modes of communication throughout the history of theatre. Of course, it may well be that since all the other elements in a drama are attached to production and only words in their written form can be transmitted, it is they that have become synonymous with theatrical communication. While the total theatrical production of a Shakespearean play, for instance, did not rely only on words, it is the one remaining remnant which indicates the nature of the play. Antonin Artaud, however, makes the point that written texts of the plays of Shakespeare do not indicate the "theater's physics" or the "scenic rhythm."[6] It is to this rhythm that one must turn, he argues, in order to understand the effect the play had on contemporary audiences. In short, the written text of a play may be informative, may even supply the outline for the production, but it in no way describes the nature of the production. For a production is a combination--in a certain organic form--of all its components, including living man and scenic effects, both of which must be seen in production.

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[6]Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 108.

There have been many people concerned with theatre who have stressed the multifaceted nature of the dramatic form and its similarity to poetry. Richard Wagner used the term Gesamtkunstwerk to indicate the "collected, united, whole, or total artwork."[7] Wagner believed that "the drama, as the most perfect artwork, differs from all other forms of poetry, in just this--that in it the aim is lifted into utmost imperceptibility by its entire realization."[8]

The Symbolists also emphasized the idea that the poetic nature of theatre stemmed from the meshing of various artistic forms within the framework of the theatre. One of the most famous declarations of the relation between theatre and poetry was made by Jean Cocteau in his Preface to Les Maries De La Tour Eiffel /The Eiffel Tower Wedding Party/. "The action of my piece is pictorial," he proclaimed, "though the text itself is not. The fact is that I am trying to substitute a 'theater poetry' /poesie de théâtre/ for the usual 'poetry in the theatre.' /Poesie au théâtre/ 'Poetry in the theater' is a delicate lace, invisible at any considerable distance. 'Theatre poetry' should be a coarse lace, a lace or rigging, a ship upon the sea. Wedding Party /Les Maries/ can be as terrifying as

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[7]E. P. Kirby, "Introduction," Total Theatre, ed. E. T. Kirby (New York: Dutton and Co., 1969), p. xiii.

[8]Richard Wagner, "Essence of Drama Is Known Through Feeling," rpt in Total Theatre, p. 5.

a drop of poetry under a microscope. The scenes fit together like the words of a poem."[9]

It was Antonin Artaud who attempted to write a manifesto for a theatre of poetry. In The Theater and Its Double he argues that the stage is a concrete physical place which demands a form of language no longer yoked to the word, a "poetry of space," which gains expression from the physical nature of the form. Those elements which could be employed as poetic agents in theatre, once the word had been relegated to a subsidiary position, were music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesticulation, intonation, architecture, lighting, and scenery. These forms actually fall under two broad headings: the mise-en-scene or those elements which usually provide a material backdrop for the action of a play, and physical movement performed by the actors which usually functions only to extend the ideas expressed by words. Both these theatrical forms, Artaud believed, could be used as modes of expression in their own right, once they emerged from the shadow of language.[10]

Once the notion of the poetic nature of a play is accepted, new aesthetic and critical approaches to drama become necessary. Unfortunately, the limits of this study do not allow for an extended discussion of the form these

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[9]Jean Cocteau, "The Eiffel Tower Wedding Party," trans. Dudley Fitts, in The Infernal Machine and Other Plays (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 156.

[10]See the discussion of Artaud, Chapter One, pp. 18-24, and Chapter Four, pp. 234-235.

new approaches must take; however, two important points must be mentioned. First is the question of critical interpretation and meaning. Traditionally plays could be judged by how effectively they told a story, delineated character, or presented an idea. Once a play is accepted as a poetic image such yardsticks become meaningless. The success or failure of the play must be judged as it is in poetry, on the total evocation of the poetic image. The standard notion that a play must convey information must be discarded much as sophisticated readers have learned to discard the notion that a poem must give information. An internal coherence and an internal validity based on the particular poetry of the art form becomes the only critical measure, and meaning expands to include the shape the content takes.

The second point which will undergo some change if theatre is thought of as poetry is the idea of form. In The Poetics Aristotle described the theatre of Greece with which he was familiar, and from the specific plays at his disposal, he reached certain conclusions about the nature of drama. Aristotle's discription of the Greek theatre was a description of a theatre based on a foundation of absolutes. As Francis Fergusson explains in The Idea of a Theater Greek drama, as well as Elizabethan drama, was "itself a mirror which had been formed at the center of the culture of its time, and at the center of

the life and awareness of the community."[11] The Greek theatre was based on a society which had a central focus and could, thus, recreate itself in a unified art form that approximated or imitated the clarity and unity of the world it represented. Since the world of ancient Greece had a harmony, an art form that was an imitation of actions within such a world logically was thought to have a linear form that consisted of a beginning, middle, and end. In a world which accepted causality, the action could involve reversal and recognition which were in accordance with the concepts of probability and necessity.

As much as Aristotle articulated the position that grew naturally out of the total societal structure of the Greek civilization, Artaud expresses a contemporary aesthetic. If a playwright believes all action is meaningless, the imitation of an action becomes an imitation of this meaninglessness. The adherence to rules of necessity and probability becomes impossible since they imply logic and order. Linear progression of plot is impossible as well, since it implies movement towards some recognizable conscious goal. Circularity becomes the spatial form of a play in a relativistic world. Or better still, the mosaic displaces the line, since the form which a play takes in a relativistic world is fragmented and adhering, if at all,

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[11]Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theater (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 1.

to some poetic image made from the coalescence of disparate elements.

The degree to which the chaos of modern life is acknowledged almost provides an "idea of the theater," as Fergusson used the term in 1949, albeit a negative idea. "Drama," he said in his conclusion to his study, "can only flourish in a human-sized scene, generally accepted as the focus of the life or awareness of its time, and such a focus no longer exists."[12] If one may speak of alienation and meaninglessness as a cohesive 'focus' for art, then the Absurd theatre might be considered as stemming from the central preoccupation of the society which spawned it. And the form this theatre has taken borrows from the society as well. Since it is a society that is fragmented and chaotic, the theatre it has produced is fragmented and chaotic as well. This is not to negate its quality as art, but rather to indicate that the art form has become poetic--multi-dimensional and irreducible--and has accommodated the diversity of the actions and society it imitates, or as Samuel Beckett has put it, it has "accommodated the mess."

Ruby Cohn in Dialogues in American Drama begins her discussion with the statement that, more and more, contemporary theatre seems to be moving toward the idea of poetic coherence articulated by Artaud and away from the

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[12]Fergusson, p. 225.

ideas of Aristotle. "After centuries of Aristotelian dramaturgy, Artaud is the vatic force of today's young theatre."[13] An important difference between Aristotle and Artaud is that the former described a theatre that existed, the latter acts as an oracle for a theatre he would see exist. Ionesco in an article entitled "Ni un Dieu, Ni un Demon" cites the extreme to which the visionary Artaud goes as a weakness in his theory.[14] While not renouncing language and structure to the degree that Artaud does, Ionesco and other Absurdists do create a theatre poetry.

The Theatre of the Absurd, while not the poetic theatre that Artaud envisioned, is nevertheless poetic in that it shuns discursive language for an evocative form which will offer the multiple impressions usually connected with poetic statement. Martin Esslin notes the poetic aspect of the Absurd theatre. "Which are the innovations of the absurdists, the new modes they have contributed to the vocabulary and syntax of the theatre? Above all they have demonstrated that poetry in the theatre is not merely a matter of language but that the theatre itself is a form of poetry: concretized metaphor, complex imagery on multiple

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[13]Ruby Cohn, Dialogue in American Drama (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1971), p. 5.

[14]Eugene Ionesco, "Ni Un Dieu, Ni Un Demon," Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeline Renaud et Jean-Louis Barrault, 30, No. 23 (May, 1958), pp. 130-134.

planes of meaning and association, from the most earthily concrete to the most esoterically abstract."[15]

The following study will concentrate on the forms this poetry takes in the plays of Ionesco, Beckett, and Pinter. For the sake of simplicity, I have focused on one aspect of poetic form in each playwright. Obviously, each play discussed employs many poetic devices which together form a poetic image and language.

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[15]Martin Esslin, Reflections (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1971), p. 181.

I. Eugène Ionesco: The Poetry of Space

Ionesco's working definition of theatre concentrates on its physical nature. "Theatre is whatever is shown on a stage. That's the simplest definition, but also the least unjust, the vaguest . . . and the hardest to contradict."[1] More than Beckett and Pinter, Ionesco uses the stage as a physical place capable of exhibiting a wide range of objects and material properties, each able to convey a meaning beyond that usually ascribed to words. Ionesco's distrust of the word as a communicative agent is coupled with his utilization of space as an alternative.

Ionesco seems to be describing this use of the mise-en-scene as a dramatic statement when he explains in an interview with Claude Bonnefoy how he uses his characters in relation to any symbolic meaning:

> These characters act as a foil. I use them to highlight the fantastic side because if you set realism against the unreal, you obtain a contrast which is also a union; in other words, the realism makes it easier to bring out the fantastic aspect and vice versa. To some extent I was doing what a painter, Byzantios, has just done. Byzantios is an abstract painter. He had painted abstract paintings in rather the same way that I had written abstract plays, The Bald Prima Donna being more or less an abstract play. Then suddenly, in his last exhibition, he invented something new: there is in his latest pictures a moving, living background, with rays of light,

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[1] Claude Bonnefoy, Conversations with Eugène Ionesco, trans. Jan Dawson (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), p. 142.

> vibrations--a whole abstract drama. In fact it's this background that's the real picture. In front of this background, as if it were on a proscenium, he paints an artichoke, a tree, a water-lily, etc. . . . so that this real or realistic orpseudo realistic object gives its truth, its strength to the abstract background of the painting. I think that this is more or less what I did spontaneously in The Chairs, where there is this movement, this abstract whirlwind of chairs, while the two old people act as the pivot for a pure construction, for the moving architecture that a play really is; similarly in Amedee where there's the real corpse and the two characters who seem to exist.[2]

A study of Ionesco's use of the background or mise-en-scene as the area where the real drama is going on can best be approached by distinguishing its several aspects. The important thing to remember is that together they make up one unified effect and act as a collective communicative medium.

Lighting

Because Ionesco's plays are so filled with sounds and objects, one can easily overlook the use of lighting as a communicative means in its own right. Of course, the use of lighting to capture mood has been a contemporary theatrical practice. What makes the use of lighting different in the Absurdist theatre is the fact that it acts as a statement by itself rather than highlighting some idea that is being verbally expressed through the text.

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[2]Bonnefoy, p. 85.

Just as the poet uses light and dark to express different conditions of the soul, Ionesco uses light and dark too. "Light is the world transfigured,"[3] he told Claude Bonnefoy. Ionesco goes on to relate the importance of light in connection with his memories of his childhood, and the way light suffused all his early days so that "Everything is miraculous, everything is a glorious epiphany, the tiniest object looks resplendent."[4] In opposition is a darkness associated with "heaviness, thickness--earth, water, and mud."[5] The lighting directions used by Ionesco indicate shifts from one state to the other. They act as pivots around which the drama takes place.

In the following plays light has three distinct forms: bright light, half light, and green light. The first is used primarily to indicate either joy or the hope of fulfillment; the second to indicate sterility, obsession, illness; and the third to indicate dullness, heaviness, nothingness.

The Chairs uses all three types of light. The play begins in a half light indicating the sterility of the life the Old Coupld have led. As the Old Woman lights a gas lamp, the light turns green, a sign for the possible solution which will come once the Old Man has delivered his

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[3]Bonnefoy, p. 29.

[4]Bonnefoy, p. 30.

[5]Bonnefoy, p. 36.

message, by way of the Orator, to his invited guests. Through the reminiscences and the arrival of the first guests, this green half light continues. When the Emperor arrives, a bright light is used. The light, however, "is cold, empty."[6] It pierces the half light of the lighthouse, but despite the eminence of the Emperor for whom the light stands, it is not the light that will dispel the shadows of the play. This cold bright light remains until the couple, satisfied that their message will be presented by the Orator they have employed, jump from the windows at the rear of the stage. After their suicide the light returns to the half light of the beginning of the play. After the Orator delivers his mute message, the stage directions say that "he goes toward the main door upstage center, gliding like a ghost. . . . The stage remains empty with only the chairs, the dais, the floor covered with streamers and confetti. The main door is wide open onto darkness."[7]

The lighting serves to outline the structure of the play, from the ill-defined hopes and dreams of the Old Couple, through the expectation that greeted their progressively more important "guests," to the final cessation of all hopes and fantasies. In a letter to the director of The Chairs, Ionesco says that at the end of the play "the lighting should grow pale and yellowish again, for it

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[6]Eugène Ionesco, Four Plays: The Bald Soprano/The Lesson/Jack or The Submission/The Chairs, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 147.

[7]Ionesco, The Chairs, p. 160.

matches the action, and now the jamboree is over."[8]

Lighting is also used to underline the poetic action in Amédée. The Buccinioni apartment is a self contained world from which its inhabitants, Amédée and Madeline, are afraid to venture out, for fear that their secret--the growing corpse which has been with them for fifteen years--will be discovered. The lighting comes in through the drawn blinds and is dull and muted to indicate the cloistered nature of the set, as well as the boredom and hostility of the inhabitants. Mixing with this half light is the green glow given off by the eyes of the corpse. Whenever the door is opened to the room in which he is kept, this light penetrates the set. It serves as a poetic reminder of the secret of the couple and of the frustrations of their lives. This blending of dull white and green continues in Acts I and II, since the situation remains constant. It is only when Amédée finally decides to rid himself of the corpse that bright light, in the form of moonlight, enters. It serves as a striking sign of his liberation and spiritual lightness, and prefigures his floating away at the end of Act III.

A third play which uses similar lighting effects is Jack or The Submission. The play deals with the double fall of the main character Jack. First he submits to his

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[8]Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 191.

parents' pleading and accepts the family motto, "I like potatoes fried with bacon." By so doing he renounces his individuality and becomes heir to their traditions and ideas. Next, he is seduced into marrying Roberta II, a girl whose physical characteristics--two noses and nine fingers--seem to indicate her individuality. However, once in love, he finds that this marriage is as much a capitulation to convention as was his avowal of the family motto. The nature of marital entrapment becomes the theme of The Future Is in Eggs.

The lighting in the play indicates the movement from fall to possible salvation through love to second fall. The play begins in grey monochrochrome which matches the shabbiness of the costumes and decor. During the seduction scene, the directions say, "The somber decor of the beginning becomes transformed by the lighting during the seduction scene, when it grows greenish, aquatic, toward the end of that scene then it darkens again at the end of the play."[9] This greenish color emphasizes the erotic, actually grotesque nature of the animal like pairing of Roberta II and Jack as they do their obscene dance of courtship. As the word chat is repeated, it has the effect of blotting out the light as well as verbal distinctions.

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[9]Ionesco, Jack or The Submission in Four Plays, p. 80.

At the end of the play the grey light of the beginning returns. Jack's love evidently will not deliver him from the monotony and dullness that he faced at the beginning of the play.

Probably the play where lighting plays its most noticeable role is The Killer. In fact, in many ways the play is an extended application of Ionesco's distinction between the lightness and ecstasy of light and the heaviness and despair of darkness. Claude Bonnefoy, noting how often light occurs in the plays of Ionesco and how often its opposite mud, slime, darkness as manifestations of alienation appear, asks if the author has ever been overwhelmed by light.

> Eugène Ionesco: Yes. Once. And I've described it.
>
> C.B. Where? I can't place it.
>
> E.I. The Killer. But nobody could understand what the radiant city mentioned in the play was. It's light, the city of light.[10]

As Ionesco goes on to explain, critics were too busy attributing social, political and economic meanings to the first scene of the play to bother concentrating on the simple notion of light as opposed to the darkness that pervades the rest of the play. To Ionesco, the presence of the killer in the radiant city is the infringement of

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[10]Bonnefoy, p. 29.

darkness and heaviness on light, and the return to the familiar which always invades the sense of evanescence that is symbolized by the light.

The stage directions at the beginning of Act I read:

> The atmosphere for Act I will be created by the lighting only. At first, while the stage is still empty, the light is grey, like a dull November day or afternoon in February. The faint sound of wind, perhaps you can see a dead leaf fluttering across the stage. In the distance the noise of a tram, vague outlines of houses; then, suddenly, the stage is brilliantly lit; a very bright, very white light; just this whiteness, and also the dense vivid blue of the sky. . . . The blue, the white, the silence and the empty stage should give a strange impression of peace.[11]

It is to this lightness, a sign for the lightness of spirit and childhood joy, that Bérenger responds. "It's magnificent (He looks about him.) I'd been told all about it, you see, but I didn't believe it . . . or rather I wasn't told a thing about it, but I knew, I knew that somewhere in our dark and dismal city, in all its mournful, dusty, dirty districts, there was one that was bright and beautiful, this neighborhood beyond compare, with its sunny streets and avenues bathed in light . . . this radiant city within a city which you've built. . . ."[12]

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[11]Eugène Ionesco, The Killer in Plays: The Killer/ Improvisation or The Shepherd's Chameleon/ and Maid to Marry, trans. Donald Watson (London: John Calder, 1960), p. 9.

[12]Ionesco, The Killer, p. 11.

Yet a killer invades this beautiful scene and figuratively casts a shadow on the light. In his discussion with Bonnefoy, Ionesco discusses what this light and the subsequent extinction of it by the presence of the killer means to him.

> E.I. . . . A lot of people have misunderstood The Killer. In the first act, Bérenger enters a radiant city. In a world that has been disfigured, he discovers a world transformed; he regains paradise after leaving the rainy town, after leaving the world of limbo.
>
> C.B. The worrying thing is that this paradise should be inhabited by a criminal. What, in that case, is the meaning of this precarious and luminous world?
>
> E.I. It's degradation, the fall.
>
> C.B. It's the summit.
>
> E.I. It's the fall.
>
> C.B. It's the summit, the point from which one starts to fall.
>
> E.I. That's right.
>
> C.B. Doesn't ecstasy presuppose the moment in which one falls back into the ordinary?
>
> E.I. Yes, it's the fall, it's original sin, in other words, a slackening of attention, of the strength with which one looks at things; or again in other words, it's losing the faculty of wonderment, oblivion, the paralysis bred by habit. Familiarity is a grey cover beneath which we hide the world's virginity; that's what original sin is about--when you know what things are, but can no longer recognize anything, can no longer recognize yourself. It's also the introduction of an evil into the world. Nobody came close to understanding the play in this way. The critics said that it was not in fact about

> a radiant city, or rather, that this radiant city was the modern city. . . . For me, the 'radiant' city means a city 'shining with light.'[13]

Light, then, when used by Ionesco takes on a metaphysical meaning, one that is intensely personal. Ionesco can even trace the source of this identification of purity with light. He remembers his childhood days at La Chapelle-Anthenaise in relation to bright, clear light and sky. As the conversation above indicates light does not signify a specific clearly defined idea but a series of general impressions, all positive and transcendent.

The absence of light and the movement into darkness and dreariness that occurs in The Killer, as Bérenger leaves the radiant city and searches in the rest of the town for the killer, is Ionesco's equivalent to a statement of absurdity and meaninglessness. Seen in this way, the final confrontation between Bérenger and the killer is a plea for the recovery of light, a recovery doomed to failure since the darkness is as much a product of the vision of Berenger and the world in which he lives as the premeditations of the killer.

Sound

The most obvious source of pure sound in Ionesco's plays is the use of words divorced from discursive meaning

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[13]Bonnefoy, pp. 30-31.

and used for their pitch and vocal effects. Artaud recognized that words, when used for their pure sound, could be a primary evocative force in the poetry of space. In a parenthetical statement he says, "I am well aware that words too have possibilities as sound, different ways of being projected into space, which are called intonations. Furthermore, there would be a great deal to say about the concrete value of intonation in the theater, about this faculty words have of creating a music in their own right according to the way they are pronounced, independently of their concrete meaning and even going counter to this meaning--of creating beneath language a subterranean current of impressions, correspondences, and analogies."[14]

More than Beckett and Pinter, Ionesco uses words for their intonations and pure sound. As I have already indicated in the chapter on silence, the verbal chaos at the end of The Bald Soprano is pure sound, which has the function of indicating the frenzy that the characters feel. Even when recognizable words are used, they are used not to denote meaning but rather to orchestrate a pattern of heightening chaos. Words are echoed, with one speaker catching a sound and carrying it across to the next context.

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[14]Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 38.

Mrs. Martin: Don't ruche my brooch!

Mr. Martin: Don't smooch the brooch!

Mr. Smith: Groom the goose, don't goose the groom.

Mrs. Martin: The goose grooms.

Mrs. Smith: Groom your tooth.

Mr. Martin: Groom the bridegroom, groom the bridegroom.

Mr. Smith: Seducer seduced!

Mrs. Martin: Scaramouche!

Mrs. Smith: Sainte-Nitouche!

Mr. Martin: Go take a couche.

Mr. Smith: I've been goosed.[15]

Though the words may be recognizable they have the same function as the rhyming sounds that follow them. In The Bald Soprano the frenzy and subsequent paroxysm indicate the failure of language.

In several other plays, pure sound indicates a sexual encounter. For instance, in Jack or The Submission Roberta II's story of the horse disintegrates into pure sound which seems to represent the rhythm of the sexual act. The rhythm and the sounds take precedence over any denotative meaning.

Roberta II: Suddenly, in the distance a horse whinnies . . . han! han! Approaches, han! han! han! han!

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[15]Ionesco, The Bald Soprano in Four Plays, p. 40.

Jack (suddenly happy): Oh yes, that's it, han! han! han!
Roberta II: Galloping at full speed, galloping at full speed. . . .
Jack: Haan! haan! haan!
Roberta II: There he is on the great empty square, there he is. . . . He whinnies, runs around, galloping, runs around galloping . . . runs around, galloping, runs around, galloping.
Jack: Han! han! haan! at full speed, galloping, at full speed galloping . . . Oh yes, han! han! han! galloping, galloping, galloping as hard as he can.
Roberta II: His hooves: click clack click clack, galloping, striking sparks. Click . . . clack . . . clack . . . clack . . . vrr . . .
Jack (laughing): Oh yes, yes, bravo, I know, I know what's going to happen. But quickly . . . quickly . . . go on . . . hurrah. . . .[16]

Here sound and rhythm have replaced sexual embrace. A poetry of language is achieved, but it has nothing to do with the story's content other than providing an image of the horse often associated with sexual potency. Language in this sense becomes more than what Kenneth Burke called symbolic action; it becomes a concrete manifestation of action.

The same use of sound and rhythm which employ recognizable words but whose intention is incantatory and, here again, sexual, is seen in The Chairs. The old couple begin telling their story, the one that has occupied them every night "for all the seventy-five years that we've been married."[17]

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[16]Ionesco, Jack or The Submission in Four Plays, p. 106.

[17]Ionesco, The Chairs in Four Plays, p. 115.

> Old Man and Old Woman (laughing together): At last we laughed. Ah! . . . laughed . . . arrived . . . arrived . . . the idiotic bare belly . . . arrived with the rice . . . arrived with the rice . . . (This is all we hear. At last we . . . bare-bellied . . . arrived . . . the trunk . . . Then the Old Man and Old Woman calm down little by little.) We lau . . . Ah! . . . aughed . . . Ah! . . . arrived . . . Ah! . . . arroved . . . aughed . . . aughed.[18]

The passage is more clearly pure sound in the French version where words are not fleshed out as they are in the English translation.

> Alors, on a ri. Ah! . . . ri . . . arri . . . arri . . . Ah! . . . Ah! . . . ri . . . va . . . arri . . . le drole ventre nu . . . au riz arriva . . . au riz arriva. Alors on a . . . ventre nu . . . arri . . . la malle . . . on a . . . ah! . . . ah! . . . arri . . . ah! . . . arri . . . va . . . ri. . . .[19]

Besides the sound of words divorced from meaning, Ionesco uses sounds of humans, animals, mechanical objects, and movement to give a poetic rhythm to his plays. In The Chairs the sound of the water against the island and the sound of boats coming and going give an important dimension of authenticity to the arrival of the guests. The shock of their invisibility is heightened by this concrete use of sound. The people themselves are never heard until the end of the play, after the orator has left. The stage

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[18]Ionesco, The Chairs, p. 117.

[19]Ionesco, Les Chaises in Theatre I (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), pp. 130-131.

directions say: "We hear for the first time the human noises of the invisible crowd; these are bursts of laughter, murmurs, shh's, ironical coughs; weak at the beginning, these noises grow louder, then, again, progressively they become weaker. All this should last long enough for the audience--the real and visible audience--to leave with this ending firmly impressed on its mind. The curtain falls very slowly."[20]

By using the sounds at the end of the play as the audience leaves the theatre, Ionesco clearly makes the point that the audience of theatregoers has been the invisible audience on the stage for whom the chairs stood as testimony. This is much the same effect that Peter Brook used in Marat/Sade to indicate that the theatre audience is an extension of the few players designated as audience on the stage. The use of chairs rather than actual people makes the transference even stronger by making it more absurd.

Besides the sounds of humans, Ionesco also uses sounds emanating from mechanical devices and from physical occurrences which have a poetry of their own. In Amédée, the sounds of trains in Act III indicate that Amédée has caused the entire town to join in the action of the disposal of the corpse.

In Amédée the growth of the corpse is also accompanied by sound. A gong is used when the feet reach the door. In

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[20]Ionesco, The Chairs, p. 160.

Act II of the same play, while Madeline and Amédée pull the corpse out, there is a constant thumping sound which approximates Madeline's heartbeat in her agitated state. The heartbeat serves to act almost as a musical accompaniment to the dance like movements of the couple as they rid themselves of the corpse.

As a sound that emphasizes the wordless movement on the stage, the boat whistles, and the splashing of waves that signal the arrival of new guests in The Chairs has the same effect. The doorbell that rings when each guest disembarks also is an effective sound. It replaces the heartbeat as a method of tracing the heightening frenzy that goes on as the old man and woman move in their dance, assembling more and more chairs to the never ending signal of the doorbell. The doorbell has the same effect that the whistle does in Beckett's Act Without Words I and the bell in his Happy Days. It seems to represent a higher force, the controller of the action, who uses it to call the humans to his bidding. Used in this way, the sound effects also take on almost a metaphysical life. In Beckett these controlling sounds can be interchangeable with light as well. For instance, in Play it is the spotlight that calls the characters to account rather than a bell. But the effect is the same.

At the end of many of his plays, Ionesco uses various sounds to indicate the paroxysm that is about to occur. In Rhinoceros the final lonely monologue of Bérenger, in

which he states his inability to become like everybody else, is set in counterpoint to the trumpeting of the rhinoceros outside his window.

Often sound and light merge to create one poetic image. At the end of Amédée the sound of firecrackers accompanies the shooting stars, comets, and brilliant flashes. Together they achieve an external representation of the departure of the freed Amédée. In a similar way as the grounded Bérenger in A Stroll in the Air walks toward the town, the directions read,"The evening falls blood red, the spluttering of firecrackers can be heard, followed by fleeting red glows."[21] Bérenger has just described the apocalypse that he has seen in his aerial stroll. But he has also reconciled himself to the role of husband and father, and the fact that nothing will change the eventuality of the cataclysm. Both the lighting and the sounds, muted and sputtering though still bearing the traces of the red hell he has seen, indicate this message.

Costumes

As with light and sound, it would be easy to overlook the importance that Ionesco places on costume as a conveyor of meaning. Yet, he deliberately indicates the type of costumes to be worn, and seems to have thought of them as

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[21] Eugène Ionesco, A Stroll in the Air in A Stroll in the Air and Frenzy for Two, or More trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 117.

ancillary to the total shape of the play.

A shabby, old, torn costume usually goes hand in hand with a grey, dull light, which also represents vacuity, alienation, and meaninglessness. In Jack or The Submission, Ionesco indicates that the entire set is old, messy, and the clothes are shabby. Jack, to emphasize his overextended adolescence, wears a cap and clothes which are too tight for him. The couple in The Chairs are also dressed shabbily. The old woman wears red, coarse stockings which, at one point in the action, she displays along with torn undergarments. The shabbiness of the old couple indicates the shabby lonely life they have led. It is a metaphysical sign rather than an economic one.

Clothes are also important in Rhinoceros when in Act I Jean and Berenger meet in the cafe. Ionesco goes to pains to indicate the fastidiousness of Jean and the slovenliness of Bérenger: "(. . . Jean is fastidiously dressed: brown suit, red tie, stiff collar, brown hat. He has a reddish face. His shoes are yellow and well polished. Berenger is unshaven and hatless, with unkempt hair and creased clothes; everything about him indicates negligence.)"[22]

From their appearance at the beginning of the play, it becomes apparent that Jean cares what society thinks, that he is conscious of being accepted; and Bérenger is not.

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[22] Eugène Ionesco, Rhinoceros, trans. Derek Prouse (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 4.

Bérenger's monologue at the end of the play in which he explains that he would become a rhinoceros if he could, but that he is unable to conform to the majority, is foreshadowed by his antisocial behavior at the beginning of the play, a behavior manifested by the exterior signs of his clothing.

Besides indicating slovenliness and neglect, clothes may also indicate vestiges of gentility, property, or even aesthetic or artistic individuals. Amédée wears black striped pants, and a butterfly collar, signs of his playwright's leanings, albeit oldfashioned. The man in The New Tenant is dressed like a wealthy businessman. His burial amid his property is thus foreshadowed by the outward materialism. It is sheer poetry to think that behind the obtruding furniture that has hidden him sits the man of property complete with patent leather shoes and bowler hat.

The only place where Ionesco seems to be using costumes in a symbolical way is in A Stroll in the Air. Josephine, Bérenger's wife, wears two costumes. One is a blue dress with white stars, the other is a blue outfit "of rather classic cut, with a rose pinned on the lapel."[23] Throughout the play, Berenger refers to the blue sky and perfection. It seems hardly likely that Josephine's two blue costumes with white stars and with a red rose are

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[23]Ionesco, A Stroll in the Air, p. 28.

coincidental. They seem to indicate the earthbound equivalent of the blue sky that Berenger will, in the end, return to after his sky walk, and the place of his wife in the search for answers to the questions of existence.

Costumes have traditionally been used to indicate something about the personality of the characters wearing them. What does seem important with Ionesco's use of costumes is the part it plays in the completion of the pictorial effect that communicates the total vision of the play.

This use of costumes will be carried out by Beckett and Pinter too. Didi and Gogo are both dressed like tramps, complete with their Charlie Chaplin bowler hats to indicate both their humbleness and the fact that the tramp, homeless and alone, is the contemporary Everyman. In Pinter's early plays, the slovenliness of the costume indicates the chaotic state of mind that the characters are in and the necessity of the room to shield this state from the outside world.

Objects/Props

Ionesco excels in the use of physical objects and props. His theatre has been called a theatre of clutter, what with objects proliferating over the stage, often to the exclusion of people. The use of objects, not as backdrops but as equals with the humans in a particular scene, helps emphasize the mechanical nature of many humans and

their easy interchangeability with objects.

Ionesco's love of physical props may well be a carry over from his early Surrealist days. Ionesco himself has said: "Everything is permitted in the theatre: to bring characters to life, but also to materialize state of anxiety, inner presences. It is thus not only permitted, but advisable, to make the properties join in the action, to make objects live, to animate the decor, to make symbols concrete. Just as words are continued by gesture, action, mime, which, at the moment when words become inadequate, take their place, the material elements of the stage can in turn further intensify these."[24]

There is no restriction on what physical objects Ionesco will employ to externalize states of being that are beyond the scope of words. "I personally would like to bring a tortoise on to the stage," he says, "turn it into a race horse, then into a hat, a song, a dragon, and a fountain of water. One can dare anything in the theatre, and it is the place where one dares the least. I want no other limits than the technical limits of stage machinery."[25]

Sometimes Ionesco almost seems to be getting his wish to bring tortoises or their equivalent on stage. The

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[24]Bonnefoy, p. 142.

[25]Bonnefoy, p. 143.

most famous object he employs, one that has direct connection with Surrealistic gimmicks, is the corpse in Amédée. The body as it grows "by geometrical progression" dwarfs everything in the apartment. With the green light shining from its beacon eyes and the accompanying noises of its movement, it overshadows everything else in the play both physically and emotionally. There is a portion of Act II when Amédée and Madeline disappear completely, hidden as they are by the body and the furniture they have had to move out of its way. The corpse is a perfect Surrealist symbol. Whether it represents a love that has died between the couple, a baby they did or did not have, the passage of time, it makes no difference. The physical presence of the corpse is so overwhelming and so incongruous in the otherwise realistic setting, that it calls attention to itself as object and defies any symbolic interpretation.

In the same way, the chairs in the play by the same name defy symbolic reduction beyond their physical presence. They so completely dominate the action by usurping the playing area of the stage from the human characters, that they relegate the old man and old woman to a small corner and eventually push them out the window, remaining victorious after the people are gone. The very act of carrying them in, like the act of carrying the corpse out in Amédée, becomes the central action of the play. Its gratuitous quality helps indicate the meaninglessness of the lives led by the couples in both plays.

There are several other Surrealist images that serve an auxiliary function in Ionesco's plays: Roberta II with her three noses and her nine fingers; the giant puppet of John Bull and the figures from the anti-world in A Stroll in the Air; the "daughter" in Maid to Marry who "is a man, about thirty years old, robust and virile, with a busy black moustache, wearing a grey suit;"[26] the clocks in The Bald Soprano and Amédée that strike of their own volition; the blazing horse's head that appears while Roberta II tells Jacques her story; and the banner which blazes out from the unfurling body of the corpse in Amédée. Each adds a touch of poetry that words could not convey.

Ionesco also has an entire play that is Surrealist inspired. More incongruous gimmicks and actions are used in The Picture than in any other work by Ionesco. In the play a man known only as "a large gentleman" attempts to dupe a poor painter out of the painting he has come to sell. After convincing him that the work is worthless and generously offering to allow the artist to leave it temporarily, the large man sends the deceived painter away. The one-armed sister of the large gentleman appears in the early part of the play and is thoroughly browbeaten by her brother. Only when the painter leaves does she suddenly emerge as a shrew, bullying her now meek brother. This relationship

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[26]Eugène Ionesco, Maid to Marry in Plays, Volume III, p. 158.

bears some resemblance to that between Marie and the professor in The Lesson, where the maid, for some reason, seems to have power over the professor.

In The Picture, the large man, finally sick of the ugliness and belligerence of his sister, takes out a gun and "shoots" her. But in true Surrealist fashion, the "shot" turns the ugly sister into a beautiful woman, the very woman in the picture. The sister's cane even becomes a luminous sceptre. If this were not enough a neighbor, seeing the transformation in the sister, asks the large man to "shoot her." The play ends in a paroxysm of pistol shots, firecrackers, and lights. A 1971 production done on television used a circus setting for the last scene. The large man was the ring master firing his gun as he rode a trick bicycle while cracking a whip.

The play, while not one of Ionesco's best, does illustrate the use of nonverbal physical images which defy reduction or interpretation outside of the concrete frame in which they occur. Gabriel Marcel reviewing The Picture said, "I don't mind admitting that I don't understand the play, but I can also guarantee that no one else will understand it any better."[27]

If the visual images caused confusion in this play, they were a source of clarity in another Ionesco play:

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[27]Gabriel Marcel as quoted by Bonnefoy, p. 177.

Rhinoceros. As one critic put it, "This time, no mistake about it, Ionesco is writing in French! And his Rhinoceros is a completely clear work, with its own limpid symbolism, all the more powerful for being accessible and all the greater because everyone can grasp its meaning."[28]

Ironically, because of the seeming clarity offered by the unambiguous central image, certain critics--Susan Sontag for one--find the play prosaic and bourgeois. Whether the specificity of the rhinoceros diminishes the multidimensional nature of its poetic function can be debated; nevertheless, the rhinoceros as an image of man conforming to a societal standard is a dramatic and effective one. The tough skin of the pachyderms, their animal nature and herd instinct does offer a temptation for a simplistic manipulation of the metaphor, but it does not diminish its visual impact.

Perhaps the most interesting "object" used in an Ionesco play is the woman who appears midway in the action in Victims of Duty and sits silently observing the play. Here is a human being reduced to a prop with neither voice nor motion. By her presence, she emphasizes the theatrical nature and puppet like movements of those who do move before her and continually address their actions to her.

One type of object which should be mentioned in passing is the concretized word, discussed at length in

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[28]Jean Vigneron as quoted by Bonnefoy, p. 180.

Part One of this study. Words become physical objects when they lose all their evocative power. They can perform objectified actions since they are freed from the action for which they were grammatically designed, namely communication. Several examples of the use of words as objects can be cited in Ionesco's plays. In The Lesson the use of the word "knife," repeated over and over, with progressively more threatening tones gains a palpable existence in the action and eventually is capable of committing murder:

> Professor: Repeat, repeat: knife . . . knife . . . knife . . .
> Pupil: I've got a pain . . . my throat, neck . . . on, my shoulders . . . my breast . . . knife . . .
> Professor: Knife . . . knife . . . knife . . .
> Pupil: My hips . . . knife . . . my thighs . . . kni . . .[29]

The same solidification of word into object is achieved at the end of Jack or The Submission as well when Roberta II reduces all to chat. In the same way, earlier in the same play, Jack's father and mother were able to subdue Jack by using "Chronometer" to quash Jack's rebellious nature. The word itself becomes the weapon that defeats him, and his capitulation is also marked by words as concretized action.

All of the examples of poetry in space discussed in this section evoke an atmosphere that words can not possibly

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[29] Ionesco, The Lesson in Four Plays, p. 74.

convey; they each have a meaning that in concept offers a unified impression. This image that is made up of the elements of the mise-en-scene may not be reducible to one meaning, much as a poem does not lend itself to simple reduction. The complexity does not, however, undermine or impede understanding. Each element mentioned is only one means of conveying a total picture, and can not be seen in isolation without destroying its function in the dramatic work. Together, they create a poetry in space that comes close to fulfilling Artaud's idea that background elements can offer to theatre an evocative language if they cease to function as trimming and become poetic in their own right.

II. Samuel Beckett: The Poetry of Movement

The original French title of Beckett's first produced play is En Attendant Godot which translates to mean While Waiting for Godot. Eric Bentley makes the point that "The subject is not that of pure waiting. It is: what happens in certain human beings while waiting."[1] The "while" implies time. It serves as a parenthesis encapsulating actions that are merely means with which to fill time while waiting.

Beckett in a letter to his American director Alan Schneider has offered some indication of his attitude toward his work: "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated, nec tecum nec sine te, in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could."[2]

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[1]Eric Bentley, "The Talent of Samuel Beckett," New Republic (May 14, 1956), rpt. in Casebook on Waiting for Godot, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 65.

[2]Samuel Beckett as quoted by Martin Esslin, "Introduction," Samuel Beckett, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 1.

What Beckett says about his intention--to testify to the "thereness" of his characters--can be seen as the primal intention of theatre. As Jerzy Grotowski, one of the most influential forces in the post-Absurdist theatre, has noted, what distinguishes drama from all other forms is the physical presence of an actor confronting an audience. Scenery, lighting, props, even costumes may only be embellishments; they can be eliminated and one is still left with the matrix of the theatrical act.[3]

Alain Robbe-Grillet, writing about Beckett's theatre, emphasizes this idea of presence. Robbe-Grillet states his desire to see how Beckett would handle the living human on stage when his novels have reduced existence to the point that there is just a voice, emanating from mud, with no past, no present and no future. "What does Waiting for Godot offer us? It is hardly enough to say that nothing happens in it. That there should be neither complications nor plot of any kind has already been the case on other stages. Here, it is less than nothing, we should say: as if we were watching a kind of regression beyond nothing."[4] Robbe-Grillet explains, however, that by watching the two tramps wait, one is left with

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[3]See Jerzy Grotowski, Toward a Poor Theatre (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968). This subject is handled at length in Chapter Three.

[4]Alain Robbe-Grillet, For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 116.

the most theatrical of spectacles, that of two human beings, actually there, existing before one's eyes. "We grasp at once, as we watch them, this major function of theatrical representation: to show of what the fact of being there consists. For it is this, precisely, which we had not yet seen on a stage, or in any case which we had not seen so clearly, with so few concessions. The dramatic character, in most cases, merely plays a role, like the people around us who evade their own existence. In Beckett's play, on the contrary, everything happens as if the two tramps were on stage without having a role."[5]

Beckett's theatre can be described as a theatre intent on illustrating man's endurance. That is all. Beckett can not give meaning to his characters' struggles, for, he believes, there is no meaning. One can only give artistic form to the meaninglessness. In this connection the present participle form in the title Waiting for Godot is essential. The characters are caught in the process of acting. The emphasis on the present moment of physical existence necessitates a dramatic form that will underline movement and action without trying to ascribe meaning to it. Words will be spoken, but the words, too, will testify only to the physical presence of the speakers; they will in no way explain that presence.

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[5]Robbe-Grillet, p. 120.

Thus described, Beckett's plays sound like the anti-plays of Ionesco; yet, as Herbert Blau notes, they are very much theatrical works. "And with all its pretended anti-drama, we know it is brazenly theatrical--an occasion of Talent: The No, the pantomime, the music hall, the circus, the Greek messenger, and the medieval angel: the play is a History of dramatic art."[6]

The theme of Beckett's plays may be inertia, nothingness, and paralysis the plays themselves are highly active. Both Roger Blin, the first director of Waiting for Godot and the original Pozzo, and Blau, an American director and critic, have noted the arduous physical task of acting in a Beckett play. "You need to be very fit to play Beckett's decrepits,"[7] Blin notes. Blau agrees indicating that, if Beckett's plays are approached through the action contained within them, much of the seeming ambiguity fades in the light of concrete motions.

> As for uncertainty of meaning, just perform what he /Beckett/ tells you to perform, and you will feel--as if by some equation between doing and feeling--exactly what you need to feel, and in the bones. Climb up the ladder like Clov, backing down the rungs as he must and you will know why he walks as he does. . . . Let the tramps and Pozzo pummel you at the same time, and you will know what it is to be 'finished!' Try

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[6]Herbert Blau, The Impossible Theatre: A Manifesto (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p. 232.

[7]John Fletcher, "Roger Blin at Work," Modern Drama (February 1966), rpt. in Casebook on Waiting for Godot, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 22.

> keeping Hamm's chair exactly in the center of the stage, and you will know what a tortuous thing it is to wait on him. . . . On the physical level, the inexhaustibility of the plays is just plain exhausting.[8]

What Beckett creates on stage is actually a poetry of movement, one which indicates the struggling of the live characters against some metaphysical world that they cannot understand. The physical becomes the area in which they can function, even if it often is juxtaposed to their own expressed ideas and desires.

> Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?
> Estragon: Yes, let's go.
> They do not move.[9]

The following discussion will concentrate on a few of the most obvious manifestations of movement as poetic statement that appear in Beckett's plays. Each is different. The degree to which Beckett has been able to synthesize such varied movements as circus routines and pantomime shows his great theatrical versatility. At the core of each is a poetry of movement that comes from its ability to convey meaning beyond words. And if the meaning indicates ultimately, that no meaning can be found, the physical act becomes meaning in itself.

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[8]Blau, p. 231.

[9]Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 61.

Play

Of all the forms of physical movement which interest Beckett the most generally used is the simple act of play. As Tom Driver notes,

> All of Beckett's plays are 'games' for actors. . . . Long before he called one of his pieces Play, Beckett was writing playful pieces (nevertheless in great seriousness) in which the characters were clearly aware that they were participants in games. They engaged themselves in talk and went through numerous gestural routines in order to pass the time and give some structure, however fragile, to an otherwise empty existence. When Beckett implies that life is a game, he does not mean only that it is arbitrary and made up of (perhaps) enjoyable routines; he means also, and more importantly, that it is just something to do.[10]

Games, or playing, denote certain things: self-consciousness on the part of the player, freedom of motion within the bounds of the game, and an artificiality derived from the fact that the play is not life but a prescribed activity that fills time within life. Richard Schechner in his preface to Public Domain discusses play as an example of the self-conscious type of acting that differs from the formula of Stanislavski, where the actors were to imitate, not play at, being certain people. Schechner uses J. Huizinga's definition of play: "Summing up the formal characteristics of play, we might call it a free activity

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[10]Tom Driver, Romantic Quest and Modern Query (New York: Delacorte Press, 1970), pp. 386-387.

standing quite consciously outside ordinary life as being not serious, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly."[11]

In this sense the characters in a Beckett drama are playing. Their play involves a physical activity, the goal of which is to pass time while waiting or while enduring. Since the goal of the activity is to relieve the tedium of existence and, if possible, to make time pass more quickly and more pleasantly, there is relative freedom and improvisation allowed within these very general strictures. Didi and Gogo may sleep, embrace, talk, curse, or do anything. Their only restriction is that they must remain where they are until they meet Godot. In the same way Hamm and Clov in Endgame are free within the confines of their cell to do any activity they choose. The refrain "Me to play" may set in motion any number of moves as long as the game continues. Winnie, in Happy Days, may, likewise, find activities to keep herself occupied; she may delve into the confines of her black bag and play with the contents as she chooses. Krapp may "play" his tape recorder, as he does each year, in ritual fashion. This activity, too, is a sort of game.

The playing of games creates its own poetic patterns in the plays. It was Wittgenstein who defined meaning as

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[11]Richard Schechner, Public Domain (New York: Avon Books, 1969), p. 98.

that which can be determined from particular language games. He saw that the context of action within which one might observe words functioning gave the best indication of meaning that one could find. By focusing on games which his characters play in order to pass time, Beckett is not only able to offer dramatic situations but to supply what little concreteness to language modern man may be able to find. Meaning comes from the use that his characters give to words within play situations. And the play situations in turn provide what dramatic action can be found in a world in which nothing happens.

The idea of language as play can be seen in Godot when Didi and Gogo seem to be using verbal exchanges as contests. To emphasize the game that words create Didi says, "Come on, Gogo, return the ball can't you, once in a while?"[12] In response Gogo with exaggerated enthusiasm says, "I find this really most extraordinarily interesting."[13] All the conversation in the play follows the give and take of some game, the object of which is to pass time. The technique of stichomythia, wherein antithesis and repetition are voiced by different people, is, more than anything else, a verbal game.

The game played never obliterates the situation the

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[12]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 9.

[13]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 9.

two tramps face. Talk of carrots, the Gospels, suicide, even when couched in a word game, never completely conceals the reality of the waiting. In the same way, however, when talk begins with the reality of the ordeal of waiting for Godot, Didi and Gogo are able to turn it into a game in the attempt to mitigate their suffering. The following conversation, for instance, begins in the discursive mode but soon turns into an example of stichomythia or play.

> Estragon: . . . . Let's go.
> Vladimir: We can't.
> Estragon: Why not?
> Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.
> Estragon: (despairingly) Ah! (Pause.) You're sure it was here?
> Vladimir: What?
> Estragon: That we were to wait.
> Vladimir: He said by the tree. (They look at the tree.) Do you see any others?
> Estragon: What is it?
> Vladimir: I don't know. A willow.
> Estragon: Where are the leaves?
> Vladimir: It must be dead.
> Estragon: No more weeping.
> Vladimir: Or perhaps it's not the season.
> Estragon: Looks to me more like a bush.
> Vladimir: A shrub.
> Estragon: A bush.[14]

In case the conversation above should be mistaken for serious debate, Beckett has the tramps refer directly to the fact that talk is only a form of play. The dialogue above is play; the dialogue that follows is a self-conscious playing at playing.

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[14]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 10.

Vladimir: Will you not play?
Estragon: Play at what?
Vladimir: We could play at Pozzo and Lucky.
Estragon: Never heard of it?[15]

Another example of the self-conscious playing at play is when the two begin to fight and Gogo remarks, "That's the idea, let's abuse each other."[16] The stage directions say, "They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other."[17] The game begins. After several curses, culminating with "Crritic," the two play at making up:

Estragon: Now let's make it up.
Vladimir: Gogo!
Estragon: Didi!
Valdimir: Your hand:
Estragon: Take it!
Vladimir: Come to my arms:
Estragon: Your arms?
Vladimir: My breast!
Estragon: Off we go!
(They embrace. They separate. Silence.)
Vladimir: How time flies when one has fun![18]

The game, however, never does totally fill the void, for when one has stopped playing, the reality of the situation returns.

The idea of play as a poetic activity is seen most clearly in Endgame. The title itself Fin de Partie indicates the final action in a game of chess. In Beckett's play the action centers on the completion of the play,

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[15]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 47.

[16]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 49.

[17]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 49.

[18]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 49.

but the action is still going on. As Clov says at the beginning of the play, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished."[19] The entire ritual that occupies the characters in the shelter is part of a game that is on the verge of completion. Between Waiting for Godot and Endgame the possibilities within the form of the game have been greatly reduced. In Endgame, variation includes such things as looking out one window first rather than another, going in one direction rather than another in the traversing of the room, and talking or being quiet. The freedom of action within the confines of the game is limited just as the hopelessness of the game is heightened. Hamm articulates both the comfort and the restriction of the game: "Old Endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing."[20] Yet painful as the game is, the thought of stopping the game is more painful.

> Clov: (imploringly) Let's stop playing!
> Hamm: Never.[21]

The ingenuity with which one may play the game is indicated by Winnie in Happy Days. Buried up to her waist in Act I and up to her neck in Act II, she still

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[19]Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 1.

[20]Beckett, Endgame, p. 82.

[21]Beckett, Endgame, p. 77.

conscientiously plays at passing time. Whereas Didi and Gogo, and Hamm and Clov could engage in conversation, Winnie for the most part must talk to herself. The contents of the black bag keep her occupied. To read what is said on the label of a toothbrush becomes a game as well as major preoccupation. There seems nothing too insignificant that it can't be used in the game. In fact that is Beckett's point: the most insignificant things make up the incessant chatter that fills time in man's wait for the end of the game and the end of life.

> Vladimir: This is becoming really insignificant.
> Estragon: Not enough.[22]

Pantomime

In a brochure put out by Jacques Lecoq's School of Mime the following sentence appears: "Where everything moves, gestures, sounds and words are children of the same silence. The cry searches for its sign."[23] Mime has traditionally been used in theatre, but rarely before the contemporary drama has it been seen as a theatrical means of communication divorced from words for which it is a substitute. Mime used to communicate an unexpressed cry becomes not merely the physical manifestation of a particular word or a particular action, but a meaningful sign in its own right.

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[22]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 44.

[23]Jacques Lecoq, quoted by Bari Rolfe, "The Mime of Jacques Lecoq," The Drama Review, 16, No. 1 (March, 1972), p. 35.

Artaud in his call for a poetry of space saw the importance of pantomime. But he called for an "unperverted pantomime." He explains, "I mean direct Pantomime where gestures--instead of representing words or sentences as in our European Pantomime (a mere fifty years old!) which is merely a distortion of the mute roles of Italian comedy--represent ideas, attitudes of mind, aspects of nature, all in an effective, concrete manner, i.e. by constantly evoking objects or natural details, like that Oriental language which represents night by a tree on which a bird that has already closed one eye is beginning to close the other."[24]

In order to understand Artaud's idea of physical movement which acts as a sign for ideas, one must turn to his essay on the Balinese theatre. While more a form of dance, the movements of the dancers do fulfill the criteria of direct pantomime where gestures represent ideas in a formalized way. An animated hieroglyphic is what Artaud called the contortions, body movements, hand gestures and facial distortions of the dancers. Their dance was "a work of spiritual architecture, created out of gesture and mime. . . ."[25] What impressed Artaud was how integrated the mime was with the entire spectacle. "There is no

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[24]Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 40.

[25]Artaud, p. 55.

transition from a gesture to a cry or a sound: all the senses interpenetrate as if through strange channels hollowed out in the mind itself!"[26] What appealed further to Artaud was the ability of these gestures to invoke the cruelty and psychic violence he believed to be the essence of theatre. "A kind of terror seizes us at the thought of these mechanized beings, whose joys and griefs seem not their own but at the service of age-old rites, as if they were dictated by superior intelligences."[27] Because of the spareness of the motion and because it does not depend on the vagaries of words but is direct in its physicality, the communication produced seemed, to Artaud, to achieve a validity not found in verbal discourse. "The Balinese productions take shape at the very heat of matter, life, reality. There is in them something of the ceremonial quality of a religious rite, in the sense that they extirpate from the mind of the onlooker all idea of pretense, of cheap imitations of reality."[28]

It is at first glance a long way from a Balinese dance to the Theatre of the Absurd. While mime does not hold the complete dominance that it did in the Balinese theatre, it does exist for the same ends and in the same

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[26]Artaud, p. 57.

[27]Artaud, p. 58.

[28]Artaud, p. 60.

metaphysical position, if not in the same form.

One has only to think of the pantomime of the two old people dragging out chair after chair in Ionesco's play The Chairs, to realize how well the Absurdist dramatist follows Artaud's suggestion that unperverted pantomime represents ideas not specific words and sentences. The very essence of the play, defying even a translation into a verbal message, is all there in the action of carrying chairs. So too, the movement of the workers bringing in furniture in The New Tenant, while it appears to be merely a direct performance of some stage business, carries with it a meaning that is central to the play. It creates and becomes part of the poetic image of the man of property finally buried by his material possessions. Although it does not have the multidimensional evocative thrust of the chair image, it is, nevertheless, dramatic and at the same time poetic. A third example of the type of pantomime that goes beyond the specific business that gives rise to it and becomes an evocative and communicative force in its own right is the ballet which engages Madeline and Amédée as they divest themselves of the corpse in Amédée. The pulling and tugging becomes more than just a physical exercise; it becomes a poetic hieroglyphic for the rebirth that is taking place in Amédée.

While the pantomime used in the theatre of Ionesco is fantastic and dramatically shocking, the pantomime

used by Beckett involves the most mundane business. Yet its great poetic impact comes precisely from its being grounded in the mundane. Initially, one is tempted to argue that Beckett's use of gestures is not unperverted pantomime at all. There is something too prosaic about the kinds of motions his characters engage in: the removal of a shoe, the doffing of a hat, the pushing of a wheelchair, the winding of a tape, the eating of a banana. These movements seem to be part of a repertoire that is used in traditional theatre. Yet in the sparse, economic theatre of Beckett, no motion is insignificant. The removal of a shoe becomes not something to give verisimilitude to the characters or the action, but a poetic sign in itself. It comes close to approximating the effect that Artaud described in the Balinese movement. However, it escapes the kind of rigid, formal, repetitive signs that Artaud seems to indicate as central to the traditional Oriental theatre.

At the beginning of Waiting for Godot, the following stage directions are given: "Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before."[29] Seeing it for the first time, one might think that the gesture is meaningless; but within the context of the play it is pregnant with meaning and

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[29]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 7.

associations. The act of struggling with a shoe, of giving up and trying again, is in physical shorthand an image of the entire play. The pantomime that begins the play, then, is not just stage business; it is actually a sign for the metaphysical condition of the tramp. As the action unfolds, it becomes apparent that, as Artaud indicated in respect to the Balinese performance, "there is no transition from a gesture to a cry or a sound." The simple act that Gogo performs is repeated over and over, with words, with cries: Struggle, defeat, cessation, return, struggle, ad infinitum. Again, as Artaud noted, the act itself, because of its uncluttered physicality, carries a sense of reality. A rite is being performed whose direction is controlled as if it "were dictated by some superior intelligences."

Didi and Gogo begin to speak after the pantomime with the shoe; the words become verbal extensions of the action which has preceded them.

> Estragon: (giving up again). Nothing to be done.
> Vladimir: (advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart) I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't tried everything. And I resumed the struggle.[30]

A variation on the conflict with the shoe is created when Beckett has Didi resort to shaking his hat. In this instance struggle is not involved, only annoyance and discomfort.

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[30]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 7.

The two motions--removal of the shoe and removal of the hat--become intertwined, almost like a primitive dance. The stage directions for Didi indicate that as he talks, "he takes off his hat, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, puts it on again." After a few more words he again takes off his hat, again puts it on, commences speaking and again "he knocks on the crown as though to dislodge a foreign body, peers into it again, puts it on again." This time he repeats what Gogo has said earlier, "Nothing to be done." As if to carry the these through a series of variations this sentence is followed by the pantomime of Gogo's struggle with his shoe. "Estragon with a supreme effort succeeds in pulling off his boot. He peers inside it, feels about inside it, turns it upside down, shakes it, looks on the ground to see if anything has fallen out, finds nothing, feels inside it again, staring sightlessly before him." And again as if in answer Didi "takes off his hat again, peers inside it, feels about inside it, knocks on the crown, blows into it, puts it on again."[31] The directions as they appear on the printed page have an almost poetic rhythm themselves, with the repetition of "peers," "feels," "knocks." It is this poetic rhythm that is transferred to the stage by the action.

There have been many critics who have given literal interpretations to the shoe and the hat pantomimes. Ruby

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[31]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 8.

Cohn in her study of Beckett makes a strong case for the idea that Gogo represents the body and Didi the mind, with the shoe and the hat acting as signs of the dichotomy.[32] To extract a meaning from the objects and the pantomime done with them is natural, but one should not forget that the importance of pantomime resides in the evocative, non-translatable poetic image it can visually create.

The nonreducible, but deeply moving gestures of the Balinese dancers were significant to Artaud precisely because the movements spoke of areas not expressible in logical terms. "These strange games of flying hands, like insects in the green air of evening, communicate a sort of horrible obsession, an inexhaustible mental ratiocination, like a mind ceaselessly taking its bearings in the maze of its unconscious."[33]

The gestures of Didi and Gogo while rooted in the reality of daily existence, have the same evocative power of calling up inner states of being. The embraces, touches, and movements of the pair point to their mental task of making sense and of confronting the incomprehensible situation in which they find themselves. If, as Artaud says, "a gesture narrowly divides us from chaos,"[34] the movements

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[32]Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 214.

[33]Artaud, p. 63.

[34]Artaud, p. 64.

of the tramps can be seen as visual manifestations of man's tendency to perform physical activities, in ritualistic fashion, to ward off the chaos that threatens to overwhelm life itself.

Nowhere is the confrontation between gesture and chaos more graphically demonstrated than in the arrival of Lucky and Pozzo. The cry that marks the arrival of the newcomers is the first sound that has invaded the otherwise closed world of Didi and Gogo. Whether it emanates from Godot or from some other frightening, unknown source, it strikes fear in them. This fear is immediately translated into pantomime which offers a visual statement on the terror of the unknown and man's feeble attempt to confront it by clinging to his fellowman:

> A terrible cry, close at hand. Estragon drops the carrot. They remain motionless, then together make a sudden rush toward the wings. Estragon stops halfway, runs back, picks up the carrot, stuffs it in his pocket, runs to rejoin Vladimir who is waiting for him, stops again, runs back, picks up his boot, runs to rejoin Vladimir. Huddled together, shoulders hunched, cringing away from the menace, they wait.[35]

There are few physical images in the theatre as poetic and as tragic as the two tramps huddled together waiting for the arrival of the unknown menace. It is an animated hieroglyph for the entire play, indicating, as it does, both the shared humanity of man clinging to his

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[35]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 15.

fellow man and the inadequacy and meaninglessness of the shared gesture in the face of the seemingly overwhelming force of the unknown.

The arrival of Lucky and Pozzo in itself is a pantomimed extension of the dialogue that Didi and Gogo had spoken just prior to their entrance. It is an example of how pantomime can underline and extend what has been articulated in traditional dialogue form.

> Estragon: (his mouth full, vacuously) We're not tied?
> Vladimir: I don't hear a word you're saying.
> Estragon: (chews, swallows) I'm asking you if we're tied.
> Vladimir: Tied?
> Estragon: Ti-ed.
> Vladimir: How do you mean tied?
> Estragon: Down.
> Vladimir: But to whom? By whom?
> Estragon: To your man.
> Vladimir: To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it. (Pause) For the moment.[36]

Except for his long tirade, Lucky is silent throughout the scene. He is able to communicate quite forcefully, however, through pantomime. His initial appearance is shocking and immediately establishes his suffering. When Lucky first appears on the stage he is literally tied to a rope which is being held by some unknown force. That Beckett has Lucky appear, cross the stage and exit on the far side without ever introducing the person or thing holding the rope, allows the scene to visually

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[36]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 14.

represent the condition of the tramps, being tied to something or someone that binds them but whom they cannot see. It is possible, of course, to see in the Lucky/Pozzo relationship more than just a mirror image of the Didi-Gogo/Godot relationship. Lucky, with his running sore and stooped body, stands as a poetic emblem for subjugated man. His pantomime of dumb service to the tyrannical Pozzo reinforces this interpretation. Every movement is slow, repetitive and prolonged, emphasizing the suffering of Lucky and also the relation between this condition and the condition of dogged repetitiveness that exists in the entire play.

Beckett's mastery of staging is demonstrated in the skill in which he handles the scene. The idea of having a hidden Lucky fall down when Pozzo pulls the rope is masterful. What might have been just a humorous pratfall if it had occurred on stage, becomes almost tragic when played offstage in the darkness that exists beyond the circumscribed world of the set. Had Beckett been interested in using gesture as a source of amusement alone, he surely would have staged Lucky's fall. That he chooses not to indicates the poetic intention of such stage business in the mind of Beckett.

In Act II Pozzo and Lucky enter in the same manner, the only difference is that Pozzo is now blind.and, therefore, the rope serves to lead him as it served previously

to subjugate Lucky who is now mute. The physical image becomes a metaphysical statement in itself without any recourse to words. It indicates, among other things, the shifts in human conditions, the deceptive nature of appearances, and the never stationary relations that bind people physically and spiritually. All these meanings are possible because of the drastic impact of the pantomimed entrance.

Act II has much more pantomime than Act I. In a long routine, that will be discussed under circus and clown routines, Didi and Gogo play at exchanging hats. In another long routine, more specifically pantomime, the two tramps try to raise the fallen Pozzo and Lucky to their feet. The image of all four sprawled on the stage is another clear and important physical gesture in the play. Again Beckett creates a poetic sign of the metaphysical position of man in the play. Within the physical activity of Didi and Gogo pulling up Lucky and Pozzo there is also another dimension. That the tramps go to the aid of Pozzo and Lucky and that all help each other indicate the humanity that is also present in the play and in Beckett's writings. Both futility and humanity are, thus, demonstrated through the use of pantomime.

Endgame, Beckett's next play, employs even more pantomime than Waiting for Godot. The play opens with an extended mime in which Clov goes through the daily ritual of climbing a ladder and looking out the two windows in

the shelter, to see if anything has changed since his last check. The movement is belabored, slow, and seemingly endless, as all Beckett's pantomime gestures are.

> Clov goes and stands under window left. Stiff, staggering walk. He looks up at window left. He turns and looks at window right. He goes and stands under window right. He looks up at window right. He turns and looks at window left. He goes out, comes back immediately with a small step-ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window left, gets up on it, draws back curtain. He gets down, takes six steps (for example) towards window right, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window right, gets up on it, draws back curtain. He gets down, takes three steps towards window left, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window left, gets up on it, looks out of window. Brief laugh. He gets down, takes one step towards window right, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window right, gets up on it, looks out of window. Brief laugh.[37]

Expressed in these labored motions is all the frustration, boredom, and ineffectuality of Beckett's dramatic world. The same effect is achieved in the opening of Krapp's Last Tape as well. It too is almost agonizing in its slowness and repetitions. In some productions the opening pantomime which precedes the playing of the tapes can last up to five minutes, almost a play of its own. It includes, besides the fumbling with the tapes in preparation for playing them, a clown routine in which Krapp eats a banana, throws the peel away, and later trips on it. In the actual pantomime, Beckett has Krapp leave the stage completely

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[37] Beckett, Endgame, p. 1.

for an interval of time. Only the sound of a cork popping is heard. The audience is left to imagine the action, just as it did when Lucky fell offstage. Pantomime thus is reduced even further to a motion that exists completely in the imagination of the audience. Only Beckett could think of reducing the little action he does present even further.

A play in which both words and actions seem compressed almost to the point of disappearance is Come and Go, Beckett's shortest work. He calls it a dramaticule because of its brevity. The action concerns three old school friends who meet and exchange a few words. Each is aware of something that she sees in the others, but does not want to verbalize. The pantomime concerns the coming and going of the three. One leaves the other two alone and the secret is passed. When all three are finally on stage again Beckett indicates an intricate joining of hands. In a note that follows the play, he outlines the successive positions as each woman leaves and allows the other two to speak about her. There is something eloquent in the almost ballet-like effect. What is more important, however, is that the movement allows for a comment about the shared humanity of the three. Each recognizes something--probably age and the passage of time--in the other. The joining of hands at the end in an elaborate ritual is a sign for the recognition and for the shared response and the ties that

bind the three. The actions illustrate the final lines:

> Vi
> May we not speak of the old days? (Silence.) Of what came after? (Silence.) Shall we hold hands in the old way?
>
> After a moment they join hands as follows: Vi's right hand with Ru's right hand, Vi's left hand with Flo's left hand, Flo's right hand with Ru's left hand, Vi's arms being above Ru's left arm and Flo's right arm. The three pairs of clasped hands rest on the three laps.
>
> Silence.
>
> Flo
> I can feel the rings.
> Silence.[38]

A human condition has been reduced to a physical series of actions. All the evocative meanings are conveyed in the holding of hands and the exits and entrances in the play. There is no need to speak of the old days.

Beckett's use of pantomime culminates in his Act Without Words I and II. In these plays, there are no words at all. All is mime. In a sense what Beckett has done is to take the initial action of Waiting for Godot--the pantomime with the shoe--and extend it to include battle done with all the elements of nature. The play begins in medias res as all of Beckett's other plays do.

> The man is flung backwards on stage from right wing. He falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects.
> Whistle from right wing.

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[38] Samuel Beckett, Come and Go (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967), pp. 13-14.

> He reflects, goes out right.
> Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, dust himself, turns aside, reflects.[39]

The action is repeated as the man struggles with a tree, water, and suicide. Continuously he pauses between defeats, brushes himself off and goes into battle again. The pantomime ends with the man still looking at his hands. He has not been defeated; he is still there. The pantomime acts as a poetic image of the basic Beckett idea: man struggling to keep going against forces he cannot control.

Endurance and repetition are also central to Act Without Words II. In this case the pantomime is closer to traditional stock pantomime business where someone imitates specific actions: getting dressed, eating, working, etc. In this play two characters, A and B, are prodded by a force, represented simply by a light, to crawl out of their respective sacks and go through the motions of the day. A is a pill taking, nervous, sloppy fellow; B is organized, efficient, neat. They both, however, are controlled by the light, and they both go through the same motions, albeit differently. Beckett has reduced the routine of daily existence to a few appropriate gestures. He has also been able to contrast two life styles and make a further

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[39]Samuel Beckett, Act Without Words I in Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces, p. 125.

comment about the enslavement through monotony and repetition that different life styles do not alter. All this is done by pantomime.

Music Hall/Circus/Clowns

I have put the three categories together because, for purposes of this discussion, the dissimilarities are too minor to be distinguished. The type of gesture referred to here is that of the clown, whether he is in the music hall, the circus or--like the most famous clown of all, Charlie Chaplin--in the movies. Certain points are similar. In each case the intention for which the physical gesture is employed is to create laughter, whether from a grimace or from a walk, a routine involving a prop, or a pratfall. The idea is to make people laugh at the expense of the clown, but also to create a feeling of vulnerability and sympathy because there is something of each person in the clown. Charlie Chaplin's Little Man has become an archetypal figure in the twentieth century. His struggles against nature and against the establishment are the struggles of all nonentities, and his triumphs the triumphs of each man who has wanted to outwit authority. Hart Crane's poem Chaplinesque illustrates the appeal of the Chaplin image and, by association, of Waiting for Godot.

Chaplinesque

We make our meek adjustments,
Contended with such random consolations
As the wind deposits
In slithered and too ample pockets.

For we can still love the world, who find
A famished kitten on the step, and know
Recesses for it from the fury of the street,
Or warn torn elbow coverts.

We will sidestep, and to the final smirk
Dally the doom of that inevitable thumb
That slowly chafes its puckered index toward us,
Facing the dull squint with what innocence
And what surprise!

And yet these fine collapses are not lies
More than the pirouettes of any pliant cane;
Our obsequies are, in a way, no enterprise.
We can evade you, and all else but the heart:
What blame to us if the heart live on.

The game enforces smirks; but we have seen
The moon in lonely alleys make
A grail of laughter of an empty ash can,
And through all sound of gaiety and quest
Have heard a kitten in the wilderness.[40]

Crane's poem in rhythm and verbal images attempts to approximate the physical movement of Chaplin. "The pirouettes of any pliant cane" are difficult to recreate with words. On the stage the recreation becomes simply a case of borrowing the visual characteristics and the physical mannerisms of a Chaplin and affixing them to the characters in a play. By so doing both the characters and the play take on a dimension of humor and pathos which is conveyed completely in nonverbal ways. This is precisely what

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[40] Hart Crane, "Chaplinesque," in The Oxford Book of American Verse, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 963.

Beckett has done in Waiting for Godot. He has dressed his four characters in Chaplin's bowler hat. He has given Didi Chaplin's walk. And he has incorporated traditional tricks of the vaudeville and circus clown such as juggling and pratfalls.

Didi first walks out "with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart."[41] This is a typical Chaplin waddle. In Act II when Gogo and Didi find Gogo's shoes they are "heels together, toes splayed."[42] Again an image of Chaplin's walk. Even more closely associated with Chaplin is the bowler hat. In Godot it becomes more than a prop; it is what makes at least one character--Lucky--able to think. Putting on the hat starts Lucky's tirade, removal of it silences him. The hat has the same effect with the other characters. When Didi has his bowler off, he is incapable of talking.

One of the funny routines involves the exchange of hats with Didi and Gogo juggling Lucky's hat which was left over from Act I. The stage directions describing the pantomime with the hat take up almost a printed page. The trick is a throwback to an old music hall routine, but it is also a sign for Chaplin and a reminder of the power that the hat exercised on the head of Lucky in Act I. Further, it is one of the few tangible signs that the tramps are

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[41]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 7.

[42]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 37.

indeed in the place they were in yesterday. It indicates a continuity and a relationship between yesterday and today. The pile up in Act II is also pure clown routine with people bumping into people and unable to get up.

Ruby Cohn in her study of Samuel Beckett's works entitled The Comic Gamut makes the observation that vaudeville comedians rather than dramatic actors played the leads in both the Paris and New York productions of Godot. Bert Lahr was Gogo in New York.[43] And though, as Eric Bentley argues, Lahr's talent, not his vaudeville background, was the reason for his outstanding success,[44] it seems that his experience as a clown rather than as an actor allowed him to bring to the part the clown-like nature that Beckett intended.

Another vaudeville clown that has been associated with Beckett's work is Buster Keaton, who starred in Beckett's movie Film. Keaton is the master of the dead pan, and this was the kind of comic effect Beckett wished. What Beckett sought was a clown's tragic side: the expressionless face that tries to escape from human observation only to find that he can't escape from self observation.

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[43]Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 211.

[44]Eric Bentley, "The Talent of Samuel Beckett," New Republic (May 14, 1956), rpt. in Casebook on Godot.

Another clown source might be the Marx brothers. Their zany anarchic humor, in general, seems more closely aligned to Ionesco's theatre than to Beckett's. The use of sight gags, the word games, the Surrealistic images that suddenly materialize are pure Ionesco. What is Beckett, however, is the pathos and humor of Harpo. Harpo, without the sardonic wit of Groucho or the sly conniving of Chico, is close to the pure clowns of Beckett's theatre. He is lovable and blundering, full of love and compassion but ridiculous. He will play a harp with beauty and then, as he does in A Day at the Races, end by falling into a pool. He could well be a Beckett clown. Artaud recognized the power of the Marx brothers, whose movie Animal Cracker he called an extraordinary thing, "the liberating through the medium of the screen of a particular magic which the customary relation of words and images does not ordinarily reveal. . . ."[45] The antics Artaud felt were disquieting, tragic, and capable of illustrating a sense of fatality.

Jean Anouilh, the French playwright, was one of the first to recognize the clown image in Beckett. His review of Waiting for Godot ends with the following observation: "One can only raise one's hat--a bowler to be sure, as in the play--and pray to heaven for a little talent. The greatness, the artful playing, a style--we are 'somewhere'

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[45]Artaud, p. 142.

in the theatre. The music-hall sketch of Pascal's Pensees as played by the Fratellini clowns."[46]

Alfonso Sastre in an article entitled "Seven Notes on Waiting for Godot" calls his second observation The Great Circus of the World:

> Beckett discovers the circus as an existential representation. This pair, the 'clown' and the 'augustus,' is a simplified presentation of a complex relationship: that of man and his fellow. The 'clown' and the 'augustus' are two men who do not understand each other. Because of this, we laugh. Because of this, we might also cry. (Some children--let us remember--weep at the sight of circus slaps and blows.) In spite of all the love which the clowns feel for one another, they are brutally separated, as though they belonged to two different biological species. On the one hand, that flour-white face, that large painted eyebrow, that spangled costume, those white stockings, that average mentality. On the other, a huge nose, an immense mouth, vast clown pants, an alarm clock in the pocket, great shoes, and an incredible mentality. Everything is prepared so that they will not understand one another. They will make grotesque efforts, they will slap each other, play musical instruments, perform the most incredible pirouettes in order to express themselves. They will not succeed in understanding each other.
>
> Beckett takes his point of departure from this circus pair. He destroys their external differences. He rubs out the huge eyebrow. Takes off the big nose. Erases the bright colors. Washes off the make-up, so that the true sunken eyes appear. He throws the pair into the circus ring. They are flung down. They wait. They get bored. They play.
>
> We laugh, but our laughter rings hollow. What has happened? We have recognized ourselves.[47]

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[46] Jean Anouilh, "Godot or the Music-Hall Sketch of Pascal's Pensees as Played by the Fratellini Clowns," Arts #400 (January 27, 1953), rpt. in Casebook on Godot, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 13.

[47] Alfonso Sastre, "Seven Notes on Waiting for Godot," Primer Acto, No. 1, trans. Leonard Pronko (April, 1957), rpt. in Casebook on Godot, pp. 102-103.

What Sastre has reference to is the traditional roles of the two clowns, the white clown and Augustus, made famous by Francosi and Albert Fratellini. Their routine was similar to what Beckett approximates. "The most trivial theme provokes contrasting reactions from the two clowns, and this very misunderstanding, this distance, causes the theme to advance, ricochet, bounce and take on new meaning from the games, quiporquos, and lazzi. The spectacle is pure play, pure movement of a parodic action which propagates itself, giving rise to laughter, without any other apparent necessity than the pleasure of continuing."[48]

Certainly this describes much of what goes on in Waiting for Godot. The technique of stichomythia, the rapid exchanges and the contrary positions that are taken by Didi and Gogo are clowns' routines, using the same techniques of play described earlier. One of the favorite word exchanges in the play takes the following form: one character will describe something, the other will offer another description only to be followed by the first reiterating his original word. A verbal tug of war is created, for no apparent reason other than to pass the time and create some humor.

> Estragon: Looks to me more like a bush.
> Vladimir: A shrub.
> Estragon: A bush.[49]

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[48]Genevieve Serreau, "Beckett's Clowns," Histoire du Nouveau Theatre, trans. Ruby Cohn (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966), rpt. in Casebook on Godot, p. 173.

[49]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 10.

At one point in the play the tramps call direct attention to the technique they are employing in their exchange:

> Vladimir: Charming evening we're having.
> Estragon: Unforgettable.
> Vladimir: And it's not over.
> Estragon: Apparently not.
> Vladimir: It's only beginning.
> Estragon: It's awful.
> Vladimir: Worse than the pantomime.
> Estragon: The circus.
> Vladimir: The music-hall.
> Estragon: The circus.[50]

Clown and music hall routines are associated with words as well as actions. The word mix-up or double talk is very much a technique of the clown. One is reminded of variety comedians.

> Estragon: Who?
> Vladimir: What?
> Estragon: What's all this about? Abused who?
> Vladimir: The saviour.
> Estragon: Why?
> Vladimir: Because he wouldn't save them.
> Estragon: From hell?
> Vladimir: Imbecile. From death.
> Estragon: I thought you said hell.
> Vladimir: From death, from death.
> Estragon: Well what of it?[51]

The dropping of trousers is also a vaudeville routine. It is on this note that the play ends. Gogo has taken down the rope that holds up his pants in order to hang himself. But instead of a suicide the scene dissolves into a slap-stick image of Gogo with his pants falling down. The comic has mitigated the tragic, and though the poetic

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[50]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 23.

[51]Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 10.

image is of man as ridiculous object it is also of man as survivor, for the suicide has been thwarted by a laugh, and the act will be performed again tomorrow.

Moholy-Nagy observed that what made the use of music hall and clown and circus important was the idea that it brought theatre back to the people.

> Today's circus, operetta, vaudeville, the clowns in America and elsewhere (Chaplin, Fratellini) have accomplished great things . . . even if the process has been naive and often more superficial than incisive. Yet it would be just as superficial if we were to dismiss great performances and 'shows' in this genre with the word Kitch. It is high time to state once and for all that the much disdained masses, despite their 'academic backwardness,' often exhibit the soundest instincts and preferences. Our task will always remain the creative understanding of the true, and not the imagined needs.[52]

The idea that theatre can be non academic, can contain elements from circus, music hall and other common media, leads directly into theatre as nonliterary and nonverbal. If poetry can come from a pratfall, then a pratfall can be theatre and does not need an elaborate verbal context. Thus the Happening takes its point of departure. In the next chapter we shall see how this poetry of gesture combining with a poetry of space experiments with a nonverbal language.

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[52]Moholy-Nagy, "Theatre, Circus, Variety," The Theater of the Bauhaus, rpt. in Total Theatre, ed. E. T. Kirby (New York: Dutton, 1969), p. 121.

III. Harold Pinter: The Poetry of Imagery

Martin Esslin in The Theatre of the Absurd discusses Harold Pinter in a chapter entitled "Parallels and Proselytes." Although only a few pages are given to the other "proselytes," Pinter is accorded twenty-five pages in the second revised edition of the book. Certainly, in importance, Pinter might well deserve a chapter of his own and rank as a full fledged Absurdist. Pinter's relegation, however, to proselyte status does not indicate the inferiority of his work but rather the tangential quality of it in relation to Beckett and Ionesco. There is in the theatre of Pinter, particularly in the direction it has taken in the last five years, a form and language that branches out from that used by the Absurdists. In a sense, Pinter's plays illustrate the rearticulation of language which Ionesco saw as the next step after disarticulation and devaluation. Pinter has been able to forge a language of theatre that does not destroy language but rather uses it in its most hackneyed form and makes a poetry out of it.

As Esslin says in his full study of Pinter entitled The Peopled Wound: "A playwright so fascinated by the difficulty, the terror, the pitfalls of communication will inevitably be fascinated by words and their multifarious uses to disclose and to disguise meaning. Pinter's theatre is a theatre of language; it is from the words and their

rhythm that the suspense, the dramatic tension, the laughter, and the tragedy spring. . . . It is his ability to combine the appearance of utter reality with complete control of rhythm and nuance of meaning that is the measure of Pinter's stature as a poet.[1]

Arnold Hinchcliffe also notes the poetic quality in Pinter's plays: "Pinter's use of [cliché] fascinates and evolves; and this usage makes him of all contemporary British dramatists the most poetical--more so than either Fry or Eliot. Pinter has looked at the whole, not merely at the language, to find . . . 'the strange sublunary poetry in ordinary things under a microscope.'"[2]

The poetry of Ionesco and Beckett that has been discussed in this essay has been a poetry derived from the physical nature of drama. The mise-en-scene and the motions of the actors have been shown to be evocative and capable of creating a poetic statement outside of the confines of language. Pinter, too, creates a poetry on the stage, one which escapes the limitation of denotative language. Instead of using words for discursive purposes as they have been traditionally used in drama, he creates verbal images that are able to shape and structure the play much as images in poems provide a structural unity. What makes Pinter's

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[1]Martin Esslin, The Peopled Wound (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 42.

[2]Arnold Hinchcliffe, Harold Pinter (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), p. 165.

accomplishments unique, however, is that his images derive not from verse or even elevated prose, but from the most mundane, cliché-ridden language.

Verse drama has traditionally been considered the only verbal drama capable of creating poetic, evocative images on the stage. It was T. S. Eliot, more than any other contemporary writer, who championed the use of poetry as a dramatic medium, because of its ability to create an imagistic richness. Eliot's reasons for desiring poetry, however, were not merely to provide concrete imagery, albeit aesthetically pleasing. Eliot agreed with Cocteau that poetry cannot be mere window dressing in a play. "For I start with the assumption that if poetry is merely a decoration and added embellishment, if it merely gives people of literary tastes the pleasure of listening to poetry at the same time that they are witnessing a play, then it is superfluous. It must justify itself dramatically, and not merely be fine poetry shaped into a dramatic form."[3]

Eliot believes that what passes for ordinary conversation on the stage is actually as artificial as verse is. "For I mean to draw a triple distinction: between prose and verse, and our ordinary speech which is mostly below the level of either prose or verse. So if you look at it in this way, it will appear that prose, on the stage, is as artificial as verse: or alternately, that verse can be as

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[3]T. S. Eliot, Poetry and Drama (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 10.

natural as prose."[4]

Northup Frye in The Well Tempered Critic makes a similar distinction between verse, prose, and ordinary discourse. "The language of ordinary speech is called prose only because it is not distinguished from prose. Actually prose is the expression or imitation of directed thinking or controlled description in words, and its unit is the sentence . . . prose imitates, in its rhythm and structure, the verbal expression of a conscious and rational mind. Prose, therefore, is not ordinary speech, but ordinary speech on its best behavior, in its Sunday clothes, aware of an audience and with its relation to that audience prepared beforehand. It is the habitual language only of fully articulate people who have mastered its difficult idiom."[5]

Ordinary speech is distinguished, Frye observes, by its rhythm and repetitions. Ordinary speech, he says "is much more repetitive than prose, as it is in the process of working out an idea, and the repetitions are largely rhythmical filler, like the nonsense words of popular poetry, which derive from them. In pursuit of its main theme it follows the paths of private associations which gives it a somewhat meandering course."[6] Frye gives the label

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[4]Eliot, p. 12.

[5]Northrup Frye, The Well Tempered Critic (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 18.

[6]Frye, p. 21.

associative rhythm to ordinary speech. It is characterized, says Frye, not only by its rhythm but by its apparent disregard for its audience. "Full awareness of an audience makes speech rhetorical, and rhetoric means conventionalized rhythm."[7]

The poetry that Pinter weaves is a poetry of associative rhythms. It fulfills the function that Eliot mentions by being transparent, and not calling attention to itself. It is able to accomplish just what Eliot sought in the following passage, though from an entirely different direction, and by employing not poetry but ordinary speech:

> What we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre; not to transport the audience into some imaginary world totally unlike their own, an unreal world in which poetry can be spoken. What I should hope might be achieved by a generation of dramatists having the benefit of our experience, is that the audience should find, at the moment of awareness, that it is hearing poetry, that it is saying to itself, 'I could talk in poetry too!' Then we should not be transported into an artificial world; on the contrary, our own sordid, dreary, daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured.[8]

In a sense Pinter reverses what Eliot intended. He creates a poetry out of the most mundane clichés of language, and the audience upon hearing their own words is able not only to say, I could talk in poetry too! but also, What I thought ugly and base can be poetic too!

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[7]Frye, p. 21.

[8]Eliot, p. 15.

J. L. Styan makes an interesting comparison between the language of Eliot and Pinter by comparing how the same image is described by each. In both The Family Reunion and The Caretaker there is a scene in which a character talks about the necessity of a clock. Amy in The Family Reunion says:

> O Sun, that was once so warm, O Light that was
> taken for granted
> When I was young and strong, and sun and light
> unsought for
> And the night unfeared and the day expected
> And clocks could be trusted, tomorrow assured
> And time would not stop in the dark![9]

Davies, the tramp in The Caretaker also talks about clocks; and he, too, is indicating his fear of time, and the uncertainty of tomorrow:

> See, what I need is a clock! I need a clock to tell the time! How can I tell the time without a clock? I can't do it! I said to him, I said, look here, what about getting in a clock, so's I can tell what time it is? I mean, if you can't tell what time you're at you don't know where you are, you understand my meaning? See, what I got to do now, if I'm walking about outside, I got to get my eye on a clock, and keep the time in my head for when I come in. But that's no good, I mean I'm not in here five minutes and I forgotten it. I forgotten what time it was! (Davies walks up and down the room.) Look at it this way. If I don't feel well I have a bit of a lay down, then, when I wake, up, I don't know what time it is to go and have a cup of tea! You see, it's not so bad when I'm coming in. I can see the clock on the corner, the moment I'm stepping into the house I know what the time is, but when I'm in . . . then I haven't the foggiest idea what time it is! (Pause) No, what

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[9] T. S. Eliot, The Family Reunion, as quoted by J. L. Styan, The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1962), p. 310.

> I need is a clock in here, in this room, and then I stand a bit of a chance.

Styan notes, "This too is emotive language of controlled rhythm and imagery, and through it we find that we talk Pinter language as M. Jourdain discovered that he was talking prose."[10]

Using associative rhythms that are unique for each character he creates Pinter is able to fashion images that fill his plays with a presence that makes them almost physical properties. It is true that other dramatists have used objects as symbols before. Ibsen filled his plays with symbols that pointed to the condition or situation of his characters. Nora in A Doll's House before leaving Thorvald dances a tarantella, a fast uninhibited folk dance. Hedda plays with the guns that are her legacy from her father, the general, all during Hedda Gabler. More directly, Hedvig ministers to the wild duck in the play by the same name. There is, however a difference in Pinter's use of imagery. In Ibsen's plays the images are related to specific physical objects that have been carefully planted within the realistic framework. Often they are not mentioned by the characters but rather exist as part of the scenery or plot. Only after a particular event has occurred does their symbolic nature become apparent. When Nora leaves Thorvald the tarantella she has been practicing gains significance.

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[10]Styan, p. 311.

In short, a specific turn in the action of the plot illustrates the significance of the image and raises it to a poetic metaphor no symbol.

In Pinter's plays the imagery is directly connected not to the setting or the plot, but to the language of the characters. For the most part the images do not further the action or clarify it in any way. They serve no discursive end as they do in most of Ibsen's plays. They simply provide a poetic dimension, as inexplicable as it is evocative. One reason for this is the fact that the images exist in the characters' minds rather than in the present, material surroundings in which the characters move.

In The Birthday Party, for instance, each character, with the exception of Petey, spins a set of images. When a character speaks, he verbally creates the image on the stage with such intensity that the effect is almost as visual as what one finds in films when flashbacks and actual superimposition of past on present allows for images of revery to materialize. In Act II of the play, when the principal characters have been drinking heavily, they lapse into revery and each creates his own poetic fiction by articulating the images of the past. Meg muses about her childhood: "My little room was pink. I had a pink carpet and pink curtains, and I had musical boxes all over the room. And they played me to sleep. And my father was a very big doctor. That's why I never had any complaints. I was cared for, and I had little sisters and brothers in

other rooms, all different colors."[11] The memory is pure fantasy. The rhythm is that of a young child declaiming. The repetition of "and" gives equal weight to both father and musical boxes, and the elliptical "all different colors" seems to conjure up images of brothers and sisters in different hues. The unfulfilled dream of a little girl, however, seems more real than the seedy, fat old woman who is dreaming them. It gives her a dimension of poignancy and helps explain her need to baby her boarder, Stanley.

In the same way Goldberg, the sinister guest who has come to take Stanley away, creates his own images, also couched in an associative rhythm appropriate to his background and his mental predelections:

> I had a wife. What a wife. Listen to this. Friday, of an afternoon, I'd take myself for a little constitutional, down over the park. Eh, do me a favour, just sit on the table a minute, will you? (Lulu sits on the table. He stretches and continues.) . . . and then back I'd go, back to my little bungalow with the flat roof. "Simey," my wife used to shout, "quick, before it gets cold." And there on the table what would I see? The nicest piece of rollmop and pickled cucumber you could wish to find on a plate.[12]

That rollmop and cucumber are served cold is unimportant; there is no one to refute the story. In the same way, the use of different names in these reveries seems to make no differences as long as the discrepancies are not brought into the actual conversations where verification is important.

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[11]Harold Pinter, The Birthday Party, in The Birthday Party and The Room (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 60.

[12]Pinter, The Birthday Party, p. 59.

The one time McCann calls Goldberg Simey, the name he uses in his private dreams, Goldberg loses his temper: "Goldberg (murderously). Don't call me that. (He seizes McCann by the throat.) Never call me that."[13]

Neither speech in any way furthers the action of the plot as speeches do in traditional drama. The images invoked serve only to add a poetic dimension, one synonymous with a form of character delineation that eludes discursive reduction. Meg and Goldberg take on the multifaceted form of real human beings. The images they verbally create are concrete and yet provide only fleeting clues to their personalities, motivations, or backgrounds.

Martin Esslin calls attention to the tendency in Pinter's plays to present images which serve no function other than to give a poetic density and tone to the work: "Pinter's first ambition," he notes, "was to write poetry; basically he has remained a lyric poet whose plays are structures of images of the world, very clear and precise and accurate images, which, however, and this is the point, never aspire to be arguments, explanations, or even coherent stories aiming to satisfy the audience's craving for vicarious experiences through involvement in a nicely rounded incident; instead Pinter's plays present us with a situation, or a pattern of interlocking situations designed to coalesce

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[13]Pinter, The Birthday Party, p. 76.

into a lyrical structure of moods and emotional insights."[14]

Pinter's most recurring general image in his early plays is a room. "When the curtain goes up on one of my plays," Pinter has said, "you are faced with a situation, a particular situation, two people sitting in a room, which hasn't happened before, and is just happening at this moment, and we know no more about them than I know about you, sitting at this table. The world is full of surprises. A door can open at any moment and someone will come in. We'd love to know who it is, we'd love to know exactly what he has on his mind and why he comes in, but how often do we know what someone has on his mind or who this somebody is, and what goes to make him what he is, and what his relationship is to others."[15]

The image of the room, then, allows Pinter to create a dramatic situation--someone reacts to someone entering or leaving. The image is not static. It sets in motion situations, since the people within the room will in some way be affected by those who enter its confines. At first glance, the image does not sound too promising. If one were to read about it before ever seeing a Pinter play, he would have reason to be skeptical about its wide-ranging possibilities. Why should the audience be more than momentarily curious about one room and the intrusion of someone into it? But,

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[14]Esslin, The Peopled Wound, p. 42.

[15]Pinter, quoted by Esslin, p. 31.

Pinter argues, and his plays prove, the image is a powerful, universal one, for it deals with a territorial drive that is basic not only to man, but, as Richard Ardrey has demonstrated in Territorial Imperative, to the entire primate species. Pinter explains the universality of the image: "We are all in this, all in a room, and outside is a world . . . which is most inexplicable and frightening curious and alarming."[16]

The image of the room is for Pinter an image of man living within his own head. Many critics have noted that Beckett too seems to create from the room, particularly the room in Endgame, almost the approximation of the interior of a man's skull. Pinter has equated the room with the personal, private world in which each man lives, after he has withdrawn from intercourse with the rest of the world: "I'm dealing with these characters at the extreme edge of their living, where they are living pretty much alone, at their hearth, their home hearth . . . We all, I think . . . may have sexual relationships or go to political meetings or discuss ideas, but when we get back to our rooms and we are faced with a bed and we are either alone or with someone else, then . . . I don't think we go on long about ideas or political allegiances. . . . I mean, there comes a point, surely, where this living in the world must be tied up with living in your own world, where you

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[16]Pinter, quoted by Esslin, p. 23.

are--in your room. . . . Before you manage to adjust yourself to living alone in your room . . . you are not terribly fit and equipped to go out and fight the battles . . . which are fought mostly in abstractions in the outside world."[17]

It might be argued that not everyone has a Goldberg and McCann come to threaten him, but Pinter rejects the notion that what happens to his characters is somehow more terrifying than what happens to all contemporary men. "I don't think [my plot] is all that surrealistic and curious because surely this thing, of people arriving at the door, has been happening in Europe in the last twenty years. Not only the last twenty years, the last two to three hundred."[18]

It is difficult to think of any other major playwright who has consistently used one particular image to shape his plays as Pinter has. It might be argued that, if the playwright thinks of the world as a stage, and then goes to pains to indicate that his setting for the play is really a stage, he is using a consistent metaphor. Brecht, with his theatrical elements always in view, was not able to sustain the stage as metaphor. It gave way in the face of the compelling scenes of his plays. In Pinter, however, the room is always there as an image that influences all within its confines. It actually plays a part in each play, and takes on a shape that is at once similar but at the same

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[17]Pinter, quoted by Esslin, pp. 26-27.

[18]Pinter, quoted by Esslin, p. 28.

time unique as the plays themselves are.

James Hollis in a discussion of the room as a metaphoric image in Pinter's plays includes only The Room, The Birthday Party and The Dumb Waiter.[19] Actually the image of the room is at work in all Pinter's plays. It is almost impossible to think of a Pinter play set outdoors, where characters sit under trees, or walk through radiant cities. The basic structures of his plays can actually be seen as extensions of the room image:

> Given a man in a room and he will sooner or later receive a visitor. A visitor entering the room will enter with intent. If two people inhabit the room the visitor will not be the same man for both. A man in a room who receives a visit is likely to be illuminated or horrified by it. The visitor himself might as easily be horrified or illuminated. The man may leave with the visitor or he may leave alone. The visitor may leave alone or stay in the room alone when the man is gone. Or they may both stay together in the room. Whatever the outcome in terms of movement, the original condition, in which a man sat alone in a room, will have been subjected to alterations. A man in a room and no one entering lives in expectation of a visit. He will be illuminated or horrified by the absence of a visitor. But however much it is expected, the entrance, when it comes, is unexpected and almost always unwelcome. (He himself, of course, might go out of the door, knock and come in and be his own visitor. It has happened before.)[20]

His first play The Room is almost exclusively dependent on the image of the room as it conveys the sense of shelter,

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[19]James Hollis, The Poetics of Silence (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1970), pp. 18-51.

[20]Pinter, quoted by Esslin, p. 33.

are--in your room. . . . Before you manage to adjust yourself to living alone in your room . . . you are not terribly fit and equipped to go out and fight the battles . . . which are fought mostly in abstractions in the outside world."[17]

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time unique as the plays themselves are.

James Hollis in a discussion of the room as a metaphoric image in Pinter's plays includes only The Room, The Birthday Party and The Dumb Waiter.[19] Actually the image of the room is at work in all Pinter's plays. It is almost impossible to think of a Pinter play set outdoors, where characters sit under trees, or walk through radiant cities. The basic structures of his plays can actually be seen as extensions of the room image:

> Given a man in a room and he will sooner or later receive a visitor. A visitor entering the room will enter with intent. If two people inhabit the room the visitor will not be the same man for both. A man in a room who receives a visit is likely to be illuminated or horrified by it. The visitor himself might as easily be horrified or illuminated. The man may leave with the visitor or he may leave [redacted] visitor may leave alone or stay [redacted] when the man is gone. Or [redacted] together in the room. W[redacted] terms of movement, t[redacted] in which a man sat alc[redacted] been subjected to [redacted] room and no one ent[redacted] n of a visit. He [redacted] orrified by the abse[redacted] however much it is e[redacted], when it comes, is une[redacted] lways unwelcome. (He [redacted]e, might go out of the door, [redacted]me in and be his own visitor. It has happened before.)[20]

His first play The Room is almost exclusively dependent on the image of the room as it conveys the sense of shelter,

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[19]James Hollis, The Poetics of Silence (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1970), pp. 18-51.

[20]Pinter, quoted by Esslin, p. 33.

protection, and camouflage that Rose has created. It also provides the basis for dialogue. Rose talks about it to her husband, discusses it with the landlord, and the couple who come to see it. Only when Riley finally enters it, does she stop alluding to it, for it ceases to function as protection since the dreaded force is actually within its walls.

In The Birthday Party the room becomes the boarding house of Meg and Petey. It is seedy and dirty. Yet it serves to shelter and protect its owner, Meg, and its only boarder, Stanley. Both live on illusions that are allowed to flourish within its confines. Meg can pretend that she runs a respectable boardinghouse "on the list," and that she is "the belle of the ball." Stanley can live the illusion of the failed artist; "they carved me up." Riley becomes McCann and Goldberg the intruding forces that disrupt the illusions. Stanley is dragged away and Meg, presumably, will have to alter her own fantasy when she learns of her surrogate son's removal.

In The Caretaker the room becomes a more claustrophobic set. Objects of all sizes and shapes clutter its interior. The effect is almost that created by an Ionesco interior with objects dwarfing people in an almost surrealistic way. The film version of the play does indicate, through a slanted camera angle, an unnatural crowding of the people into the set. In the play, the occupant Ashton has voluntarily brought the external presence into his home. Much

as he has accumulated physical objects such as Buddah, a lawn-mower, a gas stove that doesn't work, he brings in Davies, an itinerant tramp. The room in this play serves as a refuge to the newcomer and the focus is on his ultimate expulsion from it, rather than on his disruptive effect on the owner.

The three plays are seen as a unit by Pinter in relation to the central image of the room. "I went into a room and saw one person standing up and one person sitting down, and a few weeks later I wrote The Room. I went into another room and saw two people sitting down, and a few years later I wrote The Birthday Party."

In two other plays, both written for television, the room acts as a central image as well. The Basement is an adaptation of an early Pinter poem entitled Kullus. Kullus, it may be remembered, was the name of the silent character in the short story, The Examination. In the play the disruptive force is Stotts, a man who evidently is the idol of his old college friend Law, the owner of the room. When Stotts arrives with a girl and proceeds to move in, the room acts as a battleground in which the two men fight for the affection of the girl. In the stage directions, Pinter indicates that the room actually changes in appearance from the traditionally furnished room of Law to a modern, contemporary furnished room which is influenced by Stotts. The room therefore, does not remain static but mirrors the tensions and struggle between the two men.

Just as the changing room in The Basement represents the shifting relationships among the three inhabitants, the elusive room in The Dwarfs represents the deteriorating mental state of Lenny. The Dwarfs is in many ways Pinter's most enigmatic play. The language is the closest that he comes to poetry. While both the later plays Landscape and Silence are more disjointed, and more lyrical, The Dwarfs, despite the shifts of scene and the apparent coherence of action, is poetic in its attempt to capture the almost totally subjective state of Lenny's mind as he reacts to his two friends, Mark and Pete. Len makes an attempt to hold on to the room as a tangible force that will ward off the dwarfs that threaten to destroy him. Yet, the room does not remain a physically objective and, therefore, reliable fixed point. It takes on the coloration of Lenny's decaying thoughts:

> The rooms we live in . . . open and shut. [Pause] Can't you see? They change shape at their own will. I wouldn't grumble if only they would keep to some consistency. But they don't. And I can't tell the limits, the boundaries, which I've been led to believe are natural. I'm all for the natural behaviour of rooms, doors, staircases, the lot. But I can't rely on them.[21]

In this play Pinter reduces the poetic image still further. Instead of the room approximating the inner life of man, the room itself represents the macrocosm, and Len's own mind is withdrawn to the point that even the room does not

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[21]Harold Pinter, The Dwarfs in A Slight Ache and Other Plays (London: Melhuen and Co., 1961), p. 99.

provide the comfort and security it does in other Pinter plays. Pinter, in the play, is doing what Beckett does in Film. He is indicating that a man can not get away from his own self scrutiny. Just as the character in Film does, Len seeks to barricade himself within the room only to find that the room takes on all the hostile images of his own mental state.

The room still functions as the central image of the later plays, but its function is more subtle. In The Homecoming, all of the action takes place in the living room. Though other rooms are indicated, this room is the central focus of family life. It is a large room, with oversized furniture that seems to dwarf the inhabitants. The set in the New York production seemed actually to create a surrealistic effect. Gone was the visual realism of The Caretaker and The Birthday Party sets. There was no attempt to approximate the actual living room of the middleclass family that was being represented. Max and his brother Sam and Max's sons, Lenny and Joey, seemed lost in the high-ceilinged room. The sense of isolation that the room gave was reinforced by the dialogue which indicated the hostility among father and sons and brothers.

Central to the image of the room is the image of the dead mother, Jesse. When Teddy the visiting son from America brings his wife Ruth home to meet his family, he remarks about the room: "What do you think of the room? Big, isn't it? It's a big house. I mean, it's a fine room,

don't you think? Actually there was a wall, across there . . . with a door. We knocked it down . . . years ago . . . to make an open living area. The structure wasn't affected, you see. My mother was dead."[22]

There is a temptation to give such a speech a symbolic reading, especially in light of the fact that it is the mother's absence that seems to create the tensions in the family, and it is Ruth's usurpation of the role that is the central action of the play. The room, therefore, is a sign for the altered condition of a family that has been separated from the woman who held it together.

Carrying the idea of the room as the central image in the play even further, there have been some critics who have seen the actual shape of the room with its arched exit at the back of the set leading to steep ascending stairs as a representation of sexual openness.

The room evidently does connote the battleground on which the battles between the generations and the battles between the sexes are fought. It also stands in contrast with the more domestic kitchen. Max, the surrogate mother before Ruth's arrival, indicates to Sam: "I hate this room. (Pause) It's the kitchen I like. It's nice in there. It's cosy."[23]

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[22]Pinter, The Homecoming (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 21.

[23]Pinter, The Homecoming, p. 37.

Each member of the family has his own room. Even Teddy, absent for six years, still has a room. When all the members of the family come together in the living room, however, there is no sense that the separateness represented by the individual rooms is mitigated by the physical proximity of the family in 'the family room.' If anything the distances between the members is heightened.

In Pinter's last three plays, Landscape, Silence, and Old Times, the setting is still the room. In Old Times there are actually two rooms presented, the living room and the bedroom, a fact that has led some critics to comment that the double set indicates Pinter's growing success and growing affluence. Because of the poetic nature of these plays and because of the fact that they are more revery or mood pieces than the earlier plays, the rooms do not impose themselves as unifying images to the degree they do in the more concrete plays. In Landscape and Silence the rooms are actually lighted spaces which are used to indicate the isolation of the speakers. When the metaphor for protective security is a room, it indicates that the character is able to feel relatively safe within its confines and able to talk with those few trusted people whom he voluntarily lets in. For example, Rose is not threatened by the presence of Bert, and Meg is able to talk with Petey and Stanley without fear that they will destroy her protective illusions. In Landscape and Silence the characters are not even able to let loved ones into the circle of revery they have built

around themselves. Beth no longer even hears Duff in Landscape. In Silence the three characters have their own circles of light, much like the characters in Beckett's Play, and while the Pinter characters are not literally confined to urns the way the Beckett figures are, they are, nevertheless, isolated from each other. Even when two move into the same lighted area, there is no feeling that they have shared space together since they are unable to share their thoughts.

While the room is Pinter's essential image, he does make use of secondary images within his plays. These images are of two types. There is the image that is represented by an actual physical object within the scene, and there is the image that comes from a verbal description. The latter predominates in Pinter's plays. Because of Pinter's ability to capture the exact diction and tone of conversation, the verbal images often becomes more real than their physical counterparts. The audience can almost see the basement that Rose describes with its dark, wet walls. The image of Stanley, being 'carved up' by the critics, and being locked out of the concert hall is as vivid as the unshaven Stanley who spins the image. The Luton monastery where the tramp Davies has been turned away is equally vivid, as is the wife who boiled her underwear in the vegetable pan. The specificity of details, such as the type of pan in which she kept her underwear, does nothing

to explain the significance of the image; it rather establishes its concreteness, a concreteness that is detached from meaning. This effect is what makes Pinter's plays so similar to the effects of the nouvelle roman where surface details are presented in lieu of interpretation.

An example of a physical object used by Pinter is the drum, used in both The Birthday Party and The Lover. In The Birthday Party Meg gives it to Stanley "because you haven't got a piano,"[24] she explains. She is referring to the fact that Stanley has been a musician. The effect of the drum image is to make a mockery of Stanley's talents by the substitution of the toy drum for the piano. The drum also serves as an outlet for Stanley's growing fears. At the end of Act I, when he learns that two strange men are inquiring about the rooming house, he begins to beat on the drum in frantic strokes, becoming "savage and possessed." This dramatic ending of Act I prepares the way for the ritual destruction of Stanley in Act II where the staccato of Goldberg's and McCann's questions have replaced the beating drum.

The drum is also a physical image in The Lovers, a short play written for television. The play concerns the fantasies of a couple who pretend to lead a dual life, involving a mistress and a lover. In reality the husband and wife play the dual roles and fulfill the erotic

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[24]Pinter, The Birthday Party, p. 36.

fantasies of the other. The only image that carries over from the fantasy life to the real life is a drum, used in the ritual of the fantasy lovemaking as a sexual sign. When the husband calls attention to it, outside of the context of the fantasy, its presence threatens to destroy the illusionary world the two have concocted.

The drum as an image brings with it certain pre-established associations. It connotes ritual, primitive rites, music, rhythm. Pinter, however, is more comfortable when he creates his own physical images, or rather, when he lets his characters impart meaning to physical properties. A good example of the subjective interpretation of physical object into metaphor, is seen in The Birthday Party. Stanley in Act I tries to frighten the child like Meg by taunting her, much the way one would taunt a child.

> Stanley: Meg, do you know what?
> Meg: What?
> Stanley: Have you heard the latest?
> Meg: No.
> Stanley: I'll bet you have.
> Meg: I haven't.
> Stanley: Shall I tell you?
> Meg: What latest?
> Stanley: You haven't heard?
> Meg: No.
> Stanley (advancing): They're coming today.
> Meg: Who?
> Stanley: And do you know what they've got in that van?
> Meg: What?
> Stanley: They've got a wheelbarrow in that van.
> Meg (breathlessly): They haven't.
> Stanley: Oh yes they have.
> Meg: You're a liar.
> Stanley: A big wheelbarrow. And when the van stops they wheel it out, and they wheel it up the garden path, and then they knock at the front door.

Meg: They don't.
Stanley: They're looking for someone. A certain person.
Meg (hoarsely): No, they're not!
Stanley: Shall I tell you who they're looking for?
Meg: No!
Stanley: You don't want me to tell you?
Meg: You're a liar.[25]

In Act III, after the party, when Meg comes down to greet Petey she sees a car parked outside. The image that was planted in Act I is resurrected again. She asks Petey about the van, "Well . . . I mean . . . is there . . . is there a wheelbarrow in it?"[26] It is this van that will shortly take Stanley away, the van that he has imagistically described to her in the beginning of the play and that created a threat that was fulfilled in Act III. Ironically it is Stanley, not Meg, who is taken away.

Facts, perfectly innocuous in the context in which they are spoken, also take on the aspect of images in many of Pinter's plays. For instance, Stanley in The Birthday Party says to McCann that he used to live near Maidenhead, take tea in Fuller's teashop, and get books from Boot's library. Later Goldberg refers to the same places. This is the only indication given in the play that the two men have had any contact in the past. The geographical names become images of veiled, mysterious past associations never explained.

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[25]Pinter, The Birthday Party, pp. 23-24.

[26]Pinter, The Birthday Party, p. 69.

There is obviously something rather arbitrary about the imagery in The Birthday Party. It is more subtle, and more pervasive in The Homecoming. The most important image, after that of the room, is the image of Jesse, the dead wife and mother. Like many of Pinter's women, she fulfills the dual function of mother and whore. Max when he first mentions her to his brother Sam says, "Mind you, she wasn't such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch."[27] This dichotomy between woman as wife, mother, and as whore is repeated when Max confronts his daughter-in-law Ruth for the first time. "Who asked you to bring tarts in here?"[28] he asks Teddy, Ruth's husband. The association and the duality is further transferred from Jesse to Ruth, when Max, in a purposely elliptical statement, says, "I've never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died."[29]

Associated with the image of Jesse is the fact that she has been escorted around town by Sam, Max's brother in his capacity as chauffeur. Sam alludes the fact in the very beginning of the play.

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[27]Pinter, The Homecoming, p. 9.

[28]Pinter, The Homecoming.

[29]Pinter, The Homecoming, p. 42.

> Never get a bride like you had, anyway. Nothing like your bride . . . going about these days. Like Jesse. (Pause) After all, I escorted her once or twice, didn't I? Drove her round once or twice in my cab. She was a charming woman. (Pause) All the same, she was your wife. But still . . . they were some of the most delightful evenings I've ever had. Used to just drive her about. It was my pleasure.[30]

Later, when Lenny first meets Ruth, he delivers a long rambling monologue about a woman who made "certain proposals" to him and sent her chauffeur to procure for her. "He was an old friend of the family,"[31] Lenny tells Ruth.

The image that Lenny has invoked of the lady with her chauffeur melts into the image of Jesse with Sam driving her about. Both become associated with the figure that Ruth will play in the family as a combination wife/whore. One way to explain the fact that Ruth leaves her husband and chooses to remain as whore in her husband's house is to see it as a materialization of the dual role that has been created around the image of the deceased mother. The presence of Ruth gives rise to the acting out or the superimposing of the wish fulfillments of the men in the family. As Pinter has noted; "I suggest there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false."[32]

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[30]Pinter, The Homecoming, p. 16.

[31]Pinter, The Homecoming, p. 31.

[32]Pinter, Evergreen Review, 8, No. 33, p. 81.

Ruth's role in the play is superficially obvious. Arnold Hinchcliffe says Ruth is a nymphomaniac. James Hollis' definition seems closer to the poetic ambiguity of the role in the play, however, "Ruth is clearly the nexus of The Homecoming. She is wife, mother, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, whore, and eternal feminine. She is all things to all people. She is the point of origin and return, the locus of the coming home. Her circumference is nowhere and her center is everywhere."[33]

The plays which come closest to being dramatic poems, utilizing imagery that comes solely from the evocative quality of verbal description are Landscape and Silence. In both plays Pinter seems to be experimenting with a new form. In both there is no interaction between the characters; therefore, traditional dramatic action is absent. The characters merely carry on simultaneous monologues in which they create action through their world pictures. Instead of recording the surface chatter that masks the inner dialogue, Pinter taps the inner stream of consciousness directly. Beth seems to be carrying on a silent monologue while Duff talks to her. She does not hear him and he does not hear her silent words. Each uses certain recurrent images and at times the imagery actually carries over from one character to the other. In fact, the only contact between the characters is this shared imagery.

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[33]Hollis, Harold Pinter, p. 106.

Beth's images have to do with a day at the beach, with sun, water, and certain physical positions she associates with emotional experiences.

Beth

> I would like to stand by the sea. It is there. (Pause) I have. Many times. It's something I cared for. I've done it. (Pause) I'll stand on the beach. On the beach. Well . . . it was very fresh. But it was hot, in the dunes. But it was so fresh, on the shore. I loved it very much.[34]

Duff makes use of water imagery, but it is the rain that he has taken shelter against.

Duff

> I had to shelter under a tree for twenty minutes yesterday. Because of the rain. I meant to tell you. With some youngsters. I didn't know them.[35]

Throughout the play, the evocative nature of Beth's dreams is contrasted with the specific, mundane ramblings of Duff.

Beth

> They all held my arm lightly, as I stepped out of the car, or out of the door, or down the steps. Without exception. If they touched the back of my neck, or my hand, it was done so lightly. Without exception. With one exception.

Duff

> Mind you, there was a lot of shit all over the place, all along the paths, by the pond. Dogshit, duckshit . . . all kinds of shit . . . all over the paths. The rain didn't clean it up. It made it even more treacherous.[36]

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[34]Pinter, Landscape, p. 9.

[35]Pinter, Landscape, p. 9.

[36]Pinter, Landscape, p. 12.

Duff mentions that while he stood under a tree a young couple was standing a distance away. Beth mentions an old man on the beach. Neither figure is discernible and both disappear. Yet they seem to invade both dreams in the same disturbing way. The technique seems similar to what many filmmakers, particularly Antonioni, Fellini and Renais, have used: imposing a vague physical presence on a scene to indicate some externalization of inner states of the viewer. The recurrence of scenes described through their physical properties also is very similar to the techniques of the nouvelle roman where an almost obsessional repetition of physical positions, sensations, and landscapes is used to indicate the obsessional nature of the character's mind or the implied situation that exists between characters. Beth and Duff repeatedly allude to a scene that keeps repeating itself, where Beth had stood at a window and felt a hand on the back of her neck. Was it Duff's? Was it Mr. Sykes', the owner of the house for whom both work or worked?

The connection between the man of Beth's dreams and Sykes is made when Duff refers to a blue dress that Mr. Sykes had given her, and Beth remembers wearing a blue dress to meet her lover. Whether the lover is Sykes or Duff at an earlier age is not as important as the evocation of both possibilities through the use of the poetic stream of consciousness and imagery.

Having gone this far away from the confines of the drama and toward a pure poetry, Pinter takes another turn in Old Times and produces a play that perfectly integrates poetic images and drama. It is very much a synthesis of the earlier plays of doom and menace with the later poetic works.

The rooms in which the play take place carry meaning, but they function more like the backdrop in Ionesco's plays than as viable poetic images in the sense in which early Pinter rooms are used. The decor is modern. One touch that should be kept in mind is the fact that Pinter indicates that the furniture in Act II, which takes place in the bedroom, is in direct opposition to the arrangement of that in Act I, which is set in the living room--almost a mirror image. The lighting, too, indicates a mirror effect, with the lighting at the very end becoming very bright as if to indicate the frozen, unreal or mirror like quality.

In an interview with Mel Gussow Pinter indicates that the original germ for the play was simply "two people talking about someone else."[37] Having visualized the primary form of the play, his next problem, he indicated,was how to determine to bring the third person onstage. "Is she actually going to walk in the door," Pinter says. "Or is is going to be a question of one of those blackouts. Suddenly there she is--Scene Two! And then I don't know how

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[37]Harold Pinter, as quoted by Mel Gussow "Old Times as in New Pinter Era," Program for the New York Production.

it happened. I thought she's there, she's there. I made a note on my first manuscript: Anna there all the time question mark. And of course that was it. I was terribly excited when I discovered that."[38]

The play opens with the husband and wife talking about the arrival of Anna, while Anna, turned to a window, bathed in shadows, stands behind them.

Kate

(Reflectively.) Dark
Pause

Deeley

Fat or thin?

Kate

Fuller than me. I think.
Pause

Deeley

She was then?

Kate

I think so.

Deeley

She may not be now.
Pause
Was she your best friend?

Kate

Oh, what does that mean?

Deeley

What?[39]

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[38]Pinter, as quoted by Gussow, Program.

[39]Pinter, Old Times, pp. 7-8.

The conversation, sparse as it is,does give rise to certain images that will be repeated throughout the play. Kate mentions that Anna used to steal her underwear, and that she was her only friend. Later in the play Anna will mention how she went to a party in borrowed underwear and Deeley will reply that he was there sitting across the room gazing up her legs. The underwear image thus becomes a theme that is transferred from one revery to the other, with each character repeating it as he would the refrain of a song, shaping it to his own imaginative ends.

The section with the husband and wife ends abruptly with Deeley saying, "Anyway none of this matters." What Pinter seems to be doing is approximating the form of traditional drama, with exposition and rising expectations, but all in the most narrow of confines with the most mundane of images. These images, however, will dramatically illuminate the tensions and relations which the three feel and create.

The entrance of Anna is achieved by having her abruptly leave the window and begin talking immediately. Her speech is in direct contrast to that of Deeley and Kate. It is melodious, swift, and rhythmical, it is pure poetic evocation. It seems, in fact, to be fiction as a dream filled with cliches associated with remembrance. It is similar to the song "You can't take that away from me" which she and Deeley will sing later in the play.

ANNA

> Queuing all night, the rain, do you remember? my goodness, the Albert Hall, Covent Garden, what did we eat? to look back, half the night, to do things we loved, we were young then of course, but what stamina, and to work in the morning, and to a concert, or the opera, or the ballet, that night, you haven't forgotten? and then riding on top of the bus down Kensington High Street, and the bus conductors, and then dashing for the matches for the gasfire and then I suppose scrambled eggs, or did we? who cooked? both giggling and chattering, both huddling to the heat, then bed and sleeping, and all the hustle and bustle in the morning, rushing for the bus again for work, lunchtimes in Green Park, exchanging all our news, with our very own sandwiches, innocent girls, innocent secretaries, and then the night to come, and goodness knows what excitement in store, I mean the sheer expectation of it all, the looking-forwardness of it all, and so poor, but to be poor and young, and a girl, in London then . . . and the cafes we found, almost private ones, weren't they? where artists and writers and sometimes actors collected, and others with dancers, we sat hardly breathing with our coffee, heads bent, so as not to be seen, so as not to disturb, so as not to distract, and listened and listened to all those words, all those cafes and all those people, creative undoubtedly, and does it still exist I wonder? do you know? can you tell me?[40]

There are no sentences, just phrases, without punctuation, mostly word pictures of scenes and sights of London, as if taken from a fantasized romantic version of what it is like to be young in London. There is that same ring of wish fulfillment and artificiality that one finds in Meg's reveries in The Birthday Party. The use of the present participles shows the technique that Pinter is using of having the past blend with the present.

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[40]Pinter, Old Times, p. 17.

Later in the act the distinction between past and present will be obliterated as the former roommates start to talk to each other as if they were still girls in London. The distinction between present and past will be completely destroyed.

Kate

What shall we do then?

Anna

Stay in. Shall I read to you? Would you like that?

Kate

I don't know.[41]

Deeley is forgotten as the women relive or create the past, one is not sure which.

Anna's opening speech leads directly into the snatches of old songs which she and Deeley sing.

Deeley

Blue moon, I see you standing alone . . .

Anna

(singing) The way you comb your hair . . .

Deeley

(singing) Oh no they can't take that away from me . . .

Anna

(singing) Oh but you're lovely, with your smile so warm.

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[41]Pinter, Old Times, p. 44.

Deeley

(singing) I've got a woman crazy for me. She's funny that way.[42]

This singing goes on for several minutes. It is the first time that Pinter has used song in his plays, and the effect here is dramatic. There is a humor in the perfunctory manner in which the two sing, slightly off key, the songs that romanticize the past. As the songs end, the second part of the play ends. Deeley abruptly shifts tone, as Anna did in the beginning of her part, with a long monologue about how he met Kate. Starting with the statement "What happened to me was this," he launches into a story in which he employs certain images. He tells of being in an old neighborhood and stopping in to see the movie Odd Man Out. In the lobby he sees two usherettes "one of them was stroking her breasts and the other one was saying 'dirtybitch' and the one stroking her breasts was saying 'mnnnn' with a very sensual relish and smiling at her fellow usherette."[43] The image of the movie and the two usherettes is picked up later when Anna reveals that Kate had once dragged her to see Odd Man Out, although Deeley had earlier indicated that Kate had been alone. The unspoken association between the two usherettes and the two women is established and creates a sexual dimension that Kate later clarifies somewhat in her

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[42]Pinter, Old Times, p. 27.

[43]Pinter, Old Times, p. 29.

monologue. Kate in her long monologue clarifies an image Anna has recalled of a man sobbing in the bedroom the girls shared. Kate indicates that the man, as well as Anna, have been her lovers, but that she has eluded both of them much as she does within the play.

Kate is actually the passive object for whom Anna and Deeley have been verbally sparing for with remembrances of the past. She replaces the room as the object. Kate, by her imperviousness, similar to the silences of the matchseller and Kullus, is the powerful one; the one that can finally reduce Deeley to tears and the verbal Anna to silence.

The play finally becomes a total synthesis of images and reality; one a mirror image of the other just as one room is a mirror image of the other. The world of dream and the world of reality are held together by the images of underwear, a sobbing man, a figure standing over a bed, the song "You can't take that away from me," Odd Man Out, and the old days in London. It is as if Pinter had taken all the memories of companions who have not seen each other for twenty years, extracted the images which they use to confront each other and recreated the past. He blends them into a mood piece in which nothing is extraneous, everything designed to give rise to some new evocative mood.

Like poems, the plays of Pinter are held together by the images that are embedded within them. These images, unlike ones traditionally used in drama, do not serve to

further the story. Rather, they indicate the multiplicity of action, motivation, and meaning present in the plays. Pinter has been able to illustrate through his poetic imagery that language can be used in drama if it is shaped into evocative images that transcend discursive thought. Playwrights, of the post-Absurdist period, may be able to use the example of Pinter and still work within a verbal tradition. There are playwrights such as Sam Shepard and Lanford Wilson in America and David Storey in England who are carrying out the tradition of a theatre of poetry. But they are presently in the minority. As successful as Pinter has proved in the area of language, the nonverbal movement seems far more dominant in the theatre that has followed the Absurdists. The poetry of space and the poetry of gesture described by Artaud and illustrated in the plays of Ionesco and Beckett, seems to be the source of inspiration. It will be this type of theatre that will be discussed next.

CHAPTER FOUR

A NONVERBAL THEATRE

Ruby Cohn in the final chapter of her new book Dialogue in American Drama raises the question of whether the movement toward silence will be the death of drama.[1] Taken at its furthest extension, the tendency to lapse into silence, whether a progression into some unarticulated truth or a retreat into the despair of nothingness, is seen as a threat to theatre. A theatre with no words, it is feared, may no longer be theatre.

John Gassner in Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama mentions the same fear. "Having learned to do without characters, we may soon learn to do without language altogether, if by language we mean coherent speech. And after that there can be only one more step, and that is to do without a play altogether in writing a play, or to write something for the stage Ionesco correctly designated as an antiplay--presumably with noncharacters in nonspeech!"[2]

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[1]Ruby Cohn, Dialogue in American Drama (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1971).

[2]John Gassner, Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Co., 1966), p. 377.

Jean Vannier in "A Theatre of Language" shares this fear that in making fun of language, in "committing murder" with language there will be a time when language will no longer be able to be used and so the drama will die.[3]

This fear that at the heart of the movement away from words lies the destruction of drama itself is based on certain suppositions about the nature of drama:

1. That a play is the product of one man--the playwright.
2. That theatre is a place for presenting the playwright's ideas, psychological delineation of character, or stories.
3. That actors and director flesh out the drama as the playwright conceives it.
4. That the audience is the passive recipient of the idea of the playwright offered through the intermediary agency of the actors.

The second generation theatre avant-garde or post-Absurdists reject the premises listed above. For them, the playwright is no longer important. If words are meaningless, why then use a playwright? If the Language of Theatre will consist of a Language of Space, employing music, dance, and scenery, then why not make the creation a joint effort of those people involved with such media? This is what the new theatre has attempted to do by forming ensembles designed to create theatre pieces through group effort rather than

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[3]Jean Vannier, "A Theatre of Language," trans. Leonard Pronko, Tulane Drama Review, 7, No. 3 (1963), p. 184.

through the efforts of one man--the playwright. Since theatre is no longer yoked to the word and since it acknowledges the primacy of sensory apprehension, the notion that ideas are to be presented has been abolished. Ideas imply facts and intellectual approaches. Intuitive reactions are more in keeping with a nonverbal theatre form. New productions, therefore, have been emphasizing effects that will heighten sensory impact and have done away with character delineation, story, and traditional ideas as outmoded forms of the Theatre of Words. Since the direct confrontation of experience is essential, the function of the actor and the director has shifted. The actor becomes the conveyor of the experience. The task of making the audience respond is up to him, and, beyond him, up to the director. Since the actor can no longer merely rely on memorizing the words of someone else, he is called on in the new theatre to create, sometimes directly under the guidance of the director as in the case of the Polish Laboratory company, sometimes on his own as in the case of the Living Theatre. Actor preparation has, therefore, been one of the most vital considerations of these ensemble groups.

Finally, the idea that audiences are merely passive recipients of the theatrical experience has been rejected. If theatre is considered redemptive as Artaud saw it and as Grotowski and other new practitioners see it, then the audience is expected to have direct confrontations with the

theatrical experience in order to be directly affected by it. Theatre experiments have taken into account the audience in an entirely new way. In order to bring actor and audience together, traditional theatres have been abolished. Goethe called the auditorium the mystical gulf. It is in the hope that the gulf can be bridged that many theatrical experiments use space in new ways. Events take place around the audience. The actors are interspersed with the viewers. Often space is exchanged between audience and player. As Richard Schechner notes, this new idea of shared space emanates from the idea that theatre is no longer considered an art form divorced from ordinary life. Just as in everyday street life, space is not demarcated for action and for viewing, so in a theatre that wishes to approximate life, dramatic events cannot be limited to designated areas if they are to involve both participants and spectators.[4]

These are general changes in attitude about the concept of theatre. From these changes it is clear that the idea of what constitutes theatre has also changed. Contemporary theoreticians have hearkened back to the ideas put forth by Artaud. Artaud saw that before there could be a new Language of Theatre there would have to be a new concept of what theatre was. "I am well aware that the language of gestures and postures, dance and music, is less capable of analyzing a character, revealing a man's thought, or elucidating states

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[4]Richard Schechner, Public Domain (New York: Avon Books, 1969), pp. 167-210.

of consciousness clearly and precisely than is verbal language, but who ever said the theater was created to analyze a character, to resolve the conflicts of love and duty, to wrestle with all the problems of a topical and psychological nature that monopolize our contemporary stage?"[5]

Artaud argued that for too long theatre was considered culture and that as such it was isolated from the experiences of common men, set apart and worshipped. What Artaud called for was "culture-in-action . . . culture growing within us like a new organ, a sort of second breath."[6] What he protested against was "the senseless constraint imposed upon the idea of culture by reducing it to a sort of inconceivable Pantheon, producing an idolatry no different from the image worship of those religions which relegate their gods to Pantheons. . . . the idea of culture as distinct from life--as if there were culture on one side and life on the other, as if true culture were not a refined means of understanding and exercising life."[7]

In theatre experimentations today, the distinctions between what is theatre and what is life are blurred. Often theatrical productions will be set on street corners, in

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[5]Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 41.

[6]Artaud, p. 8.

[7]Artaud, p. 9.

garages, and in restaurants. They will consist of political demonstrations, nude exhibitions, circus routines, and, often, silence. The removal of the restrictions of verbal theatre has been accompanied by removal of all restrictions on what constitutes theatre. Artaud observed, "It seems indeed that where simplicity and order reign, there can be no theater nor drama, and the true theater, like poetry as well, though by other means, is born out of a kind of organized anarchy, after philosophical battles which are the passionate aspect of these primitive unifications."[8]

This organized anarchy is another way of saying that theatre will be as life is. A contemporary theoretician, John Cage, defines theatre as "something which engages both the eye and ear. The two public senses are seeing and hearing. . . . The reason I want to make my definition of theatre that simple is so one could view everyday life itself as theatre."[9] This idea that anything can be theatre is Artaud's view that theatre must be culture-in-action extended as far as it will go. It is, of course, to blur distinctions between artists and ordinary men. Yet, one may question whether such a blurring would be a bad thing. Ionesco, for one, says, "Ultimately, with the audience all

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[8]Artaud, p. 51.

[9]Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, "An Interview with John Cage," Tulane Drama Review, 10, No. 2 (Winter 1965), p. 50.

participating, everyone should be an author. Formerly, authors proposed a mode of imaginative life. Now the art of the theatre must give to each person the possibility of living, of being a poet, of bringing out his own particular piece of the unforseen."[10]

This of course is precisely what Artaud had in mind, a theatre where each man could participate as he became aware of the possibilities of his own unleashed double nature. Such a theatre is a departure from the basic theatre of the Absurdists.

The Absurdist writers were the first generation avant-garde in the contemporary theatre revolution. As such they were involved in making the case against language. As Ionesco said, "I wanted to divest the theatrical language of its literary aspects. Like the cubist painters, I wished to find the joints of my art and show them in motion."[11] Those who create a form can not be concerned with polishing it. Gertrude Stein recognized this about the early Cubists, Imagist poets and herself. The same is true for Ionesco, Pinter, and Beckett. The three have built their theatre on the decay of the word. Once having exposed the limitations of language and suggested the direction of the new

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[10]Claude Bonnefoy, Conversations with Eugène Ionesco, trans. Jan Dawson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 171.

[11]Rosette Lamont, "Eugène Ionesco," The Playwright Speaks, ed. Walter Wager (New York: Delacorte Press, 1967), p. 157.

mediums of communication, the next generation has been free to follow the direction unencumbered by the necessity of arguing the case against words themselves.

Certainly today Ionesco, Pinter, and Beckett can hardly be considered avant-garde in the sense that Ionesco uses it--"an enemy inside a city he is bent on destroying."[12] Ionesco himself has been inducted into the august French Academy and has had a recent play, Hunger and Thirst, premiered at the Comédie Française, the bastion of conservative theatre in France. Beckett has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. And Pinter--not to denigrate his accomplishments by citing such a questionable prize--has had his new play Old Times reviewed favorably in Time magazine.

The theatre of the Absurdists is not the theatre of Artaud. And it is to Artaud that the present generation looks. Peter Brook, director and author of The Empty Space, notes the difference. After citing the new theatrical vocabulary the Absurdists introduced, he says:

> Like so much that is novel in texture, like much concrete music, for instance, the surprise element wears thin, and we are left to face the fact that the field it covers is sometimes very small. Fantasy invented by the mind is apt to be lightweight, the whimsicality and the surrealism of much of the Absurd would no more have satisfied Artaud than the narrowness of the psychological play. What he wanted in his search for a holiness

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[12]Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 43.

> was absolute: he wanted a theatre that would be a hallowed place: he wanted that theatre served by a band of dedicated actors and directors who would create out of their own natures an unending succession of violent stage images, bringing about such powerful immediate explosions of human matter that no one would ever again revert to a theatre of anecdote and talk. He wanted the theatre to contain all that normally is reserved for crime and war. He wanted an audience that would drop all its defenses, that would allow itself to be perforated, shocked, startled, and raped, so that at the same time it could be filled with a powerful new charge.[13]

Leonard Pronko, a critic who has done extensive work with the avant-garde theatre movement, agrees that the effect of the Absurdists has waned:

> The essence of Absurd drama was a metaphysical dimension expressed obliquely throughout every facet of the play. After reaching a peak in the fifties, Absurdism seems to have expired. Like much of the poetry of the period, the Absurd drama was a drama of alienation. It was perhaps a theatrical representation of what Rollo May calls a dying mythology. . . . Now that the ground has been cleared . . . perhaps the way is open to a more affirmative kind of comment, one dealing with those myths which Dr. May sees as belonging to the coming era: cooperation, subjectivity, collectivism. We are witnessing now the bumbling efforts to construct a theatre on such data. . . . One of the most fertile paths to be followed, as yet scarcely explored, is that suggested by Antonin Artaud: a theatre based upon a synthesis of the various theatrical arts and corresponding to the ideals of Artaud not as he attempted to realize them in his abortive scenarios, but as he dreams of them in his flamboyant essays.[14]

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[13]Peter Brook, The Empty Space (New York: Avon Books, 1965), p. 53.

[14]Leonard Pronko quoted in "Commentary: How Does the Idiom of the Absurd Differ from Traditional Drama," Comparative Drama, 3, No. 3 (February 1969), p. 229.

One of the reasons that Artaud takes precedence over the Absurdists comes from the fact that he attempts to offer a cure for the disease that they describe. It was Camus who said that revolutions cannot be fought on negation alone. Unfortunately, the present avant-gardist overlooks the fact that the Absurdists, in their movement away from a verbal theatre, create a positive form even if it is used to articulate a pessimistic view. In their attitude toward language, Artaud and the Absurdists are close. Both would agree with the idea, expressed by Artaud: "Dialogue--a thing written and spoken--does not belong specifically to the stage, it belongs to books, as is proved by the fact that in all handbooks of literary history a place is reserved for the theater as a subordinate branch of the history of the spoken language."[15] And yet, Artaud goes further, for he calls for the abolition of texts themselves, no matter what their form. Artaud says in "No More Masterpieces," that the written text once uttered is dead.

> We must get rid of our superstitious valuation of texts and written poetry. Written poetry is worth reading once, and then should be destroyed. Let the dead poets make way for others. Then we might even come to see that it is our veneration for what has already been created, however beautiful and valid it may be, that petrifies us, deadens our responses, and prevents us from making contact with that underlying power, call it thought-energy, the life force, the determinism of change, lunar menses, or anything you like. Beneath the poetry of texts there is the actual poetry, without

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[15]Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 37.

> form and without text. And just as efficacity of masks in the magic practices of certain tribes is exhausted--and these masks are no longer good for anything except museums--so the poetic efficacity of a text is exhausted, yet the poetry and the efficacity of the theater are exhausted least quickly of all, since they permit the action of what is gesticulated and pronounced, and which is never made the same way twice.[16]

Such an attitude implies the abolition of the playwright as he functions in the Theatre of the Absurd. In such pronouncements Artaud is not entirely clear, for when he speaks of a poetry existing below the poetry of texts, he does not indicate how such a poetry will be conveyed if not by some interpreter. He himself left scripts that were written poetry.

What he does seem to indicate is that a text, if it is written will be fluid enough to allow a flexibility of form, almost an improvisational structure. John Cage describes the type of structure that Artaud seems to be calling for: "The structure we should think about is that of each person in the auditorium. In other words, his consciousness is structuring the experience differently from anybody else's in the audience. So the less we structure the theatrical occasion and the more it is like unstructured daily life, the greater will be the stimulus to the to the structuring faculty of each person in the audience. If we have done nothing then he will have everything to do."[17]

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[16]Artaud, p. 73.

[17]Kirby and Schechner, p. 55.

The placement of so much responsibility on the audience is not an abdication of responsibility on the part of the artist, Cage argues, but a realistic attempt to make theatre more than merely a dead cultural word.

To see how the theatre described by Artaud and Cage differs from the Theatre of the Absurd and other more traditional theatres Richard Schechner uses a chart in his book Public Domain. Though he is talking specifically about one type of theatre--Happenings--the characteristics apply to all new experimentation:

TRADITIONAL	NEW
plot	images/events
action	activities
resolution	open-ended
roles	tasks
themes/thesis	no pre-set meaning
stage distinct from house	one area for all
script	scenario or free form
flow	compartments
single focus	multi-focus
audience watches	audience participates, sometimes does not exist
product	process.[18]

Judging from this chart it is clear that the Theatre of the Absurd for all its experiments with language was a traditional theatre. Plot was still present in most of the works. In fact, a case can be made for the notion that such plays as Waiting for Godot follow classical Aristotelian concepts of plot development with designated beginning, middle, and end and with recognizable, balanced sections. Although

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[18]Schechner, Public Domain, p. 146.

Absurd plays seemed to have no action other than waiting or filling time and, therefore, no resolution, they did have recognizable characters doing things, i.e. playing roles. The plays were written and took place in traditional theatres on a proscenium stage with a passive audience watching.

New theatre experiments have involved a wider, less definable scope. Schechner uses the term "events" to describe the things that are now considered theatre. Plays may be only a small part of the theatrical undertaking . Based on Cage's definition, almost anything that takes place in everyday life can be theatre if it is so designated. The designation is crucial. Take people, Cage argues, and place them in a concert hall where they are prepared to hear and then have them confront a piece such as his 4'33" which is totally silent. Since the framework indicates an experience is about to take place, the audience will "listen" even to the silence. And, Cage argues, they will actually hear the noise that exists in silence. Now, it is possible for people to do the same thing in their own living rooms. The point is that they don't. The concert hall acts as a frame isolating ordinary events and demanding special consideration of them. After experiencing 4'33" the hope is that the same audience will then go home and listen to the same "piece" being "played" in

their homes. In other words, the art form has been instructive not merely entertaining.[19]

Returning to Schechner's chart, it becomes clear that in order to have the audience learn they must be able to participate in the event or to view others carrying out the activities or tasks from which they themselves will learn. Since activities derive their meaning from their doing and have no other a priori definition but their completion, meaning becomes extraneous to the accomplishing of some designated piece of business. Therefore, many of today's theatrical experiments are accurately called processes. They are ways of doing something, and they are in flux, taking shape through the doing.

One thing is important to note, in connection with the chart. All of the characteristics listed under the term NEW are nonverbal. In a sense, the Theatre of the Absurd's experiments with new modes of communication have led directly to the use of this new language in totally different dramatic contexts. The following discussion will touch on some of the new theatrical experiments. Throughout the discussion, the notion of the nonverbal aspect of the theatre will be emphasized, for though the second generation avant-garde has a totally new dramatic form, it has considerable relation to the languages discussed in this

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[19]Kirby and Schechner, "An Interview with John Cage."

study. It can be said, in fact, to be putting these languages into practice.

The most important forms of the nonverbal theatre movement have been the following:

1. Happenings
2. Group or Ensemble Theatres
   - A. The Polish Laboratory Theatre
   - B. The Theatre of Cruelty and The International Center for Theatre Research
   - C. The Living Theatre
   - D. The Open Theatre
   - E. The Bread and Puppet Theatre

I. Happenings

A poetic image given concrete form is the way Martin Esslin defines Happenings. By emphasizing the Language of Poetry that lies at its center, Esslin is able to draw a line between Happenings and the Theatre of the Absurd:

> Happenings, three-dimensional poetic images that envelop the participants are therefore anti-literary theatre of the most extreme kind--if they are theatre at all. In this respect they are a direct continuation of the tendency already manifested in the Theatre of the Absurd, which diminished the importance of the narrative line, character, plot, and dialogue in favor of the presentation of concretized poetical imagery. Put the spectators right inside such a poetic image and you have a Happening.[20]

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[20]Martin Esslin, Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1971), p. 206.

Happenings have had a tremendous effect on theatre and all art forms in the last ten years. The term itself needs clarification. The Happening movement is really an historical term designating those occurrences which blossomed throughout the western art world in the early sixties. Much like the Surrealist movement of the twenties, it caught the imagination of many practicing artists in different fields. Though actual Happenings occupied only a brief period of time, the term, like Surrealism before it, has remained, and the shock waves produced by the movement are still being felt.

Happenings called into question the very premises of artistic sanctity. By creating works that were series of chance occurrences involving such items as toilet paper, custard pies, people wrapped in gauze, people naked, lights, water, and such activities as building giant sand castles on beaches, destroying machines and emulating machines, the Happenings destroyed the aesthetic premises of art as very few things before had. As Peter Brook notes, "A Happening is a powerful invention, it destroys at one blow many deadly forms, like the dreariness of the theatre buildings. . . . A Happening can be anywhere, any time, of any duration: nothing is required, nothing is taboo. A Happening may be spontaneous, it may be formal, it may be anarchistic, it can generate intoxicating energy. Behind the Happening

is the thought Wake up."[21]

Allan Kaprow is given credit with first using the term Happening and giving birth to the idea, as an outgrowth of Action Painting in the later 1950's. As he defines it,

> Happenings are events which, put simply, happen. Though the best of them have a decided impact--that is, one feels, "here is something important"--they appear to go nowhere and do not make any particular literary point. In contrast to the arts of the past, they have no structured beginning, middle, or end. Their form is open-ended and fluid; nothing obvious is sought and therefore nothing is won, except the certainty of a number of occurrences to which one is more than normally attentive. They exist for a single performance, or only a few more, and are gone forever, while new ones take their place.[22]

Four basic characteristics of the Happening which Kaprow indicates are the following: (1) the context. Taking place in lofts, garages, and often in public places such as New York's Grand Central Station, the Happening emphasizes the removal of the theatrical event from the stage and the reestablishment of it within the framework of the familiar everyday situation and scene. (2) the obliteration of plot. Its improvisatory nature precludes traditional plot with any linear progression. Instead, a Happening is a random assortment of activities designed and then, usually, set free by the creator to fall into place. A

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[21]Brook, The Empty Space, p. 55.

[22]Allan Kaprow, "Happenings in the New York Scene," Art News, 60, No. 3 (May 1961), p. 38.

devaluation of words is central to this breakdown in plot. Words when used in a Happening will not make sense:

> A play assumes words to be the almost absolute medium. A Happening will frequently have words, but they may or may not make literal sense. If they do, their sense is not part of the fabric of 'sense' which other nonverbal elements (noise, visual stuff, actions, etc.) convey. Hence, they have a brief, emergent and sometimes detached quality. If they do not make 'sense' then they are heard as the sound of words instead of the meaning conveyed by them. Words, however, need not be used at all: A Happening might consist of a swarm of locusts being dropped in and around the performance space. This element of chance with respect to the medium itself is not to be expected from the ordinary theatre.[23]

(3) Chance occurrences. Kaprow emphasizes the idea that chance is, by definition, related to risk; and it is through the risk and, often, dangers involved in the activities that the excitement of a theatrical spectacle is achieved. Chance also emphasizes the fact that the Happening is never the same. "Simply by establishing a flexible framework of the barest kind of limits, such as the selection of only five elements out of an infinity of possibilities, almost anything can happen. And something always does, even things that are unpleasant."[24] (4) Impermanence. Since the Happening is the result of particular circumstances joined in an organization dependent on chance, nothing can completely be repeated. Thus a Happening is a one-time-only event.

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[23]Kaprow, p. 59.

[24]Kaprow, pp. 59-60.

As an example of what Kaprow means, one can turn to one of Kaprow's more famous Happenings entitled Calling.

> Briefly, three people were stationed one Saturday afternoon on different street corners in New York. At a specified time separate cars picked them up. Each of the individuals was then covered from head to foot in tin-foil. The cars were then parked, each in a different spot, and the drivers departed, leaving behind them the human packages.
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> The process was repeated with three other individuals, each of whom was wrapped in muslin and tied with cord, and three other drivers. Finally, three of the packages were delivered to Grand Central Station and propped against the information booth. Each of the three human bundles then unwrapped himself, went to a telephone booth and dialled the number of one of the participants who had helped to drive or wrap them. For five minutes the three people in Grand Central Station and the three people in their three separate apartments throughout the city listened to the ringing. After each telephone had rung fifty times it was picked up. 'Hello.' The correct name was asked but the recipient of the call hung up without saying anything more. Saturday's part of Calling, all carried out to an exact time schedule over several hours, was complete. The following day an even more elaborate sequence concluded the whole operation.[25]

One of the most important characteristics of the Happening is its participatory nature. Anyone can be a performer. To illustrate the point in 1963 John Arden, the English playwright, put the following ad in Encore Magazine: "John Arden has conceived the idea of establishing a free public Entertainment in his house. . . . No specific form of entertainment is at present envisioned but it is hoped

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[25]James Roose-Evans, Experimental Theatre: From Stanislavski to Today (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. 137.

that in the course of it the forces of Anarchy, Excitement, and Expressive Energy latent in the most apparently sad persons shall be given release."[26]

Ian Watson, commenting on Arden's experiment, voiced reservations about the whole idea of extending theatrical performances to include chance occurrences put on by non-professionals: "Anarchy is a tightrope that can only be walked by a group of people all educated to keep their balance and not to flag in the middle. To what extent it can be a basis for theatre on a larger scale still remains a question."[27]

John Osborne, another English playwright, shares Watson's scepticism. He calls Happenings "democracy gone mad. It ignores the premise of art, which is that somebody can do something better than you. The assumption of all those Happenings is that everybody can do it as well as everybody else. Some clod flashing lights on a wall is doing something as significant as putting pen to paper."[28]

II. Theatre Ensembles

These questions about the amateur versus the professional, anarchy versus control, and improvisation versus

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[26]Ian Watson, "Kirbymoorside," Encore, 10, No. 6 (November/December 1963), p. 16.

[27]Watson, p. 17.

[28]John Osborne quoted by Robert Brustein, The Third Theatre (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), p. 76.

prepared text are crucial not only to Happenings but to another type of experimental theatre form: theatre ensembles. These ensembles consist of actors, directors, and, often, scenarists and lighting specialists. Their intention is to create theatre productions from a communal effort. The idea of ensemble groups is not new. In Russia, Stanislavski worked with the Moscow Art Theatre Studio. What is new is the dispensing with the playwright. Productions are created not merely performed by the group. The combined efforts of the ensemble produces the play.

Such a movement can be seen as an outgrowth of the Absurd theatre. Once the word was abolished, the playwright became unnecessary. Further, if language involved space, gesture, lighting, and music, a variety of people, each concerned with one specialty, were needed to implement the diversity of languages.

Of the many ensemble groups existing today in the Western theatre, the following have been chosen because of their relative success and because they represent varying attitudes toward the function of ensemble productions.

A. The Polish Laboratory Theatre

The Polish Laboratory Theatre is the province of one man: Jerzy Grotowski. Unlike other ensemble groups, the Polish theatre is completely controlled by its director. From its base in Wroclaw, Poland, the theatre and Grotowski have attracted an international following. A cult of

personality has grown up around Grotowski. His followers have placed him alongside Stanislavski and Artaud as a shaper of theatre in the twentieth century.

In the preface to Grotowski's book Toward a Poor Theater Peter Brook says: "Grotowski is unique. Why? Because no-one else in the world, to my knowledge no-one since Stanislavski, has investigated the nature of acting, its phenomenon, its meaning, the nature and science of its mental-physical-emotional process as deeply and completely as Grotowski."[29]

Grotowski calls his theatre a Poor Theatre. By that he means that the theatre as he sees it is one stripped of inessentials, one that concentrates on that which is unique to theatre alone: direct contact between a live actor and a live audience. "The theatre must recognize its own limitations. If it cannot be as lavish as television, let it be ascetic. If it cannot be a technical attraction, let it renounce all outward technique. Thus we are left with a 'holy' actor in a poor theatre."[30]

This concept of theatre is directly opposed to total theatre which includes all theatrical elements of production. It stresses, instead, the supremacy of the actor. "There is only one element of which film and

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[29]Jerzy Grotowski, Toward a Poor Theatre, Preface by Peter Brook (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 13.

[30]Grotowski, p. 41.

television cannot rob the theatre: the closeness of the living organism."[31]

Grotowski's view of theatre harks back to Artaud. Both believe in "a sense of life renewed by the theater, a sense of life in which man fearlessly makes himself master of what does not yet exist and brings it into being."[32]

There is in Grotowski's theatre the complete dedication that Artaud envisioned. Grotowski says, "Theatre, real theatre is a ludens mysterium, tremendum, et fascinosum, a mysterious, fearful and captivating game. But our civilization, separating the sacred from the profane, has condemned the theatre to the role of a mere diversion. Any attempt to confront the myths of our world in a present-day light appears therefore as a profanation. They have put a straitjacket on the theatre. We want to 'let loose the madman.'"[33]

Grotowski's method of arousing the potential spirit of theatre has been to concentrate his energies on freeing the "holy" actor who acts as the transmitter of the mystery of the theatrical experience. In the Polish Laboratory Theatre actors dedicate themselves totally to their acting. Unlike traditional theatre where the actors see their work

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[31]Grotowski, p. 41.

[32]Artaud, p. 13.

[33]Michael Kustow, "Ludens Mysterium, Tremendum, et Fascinosum," Encore, 10, No. 5 (September/October 1963), p. 9.

as a craft which occupies only a portion of their lives, in Grotowski's theatre the actor is expected to give himself over completely to the training required. This training--the core of Grotowski's theatrical experiments--concentrates on reshaping the total man so that he can, in turn, create out of his own physical and emotional strengths. "One thing is clear: the actor must give himself and not play for himself or for the spectator. His search must be directed from within himself to the outside but not for the outside."[34]

Grotowski explains that he means by the holy actor:

> Don't get me wrong. I speak about "holiness" as an unbeliever. I mean a "secular holiness." If the actor, by setting himself a challenge publicly challenges others, and through excess, profanation and outrageous sacrilege reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration. If he does not exhibit his body, but annihilates it, burns it, frees it from every resistance to any psychic impulse, then he does not sell his body but sacrifices it. He repeats the atonement; he is close to holiness. If such acting is not to be something transient and fortuitous, a phenomenon which cannot be foreseen in time or space: if we want a theatre group whose daily bread is this kind of work--then we must follow a special method of research and training.[35]

This new method of preparation involves physical development of the body, for the body is seen as the instrument that relates the emotion of the play. Since words are

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[34]Grotowski, p. 247.

[35]Grotowski, p. 34.

not essential to the communicating of ideas, Grotowski can do away with voice, diction and theatrical business. The actor is the meaning. His flesh--the ability of his body to convey pain, joy, and ecstacy--is the medium of his craft.

> The actor who undertakes an act of self-penetration, who reveals himself and sacrifices the innermost part of himself--the most painful, that which is not intended for the eyes of the world--must be able to manifest the least impulse. He must be able to express, through sound and movement, those impulses which waver on the borderline between dream and reality. In short, he must be able to construct his own psycho-analytic language of sounds and gestures in the same way that a great poet creates his own language of words.[36]

Grotowski's theatre accepts the devaluation of words. The experiments that Grotowski undertakes deal principally with finding physical language.

Grotowski, therefore, believes that there is no need in the poor theatre for a text. In mentioning the things the theatre can eliminate in order to get to its essential form he cites text. The text may be a starting point but it in no way limits the actual creation that goes on in the psyche and body of the actor. "For both producer and actor, the author's text is a sort of scalpel enabling us to open ourselves, to transcend ourselves, to find what is hidden within us and to make the act of encountering the others: in other words, to transcend our solitude."[37]

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[36]Grotowski, p. 35.

[37]Grotowski, p. 57.

This truth of self analysis is what the actor offers in the framework of the play, and he offers it through his own body language.

Half of the theatrical experience is the actor, the other half is the audience. In his ideas about audiences Grotowski has also been experimental. He believes in a participatory theatre, but one that is disciplined. "I am trying to create a theatre of participation, to rediscover factors which characterised the origins of the theatre. Place actors and spectators close together, in a new scenic space which embraces the entire room, and you may create a living collaboration. Thanks to the physical contact, the spark can cross between them. The duration of the performance becomes a privileged moment."[38]

Grotowski insists on keeping his audience small, usually around forty people. With fewer spectators more intimate contact can be achieved between actor and viewer. Also Grotowski uses his audience within the framework of the production, and smaller audiences are easier to place.

In order to achieve this closeness, Grotowski has done away with the traditional theatre separations. He utilizes space in ways that are appropriate to the effects he wishes to create in individual plays. In The Constant Prince, he places a high fence around the audience and forces them to peer over as if they were watching animals in a ring or

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[38]Kustow, p. 11.

a medical operation. In Akropolis he has the audience sitting on makeshift bunks placed on different levels. The actors, dressed in Auschwitz prison garb perform around, behind, and next to the audience. Thus the audience becomes not spectators but part of the mise-en-scene by their presence. In Grotowski's production of Dr. Faustus, he has the audience seated at a long banquet table, over which Faust presides. They, therefore, play the role of guests asked to share Faust's dilemma.

In all the productions of the theatre, Grotowski usually starts with some text. For instance Akropolis is a play based on the work of the famous Polish writer Wyspianski. Grotowski sets the action in Auschwitz in order to emphasize the contemporary parallels to the suffering and anguish of the play. His attempt is to intersperse the contemporary with the classical in order to create an archetypal theatre where myths will speak directly to a contemporary audience.

> Primitive man was able to act out his environment through these rites, and crystallise his reactions in myths and symbols. Modern man, critical and sceptical, can't do this. One must find new forms, which, while keeping elements of primitive ritual--the participation of all those present and the profanation of taboos--allow the spectator to discharge his subconscious stockpile of emotions during the performance. One must find nonreligious stimuli as deep rooted in modern man as 'participation mystique' is in the primitive one must handle them in a theatrical way and attack the spectator's psyche.[39]

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[39]Kustow, p. 12.

Grotowski's theatre in its attempt to attack the psyche has moved totally outside the framework of the Language of Words. It has embraced as a fait accompli the notion that theatre language is nonverbal, and it has even set up a laboratory in which to test and experiment with techniques which will best convey the new nonverbal language.

B. The Theatre of Cruelty and the International Center for Theatre Research.

Another man who is also interested in experimenting with nonverbal theatre forms is Peter Brook. Brook is a British director who in 1965 helped found a Theatre of Cruelty in London which attempted to put into practice some of the views of Artaud. Far more traditional than Artaud would have liked, the theatre did succeed in serving as a training ground for some gifted playwrights, notably John Arden, author of Sergeant Musgrave's Dance.

Although Brook's Theatre of Cruelty experiment was still based on the Language of Words, in theory he shares the view that words do not serve as communicative agents in theatre. In a 1961 article entitled "Search for Hunger" Brook stated: "I believe in the word in classical drama because the word was their tool. I don't believe in the word much today because it has outlived its purpose. Words don't communicate, they don't express much, and most of

the time they fail abysmally to define."[40]

Brook had an opportunity to experiment with a script that allowed latitude beyond the printed word. In Peter Weiss's Marat/Sade, Brook coupled the words with what came closest to a Theatre of Cruelty seen in popular commercial theatre. Set in a madhouse, the play allowed the traditional separation of actor and audience to be abolished. The audience was actually at the madhouse viewing hideous, distorted howling forms of life acting out their madness and the play.

In 1970 Brook moved even further away from the word-centered theatre. He established the International Center for Theater Research. A multi-national group, it has experimented with drama that uses a new language, one written especially for its production of Orghast by the poet Ted Hughes. The language, too, is called orghast. Brook wanted a language "that transcends nationality and the cultural and social forms that already exist. We wanted to put on stage language that is identical with the feelings behind the language, a language that could hit the spectator directly and emotionally."[41] The setting for the production was Persepolis, the ancient imperial capital of Persia. There amid mountains, and in front of the tomb of King Artaxerxes III, the actors

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[40]Peter Brook, "Search for Hunger," Encore, 18, No. 32 (July/August 1961), p. 19.

[41]Margaret Croyden, "Peter Brook Learns to Speak Orghast," The New York Times (October 3, 1971), p. 3.

attempted to recreate a theatre of myth on the grand scale that the environment and the freedom of the incantatory language permitted.

Brook's theatre is experimental. He hopes to go to other countries where the environment will determine the production. Brook is committed to theatrical innovation. He does not have answers, but he is aware of the questions that a nonverbal theatre asks. In the program notes to Orghast he says: "What is the relation between verbal and nonverbal theatre? What happens when gesture and sound turn into word? What is the exact place of the word in theatrical expression? As vibration? Concept? Music? Is any evidence buried in the sound structure of certain ancient languages?"[42]

C. The Living Theatre.

Still another group to move away from the traditional theatre and experiment with ensemble productions that try to raise the consciousness of the audience and require a complete commitment on the part of the actors is the Living Theatre. If Grotowski's Polish Laboratory Theatre is the quintessence of discipline, The Living Theatre, headed by Julian Beck and his wife Judith Malina, is the quintessence of anarchy. Begun in 1946, as a group dedicated to putting on new plays not showcased elsewhere, the group ultimately has expanded into a nomadic, communal society who act and

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[42]Croyden, p. 5.

live together.[43] In 1963 they were evicted from their New York home for failure to pay taxes.

Unlike Grotowski, the Becks exert no total control. The idea for the productions comes from the group experience. The group is committed to certain basic things: revolution, the abolition of the capitalistic system, total personal freedom, and pacificism. They see their theatre as a political one able to get the audience not merely to confront hidden fears and expiate them but to take political actions.

In the introduction to Michael Smith's book Theatre Trip, Julian Beck expresses his aim: "Until we are all artists. Every man and woman. All the time. Until we are all priests. Until we are all workers. Until then the struggle is to create the reality, and part of the work of doing this is the creative destruction of what is unreal, the social and economic structure."[44]

The productions created by the Living Theatre include Frankenstein, Mysteries, and Paradise Now. Each has evolved over a period of time and has been the joint effort of the group. A brief summary of the sections of Mysteries should indicate how eclectic the productions are, employing as they do yoga, exercise, tableaux, light shows, incense burning and pantomime.

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[43] In January 1970 the group divided into four sections. The Brazilian contingent headed by the Becks was detained in jail for several months because of alleged subversion.

[44] Michael Smith, Theatre Trip (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1969), p. 2.

Mysteries consists of seven parts. In the first part, "Brig Dollar," a man stands silent for seven minutes. He is followed by twelve men coming up on stage, doing "brig" or army formations. This is followed by a poem coming from six different places in the theatre, the words of which are taken from a dollar bill. Next comes "Odifery," where a girl, after reciting sagas, burns incense, to emphasize the total sensory experience that is being called into action. "Street song" has Julian Beck sitting on the bare stage with the rest of the cast sitting in the audience, shouting slogans from the street: "Stop the war," "Feed the poor," "Freedom for all." The intention is to get the audience to shout, too. The audience is then asked, once they have liberated themselves by speaking out, to join a chord--a yoga circle.

Act II begins with "World boxes." The tableaux vivants consist of light flashing on to reveal four people in positions. When the lights flash off the positions are changed. "Lee's Piece" is an acting exercise that has been incorporated in the production. One person starts an improvisational gesture which is repeated by someone in the line facing him. The second person makes a new gesture, which is also repeated by a third member. Gradually sound is added and gestures expand to full body movements which carry performers across the stage. The highlight of the entire production is "The Plague." It is directly inspired

by Artaud's essay "The Theatre and the Plague" in which he likens the power of the theatre he envisions to the chaos of a plague. In Mysteries, "The Plague" starts in darkness with noises which rise to groans of agony. As lights come up many people are seen in various forms of physical torment. Gradually the movements become more frantic. Some actors crawl off stage and "die" in the audience. At its height, there is utter silence. All have been "killed" by the plague. Gradually, however, members of the cast rise from "death." These "doctors" take the bodies of other actors and, after removing their shoes, carry them on the stage making a human pyre.

The tendency of the cast to mingle among the audience, touch them, physically and verbally exhort them to action, has caused much debate, particularly during the much heralded American tour the group made in 1968. Also questioned was the act of liberation manifested by the removal of clothing, and the nude procession out of the theatre--an act that led to arrest in New Haven, Connecticut.

Judith Malina in a symposium conducted by Robert Brustein at the Yale Drama School explains the necessity for nudity in relation to the basic premises of the Living Theatre: "Everything we do is a role: every relationship we have is falsified by our exterior, by our behavior. Paradise Now is an attempt to break that at every point we know how, including taking our clothes off to the legal

limit, and then pointing out to you that there is a legal limit, and what are you going to do about it, and what are we going to do about it together?"[45]

This call to action is illustrated in the following lines spoken by the group in Paradise Now:

> Free theatre. The theatre is yours. Act. Speak. Do whatever you want.
>
> Free theatre. Feel free. You, the public, can choose your role and act it out.
>
> New York City. Eight million people are living in a state of emergency and don't know it.
>
> Manhattan island is shaped like a foot.
>
> At the foot of New York is Wall Street.
>
> Free theatre. In which the actors and the public can do anything they like.
>
> Free theatre. How much did you pay to get in here? Act.[46]

This direct challenge to "do something" about societal restrictions is basic to the Living Theatre's productions, and it has been the point of friction with audiences. Robert Brustein, for one, was an early champion of the group, but changed his mind when he found that their harangues to do something became fascist in their bombardment and amateurish in their presentations. "Unfortunately," he says, "the Living Theatre had little of

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[45]Judith Malina, The Living Theatre: Yale/Theatre, 2, No. 1 (Spring 1969), p. 23.

[46]Judith Malina and Julian Beck, Paradise Now (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 23.

substance to contribute beyond its physical athleticism and its exotic life style."[47] Others seem to share Brustein's view. Leonard Pronko in a carefully qualified criticism of the group says about all theatre experimentation, "Paradise is the goal, but Paradise is definitely not Now."[48]

The Living Theatre, for all the criticism it has generated, stands as an extreme of the idea that theatre as participatory and as total can be communicative without words, by employing sound, body movements, and lighting.

D. The Open Theatre.

The Open Theatre was started by Joseph Chaikin, formerly a member of the Living Theatre. His goal as director is "to redefine the limits of the stage experience or unfix them. To find ways of reaching each other and the audience."[49] The production comes from an ensemble effort as it does in the Living Theatre. There is more emphasis on actor training, however. Games, exercises, activities are undertaken in order to get the actor to create emotional scenes from his own resources. A situation may be mentioned, as in the working out of The Serpent, where the garden of Eden is to be evoked. Each actor is then asked to express

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[47]Robert Brustein, The Third Theatre (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), p. xiv.

[48]Pronko, Comparative Drama, p. 229.

[49]Joseph Chaikin, quoted by Richard Schechner, Public Domain, p. 135.

his concept of purity, innocence, and evil. Continuous repetition makes such responses resemble Artaud's "animated hieroglyph."

Unlike the other groups mentioned, the Open Theatre has had playwrights working with them, most importantly Jean-Claude van Itallie and Megan Terry. Playwrights, Chaikin says, "suggest forms for us--later these are often written out. These pieces are inspired by the actors' work. You see, there's a give-and-take. After the writer has suggested a form--I don't like 'plot' because these things are often much simpler than a plot--we begin to improvise with them. We select what language to use. Very often this is a 'language' of our own, sounds which communicate. . . . The mode of the language depends on the form of the improvisation, its goals and our own warm-up. . . . We're in no hurry."[50]

The Serpent grew out of an eight month collaboration between Van Itallie and the ensemble. The basic idea of the fall of man was initially presented to the group who then went through a long process of personalizing the fall and indicating their individual concept of sin, death, salvation through body motion and sound. These personal expressions were the direct result of exercises designed to call up the subconscious reactions of the actors to the story of Adam and Eve. Chaikin explains his intention:

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[50]Schechner, p. 135.

> The collaboration requires that each person address to himself the major questions posited in the material: what are my own early pictures of Adam and Eve and the serpent, of the Garden of Eden, of Cain and Abel? These questions deal with a personal remembered 'first time.' They are questions we stopped asking after childhood. We stopped asking them because they were unanswerable (even though we gave or guessed at answers), and later we substituted 'adult' answerable questions for them. The group must also go into those deeply dramatic questions of the 'first man' and 'first woman,' 'first discovery of sex,' and also the character of God in the Old Testament.[51]

Miss Terry has experimented with a form of writing form that is an outgrowth of the exercises done in the Open Theatre; she calls it transformation. It has its roots in the improvisational theatre of Paul Sill's Second City. Peter Feldman, a director with the Open Theatre, explains the technique: "The transformation . . . is an improvisation in which the established realities or 'given circumstances' of the scene change several times during the course of the action. What may change are character and/or time and/or objectives. Whatever realities are established at the beginning are destroyed after a few minutes and replaced by others. Then these in turn destroyed and replaced. These changes occur swiftly and almost without transition, until the audience's dependence upon any fixed reality is called into question."[52]

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[51] Joseph Chaikin quoted by John Lahr, Up Against the Fourth Wall (New York: Grove Press, 1970), p. 163.

[52] Schechner, Public Domain, p. 136.

As Richard Schechner says, the technique can have an effect on the playwright as well: "If the actor no longer has to make naturalistic connectives between scenes, the playwright, too, can jump from situation to situation, structuring his play on the progression of action-blocs rather than on motivationally connected sequences, each of which is psychologically contained in a larger unit--beat, scene, act, play. The new action-blocs can relate to each other in pre-logical ways. They can compress, go off on tangents, serve as counterpoint, stop plot development to explore mood, and so on."[53]

This technique goes hand in hand with the expressed goal of the Open Theatre. "What we're really experimenting with at the Open Theatre is how to split the human being up, in different levels, in ways which the human being has never been split up before. In other words, to use the analogy of painting, instead of a naturalistic canvas, an impressionistic one."[54]

E. The Bread and Puppet Theatre

The Bread and Puppet Theatre is the creation of Peter Schumann. It uses puppets, often ten feet high to put on plays that are both primitive and simple while at the same time moving and direct in their appeal. Schumann rejects the more flamboyant techniques of such groups as The Living

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[53]Schechner, Public Domain, p. 137.

[54]Lahr, Up Against the Fourth Wall, p. 167.

Theatre: "You can't simply shock an audience. That will disgust them. We don't necessarily have to revolutionize the theatre. It may be that the best theatre--if it comes--will develop from the most traditional forms. A theatre is good when it makes sense to people."[55]

The Bread and Puppet theatre tries to make sense by basing its productions on the most pressing concerns of the audience, most notably the Viet Nam War. The war has had a profound effect on the group and underlies many of its works. The symbol of a Vietnamese woman holding a child in her arms appears frequently in their production and many of the masks used are patterned after Vietnamese facial features.

In order to reach the greatest number of people the group usually holds its performances outdoors. They are the closest thing America has to a street theatre. In fact, they have been instrumental in starting the Guerilla Theatre movement which has become a central part of many anti-war demonstrations in the last few years. Such groups take their point of departure from the idea of Brecht that the street is the real arena of theatre. As he says in the following poem:

> Artists, you who make Theatre
> in great houses, beneath artificial suns of
> light,

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[55]Peter Schumann quoted by James Roose-Evans, Experimental Theatre (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. 121.

> in front of the silent crowd--go and seek now and then
> the Theatre of everyday--thousandfold and without shame
> yet so very full of life; Theatre of the Earth;
> Theatre fed by living together
> of people; Theatre placed in the streets.[56]

The same idea of an indigenous street theatre is expressed by Judith Malina too. "We're all looking now, I think, all of us, to make theatre into life and life into the theatre which is why it's popularly said now, 'The theatre is in the streets; the real theatre is in the streets.'"[57]

James Roose-Evans notes in Experimental Theatre that while the Becks talk about a theatre of the streets, the Bread and Puppet Theatre actually is a theatre of the streets. They charge no admission. They take their puppets to demonstrations, protest meetings, street gatherings of all kinds. By so doing the Schumann group has reversed the procedure of having theatre fall heir to a Language of Words distorted by political usage. In the Bread and Puppet productions the political context gives a new impetus to language and purifies it for use in more general contexts.

In A Theatre Divided Martin Gottfried described the present avant-garde theatre as a left-centered theatre.[58] Certainly the American ensemble groups share with the

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[56] Bertolt Brecht quoted by J. Styan, The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern, Tragedy (Cambridge: University Press, 1962), p. 277.

[57] Judith Malina, The Living Theatre: Yale/Theatre, p. 26.

[58] Martin Gottfried, A Theatre Divided: The Postwar American Stage (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958).

Bread and Puppet Theatre a profound abhorrence for the present societal structure and the desire to have their theatrical productions help further a revolutionary movement. Whereas the Living Theatre exhorts the audience to "do something," the Bread and Puppet Theatre in its simple style presents the evils for all to see. Watching the huge puppets parading silently down a New York street with their Vietnamese mask-like faces can be the strongest indictment of the war possible. Bread is given out as part of their performance in keeping with their view of a functional theatre. Peter Schumann simply notes, "We would like to be able to feed people."[59] Both physically and spiritually, it is impossible, he feels, to do so in a traditional theatre: "It's too comfortable, too well known. Its traditions upset us. People are numbed by sitting in the same chairs in the same way. It conditions their reactions. But when you use the space you happen to be in, you use it all--the stairs, the windows, the streets, the doors. We'd do a play anywhere--provided we can fit the puppets in."[60]

It is the use of puppets that has had the most pronounced effect on the nature of Schumann's theatre. Because of their size the puppets create a kind of stylized, primitive rite. In some ways this type of theatre is a throwback to

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[59]Roose-Evans, p. 122.

[60]Roose-Evans, p. 122.

the pure theatre of the Greeks. Peter Arnott in a book called Plays Without People makes an interesting point about the use of puppets. He argues that it is with puppets that the modern theatre can best approximate the ancient Greek theatre. The Greek theatre because of its size--the theatre of Dionysus in Athens holding 17,000--had to have actors who used only the most sweeping, superficial gestures and movements. The size of the puppets, with their mask-like faces, can best recapture this theatre. "The limitations of the marionette almost exactly equate those of the Greek actor. The marionette, too, is deprived, by reason of his rigid features, of the nuances of facial expression. He too is confined to a relatively small range of broad and simple gestures. And in the scale of the performance, the Greek actor-audience relationship is almost exactly restored."[61]

Gestures, not words, are primary in the Bread and Puppet performances. The effect is similar to what Artaud described concerning the Balinese Dancers whose gestures often functioned as a sign replacing words. Gordon Craig had called for actors to become "Über-marionettes." Peter Schumann goes one better: his actors are marionettes, but the productions are no less moving for their being such.

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[61]Peter Arnott, Plays Without People (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1964), p. 67.

All these theatre movements are too new to assess their impact. That there are so many theatrical experiments going on today, however, seems to indicate that the area beyond the word is fertile and vast. There are those who cry that such nonverbal experiments as Happenings are really the death knell of theatre. Much the same thing was said about Surrealism in the twenties. What Happenings did do was to blow the dust off the sacrosanct covering of art. This is a good thing. Once its vulnerability has been exposed, the question will remain: Can modern art forms find strength in new directions free from the coverings of the past or will they shrivel in their exposed state?

This study has tried to indicate that the movement away from words does not mean that words will never again be used in avant-garde theatre. As Ionesco and others have indicated, the word was in need of rearticulation. In order to rearticulate it, playwrights had to disarticulate it. The Absurdists have succeeded in doing this. Those that have come after have found the ground cleared and they have had room to experiment with totally new forms divorced from the word. It is possible that the theatre that will spring from these efforts will be a theatre that readmits the word. However, it is doubtful if the word will ever sound the same.

More and more, as the Absurd movement settles down to a historical phenomenon, it will be studied for its experiments with new forms of language rather than for its

existential content. In time perhaps, the very term Theatre of the Absurd will give way to the term Theatre of Language, implying that the language used is one uniquely of its own invention: a Language of Theatre.

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