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"The Uses and Inadequacy of
Language in the Theatre of
Genet, Beckett and Ionesco."

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of the requirements for the degree of
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This study is an attempt to show the changing role of language in the theatre as exemplified in the works of Genet, Ionesco and Beckett. The introductory section deals with the topic of language itself, both in the theatre and in everyday life. Language in the theatre can be considered from two aspects: firstly, visual communication which includes the decor, the gestures of the actors, mime and facial expressions; and secondly, aural communication which includes the dialogue, silence for a purpose, and music. Because of the impact of such media as television and cinema, the importance of the word is diminished and this is reflected in modern drama.

Genet is dissatisfied with the tradition of Western theatre and he has tried to arouse a feeling of awe in his audiences. His plays are all based around rituals, not of a religious kind, but rituals which glorify evil and end in death. His language therefore is at once exalted and incantatory, and he relies on the visual impact of his plays to a large extent. Lighting, decor and makeup are important. Because many of Genet's characters are acting in plays within plays to create a conflict between illusion and reality, the language used by one character may vary greatly.

In the works of Ionesco, language becomes a theatrical object of mockery. To him, everyday language is often an inadequate means of communication and he symbolises this by ending most of his plays with an illustration of the defeat of language. This is done by showing rational arguments failing to convince, or by the complete breakdown of language into sounds or meaningless syllables. In Ionesco's plays, language is often overcome by the

proliferation of matter on stage - mushrooms, chairs, cups and furniture multiply and stifle. He mocks empty social chatter by twisting common platitudes or by using well-known expressions out of context.

In contrast to Ionesco, Beckett's stage is almost empty, but, like him, he distrusts language as a vehicle of communication. His characters are all afraid of the implications of silence and therefore talk to keep their thoughts at bay. The talking is rarely an attempt to impart information, or even to communicate. Even when two characters are present on stage, the conversation resembles two parallel monologues. With each successive play, Beckett has shown an increasing pre-occupation with the monologue, and several of his characters are placed in situations which make monologues possible. Beckett's plays are becoming shorter and shorter and his last pieces are conducted in silence. Beckett finally relies entirely on the visual element to communicate with his audience.

Thus we have three men, with three very different solutions to the problem of language. This thesis explores the different methods used by these dramatists to communicate with the audience. In most cases, language alone is not adequate.

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Because of an increasing need to communicate with his fellows, man developed a sophisticated form of passing on information-language. This allowed for greater co-operation among men and enabled learning to be transmitted. Man thus became progressive by drawing on experiences other than his own. The arts are an extension of this communication and give us an ever-widening insight into other people's visions of people, problems and events. Of theatrical importance are ear language and eye language which together should successfully impart the dramatist's views to the audience.

Eye language is visual communication with or without the accompaniment of words. In the Western theatre it is customary for programmes to be sold before the performance of a play, and these may provide the first knowledge of a piece to the audience. Most programmes include an explanation of the play, a note on the author, and a list of characters with the corresponding list of actors. According to what is in the programme the audience move into the theatre with certain expectations and presumptions which may or may not be justified by the play. When the curtain rises the audience is confronted by the decor around which the action will take place. The playwright usually gives instructions as to the type of decor he prefers for his play. It may be elaborate and realistic as used in the Restoration comedies. In these cases, the audience enjoyed seeing slightly exaggerated views of their everyday life and habits. On the other hand, some writers ask that the stage be practically bare, either for symbolic purposes or to increase the impact

of the dialogue. Beckett's stage settings are often symbolic, such as the claustrophobic feeling induced by Fin de Partie. Genet uses symbols in a different way in Les Paravents in which the actors draw on the scenery at different times.

Closely associated with the decor is the lighting which can communicate visually to the audience. Beckett has used lighting in Comedie as an indication that a character is going to speak. Genet uses very bright lighting in Haute Surveillance to heighten the unreality of the events taking place on the stage. The lighting can fade into complete darkness to indicate nightfall such as in Oh Les Beaux Jours and En Attendant Godot. Of the greatest importance visually are the gestures and facial expressions of the actors. These can be understood by everyone, no matter what language the play is in. By using various gestures and expressions, an individual can communicate physical needs, emotions, and even opinions by a nod or a shake of the head, provided that these gestures are meaningful to others. Certain non-verbal codes such as Morse, Braille and rail-road signals have developed as an extension of gestures, but all these symbols have to be learned to be meaningful. Some gestures, such as raising the glass in a toast, or standing for royalty, have become almost international. Gesture has then passed the instinctive stage to a level of communication that is closer to speech.

In most plays the dialogue or ear language is still the most effective means of communicating the author's purpose. From the dialogue we can deduce the background to the play and what has caused the events that are

taking place on the stage. A character and his personality is most clearly revealed by what he says and what others say about him. The dialogue produces the overall tone of a play, whether it be serious and didactic, humorous or light and frothy.

The value of silence is now being realised in art forms such as music and drama, so that it has become an important part of the dialogue. Pianists may thus produce moments of silence in their pieces. This silence prepares listeners for ensuing action and holds their attention as they wait in anticipation. In the text of most plays, silence is indicated by the word 'pause'. Beckett makes significant use of this device in En Attendant Godot. Vladimir and Estragon are afraid of silence and attempt to fill it with words and games.

Pozzo: Debout! Porc! (Bruit de Lucky qui se lève.)

En avant! (Pozzo sort. Bruit de fouet.) En avant! Adieu! Plus vite! Porc! Hue! Adieu!

Silence.

Vladimir: Ça a fait passer le temps.

Estragon: Il serait passé sans ça.

Vladimir: Oui, mais moins vite.

Un temps.

Estragon: Qu'est qu'on fait maintenant? (1)

Today the study of this type of silence is made under the form of non-verbal communication. Often it is easier to communicate emotions or information without words. Both a slap on the back in congratulation and a frown of disapproval are eloquent in meaning. However, it is not only in drama that people fear the implications

(1) En Attendant Godot, p.80.

of silence. In society, silence is often regarded as an enemy, a refusal to participate, rather than as a part of language. This can be seen in such advertisements as "Are you shy, quiet, unable to converse confidently? You can soon train yourself in a fascinating American technique of knowing what to say in any company, and how to say it well." (2)

On a different level of communication from the language and its attendant silences, is mood music. Played before the drama begins, music can be as effective as the message on the programme in suggesting the tone of the play. In films, in the cinema and on television, music has become the accepted method of building up suspense, communicating joy, or merely to indicate the end of a section of the action. With the music, sounds such as the bird song in the radio programme "Open Country" may be produced. In this case the listener is supposed to be reminded of rural surroundings. Other sounds, such as ominous creakings and screams may be used to inspire fear. Almost any emotion may be aroused in the audience by the judicious use of sounds.

Language can be used in many different ways to communicate messages with different effects. It may impart straight information such as that given in a speech by a scientist or by a treasurer of a club in his financial report. The communication may be symbolic and indirect such as in the language used by a poet. For example, Hone Tuwhare refers to the atom bomb as a monstrous sun in his poem "No Ordinary Sun". (3) The poet prefers to imply rather than state. As well as

(2) N.Z.Listener, Nov.23,1970. p.19.

(3) From the collection "No Ordinary Sun", H.Tuwhare.

the informing roles, language can also be used in a ritual sense, such as when two people meet and begin discussing a neutral topic such as the weather - noise for noise's sake, as Hayakawa terms it. (4) These conversations hardly ever have any informative value but we talk because it would be impolite not to do so. The togetherness of talking is more important than the information imparted. It is this type of conversation that Ionesco mocks in such plays as La Cantatrice Chauve. Occasionally in a social situation, a quarrel will occur. A quarrel in its final stages illustrates the death of this function of language. Words lose their true meanings because generally we are not talking to the other person but are saying things that give satisfaction to ourselves.

The feeling of togetherness engendered by social group conversation is similar to that aroused by the various ritual activities present in our society, such as conventions, political gatherings, rallies and even church services. The ceremonial gatherings show that all groups - religious, political and occupational - like to gather to share a common activity, display flags and march in processions. At nearly all these functions there are traditional speeches or formal ones specially composed for the occasion. These speeches do not give us any new information but serve to reaffirm our social cohesion. Jean Genet realises the value and importance ritual has in the life of an individual and makes use of it in his plays. He wants theatre to be more like a religious ceremony and he has succeeded in

(4) S.I.Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, p.71.

doing this in his works, even if the religious aspect is reversed, so that it is the glorification of evil.

The limitations of language are such that we all have some difficulty in saying what we mean and all have difficulty in being certain that we understand what the other person means. This is further complicated by the fact that language is often used not to communicate but to deceive. Political speeches and writings may deceive by what is left unsaid and by placing a certain bias on the facts. The language of deception is practised today in the high-powered field of commercial advertising. Advertising is not now a source of information but the creating of automatic reactions, or else the creation of a desire in the individual by appealing to fear, sex, class and snobbishness. With increasing technological advances in photography and cinema, even words are being eliminated from some advertisements and being replaced by such things as a beautifully filmed series of the jet-set, all smoking a certain brand of cigarette wherever they go.

Language, both written and spoken, has unquestioningly been accepted as the superior form of communication. Certainly most of our thinking is bound up with words, but it is an exaggeration to claim that there can be no thought without language. When we perceive the significance of traffic lights we can do without the more leisurely processes of verbal reasoning. Over the last twenty years or so, artists of every medium have been questioning the validity of this faith in language. Because of the onslaught of television, radio and cinema, the written word has lost some of its influence. Modern youth, distrusting what they consider are meaningless platitudes

of an older generation, seems to have turned to the international language of music and to people of their own age for leaders. It has been said that the Woodstock and the Isle of Wight rock festivals attracted so many young people because many of the young arrived in the hope of finding the "answer".

The gradual decrease in the importance of language and the search for other modes of expression can be seen in the French theatre of the Absurd where language becomes a theatrical object of mockery, particularly in the works of Ionesco. The playwrights are aware of the dangers of words becoming divorced from their basic meanings. Vague words such as "terrific" become fashionable and impede clarity. Language in the theatre has nearly always reflected the main style and preoccupation of the time. During mediaeval times drama was usually religious and therefore didactic. Later in the classical age, plays were directed at a much narrower audience, as they were witty, poetical and intellectual. With the Romantic era, the plays became more emotive and colourful. The appeal was again to a wider audience. The twentieth century Naturalistic plays are personal and direct. The situations described are experiences known to the audience. The present experiments in drama make it difficult to predict any general trend. Likewise, this is probably a reflection of our age in which every tradition and convention is being questioned.

Such diverse writers as Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Adamov and Arrabal are often grouped by critics under the title of playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd. This term was coined by Martin Esslin because he saw in them a similarity of attitudes. Many people are, perhaps, unconsciously searching for a way in which they can adjust to a universe deprived of what was once its centre, God; a world which has become disjointed, purposeless, absurd. The Theatre of the Absurd is one of the expressions of this search. It faces up to the fact that for those for whom the world has lost its central explanation and meaning, art forms still based on the continuation of concepts have lost their validity and are no longer attractive or indeed acceptable.

In expressing the sense of loss at the disappearance of certainties, the Theatre of the Absurd by a strange paradox is also a symptom of what probably comes nearest to expressing a genuine religious quest in our age; an effort to find, not necessarily God, whose name seems to have lost its meaning, but at least a search for something beyond man. These dramatists of the absurd try to show the realities of man's condition and to shock him out of an existence which has become mechanical and deprived of dignity. Formerly, the masses kept in contact through the living ritual of their religion. When it is no longer possible to accept a closed system of values and belief, life must be faced in its stark reality. That is why the Theatre of the Absurd shows man stripped of social position or historical context. He is then confronted with the basic choices or problems of existence: man filling in time between birth and death in Beckett's plays, man rebelling against death and then accepting it

in Ionesco's Tueur Sans Gages, man hiding from reality behind illusions in Genet's plays, man forever lonely and unable to make contact with his fellows. Concerned as it is with these basic realities of life and death, isolation and communication, the Absurd theatre, however, frivolous, and irreverent it may appear, represents a return to the original religious function of theatre; the confrontation of man with myth and religious reality. Like ancient Greek tragedy and mediaeval mystery plays, it tries to make its audience aware of man's precarious position in the universe.

The central difference is that in the earlier forms of drama the realities concerned were known and universally accepted, while the Absurd theatre tries to show the absence of any such values. Thus these dramatists do not attempt to explain the ways of God to men or man's place in a God-created world but instead present in anxiety or with derision man in confrontation with daily realities as he experiences them. The plays are the writers' personal conception of the world and this personal vision is the subject matter of the play, which determines its form. It is a theatre of situation rather than a sequence of events, and therefore its language differs from argument and discursive speech as we know it. Because of these differences, the plays elicit a new response from audiences and demand a new method of interpretation. They have to be seen as poetic wholes rather than as a traditionally structured art form which has a plot, characters, themes and a recognisable setting. Often there is no development at all, or the movement of the play may be circular, precisely because life is a series of cycles, finally ending in oblivion, the state before the beginning.

Jean Genet rejects the form of the modern Western theatre which he claims has become entertainment or amusement only. For him theatre should be a form of communion. He once said he knew of nothing as theatrically effective as the elevation of the Host during the Communion service. He evokes the oriental theatre based on ritual and ceremony, a theatre of symbols and suggestion. The concept of the ritual act, the magical repetition of an action deprived of reality is the key to an understanding of Genet's theatre. He has described his ideal of the union of the ritual with the dramatic in a letter to the publisher, Pauvert, which serves as a preface to one of the editions of Les Bonnes:

"Sur une scène presque semblable aux nôtres, sur une estrade, il s'agissait de reconstituer la fin d'un repas. A partir de cette seule donnée qu'on y trouve à peine, le plus haut drame moderne s'est exprimé pendant deux mille ans et tous les jours dans le sacrifice de la messe. Le point de départ disparaît sous la profusion des ornements et des symboles Une représentation qui n'agirait pas sur mon âme est vaine..... Sans doute une des fonctions de l'art est-elle de substituer à la foi religieuse l'efficace de la beauté. Au moins, cette beauté doit-elle avoir la puissance d'un poème, c'est-à-dire d'un crime." (6)

Each of Genet's plays is a religious celebration of an inverted rite in which God is replaced by evil and religious faith by love of beauty. Genet relies to a large extent on the celebration of rituals as a means of establishing contact with his audience and therefore language in his plays is often exalted. His world is one of

(6) J.Genet, "Lettre à Pauvert", pp.145-6. Arbalète edition of Les Bonnes.

outcasts, criminals, prostitutes, servants, negroes - people who have been denied the sanction of accepted society just as Genet ^{himself} had been denied it. Genet's characters perform their rituals in a language suitable for such ceremonies. His people are isolated in that real communication is prevented by masks, mirrors, and assumptions of other people's personalities. In all his writings, Genet can be seen to be essentially religious. Rejected by the world of good, he turns to evil in an attempt to reach the absolute. The world of the criminal into which Genet plunges us is by no means anarchic. There is a clear hierarchical structure in what is generally accepted to be Genet's first play "Haute Surveillance".

It is obvious from the staging instructions Genet gave at the beginning of the play that this work is not intended to represent real events.

"Toute la pièce se déroulera comme dans une rêve. Pour obtenir cette impression, donne aux décors et costumes (bure rayée) des couleurs violentes.... Les acteurs essaieront d'avoir des gestes lourds ou d'une extrême, fulgurante et incompréhensible rapidité. S'ils le peuvent, ils assourdiront le timbre de leur voix..... Le plus de lumière possible: nous sommes en prison.... " (7)

The idealised account of the prison world is a prisoner's fantasy come to life. Thus, although the language used is almost of the ordinary everyday sort, its mode of presentation by the actors renders it ritualistic.

(7) J.Genet, "Haute Surveillance", p.9 - Gallimard.

The day-to-day life of the three prisoners has become a ritual in the world of the prison, where everything is repeated and every act and speech becomes a ceremony performed with almost religious devotion. Lefranc describing Boule-de-Neige says, "Il est exotique. Tous les gars de sa cellule le reconnaissent. Ceux des cellules autour, et toute la forteresse, et toutes les prisons de France. Il brille. Il rayonne. Il est noir et il éclaire les dix mille cellules..... Boule-de-Neige c'est un roi." (8)

In the prison, just as in the outside world, there is a clearly defined hierarchy which is recognised by the three prisoners. At the bottom is Lefranc, a minor criminal who has violated the laws of society but none of the taboos of the race. Next is the young Maurice who possesses the inhumanity which promises great crimes for the future. Yeux-Verts is a murderer and has therefore violated the most sacred of taboos, that which decrees the sanctity of human life. At the top is the Negro, Boule-de-Neige, a condemned murderer. Although he never appears, he remains the God-like central figure of the play. Within this hierarchy the ritual is completed.

Haute Surveillance is similar to Sartre's Huis Clos in that the action of the play is the inter-relationships of three people in the brightly lit, sparsely furnished prison cell, reminiscent of Sartre's Hell. Here the characters are all aspiring to the highest level possible and this causes the ritual to be played out. We see that Maurice worships Yeux-Verts and that Lefranc is jealous of this idolatry, and later we discover that

(8) *ibid*, p.16.

Yeux-Verts has been in secret alliance with Boule-de-Neige. Because this play is an inverted Mass where Lefranc is the priest and Maurice the sacrificial victim, Genet turns the Christian idea of salvation on to its head. The paradox of salvation (here damnation) is that it only comes to those who do not deliberately seek it, and the person who acts morally in order to acquire spiritual merit falls immediately into the sin of spiritual pride. Lefranc, then, suffers from the same problem which confronted Thomas a Becket in Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, that of doing the 'right' thing for the wrong reason. Lefranc's act is graceless because he is an imitator rather than a free inventor. He chose to murder Maurice hoping to be like Yeux-Verts, but the essential difference is that misfortune chose Yeux-Verts to be a murderer. Lefranc realises this finally at the end of the play when his act is rejected by Yeux-Verts. "Je suis vraiment seul." (9)

The real action of the play is the secret association between Yeux-Verts and Boule-de-Neige, an alliance which is never presented on the stage. As in Les Negres we are given an action on stage which conceals the real action taking place off-stage. Genet is committed to the belief that the real criminal is a superior being and his conviction that pure crime results from a state of being imposed on the criminal by the place society accords him. Yeux-Verts is supreme because apart from being a murderer he betrays Maurice and Lefranc by his association with Boule-de-Neige.

The play is a frank reversion to the use of theatre as a means of challenging and shocking. Normally in the

theatre we are called upon to watch a representation of reality, an action in the present tense, but an action that we know to be a semblance. The events that we see on stage seem real, but we know that they are not. With Haute Surveillance things seem to be real only to become false, reflecting on our view of reality. Our traditional notions of reality are based on preconceptions and prejudices. In the play we think we see the central character correctly through the eyes of Lefranc and Maurice, but we are deluded because they are deluded. Like all of Genet's plays, Haute Surveillance ends in a ceremony of death because in Genet's world there is no salvation except death and only the saint-criminal touched by grace can attain it. The criminal must die to retain his power. This play differs from the others by its total lack of conscious humour and there are none of those sudden intrusions of reality or common sense which break the tension and provide laughter in Les Bonnes and Le Balcon.

Les Bonnes is a theatre of charade in which Genet uses the ritual of dressing up to express the love in the hatred and the envy in the scorn. The ritual in this play is no longer unwitting. It is imposed on the characters by themselves in an effort to give meaning and direction to their dull existence. The purpose of the ritual is not only identification but also of vengeance. Each of the maids in turn acts the part of the lady partly expressing her longing to be the lady and each in turn takes it upon herself to act the maid, progressing from adoration and servility to abuse and

violence - the discharge of all the envy and hatred of the outcast. The ritual is again a type of Black Mass; the wish to murder the loved and envied object forever repeated as a ceremonial stereotyped action, an action that will never take place in the real world. The ritual never reaches its climax because the lady always returns before that. It seems that this failure is subconsciously part of the ritual. The game is played in such a way that the time wasted on preliminaries is always too long for the climax ever to be reached.

Les Bonnes deals with the failure to communicate and attempts to create on stage a ceremony that restores to the theatre some of its original mythical significance. When the curtain rises, Claire and Solange are already playing parts in a play within a play. Instead of seeing two maids talking together we see a maid's interpretation of her own world and what she thinks is Madam's view of her two maids.

Solange: (à genoux et très humble). Je désire que Madame soit belle.

Claire: Je le serai. (Elle s'arrange dans la glace). Vous me détestez, n'est-ce pas? Vous m'écrasez sous vos prévenances, sous votre humilité, sous les glaïeuls et le réséda. (10)

Thus, when the two maids are alone, they play at being mistress and servant. When Madame returns home, reality breaks in and the two maids prepare for their new role, that of being faithful and obedient servants.

There is no real communication between Madame and her maids, and no real communication between Claire and

Solange. Because neither of them ever really is what she appears to be, they can communicate only when they pretend and their communication has to cease when they return to reality. However, as this reality is also one where they do nothing but play a different part, their personality remains forever elusive. Claire and Solange use a deliberately artificial exalted language which expresses what they long to be within themselves rather than what they are for the outside world.

Claire: Monsieur n'est pas mort, Claire. Monsieur de baigne en baigne sera conduit jusqu'à la Guyane peut-être, et moi, sa maîtresse folle de douleur, je l'accompagnerai. Je serai du convoi. Je partagerai sa gloire. Tu parles de veuvage. La robe blanche est le deuil des reines, Claire, tu l'ignores. Tu me refuses la robe blanche! (11)

Grossvogel sees the entire ritual with its crises and depressions as a monologue. He justifies this by pointing out the homosexual singleness of the two maids in such speeches as Solange's: "Je n'en peux plus de notre ressemblance, je n'en peux plus de mes mains, de mes bas noirs, de mes cheveux." (13) Claire replies: "Mais j'en ai assez de ce miroir effrayant qui me renvoie mon image comme une mauvaise odeur. Tu es ma mauvaise odeur." (14) The chief concern of the ritual is that it be beautiful; it is played amidst flowers, with jewels and lavish ornaments before mirrors and under splendid light. The light must always be bright says Solange, while later she turns out the light to

(11) Les Bonnes, p.66

(12) Grossvogel, Four Playwrights and a Postscript, p.148

(13) Les Bonnes, p.95

(14) Les Bonnes, p.96.

signify that the game is at an end. Still later, Claire objects and orders "Allume! Allume! Le moment est trop beau." (15)

On both levels, reality and game, the hatred alone remains identical. The transition from one level to another often takes place in a single speech, so that Solange/Claire and Claire/Madame merge into each other.

Solange: Oui Madame, ma belle Madame. Vous croyez que tout vous sera permis jusqu'au bout. Vous croyez pouvoir dérober la beauté de ciel et m'en priver? Choisir vos parfums, vos poudres, vos rouges à ongles, la soie, le velours, la dentelle et m'en priver? Et me prendre le laitier! Sa jeunesse, sa fraîcheur vous troublent, n'est-ce pas? Avouez le laitier. Car Solange, vous emmerde.(16)

If Claire incarnates the whole concept of the mirror and the double, Solange embodies the phenomenon which, for Genet, is the supreme symbol of the whole mystery of truth and illusion; a reality deliberately disguised so that disguise and reality are identical. Solange, who is a maid, disguises herself carefully as a maid and shows that the only final distinction between her true and false identities lies in the name she chooses to give them at any precise moment. Thus the word is the controller of reality. Genet has reduced all reality to the symbol itself. "Ma victoire est verbale,"⁽¹⁷⁾ he declared in his journal; in words lie all authority, all treachery, all fear, and, ultimately, all the

(15) Les Bonnes, p.99

(16) Les Bonnes, p.24.

(17) Journal d'un Voleur, p.62.

irresistible power and secret dynamism of those supernatural forces which rule the pattern of the world.(18)

Despite the underlying seriousness of this play, Genet has been able to introduce humour in the forms of puns and dramatic irony. When reality breaks into the ceremony for the first time, Solange says to Claire, who is acting as Madame, "Ah! Oui, Claire. Claire vous emmerde Claire est là, plus Claire que jamais Lumineuse." (19) Madame unwittingly speaks the truth when she complains to the maid, "Tu veux me tuer avec ton tilleul, tes fleurs, tes recommandations." (20)

The whole play can be seen as a long ceremony interrupted by the brief appearance of Madame. This is a ceremony which has been repeated many times but this time, instead of only insulting Madame by proxy, they kill her by proxy also. Claire and Solange realise that Madame loves them, but only in the same way as she loves all her possessions. She can afford to be kind to them because she is rich. As Solange says with wry humour: "C'est facile d'être bonne..... Quand on est belle et riche. Mais être bonne quand on est bonne." (21) Their rebellion is not a symbol of servants rising against their employers, but a manifestation of the outcasts' mixed feelings of love, envy and hatred for their superiors. Eventually the maids realise that their salvation will be in the killing of Madame. "Solange, à nous deux, nous serons ce couple éternel du criminel et de la sainte. Nous serons sauvés, Solange." (22)

(18) Notre Dame des Fleurs, p.63

(19) Les Bonnes, p.73

(20) Les Bonnes, p.121

(21) Les Bonnes, p.82

(22) Les Bonnes, p.97

Le Balcon is also a ceremony, but one with a difference. The first half of the play shows a real ritual through which the characters are momentarily transformed. The second half reveals a false ritual in which the imaginary world crumbles when forced to make contact with reality. This confrontation of the real world with the imaginary is something new in Genet and not entirely successful. The first three tableaux show a careful balance between the visual effects of the rituals and the dialogue. After a brief entirely visual fourth tableau, there comes a long tableau given over to the elaboration of an abstract dialectic in the form of a dialogue between Madame Irma, the prostitute Carmen and the Chief of the Police, on the theory of functions. The theory is important, but a little out of place in a play the form of which is simplified and stylised. The second half of the play, where the characters are removed from the illusions of the brothel into reality, is less successful than the first half. It is here that the figures of fantasy are supposed to be shown exercising real power, but in fact they do nothing concrete beyond discussing the relative merits of their myths and posing for press photographers.

Were it not for the revolution, the characters would continue to play their games in the enclosed atmosphere. Mme Irma provides for them. But the Revolution is there and threatens at one moment to destroy their world of illusion completely. Like Martha and George in Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?", Genet's characters will probably find new games to play after the defeat of the Revolution. The characters in Le Balcon are well aware of the motives behind their

actions, and the Bishop gives a lucid account of how superior to reality illusions are when he recalls how happy he and his fellows were when they pursued their quest for dignity in the privacy of their rooms at the brothel. Reality offers only action and responsibility, and the Bishop seems to suggest that the ideal is to dream and not to do. Once they have become for the outside world what formerly they only pretended to be in private, they are deprived of the solace afforded by the imagination. The Balcony allows its clients to retain (or to acquire) their functions and yet to be what they are. In Genet's words, the whole play is "la glorification de l'Image et du Reflet".

Because the first part of the play is a series of rituals, the language must be noble to suit the roles being played. Genet gives the spectator a visual image of what the language is going to be like. His Bishop, Judge and General are larger than life to match their dreams. They have padded shoulders, elevated shoes and are made up in an exaggerated manner. The Bishop acts out his fantasies in his best ecclesiastical language, secure in his illusions. Genet introduces some humour into this scene when the girl he is with suddenly asks him what he would do if the sins she has been confessing were real. His mask immediately drops.

L'Eveque: (d'un ton différent, moins théâtrical).

Tu es folle. J'espère que tu n'as pas réellement fait tout cela?.... S'ils étaient vrais, tes péchés seraient des crimes, et je serais dans un drôle de pétrin. (23) Likewise the Judge, after hearing the 'crimes' of the young girl, says to the girl

(23) Le Balcon, pp.18-19

before he pronounces sentence, "Il faut que tu sois une voleuse modèle, si tu veux que je sois un juge modèle. Fausse voleuse, je deviens un faux juge." (24) Later, Genet allows reality to intrude on the general atmosphere of illusion during one of Mme Irma's speeches. She is so carried away by the splendour of the illusions she can offer, that she launches into a magnificently rhetorical speech where she quite loses contact with reality. Carmen, the girl to whom she is speaking, interrupts her to tell her how well she speaks. "J'ai poussé jusqu'au brevet." (25) replies Madame, and the audience is quickly brought back to earth. The language is exalted to go with the part being played, but it changes as the situations alter.

The play is an interweaving and a contrast between reality and illusion, the former symbolised by the Revolution and the latter by the Brothel. In the background there is twentieth century poets dilemma; he is firstly an artist in words, words are the means by which he has learnt to communicate the truths of his experience, his beliefs and his vision of the world. This type of communication is one thing, but mass-communication is another. It can debase, vulgarise and distort, yet all it uses are words, the same words as the poet is trying to use. For Genet, the language of poetry is alive while political language is dead. The most vital and living of all experiences are those which are symbolic, yet the Grand Balcony, the house of symbols is designated as the House of the Dead. The reason is that the symbols which form the substance of Mme Irma's pageantry are the product of a mass-imagination. They are functional symbols, the emblem not of man but of man-in-society.

(24) Le Balcon, p.30.

(25) Le Balcon, p.79.

They are the product of a series of acts, each of which is designed not to accomplish an object, but to produce an image for the masses. As the Chief of Police puts it to the participants in the Brothel, "Vous n'avez donc jamais accompli un acte pour l'acte lui-même, mais toujours pour cet acte accroché d'autres fasse un évêque, un juge, un général....."(26) In the Balcony the individual can bring his dreams to life but know that they still remain at the level of unreality. Madame Irma's final statement seems to indicate that man spends his time acting out illusions. "... il faut rentrer chez nous ou tout, n'en doutez pas, sera encore plus faux qu'ici." (27) This is an explicit reference to the fact that this is only a play.

The Negroes in Les Negres are taking part in a ritual ceremony of recognition and self-assertion, not of doubting and questioning. Genet presents a play labelled a 'clownerie', which is entirely ritual and therefore needs no plot devices at all. A group of negroes performs the ritual re-enactment of its feelings of revenge before a white audience. As Genet insists in his preparatory note to the play, it would lose its raison d'être if there were not at least one white person in the audience. The negro actors performing the ritual are divided into two groups; those who appear as negroes and will enact the Negroes' fantasy, and those who appear grotesquely and visibly masked to represent white people. The white audience is thus confronted by a grotesque mirror image of itself. The Negro actors stand between two audiences of whites. The stage audience

(26) Le Balcon, p.214.

(27) Le Balcon, p.245.

consists, however, of the Negroes' fantasy image of the white man, embodied in the hierarchy of power in a colonial society - the Queen, her Governor, judge, missionary and her valet.

In front of this projected image of alien rule the group of Negroes enacts its fantasies of resentment. The central part of the ritual is a fantasy of the ritual murder of a white woman, elaborately imagined in lurid detail. As an additional touch of irony, the Negro who has to enact the raped white woman is supposed to be in private life a black priest, Diouf. After his ritual murder he takes his place among the other 'whites' on the platform at the back of the stage. After the Negroes have acted out their hatred and also their guilt, the fantasy of final liberation follows. The queen and her court descend, are trapped and ignominiously put to death by the blacks. Thanking the Negro actors who have impersonated the whites, Archibald, who acts as the Stage Manager throughout the play, sums up the ritual. He realises that the time has not come for presenting dramas of noble matters but perhaps the audience will realise what is behind the emptiness and the words. The Negroes pretend to be what the whites want and expect them to be.

The spectacle of this ritual representation of the Negroes' feelings about the whites has been made clownish to render it bearable to an audience of whites. In opening the proceedings, Archibald informs the audience that the people on stage are actors and will keep a distance between them by their manner and their insolence. Hence the play takes the form of a ritual ceremony rather than being a direct discussion of the colour problem or colonialism. In ritual meaning is expressed by the repetition

of symbolic actions. The participants have a sense of awe, of participation rather than of conceptual communication. The difference is that here the audience sees a grotesque parody of a ritual in which the bitterness that is to be communicated emerges from clowning and derision.

This is only the initial deception. As the action proceeds the audience is made aware that something else more real than the ritual is happening off-stage. One of the characters, Ville de Saint-Nazaire, who was sent off with a revolver in the opening scene, returns toward the end and reports that a Negro traitor has been tried and executed. As Bobo, a kind of sorceress, says, it is a Greek tragedy and therefore the ultimate gesture is performed off-stage. The whole elaborate performance on-stage is a diversion to distract attention from the real action behind scenes. We have seen a ritual murder of a white woman, but reality was the trial and execution of a Negro traitor. It is on the entrance of Ville de Saint-Nazaire with this news that the actors who have been impersonating the white court remove their masks and reveal themselves as Negroes. When they hear that a new revolutionary delegate has been sent to Africa to resume the work of the executed traitor that they put on their masks again and enact the execution and torture of the white oppressors.

The play has a rhythm keyed to the level of ceremony it seeks and it maintains this by an exploitation of the audience's knowledge. Thus in important places in the play we hear the strains of Mozart, witness a jazz dance, follow a procession organised to the music of the Dies Irae, and recognise the distortion of certain litany

invocations. The purpose is not blasphemy. Since it would be impossible for a single man writing for a Society so diversified in its beliefs to create and maintain a private ritual, these borrowed ceremonies give the necessary familiarity to be twisted to fit the author's purpose.

The structure of Les Nègres is that of a total theatre - that is, of a theatre employing all media which can contribute to the dramatic impact of the spectacle. It uses music, dance, rhythm and ritual; it contrasts masks and faces, illusion and reality, it uses different stage dimensions with its stage audience. It borrows its techniques from the jazz band, the music-hall (Archibald) and the church service. In such a context the chief function and dramatic value of language is as a medium of incantation. The words pulsate and their very sound is hypnotic. Their meaning is rarely more than a contributing factor to their physical impact as can be seen in Vertu's Litanic des Blêmes:

"Blêmes comme le rôle d'un tubar,
 Blêmes comme ce que lâche le cul d'un homme atteint
 de jaunisse,
 Blêmes comme le ventre d'un cobra,
 Blêmes comme leurs condamnés à mort,
 Blêmes comme le dieu qu'ils grignotent le matin,
 Blêmes comme un couteau dans la nuit,
 Blêmes sauf; les Anglais, les Allemandes, et les
 Belges qui sont rouges.... Blêmes comme la Jalousie.
 Je vous salue, Blêmes." (28)

Genet has rejected the whole traditional structure, intellectual and logical, of the Western Theatre which

(28) Les Nègres, p.86.

Ionesco has called a detective story drama.

Choubert: Toutes les pièces qui ont été écrites, depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours n'ont jamais été que policières. Le théâtre n'a jamais été que réaliste et policier. Toute pièce est une enquête menée à bonne fin. Il y a une énigme, qui nous est révélée à la dernière scène.

Quelquefois avant. On cherche, on trouve." (29)

Instead, Genet has constructed a play which has more in common with music than with the usual drama. Representation has given way to abstraction and the aim of convincing an audience has been replaced by that of rousing it to a state of almost mystical delirium. Yet the final effectiveness of the play lies in the fact that it is not devoid of ideas. The dialectic is still there, but it is conveyed by implication rather than by statement.

In Le Balcon, Genet showed us a working out of functions. Here blackness is the Negro's function. The whole play is an invocation to the superiority of black over white. "Je vous ordonne être noir jusque dans vos veines et d'y charrier du sang noir. Que l'Afrique y circule." (30) says Archibald to Village. In this play, white is the symbol of death and into the category of death fall all the virtues of the whites - civilisation, politeness, culture, beauty. During the scene of the ritual murder, Neige chants some poetry which illustrates the fate of all beauty:

"Expire, expire doucement.

Notre-Dame des Pelicans,

Jolie mouette poliment

Galamment laisse-toi torturer." (31)

(29) Victimes du Devoir, p.179

(30) Les Nègres, p.76

(31) Les Nègres, p.113

One by one the whites descend toward obliteration and as they die the lyric of Black Love rises as the 'clown-erie' closes.

Vertu: Moi aussi, il y a longtemps que je n'osais t'aimer.

Village: Tu m'aimes?

Vertu: J'écoutais. Je t'entendais venir à grandes enjambées. Je courais à la fenetre et derrière les rideaux je te regardais passer.

Village: Peine perdue: je passais, mâle indifférent, sans jeter un coup d'oeil Mais la nuit je venais surprendre un rayon, de lumiere entre tes volets. Entre ma chemise et ma peau je l'importais."
(32)

Although Genet uses the black/white situation, his play implies a revenge on all those who are good and kind but who deny the humanity of those who are different. This play and Les Paravents both rely to a large extent on their visual and incantating effects rather than the effect of naturalistic discursive dialogue. Both plays produce a feeling of uneasiness and guilt in the spectators.

Les Paravents is the only work by Genet whose title refers to its form and not its content. Genet conceives of the play being presented in an open-air arena with a many-levelled stage furnished with readily movable screens which will be used as evocative backdrops, but which will also be capable of receiving periodic and spontaneous designs made by the actors. This is done in which is probably the most powerful tableau of the play. Kadidja and Ommou exhort the revolutionaries on to greater deeds. Kadidja utters a lyrical incantation to evil as she lies dying. The Arabs dash in one after the

other and draw pictures on the screens to represent the various atrocities they have committed in the cause of freedom. Earlier on, the colonists Sir Harold and Blankensee are talking and watching the Arabs work. While they talk, impressing each other with their knowledge of the Arabs, the Arab workers file in and draw flames at the base of the orange trees which are also drawn on the screens.

The multiplicity of levels gives Genet a vast floor space from which to work. For example, one level of screens represents the area of death. Only one area need be lighted at a time, so that emphasis can be given to selective lighting. Characters can be placed in whatever degree of prominence is appropriate at a given moment. The screens can also be symbols. As their name indicates, they can be protective barriers against the real forces of the world, walls serving as masks or delusions; but they can also be a measure of detachment from those genuine forces. Genet notes in his stage directions that it is necessary to have some real object on stage to offset the screens. The screens can offer protection against the discovery of the real forces of the world, but they can also be transformed into blinkers which keep the eyes of certain characters from falling on the dangers those forces now represent for them. Thus the Europeans can carry on a conversation without seeing the Arabs light their flames of insurrection. In the nature of the play, the stage must grow brighter, more and more levels must be illuminated until at the end the whole scene is ablaze with light. Every group is awaiting Said's arrival.

The actors play several roles each, so that the

reality of the human is little more than symbolic.

Again Genet counts on a visual impact. "Les Personnages: Si possible, ils seront masqués. Sinon, très maquillés, très fardés (même les soldats). Maquillages excessifs contrastant avec le réalisme des costumes." (33) The characters are therefore transformed into ritualistic objects. On a stage where actors play the sounds of animals, wind and rain, the reality of the actor fades alongside that of the screens.

In August 1966, just before the second run of Les Paravents at the Odeon Theatre de France, Genet's letters concerning the production of the play to Roger Blin were published. Genet's letters imply that he wants the abolition of rational communication in the theatre and, in its place, what Genet calls 'une déflagration politique'. Again he wanted to provide a semi-religious experience and arouse awe in the spectators. Genet succeeds in producing this awe in the scene where the mother of Saïd goes to see Madani who is able to communicate directly with the dead. Madani's own voice gradually disappears as he is filled with the presence of Slimane. Genet describes Ommou who carries on the tradition of violent revolution after Kadidja's death as a mad woman, and some of her speeches do carry paradox almost to the point of total incommunicability. "Certaines vérités sont inapplicables, sinon elles mourraient..... Elles ne doivent pas mourir, mais vivre par le chant qu'elles sont devenues.... Vive le chant!" (34)

Genet's over-all aim is to take theatre back to its original functions and make it cease to be a primarily

(33) Les Paravents, p.10

(34) Les Paravents, p.254.

verbal exploration of the human condition. He is trying to transform the theatre into something which fascinates and overwhelms the spectator by the visions which it provides of the author's truth. What he was seeking, he tells Bliⁿ, was not "un spectacle même beau selon l'habituelle beauté" but "un acte poétique". In the play, explicit argument has been reduced to a minimum, traditional psychology has dwindled to a vanishing point. Instead, the dramatic effect is created by visual images simplified almost to a point of primitivism by violence, slogans, caricature and deliberate vulgarity, and by the overwhelming impression of hatred that remains in the atmosphere long after the actors of each individual scene have vanished. Most of the problems of Genet's earlier dramas are reduced to their visual equivalents or else simplified into caricature. The multiple dimensions of illusion and reality of Les Bonnes or Les Negres are translated visually in terms of the four levels of screens on the stage and the dreams are acted out rather than argued about. Through the progress of Said from poverty to sanctity we see once again Genet's glorification of the outcast in a play which is effective through its visual rather than verbal impact.

Genet's plays may lack characters, plot, construction or social truths but this is because they are projections of a private world. It is the use of language as incantatory magic which makes Genet's theatre, in spite of its harshness and its content, a poetical theatre which evokes rather than states. Genet has described his ideal use of language in the theatre, "On ne peut que rêver d'un art qui serait un enchevêtrement profond de symboles actifs capable de parler au public un langage où rien

ne serait dit mais tout pressenti." (35)

(35) J.Genet, Lettre à Pauvert, p.142. Arbalète
édition of Les Bonnes.

Eugene Ionesco, however obscure and enigmatic he may appear in his plays, has shown that he can be highly lucid when defending himself against critics. He has also proved to be the most willing of the avant-garde dramatists to talk and write about his aims in the theatre. In his plays he has tried to make his audiences aware of the empty language in common usage - the cliches, the formulae, the meaningless slogans. In 1958 Ionesco wrote that "the work of every authentic creator consists of getting rid of the dross, the cliches of a worn-out language in order to find a simplified, essentialised, newborn language, capable of expressing new and old realities, present and past, living and permanent, particular and at the same time universal." (36) He later reaffirmed this in a reply to Kenneth Tynan's criticism of his work, "To attack a worn-out language, to try to make fun of it in order to show its limitations, its inadequacies, to try to burst it assunder, for all languages wear out, coagulate, become empty; to try to renew it, to re-invent it, or simply to amplify it, is the function of every creator." (37) Like Genet in Les Paravents, Ionesco has tried to make his decors part of the action, and to give concrete images of such concepts as fear, regret, remorse and estrangement. The world is absurd and therefore such things as a clock chiming the wrong hours is taken as commonplace, whereas the fact that a man tied up an undone shoelace is treated as unusual. Language itself becomes a manifestation of the absurd.

(36) Quoted from Tulane Drama Review, p.132, vol.7, No.3, 1963. Translated by L.Pronko.

(37) ibid, p.133.

In the traditional theatre language was a means of communication between stage and audience, a means by which various objective concepts were conveyed to the mind of the spectator. These concepts might be derived from the psychology of the characters in a given situation, or else be part of the dramatist's 'message'. They could be intellectual or evocative, but in all cases the language of the drama itself was of secondary importance. Language did not replace the role of the characters or override its own intellectual content as it sometimes does in the work of Ionesco.

There are passages, such as at the end of La Cantatrice Chauve and again in the concluding scene of L'Avenir est dans les Oeufs, where language is used almost physically. All meaning has been lost and, in fact, the borderline between word and gesture is almost erased.

Mme Martin: Espèces de glouglouteurs, espèces de glouglouteuses.

M. Martin: Mariette, cul de Marmite!

Mme Smith: Krishnamousti, Krishnamousti, Krishnamousti.

M. Smith: Le pape dérape! Le Pape n'a pas de soupape. La soupape a un pape.

Mme Martin: Bazar, Balzac, Bazaine.

M. Martin: Bizarre, beaux arts, baisers!

M. Smith: A, e, i, o, u, a, e, i, o, u, a, e, i, o, u, i!

Mme Martin: B, c, d, f, g, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, x, z!

M. Martin: De l'ail a l'eau, du lait a l'ail!

Mme Smith: imitant le train: Teuff, teuff, teuff,

teuff, teuff, teuff, teuff, teuff, teuff, teuff.(38)
 In this type of passage, language is used no longer to make the spectator think but to provoke him by the sheer violence of the pre-linguistic sounds, to react physically.

To Ionesco, much of polite drawing-room conversation is as empty and meaningless as the above passage. His characters talk to fill the silence, but without communicating anything of importance. The chatter is superficial and serves effectively as a protection against any self-revelation. In other words, to Ionesco these meaningless noises are a deliberate form of non-communication. Social conventions demand that you talk to your fellows, even when there is nothing to say. This fact is emphasised when, as the curtain falls, the Martins begin talking, using the same dialogue as the Smiths at the beginning of the play. Ionesco also includes in this play an illustration of a situation common to everyone - four people sitting together and unable to think of anything to say.

M.Smith: Hm
 Silence.

Mme Smith: Hm, hm.
 Silence.

Mme Martin: Hm, hm, hm.
 Silence.

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

Mme Martin: Oh décidément.
 Silence. (39)

Ionesco goes beyond this point in creating drama out of language itself. Language creates existence in

(38) La Cantatrice Chauve, in Theatre, vol.1, p.55.

(39) La Cantatrice Chauve, p.35.

Les Chaises where at least thirty people of flesh and blood are conjured up the words and gestures of the old couple, literally out of nothingness. The final irony is that once these people have been assembled and the Orator arrives, the old couple feel free to die because they think their message will be passed on. However, the Orator is deaf and dumb and can only produce animal sounds. In other words the events of their lives have been important only to themselves and are of no value to anyone else. That language can destroy is seen most vividly in La Leçon. Here, language is shown as an instrument of power. As the play proceeds, the pupil who was eager, lively and alert is gradually drained of her vitality, while the professor, who was timid and nervous at the beginning gradually gains in assurance and dominance. The professor derives his progressive increase of power from his role as a prescriber of meanings. Because words must have the significance he decides to give them, the pupil comes under his dominance which has its theatrical expression in her murder. The play includes a long dissertation on the Neo-Spanish language group which includes a large number of real and imaginary languages that are superficially all the same yet are all distinguished by subtle differences imperceptible to the ear but very real. Thus as the professor points out, if an Italian says 'mon pays' he means Italy, but if an Oriental says 'mon pays' he means the Orient, the same word signifying completely different things. This is a demonstration of the basic impossibility of communication - words cannot convey meanings because they leave out of account the personal associations they carry for each individual.

Words may take control and victimise man. Thus at the end of *La Leçon* the word 'couteau' as well as being a phallic symbol is also an instrument of murder. The love-making of Jacques and Roberte II (*Jacques ou la soumission*) illustrates this. Jacques has been accepted back into the family unit after he has been forced to repeat the slogan 'J'adore les pommes de terre au lard'.⁽⁴⁰⁾ After a short rebellion ('O paroles, que de crimes on commet en votre nom')⁽⁴¹⁾, Jacques is persuaded that he must conform and take a wife. The play ends with the two lovers conversing in a long succession of terms containing the syllable 'chat', to the point when Roberte proclaims that henceforth all concepts will be called 'chat' without distinction. In this way the lovers form a new language for themselves. However, the ravings of the Concierge (*Le Nouveau Locataire*), the political speech of *La Mère Pipe* (*Tueur Sans Gages*) and the final transformation of Dudard into a rhinoceros (*Rhinocéros*) are all illustrations of mankind victimised by language.

Language in Ionesco does not exist to serve the characters, the characters are simply a vehicle by which language is conveyed to the awareness of the audience. Human speech in all its absurdities is displayed. There is a paradox in Ionesco in that his plays are language dramas, but at the same time he shows language in destructions. Language as a proliferating senseless object is absurd, and Ionesco communicates this idea in concrete terms. He symbolises this absurdity by showing his characters overwhelmed by material objects. In *L'Avenir est dans les Oeufs*, Jacques is surrounded by

(40) *Jacques ou La Soumission*, p.104

(41) *Jacques ou La Soumission*, p.103. Theatre, Vol.1

eggs, the symbol of reproduction and hope for the future.

Tous: Vive la production!

Vive la race blanche!

Continuons! Continuons! (42)

Madeleine in Victimes du Devoir brings in endless cups of coffee in an excess of social behaviour, while the police officer tries to block the hole in Choubert's memory by filling him with bread. Le Nouveau Locataire consists of an empty room being filled with furniture until the new tenant is literally buried by his worldly possessions.

From the visual aspect, also, Amédée ou Comment S'en Débarrasser is impressive. Here, the proliferation of matter represents a stifling of the spirit. The dead love between Amédée and Madeleine is symbolised by a large growing corpse which eventually fills most of the flat. As the corpse grows, mushrooms - images of decay and corruption - proliferate. As Amédée gets rid of the corpse of his dead love, that stifling presence turns into lightness and lifts him into the air. There is no understanding between Amédée and Madeleine and communication is impossible.

Amédée: Sais-tu, Madeleine, si nous nous aimions en vérité, si nous aimions, tout cela n'aurait plus aucune importance.

.

Madeleine: Ne dis pas de sottises. Ce n'est pas l'amour qui va nous débarrasser de ce cadavre. (43)

(42) L'Avenir est dans Les Oeufs, p.230. Theatre, Vol.2

(43) Amédée ou Comment S'en Débarrasser, pp.290-1. Gallimard, Vol.1.

For the purpose of demonstrating in dramatic terms the absurdity of language, Ionesco's favourite weapon is the platitude. By showing up the meaninglessness of conventional idiom, by shattering the fixed phraseology of common speech, Ionesco takes us back to the roots of language. Certain plays or scenes within plays are made up almost entirely of clichés and slogans used in society. These plays are studies of the bourgeoisie betrayed and finally annihilated by the hollow conformism of its own jargon. La Cantatrice Chauve opens with a soliloquy by Mrs Smith in which she describes with numerous platitudes the meal they have just eaten. When the dialogue is finally initiated it is mainly in the form of self-contained statements that attempt little interplay.

M. Smith, toujours dans son journal: Tiens, c'est écrit que Bobby Watson est mort.

Mme Smith: Mon Dieu, le pauvre, quand est-ce qu'il mort?

M. Smith: Pourquoi prends-tu cet air étonné? Tu le savais bien. Il est mort il y a deux ans. Tu te rappelles, on a été à son enterrement, il y a un an et demi.

Mme Smith: Bien sûr que je me rappelle. Je me suis rappelé tout de suite, mais je ne comprends pas pourquoi toi-même tu as été si étonné de voir ça sur le journal.

M. Smith: Ça n'y était pas sur le journal. Il y a déjà trois ans qu'on a parlé de son décès. Je m'en suis souvenu pas association d'idées!

Mme Smith: Dommage! Il était si bien conservé. (44)

Such conversation is little more than sense destruction and its meaninglessness is echoed by the erratic chiming clock. Mary, the maid, enters and tells the Smiths what she has been doing during the afternoon. Mrs Smith immediately repeats everything she has said. "J'espère que vous avez passé un après-midi très agréable, que vous êtes allée au cinéma avec un homme et que vous avez bu de l'eau-de-vie et du lait." (45) The Smiths are joined by the Martins and the sense destruction becomes choral, with the addition of a fireman. Eventually puns, alliteration etc. swing over entirely to sounds.

Ionesco has described how he began to write for the theatre after learning English from a phrasebook. "The text being made up as it was of ready-made expressions of the most threadbare platitudes imaginable, revealed to me, by this very fact, the secret of talking and saying nothing because there is nothing personal to say, the absence of any inner life, the mechanical soullessness of daily routine: man totally absorbed in his social context. The Smiths and the Martins have forgotten how to talk because they have forgotten how to think, and they have forgotten how to think because they have forgotten the meaning of emotion, because they are devoid of passions; they have forgotten how to be, and therefore they can become anyone, anything, for, since they are not in themselves, they are nothing, but other people, they belong to an impersonal world, they are interchangeable." (46)

(45) La Cantatrice Chauve, p.25

(46) La Tragedie du Language, quoted from Coe Ionesco, p.47.

This passage does much to elucidate Ionesco's work and also shows that the platitude has several functions. On the one hand, as it stands, it is the symbol of all that Ionesco understands by the term 'bourgeoisie' - that aspect of humanity which accepts the illusion of material realism as being the whole of reality, which renounces the concept of the inner life while preferring the superficiality of rational logic displayed in the visible forms of social order. This order is shown to be hollow and therefore stupid and a source of comedy. In this sense, the platitude is a weapon of social and political satire as well as a criticism of the human condition. The void has to be filled by words and slogans until the slogan becomes the whole man. Thus M. Smith is sometimes M. Martin, then an ideologist, a Nazi, a Brechtian, a sectarian dictator, a rhinoceros or a master of the concentration camps.

The platitude is not only revealing, it has also to be revealed. Nothing is achieved by merely using a commonplace unless by its very use its commonplaceness is made apparent. It is here that language as an accurate form of communication is questioned. The essence of the platitude is that it is both spoken and listened to without any immediate awareness of its meaning or lack of meaning, being present in the mind of either speaker or hearer. The platitude must therefore destroy itself visibly and thereby reveal its absurdity. In this way the commonplace compels attention.

Le Monsieur: On pourrait même aller jusqu'à dire que la civilisation évolue sans arrêt, en un sens favorable grâce à l'effort commun de toutes les nations....

La Dame: C'est exact. J'étais pour vous le dire.

Le Monsieur: Que de chemin parcouru depuis nos ancêtres qui vivaient dans les cavernes, se dévoraient entre eux et se nourrissaient de peaux de moutons! ... Que de chemin parcouru!

La Dame: Ah! oui alors! ... Et le chauffage central, Monsieur, que dites-vous du chauffage central? Est-ce que ça existait dans les cavernes?

Le Monsieur: Tenez, chère Madame, quand j'étais enfant....

La Dame: C'est mignon à cet âge-là! (47)

In this play, Ionesco builds up cliché after cliché until the final surprise when the young and innocent daughter turns out to be a man of about thirty.

Ionesco's platitudes contradict each other and invent themselves.

Mme Smith: mettez-vous à l'aise, enlevez votre casque et asseyez-vous un instant.

Le Pompier: Excusez-moi, mais je ne peux pas rester longtemps. Je veux bien enlever mon casque, mais je n'ai pas le temps de m'asseoir. (Il s'assoit, sans enlever son casque). (48)

They harbour grotesque distortions and neologisms (chronométrable, mononstre) (49); they echo proverbs, maintaining sound and discarding sense: "Celui qui vole aujourd'hui un oeuf demain volera un bœuf" contorts itself into "Celui qui vend aujourd'hui un bœuf, demain aura un oeuf." (50)

(47) La Jeune Fille à Marier, Theatre, vol.2, p.251

(48) La Cantatrice Chauve, p.40, Theatre, vol.1.

(49) Jacques ou La Soumission, p.103 & p.98. Theatre, vol.1

(50) La Cantatrice Chauve, p.51. Theatre, vol.1

Ionesco never identifies himself completely with any of his characters, even when those characters appear to utter some of his thoughts. As a dramatist, he does not claim that language can transmit a thought exactly and without distortion, but quite the opposite; between the thought and the word there is invariably a gap, across which it is almost impossible to convey meaning. Therefore language to a certain extent is dead. Ionesco has implied in his plays that words are like corpses. Being dead, words cannot communicate efficiently and that leaves only silence.

Ionesco's plays are frequently conflicts between sound and silence in which silence wins in the end. The New Tenant is imprisoned in silence among his furniture; Les Chaises ends in silence because The Orator is deaf and dumb and the stage is empty. In Tueurs Sans Gages, discursive argument fails to convince the Killer that he should not murder people. Berenger uses every known argument for philanthropy and goodness - patriotism, self-interest, social responsibility, Christianity, reason, the vanity of all activity, even that of murder. In fact Berenger finds within himself, against his own will, arguments in favour of the Killer. Rhinocéros illustrates the final eclipse of human logic and speech. Through syllogisms the Logician proves to an old man that a dog is a cat and later that Socrates was also a cat.

Le Logician: Voici donc un syllogisme exemplaire.

Le chat a quatre pattes. Isidore et Fricot ont chacun quatre pattes. Donc Isidore et Fricot sont chats.

Le Vieux Monsieur: Mon chien aussi a quatre pattes.

Le Logician: Alors, c'est un chat.

Le Vieux Monsieur; au Logician après avoir longuement réfléchi: Donc, logiquement, mon chien serait un chat. (51)

By the end of the play, everyone except Berenger has turned into rhinoceroses. The play portrays the tragedy of the individualists who cannot join the throng of less sensitive people, the artists feeling as an outcast. By the last act, to be human is to be a monstrosity, and all Berenger's helplessness is conveyed in the speech where he discovers language will be useless.

Berenger:/.... D'abord, pour les convaincre, il faut leur parler. Pour leur parler il faut que j'apprenne leur langue. Ou qu'ils apprennent la mienne? Mais quelle langue est-ce que je parle? Quelle est ma langue? Est-ce du français? Ce doit être du français? Mais qu'est-ce que du français? On peut appeler ça du français, si on veut, personne ne peut le contester, je suis seul à le parler. Qu'est-ce que je dis? Est-ce que je me comprends, est-ce que je me comprends? (52)

Berenger's plight is that of man condemned by the breakdown of language to solitude and silence. Silence in Ionesco never offers salvation; it is always the silence of despair, defeat or disillusionment.

However, even the physical ability to utter sounds - sentences, paragraphs - is no real guarantee of communication. No words, unless they are directly related to some object or a concept, will break the silence. This

(51) Rhinocéros, p.24. Theatre, vol.3.

(52) Rhinocéros, pp.115-6. Theatre, vol.3.

is precisely the significance of the Professor's course in comparative linguistics in La Leçon. According to the Professor, all languages are identical and "une même notion s'exprime par un seul et même mot, et ses synonymes, dans tous les pays." (53) According to Roberte II in Jacques ou La Soumission all words in any given language are identical.

Roberte II: Dans la cave de mon château, tout est chat.

Jacques: Tout est chat.

Roberte II: Pour y designer les choses, un seul mot: chat. Les Chats s'appellent chat, les aliments: chat, les insectes: chat, les chaises: chat, toi: chat, moi: chat, le toit: chat, le nombre un: chat, le nombre deux: chat, trois; chat, vingt; chat, trente; chat, tous les adverbes; chat, toutes les prépositions; chat. Il y devient facile de parler. (54)

Jacques and Roberte II, realising the inevitable defeat of language by silence, and the failure of communication, have given up. By giving the same name to all things, by admitting that the verbal symbols for objects are merely dead sounds and therefore not worth distinguishing between, the distinction of objects is similarly obliterated, and everything is reduced to facelessness. The would-be suicide of La Cantatrice Chauve fails to distinguish between a gas-oven and a comb. (55) The customer in Le Salon de l'Automobile attributes identical sexual properties to his car and to the young lady who is selling it to him and is quite prepared to marry either, while Le Jeune Fille a Marier turns out to be a strapping young

(53) La Leçon, p.81. Theatre, vol.1

(54) Jacques ou la Soumission, p.126. Theatre, vol.1

(55) La Cantatrice Chauve, p.42. Theatre, vol.1.

guardsman with a handlebar moustache. In these cases, language plunges man into chaos.

In such a context, it stands to reason that communication between individuals is difficult. Obviously, any principle of total non-communication is a paradox, for the very act of writing for the stage would be a contradiction of the principle. For Ionesco the question is not so much one of a total failure to communicate (except in Les Chaises), as of a distortion of thought or purpose under the influence of words. The power of words is such that they seem to promise everything - "La Vieille: c'est en pendant qu'on trouve les idées, les mots, la ville aussi, le jardin, on retrouve peut être tout, on n'est plus orphelin"⁽⁵⁶⁾ even an escape from solitude, yet in moments of crisis the promise is left unfulfilled and the nightmare is intensified. When they speak, Ionesco's characters seem to be exhausted by the effort required to put genuine meaning into their words. The listener, preoccupied with the same problems therefore rarely listens properly and catches perhaps only the last word and replies in a similar way. In spite of the possibility of communication, nothing is achieved.

Amédée: Le pénible, le plus pénible, c'est moi qui le ferai.

Madeleine: C'est bien ton tour.

Amédée: ... et le plus dangereux.

Madeleine:... C'est assez dangereux pour l'un que l'autre.

Amédée: ... Et l'effort physique.

Madeleine: Tu es un homme.

Amédée: Je n'ai jamais pratiqué les sports
Je suis un sédentaire, moi, un intellectuel.

Madeleine: Ton éducation a été incomplète. (57)

(56) Les Chaises, p.139. Theatre, vol.1

(57) Amédée ou Comment s'en Débarrasser, p.282.Theatre, vol.1

Ionesco has mastered the art of partial communication, where A speaks, B listens and B replies as though A had conveyed no information. This process reaches its logical conclusion in the dialogues of Tueur Sans Gages and Rhinocéros, where several conversations are carried on simultaneously, each character, absorbed by his own obsessions, picking up the half-heard cues, not of his own, but of someone else's interlocution.

It is, however, in the field of emotional rather than rational communication that the lack of correlation between thought, word and gesture becomes apparent. Emotional responses are out of the realm of rational logic and this irrationality inspires the conscious mind to systematise them by social conventions which, by their very use, become meaningless. The socially acceptable stylisation of emotional responses is one of the main themes of Jacques ou La Soumission and its sequel L'Avenir est dans les Oeufs. Society requires certain emotional attitudes to be expressed in certain formulae, and pressure is put upon the individual to conform.

Jacqueline à Jacques fils: Grand-père est mort.

(Elle donne un violent coup de coude à Jacques)

Jacques-père: Ton grand-père est mort.

(Coup de coude à Jacques)

Jacques-mère: Ton grand-père est mort.

Jacques-père: Tu n'entends donc pas que ton grand-père est mort?

Jacques-fils: Non. J'en'entends pas que grand-père est mort.

Jacques-mère: Mon cher infant, ta corde sensible ne vibre donc pas? Mon cher petit, nous allons la

faire vibrer.

Jacques-fils tombe dans les bras de Jacqueline qui le remet sur pieds. Il garde, plusieurs moments, une figure immobile. Les parents, la grand-mère, le soeur guettant un signe sur le visage du fils. Ils ont l'air tres inquiets.

Jacques-mère: Pleure! Allons, Jacques, allons pleure!
(Silence) Pleure! Allons, Jacques!

Soudain Jacques fils éclate en forts sanglots.

Jacques-mère: Ah, enfin, ça y'est! Ça y est! (58)

Because these formulae lose whatever meaning they once possessed, man is in emotional isolation. This emotional imperviousness of the individual in Ionesco's world is nowhere more marked than in his reaction to violent death. Marie, the maid in La Leçon has no feelings of pity for the murdered student. Instead, she is angry that the professor has not heeded her warnings. "Et je vous avais bien averti, pourtant, tout à l'heure encore; l'arithmétique mène à la philologie, et la philologie mène au crime." (59)

Madeleine in Victimes du Devoir, confronted with the death of the Detective at the hands of Nicholas d'Eu can only worry about her reputation: "C'est tellement régrétable que cela soit arrivé chez nous." (60)

Amedee, telling the tale of a woman who drowned reveals an identical indifference, a type of alienation from others. "J'étais à la campagne, à la peche... une femme est tombée à l'eau. Elle appelait 'au secours'! Ne sachant pas nager, et puis comme ça mordait à ma ligne, je ne me suis pas derangé, je l'ai laissée se noyer."(61)

(58) L'avenir est dans les Oeufs, pp.215-6 Theatre, vol.2

(59) La Leçon, p.91. Theatre vol.1

(60) Victimes du Devoir, p.234, Theatre vol.1.

(61) Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser, p.278 Theatre 1.

This total failure of emotional response necessarily negates the concept of love and marriage. A large amount of Ionesco's drama is concerned directly or indirectly with the problems of marriage. It is surprising to find this conventional institution so much in evidence in a world which is anything but conventional. Even the lovers (Bérenger and Daisy, Bérenger and Dany, Jacques and Roberte II) from the first envisage their relationship in terms of a conventional life. The theme is usually secondary but it forms an important part of the background. Love belongs to the domain of the irrational as does sex. Sex in Jacques ou La Soumission offers a promise of communication expressed through touch and through the wild clownish poetry of Jacques and Roberte II.

Roberte II: Voulez-vous le cheval du désert, de la cité saharienne?

Jacques: La métropole du désert!...

Roberte II: Tout en briques, toutes les maisons y sont de briques, les pavés brûlent... le feu roule par en dessous... l'air sec, la poussière toute rouge.

Jacques: Du feu en poussière.

Roberte II: Les habitants y sont morts depuis longtemps, les cadavres desséchés dans les maisons.

Jacques: Derrière les volets fermés. Derrière les grilles de fer rougi. (62)

In a rationalistic social system love is inadmissible. Ionesco is only marginally concerned with social satire of such. However, Jacques ou La Soumission and L'Avenir est dans les Oeufs, Amédée ou Comment S'en Débarrasser, and Victimes du Devoir are caricatured portraits of the

(62) Jacques ou La Soumission, p.123, Theatre I.

bourgeois system at work in love and marriage. Marriage gives an opportunity for Ionesco to show two people using language as an effective means of communication, but we see marriage without love, marriage as a family convenience, a social function; marriage as a means to reproduction; marriage as the murderer of love (the corpse in Amédée). In Ionesco's works, woman is usually the cause of the loss of love. Choubert is betrayed by Madeleine (Victimes du Devoir) and betrayed most cruelly to the police. Béranger (Rhinocéros) is betrayed by Daisy, just as the earlier Béranger (Tueur Sans Gages) is betrayed by the indifferent Dany. But it is in Amédée that the stupidity and emotional barrenness of woman is emphasised. In this portrait of marital bickering, loneliness and frustration, it is Madeleine who is forever embittering the quarrels, and dragging Amédée down into her bourgeois misery. There is no communication between Amédée and Madeleine except through words, but in the absence of love they must quarrel; it is the only semblance of communication they possess.

Ionesco brings his own name into several of his plays. This serves as a source of humour and also brings the audience back to reality. One of these plays, Les Salutations, involves three men greeting each other. Like many such encounters these men have nothing of real importance to say to each other. The whole play consists of the men reeling off words such as "féculeusement, fouxarusement, fifrelinement" (63) to describe their condition. One of the men sums their situation up:

(63) Les Salutations, p.292, Theatre 3.

"Nous allons merveilleusement, nous nous portons ionescomment". A spectator (qui n'existe pas) replies:

"J'en étais sûr. Le dernier mot était prévu." (64)

In Victimes du Devoir the police officer tries to persuade Nicolas d'Eu that he should write. Nicolas replies, "Inutile. Nous avons Ionesco et Ionesco, cela suffit". (65)

Ionesco's most direct attack against his critics comes in the play L'Impromptu de l'Alma ou Le Cameleon du Berger. By the title alone, Ionesco shows that the avant-garde is merely the renewer of tradition. Moliere's L'Impromptu de Versailles and Girandoux's L'Impromptu de Paris are clearly alluded to. Ionesco puts himself on the stage in the act of writing a play - that is, asleep with a ball point pen in his hand. He is visited by three learned doctors, Bartholomews I, II and III. To the first of these Ionesco explains that he is in the process of writing a play to be called Le Cameleon du Berger, which is based on a real incident. Behind this incident Ionesco explains there will be an exposition on his theatrical ideas. Prevailed upon to read what he has written up till now, Ionesco proceeds to read exactly what the public has seen performed - an ingenious mirror effect which is immediately re-duplicated by the arrival of the second Bartholomeus who repeats the same lines as the first. The third then arrives, repeats the same lines as the first two and asks Ionesco to read his play. Ionesco starts off with the same opening passage. The fourth knocker is not admitted and the discussion can begin. The three doctors have half-Existentialist, half-Brechtian dramatic theories and

(64) Les Salutations, p.294, Theatre 3.

(65) Victimes du Devoir, p.231, Theatre I.

allude to Adamov, who discovered the Aristotelian principles before Aristotle, Sartre and Brecht who is Ionesco's special target for criticism. The language used becomes more and more abstract and removed from reality. Ionesco is rescued by the arrival of his charwoman (who has been knocking at the door all the time). She represents common sense. Ionesco recovers his poise and launches into a confession of his faith as a dramatist. He condemns the three critics for having peddled truisms covered by jargon. For Ionesco "Le Théâtre est la projection sur scène du monde du dedans; c'est dans mes rêves, dans mes angoisses, dans mes désirs obscurs, dans mes contradictions intérieures que, pour ma part, je me réserve le droit de prendre cette matière théâtrale". (66) At this point, Ionesco's manner becomes more and more pompous. He begins to quote German and American authorities and is finally asked whether he is really taking himself seriously. He realises that he has fallen into his own trap and is in danger of himself becoming didactic.

Although Ionesco's plays do not tell a story, there is nevertheless a progression. The progression is usually marked by the disintegration of words into sounds and sense into nonsense. We see this acceleration and accumulation in the growing proliferation of furniture in Le Nouveau Locataire, the increasingly crowded room of Les Chaises, and in the growing number of transformations in Rhinocéros. Because of this increasing intensity, Ionesco's plays produce a heightening of psychological tensions. According to Ionesco, anything is permitted in the theatre; states of anxiety may be

(66) L'Impromptu de l'Alma, p.57, Theatre 2.

materialised symbols, can be made concrete, and the decor may be animated. Words can be supplemented by mime, gesture, dance and action. In the theatre language is not an end in itself but merely one element among many. Ionesco's theatre is poetic, a theatre concerned with the communication of states of being. Because language consists to a large extent of pre-fabricated sets of symbols, these feelings are difficult to communicate. Language is therefore reduced to its pre-conceptual state.

Samual Beckett is unusual in that he has chosen to write his major works in a language other than his own. There have been other such writers who have become famous but they have usually been compelled by circumstances to write in a foreign language; exile, political reasons, or the desire to reach a world audience. But Beckett was certainly not in enforced exile and his mother-tongue is one of the accepted languages of the arts. He wrote his masterpieces in French because he felt that he needed the discipline of an acquired language. He is reported to have replied "Parce qu'en français c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style" when (67) asked why he wrote in French. The use of another language may force the writer to write clearly and concisely without any mere embellishments of style. Despite these possibilities, Beckett has translated his own words into English and has been able to retain the impact of the French versions. He considers that the radio plays and pieces that he has written in English are more like relaxation, as there was no struggle with the spirit of language itself.

Beckett has not restricted himself to the stage to communicate his ideas but has also experimented with the mediums of television, radio and cinema. From En Attendant Godot through to the later film and television pieces he has shown an increasing interest in presenting monologues to express man's isolation in an indifferent world. Beckett's characters vary in their reactions to the possibility of communication. Some such as Maddy Rooney in Tous Ceux Qui Tombent would like to communicate

(67) Nicklaus Gessner, 'Die Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache', p.32. Quoted in Esslin 'Theatre of the Absurd, p.19.

with their fellows but are incapable of doing so. Others such as Vladimir and Estragon are unaware of their failure to communicate, while still others do not try.

En Attendant Godot can be seen as a portrayal of the secret obsession of two people. The dialogue very rarely serves as a means of real communication, that is the imparting of information, but rather as two parallel monologues.

Vladimir: C'est long, mais ce sera bon. Oui
disait, ça?

Estragon: Tu ne veux pas m'aider?

Vladimir: Des fois je me dis que ça vient quand
même alors je me sens tout drôle. (68)

The action of the play is the illustration of how Vladimir and Estragon fill in time while they wait for Godot. Despite the fact that their speeches are often non-communicative the two people are interdependent and their natures complementary. Vladimir is the more practical of the two, while Estragon claims to have been a poet.

Vladimir: Tu aurais dû être poète.

Estragon: Je l'ai été. (Geste vers ses haillons).

Ça ne se voit pas? (69)

In eating his carrot, Estragon finds that the more he eats of it the less he likes it, whereas Vladimir reacts the opposite way. Estragon dreams and Vladimir cannot stand hearing about dreams. Vladimir has stinking breath, Estragon has stinking feet. Vladimir remembers past events and Estragon tends to forget them as soon as they have happened. It is usually Vladimir who voices the hope that Godot will come and that his coming will

(68) & (69) En Attendant Godot, pp.14 & 17.

change their situation, while Estragon remains sceptical. The opposition of their temperaments is the cause of endless bickering between them and often leads to the suggestion that they should part. Because they depend on each other they have to stay together.

Vladimir and Estragon are both aware that time must be filled in and their speeches reflect this. No question is answered directly and a point is never reached immediately if there is a possible discussion to be had. They discuss what Godot will be able to do for them.

Estragon: Et qu'a-t-il répondu?

Vladimir: Qu'il verrait.

Estragon: Qu'il ne pouvait rien promettre.

Vladimir: Qu'il lui fallait réflexion.

Estragon: A tête reposée.

Vladimir: Consulter sa famille.

Estragon: Ses amis.

Vladimir: Ses agents.

Estragon: Ses correspondants.

Vladimir: Ses registres.

Estragon: Son compte en banque.

Vladimir: Avant de se prononcer.

Estragon: C'est normal.

Vladimir: N'est-ce pas?

Estragon: Il me semble.

Vladimir: A moi aussi.

Repos. (70)

Vladimir and Estragon ask Pozzo why Lucky does not put down the bags. Pozzo is delighted at having a question to answer, but it takes two pages of digression, repetition, incomprehension, and farcical preparations like spraying his throat, before he actually answers it.

(70) En Attendant Godot, p.28.

Then a few minutes later he wants to sit down, but he does not want to sit until someone asks him to, so Estragon offers to ask him, he agrees and Estragon asks him. He refuses, pauses, and in an aside asks Estragon to ask him again. He asks him again and Pozzo finally sits. Occasionally one of the characters fail to play the game. Vladimir speaks of the thieves, mentions that one was saved and then pauses, waiting for Estragon to say something. Eventually Vladimir has to say: "Voyons Gogo, il faut me renvoyer la balle de temps en temps." (71)

En Attendant Godot does not tell a story, it explores a static situation. The dialogue therefore is not progressive but often circular like the play itself. The play ends with the situation of Vladimir and Estragon neither improved nor worsened. Estragon's story about an Englishman in a brothel is interrupted and Lucky's outburst has to be interrupted to prevent it going in the same way. After Pozzo has commanded him to think, Lucky bursts forth with his seemingly senseless tirade. The speech begins in a logical, though confused, manner by introducing a personal God who loves us dearly. The speech contains several of the play's themes - the erosive effect of time, the futility of human activity and faith in God. Eventually Lucky launches into lists of people, cliches, sports and the elements of air, earth, fire and water. Lucky's last word as Vladimir seizes his hat is "inachevés". In the second act we discover that Lucky, who has taught Pozzo all he knows, has become dumb.

(71) En attendant Godot, p.18.

To prevent boredom the two tramps occasionally find it necessary to insult each other. Then their polite drawingroom conversation degenerates into rudeness.

Vladimir and Estragon (se retournant simultanément):

Est-ce ...

Vladimir: Oh pardon!

Estragon: Je t'écoute.

Vladimir: Mais non!

Estragon: Mais si.

Vladimir: Je t'ai coupé.

Estragon: Au contraire.

Vladimir: Voyons, pas de cérémonie.

Estragon: Ne sois pas têtu, voyons.

Vladimir: Achève ta phrase.

Estragon: Achève la tienne.

(Silence. Ils vont l'un vers l'autre, s'arrêtent.)

Vladimir: Misérable.

Estragon: C'est ça, engueulons-nous. (72)

After insulting each other they make it up effusively and this also helps to pass time. As Vladimir says, "Comme le temps passe quand on s'amuse." (73)

For the tramps, identity does not appear to be fixed by names. Estragon and Vladimir call each other Gogo and Didi, although Vladimir is addressed by the boy messenger as M. Albert and Estragon, when asked his name, replies Catullus. In Act II, when Pozzo and Lucky return and the tramps try to identify them, Estragon calls out Abel. Pozzo immediately responds. But when

(72) En Attendant Godot, p.127.

(73) En Attendant Godot, p.128

Estragon calls out Cain, Pozzo again responds. "C'est tout l'humanité", (74) concludes Estragon. The personality of an individual does not remain fixed and therefore need not be labelled by one name only. There have been various interpretations of the name Godot and the meaning of Godot in the Play. English readers immediately recognise the possibility of God, but this notion is diminished by the French suffix -ot. Beckett probably chose the name Godot because it has these enigmatic qualities. Whatever the derivation of the word, Godot in the play represents the indefinable reason for living. Everyone is waiting for something to happen to give meaning to life on earth.

The over-all impression of the dialogue is one of repetitive monotony. Dominating all the repetitions are "attendant Godot" and "rien à faire". The two friends cannot go away as they have to wait. Beckett portrays waiting as something which is universal and which kills all sense of time.

Vladimir: D'un autre côté, à quoi bon se décourager à present, voilà ce que je me dis. Il fallait y penser il y a une éternité vers 1900. (75)

Vladimir wonders what day they were supposed to meet Godot and then decides it was Saturday. Estragon points out that these labels may be interpreted differently by different people. "Mais quel samedi? Et sommes-nous samedi? Ne serait - on pas plutôt dimanche? Ou lundi? Ou vendredi?" (76)

Beckett has made the visual impact of this play equally as important as the dialogue. Estragon and

-
- (74) En Attendant Godot, p.142
 (75) En Attendant Godot, p.13.
 (76) En Attendant Godot, p.22

Vladimir are waiting by an open road where the countryside is bare except for one tree. The effect of this setting is to place the two tramps nowhere in time, place or society. The tree is the only object which gives a clue to the passing of time. It is bare in the first act, but by the second it has sprouted some leaves. This could be the passing from winter to spring, but to the tramps only one day has passed, despite the fact that Estragon cannot remember anything that has happened.

Like many of Beckett's characters, Vladimir and Estragon are old and their first actions on stage prepare us for the exaggerated gestures of the silent comic - Estragon tugging at and taking off his boots, Vladimir searching for lice in his hat, their exercises, their difficulties with their trousers and their imitation of the tree. The costumes, the bowler hat and the actions all belong to the tradition of Laurel and Hardy or Charlie Chaplin. Beckett's tramps are concerned with the physical necessities of life and dignity is a thing of the past. Vladimir has to rush to the wings every time he is made to laugh and frequently the characters lose their balance and fall. Vladimir sums up man's situation when Estragon asks:

Et nous?

Vladimir: Plaît-il?

Estragon: Je dis, Et nous?

Vladimir: Je ne comprends pas.

Estragon: Quel c'est notre rôle là-dedans?

Vladimir: Notre rôle?

Estragon: Prends ton temps.

Vladimir: Notre rôle? Celui du suppliant. (77)

The indignity man has to suffer is also portrayed in the master/slave relationship of Pozzo and Lucky. This is made concrete by the fact that Pozzo is leading Lucky on a piece of rope. Pozzo is dominating and cruel but by the second act Pozzo is blind and has to depend on Lucky. This is more eloquent in meaning than any dialogue. Ironically, he is reduced to a worse state than the tramps.

Beckett has indicated the importance of gesture and action by the numerous detailed stage instructions he has given:

Lucky pleure.

Estragon: Il pleure.

Pozzo: Les vieux chiens ont plus de dignité. (Il tend son mouchoir a Estragon). Consolez-le, puisque-vous le plaignez.(Estragon hésite) Prenez. (Estragon prend le mouchoir). Essayez-lui les yeux. Comme ça il se sentira moins abandonné.

(Estragon hésite toujours)

Vladimir: Donne, je le ferai moi.

(Estragon ne veut donner le mouchoir. Gesture d'enfant).

Pozzo: Dépêchez-vous. Bientôt il ne pleurera plus. (Estragon s'approche de Lucky et se met en posture de lui essuyer les yeux. Lucky lui décoche un violent coup de pied dans les tibias. Estragon lâche le mouchoir, se jette en arrière, fait le tour du plateau en boitant et en hurlant de douleur). Mouchoir. (Lucky dépose valise et panier, ramasse le mouchoir, avance le donne a

Pozzo, recule, reprend valise et panier).(78)

Vladimir and Estragon are conscious of playing to an audience. They must have an audience to reassure themselves that they exist. Estragon: On trouve toujours quelque chose, hein, Didi, pour nous donner l'impression d'exister. (79) Despite the fact that the tramps need the audience they have nothing but contempt for it. Estragon, after deciding that people are ignorant apes, looks down into the audience and comments, "Aspects riants".(80) Vladimir evidently entertains the same sentiments. "Vladimir va de relever l'amène vers la rampe. (Geste vers l'auditoire). Là il n'y a personne. Sauve-toi par là. Allez. (Il le pousse vers la fosse. Estragon recule épouvanté). Tu ne veux pas? Ma foi, ça se comprend." (81) Apart from feeling contempt for the audience, Vladimir and Estragon are also aware that they are playing parts. While Estragon gives Vladimir instructions on how to get to the toilet, Vladimir asks that his seat be kept. Explicit references are made by the tramps to the circus and music-hall, as though they were the spectators.

Vladimir: Charmante soirée.

Estragon: Inoubliable.

Vladimir: Et ce n'est pas fini.

Estragon: On dirait qu'on non.

Vladimir: Ça ne fait que commencer.

Estragon: C'est terrible.

Vladimir: On se croirait au spectacle.

Estragon: Au cirque.

Vladimir: Au music-hall.

Estragon: Au cirque. (82)

(78)(79)(80)(81)(82) En Attendant Godot, pp.51-2, 117, 20, 125, 56.

Vladimir and Estragon play their games, sing their songs, tell stories and talk incessantly to fill the void between birth and death. Their overall purpose is to keep any thoughts at bay, including those about the meaning of existence. Vladimir and Estragon give their reasons for their continual talking in what is probably the most lyrical passage of the play.

Estragon: En attendant, essayons de converser sans nous exalter, puisque nous sommes incapables de nous taire.

Vladimir: C'est vrai, nous sommes intarissables.

Estragon: C'est pour ne pas penser.

Vladimir: Nous avons des excuses.

Estragon: C'est pour ne pas entendre.

Vladimir: Nous avons nos raisons.

Estragon: Toutes les voix mortes.

Vladimir: Ça fait un bruit d'ailes.

Estragon: De feuilles.

Vladimir: De sable.

Estragon: De feuilles.

Silence.

Vladimir: Elles parlent toutes en même temps.

Estragon: Chacune à part soi.

Silence.

Vladimir: Plutôt elles chuchotent.

Estragon: Elles murmurent.

Vladimir: Elles bruissent.

Estragon: Elles murmurent.

Silence.

Vladimir: Que disent-elles?

Estragon: Elles parlent de leur vie.

Vladimir: Il ne leur suffit pas d'avoir vécu.

Estragon: Il faut qu'elles en parlent.

Vladimir: Il ne leur suffit pas d'être mortes.

Estragon: Ce n'est pas assez.

Silence.

Vladimir: Ça fait comme un bruit de plumes.

Estragon: De feuilles.

Vladimir: De cendres.

Estragon: De feuilles. (83) Long Silence.

Vladimir and Estragon are trying to escape the voices of their inner beings. Although there are four people in this play supposedly talking to each other, Beckett's language is already moving away from the role of straight communication. Poetic evocation becomes more important.

In En Attendant Godot we wait for a significant arrival, but in Fin de Partie we wait for an insignificant departure. But Clov does not leave, just as Godot did not arrive. The end of the world is near and the action is played out in a small room instead of in the open outside setting of En Attendant Godot. Again all actions and speech are time filling. All the characters are waiting for something: Hamm for his sedative, Nagg for his pap and a change of sand, and Clov for Hamm to die. As the play progresses there is a distinct feeling of everything running down. Nagg and Nell fall silent, provisions of various kinds are exhausted, and Hamm says, "C'est fini, Clov, nous avons fini. J'en'ai plus besoin de toi." (84)

The dilapidated decor underlines this sense of ending. The dustbins, the picture with its face to the

(83) En Attendant Godot, Pp.105-6.

(84) Fin de Partie, p.73.

wall, and the dust sheets, all indicate a last refuge outside of which is death. One window looks out on a dead plain, the other on a becalmed sea. The audience can see nothing of this and has, like Hamm, to rely on Clov's reports of what he sees through the small high windows. This makes for a claustrophobic effect essential for the play's impact.

Hamm dictates the overall tone of Fin de Partie so that we miss the balance that was achieved in the Vladimir/Estragon relationship with each of them deflating the other.

Vladimir: Nous ne sommes pas des saints, mais nous sommes au rendez-vous. Combien de gens peuvent en dire autant?

Estragon: Des masses. (85)

Sometimes Clov's lines have a similar effect on Hamm, but the two characters are usually on different levels, so that Beckett has to resort to monologues in which Hamm deflates himself. "Sans doute. Autrefois. Mais aujourd'hui? (Un temps). Mon père? (Un temps) Ma mère? (Un temps) Mon... chien? (Un temps) Oh je veux bien qu'ils souffrent autant que de tels êtres peuvent souffrir. Mais est-ce dire que nos souffrances se valent? Sans doute. (Un temps) Non, tout est a - (baîllements) - bsolu, (fier) plus on est grand et plus on est plein. (Un temps. Morne.) Et plus on est vide." (86)

Altogether there is much less give and take in the dialogue than in En Attendant Godot, more dependence on long speeches and very much less movement of the characters. Hamm is confined to his armchair, Nagg and

(85) En Attendant Godot, p.134.

(86) Fin de Partie, p.24

Nell are confined to bobbing up and down in their dustbin and Clov is the only character who can move. The restriction of movement heightens the obvious interdependence of the characters, but limits the possibility of knockabout comedy. Clov rushes backwards and forwards, fetching whatever Hamm wants. His business is similar to Lucky's in that he picks things up and puts them down in obedience to Hamm's orders. There are other echoes of En Attendant Godot in this play. There is the same kind of attempt to involve the audience. Pointing his telescope at them, Clov says, "Je vois... une foule en délire." (87) There are similar references to the fact of its being a play.

Clov: A quoi est-ce que je sers?

Hamm: A me donner la réplique. (88)

Later, Hamm states that he is warming up for his last soliloquy. Likewise in Fin de Partie there is the use of a refrain:

Hamm: Qu'est-ce qui se passe?

Clov: Quelque chose suit son cours. (89)

This is not as effective as the tramps' hopeless refrain of "allons-nous-en. On ne peut pas. Pourquoi? On attend Godot. C'est vrai." (90)

There is, of course, no dramatic development of the traditional sort in Beckett's drama, but Hamm's 'story' does provide some sort of cohesion. This is

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- (87) Fin de Partie, p.41
 (88) Fin de Partie, p.59.
 (89) Fin de Partie, p.43.
 (90) En Attendant Godot, pp.81-1.

first mentioned on page 53 and peters out temporarily on page 56 only to crop up again on page 59. Dropped on page 61, it recurs on page 65 and then for the last time in Hamm's closing speech on page 76. This tenuous structure could nevertheless fall apart if it were not reinforced by the consistency of the dialogue. Throughout the play the dialogue reflects the often pointless to-and-fro of everyday conversation. This effect is achieved by two devices. The first of these is the way matters tend to be lost sight of and then picked up again in a desultory fashion later. 'Et ce rat?' (91) The second is the habit of annulment or of contradiction of a statement by action. Nell says No when Nagg offers her a piece of biscuit only to ask at once what it is he is offering her. She refuses to scratch him, only to ask 'where'.(92) Clov says, 'Alors nous mourrons' and then cancels this statement a few lines further on.(93) These two devices imitate well the inconsequential nature of casual conversation, or the ineffectiveness of communication since there is a lack of connection between word and thought.

Apart from its everyday aspect, Beckett's dialogue in this play is characterised by the high incidence of question-asking that goes on. Hamm is particularly assiduous, plaguing Clov with questions. "Tout ~~de~~ la vie", Clov complains, "les mêmes questions, les mêmes réponses" and for Hamm "les vieilles questions, les vieilles réponses, il n'y a que ça." (94) They fill his life and

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- (91) Fin de Partie, p.66.
 (92) Fin de Partie, Pp.34-5
 (93) Fin de Partie, p.26
 (94) Fin de Partie, pp.26 & 46.

give him something to say.

There are other features which mark the dialogue as being typical of Beckett. One of these is the twisted cliché - that is, a common expression which one of the characters alters to amuse himself if no-one else. Clov, after pushing Nagg back into his dustbin, remarks "Si vieillesse savait." (95) Most of the jokes, however, are meant to misfire - Nagg's tailor story, for instance. It seems to be part of Beckett's point that the characters are half-hearted in playing the game at all. Hamm yawns in the middle of his first line, "A - (baîllements) - a moi. (Un temps.) De jouer."(96) The characters realise that they must wait and suffer. This premise is made much clearer in the mime 'Acte Sans Paroles' which follows Fin de Partie as a kind of corollary. Words are dispensed with altogether in this piece which opens with a man being flung backwards on to the stage. He hears a whistle from off-stage, first from the right, then from the left, but each time he goes off in answer to it, he is flung back on. A palm tree descends from the flies, appears to offer him shade and then closes up. A carafe of water appears but eludes all his efforts to reach it. He wants to hang himself but the bough of the tree folds down against the trunk. He wants to cut his throat with a pair of scissors, but they are whisked away before he can do it. It seems that the only way to avoid frustration is by inaction. The mime ends with the man ignoring everything; he just sits and looks at his hands. Words are unnecessary to make a point a dramatist can make visually.

(95) Fin de Partie, p.29.

(96) Fin de Partie, p.24.

Likewise Fin de Partie ends with Hamm thinking he is alone and deciding that as the situation is hopeless, he can do nothing but remain in silence.

Hamm: ... ne parlons plus. (Il tient à bout de bras le mouchoir ouvert devant lui.) Vieux linge!

(Un temps) Toi - je te garde. (97)

It may be paradoxical to say that Beckett's first radio play, Tous Ceux Qui Tombent, is more visual than his two previous stage plays, despite the fact that the radio puts only voices and sounds at the writer's disposal. Beckett's aim is to build up a vivid picture of old Maddy Rooney's journey along the country road to the railway station. We hear music playing in a house, animal noises from sheep, birds, cows and cocks, a hinny neighing, a bicycle with its bell and squeaky brakes, a motor van with its rattle and a car with all its noises of doors, gears and engine.

There is more movement in this play than we are accustomed to in Beckett, but it is built in unobtrusively. The problem of the radio dramatist is to avoid purely narrative dialogue. Beckett gets around this by again having a blind man as a protagonist, which means that he not only has to be told what is happening and where he is, but also that he is liable to translate any movement he senses near him into words.

Like Hamm and the two tramps, Maddy and Dan are old, and the passing of time and physical deterioration are emphasised in the dialogue. There are references to dung and other surviving debris from past physical processes and seasonal changes. Maddy asks everyone she meets about their sick relations, so that a picture of suffering is

(97) Fin de Partie, p.76.

built up. Dan, however, is grateful for his disability and wishes he could be deaf and dumb so that any communication would be impossible. This play has tension and suspense of the kind usually avoided by Beckett, but this is probably because he has only the ears of the audience. It is not until the end that we discover that the train was delayed because a child was killed on the line. On the way to the station, Maddy tries to talk with the people she meets, but even she realises that she is merely alienating them. She is perhaps only close to Dan when they react to the title of the text for Sunday's sermon - 'The Lord upholdeth all who fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.' The old couple immediately realise that their lives have been a contradiction of this statement and break into hysterical laughter.

In the next radio play, Cendres, Beckett has reduced his cast to one person, Henry, who talks to himself and listens to other voices inside his head. To the radio listener, therefore, the usual form of dialogue is retained. We firstly hear Henry giving himself orders as if his mind and body were independent mechanisms. He goes on talking incessantly and soon we gather it is something more compulsive than mere garrulousness. Ever since his father was drowned, he has been obsessed by the sea, always wanting to be near it yet frightened to go into it and unable to bear the sound of it which is in his head all the time. Thus he keeps talking using words to drown the sound of the sea in his head. Beckett is clearly attracted by the potentialities of the monologue. Henry's obsession, Krapp's tapes and Winnie's mound are all devices to get the

character into the position of talking of himself, to himself and for himself. We guess that there is no-one with Henry, but in a radio play silence, absence and non-existence make themselves felt in the same way.

At various stages in the play, Henry calls for different sound effects, such as the noise of horses' hooves. It is significant that the arrival of Ada creates no noise, so that we assume that Henry has conjured up her presence. At the end of the play Henry is left alone in the world of his own voice and goes on telling himself the story he started before Ada arrived.

Beckett's next two radio plays, Paroles et Musique and Cascando are slight sketches which experiment with the possibilities of the medium, but not to make any kind of statement. In both of them Beckett breaks up an interior monologue into separate voices and makes music a 'character'. Paroles, otherwise known as Joe, and Musique, otherwise known as Bob, are both at the disposal of a character called Croak, who announces that they are going to deal with the theme of love. Paroles and Musique separately deal with this topic in their own fashions and are at first unsuccessful. Eventually they co-operate and a short lyric is sung. Paroles, becoming more than just words, begs Musique to repeat the tune and the play ends with a profound sigh from Paroles.

Similarly, in Cascando the story-teller is broken down into two voices, Ouvreur and Voix, and again music is used as a character. Ouvreur has two 'doors' at his disposal, words and music, or both together. Words

tells an incoherent story, reinforced by music, about an old man drifting out to sea. In these two pieces, language alone is not enough. Beckett has used music as well to evoke rather than state. Music can communicate effectively with every individual in the audience and contribute to the mood of the play.

In La Dernière Bande, Beckett produces the effect of dialogue by presenting an old man listening to tape recordings of his impressions made thirty years back. This is better than any kind of flashback device as a means of confronting one self with the other and the audience with both. Beckett presents us with a picture of decrepitude contrasting with the man portrayed by the tape recordings. However, Krapp still eats too many bananas, drinks and lusts after women, all broken resolutions. Krapp's only reality is words. His own past is only real for him in the form of words on a tape and the pleasure he enjoys most in the present is words. Krapp sits in a circle of light, surrounded by what he thinks is comforting darkness. Like so many of Beckett's works, this play ends in a hopeless silence while the tape runs on and Krapp sits motionless. Because of Krapp's mental and physical disintegration there is nothing left to say, and even words have failed him. Words alone cannot sustain a man through years of loneliness.

In Oh Les Beaux Jours we are faced with a fifty-year-old blonde buried up to her waist in the centre of a mound. Winnie represents a person unable to transcend the frivolities of life. The play is almost a monologue, but there is also Winnie's husband, Willie. Most of the time he is out of sight behind the mound,

and when he speaks at all it is usually to utter one syllable. He can still move about on all fours but he doesn't crawl fully into sight until the end of the play. His chief function in the action is to provide a strictly theoretical possibility that he is listening to Winnie. She knows he is not, and mostly she is talking neither for him nor to him, but his presence makes her speeches something different from what they would be if she were entirely alone.

Winnie has an enormous amount to say, mainly for her own benefit, and most of it is extremely monotonous. The triviality of her mind is underlined by the triviality of her actions, all of which help to fill in her day. They are petty and quite inappropriate to her situation. We see her cleaning her teeth, filing her nails, putting on lipstick and adjusting her hat. The incessant fussy actions are marked out by stage directions even more meticulous than those in En Attendant Godot.

"Un temps. Elle se tourne vers le sac, farfouille dedans sans le déplacer, en sort une brosse de dents, farfouille de nouveaux, sort un tube de dentrifice aplati, revient de face, dévisse le capuchon du tube, dépose le capuchon sur le melon, exprime non sans mal un peu de pâte sur la brosse, garde le tube dans une main et se brosse les dents de l'autre." (98) Most of her actions are actions which are part of anyone's daily routine, but because of her situation they appear incongruous and pointless.

Beckett makes much the same point without the use of words at all in Acte Sans Paroles II. On the stage there are two sacks each containing a man. Each man in

(98) Oh Les Beaux Jours, pp.11-12.

turn is pricked by a stick. The first man, after leaving the sack, performs his daily tasks sluggishly and then returns to his sack. The second man goes about his tasks in a gay brisk manner, but the end result is still the same. He also returns to his sack.

Like Henry in Cendres, Winnie has to give herself orders. "Commence, Winnie. (Un temps.) Commence ta journée, Winnie." (99) Unlike En Attendant Godot where night does fall, there is unremitting sunlight and bells have to be rung to signal the beginning and end of the day. Again the dialogue is only to fill the silence, although Winnie suspects that even words may not be enough. "Les mots vous lâchent, il est des moments où même eux vous lâchent." (100)

Beckett's one-act piece called Comedie has all three characters imprisoned up to their necks in urns. But they don't speak to each other, even to the extent that Winnie was speaking to Willie. The man and the two women are all talking about a triangular relationship in which they were involved together. Each one has a separate series of memories about it, and although their speeches are counterpointed, the minds behind them are not even aware of each other except in the past tense. The speeches are not made in reply to any previous speech, they are made into the void and this, too, is in accordance with the growing tendency for Beckett's monologues to be less and less addressed to anyone in particular.

(99) Oh Les Beaux Jours, p.11.

(100) Oh Les Beaux Jours, p.32.

Krapp's tapes are made only for himself and Winnie needed no cue to speak except from the bells. In Comedie, Beckett uses a spotlight to cue the speeches by shining on the character who is to talk. He keeps on talking until the light moves off him on to the next. The effect this creates is of three people trapped and passive in a limbo created by their own consciousness. Again, the cycle is unending. The audience is made to hear the whole play twice and it is beginning again as the curtain falls. The audience finds it difficult to follow the thread of the story, but Roy Knight, in a lecture given at Massey University in 1970, suggested that each individual interprets Comedie differently. He fills in parts he cannot hear or understand from his own experiences of life. Written since Comedie is a miniature playlet Va-et-Vient, a piece which deals with our reluctance to face our own predicament while being only too eager to gossip about that of our fellow men. The three women gossip in all the combinations of two and then, having nothing left to say, the three of them sit in silence facing the audience.

The more plays Beckett writes the more he tends to exclude external action and to concentrate on reproducing voices inside his hero's head. Dis Joe is his first piece for television and instead of letting the medium push him into paying attention to external events, he carries on the process of studying the interior monologue. Apart from a few routine actions at the beginning of the play, Joe is passive throughout, sitting on the edge of the bed, not speaking. There is a monologue going on in his head in a woman's voice, and that is all the audience hears. Joe's face reflects

increasing tension until the final close-up shot when Joe fears that the voice has left him altogether. Joe seems to want to escape the inevitable confrontation between himself and his consciousness.

Beckett's one venture into the medium of cinema, simply called Film, has no speech, not even an interior monologue. This film, which starred Buster Keaton, deals with the equation of existence with the fact of being perceived. The flight from self-perception is put into visual form.

Beckett's latest stage piece, called Breath, lasts thirty seconds and was written as a prologue for the controversial musical Oh! Calcutta! It has no actors and no dialogue and its props are miscellaneous bits of rubbish. This stage piece is the ultimate in disillusion of the traditional forms of theatre and of drama itself, as a form of expression. Beckett seems to have reached an impasse in the dramatic world, with no solution to the problem of language, except silence.

If Beckett's plays are concerned with expressing the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to continual change, his use of language probes the limitations of language, both as a means of communication and as a vehicle for the expression of thought. Beckett has tried to find a means of expression beyond words. On the stage, as can be seen in the two mime plays, one can dispense with words altogether, or at least reveal the reality behind the words. The actions of a character may contradict his spoken intention. "Allons" say the two tramps at the end of each act of En Attendant Godot, but the stage directions inform us that they do not move.

On the stage language can be put into an unusual relationship with action, and the facts behind the language can be revealed. Therefore mime, knockabout comedy and silence are all important in their relationships to language - Krapp's eating of bananas, the variety turn with Lucky's hat, and Clov's immobility at the close of Fin de Partie, which puts his verbally expressed desire to leave in question, are all part of language. Beckett's use of the stage is an attempt to reduce the gap between the limitations of language and the intuition of being, despite the inadequacy of language to do this.

Words in Beckett's plays also serve to express the breakdown of language to communicate accurately. Where there is no certainty there can be no definite meanings. This accounts for the different names Vladimir and Estragon are given throughout En Attendant Godot. More important than any of the formal signs of the disintegration

of language and meaning is the nature of the dialogue itself, which often breaks down. No true exchange of thought occurs in it. This can be seen in the loss of meaning of single words (Godot's messenger does not know whether he is unhappy or not), or through the inability of the characters to remember what has happened or what has just been said. In a purposeless world, dialogue like all action becomes a mere game to pass the time. Winnie's incessant chatter in Oh Les Beaux Jours fills in time and avoids silence. But it is often time itself that drains language of any meaning. In La Dernière Bande, the idealistic professions of faith Krapp made in his best years have become empty sounds for the old Krapp.

Although Beckett has added a new dimension to language in the theatre, his later stage pieces and films suggest that his disillusion with language as a vehicle of communication is complete. Dis Joe and Film rely on the visual effects of the two mediums to communicate the characters' emotions to the audience. Breath dispenses with character, plot and action as well as language, so that all the accepted features of theatre are absent. Language for Beckett has become inadequate.

Ionesco's works also suggest that meanings of words have been lost and that the power of language as a means of communication is diminishing. However, when language is dislocated and distorted, we have a new perception of reality. Ionesco wants his audience to recognise the absurdity of the commonplace and the frequent falseness of language. To feel this is to go beyond it. Just as words are continued by gesture, actions and mime, which at the moment when words become inadequate take their

place, the material elements of the stage can in turn further intensify these. Language can therefore be reduced to a minor function. According to Ionesco, the theatre cannot hope to challenge those forms of expression in which language is autonomous - the discursive speech of philosophy, the descriptive language of poetry and fiction. For this, the use of language of the theatre is too narrowly circumscribed to language as dialogue.

In the theatre, language is not an end in itself but merely one element among many; the author can treat it freely and make the action contradict the text or let the language of the characters disintegrate altogether. Language can be turned into theatrical material by carrying it to its extreme. Words are stretched to their limits and the language is made to destroy itself in its inability to contain its meaning. Ionesco's theatre is largely concerned with the communication of the experience of states of being. If language has hardened into impersonal and meaningless clichés, it is a hindrance to real communication. The breakthrough into another person's consciousness of the writer's feeling has to be done on a more basic level. Beckett has done this by eliminating language altogether, but Ionesco continues to use language as his means of communication even while mocking it.

Genet has found that language in the Western theatre fails to arouse or inspire awe. Theatre, for him, has lost its power and dignified solemnity. He therefore attempts to inspire emotion by using ritual ceremonies. According to the situation, Genet's language may be exalted and grand, or quite earthy.

Genet has moved towards a total theatre - one which

includes music, striking decors, and unusual lighting as well as the action and the dialogue. Language in its usual form is also for him a hindrance to communication. Occasionally he reduces language to an incantatory role or raises it to a level comparable in importance to action. Language has not therefore been a barrier to communication for Genet. He has changed it to suit his purpose and has found that he is able to involve his audience in his works. Ionesco is content to present the inability of language to communicate by mocking it. Beckett's people have never been able to communicate, and he has chosen silence, either because he sees the problem of language as insurmountable, or because he thinks silence is a more effective and universal means of communicating a state of mind than language.

These three dramatists are similar in that they are all searching for a mode of expression beyond the merely verbal. In this search, they all show a return to early forms of theatre involving many aspects of entertainment - to a time when language was scarcely needed to portray emotions. In this respect, theatre has come a full circle, and language has been demoted as the principal means of communication.

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