

AGENTS, PUPPETS, AND BEING-FOR-OTHERS:

TRACES OF HUMANISM IN THE

STAGE CHARACTERS

OF

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

AND

EUGENE IONESCO

PhD THESIS

DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

2000

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this thesis is to provide a sustained and in-depth comparison of the theatre and thought of Jean-Paul Sartre and Eugène Ionesco, and in so doing to fill the void in an astoundingly neglected field of criticism. The thesis explores the rich contrasts and surprising similarities emanating from the different slants of Sartre's Existentialism and Ionesco's Absurdism, which are juxtaposed under the umbrella term of Humanism. The intention of this comparative survey is to trace the ontological, metaphysical, and ethical implications of Humanist thought evident in the theory and theatre of the two dramatists, and to assess the contribution made by Ionesco and by Sartre to the quest of contemporary Humanist philosophy to determine the significance of precisely what it is to be human.

To facilitate comparison, the dramatists' subjects have been diametrically divided into agents and puppets. Much has been written on the Sartrean agent, based as it is on action and concrete engagement in its world; and the characters that people the stage and world of Ionesco, though less analysed, can be seen to emerge as puppet-like creations, pre-determined, controlled, and passive, and fashioned on the theatrical tradition of *guignol*. Such division is thus far from arbitrary, and it provides an ideal point of departure for the ensuing comparative exploration.

The focus lies in four main areas: firstly, the history and tradition of Humanist philosophy is reviewed, and the thought of Sartre and Ionesco placed into its context; secondly, the Sartrean agent is explored in the light of the Existentialist ontology of Freedom, consciousness and temporality, and of the ethical concepts of Engagement, responsibility, and Authenticity; thirdly, the Ionescan puppet is scrutinised with reference to Absurdist notions of Anguish, revolt, passivity, and despair; and finally, the complex world of Being-for-Others, of relationships, coexistence, and society, is discussed in a contrapuntal analysis of the presence of others, the tensions between the Self and the Other, the search for a collective ethic, and the reality of individualism and isolation.

The methodology is based on the intensive textual analysis of the dramatists' theatrical works, supported by the non-fictional philosophy of their lectures, essays, novels, treatises, and journals which offer a vital insight into their respective world-views, interests, and intentions. The writers are placed into their philosophical and contemporary contexts, and the influences of both come under review.

The ultimate aspiration of the thesis is to prove that such a comparison is not only valid but of vital importance, and long overdue if the wealth of contrasts and similarities is ever to be uncovered, and if light is to be shed on the timeless and thus continuing problems inevitably faced by Man.

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NOTES ON REFERENCES

References are made according to the fifth edition of the MHRA Style Book. For the sake of convenience, and following MHRA convention, footnote references are reduced to give the basic information which may be used in conjunction with the bibliography to provide a complete reference. This is particularly the case for the works of Sartre and Ionesco themselves.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Puisque l'artiste appréhende directement le réel, il est un véritable philosophe. Et c'est de l'ampleur, de la profondeur, de l'acuité de sa vision philosophique, de sa philosophie vivante, que résulte sa grandeur. (Eugène Ionesco)¹

J'ai la passion de comprendre les hommes. (Jean-Paul Sartre)²

In the words of Francis Jeanson, Sartre's life-long friend and critic, 'exister, c'est être un problème pour soi-même'.³ This simple profundity could well have been scribed with Ionesco and Sartre in mind, for these two dramatists devoted their work, and even their lives, to the elucidation of the *problem* that defines human existence on earth. Ionesco's words above mark a valiant attempt to obliterate the misconceived and artificial gap between the artist and the philosopher, and serve to situate the Absurdist as a thinker in his own right; and Sartre's impassioned admission places his thought too within the boundaries of the *living philosophy* cried out for by Ionesco. Both men undoubtedly share this 'passion de comprendre les hommes', and both display the 'profondeur' and 'acuité' of their 'vision philosophique' in their successful transposition of philosophy to the stage. This shared passion, methodology, and talent form the basis for and justification of the forthcoming comparative survey.

Given the mutual disdain and disrespect displayed by Ionesco and Sartre towards one another, their political diversity, and artistic dichotomy, the particular choice of comparison may at first sight appear somewhat arbitrary; and in the light of *La Leçon*, a doctoral thesis on Ionesco must certainly be viewed with some degree of irony. But originality is far from the greatest inspiration for a sustained comparison of Ionesco and Sartre. Even a brief perusal or audience of their respective plays reveals not only thought-provoking differences in outlook but, more significantly, an astounding degree of convergence. This common ground makes the glaring critical void in this field all the more surprising: many critics, such as Bradby, Malachy, and Issacharoff, have dedicated two of the inevitable chapters of their books to Sartre and to Ionesco; some, including Esslin, Champigny, Coe, Hayman, Jacquart, Lamont, and Vernois, have made reference to the two for the purpose of brief comparison or, more usually, simplistic contrast; but rare indeed is the critic who has devoted time and energy to an all-encompassing and exclusive comparison of two of this century's greatest philosophers and playwrights.

The current state of criticism is thus disappointingly sparse. Recent Sartre criticism, when not essentially biographical, has, particularly in the United States, focused on Sartrean ethics, attempting invariably to post-construct an Existentialist morality by weaving together often ill-fitting extracts from *Cahiers pour une Morale*, *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, *L'Etre et le Néant*, etc.⁴ Sartre's plays are often disregarded entirely in this process, seemingly willingly disendowed of any ethical portent and left to the attention of revivalist stage directors. Yet the achievements in this ethical field have been few and far between: there is much speculation but little controversy and, paradoxically, even less convergence.

¹ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.71.

² See Francis Jeanson, *Sartre par lui-même*, preface.

³ *Le Problème moral et la Pensée de Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.279.

⁴ Bell, Catalano, Fretz, Glynn, and Spiegelberg are obvious examples of this predominant preoccupation with Sartrean ethics.

Thus, at the dawn of a new millennium, the time seems ripe for a new outlook and for vital reassessment of the Sartrean legacy. Enough time has elapsed since Sartre's death and its aftermath for a genuine critical distance to be established; and, as pointed out by Howells, recent philosophical trends against Sartrean Existentialism have actually facilitated the task of reassessment:

If the vogue for existentialism in the 1940s led all but the most dedicated student to a facile, simplifying view of its tenets, its current *lack* of popularity is already leading to a reappraisal of its philosophical contribution and originality.⁵

Indeed, the combination of the turn of the century and the twentieth anniversary of Sartre's death has seemingly refocused attention on the philosopher's huge significance, rekindling perhaps the extraordinary memories of the fifty thousand strong procession which followed his funeral cortège to his resting place in the Cimetière de Montparnasse. The publication in January of Bernard-Henri Lévy's *Le Siècle de Sartre: une enquête philosophique*, the very title of which pays homage to the philosopher's vastly influential legacy, was accompanied by television discussion programmes, the opening of a new 'Sartre website', and the apparition of no fewer than three *hebdomadaires* dedicated to the 'return' of Sartre; and this in Paris, where Structuralism and deconstruction had seemed to have buried Sartre for ever. In the words of the cover-title of *Le Nouvel Observateur* (13 January 2000), 'Après vingt ans de purgatoire Sartre revient'; and this resurrection was explained in *L'Événement* as a rehabilitation waiting to happen:

Depuis sa disparition, il y a vingt ans, il faisait figure de monument du passé: daté, critiqué, raillé. Oublié. Et voici que l'encombrant cadavre bouge enfin. Surprise! Sartre avait travaillé pour un temps à venir: le nôtre. Réhabilitation. [...] La liberté est toujours à la croisée des chemins. Le sartrisme manque aux intellectuels.⁶

Howells's prescience, already apparent in Britain, the United States, and Japan, is now finally being vindicated in the homeland of the intellectual. In Lévy's opinion, this new interest is far from pure nostalgia, for 'il y a dans le Sartre de *La Nausée* et de *L'Être et le Néant* la philosophie antitotalitaire la plus féconde du XX^e siècle'.⁷

If there is a 'philosophie antitotalitaire' of equal fecundity in the twentieth century, it is surely that of Ionesco, concretised so perfectly in his *Rhinocéros*; and, although a new wave of Ionesco criticism has sadly not yet materialised, Howells's words hold equally true for Ionesco's Absurdism – a label which itself proves more problematic than Sartre's due to the dramatist's ambivalence towards it. Criticism of Ionesco appears to have reached an all-time low: if disenchantment has affected Existentialism, it has certainly taken the sting out of the controversy sparked initially by the so-called Theatre of the Absurd. Ionesco's critics are an eclectic bunch of academics, mystics, theatre practitioners, formalists, and philosophers, and between them, they have covered the Ionescan legacy in comprehensive detail. But few have extracted the deeply philosophical aspects and influences of Ionesco's œuvre – Dobrez is sadly the exception – and none has thus far dared to juxtapose his work with the thought of his detested rival. Yet the connections are fundamental:

⁵ Sartre: *The Necessity of Freedom*, p.201.

⁶ Petit, Philippe, 'Quoi de neuf? Sartre!', *L'Événement du jeudi*, no.10, 20 January 2000, pp.8-9, (p.8).

⁷ Lévy, Bernard-Henri, 'Le retour de Sartre', interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no.1836, 13 January 2000, pp.14-16, (p.14).

Les préoccupations de Ionesco et sa vision de la réalité, en effet, rejoignent celles des écrivains et des philosophes qui, au lendemain de la guerre, montraient l'individu cerné de toutes parts par l'inhumain, 'étranger' condamné à la lucidité, condamné au 'huis clos' où le regard de l'autre est un enfer, assumant un destin qu'il n'a pas choisi, voué à tous les échecs.⁸

The 'relatively absolute objectivity' foreseen and dreamt of by Ionesco, 'après les tempêtes',⁹ has now perhaps finally been accomplished at a time when the beckoning millennium calls out also for a review of contemporary Humanism: Man's sense of divine abandonment and striving for an ethics in the wake of this abandonment are surely as acute as they were in the Left Bank cafés of the 1940s and '50s, and the precise Humanist legacies of Sartre and of Ionesco remain to be fully assessed. The central aim of this thesis is therefore to compare and contrast the intertwining roots of Absurdism and Existentialism in order to elucidate their respective responses to the existential problems posed by the human condition: Why are we here? Why do we die? What is our condition? How should we live it? How can we coexist? The aim is certainly ambitious, for it focuses on the most basic fundamentals of ontology, metaphysics, and ethics concerning the meaning of life and a possible *modus vivendi*. Other central aims include the ambitions to invoke a greater understanding of Absurdist and Existentialist Humanism, to contribute to the current debate on the potential of a Sartrean ethics, to refocus attention on the underlying philosophy of Ionescan drama, to explore the common ground in the realm of Being-for-Others, and ultimately to assess the combined achievements of both dramatists in relation to existential and Humanist philosophy.

The methodology is based on intensive textual analysis of the primary texts of the dramatists' plays, and of the secondary texts which comprise their lectures, novels, essays, treatises, and journals. It juxtaposes these texts in a comparative analysis in a technique which is elaborated and justified by Fletcher:

Techniques special to comparative literature can help to clarify and situate accurately various literary relationships which are too often taken casually for granted or passed over without examination in an incidental phrase. [...] When applied to specific texts, the comparatist technique which I term 'confrontation analysis' can hope, through parallel and contrast, to define with a welcome degree of precision the specific qualities of a representative, even exemplary writer.¹⁰

For the purpose of such comparatist technique, the exhaustive œuvre of Sartre will be necessarily restricted to a predominant focus on his early philosophy, which lends itself to the present comparison more easily than socio-political texts, such as the *Critique*, or vast psychoanalytical portraits, the likes of *L'Idiot de la famille*.

Chapter One is an introductory chapter, focusing on the similarities and discrepancies between Sartre's Existentialist and Ionesco's Absurdist Humanism, and attempting definitions of Humanism, the Sartrean agent, and the puppet of Ionesco. But who and what are these 'agents' and 'puppets', and what is their common connection with Humanism? The term *agent* naturally reflects the demands on the positive Sartrean

⁸ Abastado, Claude, 'L'art réinventé', in *Les Critiques de notre temps et Ionesco*, ed. Raymond Laubreaux, p.170.

⁹ See *Notes et contre-notes*, p.125.

¹⁰ Fletcher, J., 'A Psychology Based on Antagonism: Ionesco, Pinter, Albee and Others', in *The Two Faces of Ionesco*, ed. Rosette C. Lamont and Melvin J. Friedman, p.175.

character to *act* and to transcend its condition. Its theatrical début is prefigured in *La Nausée* in a defence of human existence surprisingly subordinated by its accreditation to an author that the Autodidacte (the *bad* Humanist) has read: 'La vie a un sens si l'on veut bien lui en donner un. Il faut d'abord agir, se jeter dans une entreprise. Si ensuite l'on réfléchit, le sort en est jeté, on est engagé.'¹¹ Despite its lowly origins, this life philosophy clears the path for the advent of the Humanist agent, for the Promethean protagonists who will defend the Sartrean cause. This insight into action is picked up in the *Cahiers*, where we learn that: 'Agir c'est poser que l'Etre a un sens [...]. Si l'action réussit, le sens est inscrit. Et fondamentalement on agit *pour* que l'Etre ait un sens. C'est le but de tous les buts.'¹² However, Sartre goes on to discuss the implication of the failure of action, providing a wonderful introduction to the role of Ionesco: 'Agir et échouer c'est prouver que le sens de l'Etre est de rendre impossible la vie humaine. Ici intervient le poète.'¹³ Ionesco, the self-confessed 'poète', obligingly produces these 'anti-agents', or puppets, who indeed fail in their action, revealing human life as impossible and Being as ultimately senseless.

The Ionescan motif of the puppet is both visual and metaphorical. Following the long history of puppet theatre, stemming back to the religious rituals of the early Egyptians, Hindus, and Greeks, and more recently influenced by the *guignol* tradition of France, Ionesco uses dolls and marionettes as a visual metaphor for the repressed and alienated condition of Man. It is likely that the dramatist was influenced by the European avant-garde including Maeterlinck, who claimed that 'actors were too obtuse to convey his metaphysical concerns', and the Russian symbolist Fyodor Sologub, who argued that 'actors should simply perform what the playwright reads aloud, thus emblemizing the relationship of the helpless human being to fate'.¹⁴ The influence of Jarry is also central here. Philosophically, the motif appears to be Platonic, for the references to puppets in *The Laws* bear close resemblance to Ionescan characterisation and even affect the ethical:

Let's consider each of us living beings to be a divine puppet, put together either for their [the gods'] play or for some serious purpose – which, we don't know. What we do know is that these passions work within us like tendons or cords, drawing us and pulling against one another in opposite directions towards opposing deeds, struggling in the region where virtue and vice lie separated from one another.¹⁵

The concepts of the puppeteer-God, of divine malevolence, and of Manichaean spiritual forces are all familiar aspects of Ionescan Humanism, and they underline the effectiveness of the metaphor of the puppet. It is the symbol of the puppet, then, which will be used in contrast to the agent of Sartre, for both the puppet and the agent will be shown to embody the Humanistic attributes of their respective creators.

The connection between Humanism, the Sartrean agent, and the Ionescan puppet is linked with the thesis's central theme of Authenticity, which will be explored in the light of identity and ethical action. The quest for Authenticity, for 'authentic existence', is central to both Sartrean and Ionescan conceptions of Humanism; and, in the world of Being-for-Others, where the subject is forced to build relationships, it will hopefully be shown to provide the common ethical ground for the agent and the puppet alike.

The first chapter thus aims to extrapolate a common Humanist ideal which will

¹¹ *La Nausée*, p.159.

¹² *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.502.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.502-03.

¹⁴ See Martin Banham, *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre*, p.888.

¹⁵ Plato, *The Laws*, pp.24-25.

prefigure the quest for Authenticity and therefore lay the foundations for a rich and valid comparison. The second chapter traces the ethical journey of Sartre's agents from their perception of the Absurdity of their condition to the potential transcendence offered by their ontological freedom, and from their ethical freedom to the challenges of heroism and Authenticity. It explores the central tenets of Sartrean Existentialism, and seeks to underline the problems of terminology and contradiction. Chapter Three explores the world of Ionesco's puppets and provides a comparative and hopefully complementary balance to the focus on the Sartrean agent. This choice of structure consciously divides the dramatists' stage characters into a crude dichotomy of active and passive, agent versus puppet, and extends the metaphor to its full conclusion. Thus the puppet is regarded as a metaphysical marionette, a victim or plaything of the gods, and a rat on a wheel, before progressing (or rather mutating) to the heights of the archetype, Everyman, and anti-hero, where the Ionescan ideal of Authenticity is offered up for comparison with Sartre's. The final chapter builds on the work of the first three chapters to create the basis for a contrapuntal analysis, a direct comparative juxtaposition of thought. The individual experiences of the agent and puppet are broadened out into the world of relationships, coexistence, and society, where their Humanist values are truly put to the test. This closing chapter seeks to determine the fate of Sartre and Ionesco's collective Humanism and to propose potential solutions to problems which remain unsolved.

The ultimate aspiration of the thesis is not so much to answer the metaphysical questions surrounding the meaning of life as to reawaken critical interest in Sartre, in Ionesco, and, more than anything, in the inseverable ties that exist between the two. This can only be effected by a successful rapprochement or even fusion of the often crudely separated disciplines of philosophy and theatre. If the thesis succeeds in bridging these two unnecessary gaps, it will at least have achieved the most modest of its goals.

CHAPTER ONE – TOWARDS A HUMANIST IDEAL

Vous me reprochez d'utiliser le mot humanisme. C'est parce que le problème se pose ainsi.¹

Hélas, l'humanisme s'en va en morceaux.²

INTRODUCTION

The remarks above immediately situate the theatre and thought of both Sartre and Ionesco within the broadest context of Humanism, and it is within this context that the philosophical approach of the thesis will be governed. Sartre's comment reveals the necessity of such an approach, and to explore Sartrean theatre beyond the boundaries of Humanism would clearly be somewhat blinkered; and at first sight, it seems that Ionesco shares his contemporary's philosophical outlook, bemoaning with typical desperation the steady disappearance of Humanist values. The aim of this chapter is then to analyse and attempt to define the Humanism of Ionesco and of Sartre, in order to create a solid philosophical base for subsequent comparison.

The greatest challenge at this early stage is of course to define the term of Humanism itself, for there are undoubtedly as many forms of Humanism as there are Humanist thinkers. This task will be attempted with brief reference to the history of Humanism, to significant forerunners of Ionesco and Sartre, and will undoubtedly culminate in an exploration of the terminological problems posed by the term. The other terms in need of definition are naturally those of the *agent* and the *puppet* – concepts which give an early insight into the thinkers' diverse forms of Humanism and which will be central to the thesis as a whole.

The ultimate aim of this introductory chapter is to point towards a Humanist ideal shared by both dramatists which will form a suitable point of departure for the thesis. At the heart of any Humanism lies a desperate search for ethics, and if the thesis is, as stated, to be an ethical journey through the philosophical theatre of Ionesco and Sartre, its destination may well remain open, but its origin must be established as quickly and accurately as possible.

¹ Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, discussion, p.102.

² Ionesco, *Antidotes*, p.18.

i) Humanism

According to The Chambers Dictionary, Humanism is ‘any system which puts human interests and the mind of man paramount, rejecting the supernatural, belief in a god, etc.’. Although this may appear to be the broadest of definitions, it is actually quite restrictive in precluding both religion and the supernatural. The definition is certainly helpful in underlining as the central tenet of Humanism the primacy of the human being, but in simplistically overlooking any theistic or agnostic Humanism, it reveals itself to be grossly insufficient as a workable definition of the term. A more philosophical definition is provided by Heidegger, who uncovers the term’s etymology:

L’“humanum”, dans le mot, signale l’humanitas, l’essence de l’homme.
L’“...isme” signale que l’essence de l’homme devrait être prise comme essentielle. C’est ce sens que le mot ‘humanisme’ a en tant que mot. Lui rendre un sens ne peut signifier que ceci: déterminer à nouveau le sens du mot.³

The core of this philosophical definition replicates that of the first definition in placing *humanness* at the centre of its system of belief. In thus re-establishing the original sense of the term, and in leaving the way open for religious and even mystical beliefs, it can be seen to provide a workable definition of Humanism. This definition is echoed in Ionesco’s *Le Tableau*, where behind the parodic truisms lies a simple affirmation of Heideggerian thought:

Le Peintre:	Humanisme, c’est une grande chose!
Le Gros Monsieur:	Oui... Dame, ça tient de l’humain. Et c’est l’humain qui fait l’homme! ⁴

Despite Heidegger’s success in redefining a sense for Humanism, his own relationship with the concept is far from easy. His 1946 letter to Jean Beaufret, *Über den Humanismus*, betrays a definite reluctance to unite himself with Humanism, particularly in the context of the post-war fear of ideology:

Vous demandez: ‘Comment redonner un sens au mot “Humanisme”?’ Cette question dénote l’intention de maintenir le mot lui-même. Je me demande si c’est nécessaire. Le malheur qu’entraînent les étiquettes de ce genre n’est-il pas encore assez manifeste? On se méfie certes depuis longtemps des “...ismes”.⁵

The problem of labelling highlighted by the German thinker certainly cannot be overlooked, but it will be remembered that, in the words of Sartre in his public lecture on Humanism, the problems to be explored present themselves in the context of this concept of humanness, and it seems that the broad definition proposed above succeeds in providing us with a sense, without the drawback of the dangerous narrowness of labelled ideology.

The first recorded use of the term in France appears in an article by Abbé Baudeau in 1765.⁶ But European Humanism has emerged gradually, rather than

³ *Lettre sur L’Humanisme*, p.117.

⁴ *Théâtre III*, p.236.

⁵ *Lettre sur L’Humanisme*, pp.33-35.

⁶ See ‘Des sciences et des arts’, *Ephémérides du Citoyen*, 1, no.16 (1765), p.247.

spontaneously, over a period of time stretching back to Cicero and Varro. The Italian Renaissance brought renewed interest in everything Classical, and Humanism was certainly no exception; and the post-Enlightenment flourishing in philosophy and philosophical literature, sustained by figures as diverse as Kant, Hegel, Goethe, and Voltaire, refocused thought on humanity after centuries of subordination to God. However, Humanism has never entirely freed itself from the shackles of God and religion, and in France particularly, the tension between secular and religious Humanism subsists:

Secular Humanism tends to deny God in order to make room for human being, for instance in Feuerbach's inversion of the usual conception of the dependence of human being on God in favour of a dependence of God on human being. Human being seeks its salvation through its own works. Religious Humanism takes the contrary view, expressed by Kierkegaard, that human salvation must be sought in the return to God.⁷

French Humanism certainly has its Cartesian roots, but it has been greatly influenced by German Humanism: Proudhon can be credited with popularising Feuerbach's secular Humanism in France, while more recently the French reception and interpretation of Heidegger, aided (or arguably hindered) by Sartre, Beaufret, and others, has reinvigorated the Humanist debate, causing rifts not only religious, but ontological, anthropological, and political. It is in this precarious context, then, that the Humanism of Sartre and of Ionesco has evolved, and in the diversity between their respective concepts of Humanism, the tension between religion and secularism lives on.

If Heidegger's relationship with Humanism was not always exactly smooth, it was certainly not nearly as uncomfortable as those of Ionesco and Sartre, both of whom have been prone to reject and even parody the concept. Sartre's early fiction, such as *La Nausée* and *Erostrate*, betrays a deep distrust for Humanism, misrepresenting its more serious tenets and exposing it to easy ridicule. This approach is personified in the character of L'Autodidacte, whose very name is complicit in belittling his views; and, certainly, the Humanism entertained by the character is a ridiculous misconception of the notion – the misconception indeed subsequently rejected in *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*. Thus the Autodidacte basks in the reflected glory of the great artists, for he is a man, and the paintings he admires were painted by men.⁸ He is condemned by the narrator as a 'humaniste de province', since 'son amour des hommes est naïf et barbare'.⁹ But the attack on Humanism is not restricted to the personal, and in Roquentin's first general attack, the opposition between secular and religious Humanism comes once more to the fore:

L'humaniste dit 'de gauche' a pour souci principal de garder les valeurs humaines; il n'est d'aucun parti, parce qu'il ne veut pas trahir l'humain, mais ses sympathies vont aux humbles; c'est aux humbles qu'il consacre sa belle culture classique. [...] L'humaniste catholique, le tard-venu, le benjamin, parle des hommes avec un air merveilleux. [...] Il a choisi l'humanisme des anges; il écrit, pour l'édification des anges, de longs romans tristes et beaux.¹⁰

The parody is already apparent, and lest we remain in any doubt as to Sartre's initial

⁷ Rockmore, Tom, *Heidegger and French Philosophy*, p.68.

⁸ *La Nausée*, p.154.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.160.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.165.

regard for Humanism, the attack is soon extended:

Ça, ce sont les grands premiers rôles. Mais il y en a d'autres, une nuée d'autres: le philosophe humaniste, qui se penche sur ses frères comme un frère aîné et qui a le sens de ses responsabilités; l'humaniste qui aime les hommes tels qu'ils sont, celui qui les aime tels qu'ils devraient être, celui qui veut les sauver avec leur agrément et celui qui les sauvera malgré eux, celui qui veut créer des mythes nouveaux et celui qui se contente des anciens, celui qui aime dans l'homme sa mort, celui qui aime dans l'homme sa vie, l'humaniste joyeux, qui a toujours le mot pour rire, l'humaniste sombre, qu'on rencontre surtout aux veillées funèbres. Ils se haïssent tous entre eux: en tant qu'individus, naturellement – pas en tant qu'hommes.¹¹

The startling diversity of Humanism is explored in this passage, which makes its ultimate condemnation particularly effusive and Sartre's subsequent reconciliation with the concept all the more surprising.

Ionesco's relationship with Humanism is not so neatly chronological. On the contrary, his feelings towards the movement are undulatingly ambivalent. Like Heidegger, Ionesco is concerned with the *essence* and the *humanness* of Man, but he has never really developed this concern into a consistent or sustained philosophy. On two separate occasions, Ionesco is in clear contradiction with himself within the same work, betraying his obvious unwillingness to be uncompromisingly associated with Humanism:

La liberté de l'homme, l'humanisme, ce sont des idées ridicules.¹²

La grandeur de la France dans le monde est due à sa culture et à sa culture humaniste. [...] La qualité esthétique ou spirituelle d'une œuvre s'apprend ou plutôt se découvre, se reconnaît, car tout le monde a en soi, peut-être caché à lui-même, le sens de la valeur.¹³

In *Un homme en question*, published two years later, the author moves from a committed humanist to an explicitly anti-humanist position within the space of a mere five pages:

Nous tous, humanistes depuis quelques siècles, nous avons catalogué, mis en fiches ou dans des œuvres, notre difficulté de vivre et nos égarements.¹⁴

Voilà ce que les hommes et ce qu'on appelle l'humanisme se sont proposé. C'est de l'abandon des soucis spirituels ou métaphysiques qu'il s'agit là.¹⁵

On the one hand, Ionesco can be seen to support the ethical values of humanist culture, situating himself at the end of a line of pessimistic, or Absurdist, Humanists; and on the other, he rejects the optimistic Humanism of freedom propounded by Kant and Sartre, which he sees as destroying the spiritual and metaphysical. The finer details of Ionescan Humanism remain to be elucidated, but for the moment we can safely assume that Ionesco is rather generally humanistic than specifically Humanist, and that his

¹¹ Ibid., pp.165-66.

¹² *Antidotes*, p.46.

¹³ Ibid., p.175.

¹⁴ *Un homme en question*, p.67.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.72.

conception of Humanism, while ambivalent, is closer to the religious than to the secular brand of the movement. Both Sartre and Ionesco have been shown to fluctuate in their respective responses to Humanism, and the terminology to be used in the thesis is thus bound to prove problematic. But it is to be hoped that a more detailed exploration of both thinkers' conceptions of Humanism will lessen the ambiguity and point towards a Humanist ideal that will provide a base for further comparison.

ii) Sartrean Humanism

At the very core of Sartrean Humanism lies a committed and instinctive atheism. In *L'Être et le Néant*, one of Sartre's early tasks is to try to show the ontological impossibility of God. He sets about this with a full description of the structures of *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, concluding that God, as an ideal fusion of two structures of being which cannot be synthesised, can exist only as this ideal.¹⁶ If *en-soi* is total positivity and plenitude, and *pour-soi* exists as negation and nothingness, then any fusion of the two (or *soi*) can be seen to be a logical impossibility, a contradiction in terms. In Sartrean terms, God would be the being which simultaneously is what it is, is not what it is, and is what it is not – another ontological paradox. The creative process is also invoked to reveal the unsustainability of an eternal Creator, and, like Nietzsche before him, Sartre is open also to the notion of the death of God:

On peut concevoir une *création*, à la condition que l'être créé se reprenne, s'arrache au créateur pour se refermer sur soi aussitôt et assumer son être: c'est en ce sens qu'un livre existe *contre* son auteur. Mais si l'acte de création doit se continuer indéfiniment, si l'être créé est soutenu jusqu'en ses plus infimes parties, s'il n'a aucune indépendance propre, s'il n'est *en lui-même* que du néant, alors la créature ne se distingue aucunement de son créateur, elle se résorbe en lui.¹⁷

So according to Sartrean Humanism, Creation can only have taken place if Man has subsequently assumed his own being. If Creation is continual and infinite, then no distinction can be drawn between Man and God. Either way, human being achieves primacy: either Man *is* God, or Man is free and God does not exist.

The atheistic logic continues in *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, where Sartre reinforces the primacy of Man with a useful gloss of his philosophy:

L'existentialisme athée [...] déclare que si Dieu n'existe pas, il y a au moins un être chez qui l'existence précède l'essence, un être qui existe avant de pouvoir être défini par aucun concept, et que cet être c'est l'homme ou [...] la réalité humaine.¹⁸

Sartre's Humanism thus places Man back in the centre of his universe, but in so doing, removes itself philosophically from the focus on human essence to be found in the thought of Heidegger and Ionesco. *La réalité humaine*, Sartre's (mis)translation of Heidegger's *Dasein*, is thrown into the world where it is inevitably bastardised by the absence of a Creative Father – a condition acknowledged by the chorus of *Les Troyennes* which laments, 'L'Aube est horriblement belle| et les Dieux nous ont abandonnés.' However, it is not Sartre's intention to *prove* the non-existence of God, for the problem with which he is essentially concerned is one of human freedom and self-salvation, one of Humanism rather than atheism:

L'existentialisme n'est pas tellement un athéisme au sens où il s'épuiserait à démontrer que Dieu n'existe pas. Il déclare plutôt: même si Dieu existait, ça ne changerait rien; voilà notre point de vue. Non pas que nous croyions que Dieu existe, mais nous pensons que le problème n'est pas celui de son

¹⁶ See *L'Être et le Néant*, p.133.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹⁸ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.21.

existence; il faut que l'homme se retrouve lui-même et se persuade que rien ne peut le sauver de lui-même, fût-ce une preuve valable de l'existence de Dieu.¹⁹

Sartrean Humanism thus functions in spite of and beyond the scope of God rather than defiantly against his existence. But these fire-stealing words of Sartre are in direct contradiction to his preceding comments on ethics: 'L'existentialiste [...] pense qu'il est très gênant que Dieu n'existe pas, car avec lui disparaît toute possibilité de trouver des valeurs dans un ciel intelligible.'²⁰ This blatant contradiction is notorious in criticism of Sartre's 'hastily contrived' lecture, and it is certainly valid: the possible existence of God cannot be simultaneously irrelevant and troublesome, and while Sartre's atheistic stance may remain coherent, the relationship between his Existentialist Humanism and God has certainly become more ambiguous. The point is emphasised, in different terms, by Rockmore: 'In our own time, no one has gone further toward the elaboration of an atheistic philosophy than Sartre, although even he understands human being through a conception of an absent God.'²¹

This dependence on the absence of God for the foundation of Sartrean Humanism is borne out also in Sartre's theatre, where the existence of divinity is constantly an underlying source of conflict. From *Les Mouches* to *Les Troyennes* characters are distinguished as either atheistic (and so elevated to the Existentialist elite) or theistic (and thus denounced for their Bad Faith). The conflict between God and Man is ever pressing, and the point is reinforced that Man's salvation rests solely in his own hands:

Frantz: Alors? Nous sommes impuissants?

Le Père: Oui, si nous choisissons l'impuissance. Tu ne peux rien pour les hommes si tu passes ton temps à les condamner devant le Tribunal de Dieu.²²

The freedom of choice is of course a central tenet of Sartre's Humanist Existentialism, and it is clear here that any human impotence or helplessness, any divine power, can only materialise through a subject's decision to effectively abdicate free choice. Indeed, as Georges reminds Jules, the only proof of God's existence is determined through the weakness of Man: 'Avez-vous oublié votre catéchisme? On prouvait Dieu par le besoin que l'homme a de lui.'²³ The presence of God, it seems, is nothing but a fiction invented in the heads of men.

The true Sartrean heroes such as Oreste and Goetz ultimately recognise that any supernatural power is given to divinities by Man, and they transform the Humanist debate into a mutually exclusive alternative between an invisible God and an all too concrete Man:

Tu vois ce vide au-dessus de nos têtes? C'est Dieu. Tu vois cette brèche dans la porte? C'est Dieu. Tu vois ce trou dans la terre? C'est Dieu encore. Le silence, c'est Dieu. L'absence, c'est Dieu. Dieu, c'est la solitude des hommes. [...] Si Dieu existe, l'homme est néant; si l'homme existe...²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid., p.95.

²⁰ Ibid., p.35.

²¹ Heidegger and French Philosophy, pp.64-65.

²² *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.77.

²³ Nekrassov, p.147.

²⁴ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.238.

Goetz, the ultimate Sartrean *bastard*, comes to accept his abandonment by God, and with it, the illegitimacy of both religion and prescribed ethical values. But, as Lafarge reminds us, the enlightenment was prefigured in *Les Mouches*, with the hero's usurping of his supposed creator's power: 'We must [...] acknowledge that if man exists – and he does – God does not exist. Orestes' freedom is Jupiter's death.'²⁵ The existence of Man is never in doubt in Sartrean Humanism, and in the binary opposition that it establishes between the human and the divine, it is the latter that crumbles into nothingness; such is the legacy of Sartre's cherished atheism.

The catalyst for Sartre's certainty in human existence is of course the Cartesian Cogito, which can thus be regarded as the premise for his Humanism. The significance of Descartes for the development of Sartrean Humanism is pointed out by Krell, who acknowledges the link between subjectivity and primacy: 'Sartre reaffirms that man's freedom to act is rooted in subjectivity, which alone grants man his dignity, so that the Cartesian 'cogito' becomes the only possible basis for a humanism.'²⁶ Human dignity and freedom are both dependent on subjectivity, and if Sartre's Existentialism is a Humanism, it is because it focuses on *pour-soi's* ability to exist rather than *en-soi's* capacity to be, on the human relationship with matter rather than materialism as an end in itself. The influence of Descartes should not be understated, for the independence of human consciousness and thought established by the Cogito cleared the way for a clean break with religion, for the dominance of reason over faith. However, it must be acknowledged that Sartre's interpretation of the Cogito marks a definite and defining break from Descartes, who of course appealed to the 'certainty' of God's existence and perfection to underpin the fundamental 'truth' of the Cogito: the starting point of Sartrean Humanism lies in the affirmation of subjectivity, based on the theory of reflection explored in *La Transcendance de l'Ego* and in *L'Etre et le Néant*, which leaves no room for the perfect synthesis of a creator-God which, in Sartre's eyes, would diminish the freedom apparent in the Cogito.

The only precise definition of Sartre's Humanism comes in his *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, even though the basis for this lecture is to be found in *L'Etre et le Néant*. The subtitle to this seminal work – *essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* – gives the first insight into Sartre's approach to Humanism, which is based, accordingly, on Husserl's phenomenology applied to the philosophy of the modes of being (in Sartre's case, the relationship between *pour-soi* and *en-soi*, and the interrelationship between the Self and the Other). Though complex and subject to the usual inadequacy of labelling, Sartre's choice of subtitle does help to situate his Humanism, distinguishing it from the broader questions of metaphysics to be found, for example, among religious and Absurdist Humanists alike. Unconcerned, then, with transphenomenal issues of pre-birth, birth, death, and the afterlife, Sartre concentrates on the Humanist problems of the conscious human subject, and the definition of Humanism provided in the lecture remains true to the aims of *L'Etre et le Néant*.

Sartre's definition of his Humanism comes towards the end of his lecture, and one of its aims is clearly to distinguish between two types of Humanism – the one ridiculed in his early fiction, and the genuine form to be adopted into his Existentialism:

En réalité, le mot humanisme a deux sens très différents. Par humanisme on peut entendre une théorie qui prend l'homme comme fin et comme valeur supérieure. [...] Cela supposerait que nous pourrions donner une valeur à l'homme d'après les actes les plus hauts de certains hommes. Cet humanisme est absurde, car seul le chien ou le cheval pourrait porter un

²⁵ Lafarge, René, *Jean-Paul Sartre: His Philosophy*, p.134.

²⁶ See Heidegger, M., *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, p.191.

jugement d'ensemble sur l'homme et décider que l'homme est épatant [...]. L'existentialiste ne prendra jamais l'homme comme fin, car il est toujours à faire. [...] Mais il y a un autre sens de l'humanisme, qui signifie au fond ceci: l'homme est constamment hors de lui-même, c'est en se projetant et en se perdant hors de lui qu'il fait exister l'homme et, d'autre part, c'est en poursuivant des buts transcendants qu'il peut exister; l'homme étant ce dépassement et ne saisissant les objets que par rapport à ce dépassement, est au cœur, au centre de ce dépassement. Il n'y a pas d'autre univers qu'un univers humain, l'univers de la subjectivité humaine. Cette liaison de la transcendance, comme constitutive de l'homme [...] et de la subjectivité, au sens où l'homme n'est pas enfermé en lui-même mais présent toujours dans un univers humain, c'est ce que nous appelons l'humanisme existentialiste. Humanisme, parce que nous rappelons à l'homme qu'il n'y a d'autre législateur que lui-même, et que c'est dans le délaissement qu'il décidera de lui-même; et parce que nous montrons que ça n'est pas en se retournant vers lui, mais toujours en cherchant hors de lui un but qui est telle libération, telle réalisation particulière, que l'homme se réalisera précisément comme humain.²⁷

The Humanism here advocated by Sartre, in an obvious retreat from his initial anti-Humanist stance, is a complex fusion of transcendence and subjectivity, and these terms need to be deconstructed before the Humanism they support can be fully understood. By transcendence, Sartre is referring to Man's possibility, and even duty, to *go beyond the Given*, to defy and exceed the apparent limits of the human condition or *facticity*. Man is defined by his ability to act, and it is only in acting beyond the confines of any essence, Self, or personality that he can make himself and other men exist. He is free and condemned never to coincide with himself until he dies; and his relationship with matter, with objects, and with the world into which he is thrown, is one of continual projection, of *moving beyond*. Subjectivity is a multifarious and thus confusing term, but its employment within this context is indicated clearly by Sartre. As discussed, it has obvious connotations with the Cogito, but here, its sense is to denote Man's free and autonomous presence in an anthropocentric human universe. Existentialist Humanism is thus never based on value judgements *of men by men*, but on acceptance of ethical autonomy and complete responsibility, on liberatory action which achieves its transcendent goal. Sartre's own analysis of his theory emphasises the freedom that it expounds, and links back neatly to the interdependence of subjectivity and human worth: 'Cette théorie est la seule à donner une dignité à l'homme, c'est la seule qui n'en fasse pas un objet.'²⁸

The specific sense of subjectivity as invoked by Sartre in relation to his Humanism is expanded upon by de Beauvoir, who introduces the connection between Humanism and the ethical goal of Authenticity:

Ce qui définit tout humanisme, c'est que le monde moral n'est pas un monde donné, étranger à l'homme et auquel celui-ci devrait s'efforcer d'accéder du dehors: c'est le monde voulu par l'homme en tant que sa volonté exprime sa réalité authentique.²⁹

Again, the emphasis is placed on anthropocentrism and free choice, but by shifting the ground from the breadth of ontology to the specificity of the moral world, de Beauvoir

²⁷ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, pp.90-94.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.63.

²⁹ *Pour une Morale de l'Ambiguïté*, p.25.

moves the discussion on towards the ethics of a Humanist ideal. The ethical impact of *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme* was profound, and the critical response varied to say the least; but whatever the position of the critic, the ideological force behind Sartre's doctrine has never been in doubt: 'It is as a humanism that existentialism is most aggressive, both in its negative assertions and in its positive claims.'³⁰ Its negative assertions, concerning essentially its instinctive atheism and its rejection of various other forms of Humanism, have been discussed, and its positive claims, including its emphasis on subjective autonomy and transcendent action, can be seen to lay the foundations for a Sartrean ethics. However, the critical response was not always so positive, with some critics protesting that Sartre achieved very little by associating his philosophy with Humanism:

Sartre, toutefois, ne dit pas que l'existentialisme soit le *véritable* humanisme, il dit que c'en est un. Cela signifie qu'il y en a plusieurs, autant peut-être que de conceptions de l'homme? Nous ne sommes alors guère avancés.³¹

The critique is certainly valid, particularly in the light of Sartre's awkward relationship with Kantian universality, which is ultimately rejected in the *Cahiers*. Sartre's answer to the charge would presumably have been that while recognising that other forms of Humanism exist, his own was the most coherent and applicable. But other, more justified, criticisms can and have been levelled at Sartre's Humanism. Perhaps the most damaging of these came in Heidegger's *Über den Humanismus*, which emphasised the differences between Heidegger and Sartre, exposing the latter's misinterpretation of the former in several key areas. In his letter, Heidegger points out that while Sartre places Man at the centre of Being, he himself regards Man as the 'shepherd of Being', the entity to and through which Being is revealed.³² His second main objection concerns Sartre's misinterpretation of the sentence: 'L'"essence" de l'être-là réside dans son existence' from *Being and Time*, by which he meant not that existence precedes essence, but that 'l'homme déploie son essence de telle sorte qu'il est le "là", c'est-à-dire l'éclaircie de l'Etre'.³³ Concerned as ever predominately with Being itself, Heidegger also refuses to confirm or deny the philosophical possibility of God: 'Il est [...] non seulement précipité, mais erroné dans sa démarche même, de prétendre que l'interprétation de l'essence de l'homme à partir de la relation de cette essence à la vérité de l'Etre est un athéisme.'³⁴ Heidegger's contention is that if Being has not yet begun to be understood, the existence of the ultimate transcendent being can only remain undetermined. The critique of Sartre's atheism is self-evident, and as Heideggerian philosophy became increasingly popular in France, the objections to Sartrean Humanism expressed in the *Letter* began to take their toll.

Another weakness of Sartre's Humanism is that its emphasis on action, on the pursuit of transcendent goals, leaves it open to the charge that it places no inherent value on human being, that in contrast to, say, Ionescan Humanism, it betrays a blatant disregard for inherent human essence, worth, or sufficiency, concentrating solely on choices and deeds: 'Chaque personnage ne sera rien que le choix d'une issue et ne vaudra pas plus que l'issue choisie.'³⁵ The ethical implication of this is that Man is regarded as a means rather than an end, again conflicting somewhat with the focus on

³⁰ Barnes, Hazel E., *The Literature of Possibility: A Study in Humanistic Existentialism*, p.367.

³¹ Boutang, Pierre and Bernard Pingaud, '*Sartre est-il un Possédé*' suivi de '*Un Univers Figé*', p.41.

³² *Lettre sur L'Humanisme*, pp.18-19.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.61.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.133.

³⁵ 'Qu'est-ce que la Littérature?', *Situations II*, p.313.

dignity uncovered in Sartre's discussions on subjectivity. It is this refusal to love and value Man regardless that most influences Sartre's characterisation, and the now notorious stage character of the Sartrean agent is a powerful reminder of the playwright's interpretation of Humanism.

The first and one of the most memorable of these is Oreste, who accepts full responsibility for the outcome of his actions and exults in his role as Defender of Man. Oreste represents a powerful symbol of freedom, of the subjectivity and transcendence demanded by Sartre, and as such he is the bane of Jupiter and the gods, whose power he systematically destroys:

Quand une fois la liberté a explosé dans une âme d'homme, les Dieux ne peuvent plus rien contre cet homme-là. Car c'est une affaire d'hommes, et c'est aux autres hommes – à eux seuls – qu'il appartient de le laisser courir ou de l'étrangler.³⁶

Jupiter is aware that his power is in the hands of mortals, and in his reflection on human being, he inevitably associates freedom with action and thus with moral choice. *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* continues the Humanist debate, focusing equally on human responsibility and agency. The play contains no fewer than three contrasting Humanist agents who come to realise the meaning of both transcendence and subjectivity in their respective Humanist stances:

Nasty: Je ne connais qu'une Église: c'est la société des hommes.³⁷

Hilda: Moi, je suis du parti des hommes et je ne le quitterai pas.³⁸

Goetz: Je veux être un homme parmi les hommes.³⁹

Although Nasty, Hilda, and Goetz are placed in a triangle of mutual opposition for the greater part of the action, their respective claims to hero status are established through their shared Humanist ideals. To be sure, they represent three different slants of Humanism – perhaps Marxist, pacifist, and realist – a fact which gives further credence to the objections of Boutang and Pingaud above; but they also reflect a Humanism which places Man as the sole source of ethical values and transcendence. According to Sartre, 'il n'y a rien de plus important pour les hommes que d'être des hommes'.⁴⁰ It remains to be seen if Ionesco will agree.

³⁶ *Les Mouches*, p.203.

³⁷ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.36.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.158.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.245.

⁴⁰ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.96.

iii) Ionescan Humanism

Ionesco's relationship with Humanism has already been shown to be ambivalent and contradictory, and this ambivalence is merely compounded by his attitude towards religion. At the heart of Sartrean Humanism lies a distinctive atheism, but Ionescan Humanism is characterised by an agnosticism which fluctuates between outrage at the imperfections of God's Creation and at the perceivable Fall from grace, and despair at the apparent lack of a divinity; between a longing for religion and an anti-theistic revolt. Ionesco's approach to Humanism is metaphysical rather than ontological, and he is concerned primarily with the transphenomenal questions which Sartre disregards, such as the origins of Man, the existence of a demiurge, and the prospect of life after death. The playwright is ready to admit that his work is inspired by an anguished longing for a God-figure, by a neurosis fuelled by the terror that such a figure might not exist:

- G.L.: Et si personne ne venait? Et si personne ne nous attendait au bout du chemin? N'est-ce pas là la question qui vous tourmente?
- E.I.: C'est la question qui me tourmente, c'est l'angoisse de mes angoisses.
- G.L.: Votre œuvre n'est-elle pas alors un dialogue avec une éventuelle absence?
- E.I.: Si. C'est cette absence dont j'ai peur. Oui. Pour un quart, un dixième du temps que je vis, je crois, le reste du temps je suis agnostique.⁴¹

There is never a danger of atheism with Ionesco, just an oscillation between agnosticism and religious belief. However, the small amount of time governed by belief is eclipsed by the overwhelming sense of doubt: 'J'ai toujours essayé de croire en Dieu. Pas assez naïf, pas assez subtil.'⁴² In this sense, Ionesco is a religious Humanist, for he combines an empathetic preoccupation with Man with a refusal to discount religion. Indeed, according to Esslin, Ionesco's theatre functions as a genuine religious quest, for 'concerned as it is with the ultimate realities of the human condition, the relatively few fundamental problems of life and death, isolation and communication, the Theatre of the Absurd [...] represents a return to the original, religious function of the theatre – the confrontation of man with the spheres of myth and religious reality'.⁴³ In this sense, Ionesco's metaphysical Humanism can certainly be seen to depart from Sartrean Humanism, but confusion subsists in the uncertainty surrounding God's existence, and Ionesco's potential to focus on the primacy of Man is harnessed by his religious aspirations: 'Ce que j'admettrai, c'est ceci: tout pour Dieu, si on est croyant; ou sinon, tout pour l'homme, pour les hommes, pour la joie de l'homme, pour le perfectionnement de l'homme.'⁴⁴ Ionesco is hedging his bets, and his 'si...sinon...' is typical of his failure to engage himself in a consistent and positive Humanism.

Ionesco is plagued with the desire for God to reveal himself to Man, much as Heidegger is desperate for Being to unveil itself through humanity. But, as his latest creations reveal, he is destined to permanent agnosticism and doubt:

- Madame Simpson: Dieu est grand, plus grand que quoi? Je dis mon Dieu, je ne sais pas qui c'est.

⁴¹ 'Tout finit dans l'horreur', interview with Gabriel Liiceanu, *Magazine littéraire*, no.335 (1995), p.22.

⁴² *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.59.

⁴³ *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p.402.

⁴⁴ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.115.

Arlette: C'est peut-être la matière, mais la matière on ne sait pas non plus ce que c'est.⁴⁵

The link with Heidegger is again apparent, for the ignorance surrounding God and matter, and the possible monistic fusion of the two, indicates once again their common drive towards an elucidation of Being. If Ionesco is heard to cry, 'Mon Dieu, que les Cieux sont tranquilles',⁴⁶ it is not merely to engage his irrepressible humour, nor to re-work the Pascalian aphorism, but to convey his desperation for knowledge, for a sign or a sound from heaven which could assuage his metaphysical Angst. But, seemingly unimpressed by the philosophical approach to religious knowledge, Ionesco turns to the psychology of the unconscious for an answer to the problems of faith:

Peut-être, suis-je moi-même un incroyant plein de foi. La foi de la non foi, l'espérance du désespoir. Il est Celui que l'on croit avoir oublié et que l'on peut rencontrer au coin de la rue. Les moments de croyance réels peuvent s'oublier comme s'oublent, au réveil, les rêves de la nuit.⁴⁷

It is likely that this linking of religious faith and dreams is an influence of Jung, who dedicated one of his published lectures to a study of the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis. His findings, which point towards an inherently religious psychic archetype without proving the existence of God, are wholly consistent with Ionesco's adopted position:

It would be a regrettable mistake if anybody should understand my observations to be a kind of proof of the existence of God. They prove only the existence of an archetypal image of the Deity, which to my mind is the most we can assert psychologically about God.⁴⁸

Jung's analysis here provides a key to situating the Humanism of Ionesco – a task which is proving highly problematic due to his incoherent relationship not only with Humanism itself, but also with religion and God. Following Jungian psychology, then, Ionesco's Humanism is religious but not theistic; spiritual, archetypal, and even mystical, but certainly not Christian or theocentric in any guise.

Ionesco's theatre bears witness to all these tendencies and to his underlying religious uncertainty. One of the most ostensible dream sequences in the plays involves Choubert's desperate search for Mallot – a scene reminiscent of Beckett's *En attendant Godot* – which inevitably ends in failure. Once again, religion is linked with the unconscious, and it is surely no coincidence that the instigator of the search, the despotic Policier, is convinced of the existence of an omnipotent and somewhat malevolent God:

Je fus reconnaissant à Dieu pour toute ma misère et pour toute la misère des siècles, pour tous les malheurs, pour tous les bonheurs, pour les humiliations, pour les horreurs, pour les angoisses, pour la grande tristesse.⁴⁹

The Policier represents the tyrannical Ionescan father-figure who appears sporadically in the plays and who emanates not only from Ionesco's own filial experience but also from

⁴⁵ *Voyages chez les Morts*, p.66.

⁴⁶ *La Quête Intermittente*, p.107.

⁴⁷ *Le Blanc et le Noir*, p.20.

⁴⁸ Jung, C. G., *Psychology and Religion*, p.73.

⁴⁹ *Victimes du Devoir, Théâtre I*, p.206.

his conception of God – a conception based, perhaps, on a combination of the Cartesian hypothesis of an ‘evil demiurge’, of Chestov’s portrayal of the cruel God of Job, and of the Dostoevskian God of vengeance. But in a paradox typical of Ionescan Humanism, God is both longed for and blamed; his absence is lamented, his presence reviled. The ambiguity continues in *Tueur sans gages* with God’s apparent incarnation as the Architecte, the fatalistic creator who is, we are told, of an ‘âge sans âge’,⁵⁰ and who watches almost apathetically as his Radiant City is systematically destroyed by the forces of evil.

The focus on evil is another guiding force behind Ionesco’s religious outlook and Humanism. At times it seems that the agnostic envies the position of atheism and that he is unable to adopt this position not so much through religious belief as through a heightened perception of evil:

S’il n’y avait pas Dieu, tout serait plus simple, peut-être. Je me sens davantage tenté de croire au diable plutôt qu’à Dieu. Mais si je crois au diable, je crois alors aussi en Dieu. On ne peut comprendre l’histoire des hommes sans la démonologie.⁵¹

The presence of evil is always at least in the background in Ionescan drama, and the playwright’s mystical outlook tends to lend it an air of demonology, typified perhaps in *Macbett*. The result on the stage is often a Manichaean struggle between the forces of good and evil, as in the powerful closing scene of *Tueur sans gages*, and, as in this play, it is darkness and evil that prevail. Such predominance of evil reflects the deep sense of abandonment which underlines Ionesco’s plays, the lack of identity and feeling of orphanage which accompanies the Second Fall:

A partir de quel moment les dieux se sont-ils retirés du monde, à partir de quel moment les images ont-elles perdu leur couleur? [...] Nous avons été abandonnés à nous-mêmes, à notre solitude, à notre peur, et le problème est né. Qu’est-ce que ce monde? Qui sommes-nous?⁵²

This theme of Paradise Lost is central to Ionesco’s theatre and it is of vital significance to his Humanism, for it links his religious ambivalence to his obsession with the universal problems of Man, to his pursuit of metaphysical Truth. It also serves to situate Ionescan Humanism within the context of an Absurdist tradition stemming back to Nietzsche, to Jarry and ‘Pataphysics, and then coloured by contemporaries such as Camus, Beckett, and even Sartre. However, Ionesco’s particular Humanism cannot be so neatly contextualised; it can be seen to have been influenced by sources as diverse as Plato, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Christianity, Mysticism, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Chestov, and Heidegger, to name but a few, culminating in an eclectic conception of Humanism characterised by universality, scepticism, outrage, chaos, and nonsense. There is no place here for a formalistic discussion of Absurdism, nor even for a comprehensive review of Ionesco’s philosophical sources, but to a very large extent, the dramatist’s journals and plays succeed in speaking for themselves.

The predominant Absurdist feature of Ionescan Humanism is certainly the sense of outrage at the universal human condition, and it is focused most acutely on its silent artisan:

Dieu n’aurait pas pu inventer un monde plus cruel. Il a inventé le monde le

⁵⁰ *Théâtre II*, p.61.

⁵¹ *Un homme en question*, p.194.

⁵² *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.168.

plus cruel possible. Cela veut dire que Dieu n'est pas moraliste [...]. Dieu est l'artiste amoral par excellence. [...] Evidemment le monde est mauvais, plus qu'évidemment le monde est mauvais. Ou peut-être mal fait, mal fabriqué.⁵³

Again, Ionesco's religious ambivalence shines forth, but there is a significant development in his Humanism here in the recognition of the disassociation of the divinity and ethics. However, although Ionesco has placed Man back at the source of his own values, the senselessness of Man's condition has left him in an ethical and epistemological void:

Quelquefois, je me croyais religieux, d'autres fois je me croyais humaniste, mais en réalité je suis devant le monde comme devant un bloc opaque et j'ai l'impression que je comprends rien à rien, et qu'il n'y a rien à comprendre. [...] Je suis comme Job, l'homme qui a perdu la divinité et qui, tourné vers le vide, n'y comprend plus rien. La seule force qui me reste, c'est le refus.⁵⁴

In describing his wavering relationship with Humanism, Ionesco conveys his Dostoevskian fear at the open fate of Man caused by the absence of God. The influence of the Russian continues as the Mousehold of the Underground Man is adapted into Ionesco's Absurdist preoccupation with the symbolism of the wall of reason, the destruction of which leaves Modern Man in the grasp of the vacuum of chaos:

Ces murs qui s'élèvent, ces murs impénétrables que je m'acharne à vouloir trouver ou abattre ne sont peut-être que la raison. La raison a élevé ces murs pour nous préserver du chaos. Car derrière ces murs, c'est le chaos, c'est le néant. Il n'y a rien derrière les murs. Ils sont la frontière entre ce que nous avons réussi à faire de ce monde et le vide. De l'autre côté c'est la mort.⁵⁵

Though terrified by what lies on the other side of the wall, Ionesco's achievement is to explore this unknown territory, to throw himself completely into the Absurd. What he indeed discovers there is not only the grim reality of death, but all the antitheses of reason – the discourse of anti-logic, the chaos of existence, and the senselessness of life itself.

The philosophical world was shaken in 1942 by the publications of Camus's *L'Etranger* and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, both of which were inspired by the philosophy of the Absurd. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus succeeds in drawing together the philosophical traditions of the Absurd, including Jaspers, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and Chestov, and he invokes the mythical hero of Sisyphus to represent the condition of Modern Man, a condition embodied in *L'Etranger*'s Meursault, whose Absurdist anti-heroism is reflected in the fact that he is both sensitive to the world's disharmony and the sole creator of his values. The impact of these works was formidable, and not least on Sartre and Ionesco. But where Sartre's Humanism followed the established philosophical route of phenomenology, Ionescan Humanism took the more avant-garde route, converging somewhat inevitably with the anthropological Humanism of Camus. The outrage at the cruelty of an invisible Creator-God, the protest at the futility of the

⁵³ *Un homme en question*, p.100 and p.200. This is obviously also a parody on Leibniz's viewpoint that God created the 'best possible world'.

⁵⁴ *Ruptures de Silence*, p.70 and p.90.

⁵⁵ *Journal en miettes*, p.212. See also Chestov's tracing of the development from Plato's 'grotto' to Dostoevsky's 'underground man', who discovers on the wall not the 'reality' of the 'average' man, but merely shadows and phantoms. According to Chestov, this is indeed the only true reality. (*Sur la balance de Job*, p.38.)

modern human condition, and the interest in the problems of coexistence and solidarity are features common to both Ionesco and Camus; and yet their respective paths to Humanism diverge as they digress into the spiritual:

Ionesco is a humanist, as is Camus. Both are lovers of the world (if in diverse ways), both deplore the existence of suffering, both stand for tolerance, moderation, an end to violence, both are essentially moralists. [...] The parallel breaks down at the point where Ionesco's humanism shades off into the metaphysical and the religious. For Camus the difficulty is the divorce between man and his world. For Ionesco it is that between creature and demiurge, man seen as fallen angel and the diabolical authority in control over him.⁵⁶

Once again, Ionesco's relationship with religion can be seen to define his Humanism, and his refusal to reject the supernatural sets him apart not only from other Humanists, but also from other Absurdist. Unlike Heidegger and Sartre, Ionesco's concerns are predominantly metaphysical, and his Humanism thus leaves room for spiritual speculation and contemplation. Indeed despite his occasional vilification of the demiurge, he never quite loses hope in his quest for the divine: 'Pour la plupart des Modernes, la métaphysique est devenue inacceptable, elle est à rejeter. C'est parce qu'ils craignent que la métaphysique pourrait nous mener à Dieu. On a peur d'être aliéné par Dieu.'⁵⁷

The complexity and ambiguity of Ionesco's Humanism is merely compounded by his interest in mysticism and spirituality. A central difference between himself and Sartre lies in the dichotomy between religion and ideology; where Sartre remains atheistic and the champion of ideology, Ionesco becomes both anti-ideological and theistic: 'La religion humanise et les idéologies déshumanisent, c'est-à-dire qu'une idéologie totalitaire est exactement le contraire de la religion. [...] Pour moi, l'idéologie est comme une religion très dégradée, anti-mystique.'⁵⁸ The dehumanising aspect of ideology is of course the inspiration behind *Rhinocéros*, and the mystical transcendence of religion the force behind plays like *Le Roi se meurt* and *Le Piéton de l'Air*. Although Ionescan theatre lacks a conventionally religious character, spirituality itself is never too far removed from the action, and it seems that Humanism is indeed dependent on a Kierkegaardian recourse to the divine: 'On ne peut aimer les hommes que s'ils ont Dieu en eux.'⁵⁹ So when Choubert protests: 'Je ne suis qu'un homme après tout', and the Policier replies: 'Il faut l'être jusqu'au bout',⁶⁰ we are inclined to suppose that to be human is also to be divine, that Humanism is inevitably religious. This conception of Man explains Ionesco's belief in the inherent value of humanity which results in a profound regard for the sanctity of human life and in the perception of Man as an end in himself. In this sense, he opposes diametrically the Humanism advocated by Sartre, echoing indeed the theory rejected by the Existentialist which 'prend l'homme comme fin et comme valeur supérieure'.⁶¹ In this context, it is perhaps appropriate that Sartre dismissed the theory as *absurd*.⁶²

Ionesco's high regard for humanity leads him towards a Humanism which cherishes human life by opposing violence and which promotes humane values such as peace, love, and fraternity. Ionescan drama may well focus predominantly on the

⁵⁶ Dobrez, L. A. C., *The Existential and its Exits*, p.178.

⁵⁷ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, pp.78-79.

⁵⁸ Ionesco interviewed in Ahmed Kamyabi Mask, *Ionesco et son Théâtre*, pp.152-53.

⁵⁹ *Antidotes*, p.245.

⁶⁰ *Victimes du devoir, Théâtre I*, p.216.

⁶¹ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.90.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.91.

repercussions of the absence of such values, but the overriding message of the plays is that Man must retain his humanity and strive to overturn the chaos of destruction:

Seigneur, écoutez-nous. Que la haine et la colère se dissipent comme la fumée dans le vent, que l'ordre humain renverse l'ordre naturel où sévissent la souffrance et l'esprit de destruction. Que l'amour et la paix soient délivrés de leurs chaînes et que soient enchaînées les forces négatives, que la joie resplendisse dans la lumière céleste, que la lumière nous inonde et que nous baignons en elle. Ainsi soit-il.⁶³

This prayer of *Le Moine* captures perfectly the ambiguity of the interrelationship between humanity and religion, calling on God to promote the values of Man. The invocation may be somewhat ironic, but the Manichaean terminology and the mystical imagery serve to create a fusion between the human, the spiritual, and the religious, and reflect once again the eclectic complexity of Ionescan Humanism. In the world of Being-for-Others, this eclecticism proves problematic, for the *human* in Humanism has become so broad that successful coexistence is placed under threat:

Vous avez un tempérament diamétralement opposé au mien. Les hommes sont tous des frères, bien entendu, ce sont des semblables qui ne se ressemblent pas toujours. Il y a cependant un point commun. Il doit y avoir un point commun, un langage commun... Lequel? Lequel?⁶⁴

Bérenger's desperation to find communion with the Tueur is one of the most poignant moments in Ionescan theatre, for it shows the dramatist's Humanism at its most vulnerable and tender. But the answer to Bérenger's question was perhaps foreshadowed by Heidegger in his vision of the role of Humanism: 'L'humanisme consiste en ceci: réfléchir et veiller à ce que l'homme soit humain et non in-humain, "barbare", c'est-à-dire hors de son essence. Or en quoi consiste l'humanité de l'homme? Elle repose dans son essence.'⁶⁵ This focus on human essence is indeed adopted by Ionesco, and it is reflected in his portrayal of the universal human being to be found in his archetypes and Everymen. Like Heidegger, and in contrast to Sartre, Ionesco is concerned with *being* in general, and, if anything, existence is subordinated to essence. This contrast is symbolised in the dichotomy between Sartre's agent and Ionesco's puppet, between the Sartrean character who is the free master of his action and the Ionescan victim who is a 'plaything of the gods'. The Shakespearean reference here is far from accidental, and it reinforces the eclectic and universal nature of Ionesco's conception of Humanism. Indeed it is not presumptuous to claim a direct link between Shakespearean and Ionescan Humanism, for we know that Ionesco's theatre was greatly inspired by Shakespearean drama, and for the very reason that it encompassed the broadest portrayal of the human condition. Ionesco's humanism, then, is defined ultimately by 'what it is to be human'; and if this involves a complex reworking of philosophical responses to the question, a constant doubting of the demiurge, and a defiant rejection of a coherent '-ism', then so be it.

⁶³ *Macbett, Théâtre V*, p.176.

⁶⁴ *Tueur sans gages, Théâtre II*, p.167.

⁶⁵ *Lettre sur L'Humanisme*, p.45.

iv) A Humanist Ideal

If the agent and the puppet provide such suitable philosophical symbols for Existentialist and Absurdist Humanism, it is because each encapsulates the desperate search for ethics in the wake of an absent God. Sartre's agent is confronted with the moral responsibility to act, in the knowledge that his freedom to act is boundless and that he is nothing but the sum of his actions. Ionesco's puppet, on the other hand, is conditioned from above and fated to mortality and chaos, but his strings pull him in polar directions and he alone can decide which strings must be cut. Both the agent and the puppet are sensitive to their abandonment by God – the agent is bastardised, the puppet orphaned – and their challenge is to make their way successfully through an ethical journey in a moral vacuum.

Theirs is surely also the challenge of any valid Humanism, and the challenge is clearly set by Heidegger:

Le vœu d'une éthique appelle d'autant plus impérieusement sa réalisation que le désarroi évident de l'homme, non moins que son désarroi caché, s'accroissent au-delà de toute mesure. A cet établissement du lien éthique nous devons donner tous nos soins.⁶⁶

Both Sartre and Ionesco respond to this challenge, and the agent and puppet are united in their respective pursuit of the ethical. At this early stage, however, the only guiding force behind them is their Humanism, and thus their goal can only be characterised as a Humanist ideal. But what is the nature of this Humanist ideal? How can the agent and the puppet, the instruments of two very different forms of Humanism, be in search of the same Humanist ideal? The answer to these awkward questions lies in the concept of Authenticity. For Sartre, Authenticity is linked with a conversion of consciousness to *pure reflection*, which involves a free acceptance of the ambiguous human condition and a rejection of Bad Faith. De Beauvoir defined Humanism as the development of subjectivity into the expression of authentic reality, and Sartre showed this authentic reality to be dependent on action. For without action, identity, existence, and any sense of self are under threat; and without identity and Self, there can surely be no Authenticity. Ionesco, too, links Authenticity with identity, which he expresses, like Heidegger, in terms of essence and humanness; and as a religious Humanist, he presumably concurs with Kierkegaard's contention that human salvation must be sought in the return to God. But his solution is to recognise the divine in Man, and then, as the Policier advises Choubert, to live out this condition to the full.

It seems that the common ground on Authenticity lies in the challenge to remain true to *the human* that lies within us. The only way to determine *the human* as conceived by Sartre and Ionesco is to search for a human identity among the agent and the puppet, and it is to be hoped that this human identity will provide the key to a viable ethics and turn a contested Humanist ideal into a shared Humanist value.

⁶⁶ *Lettre sur L'Humanisme*, p.141.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this introductory chapter was to attempt a definition of the concept of Humanism and to situate the Humanist thought of Sartre and Ionesco within the philosophical and historical context of the movement. The broad definition of Heidegger was adopted, according to which Humanism is any system which gives primacy to humanness, to human identity, to what it is to be human.

Two very different forms of Humanism were uncovered. Sartre's Existentialist Humanism transpired to be a complex fusion of transcendence and subjectivity, an atheistic doctrine based on action and influenced predominantly by Descartes and Heidegger. Ionesco's Absurdist Humanism proved to be ambivalent and paradoxical, an eclectically influenced collection of beliefs which, while agnostic, recognised the divine in Man and valued him *per se*. The strengths and weaknesses of both systems were revealed. While Sartrean Humanism remained defiantly Humanistic and coherent, it was shown to be based on a misinterpretation of Heideggerian thought, and to place no intrinsic value on humanity; and while Ionescan Humanism underlined a commitment to humanity in the cruel absence of the divine and to a resolution therefore to seek the divine in the human, it betrayed a definite lack of coherence and a resistance to close definition. Ionescan Humanism can perhaps indeed be defined by its resistance to definition, by its individualistic, if not anarchistic, characteristics, which reflect an ethical uncertainty so at odds with Sartre. Ionesco's Humanism is predominantly instinctive; it does not know where its path will lead it.

According to Heidegger's delineation of the desirable aims of Humanism, it is perhaps to be expected that the systems of Ionesco and Sartre come into conflict:

Si l'on comprend par humanisme en général l'effort visant à rendre l'homme libre pour son humanité et à lui faire découvrir sa dignité, l'humanisme se différencie suivant la conception qu'on a de la 'liberté' et de la 'nature' de l'homme.⁶⁷

It has already been seen that Sartre and Ionesco differ widely in their conceptions of both freedom and human nature, and these differences seem to threaten any possibility of a shared ideal. But even Ionesco, at least retrospectively, recognises the Humanist link between himself and Sartre, and thus rekindles the hope of common progress:

Par rapport à ce qui se passe actuellement dans le monde moderne des idées, structuralisme, scientisme, etc., profondément anti-humaniste, non seulement l'existentialisme, mais encore le marxisme nous paraît être lumineusement humaniste.⁶⁸

Lorsque Jean-Paul Sartre a été ensuite humaniste et qu'il a voulu faire une troisième position, je l'ai approuvé.⁶⁹

It is not just their common Humanist stance that unites Ionesco and Sartre, but a more precise concordance on the ideal of Authenticity, on the necessity to elucidate the human identity. In this respect, the Existentialist and the Absurdist are at one: 'Just as Descartes had used his intelligence to "argue" his way to God, so the Existentialists and

⁶⁷ *Lettre sur L'Humanisme*, p.49.

⁶⁸ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.82.

⁶⁹ *Ruptures de Silence*, p.50.

Absurdist argued their way towards a new transcendence.⁷⁰ The transcendence referred to can be recognised in the Humanist goal of Authenticity, the common goal of the agent and the puppet. But the path towards this goal is long and complex, and will inevitably involve an independent and comparative exploration of the journeys taken by both the Sartrean agent and the Ionescan puppet. Such is the remit of the forthcoming thesis.

⁷⁰ Coe, Richard N., *Ionesco: A Study of his Plays*, p.162.

CHAPTER TWO – THE SARTREAN AGENT

INTRODUCTION

The discussion of Existentialist Humanism and the brief delineation of the Sartrean agent undertaken in the previous chapter have opened the way for a detailed analysis of Sartre's conception and portrayal of the individual human being, the *Pour-soi*, and of the common human condition, the *réalité humaine*. It was shown that Sartre's Existentialism has justifiable claims to present itself as a Humanistic ideology in a number of significant ways: firstly, by revealing an exclusively anthropocentric *Weltanschauung*, in which Man is elevated to supremacy at the expense of an extinct or absent God; secondly, by challenging itself to (re)invent or (re)create Man through phenomenological ontology, thereby revealing the paramount importance of human freedom; thirdly, in its defiant, if not parodic, rejection of traditional forms of Humanism, which are replaced by an innovative synthesis of transcendence and subjectivity founded on Existentialist freedom and neo-Cartesian facticity; and finally, in its exhaustive search for a discernible and viable code of ethics, which could govern the morality of modern Humanism and finally usurp the tired throne of Seriousness.

The figure at the centre of Sartre's Humanism is the agent, who will be shown to be, to varying degrees of idealism, intellectual, ontological, ethical, and authentic/heroic. Agents are defined by their *actions*, for Man is no longer viewed as a concrete end, but as a free, responsible existence, defined by what he does. The distinction has been made with Ionesco's *puppet*, who represents a very different form of Humanism, and it is hoped that this exploration of the Sartrean agent will prepare the way for a rich, contrasting comparison with the Ionescan model of Man.

The aims of this chapter are both varied and ambitious, and my underlying contention is that this notoriously over-ploughed field of criticism is in urgent need of reassessment, fresh outlook, and a challenging new direction. To this end, a uniquely balanced combination of Sartre's philosophy and theatre will incite an original study of Sartrean characterisation and ethics, which will trace the progressive process of the agent, focusing on the human condition, personality, and code of moral conduct. The use of theatre as the genre for the primary focus is justified not only in that it enables direct comparison with Ionesco; it is on the theatrical stage that the theoretical agent of philosophy is transposed and presented in practice, and it is in this world of action that he visibly comes to life: 'The Sartrean hero, both an agent and an actor, belongs in the theatre.'¹

An attempt will be made, then, to demonstrate a consistency between the stage characters of the plays and the complex creations who seem to walk the pages of philosophical treatises like *La Transcendance de L'Ego*, *L'Etre et le Néant*, *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme* and *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*; it is theatre, more than any other genre, which definitively portrays 'Man in situation'. This comparative methodology will highlight any inconsistencies and will inevitably lead into a critique of central concepts of Sartrean terminology.

Moreover, the new wave of Sartre criticism, which began, perhaps, in the 1980s with the death of Sartre and the posthumous publication of, among others, *Cahiers pour une Morale* (1983), will be reconstructed in the following ways: concepts will take precedence over characters, given Sartre's destruction of the psychologically consistent

¹ McCall, Dorothy, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.152.

personality; Sartre's contribution to contemporary Humanism will be reassessed, and not simplistically dismissed following the accepted failure of *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme* or the relative decline in interest in Humanism itself; and the recent preoccupation with Existentialist ethics will be challenged, explored, and undermined. But the ultimate aims of the chapter are to delineate the characteristics of the Sartrean agent, to extract and analyse the resulting problems and polemics, and to propose, in the light of the subsequent conclusions of Ionesco, a novel and illuminating conception of Sartre's Existentialist philosophy and theatre.

i) Acknowledging the Absurd: The Intellectual Agent

The recognition of the Absurd – the strange and seemingly senseless, unjustifiable nature of *la réalité humaine* – is Sartre's *point de départ philosophique* and thus a vital precondition for the successful Sartrean agent. Without acceptance of this basic *fact* of existence, it seems impossible to progress beyond the apparent restrictions of our natural condition and define ourselves as human beings. Indeed, as Camus contends, our greatest actions and achievements all derive from the Absurd, and this philosophical origin must therefore form the very core of any form of Humanism: 'Toutes les grandes actions et toutes les grandes pensées ont un commencement dérisoire.'² It is of course in this respect that Sartre most closely coincides with the more renowned Absurdists such as Camus, Ionesco, Beckett, and Genet, but he removes himself from their school of philosophy by projecting beyond despair towards transcendence, hope, and even salvation. However, though quick to level criticism at the Absurd movement, particularly as portrayed in the anti-theatre of Ionesco and Beckett, for its bourgeois passivity and elitism, it is on the solid foundations of the movement that he builds his philosophical empire; and it is ironic that a theatre aimed at the masses³ should presuppose a cerebral appreciation of the meaninglessness of existence embodied so effectively in Sartre's early creation, the intellectual Roquentin. It is for this reason that the acceptance of the Absurd requires an intellectual agent: any given member of the masses may well be able to *feel* or *experience* the Absurd, but a complete understanding of its implications must be the prerogative of the privileged and lucid consciousness.

The first step of the intellectual agent, therefore, is to accept his condition and situation – the ambiguous reality of *pour-soi* and its contingent position *au-milieu-du-monde*, where it battles for being and existence with *en-soi* and *autrui*. The ambiguity at the heart of the structure of *pour-soi*, the constant tension between its facticity and transcendence, is its most defining feature, and its wider implications have a profound effect on all levels of humanity – intellectual, ontological, and ethical. This ambiguous, almost schizophrenic, tension imposes itself on the consciousness, and so compounds the burden of our initial conception of Absurdity: 'Moi, je suis agent double de naissance [...] et je suis fait de deux moitiés qui ne collent pas ensemble: chacune des deux fait horreur à l'autre.'⁴ In the realm of the Absurd, it is essentially with *facticity* that we are concerned, and this is to form the focus of the present study.

The facticity of *pour-soi* is equivalent to its contingency or *the Given* – that is, its gratuitous, unjustifiable existence, and the situation (world) into which it is 'thrown':

Il est en tant qu'il est jeté dans un monde, délaissé dans une 'situation', il est en tant qu'il est pure contingence, en tant que pour lui comme pour les choses du monde, comme pour ce mur, cet arbre, cette tasse, la question originelle peut se poser: 'Pourquoi cet être-ci est-il tel et non autrement?'⁵

It is significant here that Sartre links *pour-soi* and *en-soi*: our facticity lies in our connection to *en-soi* – to our world, its objects, and to our own past – and attempts to justify human existence are no more valid or likely to succeed than those to explain the *raison d'être* of the world around us. Sartre, then, is not concerned with the reasoning behind Man's existence or ontological structure, which he leaves to metaphysics, but exclusively with the description of these realities, with the *how* and not the *why*. His

² *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.26.

³ See 'Théâtre populaire et théâtre bourgeois', in *Un Théâtre de Situations*, pp.68-80.

⁴ Goetz in *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.57.

⁵ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.122.

stage characters reflect this philosophical outlook, taking control of the situations in which they find themselves and ideally making them their own. However, awareness of their contingent existence does not prevent Sartre's characters questioning the origins of their being or the validity of their lives: 'Est-ce que je savais, moi, ce que je faisais sur terre? Il faut bien justifier sa vie.'⁶ Johanna's doubt arises from her perception of the Given, and although she has formed a cerebral conception of the Absurd (evident in her rhetorical question), she has not yet determined a means of escape. The problem of escaping the Absurd, of going beyond the Given, is highlighted by Camus, who concludes that Man's only Given is that of the Absurd itself: 'L'unique donnée est pour moi l'absurde. Le problème est de savoir comment en sortir.'⁷ Sartre unites the Given with the possibility of a universal human condition, which is once again contributive towards the synthesis of his Existentialism and his Humanist ideology:

S'il est impossible de trouver en chaque homme une essence universelle qui serait la nature humaine, il existe pourtant une universalité humaine de *condition* [...], l'ensemble des *limites* a priori qui esquissent sa situation fondamentale dans l'univers.⁸

Though as ever careful to distinguish between a human condition and a human nature, his acceptance of the former term has encouraged critics' doubts about his dismissal of the latter.⁹ But here, it is purely Man's condition that is in question, and it is the universal nature of this condition, the shared experience, which, above all, contributes to the force of Absurdist philosophy. Sartre's characters succeed in adding both weight and prestige to this derisory view of the human condition, and the underlying sense of despair is particularly reminiscent of Ionesco's creations. Roquentin again serves as the true Absurdist example, declaring the ultimate pointlessness of human existence: 'Nous voilà, tous tant que nous sommes, à manger et à boire pour conserver notre précieuse existence, et [...] il n'y a rien, rien, aucune raison d'exister.'¹⁰ If this metaphysical cry of despair evokes Ionesco, his earlier discontent at the tedium of everyday life recalls Beckettian monotony:

Quand on vit, il n'arrive rien. Les décors changent, les gens entrent et sortent, voilà tout. Il n'y a jamais de commencements. Les jours s'ajoutent aux jours sans rime ni raison, c'est une addition interminable et monotone.¹¹

The theatrical metaphor ironically conveys the suitability of the stage to portray Absurdist thought, despite Sartre's expressed intention to do just the opposite. But however anxious to overcome, or perhaps overlook, the impasse of Absurdism, Sartre cannot prevent its influence on his characterisation. His last play, the somewhat neglected adaptation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, is markedly different from his earlier plays in its dark tone and poetic structure, and it is thus particularly suited to the generally nihilistic outlook of Absurdist thought, conveying as it does the quiet desperation of our everyday lives:

Il faut qu'un homme soit fou pour se dire heureux

⁶ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.119.

⁷ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.49.

⁸ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, pp.67-68.

⁹ See later, Section 2, and Naville in *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, discussion, p.110: 'Votre conception de la condition humaine, c'est un substitut pour la nature humaine.'

¹⁰ *La Nausée*, p.159.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.62.

avant le dernier moment de son dernier jour.¹²

Hécube's pessimism is both moving and effective, especially in the intensely tragic context of the play, but it certainly does not stand alone in Sartrean theatre. Indeed the seeds of despair are sown in Sartre's first major play, in which Jupiter, assuming the role of an omnipotent God, laments the very creation of the human being: 'Le premier crime, c'est moi qui l'ai commis en créant les hommes mortels.'¹³ But in a Godless world, the lamenting is left to Man, and in the absence of a God, devoid of metaphysical meaning, it is Man who is challenged to justify his reasons for existence: 'Osez-vous bien me demander mes raisons de mourir? C'est à moi, malheureux, c'est à moi de vous demander vos raisons de vivre!'¹⁴ Georges's incisive inversion is taken up by Lénie in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, who combines a similarly Absurdist outlook with a bourgeois sense of stoicism: 'Je vous l'ai dit: cette famille a perdu ses raisons de vivre, mais elle a gardé ses bonnes habitudes.'¹⁵ Her cynical pragmatism is not shared by her antagonists, however, who reveal a deeper insight into existential Absurdity in their strong, evocative diction:

Johanna:	Les fous disent la vérité, Werner.
Werner:	Vraiment. Laquelle?
Johanna:	Il n'y en a qu'une: l'horreur de vivre. ¹⁶

The Absurd nature of the human condition can be seen to underpin Sartre's philosophy and encompass his broad range of plays. The senselessness, despair, and even horror of human existence are voiced by characters as diverse as Roquentin and Hécube, Jupiter and Johanna – a diversity which reinforces the universality of Man's shared condition and underlines the philosophical significance of the theme; and it is fitting that a discussion on the Humanist condition should conclude with a reference to the absent God: 'C'est drôle, une vie qui éclate sous un ciel vide. Ça ... ça ne veut rien dire.'¹⁷ Le Père's final speech comprises a subtle union of senselessness and derision, and as such is an appropriate endnote to a general analysis of the Absurd. But it is now time to scrutinise the specifically Sartrean concepts of Absurdism, which are to distance Sartre from the more traditional exponents mentioned above.

Our facticity is of course determined by our birth into the world, where we receive our place in time and space. The notion of birth is essential for metaphysical Absurdist such as Ionesco, but as an ontologist, Sartre views this extraordinary catalyst somewhat differently. He is initially concerned to restrict the problem yet again to metaphysics, taking the starting point of ontology as the very first moment of consciousness:

Il y a un problème métaphysique de la naissance, dans la mesure où je peux m'inquiéter de savoir comment c'est d'un tel embryon que je suis né; et ce problème est peut-être insoluble. Mais il n'y a pas de problème ontologique: nous n'avons pas à nous demander pourquoi il peut y avoir une naissance des consciences, car la conscience ne peut s'apparaître à soi-même que comme néantisation d'en-soi, c'est-à-dire comme *étant déjà née*. [...] La

¹² *Les Troyennes*, p.119.

¹³ *Les Mouches*, p.198.

¹⁴ *Nekrassov*, p.28.

¹⁵ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.245-46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.367.

naissance [...] est une loi d'être du Pour-soi. Etre Pour-soi, c'est *être né*.¹⁸

Being insoluble, the notion is thus absurd, but it nevertheless seems to worry Sartre, who subsequently unites it with the problem of *place*, conveniently reuniting it with his phenomenological ontology: 'Naître c'est [...] *prendre sa place* ou plutôt la *recevoir*.'¹⁹ The place in which we find ourselves determines to a large extent our class, race, and nationality, and it is thus of vital importance. But the purely random nature of our birth into a particular situation is perhaps the most outrageous reminder of our contingent facticity:

Je suis *là*: non pas ici mais *là*. Voilà le fait absolu et incompréhensible qui est à l'origine de l'étendue et, par suite, de mes rapports originels avec les choses (avec celles-ci, plutôt qu'avec celles-là). Fait de pure contingence – fait absurde.²⁰

When we question our existence, it is primarily to the contingency of our birth, and therefore place, that we must return, and once in the troublesome predicament of a Heideggerian *situation limite*, Sartre's characters often challenge the contingent origin of their very being: 'Et voilà. (*Il rit*) C'était vraiment tout à fait inutile que je naisse.'²¹

Despite the gratuitous uniqueness of our individual *places*, there are naturally environmental features which we have in common. The problem of *autrui* will be dealt with later, but the existence of *objects* (*les choses*) is a significant and unifying element of place, and it is regarded by Sartre primarily as an area of conflict. Wherever we are born, we all face resistance from the objects around us, whether in the form of a mountain to climb, a river to cross, a wall to transcend, or a door to be opened, and this common resistance is referred to by Sartre as the Coefficient of Adversity.²²

If birth is seen as the first moment of consciousness, as the origin of ontological facticity, then death must be regarded as its last. Like birth, death (or rather, mortality) is a major obsession of metaphysical Absurdism, yet Sartre is content to reduce it initially to the phenomenological immanence of his notion of facticity:

Elle ne saurait donc appartenir à la structure ontologique du pour-soi [...]. La mort est un pur fait, comme la naissance; elle vient à nous du dehors et elle nous transforme en dehors. Au fond, elle ne se distingue aucunement de la naissance, et c'est l'identité de la naissance et de la mort que nous nommons facticité.²³

Sartre's outlook is again essentially ontological: as birth was linked with *place*, so is death transposed into *finitude*, the progressive exclusion of rejected possibilities, before it can merit the philosopher's attention. But in this case, the two terms are explicitly disassociated, and unlike birth, death is thus high-handedly rejected in an apparent manipulation of metaphysics to cover any area of ontological uncertainty:

Il convient de séparer radicalement les deux idées ordinairement unies de mort et de finitude [...]. La mort est un fait contingent qui ressortit à la facticité; la finitude est une structure ontologique du pour-soi qui détermine

¹⁸ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.185.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.571.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.572.

²¹ Henri, *Morts sans Sépulture, Théâtre I*, p.204.

²² The term is borrowed from Bachelard. See also later, in relation to free projects.

²³ *L'Etre et le Néant*, pp.629-30.

la liberté et n'existe que dans et par le libre projet de la fin qui m'annonce mon être. Autrement dit, la réalité humaine demeurerait finie, même si elle était immortelle, parce qu'elle se *fait* finie en se choisissant humaine.²⁴

The aforementioned conflict between *en-soi* and *pour-soi* is extended into this domain as well: death is seen as the final victory of the former over the latter, 'passifying' the subjectivity and re-seizing it as plenitude of being, so conquering, at least in part, the temporality and nothingness introduced into the world by the birth of the individual *Pour-soi*. Because death entails the relinquishing of consciousness, it is inherently Absurd, and this is apparently the sole characteristic with which it is accredited:

Ce qu'il faut noter tout d'abord c'est le caractère absurde de la mort.²⁵

Ainsi, la mort n'est jamais ce qui donne son sens à la vie: c'est au contraire ce qui lui ôte par principe toute signification. Si nous devons mourir, notre vie n'a pas de sens parce que ses problèmes ne reçoivent aucune solution et parce que la signification même des problèmes demeure indéterminée.²⁶

Rather than face these essential problems of birth and death, or follow them through to their logical conclusion of all-embracing Absurdity, Sartre chooses to override them, and the notion of death is ultimately expelled completely from the ontological make-up of *pour-soi*:

Il n'y a aucune place pour la mort dans l'être-pour-soi; il ne peut ni l'attendre, ni la réaliser, ni se projeter vers elle; elle n'est aucunement le fondement de sa finitude [...] Qu'est-elle donc? Rien d'autre qu'un certain aspect de la facticité et de l'être pour autrui, c'est-à-dire rien d'autre que du *donné*. Il est absurde que nous soyons nés, il est absurde que nous mourions.²⁷

This half conclusion, reminiscent in technique of Husserlian *epoche*, is far from satisfactory, and it soon becomes apparent that the only answer to, or even treatment of, these highly significant questions will be found in a metaphysical exploration of Absurdity. There is not even an approach to an answer in Sartre's theatre; the impression left by his fiction is Roquentin's desperate aporia: 'Ce qui m'a retenu, c'est l'idée [...] que je serais encore plus seul dans la mort que dans la vie.'²⁸

The logical and correct explanation for Sartre's considerable failures in this area is that he is primarily concerned with the *existing* consciousness, which lies solely within the immanent boundaries of the contingent metaphysical realities of birth and death; and it is of course in this domain that his truly outstanding achievements have been made. The concept at the very heart of Sartrean ontology is that of total, unadulterated freedom, and the connection between freedom and contingency is forced and expanded into philosophical assimilation: 'Le fait de ne pas pouvoir ne pas être libre est la *facticité* de la liberté, et le fait de ne pas pouvoir ne pas exister est sa *contingence*. Contingence et facticité ne font qu'un.'²⁹ Thus freedom and facticity are

²⁴ Ibid., pp.630-31.

²⁵ Ibid., p.617.

²⁶ Ibid., p.624.

²⁷ Ibid., p.631.

²⁸ *La Nausée*, p.164.

²⁹ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.567.

interdependent forces which govern the inner structure of *pour-soi*, and this interdependence is at the root of the Existentialist axiom contending that 'Man is condemned to be free'. Freedom, then, is the most *essential* part of our facticity, in both senses of the term, and it is the concept of freedom that truly distinguishes Sartrean Humanism. The ontological implications of the concept will be dealt with in the following section, but for the moment it suffices to accept the notion as contingent, and regard it as the defining feature of our facticity, and thus of our humanity: 'En fait, nous sommes une liberté qui choisit mais nous ne choisissons pas d'être libres: nous sommes condamnés à la liberté.'³⁰

As a feature of facticity, freedom is inherently Absurd, but it deserves this classification in its own right as the causal factor of our Anguish. For Sartre, Anguish is the human awareness (reflective apprehension) of its own freedom and its lack of external justification: 'C'est dans l'angoisse que l'homme prend conscience de la liberté.'³¹ Sartre thus accepts Heidegger's unification of his own *Angst* at the 'saisie du néant' with Kierkegaard's 'angoisse devant la liberté',³² thereby, like his predecessor, synonymising freedom and nothingness. But whereas Kierkegaard's Anguish was essentially religious, based on the premise of Original Sin, Sartre's is Humanistic in its ontological and anthropocentric origin. Projection towards the future is a major source of anguish, since *pour-soi* is forced to be its future 'sur le mode de n'être pas',³³ which takes it into the realm of possibility:

L'angoisse, en effet, est la reconnaissance d'une possibilité comme *ma* possibilité, c'est-à-dire qu'elle se constitue lorsque la conscience se voit coupée de son essence par le néant ou séparée du futur par sa liberté même.³⁴

By choosing its preferred *possible*, *pour-soi* projects itself continually from its past and through its present towards its future, but the realisation that *nothing(ness)* either justifies its choice or connects its three ekstases of temporality invokes a constant state of Anguish. Sartre notes that while *fear* is fear before the world, Anguish is anguish before oneself, and he later extends this definition to include an awareness of *autrui*: 'L'angoisse est constante, en ce sens que mon choix originel est une chose constante. En fait, l'angoisse est, selon moi, l'absence totale de justification en même temps que la responsabilité à l'égard de tous.'³⁵ The ethical implications of this extension (invoking the moral responsibilities demanded by the gaze of the Other) will be discussed in the final chapter, but we can see from this analysis that Sartre's conception of *angoisse*, though not metaphysical, contributes to the Absurd in terms of both ethics and ontology, through the constant implication of the Self and the Other.

Since Anguish precedes (and ideally incites) action, the theme is relatively overlooked in Sartre's theatre, and, yet again, it is left to Roquentin to convey the practical manifestations of this potent human drive:

Une véritable panique s'empara de moi. Je ne savais plus où j'allais. Je courus le long des Docks, je tournai dans les rues désertes du quartier Beauvoisis: les maisons me regardaient fuir, de leurs yeux mornes. Je me répétais avec angoisse: où aller? où aller? *Tout* peut arriver.³⁶

³⁰ Ibid., p.565.

³¹ Ibid., p.66.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p.69.

³⁴ Ibid., p.73.

³⁵ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, discussion, p.100.

³⁶ *La Nausée*, pp.113-14.

The three central characteristics of panic, doubt and contingent possibility can be appreciated here, and the personification of *en-soi*, of Being, provides a pleasing structural link between the affiliated notions of *l'angoisse* and *la nausée*, so effectively communicated by Cranston:

Nausea is the natural feeling that comes to anyone who confronts the fluid, sticky, viscous mess which constitutes the world of sensible appearance. Anguish is the natural feeling that comes from confronting the absolute openness of our own future, that nothingness in the centre of which we live.³⁷

These 'natural feelings' comprise then the conflicting worlds of *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, but this does not divide them completely, for perception of one can aggravate awareness of the other; and, like Roquentin, we often spend our time in a vertiginous flight from one to the other.

Originating in this viscous world of objects, Nausea is literally the *taste* of our contingent facticity, and it reveals itself to us in our conflicts with *en-soi* and *autrui*. It is symbolised particularly by material and physical waste, such as refuse, compost, vomit, excrement, and blood, and is portrayed sporadically in Sartrean theatre, but perhaps nowhere so effectively as in the eponymous pests of *Les Mouches*, who loom so ominously around the moral and physical decay evident in the plagued inhabitants of Argos. In our Anguish, Nausea is our natural response to our confrontational coexistence with *en-soi*; as with Roquentin, it is also the precondition to an enlightened appreciation of Being through a *dévoilement de l'existence*:

Alors la Nausée m'a saisi, je me suis laissé tomber sur la banquette, je ne savais même pas où j'étais; je voyais tourner lentement les couleurs autour de moi, j'avais envie de vomir. Et voilà: depuis, la Nausée ne m'a pas quitté, elle me tient.³⁸

To Roquentin, this excessive and introspective Absurdist, Being is *de trop* – grotesque and gratuitous, anonymous and ubiquitous. It is encapsulated memorably in the image of the seeping root of the *marronnier*, that epitome of intrusive viscosity which forces the character to a greater understanding of *pour-soi* through intense focalisation on *en-soi*: 'Combien de temps dura cette fascination? *J'étais* la racine du marronnier. Ou plutôt j'étais tout entier conscience de son existence.'³⁹ In actually *becoming* the root, Roquentin fuses himself with his own facticity, before realising the act of his reflection, and thus the potential of his dormant transcendence. But, continuing his impure (accessory) reflection, he begins to appreciate the Absurdity of Being, for which the root becomes a potent metaphor: 'L'absurdité, ce n'était pas une idée dans ma tête, ni un souffle de voix, mais ce long serpent mort à mes pieds, ce serpent de bois.'⁴⁰ The contemplation of Being awakens Roquentin to the Absurd duplicity of *en-soi*: he is faced, simultaneously, with the repulsive grotesqueness of its facticity, and the tempting fulfilment of its plenitude, which leaves him with a combination of Nausea and Anguish, both fleeing from and longing for the attributes of Being.

This somewhat paradoxical state reflects the characteristic ambiguity of *pour-soi*, and Roquentin's 'écœurement'⁴¹ invades the stage through characters like Mouton,

³⁷ Sartre, p.49.

³⁸ *La Nausée*, p.35.

³⁹ Ibid., p.185.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.181.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.137.

who effectively convey this precarious oscillation between the hollow Anguish of Man's existence and the Nausea of his being: 'Le cœur de l'homme est creux et plein d'ordures.'⁴² The resonance may be Beckettian, but the philosophy is profoundly Sartrean. The feeling of 'hollowness' presents itself to Sartre's characters as the permanent possibility of *potential*, which explains the conundrum of *pour-soi* 'being what it is not': 'L'homme est toujours séparé de ce qu'il est par toute la largeur de l'être qu'il n'est pas.'⁴³ Presented with the complete ontological structure of *en-soi*, *pour-soi* appreciates itself as 'lacking', a point well illustrated by Sartre in the example of the crescent moon: as *en-soi*, this phenomenon is neither 'full' nor 'incomplete', it simply *is*; but the *Pour-soi*, looking skywards, perceives the crescent as both incomplete and lacking, hence the vague misnomer of 'full moon'.⁴⁴ We can thus appreciate Sartre's contention that it is *pour-soi* that introduces absence, deficiency, and nothingness into the world. It is as if *en-soi* teases and chastises *pour-soi*, exhibiting its satisfaction in a diverse range of phenomena from the most profoundly beautiful to the most repulsively grotesque; and *pour-soi* is left unfulfilled, in deep dissatisfaction:

Que la réalité humaine soit manque, l'existence du désir comme fait humain suffirait à le prouver [...]. Un être qui est ce qu'il est [...] n'appelle rien à soi pour se compléter.⁴⁵

Ce que le pour-soi manque, c'est le soi – ou soi-même comme en-soi.⁴⁶

This unrealised and unrealisable potential is another defining feature of *pour-soi*, revealing once again the Absurd nature of its structure, for Man is left in a state of constant yearning for something he is never to attain. This merely compounds his Anguish, filling him with a sense of incompleteness and condemning him, perhaps for good, to unhappiness and suffering:

La réalité humaine est souffrante dans son être, parce qu'elle surgit à l'être comme perpétuellement hantée par une totalité qu'elle est sans pouvoir l'être, puisque justement elle ne pourrait atteindre l'en-soi sans se perdre comme pour-soi. Elle est donc par nature conscience malheureuse, sans dépassement possible de l'état de malheur.⁴⁷

It is worth noting two things about Sartre's flirtation with pessimism here: firstly, by referring to the 'nature' of the 'réalité humaine', he comes desperately close to acknowledging a human nature; and secondly, he seems to reject the possibility of a 'conscience heureuse', of action, hope, and salvation, as if anticipating the conclusions of the metaphysical Absurdists. As yet, there is little sign of optimism, for Sartre goes on to introduce the symbol of the 'trou':

Le trou est le symbole d'un mode d'être que la psychanalyse existentielle se doit d'éclaircir. [...] On voit tout de suite [...] qu'il se présente originellement comme un néant 'à combler' avec ma propre chair: l'enfant ne peut se tenir de mettre son doigt ou son bras entier dans le trou. [...] Ainsi, boucher le trou, c'est originellement faire le sacrifice de mon corps

⁴² Nekrassov, p.160.

⁴³ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.53.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.129.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.130.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.132.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.134.

pour que la plénitude d'être existe, c'est-à-dire subir la passion du Pour-soi pour façonner, parfaire et sauver la totalité de l'En-soi. Nous saisissons là, à son origine, une des tendances les plus fondamentales de la réalité humaine: la tendance à remplir.⁴⁸

Flouting Freud's libidinous fascination with the 'hole', Sartre's symbol is merely a continuation of the human desire to be 'whole'; and although Sartrean Woman, viscous and *trouée*, may be the ideal symbol of *le manque*, the condition is a fundamental reality for humanity as a whole: 'Le Pour-soi, en effet, n'est pas autre chose que la pure néantisation de l'En-soi; il est comme un trou d'être au sein de l'Etre.'⁴⁹

As a central concept of Existentialist psychoanalysis, it would be interesting to examine the significance of the 'trou' in works such as *Baudelaire*, *L'Idiot de la famille*, and *Saint Genet*, but this time we do not need to turn to the novel to find examples of the theme in practice. Sartre's theatre, though one of action, is peopled with characters who acknowledge, or at least betray, a desire to be whole, either as a Sartrean precursor to the mode of doing, or an un-Sartrean regret at a failed existence:

Je vais, je viens, je sais crier d'une voix forte, je promène partout ma grande apparence terrible [...]. Mais je suis une coque vide: une bête m'a mangé le dedans sans que je m'en aperçoive. [...] Ai-je dit que j'étais triste? J'ai menti. Il n'est ni triste ni gai, le désert, l'innombrable néant des sables sous le néant lucide du ciel: il est sinistre. Ah! je donnerais mon royaume pour verser une larme!⁵⁰

Johanna: Qu'est-ce qui vous possédait, vous?
Frantz: Est-ce que cela porte un nom? Le vide.⁵¹

Égisthe and Frantz's comments reveal a somewhat desperate sense of emptiness; they are tortured and possessed by nothingness and desire, and become inhuman and thus unsalvageable. They are contrasted, though, with more positive characters like Kean and Goetz, whose desire overcomes their nothingness and leads them to the greatest and most fundamental yearning, the desire to be God. Although in Goetz, this initially presents itself as a type of megalomania, it is in fact an existential rather than political goal, and it can be seen to shape and dominate every Fundamental Project of *pour-soi*. As pointed out by Champigny, the Sartrean desire to be God encapsulates and universalises the plagued condition of humanity, unifying the similar phenomena of Ancient Greek hybris, Christian myth, and the *mal du siècle* of Romanticism.⁵² This desire to be God is of course the logical conclusion to the tensions and conflicts apparent in the coexistence of *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, for if there were a God, this ideal (impossible) being would simultaneously enjoy the objective plenitude of the former and the transcendent subjectivity of the latter, would be defined as *en-soi-pour-soi*, Creator and created:

Le possible est pro-jeté en général comme ce qui manque au pour-soi pour devenir en-soi-pour-soi; et la valeur fondamentale, qui préside à ce projet est justement l'en-soi-pour-soi, c'est-à-dire l'idéal d'une conscience qui serait fondement de son propre être-en-soi par la pure conscience qu'elle prendrait

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.705.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.711.

⁵⁰ *Les Mouches*, p.192.

⁵¹ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.195.

⁵² *Stages on Sartre's Way*, p.7.

d'elle-même. C'est cet idéal qu'on peut nommer Dieu. Ainsi peut-on dire que ce qui rend le mieux concevable le projet fondamental de la réalité humaine, c'est que l'homme est l'être qui projette d'être Dieu.⁵³

We are now in the realm of pure Absurdism, for Man has been defined as the being which longs to be the being that cannot be. If the semantics are nonsensical, the philosophy is equally so, but we should not therefore presume that it is flawed – if Man is Absurd, why should he make sense? Aware of its contingent birth and gratuitous death, *pour-soi* nevertheless projects itself towards an *ens causa sui*, disregarding its pre-reflexive consciousness of this inherent impossibility: 'Le désir est manque d'être [...]. Cet être, nous l'avons vu, c'est l'en-soi-pour-soi, la conscience devenue substance, la substance devenue cause de soi, l'Homme-Dieu.'⁵⁴ The oxymoronic 'Homme-Dieu' is then an impossible synthesis of *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, a monistic, Spinoza-style consciousness, but one which by rejecting God is forced to found itself.

By exploring common human projects such as creating, possessing, destroying, and even eating, Sartre shows how *pour-soi* attempts to establish itself as its own foundation. The first of these projects is perhaps an undisguised attempt at self-deception, but the others are not quite so obvious. The act of possessing is effectively portrayed in *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, for one of Goetz's bids for divinity takes the form of the material possession of land. Sartre may link this politically with the projects of the bourgeoisie, but both have as their origin the ruthless search for plenitude:

Tout projet possessif vise à constituer le Pour-soi comme fondement du monde ou totalité concrète de l'en-soi en tant que cette totalité est, comme totalité, le pour-soi lui-même existant sur le mode de l'en-soi. Etre-dans-le-monde, c'est projeter de posséder le monde, c'est-à-dire saisir le monde total comme ce qui manque au pour-soi pour qu'il devienne en-soi-pour-soi.⁵⁵

But when this project predictably fails, it is merely replaced by the negative project of destruction, which shares the same end of becoming the Master of Creation:

C'est précisément la reconnaissance de l'impossibilité qu'il y a à *posséder* un objet, qui entraîne pour le pour-soi une violente envie de le *détruire*. Détruire, c'est résorber en moi, c'est entretenir avec l'être-en-soi de l'objet détruit un rapport aussi profond que dans la création. [...] La destruction réalise [...] l'appropriation, car l'objet détruit n'est plus là pour se montrer impénétrable.⁵⁶

And eating is no more than a 'sub-project' of destruction: 'Consommer, c'est anéantir et c'est manger; c'est détruire en s'incorporant.'⁵⁷ All these various acts of being are essentially appropriative, and appropriation, as a mode of having, is the result of the primary mode of being, namely the desire to be God, which Sartre recognises as the ideal or value of *pour-soi*:

On voit que l'appropriation n'est pas autre chose que le *symbole* de l'idéal du pour-soi ou valeur. [...] Je ne satisfais pas plus mon désir originel d'être à moi-même mon propre fondement, par l'appropriation, que le malade de

⁵³ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.653.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.664.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.688.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.683.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.684.

Freud ne satisfait son complexe d'Œdipe lorsqu'il rêve qu'un soldat tue le Tsar (c'est-à-dire son père).⁵⁸

Although we are left with an unsolved problem, with Man in a constant state of unfulfilled desire, we have at least gleaned a valuable insight into Sartrean psychoanalysis, and the exploration of the human yearning to be God has clarified the tense and highly complex interrelationship between the ontological structures of *pour-soi* and *en-soi*:

Tout se passe comme si le monde, l'homme et l'homme-dans-le-monde n'arrivaient à réaliser qu'un Dieu manqué. Tout se passe donc comme si l'en-soi et le pour-soi se présentaient en état de *désintégration* par rapport à une synthèse idéale. Non que l'intégration ait jamais *eu lieu*, mais précisément au contraire parce qu'elle est toujours indiquée et toujours impossible. C'est le perpétuel échec qui explique à la fois l'indissolubilité de l'en-soi et du pour-soi et leur relative indépendance.⁵⁹

We can now appreciate Sartre's concept of the Absurd and the specific use he makes of it as the starting point of his ontology. Although this central theme does not feature greatly in Sartrean theatre, close analysis of the plays does reveal an Absurdist outlook among the various stage characters, and a reading of Sartre's philosophy and novels, in particular *L'Être et le Néant* and *La Nausée*, gives a comprehensive impression of Sartre's ontological Absurdism. This impression is not as remote from the metaphysical Absurdist as one might imagine, despite Sartre's disregard for certain significant themes, and if we recall Camus's portrayal of Absurd Man in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, we cannot fail to acknowledge a definite resemblance:

Les dieux avaient condamné Sisyphe à rouler sans cesse un rocher jusqu'au sommet d'une montagne d'où la pierre retombait par son propre poids. Ils avaient pensé avec quelque raison qu'il n'est pas de punition plus terrible que le travail inutile et sans espoir.⁶⁰

The useless, hopeless task imposed on Sisyphus is certainly not dissimilar to that endured by Sartrean Man, who is condemned to the facticity of a contingent birth, anxious, finite freedom, and a gratuitous death, and who suffers *en-soi* in the form of Nausea, the Coefficient of Adversity, and the desire to be God.

If Sisyphus is a symbol for Sartrean Man, at least at this early stage, it is because Sartre accepts the Absurdity of Man's condition and facticity: his Humanism is based upon this premise, removing it definitively from the idealisation of earlier forms, and the intellectual, Humanist agent must regard Absurdism as the pre-condition, the *point de départ*, for any valid choice of action. But where Camus simply tells us that we should 'imaginer Sisyphe heureux',⁶¹ Sartre indicates a possible salvation, affording us a means of escape from the impasse of Absurdism in the form of personal transcendence:

Pour lui, l'Absurde est toujours déjà là: exister, c'est conserver le pouvoir de s'y arracher.⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.682.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.717.

⁶⁰ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.163.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.168.

⁶² Jeanson, Francis, *Sartre par lui-même*, p.163.

Il nous faut crever ou inventer l'homme, choisir l'existence ou sombrer dans l'Absurde.⁶³

For Sartre, then, to exist is to have the strength to transcend the Absurd and go beyond the Given. If, in a *désagrégation intime*, *pour-soi* is divided into facticity and transcendence,⁶⁴ it is the duty of the agent to transcend his facticity, converting his Anguish into action and rejoicing in his freedom. After all, in the famous words of Oreste, 'la vie humaine commence de l'autre côté du désespoir',⁶⁵ and without the catalyst of Anguish, its action would be doomed to impotence:

Il ne s'agit pas [...] d'une angoisse qui conduirait au quiétisme, à l'inaction. Il s'agit d'une angoisse simple, que tous ceux qui ont eu des responsabilités connaissent [...]. C'est la condition même de leur action.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid., p.178.

⁶⁴ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.111.

⁶⁵ *Les Mouches*, p.238.

⁶⁶ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, pp.32-33.

ii) A Celebration of Freedom: The Ontological Agent

It has been discussed how *pour-soi* is condemned to be free as a primary condition of its facticity. But through transcendence, it is able to overcome the Given and choose for itself its level of freedom. It is in this context that Sartre's agent is ontological, for without a philosophical appreciation of its unavoidable freedom, *pour-soi* will have little chance to project towards action, ethical commitment, and ultimate salvation. Freedom, then, is viewed by Sartre as an ontological condition, and the aim of this study is to consider its effects on the human reality and the problems posed by its relentless supposition.

In the same way that Absurdism formed a cohesive classification for the issues of facticity, freedom can be seen to determine the various manifestations of transcendence, defining the very structure of the consciousness and all of its *conduites*: 'Liberté, choix, néantisation, temporalisation, ne font qu'une seule et même chose.'⁶⁷ The notion of *néantisation* is of particular importance in that it is totally inseparable from the phenomenon of freedom; indeed the title of *L'Être et le Néant* is broadly analogous to the respective concepts of facticity and freedom, and serves to elucidate their connotations to some degree of precision. The connection between freedom and nothingness is that *pour-soi* 'nihilates' *en-soi* through its consciousness, drawing itself from the plenitude of Being towards a free existence as an abandoned Nothingness in the very heart of Being:

La liberté, c'est précisément le néant qui *est été* au cœur de l'homme et contraint la réalité-humaine à *se faire*, au lieu d'*être*. [...] L'homme ne saurait être tantôt libre et tantôt esclave: il est tout entier et toujours libre ou il n'est pas.⁶⁸

Sartre's polemic extremism comes to the fore in his writings on freedom, and there is literally no room for compromise of any kind. But the freedom described by Sartre is ontologically specific and should not be confused with the more literal semantics of the term. It is thus absurd and nonsensical to speak of freedom in terms of 'success' or of it giving us the ability to obtain what we desire; freedom must respect the constraints of facticity, whether presented as a prison door or the fact we have blond hair, and we can only transcend the Given within the framework of reason. However, when *en-soi* reveals itself as a resistance to our free projects, as a Coefficient of Adversity, it is ultimately our own freedom which willingly concedes this power:

Nous ne sommes séparés des choses par rien, *sinon par notre liberté*; c'est elle qui fait qu'*il y a* des choses, avec tout leur indifférence, leur imprévisibilité et leur adversité.⁶⁹

Le coefficient d'adversité des choses [...] ne saurait être un argument contre notre liberté, car c'est *par nous*, c'est-à-dire par la position préalable d'une fin que surgit ce coefficient d'adversité. Tel rocher qui manifeste une résistance profonde si je veux le déplacer, sera, au contraire, une aide précieuse si je veux l'escalader pour contempler le paysage. [...] Il est neutre.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.543.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.516.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.591.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.562.

Indeed it is thanks to this resistance that our freedom is revealed – ‘sans obstacle, pas de liberté’⁷¹ – for without the barrier of Being, our freedom would become superfluous. In terms of ontology, then, there are apparently no restrictions to our freedom apart from those we willingly impose on ourselves, as Sartre implies when he asserts that ‘chacun se fait sa propre porte’.⁷²

The theme of freedom can be seen to dominate much of Sartre’s early work, and the early plays, in particular, show characters rejoicing in their freedom. It has often been commented that *Les Mouches* provides the closest reflection of Sartre’s early philosophy, and it is this play whose hero most successfully incarnates his ontological agent: ‘Je ne suis ni le maître ni l’esclave, Jupiter. Je *suis* ma liberté! A peine m’as-tu créé que j’ai cessé de t’appartenir.’⁷³ Oreste literally becomes his own freedom, and by assuming his autonomy, he proudly takes his place in the celebrated ranks of Humanism. As such, he poses a threat to the hierarchical system of determinist absolutism, and Égisthe’s fears remind us clearly of the transcendent power of our freedom: ‘Il sait qu’il est libre. Alors ce n’est pas assez que de le jeter dans les fers. Un homme libre dans une ville, c’est comme une brebis galeuse dans un troupeau. Il va contaminer tout mon royaume et ruiner mon œuvre.’⁷⁴

Man’s assumption of his freedom, as typified by Oreste, opens the floodgates of Existentialist philosophy and carries us away from the desperate pessimism of Absurdism towards a new, enlightened optimism. Given the initial attacks on his philosophy for its apparent inducement towards Quietism, Sartre is particularly keen to emphasise this point: ‘L’existentialisme est un optimisme, une doctrine d’action, et c’est seulement par mauvaise foi que, confondant leur propre désespoir avec le nôtre, les chrétiens peuvent nous appeler désespérés.’⁷⁵ This optimism again emanates from our freedom, and the combination of these two qualities defines the nature of our transcendence. Sartre refers to *pour-soi*’s transcendence as a ‘négation interne et réalisante’⁷⁶ to describe its ability, within the internal unit of the consciousness, to ‘negate’ the facticity of Being (*en-soi*) and to ‘realise’ (to be aware of its situation and to bring about free projects); and any philosophical doctrine which endows the individual with the power of free transcendence must, he feels, be acknowledged as optimistic. If we accept this doctrine, our lives are what we make them and belong to no-one else:

Georges: A qui est-elle, ma vie?
Le Clochard: Elle est à vous. Entièrement à vous.⁷⁷

The burden of responsibility which this autonomy implies will be discussed in due course, but it cannot be fully appreciated without a prior understanding of how the ontological structure of *pour-soi* condemns it to this level of freedom. It is the consciousness, the transcending *Pour-soi*, that provides the key to this understanding by extending even further Sartre’s conception of freedom.

Sartre’s theory of consciousness is based on adaptation and development of both Descartes’s Cogito and Heidegger’s existential response to Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology.⁷⁸ Cartesian theory is extended in temporality to uncover a thinking

⁷¹ Ibid., p.564.

⁷² Ibid., p.635.

⁷³ *Les Mouches*, p.235.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.203.

⁷⁵ *L’Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.95.

⁷⁶ *L’Être et le Néant*, p.228.

⁷⁷ *Nekrassov*, p.24.

⁷⁸ See *La Transcendance de l’Ego*, pp.26-37, and Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Context of the Phenomenological Movement*, Chapter Three, pp.51-61.

being who is, was, and will be, simultaneously and transphenomenally,⁷⁹ and subjectivity becomes the pre-reflective consciousness (of) consciousness; and the *intentional* consciousness attributed to *Dasein* receives an appended modification on its transfer to *pour-soi*: 'La conscience est un être pour lequel il est dans son être question de son être *en tant que cet être implique un être autre que lui*.'⁸⁰ Sartre's adaptation is vital, for it affects his subsequent theory on *pour-soi*'s freedom, temporality, and on his goal of pure reflection. His consciousness is free because it is devoid of substance and content, and can never fix itself in nature or time, unlike the *conscience malheureuse* which is plagued with the Absurd desire to be God; and unlike Freudian consciousness, which can conveniently escape into the Unconscious, it exists only, and permanently, on the conscious level:

Toute conscience [...] est conscience *de* quelque chose [...]. La conscience n'a pas de 'contenu'. [...] Une table n'est pas *dans* la conscience, même à titre de représentation. Une table est *dans* l'espace, à côté de la fenêtre, etc.⁸¹

The Sartrean theory is unoriginal in its phenomenological traditionalism and problems such as that of *knowledge* are marginalised into a fitting 'complex'.⁸² The impression we are left with is perhaps less convincing in its ontological validity than in its pleasing literary metaphor: 'L'eau est le symbole de la conscience: son mouvement, sa fluidité, cette solidarité non solidaire de son être, sa fuite perpétuelle, etc., tout en elle me rappelle le Pour-soi.'⁸³ However, we have now gleaned significant insight into the ontological structure of the consciousness – its free structural void, its reflective and pre-reflective duality, and its function as a type of translucent interface between *en-soi*, itself, and its temporal ekstases – and this foundation is essential if we are to appreciate the central core of Existentialist theory, the vital attestation that existence precedes essence.

The profound and logical implication of this conclusion is that the free, transcendent agent of Sartrean Existentialism has no recourse to a fixed, universal essence or a 'human nature'. Since the consciousness serves the *Pour-soi* as a temporal transcendence, there can be no linearly determinant relationship between its past (its essence), its present (its nothingness), and its future (its existence). Its past is its only essence, the *en-soi*, the substance that it longs for, since it can be regarded and assessed by itself and by *autrui*; its present is its consciousness, a nothingness that can never be fixed; and its future is the free existence ahead of it, determined solely by its choice of action:

Il n'y a pas de nature humaine, puisqu'il n'y a pas de Dieu pour le concevoir. L'homme est seulement, non seulement tel qu'il se conçoit, mais tel qu'il se veut [...]. L'homme n'est rien d'autre que ce qu'il se fait.⁸⁴

Sartre's rejection of human nature is of course a central tenet of his Humanism, for he takes the supremacy of Man to its logical conclusion in making him the sole creator of his essence. This point is emphasised by a critique of God's Creation which establishes a role reversal in this first creative process:

⁷⁹ It is also extended in implication to elucidate Sartre's theory of the conscious choice of emotions.

⁸⁰ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.29, (my italics).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁸² In this case, into the Actaeon Complex, which regards knowledge as a means of appropriative violation along with eating, destruction, and sexual sadism, again caused by the fundamental desire to *remplir*.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.702.

⁸⁴ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.22.

Adam ne se définit point par une essence, car l'essence est, pour la réalité humaine, postérieure à l'existence. Il se définit par le choix de ses fins, c'est-à-dire par le surgissement d'une temporalisation ek-statique qui n'a rien de commun avec l'ordre logique.⁸⁵

Thus Adam may choose to create God (to *believe*), but God has no power to create Adam (Man) nor to endow him with an essence. Sartre's Humanism succeeds then in replacing God with Man, and, to this extent, is truly anthropocentric.

To deny this elevation by seeking refuge in a creating God or an aprioristic human nature is to act in Bad Faith, and the effect is to re-reverse the roles and reduce the agent to the puppet. This denial of the freedom offered to Man by Existentialist Humanism is particularly well explored in the opening tableau of *Nekrassov*, where Georges, offered a lifeline ('une corde') to prevent his suicide, defends his decision to accept it:

Georges: Je l'ai prise parce que j'y étais forcé.
 La Clocharde: Forcé par quoi?
 Georges: Tiens: par la nature humaine. C'est contre nature, le suicide!⁸⁶

Georges is using the cushion of human nature to deny his free decision to save himself, and, in so doing, he provides us with a typical example of the human abdication of freedom to an unknown entity. Another such entity is the consistent human personality or character,⁸⁷ which amounts to little more than the microcosmic solipsism of a large-scale human nature:

Ainsi ne trouvons-nous aucune donnée dans la réalité humaine, au sens où le tempérament, le caractère, les passions, les principes de la raison seraient des *data* acquis ou innés, existant à la manière des choses. La seule considération empirique de l'être-humain le montre comme une unité organisée de conduites ou de 'comportements'.⁸⁸

So in the same way that Man cannot be justified by a transcendent human nature, neither can he hide behind his conception of himself. Sartre has reduced the personality to an organised unit of active behaviour whose only cohesion lies in the choice of Fundamental Project; and if I am to judge myself, I can only rely on the actions of my past. Hence I may claim, with justification, that I have always acted courageously in the past, but this does not mean that I *am courageous* or that I will behave courageously *in the future*, for the future is my free existence, waiting to be chosen:

Ce monde n'a de sens comme futur qu'en tant que j'y suis présent comme un *autre* que je *serai*, dans une autre position physique, affective, sociale, etc. [...] Le Futur [...] est quelque chose qui attend le Pour-soi que je suis. Ce quelque chose c'est moi-même.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.547.

⁸⁶ *Nekrassov*, p.22.

⁸⁷ For a more detailed study on personality, see Phyllis Sutton Morris, *Sartre's Concept of a Person: An Analytic Approach*, and *La Transcendance de l'Ego*, which seeks to reverse the misconception of the primacy of the ego over consciousness. See especially pp.54-72.

⁸⁸ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.555.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.171-72.

Our future is waiting for us to define it, and by the time we arrive at a given point in the future, we may find ourselves in a different situation and seem like a different person. This is consistent with Sartre's extension of Heidegger's definition of consciousness to include the idea of introspection or impure reflection involving the *Self* reflecting on an *Other* within the unit of a single consciousness. Thus Sartre's attack challenges the very idea of *Self*, for the term implies a consistent psychological unit (personality) which could fix itself in pure reflection. This would require a synthesis of consciousness and self, which is an impossibility if the consciousness is free and void; so by implication, the *Self* is at best meaningless, and at worst defunct. Its only relevance is in the past, where it has some substance, but even then its consistency is debatable and of no import whatsoever to the freedom of the present and the choices of the future. Consequently, as pointed out by Frantz, our lives begin to resemble an empty platform, our consciousnesses the wait for a derailed train: 'Qu'est-ce que c'est vivre? Vous attendre?'⁹⁰ In the absence of the *Self*, *pour-soi* is forced to choose its own future subjectively and without justification. It must act in a quasi-psychological vacuum based solely on the ontological reality of its freedom. If, in denial, it chooses to relate to the essence of its *Self*, it will be living in the past, ignoring its transcendence, and acting in the Bad Faith caused by envy of *en-soi*: 'Si la volonté doit être autonome, il est impossible de la considérer comme un fait psychique *donné*, c'est-à-dire *en-soi*.'⁹¹ We are reminded here of Roquentin, gazing at the root of the *marronnier* and longing for its plenitude: one of the roots of our *Nausée* is indeed this contrast between being and existence, between *en-soi* which *is*, and *pour-soi* which *is not what it is and is what it is not*. Devoid of plenitude, Man is a series of *conduites*, condemned to spend his life in a desperate search for his own identity:

Le Père:	Je te donne la recette: si tu veux commander, prends-toi pour un autre.
Werner:	Je ne me prends pour personne. ⁹²

By accepting the oscillating nature of *pour-soi*, the blurred dichotomy between *Self* and *autrui*, both these characters are acting in Good Faith: Le Père is acknowledging the function of role-play and the practicality of impure reflection, and Werner is approaching the autonomous ideal in relinquishing the search for the *Self*.

The reverse attitude is of course that taken by the waiter in Sartre's description of Bad Faith or by Goetz in his attempts to be Evil and then Good. *Pour-soi* can no more reduce itself to a social function than it can postulate its character to be consistently good or bad, and impose on it a subjective value judgement: 'Pour-moi, je ne suis pas plus professeur ou garçon de café que beau ou laid, juif ou aryen, spirituel, vulgaire ou distingué. Nous appellerons ces caractéristiques des *irréalisables*.'⁹³ Sartre's theatre is full of characters searching for identity – Oreste to be a saviour, Hugo, a political assassin, Werner, a successful business man and a loved son – and it is only those select few who transcend their identities by their actions and celebrate their freedom and the absence of the *Self* who are recognised by Sartre as heroic. A good example of an anti-hero is provided in the (dead) character of Garcin, who seeks recognition for his courage, despite the cowardice of his past actions; but Estelle, seeing him for what he is, is aware that his essence is not transcendent, and, in her own Bad Faith, she reduces him to his pure facticity:

⁹⁰ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.255.

⁹¹ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.518.

⁹² *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.29.

⁹³ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.610.

J'aime les hommes, Garcin, les vrais hommes, à la peau rude, aux mains fortes. Tu n'as pas le menton d'un lâche, tu n'as pas la bouche d'un lâche, tu n'as pas la voix d'un lâche, tes cheveux ne sont pas ceux d'un lâche. Et c'est pour ta bouche, pour ta voix, pour tes cheveux que je t'aime.⁹⁴

The tragedy of *Huis Clos* lies in the fact that the characters are dead and have no more cards to play. Thus they can legitimately search for a defined personality in the substance of their completed actions, but, unlike their living counterparts, they are not free to redefine themselves in future action – *les jeux sont faits*. Sartre goes on to link *pour-soi*'s attempt to find itself a character with its primary desire to be God, for in this ideal synthesis of modes, the consciousness could simultaneously be void and substance, transcendence and facticity, autonomous freedom and determined personality: 'Le caractère est même souvent ce que le Pour-soi tente de récupérer pour devenir l'En-soi-pour-soi qu'il projette d'être.'⁹⁵ The stage characters who show themselves to be guilty of such conduct have not progressed beyond the limitations of the Absurd, and it will take a revised Fundamental Project, a radical conversion like that of Goetz, to re-route them on the path of the ontological agent.

In contrast to Goetz, the character of Nasty is perhaps the leader on this track, for while Sartre's heroes are 'psychologically incredible', Nasty has no 'Self that interferes' and his personality is 'indistinguishable from his actions'.⁹⁶ He is the embodiment of the revolutionary impulse, of pure action, and although there is little evidence of the intellectual, ontological, or indeed ethical agent in him, he is in terms of personality the perfect Sartrean 'character'. However, he is a one-dimensional character who is never subject to the complexity of choice reserved for thinking beings like Hilda and Goetz, and without the compulsion of choice, he can never display the freedom of character ultimately realised by his protagonists. In this respect, he is a 'magic' character along the lines of Kean, who, as an actor, escapes the question of identity by never playing himself, who excels on the stage, where action is but gesture: 'On joue pour ne pas se connaître et parce qu'on se connaît trop. [...] Est-ce que je sais, moi, quand je joue? Est-ce qu'il y a un moment où je cesse de jouer?'⁹⁷ Kean is defined as a social puppet: on the stage, he is modelled by playwright and director, and off it, high society pulls the strings; like Nasty, Kean's freedom is limited by his inability to choose, and ultimately we must agree with Champigny that 'the theatre, the actor, is the unhappy conscience of society'.⁹⁸

Choice is a major theme of Sartrean Existentialism and it is inseparable from the issues of freedom, consciousness, identity, personality, Bad Faith, and ethics. It lies at the heart of any discussion on Sartre's agent, for it bridges the gap between identity and action:

La réalité humaine ne saurait recevoir ses fins, nous l'avons vu, ni du dehors, ni d'une prétendue 'nature' intérieure. Elle les choisit et, par ce choix même, leur confère une existence transcendante comme la limite externe de ses projets.⁹⁹

It is the ends we choose, then, and not our disparate, mercurial personalities, which are our true transcendent forces. If Sartrean Man is the sum of his choices, it is because he

⁹⁴ *Huis Clos*, p.83.

⁹⁵ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.637.

⁹⁶ McCall, Dorothy, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, pp.40-41.

⁹⁷ *Kean*, p.81.

⁹⁸ *Stages on Sartre's Way*, p.140.

⁹⁹ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.519.

is condemned to be free, to choose, and thus to choose freedom. Without this choice, there will be no being, no free or valid existence: 'Quel que soit notre être, il est choix. [...] Le concept technique et philosophique de liberté, le seul que nous considérons ici, signifie seulement: autonomie du choix.'¹⁰⁰ Oreste's autonomy is proven when he triumphs over Jupiter and chooses to liberate the people of Argos; Goetz's freedom blossoms in his final rejection of absolutes represented by the Devil and the Good Lord; and even Garcin sees the light through the mist of his ironic self-deception: 'Je n'ai pas rêvé cet héroïsme. Je l'ai choisi. On est ce qu'on veut.'¹⁰¹ But the harsh reality of choice is that it is a constant imposition on the consciousness. Bereft of nature and personality, *Pour-soi* is forced to reinvent itself on a continuous scale, to transcend any hope of identity by creating itself *en route*: 'Ainsi, sommes-nous perpétuellement menacés de la néantisation de notre choix actuel, perpétuellement menacés de nous choisir – et par conséquent de devenir – autres que nous sommes.'¹⁰² The concluding phrase illustrates effectively the close interrelationship existing between consciousness, personality, and choice, all three of which indicate the temporal autonomy that constitutes the free ontological agent. Again we are reminded of Sartre's sketch of Humanism, for in reinventing ourselves, we contribute to the reinvention of Man; in choosing for ourselves, we replace a puppeteer God with an active human agent like Oreste: 'Je ne reviendrai pas à ta nature: mille chemins y sont tracés qui conduisent vers toi, mais je ne peux suivre que mon chemin. Car je suis un homme, Jupiter, et chaque homme doit inventer son chemin.'¹⁰³

Time and temporality form the catalyst for the necessity of choice. If time were suddenly to come to a halt, *pour-soi* could finally fix itself in the elusive instant, in its present situation and *conduite*. It would then be free of choice, indeed of freedom, and in pure reflection, it could seize its own persona and become the God it longs to be. For the ontological Absurdist, this is the true ideal of eternity: 'L'éternité que l'homme recherche, ce n'est pas l'infinité de la durée, de cette vaine course après soi dont je suis moi-même responsable: c'est le repos en soi, l'atemporalité de la coïncidence absolue avec soi.'¹⁰⁴ In the absence of eternity, *pour-soi* becomes the being which introduces temporality into the world, and choice is therefore part of its facticity; even the choice *not* to choose must constitute a choice. Sartre's temporal extension of the Cogito and the temporal aspects of consciousness and personality have already been uncovered, but the significance of the temporal domination of choice remains to be elucidated.

Pour-soi is separated from itself and the world around it in the three temporal ekstases of past, present, and future: 'Le temps me sépare de moi-même, de ce que j'ai été, de ce que je veux être, de ce que je veux faire, des choses et d'autrui.'¹⁰⁵ The past has been shown to represent Man's essence, the substance posterior to his existence, and while the present is a transcendent shell of nothingness at the heart of Being and the future exists as *pour-soi*, the past *is* in the mode of *en-soi*, along with History and the History book. But this does not mean that our past is dead and fixed in stone, for the use we make of the present and future determines the significance of what has gone before: 'Moi-seul en effet peut décider à chaque moment de la portée du passé [...]. En me projetant vers mes buts, je sauve le passé avec moi et je décide par l'action de sa signification.'¹⁰⁶ The optimism continues, for Sartre is determined to reunite the past with the present and future. He regards time as a sliding scale, and there is literally

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.551 and pp.563-64.

¹⁰¹ *Huis Clos*, p.90.

¹⁰² *L'Être et le Néant*, p.543.

¹⁰³ *Les Mouches*, p.237.

¹⁰⁴ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.188.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.176.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.579.

nothing separating past from present from future: 'Que le passé soit, comme le veulent Bergson et Husserl, ou ne soit plus, comme le veut Descartes, cela n'a guère d'importance si l'on a commencé par couper les ponts entre lui et notre présent.'¹⁰⁷ Sartre, typically, is less interested in the respective ontological merits of the temporal dimensions than in the effect they have on the individual *Pour-soi*. If we compare this effect with a moving snail, the blurred edges of the three dimensions become more apparent: the present would be the moving snail; the past, the sporadic, viscous trail left behind; and the future, the free, open path stretching out in front. However closely we observe, we cannot see where the trail turns to snail, where the past becomes present, and at any given point, the snail is free to determine its future path, to turn left, right, or even backwards. But the analogy employed by Sartre is his cherished one of water: 'Depuis longtemps la pierre qui a troué l'eau a rencontré le fond de la mare, que des ondes concentriques parcourent encore sa surface.'¹⁰⁸ The past and the present combine here in the fluidity of water, which, we recall, is the essential characteristic of the consciousness. Our past may be ourselves, our unity with plenitude, but until the day we die it can never be curtailed, for it flows into the present and refuses to define us. Because of this fluidity, the present also defies fixation and presents itself as 'pur glissement le long de l'être, pur néant'.¹⁰⁹ The nature of the present calls into question the very existence of the 'instant', or at least the homogeneous instant; if human reality is governed by time, the basic unit of this reality (the *temporal atom*) must be the instant, but because of the successive nature of time, 'le monde s'effondre en une poussière infinie d'instant',¹¹⁰ and if the instant existed, *pour-soi*, by definition, could *be*, and we know that this is impossible: 'Il n'y a jamais d'instant où l'on puisse affirmer que le pour-soi *est*, parce que, précisément, le pour-soi *n'est jamais*. Et la temporalité, au contraire, se temporalise tout entière comme refus de l'instant.'¹¹¹

Sartre's study of temporality is also useful in defining the inner structure of *pour-soi*. If we examine the present in the absence of the instant, and rather in its close interrelationship with its past and future, a clearer understanding of *pour-soi* cannot fail to emerge:

Le présent n'est pas, il se présente sous forme de fuite [...]. Il est fuite hors de l'être co-présent et de l'être qu'il était vers l'être qu'il sera. En tant que présent il n'est pas ce qu'il est (passé) et il est ce qu'il n'est pas (futur).¹¹²

Thus temporality supports the theory that *pour-soi* can transcend its essence and determine its own future; the present *is* the consciousness. But as the dimension which governs choice and action, the future is the most important focus for Existentialist ontology. It is in relation to the future that the *Pour-soi* thrives as a human being and rejoices in its freedom, and this emphasis on the future is the main justification for Sartre's claim of optimism. If we were not free, we would have to *be*, not choose, our future:

Le Futur ne fait que préessquisser le cadre dans lequel le Pour-soi se fera être comme fuite présentifiante à l'être vers un autre futur. Il est ce que je serai si je n'étais pas libre et ce que je ne peux avoir à être que parce que je suis libre. [...] Je suis mon Futur dans la perspective constante de la possibilité de

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.153.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.157.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.260.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.176.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.196.

¹¹² Ibid., p.168.

ne l'être pas.¹¹³

Choice is all about the future, and by projecting ourselves from our pasts, through our presents and into our futures, we are able to escape the Absurdity of our facticity. The seeming trap of temporality and the desire for the eternal instant can be avoided if we choose our projects in the light of our freedom:

C'est par le Passé que j'appartiens à la temporalité universelle, c'est par le présent et le futur que j'y échappe.¹¹⁴

Dire que le passé du pour-soi est en sursis, dire que son présent est une attente, dire que son futur est un libre projet [...] c'est une seule et même chose.¹¹⁵

Sartre's term for our initial choice in life is the Fundamental Project or Original Choice. It is, to a certain extent, an adaptation of Aristotle's *Life Plan*,¹¹⁶ and is a concept of extreme importance given the lack of a given God, nature, essence, or personality which could determine us in advance. Indeed our only hope of identity lies in our choice of Fundamental Project, for through this, we choose our very being and attempt to define ourselves as we wish ourselves and others to regard us. However, this early and initial consciousness of freedom is also a causal factor of our Anguish: 'J'émerge seul et dans l'angoisse en face du projet unique et premier qui constitue mon être, toutes les barrières, tous les garde-fou s'écroulent, néantisés par la conscience de ma liberté.'¹¹⁷ Because we are totally unjustified in our choice of project, we cannot fail to sense a certain Anguish, and the huge significance given to this choice by Sartre can only compound our Anguish. The central aim of Existentialist psychoanalysis is to determine the choice of Fundamental Project, for, according to Sartre, once this is established, the core of the individual lies bare, and all his further projects are mere accessories which can be slotted in like vertebrae to the spine. This naturally produces a polemical contrast with Freudian psychoanalysis, which looks essentially to sexual drives and parental/environmental influences to discover the underlying personality. The contrast can be appreciated in Sartre's description of Adler's inferiority complex:

Ainsi le complexe d'infériorité est projet libre et global de moi-même, comme inférieur devant l'autre, il est la manière dont je choisis d'assumer mon être-pour-autrui, la solution libre que je donne à l'existence de l'autre, ce scandale insurmontable. Ainsi faut-il comprendre mes réactions d'infériorité et mes conduites d'échec à partir de la libre esquisse de mon infériorité comme choix de moi-même dans le monde.¹¹⁸

Whereas Freud's patient has been made to feel inferior by other people, Sartre's victim has chosen the complex himself as a means of surviving his coexistence with *autrui*. But ultimately, whatever our choice of Fundamental Project, it amounts to a desire to *be* – to *be* inferior, to *be* intelligent, to *be* generous, in the same way that a table *is* a table: 'L'homme est fondamentalement *désir d'être* [...]. Le projet originel [...] est donc le

¹¹³ Ibid., pp.173-74.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.259.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.583.

¹¹⁶ See Phyllis Sutton Morris, *Sartre's Concept of a Person: An Analytic Approach*, p.103ff.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.77.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.537.

*projet d'être.*¹¹⁹ Unless our Fundamental Project constitutes a choice of freedom, we risk falling back into the Absurdist impasse of the desire to be God. This is clearly portrayed by Sartre in the character of Goetz, who, after two unsuccessful (Absurd) choices of project – the choice to be Bad and then the choice to be Good – finally rejects these absolutes in favour of freedom and ambiguity. On each occasion, he can start afresh and with no regrets, thus his 'je ne reconnais pas les fautes de l'année dernière' at his first conversion, and his 'je recommence tout' at his second.¹²⁰

Like Goetz, our free projects exist within the broad limitations of our Fundamental Project. Just as Goetz establishes the 'Cité du Soleil' to be Good, so may we blush to be Inferior or buy a lavish present to be Generous. Our daily projects are the outward display of our freedom, and in choosing our own ends, we cannot fail to act, to transform ourselves from the modes of having and being to the valued modes of doing:

Le pour-soi qui existe sur le mode volontaire veut se récupérer lui-même en tant qu'il décide et agit. Il ne veut pas seulement être porté vers une fin, ni être celui qui se choisit comme porté vers telle fin: il veut encore se récupérer lui-même en tant que projet spontané vers telle ou telle fin.¹²¹

In choosing our projects, we become the authors of our own actions, and thus of our own destiny, and it is in this respect that the ontological agent becomes the active agent of Humanism. Sartre's stage characters are constant witnesses to this transformation in a broad scope of projects ranging from Oreste's brutal murders to Hilda's choice of pacifism; and a fundamental change of project such as that undergone by Goetz marks the clearest and most spectacular aspect of our freedom:

Ces instants extraordinaires et merveilleux, où le projet antérieur s'effondre dans le passé à la lumière d'un projet nouveau qui surgit sur ses ruines et qui ne fait encore que s'esquisser [...] ont souvent paru fournir l'image la plus claire et la plus émouvante de notre liberté.¹²²

Moving as this may be, the inherent contradiction can not be overlooked: Sartre seems to recognise the existence and validity of the *instant*, which had previously been clearly rejected. This is obviously a point of confusion for Sartre, who does not accept the instant as a temporal unit but is happy to postulate it as the moment of decisive choice:

Dans le moment où le pour-soi pense se saisir et se faire annoncer par un néant pro-jeté ce qu'il est, il s'échappe car il pose par là même qu'il peut être autre qu'il est. Il lui suffira d'expliciter son injustifiabilité pour faire surgir l'*instant*, c'est-à-dire l'apparition d'un nouveau projet sur l'effondrement de l'ancien.¹²³

The instant has become for Sartre a contradiction in terms, and it is to be one of the several problems raised by his relentless supposition of absolute freedom.

Another negative aspect of Sartrean freedom presents itself in the form of responsibility, for if we are free to choose, we can blame no-one but ourselves for the consequences of our actions. Not only does this add to our existential anguish, it also leads to the Bad Faith of the denial of freedom revealed so often in the abdication of

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.652.

¹²⁰ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.145 and p.239.

¹²¹ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.528.

¹²² Ibid., p.555.

¹²³ Ibid., p.560.

choice. The motive behind choice is important to Sartre, and even when we claim to be unaware of any motivation, there is always a reason directing what we choose:

Free to choose our conduct, we are also free to choose the causes which determine it – even when we think this is not the case; even when, in the voluntary act, we have deliberated carefully and at length over our motives.¹²⁴

Sartre divides motivation into subjective ‘mobiles’ and objective ‘motifs’; we are pre-reflectively conscious of the former and reflectively conscious of the latter. The example he gives is of someone joining the Socialist movement, whose ‘motifs’ are to serve the interests of humanity and to be part of the major force of History in the years to come, and whose ‘mobiles’ are the shame of belonging to the privileged classes, an attempt to shock those close to me, etc.¹²⁵ Our ‘mobiles’ are our hidden motives, and because Sartre rejects the Unconscious, the *Pour-soi* must at least be pre-reflectively conscious of them. This is what makes his doctrine somewhat harsh, for we can never negate the burden of responsibility:

Notre description de la liberté ne distinguant pas entre le choisir et le faire, nous oblige à renoncer du coup à la distinction entre l’intention et l’acte. On ne saurait pas plus séparer l’intention de l’acte que la pensée du langage qui l’exprime.¹²⁶

L’homme, étant condamné à être libre, porte le poids du monde tout entier sur ses épaules: il est responsable du monde et de lui-même en tant que manière d’être. Nous prenons le mot de ‘responsabilité’ en son sens banal de ‘conscience (d’)être l’auteur incontestable d’un événement ou d’un objet’.¹²⁷

In Sartre’s theatre, the heroes and anti-heroes can ultimately be separated by their attitudes towards responsibility and choice. If we consider heroes such as Oreste, Goetz, and Hoederer, all three acknowledge the motivation behind their choices and willingly accept responsibility for the result of their actions. Even farcical heroes like Georges can bear the burden of their freedom: ‘C’est à moi seul que je dois des comptes. Je suis fils de mes œuvres!’¹²⁸ Goetz’s first conversion seems at first to be the work of chance, for Sartre, making rare use of dramatic irony, perhaps to emphasise the point, shows Goetz throwing dice to decide his future; only later do we discover that he cheated, and actually made a willing choice to be Good. But other characters are not so strong and, fearful of the burden of their own responsibility, choose *not* to choose, playing instead the role of Pontius Pilate:

Je ne suis responsable de rien! Je me lave les mains de toute l’affaire!¹²⁹

Je ne veux pas choisir: je ne veux pas que tu te laisses tuer, je ne veux pas que tu le tues. Pourquoi m’a-t-on mis ce fardeau sur les épaules? Je ne connais rien à vos histoires et je m’en lave les mains. [...] Je suis innocente

¹²⁴ Lafarge, René, *Jean-Paul Sartre: His Philosophy*, p.60.

¹²⁵ See *L’Être et le Néant*, p.523.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.564.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.639.

¹²⁸ *Nekrassov*, p.25.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.149.

de tout.¹³⁰

Sibilot and Jessica are typical anti-heroes in their common reaction to responsibility: by foiling the strengths of their more autonomous counterparts, they betray their underlying weakness and passivity. Like many others, they are ultimately crushed under the bitter burden of Sartre's testing doctrine.

The problems of conscious knowledge and the instant have already been dealt with, but the repercussions of Sartrean freedom are as numerous as they are uncomfortable. At the top of the list is probably the objection to the high-handed rejection of Essentialism in favour of an uncompromising Existentialism where existence precedes essence. At times, Sartre's portrayal of a universal human condition comes dangerously close to an acceptance of a shared human nature to which all men can relate; and the fact that Sartre makes use of Classical tragedy in his artistic creation is perhaps a testimony to the validity of such a universal nature. Certainly, a reading or an audience of the plays of, say, Shakespeare, Molière, Miller, and Ionesco points towards a shared existence which transcends the barriers of time, nationality, colour, religion, and class. Yet Sartre makes no allowances for such empathy: his world is individualistic to the point of solipsism and socio-historical to the point of political totalitarianism.

His rejection of the personality, the psychologically consistent unit, is equally determined, despite the evidence of genetic and environmental influence: identical twins separated at birth and raised in different continents have tended to show remarkably similar characteristics, as have unrelated foster children raised by the same parents. Sartre's ontology and theatre make no room for such coincidence, and although his proof seems tempting, and even somewhat noble, it is not entirely consistent with the world we see around us. There is, however, the occasional slip in his characterisation, the odd inconsistency between his cafés and his stage, where characters defy the Existentialism of their creator: 'C'est une affaire de vocation [...]. On est tueur de naissance. Toi, tu réfléchis trop: tu ne pourrais pas.'¹³¹ Hoederer's declaration is uncomfortably accurate, for it seems that Hugo, victim of his class, his nature, his personality, whatever, would never be able to become a natural assassin, a cold-blooded killer. His suicide, his 'unsalvageability', proves his failure, and along with it, perhaps a failing of the doctrine that condemns him: if he is free to choose and to change, how can he be unsalvageable? Neither is there any place for psychological abnormality, for syndromes which have been proven to govern social behaviour: the closest we get is in the issue of madness, which is regarded as a somewhat eccentric, if not even superior, *conduite magique*.¹³²

The rejection of the Unconscious is equally astounding, if over-explored, given the weight of evidence in its favour. Sartre has criticised Freud for substituting his favoured *mauvaise foi* with the notion of 'a lie without a liar'¹³³ which would absolve the agent from responsibility and thus question the viability of a discernible code of ethics; and he challenges the conveniently adjustable structure of the Freudian Unconscious: 'Si vraiment le complexe est inconscient, c'est-à-dire si le signe est séparé du signifié par un barrage, comment le sujet pourrait-il le reconnaître?'¹³⁴ Such objections are certainly not without validity, but the fact that Sartre steadfastly refuses to at least explore the unknown world of the Unconscious must count against him,

¹³⁰ *Les Mains Sales*, p.179.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.213.

¹³² See especially the characterisation of Pierre and Ève in *La Chambre*, where 'madness' is undoubtedly linked with heightened perception of the world of objects and *en-soi*.

¹³³ See *L'Être et le Néant*, p.90ff., and p.552: 'Le concept de mauvaise foi [...] nous paraît devoir remplacer ceux de censure, de refoulement et d'inconscient.'

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.661.

particularly if we bear in mind the celebration of the dream evident in Absurdist theatre like Ionesco's, and the admission of de Beauvoir that Sartre was inconsistent in his view of the human unconscious.¹³⁵ The evidence of successful post-hypnotic suggestion is yet another factor working in Freud's favour and diminishing the responsibility emanating from the consciously chosen motive.

The choice of Fundamental Project is another area of contestation. We are given little insight into when or how it is chosen, if its subject is conscious of his choice, if it can be changed, etc. Sartre declares that it is 'unique',¹³⁶ and then contradicts himself by showing Goetz undergo two changes in this initial choice of project; and if it is chosen in early life, how can its naïve author be held responsible for its repercussions? De Beauvoir is again more helpful on this matter, but even she does not leave us satisfied:

Aucune question morale ne se pose à l'enfant tant qu'il est encore incapable de se reconnaître dans le passé, de se prévoir dans l'avenir; c'est seulement quand les moments de sa vie commencent à s'organiser en conduite qu'il peut décider et choisir.¹³⁷

The moral is certainly ambiguous, and it seems that such a life plan amounts to little more than token substitution for Freudian complex and desire,¹³⁸ and human nature and personality, all of which are totally unacceptable for the free, autonomous Existentialist. To criticise it Existentially, one need only refer to the seeming unanimity of the Fundamental Project and the desire to be God: Sartre has ultimately left us with the futile desperation acknowledged by the intellectual agent in his perception of the Absurd, a desperation he was so eager to avoid.¹³⁹

Sartre's answer to these and many other questions lies in his safety net of *mauvaise foi*, a term which is, despite popular belief, of the most highly-complex nature, and which has thus been drastically simplified and misconstrued by philosophers, audiences, and critics alike. Bad Faith is actually any attempt to flee the ambiguity of the *désagrégation intime*, the dualistic composition of *pour-soi* comprising transcendence and facticity. If we oscillate from one of these 'ontological poles' to the other, instead of accepting our imposed freedom to be simultaneously at the mercy of both, then we 'deceive ourselves' and act in Bad Faith. At its extremes, then, *mauvaise foi* presents itself as *pour-soi* declares either 'je ne suis pas ce que je suis' or 'je ne suis que ce que je suis' (i.e. defines itself as pure transcendence or pure facticity).¹⁴⁰ The duality is succinctly clarified by Champigny: 'Hamlet's question was: to be or not to be. Oreste's answer is: to be and not to be.'¹⁴¹ Of course, *mauvaise foi* presents itself throughout the wide range of thoughts and actions between these two extremities – indeed to such an extent that *pour-soi* spends most of its time in a state of Bad Faith. But Sartre's theatre, though dealing with the question in all its complexity, also succeeds in giving straightforward examples of his characters' Bad Faith:

¹³⁵ *La Force de L'Age*, p.135: 'Une de nos contradictions, c'est que nous niions l'inconscient; cependant Gide, les surréalistes et, malgré nos résistances, Freud lui-même, nous avaient convaincus qu'il existe en tout être un "infracassable noyau de nuit" [André Breton's term] [...] qui parfois éclate, scandaleusement.'

¹³⁶ See *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.77.

¹³⁷ *Pour une Morale de l'Ambiguïté*, pp.38-39.

¹³⁸ For a satirical contrast of the two, see especially *L'Enfance d'un Chef*, where the protagonist's (Lucien Fleurier's) childhood is subject to both Freudian and Existentialist psychoanalysis.

¹³⁹ His concept of finitude and condemnation of the Gidean *acte gratuit* are equally gratuitous, and they must compound our dissatisfaction with central areas of Sartre's ontology.

¹⁴⁰ See *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.96 ff.

¹⁴¹ *Stages on Sartre's Way*, p.87.

A la fin j'ai pensé: c'est ma mort qui décidera; si je meurs proprement, j'aurai prouvé que je ne suis pas un lâche...¹⁴²

Ils ne m'ont pas touchée. Personne ne m'a touchée. J'étais de pierre et je n'ai pas senti leurs mains.¹⁴³

These two contrasting statements highlight the tendency of the *Pour-soi* to cling to one of its ontological poles to mask itself from the Anguish of its Freedom: in believing that his death, his final act (and, moreover, a magic act), will nullify the actions of his life, his *en-soi*, Garcin is denying his facticity and striving after pure transcendence; and by attempting to 'switch off' her consciousness, convincing herself that she is as hard, as complete, as stone, Lucie is doing just the opposite, disregarding her transcendence and clinging to her facticity. Both extremes are obvious attempts to escape from Anguish; both fail, because in attempting to flee from Anguish, *pour-soi* must first be conscious of its existence.

More subtle forms of Bad Faith are found in the *Pour-soi*'s *conduites* of reflection and distraction. Reflection is the attempt of the consciousness to become its own object through dissociation, and Sartre divides this extasis into 'pure' and 'impure' reflection. The former, in its Good Faith, realises the transcendence of *pour-soi*, maintains a distance (or nothingness) between its subject- and object-consciousness, and thus points the way towards salvation;¹⁴⁴ and the latter, as accessory reflection, tries to fix the *réfléchi* as *en-soi*, unifying the two distinctive acts of consciousness and remaining in the Bad Faith of psychic contemplation. *L'Etre et le Néant*, while hinting at pure reflection in occasional footnotes, is essentially a study of impure reflection, of *pour-soi*'s attempt to deny its duality: 'L'Ego sous la double forme grammaticale du Je et du Moi représente notre *personne*, en tant qu'unité psychique transcendante.'¹⁴⁵ In impure reflection, the *Je* and the *Moi* are synthesised to create a fully constituted personality or Self, and the implicit Bad Faith involved can only result in failure: 'La réflexion impure est un effort avorté du *pour-soi* pour être autre en restant soi.'¹⁴⁶ Reflection is Bad Faith in the present dimension of time, and it is compounded by distraction, which, in a similar assumption of Self, regards the past as a consistent, determinant Essence, thus denying the freedom of choice in the projects of the future. Both reflection and distraction deny the freedom of transcendence, which means that Essentialism, Freudian Psychoanalysis, and even introspection can all be regarded by Sartre as products of Bad Faith. Emotions, too, can be viewed in this light: in *La Transcendance de l'Ego*, Sartre claims that emotions are consciously chosen qualities rather than transcendent states,¹⁴⁷ and in *Un Théâtre de Situations*, he is quick to condemn the *théâtre de caractères* for the same reasons. Thus, according to Sartre, *pour-soi* freely chooses to be happy at a celebration, sad at a funeral, etc: 'Ses souffrances viennent d'elle, c'est elle seule qui peut s'en délivrer: elle est libre.'¹⁴⁸ Electre's Bad Faith, so well observed by Oreste, is evident throughout the play, as she turns herself from vengeful and courageous to doubtful, guilty, and afraid. Emotions can

¹⁴² *Huis Clos*, p.80.

¹⁴³ *Morts sans Sépulture, Théâtre I*, p.237.

¹⁴⁴ See Thomas C. Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity*, esp. p.54.

¹⁴⁵ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.209. See also *La Transcendance de l'Ego*.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.208.

¹⁴⁷ For example, he says of hatred: 'Le rapport de la haine à l'"Erlebnis" particulier de répulsion n'est pas logique. C'est un lien magique, assurément. [...] C'est en termes exclusivement magiques qu'il faut parler des rapports du moi à la conscience.' (p.51). This is discussed also by Sylvie Le Bon, who describes emotion for Sartre as a 'conduite magique singulière', a 'fuite irréfléchie d'une conscience devant un monde qui l'envahit violemment et qu'elle voudrait anéantir.' (*Ibid.*)

¹⁴⁸ *Les Mouches*, p.227.

only be valid as means in conjunction with freely chosen ends; if they are seen as unavoidable or unproductive ends in themselves, then *pour-soi* loses its transcendence and slips back into Bad Faith. To avoid this, *pour-soi* must incorporate its emotional activity into the rest of its transcendent existence: 'We are responsible [...] not only for our voluntary acts but for our emotions and our passions, for all our activity.'¹⁴⁹

As a means of fleeing Anguish, Bad Faith is equivalent to our *être-pour-fuir*. Most, if not all, of our *conduites de mauvaise foi* are direct attempts to escape our reality, but none are so apparent as our *conduites magiques* or *d'abandon*. Presumably because the implications of Sartre's freedom are so extreme, many of his stage characters try in vain to escape from their responsibilities; the result is a rich and eclectic range of the various means of temporary flight:

- Goetz: Ote-moi la pensée! Ote-la! Fais que je m'oublie! Change moi en insecte!¹⁵⁰
- Jules: Je bois pour oublier.¹⁵¹
- Bergerat: Nous sommes ruinés et déshonorés.
Charivet: Je veux me coucher! Je veux me coucher!¹⁵²
- Frantz: Déjà ma folie se délabre; Johanna, c'était mon refuge; que deviendrai-je quand je verrai le jour?¹⁵³
- Frantz: Savez-vous pourquoi je ne me suis pas tué? Je me disais: ce qui est fait restera fait. (*Un temps. Profondément sincère*) Cela n'arrange rien de mourir.¹⁵⁴

Even from this small selection, we can appreciate the common *conduites magiques* of metamorphosis, chemical intoxication, sleep, madness, suicide, and death, whose common aim is to escape consciousness, and therefore freedom, and therefore Anguish. Thus emotional Bad Faith, at its most extreme, may also present itself as magical behaviour:

L'émotion n'est pas un orage physiologique: c'est une réponse adaptée à la situation; c'est une conduite dont le sens et la forme sont l'objet d'une intention de la conscience qui vise à atteindre une fin particulière par des moyens particuliers. L'évanouissement, la cataplexie, dans la peur, visent à supprimer le danger en supprimant la conscience du danger. Il y a *intention* de perdre conscience pour abolir le monde redoutable où la conscience est engagée et qui vient à l'être par elle. Il s'agit donc de conduites magiques provoquant des assouvissements symboliques de nos désirs et qui révèlent, du même coup, une couche magique du monde. En opposition à ces conduites, la conduite volontaire et rationnelle envisagera techniquement la situation, refusera le magique et s'appliquera à saisir les séries déterminées et les complexes instrumentaux qui permettent de résoudre les problèmes.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Lafarge, René, *Jean-Paul Sartre: His Philosophy*, p.83.

¹⁵⁰ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.153.

¹⁵¹ *Nekrassov*, p.293.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.298.

¹⁵³ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.276.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.364.

¹⁵⁵ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.521.

Sartre contrasts such behaviour with voluntary, rational conduct, through which the magical becomes technical and problems may be solved. In magical behaviour, problems are avoided in a conduct of flight as *pour-soi* flees from its transcendence to the safety of its body. This can be appreciated particularly in the *conduites* of fainting, sleep, and death, which represent progressive attempts to subjugate the consciousness to the material plenitude of *en-soi*, and therefore a vain attempt to solve the absolute problem of surpassing the desire to be God. The ultimate project of flight must be that of suicide, the choice to exterminate the consciousness and return to matter like a self-burst balloon, but this choice too is doomed to failure:

Le suicide ne saurait être considéré comme une fin de vie dont je serais le propre fondement. Etant acte de ma vie, en effet, il requiert lui-même une signification que seul l'avenir peut lui donner; mais comme il est le *dernier* acte de ma vie, il se refuse cet avenir; ainsi demeure-t-il totalement indéterminé. Si j'échappe à la mort, en effet, ou si je 'me manque', ne jugerai-je pas plus tard mon suicide comme une lâcheté? L'événement ne pourra-t-il pas me montrer que d'autres solutions étaient possibles? Mais comme ces solutions ne peuvent être que mes propres projets, elles ne peuvent apparaître que si je vis. Le suicide est une absurdité qui fait sombrer ma vie dans l'absurde.¹⁵⁶

For Sartre, then, *pour-soi* is not only condemned to be free, but also to a permanent consciousness of its Freedom, and any attempt to escape this facticity is restricted to the realm of magic. Even the self-imposed death of the consciousness cannot transcend its facticity; the only achievement of suicide is the cowardly submission to the Absurd.

It can be seen that the concept of Bad Faith enables Sartre to rebuff almost any criticism of his ontology: the objections we might raise concerning Essentialism, genetics, the human personality, parental nurture, emotional behaviour, and the Unconscious can be countered through an invocation of the Sartrean concepts of Freedom, consciousness, transcendence, dissociation, reflection, distraction, and *conduites magiques*, and through their unifying force of the Fundamental Project. Our essential objections, then, must be to the notion of Bad Faith itself.

Bad Faith, in its complex, far-reaching, and esoteric suppositions, exists as its own network of self-defence, conveniently providing implicit criticism of any attack on its merits. In its own bad faith, it is ironically reminiscent of Freudian analysis, since neither leave a place for dispute or progression:

The trouble [...] with this theory of bad faith, is simply that there is no room for a discussion of its merits. It is part of the teaching of Freudian psychology that its findings will be resisted, so that any resistance to it is taken as a confirmation of its truth. The same is even more true of Sartre's theory of bad faith. If a critic denies it, the denial will only be taken as evidence of the critic's own bad faith.¹⁵⁷

Such 'evidence' may be justified against critics like Boutang, who refuse to accept a Godless, loveless world, regarding Sartre as an agent of the Devil,¹⁵⁸ but in general the assumption is unfair and even ridiculous. For example, Sartre's *conduites magiques* such as fainting and sleep may well constitute a flight from the reality of consciousness,

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.624.

¹⁵⁷ Cranston, Maurice, *Sartre*, pp.50-51.

¹⁵⁸ See Pierre Boutang and Bernard Pingaud, '*Sartre est-il un Possédé?*' suivi de '*Un Univers Figé*'.

but they are often unavoidable, physical needs which should not be regarded as intentional escapism; and suicide, though unquestionably a chosen flight, is perfectly compatible with the notion of finitude, which, if taken to its logical conclusion, cannot escape the threat of extinction – hence the unsalvageable finitude of Hugo and of Franz, whose suicides provide fittingly dramatic *dénouements* but contradict the tenets of the philosophy behind them.

Another main objection must be that concerning Good Faith and Sartre's 'dangling carrot' of Sincerity. As an ideological, rather than purely semantic, opposition to Bad Faith, Good Faith should constitute an attempt to accept the ambiguity of *pour-soi*'s 'désagrégation', to accept the simultaneous reality of its facticity and transcendence, and to engage in pure reflection by refusing the dissociation of the consciousness and acknowledging instead the gap of free, transcendent nothingness between its *Je* and its *Moi*: 'Une liberté qui se veut liberté [...] choisit [...] d'être toujours à distance de soi.'¹⁵⁹ The ontological agent will avoid the Bad Faith of Essentialism, distraction, and impure reflection by respecting its temporal autonomy and choosing its undetermined future self. But we are told by Sartre that in practice, Good Faith is but a project of Bad Faith, as *pour-soi* flees its Anguish in the direction of facticity: 'La bonne foi cherche à fuir la désagrégation intime de mon être vers l'en-soi qu'elle devrait être et n'est point.'¹⁶⁰ Sincerity thus becomes another unrealisable, an unattainable goal like that to achieve the godlike synthesis of *en-soi-pour-soi*; for if we determine to be 'sincere', or 'true to ourselves', we must first determine what we *are*, which implicitly necessitates a rejection of the *désagrégation intime*, an acceptance of the Self as defined personality, and a reduction of *pour-soi* to mere object status. This acceptance reminds us of Sartre's 'sincere man', who reproaches the homosexual for not admitting that he *is* (only) what he is, denies his friend's transcendence, and so falls himself into Bad Faith: 'Qu'est-ce donc alors que la sincérité, sinon précisément un phénomène de mauvaise foi?'¹⁶¹ Another example is given in the Bad Faith of Goetz, who, in one of his Fundamental Projects, aspires towards a similar Sincerity: 'Je ne peux pas être un autre que moi.'¹⁶² Thus Bad Faith, however undesirable, precarious, and 'métastable',¹⁶³ becomes a normal and even durable state of existence for the *Pour-soi*, and it is difficult to see how even the ontological agent can escape its clutches. If we are condemned to *mauvaise foi*, we may question the very validity of Good Faith and Sincerity, and wonder why we should not choose to act in Bad Faith or escape from our Anguish in a *conduite magique*. Sartre's answer is simple: the logical and rational conduct of the lucid consciousness must be to accept the reality of its structure and condition, and pursue the goal of sincere Good Faith, for 'l'attitude de stricte cohérence est l'attitude de bonne foi'.¹⁶⁴ The problem of the Bad Faith evident in Good Faith will be solved through Authenticity, claims Sartre;¹⁶⁵ and when the ontological agent acts freely and in situation, he will discover his moral self, and his floundering Good Faith will finally become his ethics.

¹⁵⁹ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.722.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.111.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.103.

¹⁶² *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.104.

¹⁶³ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.88.

¹⁶⁴ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.82.

¹⁶⁵ See *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.111, footnote.

iii) The Blank Canvas of Morality: The Ethical Agent

Sartre's agent has now progressed from an intellectual appreciation of his Absurd condition and through an ontological recognition of his boundless freedom to a realisation of his moral self and of the ethical implications of his freedom in situation. Just as transcendence offered an escape from the entrapment of Absurdism, so can pure reflection and ethical Authenticity provide salvation from the ontological quandary of Bad Faith. The challenge of Authenticity will be dealt with in regard to the Sartrean hero; the challenge for the agent is to apply the freedom of his ontology to the blank canvas of his moral conduct and to seek the ethical coherence hinted at in Sartre's discussions on Good Faith. The philosophical progression from ontology to ethics has never been a smooth one, and for Sartre it has proved particularly testing; but for Sartre's agents, it must begin with an ideological fusion between their freedom and morality:

L'homme qui cherche à justifier sa vie doit vouloir avant tout et absolument la liberté elle-même: en même temps qu'elle exige la réalisation de fins concrètes, de projets singuliers, elle s'exige universellement. [...] Se vouloir moral et se vouloir libre, c'est une seule et même décision.¹⁶⁶

If logic decrees that we should try to avoid Bad Faith, then it must also encourage a strict adherence to Freedom as the catalyst for a human ethics; and Sartre's Humanist ethics, founded on the basis of this Freedom, links its agent's whole identity with the choice of his morality: 'L'homme se fait; il n'est pas tout fait d'abord, il se fait en choisissant sa morale.'¹⁶⁷ The ethical agent is thus forced to create himself in his choice of morality, and the interdependence of his ontological liberty and ethical situation serves to narrow down the scope of his choice: 'Il n'y a de liberté qu'en situation et il n'y a de situation que par la liberté.'¹⁶⁸ Freedom is meaningless, restricted to a condition of facticity, unless it is applied with vigour to the concrete situation. We have seen the futile desperation of the desire to *be* in the Absurd desire to be God and in the ontological absurdity of Bad Faith, but in the realm of ethics, *pour-soi* can progress to the mode of *doing*, and find hope and identity in the meaningful world of action. Moreover, this ethical choice of action will confirm us in our Humanism, for, according to Sartre, 'en *pratiquant* la charité nous ne servons que les hommes, mais en étant charitable nous servons Dieu. [...] Il faut que la moralité se dépasse vers un but qui n'est pas elle. Donner à boire à celui qui a soif non pour donner à boire ni pour être bon mais pour supprimer la soif. La moralité [...] doit être choix du monde, non de soi.'¹⁶⁹ Ethics, then, cannot exist in a vacuum; it must be grounded in the context of Humanistic need and based on concrete action. Like ontology, ethics should discourage solipsism, and the two should work in conjunction to eradicate the primacy of Self. For indeed ethics is as inherent to the agent as ontology:

Le rapport entre la subjectivité agissante et le Bien est aussi étroit que le rapport intentionnel qui lie la conscience à son objet [...]. Le Bien ne peut être conçu en dehors d'une subjectivité agissante, et pourtant il est l'au-delà de cette subjectivité. [...] L'homme doit [...] être considéré comme l'être par quoi le Bien vient au monde.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Beauvoir, Simone de, *Pour une Morale de l'Ambiguïté*, pp.34-35.

¹⁶⁷ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.78.

¹⁶⁸ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.569.

¹⁶⁹ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.11.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.573-74.

If ontologically *pour-soi* brings nothingness into the world, then on the ethical plane, it is the agent responsible for 'goodness'. But before we can *act*, or locate the source or goal of this goodness, we need to determine an ethical *modus vivendi*, a Fundamental Project based on our moral values, and this challenge, the justification behind our choices, lies at the heart of Sartre's interest in ethics and forms the greatest inspiration for his theatre:

Ce que le théâtre peut montrer de plus émouvant est un caractère en train de se faire, le moment du choix, de la libre décision qui engage une morale et toute une vie. La situation est un appel; elle nous cerne; elle nous propose des solutions, à nous de décider.¹⁷¹

Sartre has moved on from ontology to ethics, and he is now concerned with the implications of his ontology on the outside world, on society and politics, on the concrete situation *au-milieu-du-monde*. His theatre explores real life situations, from the everyday to the *limit* or *boundary*, and, though didactic, it leaves for the individual the choice of his own ethics.

However, Sartre certainly does not refrain from establishing strict guidelines for the moral agent: the legacy of his Humanism, his Absurdism, and his ontology cannot fail to exert a profound influence on his detailed exploration of ethics. The Existentialist Humanist is abandoned in a Godless world, free, responsible, and with no recourse to a higher moral being to justify his choice of values:

En effet, tout est permis si Dieu n'existe pas, et par conséquent l'homme est délaissé, parce qu'il ne trouve ni en lui, ni hors de lui une possibilité de s'accrocher. Il ne trouve d'abord pas d'excuses. [...] C'est ce que j'exprimerai en disant que l'homme est condamné à être libre. Condamné, parce qu'il ne s'est pas créé lui-même, et par ailleurs cependant libre, parce qu'une fois jeté dans le monde, il est responsable de tout ce qu'il fait.¹⁷²

The implications of Sartre's Humanism for the ethical agent are particularly severe, for deprived of a Moral Father, of guidance and obedience, *pour-soi* emerges ethically bastardised. The Biblical myth of Abraham evoked by Sartre has a double significance here:¹⁷³ Abraham's religious faith becomes Sartre's ethical Bad Faith, based as it is upon obedience and relinquished responsibility; and if the myth became reality, it would merely prove the existence of a jealous, violent God with an ethic of its own. Sartre's rejection of God fortunately annihilates this problem, but it leaves Man in an ethical void, compounding the awareness of his ontological Absurdism:

Frantz: Il n'y a pas de Dieu, non?

Le Père: Je crains qu'il n'y en ait pas: c'est même parfois bien embêtant.¹⁷⁴

Perhaps the one true benefit of an omniscient, omnipotent God would be the resulting possibility of a tangible code of ethics. But Sartre, ever defiant about the autonomy of Man, turns the problem round, focusing instead on the challenging optimism proffered by Humanistic freedom. This defiance features strongly in Sartrean theatre, where characters rejoice in their freedom and accept the morality within them:

¹⁷¹ *Un Théâtre de Situations*, p.20.

¹⁷² *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, pp.36-37.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp.29-32.

¹⁷⁴ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.348.

Égisthe: Ce qui est juste, c'est ce que veut Jupiter. [...]

Oreste: Que m'importe Jupiter? La justice est une affaire d'hommes, et je n'ai pas besoin d'un Dieu pour me l'enseigner.¹⁷⁵

Oreste's Humanism is truly inspiring, and it opens the way for the ethical autonomy later to be realised by heroes such as Hoederer and Goetz.

The first step on this moral crusade comes with the outright rejection of absolutism, which marks another central feature of Sartrean Humanism. It is explored most notably in *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, where the protagonist battles with the conflicting forces of Good and Evil until he sees the light and rejects both in favour of human, ethical, and political pragmatism. The play has been called an atheist allegory,¹⁷⁶ but it is actually closer to the Humanist school of thought in its attempt to project mankind rather than cynically dismiss the very notion of God: 'It is not the metaphysical problem of the existence of a divinity that concerns Sartre; it is the psychological and ethical implications of a hieratic way of thinking.'¹⁷⁷ Again, the extension of freedom from the ontological plane to the ethical sphere cannot be overlooked. Sartre is advocating free, autonomous ethics, removed from the constraints of any organised system or doctrine. Although Goetz ultimately succeeds in freeing himself from his ethical restraints, others such as Heinrich are plagued with a *conscience malheureuse*, revealing the cowardly inner conflict of their ethical Bad Faith: 'Un élu, c'est un homme que le doigt de Dieu coince contre un mur.'¹⁷⁸ Heinrich, and indeed Nasty, may well function as Goetz's alter-egos, but their main role is to effect an underlying symbiosis which elucidates the conflicts within the protagonist and urges him towards the anagnorisis of ethical liberty; and it is the final realisation that Evil and Good, the Devil and the Good Lord, are two sides of the same coin which clears the way for the change in Goetz's Fundamental Project, the genuine ethical conversion: 'Il faut avoir bonne vue pour distinguer le Bon Dieu du Diable.'¹⁷⁹ The rejection of absolutes is regarded as a vital precondition for valid moral conduct, for absolutism necessitates the abdication of choice, responsibility, and freedom. If Heinrich, as a priest, incarnates the notion of Bad Faith, then we should perhaps look to Goetz, the freedom fighter, to clarify authentic moral action.

The first goal of descriptive ethics must be to determine a discernible set of values, for without a set of moral guidelines, any form of normative ethics must seem an impossibility. However, Sartre links the moral value with the ethics of absolutism, and attempts to decipher Existentialist *values* are thus likely to be in vain. As Man is free, his values must be founded in his Freedom, and there is thus nothing (since *pour-soi* is both Freedom and nothingness) to justify his choice of values. This ethical unjustifiability, and hence paramount responsibility, is of course the main source of Man's moral anguish:

Je n'ai ni puis avoir recours à aucune valeur contre le fait que c'est moi qui maintiens à l'être les valeurs; rien ne peut m'assurer contre moi-même, coupé du monde et de mon essence par ce néant que je suis, j'ai à réaliser le sens du monde et de mon essence: j'en décide, seul, injustifiable et sans excuse.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ *Les Mouches*, p.205.

¹⁷⁶ See McCall, Dorothy, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, pp.37-38.

¹⁷⁷ Champigny, Robert, *Stages on Sartre's Way*, p.124.

¹⁷⁸ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, pp.52-53.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.224.

¹⁸⁰ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.77.

As with ontological Anguish, Man is often tempted to escape from this moral responsibility, and he usually finds his refuge in the Spirit of Seriousness, which subordinates him to the world, granting values a concrete, transcendent force of their own. Just as the Biblical Moses received the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone, so does the Serious man regard his values as concrete, as written in stone, pre-existing both himself and the choice of his actions. In a sensitive comparison, Sartre links ethics with language, moral actions with the choice of words:

Il ne saurait, en effet, y avoir de lois de la parole avant qu'on parle. Et toute parole est libre projet de désignation ressortissant au choix d'un pour-soi personnel et devant s'interpréter à partir de la situation globale de ce pour-soi.¹⁸¹

The analogy is appropriate for a writer of such renown, and Sartrean Man is consistently shown to be an able agent of his (logical) language, particularly on the stage. Another comparison is made with hierarchical organisations, where the feudal system is used to show that power, like the value, is both upheld and surpassed by the countless individual projects undertaken by every human being.¹⁸² So whether in the realm of ethics, language, or power, we must remember that these abstracts come into the world only through *pour-soi*, without which they are meaningless, empty, and redundant; and it is thus illogical, if not unethical, for *pour-soi* to subordinate itself to an entity it invents and therefore should control. Or, in Sartre's words, 'peu importe que le Bien soit. Il faut qu'il soit par nous.'¹⁸³

However, as the ethical equivalent of Bad Faith, the Spirit of Seriousness is the default morality of *pour-soi*, the refuge from the moral ambiguity it cannot bear to face. In the world of objects, it functions as the denial of the Fundamental Project: we may claim to like eating jam for its bright colour or its sweet taste, whereas really it merely recreates, in its viscous, compressible form, our original desire to *possess*. But in the domain of meta-ethics, its effect is much more serious, for by reversing the natural roles of Man and his values, it threatens the very core of any form of Humanism; and as an illogical, unethical, and harmful force, the agent must strive to defeat it:

Le résultat principal de la psychanalyse existentielle doit être de nous faire renoncer à *l'esprit de sérieux*. [...] Le résultat de *l'esprit de sérieux* qui [...] règne sur le monde, est de faire boire comme par un buvard les valeurs symboliques des choses par leur idiosyncrasie empirique [...]. L'ontologie et la psychanalyse existentielle [...] doivent découvrir à l'agent moral qu'il est *l'être par qui les valeurs existent*. C'est alors que sa liberté prendra conscience d'elle-même et se découvrira dans l'angoisse comme l'unique source de la valeur, et le néant par qui le *monde* existe.¹⁸⁴

Sartre's theatre clearly illuminates how this moral freedom is denied and traces the dire consequences of its characters' flight from ethical anguish. By definition, agents must be the subjects of their object-values, and must therefore renounce any claim to Seriousness; characters who deny their freedom place values on an ethical pedestal and flee responsibility to become their puppets:

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.600.

¹⁸² Ibid., p.606.

¹⁸³ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.574.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.721-22.

Moi, *j'ai* des idées, j'en produis à chaque minute par douzaines [...]. Vous, vous n'en avez pas, ce sont elles qui vous ont; elles vous tiennent dans leurs griffes, elles vous labourent le crâne et vous bouchent les yeux; c'est précisément pour cela qu'elles convainquent les autres; ce sont des rêves de pierre, elles fascinent tous ceux qui ont la nostalgie de la pétrification.¹⁸⁵

Sur toutes les routes il y a des crimes. Des crimes préfabriqués qui n'attendent que leur criminel. Le vrai soldat passe et s'en charge. L'histoire vous déplaît? Je n'aime pas vos yeux!¹⁸⁶

These two examples illuminate the trap set for the ethical puppet: in the first speech, Georges contrasts his own (ironic) authenticity with Sibilot's restrictive Bad Faith; and in the second, Frantz, unable to support his historical guilt, reveals his own Seriousness to the perceptive vision of Johanna. The notion that ideas or crimes possess or pre-exist humanity is the most extreme form of Serious thought, and it establishes a vicious circle between the moral standpoints of anguish, gesture, and absolutism. It acts as a threat to Humanism because in the absence of an absolute God, Serious Man can usurp the moral infallibility of a divine Godhead, and use God as a mouthpiece for the doctrine of his choice: 'Quand Dieu se tait, on peut lui faire dire ce que l'on veut.'¹⁸⁷ If we consider quasi-religious dictatorships or pseudo-religious cults, we can easily appreciate the dangerous force of this common technique of ethical control. It is a variation on this theme that forms the inspiration for *Les Mains Sales*, where transcendent, infallible principles are juxtaposed with the ambiguous politics of moral pragmatism. This ethical polemic is somewhat crudely embodied in the characters of Hoederer and Hugo, whose bitter exchanges reveal the inherent conflict between Humanism and Seriousness:

Hoederer:	Tu n'aimes pas les hommes, Hugo. Tu n'aimes que les principes.
Hugo:	Les hommes? Pourquoi les aimerais-je? Est-ce qu'ils m'aiment? ¹⁸⁸

Being free of any preordained set of values, Hoederer represents the true ethical agent as conceived by Sartre, and although audiences and critics in the past have sympathised with the idealism of Hugo, the playwright makes it clear with whom his own sympathies lie: 'Hugo n'a jamais été pour moi un personnage sympathique, et je n'ai jamais considéré qu'il eût raison par rapport à Hoederer [...]. C'est l'attitude de Hoederer qui seule me paraît saine.'¹⁸⁹ But Hugo is, in a sense, the tragic hero of the play, and the purer contrasts are to be found in characters like Louis and Olga who do not even doubt the validity of the values for which they are prepared to die. As potential martyrs to their cause, they highlight the dangerous extremism of any such collective morality.

It is clear then that, like Hoederer, the ethical agent should reject the illogical temptation of the values and absolutes advocated by the Spirit of Seriousness and base his moral conduct on the sole principle of Freedom in situation. This, of course, is not the easy route: ethical liberty removes the chance of justification and collectivism, condemning the agent to full personal responsibility, gratuitous choice, and moral ambiguity: 'For humanistic existentialism [...] man's absurdity and insecurity stem from

¹⁸⁵ Nekrassov, p.116.

¹⁸⁶ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.295.

¹⁸⁷ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.121.

¹⁸⁸ *Les Mains Sales*, p.195.

¹⁸⁹ *Un Théâtre de Situations*, p.249.

the fact that there is no ultimate standard of reference, that 'sub specie æternitatis' all actions are equal.'¹⁹⁰ Bereft of any point of reference, divine or otherwise, Sartrean Man is once more condemned to be free. Sartre's ethics are of course based on this philosophical premise, and he uses two effective analogies to underscore his perception of morality: the game (or 'play'), and the artist's canvas. The more straightforward is the blank canvas, free, empty, and clear, which gradually comes to life as the artist asserts his individuality through his choice of colour, style, and technique:

Il faut comparer le choix moral avec la construction d'une œuvre d'art [...]. Il est bien entendu qu'il n'y a pas de tableau défini à faire, que l'artiste s'engage dans la construction de son tableau, et que le tableau à faire, c'est précisément le tableau qu'il aura fait.¹⁹¹

There is no room here for preconception: we create as we go along and any guidelines must come from within. If we do not like the end result, the portrait we have painted, we should start again, like Goetz, *tabula rasa*, until we finally begin to see our moral selves reflected in the portrait. Sartre speaks of 'un avenir vierge'¹⁹² with reference to morality, again linking the ontological truths of choice and temporality with the freedom of his ethics, and the analogy of the painter is wholly consistent with these truths.¹⁹³ Although one might object that the choice of painting, and thus moral code, is utterly gratuitous, removing from morality any possibility of righteousness or judgement, it remains, as pointed out by Pilkington,¹⁹⁴ that values can be determined by the 'coherence' of the work or action – a contention which fits in neatly with Sartre's own comments on the 'strict coherence' of Good Faith.¹⁹⁵ As before, this points the way towards the possibility of moral objectivity. But that is all it does; and, once again, Sartre's insistence on absolute freedom has left us asking the right questions with little hope of finding fitting or satisfactory answers.

Let us turn, then, to the more complex analogy of *the game*. It seems appropriate that the alternative attitude to Seriousness should be one of play, in which the rules are invented as we go along, *by ourselves and for ourselves*, in the knowledge that nothing justifies their existence apart from their logic and coherence: if the game works well, we do not need to change it. This unjustified, self-imposed regulation is perhaps Sartre's answer to the Kierkegaardian ethics of irony, and it works effectively in the world of ethics, posing positive opposition to the enveloping mass of Seriousness. It is clarified most eloquently by de Beauvoir, who evokes a perceptive conception of childhood to emphasise her point:

Le malheur de l'homme, a dit Descartes, vient de ce qu'il a d'abord été un enfant. [...] Ce qui caractérise la situation de l'enfant, c'est qu'il se trouve jeté dans un univers qu'il n'a pas contribué à constituer, qui a été façonné sans lui et qui lui apparaît comme un absolu auquel il ne peut que se soumettre; à ses yeux, les inventions humaines: les mots, les mœurs, les valeurs, sont des faits donnés, inéluctables comme le ciel et les arbres; c'est dire que le monde où il vit est le monde du sérieux.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ Barnes, Hazel E., *The Literature of Possibility: A Study in Humanistic Existentialism*, p.49.

¹⁹¹ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, pp.75-76.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p.39.

¹⁹³ It is also interestingly consistent with ethical tradition, reminiscent as it is of the aesthetics of the Ancient Greek *kalo-kagathia* and of early Nietzschean thought.

¹⁹⁴ See Pilkington, A. E., 'Sartre's Existentialist Ethic', *French Studies*, 23 (1969), p.46.

¹⁹⁵ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.82.

¹⁹⁶ *Pour une Morale de l'Ambiguïté*, p.51.

Perhaps as a means of revolt, the child's natural reaction is one of play, of self-invention and regulation, and it is probably no accident that the notorious freedom of childhood becomes the very shackles of adulthood: 'Le malheur qui vient à l'homme du fait qu'il a été un enfant, c'est donc que sa liberté lui a été d'abord masquée et qu'il gardera toute sa vie la nostalgie du temps où il en ignorait les exigences.'¹⁹⁷ The agent, however, has to overcome this nostalgia and make a conscious decision to re-enter the world of play; like the artist and the child, he must invent his own morality and set himself free from the prison of Seriousness:

Catherine: Et pourquoi faire le Mal?
 Goetz: Parce que le Bien est déjà fait.
 Catherine: Qui l'a fait?
 Goetz: Dieu le Père. Moi, j'invente.¹⁹⁸

In order to uphold his Humanist ethic, it is left for Sartre's agent to cast aside the doctrines and dogma of Serious morality in the ultimate realisation that he is the author of his own destiny, that he and no other chooses the values which determine his course of action: 'Toujours pas de miracle: je commence à croire que Dieu me laisse carte blanche.'¹⁹⁹ Goetz's realisation is the vital precondition for any ethical conduct, and it must establish the foundation for any form of Sartrean ethics. To deny this ethical 'carte blanche' is to act in Bad Faith in an attempt to escape from moral responsibility, and Sartrean theatre abounds in characters too weak to accept their ethical autonomy and authorship. Like ontological Bad Faith, this denial can take many forms, but it always involves a flight from the essential ambiguity at the heart of the *réalité humaine*:

Je ne peux ni veux comprendre! Il faut croire! Croire! Croire!²⁰⁰

Je suis le plus jeune: je n'ai fait qu'obéir. Je suis innocent! Innocent!
 Innocent!²⁰¹

Le hasard a tiré trois coups de feu [...]. C'est un assassinat sans assassin.²⁰²

Pardonne-moi.
 Je n'ai rien fait.
 Si. Je sais, mon chéri, je t'ai fait mal.
 Mais ce sont les Dieux, tu le sais bien.²⁰³

Heinrich's blind faith, François' claimed naïveté, Hugo's ironic invocation of Chance, and Hélène's manipulation of the gods are all strong examples of flawed morality. The semantic repetition used by Heinrich and François betrays a somewhat pathetic attempt at self deception, and all the characters are united in their struggle to ignore the freedom of their facticity and the constant challenge of ethical transcendence.

However, even characters who accept their moral ambiguity and strive after ethical Good Faith are plagued with traps such as idealism and Sincerity. Hugo, for example, has the potential to attain hero status (and, indeed, has done so in the eyes of some critics), but by placing his principles before others and even before himself, he

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.58.

¹⁹⁸ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.81.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.104.

²⁰⁰ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.22.

²⁰¹ *Morts sans Sépulture, Théâtre I*, p.190.

²⁰² *Les Mains Sales*, p.232.

²⁰³ *Les Troyennes*, p.106.

demonstrates his naïve political idealism, subjugating progress to purity and betraying an inherent lack of Authenticity. The temptation of Sincerity is equally strong and far more ambiguous, for even Sartre seems to set it down as a challenge with one hand while removing it cynically with the other. Having denounced the ‘sincere man’ in discussions on Bad Faith,²⁰⁴ he goes on to reveal his belief in at least the potential of the very same concept of Sincerity: ‘Pourtant, le pour-soi *est* [...] à titre d’être qui n’est pas ce qu’il est et qui est ce qu’il n’est pas. Il est puisque [...] le projet de la sincérité est au moins concevable.’²⁰⁵ In relation to the analogy of the canvas, the idea of Sincerity is that the moral artist would paint a mirror image of himself to which he would endeavour to remain resolutely true. If Shakespeare’s Polonius cries ‘to thine own self be true’, Sartre’s ontology replies ‘there *is* no Self’; but his ethics seems to hesitate in self-contradiction, and the issue is simply avoided by the promise of a subsequent study on the theme of Authenticity.

In other areas, Sartre’s ethics is explicitly, if not devastatingly, clear. The logical conclusion to the rejection of absolutes, values, idealism, and Seriousness is the acceptance of autonomous freedom and sole moral responsibility: Sartre’s agents can blame no system, ideology, Other, or even Self for the consequences of their actions. As Humanists, their moral choices have a profound resonance throughout the human world; in reinventing themselves, they choose their model for humanity:

Ainsi, notre responsabilité est beaucoup plus grande que nous ne pourrions le supposer, car elle engage l’humanité entière. [...] Ainsi je suis responsable pour moi-même et pour tous, et je crée une certaine image de l’homme que je choisis; en me choisissant, je choisis l’homme.²⁰⁶

This paramount responsibility creates an ethical schism between Sartre’s ideology and that of his opponents, and it establishes a direct convergence between his ontology and his ethics, allowing no room for ‘external’ factors such as childhood, conditioning, and terror:

Sibilot: Un criminel est un criminel.
 Georges: [...] Ah! ce n’est pas vous que je risquerais d’attendrir en évoquant mon enfance malheureuse.²⁰⁷

The satire is, of course, at Freud’s expense, reasserting Sartre’s contention that a man cannot be separated from his actions: *pour-soi* is what *pour-soi* does. The Existentialist hero, then, is the one who claims his actions for himself, whether taking the credit or accepting the blame, and an ethical comparison of Hugo and Oreste clearly distinguishes the flawed idealistic puppet from the heroic moral agent:

Voilà un crime embarrassant: personne n’en veut. Je ne sais pas pourquoi je l’ai fait et vous ne savez qu’en faire.²⁰⁸

Un crime que son auteur ne peut supporter, ce n’est plus le crime de personne, n’est-ce pas? C’est presque un accident. [...] Vous me regardez, gens d’Argos, vous avez compris que mon crime est bien à moi; je le revendique à la face du soleil, il est ma raison de vivre et mon orgueil [...].

²⁰⁴ *L’Être et le Néant*, p.103ff.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.121.

²⁰⁶ *L’Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, pp.26-27.

²⁰⁷ *Nekrassov*, p.113.

²⁰⁸ *Les Mains Sales*, p.242.

Je prends tout sur moi.²⁰⁹

The ethical pragmatism demonstrated by Oreste forms a stark contrast with the doubt and hesitation evident in Hugo. The hero of the early play perhaps anticipates the more rounded dedication of Hugo's hero, Hoederer, who, like Oreste and Goetz, sees the ambiguity of ethics and accepts to be bad in order to be good. But even Hugo's idealism is better than the shameful evil which poisons the past of Frantz and many of his compatriots. Frantz's shame is obvious, but the notion of collective responsibility is much more complex, depersonalising action and thus diluting guilt:

Le Père: Alors, choisis: laisse condamner les responsables ou fais
retomber leurs fautes sur l'Allemagne entière.

Frantz: Ha! Ça revient au même.²¹⁰

The problems and contradictions evident in Sartre's ethics are both numerous and far-reaching, and it is this vital area of Sartrean philosophy which currently preoccupies the vast majority of his critics. Firstly, the over-harsh burden of responsibility must be challenged, for Sartre's expectations of his agents are certainly extreme: it is surely not logical to suppose that we are always totally responsible for the outcome of our actions. The usual objections apply, concerning age, mental state and capacity, disability, chance etc., and it seems that a compromise must be found between Sartre's insistence on the deed and the Kantian focus on the motive, which acknowledges the unforeseen gulf between the intention and the outcome. There are echoes of this in Sartrean theatre, especially in the later plays, where it seems that Sartre, somewhat uncomfortable with the rigidity of his intransigent ethics, leaves it for his characters to locate the middle ground:

Léni: Les innocents avaient vingt ans, c'étaient les soldats; les
coupables en avaient cinquante, c'étaient leurs pères.²¹¹

Le Père: Petit prince! Petit prince! Tu veux porter le monde sur tes
épaules? Le monde est lourd et tu ne le connais pas. Laisse.²¹²

It is no coincidence that *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* provides the best examples of the problems of ethical responsibility, for the play is a dedicated study of judgement and guilt. It has been said that the stage acts as a tribunal,²¹³ at the centre of which lies Frantz, the 'Butcher of Smolensk', who is racked with guilt and in desperate need of a judge. Throughout the play, his profound sense of guilt and wrongdoing, disguised in the ahistorical charade of his room and through the *conduite magique* of his madness, bears down as a weight upon his conscience, establishing a paradox between Sartre's ethical characterisation and his ontological insistence on the fluidity of consciousness. Another objection therefore must be to this uncomfortable marriage of ontology and ethics, exposed here in the ethical recourse to a form of ontological substantialism previously rejected as inherently flawed. This acceptance of the 'conscience', confused of course by the homographic ambiguity of the French (where *la conscience* is variably 'consciousness' and 'the conscience'), is supported by the recurrent, Kafkaesque symbolism of the crabs, who in this instance plague the troubled hallucinations of

²⁰⁹ *Les Mouches*, p.246.

²¹⁰ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.65.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.69.

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp.77-78.

²¹³ See McCall, Dorothy, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.128.

Frantz, reminiscent in their brutal, osseous form of his butchered ghosts from the past, and invoked therefore as the appropriate judicial arbitrators to determine his level of guilt. It seems that they choose to condemn him, for in an apocalyptic resolution not dissimilar to the dramatic fate of Hugo, Frantz is deemed unsalvageable, accepting finitude in the final *conduite* of suicide. As with Hugo, we must object to the blatant pessimism, to the repeated contradiction of ontology and ethics: Why should Frantz's past leave him without a future? Why is there no chance of a change in Fundamental Project? The pessimism is compounded by the suicide of Le Père, who, though a stronger, more functional character, is condemned along with his son, despite rejecting the guilt of his conscience:

Johanna: Vous aviez une conscience?
 Le Père: Oui. Je l'ai perdu: par modestie. C'est un luxe de prince.
 Frantz pouvait se le permettre: quand on ne fait rien, on
 croit qu'on est responsable de tout.²¹⁴

If the conscience is an ethical luxury, it is one enjoyed by many of Sartre's anti-heroes, and especially by Hugo and Frantz, whom it appears to unequivocally condemn. It may well be that the later Sartre, in his increasing dramatic interest in political symbolism, was tempted by the power of character annihilation, but such theatre sits uncomfortably with his philosophy and serves to threaten any possible synthesis between his ontology and his ethics.

In the search for a judge, it is often the conscience, this mystical, intangible arbitrator, which acquires the role, and although regret is said to have no place in the thoughts of the true Existentialist, it often becomes the yard stick on the ethical scale of action:

Mon honnêteté venait du fond de mon cœur,
 Et je ne voulais d'autre guide que ma conscience.²¹⁵

Tu peux bien vivre, toi, tu as la conscience tranquille [...]. Moi, [...] il n'y a
 pas un pouce de ma peau qui ne me fasse horreur.²¹⁶

The conscious morality of Andromaque and Lucie reveals the high regard for personal ethics evident in Sartrean theatre, and it seems that Sartre ultimately wavers on the question of the conscience, never quite succeeding in either convincing defence or thorough obliteration. His characters' actions are inseparable from their humanity, which in turn is shown to be dependent on the dictates of their conscience:

Ils ont beau jeu: là-bas, quand ils décident qu'un homme va mourir, c'est
 comme s'ils rayaient un nom sur un annuaire: c'est propre, c'est élégant. Ici,
 la mort est une besogne. Les abbatoirs, c'est ici. Il boit, il fume, il me parle
 du Parti, il fait des projets et moi je pense au cadavre qu'il sera, c'est
 obscène.²¹⁷

We cannot fail to sympathise here with Hugo's Hamletesque disposition: caught as he is between Hoederer's gifted pragmatism and the Party's dogged idealism, he is an intensely human character, and in him is embodied Sartre's unresolved conflict between

²¹⁴ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.76.

²¹⁵ *Les Troyennes*, p.70.

²¹⁶ *Morts sans Sépulture, Théâtre I*, p.264.

²¹⁷ *Les Mains Sales*, p.173.

the freedom of ontology and the conscious substance of morality.

Despite any evidence in Sartre's philosophy and theatre for or against the acceptance of the conscience, it remains the case that as an implicitly subjective arbiter of ethics, the conscience is ill-equipped to point towards a viable code of ethics. Like Frantz, then, we must look elsewhere for moral judgement; and if we recall Sartre's ethical analogies and the problem of Bad Faith, it seems advisable to return to the goals of logic and coherence – a decision proposed by Sartre in *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*:

On peut juger [...] que certains choix sont fondés sur l'erreur, et d'autres sur la vérité. On peut juger un homme en disant qu'il est de mauvaise foi. Si nous avons défini la situation de l'homme comme un choix libre, sans excuses et sans secours, tout homme qui se réfugie derrière l'excuse de ses passions, tout homme qui invente un déterminisme est un homme de mauvaise foi.²¹⁸

The 'truth', like the logic and coherence of the portrait and Good Faith, lies in the sole responsibility for a choice that is freely made. In this we have at least the basis for an objective system of moral judgement: for any given choice, we could ask its agent if the decision was ethically autonomous and if full responsibility was then assumed. A negative answer to either of these essential conditions would simplistically remove the agent from the morals of Sartrean ethics.

But such a methodology cannot form more than a basis: firstly, because only the agent, and not the choice, can ever be condemned (I may choose, *because I am a Christian*, to share my loaf of bread); and secondly, because the system lacks an adjudicator to make it accountably objective (who is to say that I did not choose freely?). The solutions to these problems lie in a normative code of ethics, but the search for a moral judge is an obstacle which must be addressed immediately, for it permeates the very heart of Sartre's theatrical exploration of ethics.

The theme of moral judgement can be seen to divide Sartre's characters into two distinct groups, namely ethical subjects and ethical objects (or, to be consistent, agents and puppets). The latter group comprises characters such as Hugo, Kean, and the unconverted Goetz, who all rely on others to create their images of themselves. Indeed *Huis Clos* is dominated by a triangular tension of judgement, in which each character's persona is created and sustained through the gaze and perception of the others, who, on the set of *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, would be transformed into Frantz's crabs. In *Les Mouches*, it is fittingly the divine character of Jupiter who is perceived as the judge, and it is in him that Électre seeks moral justification, before her brother reminds her of her genuine guilt: 'C'est à présent que tu es coupable. Ce que tu as voulu, qui peut le savoir si ce n'est toi? Laisseras-tu un autre en décider?'²¹⁹ The stronger characters, the true Sartrean agents, choose to judge themselves, remaining steadfastly true to their convictions:

Je ne suis pas un coupable, et tu ne saurais me faire expier ce que je ne reconnais pas pour un crime. [...] Tourmente-moi tant que tu voudras: je ne regrette rien.²²⁰

Au diable, le confesseur. C'est à moi seul que je dois des comptes.²²¹

²¹⁸ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, pp.80-81.

²¹⁹ *Les Mouches*, p.230.

²²⁰ Oreste, *ibid.*, p.226.

²²¹ Henri, *Morts sans Sépulture, Théâtre I*, p.200.

Je n'ai qu'un seul juge: moi, et je m'acquitte.²²²

In the absence of God, the Existentialist Humanist has recourse to nothing and no-one but himself, at least in the domain of ethics. He is abandoned in an ethical vacuum, accountable to all and yet to none:

Je suis condamné à n'avoir d'autre loi que la mienne.²²³

Des juges? Ils n'ont jamais pillé, massacré, violé? [...] S'ils font notre procès, qui fera le leur?²²⁴

Moral judgement, this central tenet of Sartrean ethics, has invited a wealth of criticism, not only from traditional Christian critics, but more importantly from those who recognise the element of solipsistic subjectivism which seems to open the way for as many moral codes as there are living human beings. In this respect, Sartre has failed to refine his ethics: he has discredited the judgement of God and *autrui*, and placed nothing satisfactory in their place. All that we are left with is the Self, which has already been dissected under the scalpel of ontology. How then am I to judge myself, if there is a constant gap between my *Je* and my *Moi*? I could use a mirror to fix the gaze of judgement on myself (recalling Estelle's craving for such in *Huis Clos*), or a tape recorder to capture my words and their persona (like Frantz, or even Beckett's Krapp), but these are no more than *conduites magiques*, disregarding the laws of temporality and thus the fundamental truths of my ontology; I am once again in Bad Faith. Aware, if not plagued, by the vicious circle of his ethics, Sartre changes his direction from the ideals of moral judgement to the pragmatic comparison of ends, and it is surely in this direction that any tenable solution must lie: 'J'aurais pu faire autrement, soit; mais à quel prix?'²²⁵

The ethical consideration of means and ends brings us back to the necessity for a normative form of ethics which could ultimately provide us with a discernible and viable code of moral conduct. In the absence of an acceptable arbiter of ethics, the focus must shift from the chooser to the choice, from the ethical agent to the moral act: ontological logistics may dissuade us from Bad Faith, but morality should guide us in our choice of action, pointing out the consequences of our possible Bad Faith. If Sartre's Humanism is to be effective, it must succeed in bridging this gap between ontology and ethics by combining Man's freedom with a sense of human justice. In order to judge the achievements of Sartrean ethics, we must therefore consider the precise legacy left by his Humanism, for if his Existentialism is a Humanism, the two must be inseparable. In terms of ethics, we need to determine whether Sartre's Humanism functions as an aprioristic moral code, an advocate of situation ethics, a combination of both models, or as a failure on both counts.

On the basis of *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, it would seem that Sartre is keen to establish a code of ethics based upon a somewhat crude reworking of Kant's Categorical Imperative:

Quand nous disons que l'homme se choisit, nous entendons que chacun d'entre nous se choisit, mais par là nous voulons dire aussi qu'en se

²²² Léni, *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.150.

²²³ Oreste, *Les Mouches*, p.237.

²²⁴ Frantz, *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.67.

²²⁵ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.531.

choisissant il choisit tous les hommes. En effet, il n'est pas un de nos actes qui, en créant l'homme que nous voulons être, ne crée en même temps une image de l'homme tel que nous estimons qu'il doit être.²²⁶

On doit toujours se demander: qu'arriverait-il si tout le monde en faisait autant? et on n'échappe à cette pensée inquiétante que par une sorte de mauvaise foi.²²⁷

The objections to this are numerous and often cited: in addition to the usual problems concerning hyper-responsibility and Bad Faith are contentions about the crass universality involved in the imperative – if I choose to marry, am I advocating marriage, monogamy, and heterosexuality over the many other valid ways of life? According to Barnes and Bell, Sartre's imperative is hypothetical rather than categorical, and given his numerous qualifications and seeming contradictions, it is difficult to fault their interpretation.²²⁸ McCall, too, finds fault with the imperative, quoting the examples of François's murder in *Morts sans Sépulture* and Hilda's decision of non-violence in *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* to contest the Kantian model, exposing it as a mere abstraction which cannot function in the concrete world of extreme situations where the only valid choice is often the lesser of two evils.²²⁹ But the main objection must be to Sartre's self-contradiction a few lines after his previous comments, which seems to condemn his own ethical code: 'L'existentialisme est très opposé à un certain type de morale laïque qui voudrait supprimer Dieu avec le moins de frais possible.'²³⁰ This objection is supported also in the *Cahiers*, which offer a consistent resistance to the Imperative.

His second attempt at defining a moral code comes in the form of an *un*-Kantian kingdom of ends, where instead of *pour-soi* becoming an end in itself, the end itself (whether moral, historical or socio-political) attains supremacy, and the means are subordinated to the ethics of the ends. In the words of Bell, 'The end, being absolute, is the essential; the human is the non essential.'²³¹ This ethic is consistent with Sartrean Humanism, which, as discussed, places no value on the human subject per se. The ethical leap towards a resolute rejection of the Kantian kingdom of ends is thus not a quantum one, and it is justified by Sartre once again in the *Cahiers*:

La cité des fins, en réalisant la totalité humaine, parce que chaque homme devient fin pour tous les autres et tous les autres pour lui, réalise en fait le totalitarisme. [...] Cette totalité ne peut pas se réaliser. Quelqu'un restera toujours en dehors (le Chef, le Führer) puisque par principe la totalité humaine est détotalisée. (p.178)

The objection here is ontological as well as ethical, with Sartre resisting both a 'human totality' and a totalitarianist morality. This is of course also a blatant contravention of the Categorical Imperative, serving merely to confuse an area of gross uncertainty, but nevertheless, the ethics of ends justifying means is by far the strongest moral influence behind Sartre's dramatic art. It can be seen to dominate whole plays, notably *Les Mains Sales*, in which Hoederer embodies the ethical moral of 'tout est bien qui finit bien'.²³² His conflict with Hugo has already been explored, but it reinforces here Sartre's inner

²²⁶ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.25.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.28.

²²⁸ See Linda A. Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity*, p.53.

²²⁹ *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.47.

²³⁰ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.34.

²³¹ *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity*, p.178.

²³² *Les Mains Sales*, p.100.

conflict of morality:

Hugo: Tous les moyens ne sont pas bons.
 Hoederer: Tous les moyens sont bons quand ils sont efficaces. [...] Comme tu tiens à ta pureté, mon petit gars! Comme tu as peur de te salir les mains. Eh bien, reste pur! [...] Moi j'ai les mains sales. Jusqu'aux coudes. Je les ai plongées dans la merde et dans le sang.²³³

In practice, Sartre comes down on the side of *efficacité*, in defiance of pure morality, and his preference is made clear in his other political plays:

Jean: C'est ton frère.
 Lucie: Après? Il devait mourir demain.
 Jean: Est-ce bien toi? Tu me fais peur.
 Lucie: Il faut qu'il se taise. Les moyens ne comptent pas.²³⁴

Goetz: Sur cette terre et dans ce temps, le Bien et le Mauvais sont inséparables: j'accepte donc d'être mauvais pour devenir bon.²³⁵

Goetz's words are of vast significance, for they give perhaps the greatest insight into the quagmire of Sartrean ethics: although in theory, Sartre propagates a universal, categorically imperative code of ethics, in practice, he is aware that the present social climate calls for pragmatism at the expense of ethical idealism. Unless we change the world, moral purity will remain but a cherished ideal, and Sartre is engaged in a process of change, justifying means that will bring about the goal of freedom. However, even he accepts the dangers of the means and ends ethic, as he reveals in his discussion on violence: 'La maxime de la violence est "la fin justifie les moyens". Il faut pourtant prendre garde à cette formule. Elle est profondément ambiguë.'²³⁶

Freedom becomes the impetus for the third attempt at establishing a moral code. This time, Sartre returns to his ontology and assumes that because we are condemned to be free, we should logically choose Freedom as our guiding moral Value. His logic is echoed by de Beauvoir, who claims that 'chacun a besoin que tous les hommes soient libres'.²³⁷ If freedom is our ontological facticity, our condition of being, it makes sense to fight oppression and transpose our freedom to our ethics. By choosing Freedom as our Fundamental Project, we could simultaneously comply with our ontology and effect a utilitarian morality, which is accepted by many as the true goal of Sartrean ethics: 'We consider the ideal of "the greatest freedom for the greatest number" as the highest normative principle of a Sartrean ethics.'²³⁸ The main advantage of this concept is that it attempts to unite ontology and ethics, and its basic sentiment could be synthesised either with the Categorical Imperative or with the Sartrean kingdom of ends. But its drawbacks are too fundamental to be overlooked. The apparent unity of this ethic with ontology is merely superficial, firstly because if Man is condemned to be free, he cannot choose *not* to be free, and secondly because the choice of Freedom as a Value amounts to little more than Seriousness. By adopting Freedom as an ethical, and not just ontological, value, Sartre falls into his own trap and denies *pour-soi* the autonomy he is

²³³ Ibid., pp.193-94.

²³⁴ *Morts sans Sépulture, Théâtre I*, p.240.

²³⁵ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.245.

²³⁶ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.180.

²³⁷ *Pour une Morale de l'Ambiguïté*, p.119.

²³⁸ Fretz, Leo, *Het Individualiteitsconcept in Sartres Filosofie*, appendix, p.268.

so desperate to achieve: 'Sartre is arguing that liberty is both intrinsically valuable, an end in itself, and at the same time that it is to be aimed at in so far as it founds values; clearly this is a genuine contradiction.'²³⁹ It is, indeed, yet another contradiction.

Sartrean ethics has now been shown to be incapable of establishing an aprioristic code of morality. This would seem to indicate the possibility of situation ethics, based not upon a universal or collective ethical approach, but rather on the free individual in the concrete situation so often extolled in Sartrean theory:

Tout choix est choix d'un changement concret à apporter à un donné concret. Toute situation est concrète.²⁴⁰

Si les valeurs sont vagues [...] il ne nous reste qu'à nous fier à nos instincts.²⁴¹

We have returned no doubt to solipsistic methodology, but at last there is no startling discrepancy between theory and practice, philosophy and theatre. Each situation must be judged on its merits according to ethics of the individual *Pour-soi*. As Sartre reminds us, 'Il n'y a pas de morale abstraite. Il n'y a qu'une morale en situation donc concrète. Car la morale abstraite est celle de la bonne conscience. Elle suppose qu'on peut être moral dans une situation foncièrement immorale.'²⁴² Situation ethics at least maintains the ambiguity.

However, the problems, doubts, and contradictions of Sartrean ethics have still not been resolved. Situation ethics may well be a valid form of moral conduct, but it provides the ethical agent with no system or source of values and is therefore of limited significance. Sartre provides a catalogue of 'unacceptable' or 'inauthentic' behaviour, but very little guidance on moral rectitude. His ethics is unquestionably plagued with inconsistency and failure. The promise of an ethics of deliverance and salvation, based on Authenticity and pure reflection, has never quite been fulfilled: the promise of a work dedicated to Existentialist ethics at the end of *L'Être et le Néant*, which was perhaps to be the fourth volume of the *Chemins de la Liberté*, lies abandoned; the *Cahiers* are ultimately fragmentary, unsynthesised, and inconclusive; the ethical work on Genet confuses readers with the elevation of a thief to martyrdom and Sainthood; Sartrean heroes are either winning losers or succeed with dirty hands; and questions of great ethical substance are relegated to the reference of footnotes. This does not bode well for Sartre's Humanism.

Sartre's inner conflict between existential freedom and moral or political engagement, evident in characters such as Goetz and Hugo (and in his own oscillations to and from the Communist Party) cannot be resolved by a critical comparison of his philosophy and theatre; it is merely compounded. The Sartrean agent is presented as a living contradiction who is ontologically autonomous but ethically in desperate need of solidarity. Ultimately, even Sartre cannot deny the contradiction, and he is forced to conclude that a viable code of Sartrean ethics remains a disquieting impossibility:

La morale a lieu dans une atmosphère d'échec. Elle doit échouer parce qu'il est toujours trop tard ou trop tôt pour elle.²⁴³

Le 'problème' moral naît de ce que la Morale est *pour nous* tout en même

²³⁹ Pilkington, A. E., 'Sartre's Existentialist Ethic', *French Studies*, 23 (1969), p.42.

²⁴⁰ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.590.

²⁴¹ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.43.

²⁴² *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.24.

²⁴³ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.19.

temps inévitable et impossible. L'action doit se donner ses normes éthiques dans ce climat d'indépassable impossibilité.²⁴⁴

There is no existentialist ethics; there are only valid choices.²⁴⁵

This ethical pessimism finds its grounding in the closing lines of *L'Être et le Néant*, where Sartre seems to renounce the possibility of moral salvation, introducing apathy and failure even to the heartland of Man's action:

Toutes les activités humaines sont équivalentes – car elles tendent toutes à sacrifier l'homme pour faire surgir la cause de soi – et [...] toutes sont vouées par principe à l'échec. Ainsi revient-il au même de s'enivrer solitairement ou de conduire les peuples. Si l'une de ces activités l'emporte sur l'autre, ce ne sera pas à cause de son but réel, mais à cause du degré de conscience qu'elle possède de son but idéal.²⁴⁶

Even at this early stage of Sartrean ethics, the element of idealism is very much in evidence, and the acceptance of failure can be seen to dominate both Sartre's early and later ethical ideology. The inherent contradictions create obstacles which prove far too complex to overcome, and the clash of ethics and ontology is too profound for any valid form of synthesis. We are left then once again with a dangling carrot, tempted by the chase but hindered by confusion, ambiguity, and finally acceptance of futility:

The very notion of deliverance or salvation implies acceptance of an Absolute, whether it be God, literature or existentialist ethics.²⁴⁷

Sans doute se donne-t-il [Sartre] beaucoup de peine pour montrer que les valeurs instaurées par moi sont réellement 'valables' et que la morale existentialiste n'est pas le culte gidien de l'acte gratuit. Mais il n'y parvient pas et les raisons qu'il invoque sont entachées d'équivoque.²⁴⁸

Sartre fails to deliver on his promise of an ethics, and this can only be a result of his refusal to separate ontology from ethics: the paradoxical nature of any attempt at synthesis is readily apparent, and instead of embarking on a futile chase, Sartre should have rather acknowledged the contradictions and reserved the ethical for the socio-political; it is in the separation of the spheres that the true contribution to a Humanism must lie. By attempting to combine his ontology and ethics, his Humanism is diminished, for the confusion of ontological description with ethical prescription, of what *is* with what *ought to be*, gives rise to a morality of descriptive prescription, which aims at being logical and falters into paradox. Though accepted by Sartre, this conclusion does not appear to have enlightened his subsequent work on ethics: 'L'ontologie ne saurait formuler elle-même des prescriptions morales. Elle s'occupe uniquement de ce qui est, et il n'est pas possible de tirer des impératifs de ses indicatifs.'²⁴⁹ Unfortunately, Sartre's ethical blindness is more than matched by many of his critics who also refuse to accept defeat in their search for a philosophy or Humanism

²⁴⁴ *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr*, p.177, footnote.

²⁴⁵ 'Interview with Sartre, 1964', cited in Dorothy McCall, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.42.

²⁴⁶ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.721.

²⁴⁷ Barnes, Hazel E., *An Existentialist Ethics*, p.42.

²⁴⁸ Waelhens, A. de, 'L'existentialisme de M. Sartre est-il un humanisme?', *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 44 (1946), p.297.

²⁴⁹ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.720.

which achieves a successful fusion of ontology and ethics. The vision of realists like Pellauer is sadly the exception:

While Sartre does offer a number of interesting discussions of topics relevant to an ethics developed on the basis of his ontology – discussions that may be read for themselves as a stimulus to further thought – any overall synthesis is lacking and in the last analysis is unattainable.²⁵⁰

The description of the relationship between ontology and ethics as stimulus to further thought is a convincing one, wholly compatible with the overview of Sartrean ethics provided in the present study. Any attempt to post-construct a Sartrean ethics must be regarded as futile and flawed: the idea that a Sartrean ethics is ultimately unresolved rather than impossible (a particularly topical one in the current critical trend) is one which regards ethics as descriptive and objective, and which is thus guilty of Seriousness. We must agree with the non-cognitive school of logical empiricism that ethics, at least as Sartre should conceive it, is neither descriptive nor based on knowledge, a contention which places us in the camp of critics such as Warnock and Bell who contend that Sartre is incapable of postulating a discernible code of ethics because he is a subjectivist for whom the objectivising of values is tantamount to ethical Seriousness.²⁵¹ The paradox has been discussed, and it must lead us to question the very validity of Sartre's Existentialist Humanism as an autonomous philosophy: in his later works, Sartre himself proposes his Existentialism as an ideology, a way of thinking, to structure, refine, and complement the philosophy, the basic thought, of Marxism, and it seems appropriate in this instance to view his Humanism as an ideology which could stimulate his ontology into a productive Existentialist ethics.

Though flawed and contradictory as a Humanist philosophy, Sartrean ethics has certainly achieved a certain level of success. Sartre's theatre champions the cause for situation ethics which, while failing to transcend the problem of subjectivism, can provide a viable form of moral conduct and work together with his ontology. His later ethical thought, based upon discussions with Benny Lévy, transcends the tomes of *L'Être et le Néant* and *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* to transform the respective *impasses* of solipsism and political absolutism into the potential fraternity of interpenetrating consciousnesses, of successful Being-for-Others, and a *modalité morale*. But even his early work succeeds in laying the most solid of foundations, in showing what is 'wrong', and in leading by example:

While Sartre's moral judgement has nothing to say about what values to choose apart from freedom (which serves as a means to every other valuation), it does enable him to condemn as inauthentic a surprising range of human choices from the relatively innocuous examples of the woman, waiter, and homosexual to the less innocuous "champion of sincerity" to the more vicious Nazis and other racists and oppressive Capitalists.²⁵²

The examples set attempt to show the way towards the salvation of Authenticity heralded in *L'Être et le Néant* and explored with vigour in Sartrean theatre. The theories

²⁵⁰ Introduction to *Jean-Paul Sartre: Notebooks for an Ethics*, p.viii. See also Juliette Simont's 'Sartrean ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, p.195: 'What is revealed through love is the *indicative mode* of ontology. The *imperative mode* of ethics aim[s] at a different totality; extensive rather than comprehensive, "all men" rather than "the whole of man". These two totalities do not overlap.'

²⁵¹ See Mary Warnock *The Philosophy of Sartre*, pp.129-34 and Linda A. Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity*, p.51.

²⁵² Bell, Linda A., *op.cit.*, p.71.

of an impossible normative ethics exhausted in philosophy are eventually subjugated to the pragmatism of action and Engagement so vital to the stage. The ultimate Humanist goal becomes that of Authenticity, and the agent is resurrected as the hero. As the Absurdist symbol of Sisyphus is replaced by the Humanist hero of Prometheus, it is to be hoped that the ill-fitting partners of ontology and ethics will finally be reunited, and that Sartre's Existentialist Humanism will rise up triumphantly out of the ashes, from the far side of despair.

iv) From Agent to Hero: The Challenge of Authenticity

The frustrations and contradictions plaguing both the ontological and ethical agents are direct repercussions of Sartre's theoretical idealism caused by his philosophical insistence on the catalyst of Freedom. His intransigence on Freedom gives rise to the complex problems of Bad Faith and Seriousness which lead the agent twice into an impasse, marring his ontology and rendering his ethics a paradox of flawed impossibility. But in the practical world of theatre, the agent comes to life, and in the absence of the promised tome on ethics, it is to the shining examples of Sartre's theatrical heroes that we must turn for Authenticity, deliverance, and salvation; the fate of Sartre's Humanism lies in their dirty hands.

With *Les Mouches* comes the first main insight into Sartre's conception of the dramatic hero, the Sartrean Man of Action who transcends the conflicting and limiting worlds of ontology and ethics in pursuit of the ultimate challenge of Authenticity. The hero is Oreste, and although this unsuspecting saviour has been much compared with Christ, the religious allegory is again misleading: as a pagan, Humanist hero, Oreste provides a pleasing ideological transformation from the Absurd condemnation of Sisyphus to the fire-stealing Humanism of Prometheus; the symbolic inspiration is classical, not Christian. As a Promethean agent, Oreste sets down a new agenda, based on the Humanistic confidence of his anthropocentric liberty, through which the gods and all religion are removed from the equation. In him, Sartre sees the basis for a modern reworking of Existentialist autonomy, a simultaneous embodiment of Everyman and Hero: 'Oreste poursuivra son chemin, injustifiable, sans excuses, sans recours, seul. Comme un héros. Comme n'importe qui.'²⁵³ In *Les Mouches*, Oreste is a powerful symbol of freedom, and the fact that he assumes full responsibility for his ethical autonomy and action enables him to usurp the controlling power of the gods, granted them only by the weaknesses of Man. By elevating himself to the highest point of the spiritual and ethical domain, Oreste is choosing for mankind, and he succeeds in reinventing the people of Argos, placing them back in the centre of their world. By deposing the gods, he shows the great potential force of the free human spirit:

Tout homme s'est senti l'égal d'un dieu à certains moments. [...] Mais cela vient de ce que, dans un éclair, il a senti l'étonnante grandeur de l'esprit humain. Les conquérants sont seulement ceux d'entre les hommes qui sentent assez leur force pour être sûrs de vivre constamment à ces hauteurs et dans la pleine conscience de cette grandeur.²⁵⁴

His human force, his Humanism, seeks then to elevate the human to the divine, as opposed to the religious attempt to bring the divine back down to Earth. In a Camus play, Oreste would be a *Conquérant*; in Sartrean theatre, he is a constant Humanist, a dedicated Man of Action.

The concept of heroism becomes increasingly complex as Sartre develops as a dramatist, and juxtaposed with troubled protagonists such as Hoederer and Goetz, Oreste becomes little more than a symbolic yard stick of comparison. There are several categories of hero in Sartrean theatre, and it is useful and appropriate to distinguish carefully between them. Oreste, though perhaps in his own group of ideal heroes, should probably be grouped along with types such as Hoederer, Canoris, and Goetz as a genuine Sartrean hero. These worthy men are elevated by comparison with the other groups, including anti-heroes (Garcin, Hugo, and Frantz), comic heroes (Kean and

²⁵³ *Un Théâtre de Situations*, p.223.

²⁵⁴ Camus, Albert, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, pp.120-21.

Georges), and the almost exclusively female failed heroes (or heroines) such as Inès, Électre, Lucie, Lizzie, Jessica, Hilda, and Johanna. The principal aim of this study is therefore to determine the qualities which separate the true heroes from their foils, and thus to glean an insight into the mystery of Authenticity.

A concept at the heart of Sartre's exploration of the theme of heroism, and one which has undoubtedly inspired much of his greatest work, is that of bastardy. This element of Sartrean characterisation is highly autobiographical, and it presents itself in Sartre's theatrical heroes in various forms, ranging from literal illegitimacy to symbolic social exclusion on grounds of class, race, colour, gender, sexuality, etc. In terms of atheistic Humanism, its roots are firmly embedded in the rejection of religion, for deprived of a moral or universal Father, Sartre's heroes are condemned to a life of ethical bastardy. Like Camus's *conquérants*, like the *étranger* or the *homme révolté*, it is thus their duty to rebel; and indeed this fight against their perceived contradictions forms the powerful impetus for their heroism:

Nous avons vu que le Personnage par excellence de ce théâtre est le Bâtard: celui qui, mis porte-à-faux dans le monde humain, se trouve par là en situation de lucidité à l'égard des contradictions de la conscience et des comédies qu'elle se donne. Et nous avons vu que l'Intellectuel est un bâtard.²⁵⁵

Sartre's existential bastardy is the equivalent of Original Sin, but unlike the religious dogma, based upon guilt and an inherent sense of shame, this Humanistic equivalent is converted into a positive incitement to action. It is evident to some extent in all Sartre's heroes – in the gender of the heroines, the failed heroes; in the social or even genuine illegitimacy of the comic heroes, who are left with a crisis of identity; and in the class, race, historicity, and very ontology of the anti-heroes and heroes, who respond to it, respectively, with woeful misguidance or in genuine revolt – but it is embodied most effectively in the character of Goetz, who encompasses all the aspects of the term and effects a scornful parody on its underlying sources of religion:

Schulheim: Tu es un assassin.
 Goetz: Oui, mon frère, comme tout le monde.
 Schulheim: Un bâtard!
 Goetz: Oui: comme Jésus-Christ.
 Schulheim: Sac à merde! Excrément de la terre!²⁵⁶

Schulheim's insult is later echoed by Goetz himself when he treats Hilda to his misogynistic tirade comparing her with a 'sac d'excréments',²⁵⁷ and it is interesting, if somewhat ironic, that one outsider should so chastise another; but it is also perhaps the source of solidarity which leads to their dependence and companionship.

The negative side of bastardy comes in the form of the *salaud*, of characters like Jupiter and Le Père who through their *esprit de sérieux* establish an ethical and/or socio-political tyranny in an attempt to impose their own bastardy on others. A close examination of this process is to be found in *La Putain Respectueuse*, where the satirical dramatisation of the White American Male serves to suppress and subordinate both the Prostitute and the Negro, abusing their rights and denying them their Freedom. The characterisation may be crude (and the play unsuccessful), but its message is a clear condemnation of all forms of tyranny, ontological and ethical alike. This brings us back

²⁵⁵ Jeanson, Francis, *Sartre par lui-même*, p.101.

²⁵⁶ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, pp.117-18.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.225.

to Sartre's first main theatrical hero, Oreste, who stands in direct opposition to the *salauds*. His much criticised departure at the end of *Les Mouches* may well leave the city in a *vide*, but as an ontological symbol of Freedom, and perhaps a historical symbol of the French Resistance, his action is entirely appropriate. Though not yet fully engaged, the Sartrean hero has at least pointed the way towards freedom and liberation, and indeed secured it, and he has already managed to conquer the tyrannical bastardy of Seriousness.

Another opposition connected with the hero is that of cowardice and courage, the stereotypical contrast between the worthy and the weak. In stark contrast to Absurdist heroes such as Béranger and Krapp, Sartre's typical heroes are decisive, resilient, and brave; their heroism lies not in the despair of their existential anguish but rather in the assured optimism of their action. Characters who fail to meet the harsh expectations of the Existentialist hero are often doomed to the realm of the *lâches*, demeaned and discredited by the courage of those around them. One such figure is of course Garcin who, though constantly aspiring to heroism, is condemned to his stasis by the constant cowardice of his actions:

Garcin: Tu sais ce que c'est qu'un lâche, toi.

Inès: Oui, je le sais.

Garcin: Tu sais ce que c'est que le mal, la honte, la peur. Il y a des jours où tu t'es vue jusqu'au cœur – et ça te cassait bras et jambes. [...] Je voulais être un homme. Un dur. J'ai tout misé sur le même cheval. Est-ce que c'est possible qu'on soit un lâche quand on a choisi les chemins les plus dangereux? Peut-on juger une vie sur un seul acte?

Inès: Pourquoi pas? Tu as rêvé trente ans que tu avais du cœur; et tu te passais mille petites faiblesses parce que tout est permis aux héros. Comme c'était commode! Et puis, à l'heure du danger, on t'as mis au pied du mur et ... tu as pris le train pour Mexico.²⁵⁸

Garcin links his cowardice with evil, shame, and fear in a rare admission of self-fault, and the source of his anguish, the 'I /eye am I', is ironically Beckettian in style due to the fact that he can judge him-Self sincerely in his death. His next admission reveals more about his, and certainly Sartre's, perception of the hero – the hard, masculine entity who gambles with his life. Inès's perceptiveness (she is Garcin's true eye) cuts through the conceit of his dream, exposing him as the coward he really is and showing him that heroes are neither comfortable nor unaccountable. Another character forced to recognise this fact is the young François, who is exposed too soon to the daunting call of heroism, accepting with some pathos the weaknesses of his youth which will ultimately culminate in his untimely death:

Est-ce que vous m'avez prévenu quand je suis venu vous trouver? Vous m'avez dit: la Résistance a besoin d'hommes, vous ne m'avez pas dit qu'elle avait besoin de héros. Je ne suis pas un héros, moi, je ne suis pas un héros! [...] J'ai fait ce qu'on m'a dit.²⁵⁹

In one of the most dramatic and moving acts of Sartrean theatre, his potential cowardice is punished with the ultimate severity in a practical demonstration of the lesser of two evils.

The struggle to cross the line from mere humanity to heroism finds its

²⁵⁸ *Huis Clos*, pp.88-90.

²⁵⁹ *Morts sans Sépulture, Théâtre I*, p.196.

incarnation in the character of Hugo, whose ideals and impulses are constantly in conflict. Hugo can be seen to represent Sartre's bastardised intellect, torn between the niceties of thought and the harsh realities of action, and his resulting sense of guilt leaves him longing for the challenges of heroism, for the life of the Adventurer. But his dreams and introspection are soon shattered by the political zealotry of Olga, whose dedication to the cause, though idealistically clean-handed, authenticates her simplistic choice of action:

- Olga: Le Parti n'a pas été créé pour te fournir des occasions d'héroïsme. Il y a un travail à faire et il faut qu'il soit fait; peu importe par qui. [...]
 Hugo: Si on me remplace, je quitterai le Parti.
 Olga: [...] Le Parti, ça se quitte les pieds devant.²⁶⁰

At one time, perhaps in the days of *Les Mouches*, Olga would have been a strong example of heroic Authenticity, but in these later days of discussion, coercion, and compromise, she is demoted to the sidelines of political ideology, heroic and yet no hero, authentic and yet not quite authentic enough. The reason for her failure is intimated by Le Père, who explains the preserve of the truly heroic:

- Le Père: Werner est faible, Frantz est fort: personne n'y peut rien.
 Johanna: Qu'est-ce qu'ils font sur terre, les forts?
 Le Père: En général, ils ne font rien.
 Johanna: Je vois.
 Le Père: Ce sont des gens qui vivent par nature dans l'intimité de la mort. Ils tiennent le destin des autres dans leurs mains.²⁶¹

Opposing 'les lâches' with 'les forts', Sartre uses Le Père to give another vital insight into his goal of heroic Authenticity. In a Heideggerian invocation of death, of the memorable *Sein zum Tode*, he reveals his further requirements of mortal awareness and control to the already established values of Humanism, action, bastardy, and courage. Living in the intimacy of death is one of Sartre's more perplexing concepts, but he fortunately defines it more clearly in an evocative description of life under the Occupation:

Jamais nous n'avons été plus libres que sous l'occupation allemande. [...] Puisque le venin nazi se glissait jusque dans notre pensée, chaque pensée juste était une conquête [...]. Puisque nous étions traqués, chacun de nos gestes avait le poids d'un engagement.²⁶²

Verstraeten elaborates on the theme, linking the hero's mortality with his greater sense of Humanism: 'C'est toujours face à un risque de mort que le héros sartrien définit sa qualité humaine.'²⁶³ Situations of mortal danger serve to magnify each small expression of Freedom, and agents who engage themselves in the situations of their Time, taking a stance and influencing others, will be rewarded with the accolade of liberty.

The broadening of the philosophical *situation* to the socio-political situation is termed by Sartre 'Historicity', a term which implies the involvement of *pour-soi* as a

²⁶⁰ *Les Mains Sales*, p.168.

²⁶¹ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.54.

²⁶² 'La République du Silence', in *Situations III*, p.11.

²⁶³ *Violence et Éthique*, p.95.

concrete agent in the actual world around it. In terms of theatre, the claustrophobic cells of *Morts sans Sépulture*'s attic and the hell of *Huis Clos* are opened out into the vast plains of *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* and *Les Troyennes*, as the protagonists learn to be-for-others. The somewhat enclosed world of *L'Etre et le Néant* is defiantly extended into the reciprocal action of *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, and yet the foundation for Historicity lies firmly embedded in the former work, connected as it is with the basic ontology of freedom and temporality: 'Le temps universel vient au monde par le Pour-soi.'²⁶⁴ Indeed *pour-soi* is condemned to its own epoch, governing and governed by its Time. Sartre reminds us that this is a basic given of ontology: 'En définitive, mon époque c'est moi [...]. Je dois l'assumer comme je m'assume.'²⁶⁵ Without *pour-soi*, time would not exist, for in *en-soi* is only found plenitude, and it is thus illogical to separate men and women from their dates: 'Chaque personne est un absolu jouissant d'une date absolue et parfaitement impensable à une autre date.'²⁶⁶ With the acceptance of ontological logistics comes the responsibility to *choose* our historical period in the same way that we chose our birth to render it less Absurd. It is for the hero, then, to historicise the world around him and make his mark by his action: 'C'est en se choisissant et en s'historialisant dans le monde que le Pour-soi historialise le monde lui-même et fait qu'il soit *daté* par ses techniques.'²⁶⁷ This, says Sartre, is Man's only authentic means of escaping the Absurd, living out his Freedom and usurping the creative role of the impossible *Homme-Dieu*; and, by extension, it is left for the living to determine the History of the passed:

C'est moi, ce sont les hommes de ma génération qui décident du sens des efforts et des entreprises de la génération antérieure, soit qu'ils reprennent et continuent leurs tentatives sociales et politiques, soit qu'ils réalisent décidément une cassure et rejettent les morts dans l'inefficience.²⁶⁸

History is no Absolute: it is as open to interpretation and alteration as Man's past, and it is Man's relationship with the Past and his past which truly determines him rather than any universal human nature: 'Chaque époque se développe suivant des lois dialectiques, et les hommes dépendent de l'époque et non pas d'une nature humaine.'²⁶⁹

Sartre's theatre of situations reflects the concerns of Contemporary Man, remaining true to its aim to take its part in History. His theatre, engaged and politically inspired, rejects classical, modernist, and epic genres alike for their psychological bias, apathetic derision, or didactic alienation; it focuses instead on the needs of the masses, or rather so is its intention:

Maintenant, ce qui importe, c'est de situer des conflits humains dans des situations historiques et de montrer qu'ils en dépendent. Nos thèmes doivent être des thèmes sociaux: les thèmes majeurs du monde dans lequel nous vivons – ceux dont nous avons pris conscience.²⁷⁰

Though certainly not innovative in form, Sartrean theatre is inspirational for its presentation of contemporary conflict, whether social, political, or ethical. But it is not always as optimistic as one might expect: the triumphalism of *Les Mouches* and *Le*

²⁶⁴ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.255.

²⁶⁵ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.507.

²⁶⁶ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.640.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.604.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.627.

²⁶⁹ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, discussion, p.136.

²⁷⁰ *Un Théâtre de Situations*, p.72.

Diable et le Bon Dieu turns sour in the later, darker pieces such as *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* and *Les Troyennes*, with their emphasis on irredeemability and futile brutality; and even the farces cast an ominous cloud on their epoch:

En plein vingtième siècle, avec les progrès étourdissants de la technique, ils croient qu'ils mourront dans leurs lits, comme au moyen âge!²⁷¹

Sais-tu ce qui est en train de mourir? L'Homme.²⁷²

The apocalyptic insight of Mouton and Sibilot anticipates and is compounded by the recorded omen of Frantz, which can leave us in no doubt as to Sartre's perception of his century: 'De qui, de quoi, ce goût rance et fade dans ma gorge? De l'homme? De la bête? De moi-même? C'est ce goût du siècle.'²⁷³ The harsh, perceptive nudity of the crabs completes the image, but it is neither they, nor Man, nor even Frantz himself which leave the bitter taste; it is the remnants of the century, the extension of Nausea to a taste of one's own Time, and in order to defeat it, Frantz, as an archetypal anti-hero, attempts the *conduite magique* of escaping his own temporality in the madness and seclusion of his sequestration:

Pour chasser le temps de cette chambre, il m'a fallu cinq années; pour l'y ramener, vous n'avez eu besoin que d'un instant. (*Il montre le bracelet*) Cette bête câline qui ronronne autour de mon poignet et que je fourre dans ma poche quand j'entends frapper Leni, c'est le Temps Universel, le Temps de l'horloge parlante, des indicateurs et des observatoires.²⁷⁴

His inevitable failure leaves the burden of his guilt unbearable, and the final note is one of despair. However, the burdens of the times, like that of the Occupation, should be viewed as an inducement to positive action, and amidst the violence and repression of our century, the politics of liberation become ever more important, giving the Sartrean hero the opportunity to shine.

It is in the Marxist Historicity of need that lies the next requirement of Sartre's authentic hero:

Quand la 'condition humaine' se concrétise sous forme de 'condition historique', la Chair elle-même va devoir s'incarner dans des besoins réels, et le Regard d'Autrui céder la place à la complexité réelle des rapports sociaux qui constituent le trame de l'histoire. La mauvaise foi, les conditions inauthentiques, le choix de l'échec, toutes les attitudes, enfin, selon lesquelles la liberté nous est montrée, dans *L'être et le néant*, se retournant contre soi, se niant elle-même, – c'est aux contradictions réelles des sociétés humaines qu'on les rapportera désormais en les nommant 'aliénations'.²⁷⁵

Jeanson looks for an answer in *l'être-pour-autrui*, in a typical critique of the subjectivist solipsism of *L'Être et le Néant*. He is right to search in that direction, but he overlooks the fact that Sartre's Being-for-Others is not limited to the Marxism of *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* and that it begins with an ontological exploration of the existential modes of *avoir*, *faire*, and *être*.

²⁷¹ Nekrassov, p.71.

²⁷² Ibid., p.107.

²⁷³ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.375.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p.255

²⁷⁵ Jeanson, Francis, *Sartre par lui-même*, p.159.

Sartre dedicates nearly two hundred pages (almost a third) of *L'Être et le Néant* to a comprehensive study of having, doing, and being. His aim is to compare the interrelationship between the three modes of human existence and thereby to trace an escape route from the original desire to *be* God. Such, he maintains, is a primary necessity of ontology:

La valeur suprême de l'activité humaine est-elle un *faire* ou un *être*? Et, quelle que soit la solution adoptée, que devient *l'avoir*? L'ontologie doit pouvoir nous renseigner sur ce problème; c'est d'ailleurs une de ses tâches essentielles, si le pour-soi est l'être qui se définit par *l'action*.²⁷⁶

The escape route soon becomes apparent: action, the mode of doing, is the only logical option for *pour-soi*, since the other fundamental modes of human reality have been shown to fuse into the futile attempt to be God, and are thus doomed to failure. Sartre takes maximum advantage of the theatrical necessity for action to reinforce his philosophical conclusion, and his greatest heroes are without exception exemplary Men of Action. The mode of having – possession or appropriation – is particularly scorned by Sartre, synonymous as it is with the evils of the bourgeoisie, and it is denounced to great effect in Hugo's first conflict with Hoederer:

Hoederer:	Ils cherchaient une arme. On peut cacher des armes dans une valise mais on peut aussi y cacher des papiers.
Hugo:	Ou des affaires strictement personnelles.
Hoederer:	A partir du moment où tu es sous mes ordres, mets-toi bien dans la tête que tu n'as plus rien à toi. ²⁷⁷

Sartre's agents are people who *do*, and, to follow their 'vocation', his heroes must free themselves from the material trappings of their class, as they would follow a religious vow of poverty. Once rid of their burdensome origins of Being, agents are finally free to act – a precondition demonstrated superbly in Goetz, who gives up his lands in desperate pursuit of active justification, acknowledging the futility of his having and his being: '*Nous ne sommes pas et nous n'avons rien.*'²⁷⁸

Action, then, is proposed by Sartre as the salvation of the human being and thus one of the most vital preconditions to heroism. It can be regarded as a combination of Historicity and the mode of doing, for it involves by definition awareness of and active influence upon one's Time. To act is to change the world:

Agir, c'est modifier la *figure* du monde, c'est disposer des moyens en vue d'une fin, c'est produire un complexe instrumental et organisé tel que, par une série d'enchaînements et de liaisons, la modification apportée à l'un des chaînons amène des modifications dans toute la série et, pour finir, produise un résultat prévu.²⁷⁹

Sartrean action is thus intentional, premeditated, and effective. It is a necessary condition of human reality, for we can only attain our liberty through action, and if we cease to act, we cannot fail to cease to *be*:

²⁷⁶ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.507.

²⁷⁷ *Les Mains Sales*, p.105.

²⁷⁸ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.57.

²⁷⁹ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.508.

Je suis, en effet, un existant qui *apprend* sa liberté par ses actes.²⁸⁰

La réalité humaine n'est pas d'abord pour agir, mais être pour elle, c'est agir et cesser d'agir, c'est cesser d'être.²⁸¹

Action lies at the heart of Sartrean philosophy, and the insistence on the freedom to act is what gives it its note of optimism and its reasonable claim to Humanism. Removed from the despair of metaphysical Absurdism and from the restrictive pretence of organised religion, Sartre's Existentialism provides a much needed lifeline to freedom, autonomy, and hope:

La doctrine que je vous présente est justement à l'opposé du quiétisme, puisqu'elle déclare: il n'y a de réalité que dans l'action; elle va plus loin d'ailleurs, puisqu'elle ajoute: l'homme n'est rien d'autre que son projet, il n'existe que dans la mesure où il se réalise, il n'est donc rien d'autre que l'ensemble de ses actes, rien d'autre que sa vie.²⁸²

The doctrine is harsh: deprived of personality, possessions, and Being, Man is reduced to and defined by the acts which he chooses to commit.

The heroes of Sartrean theatre are thus inseparable from their noble acts, just as the failed or anti-heroes are condemned by the ignobility of theirs, for in action lies the only key to identity: 'Agir (c'est-à-dire précisément l'objet du théâtre), c'est changer le monde et, en le changeant, c'est nécessairement se changer.'²⁸³ Thus Garcin's heroism remains a dream of being, contradicted starkly by the history of his actions:

Garcin: Je n'ai pas rêvé cet héroïsme. Je l'ai choisi. On est ce qu'on veut.

Inès: Prouve-le. Prouve que ce n'était pas un rêve. Seuls les actes décident de ce qu'on a voulu.

Garcin: Je suis mort trop tôt. On ne m'a pas laissé le temps de faire *mes* actes.

Inès: On meurt toujours trop tôt – ou trop tard. Et cependant la vie est là, terminée: le trait est tiré, il faut faire la somme. Tu n'es rien d'autre que ta vie.

Garcin: Vipère! Tu as réponse à tout.²⁸⁴

Inès, the viper of truth, reminds Garcin that his real intentions are revealed by his actions: to be the hero he longs to be, he would have to have acted courageously during his life; coward that he is, when put to the test, he fled from the scene. *Les Mains Sales* explores further this Sartrean propensity for action, emphasising the importance of the act by linking the pragmatic agency of Hoederer, who knows that 'on juge un type à son travail',²⁸⁵ with the intellectual idealism of Hugo, who admits that his enemy's actions speak louder than his words: 'Ce qu'il veut, ce qu'il pense, je m'en moque. Ce qui compte c'est ce qu'il fait.'²⁸⁶ Hugo's tragedy lies in the fact that these noble words are no less idealistic than any of his other beliefs.

The distinction between action and gesture is also marked in Sartrean theatre in

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p.514.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p.556.

²⁸² *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.55.

²⁸³ *Un Théâtre de Situations*, p.122.

²⁸⁴ *Huis Clos*, p.90.

²⁸⁵ *Les Mains Sales*, p.94.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p.176.

order to purify and extol the truly worthy deed. Gesture is relegated to the domain of the inauthentic and false, shown to be an ineffectual end in itself rather than an intentional and consequential means to a definite end. Theatre itself is often used as a metaphor for gesture, based as it is upon imagery and role-play, and it turns with a vengeance on itself to disown those characters who are nothing more than actors:

Leni: Sa femme a des projets.

Le Père: Ce sont des menaces de théâtre: le dépit a ressuscité l'actrice et l'actrice a voulu sa sortie.²⁸⁷

Although Le Père underestimates Johanna's capacity for action, her ultimate weakness does indeed prove Leni's judgement a little flattering. Compared with the exploits of Georges and Kean, however, Werner's wife is certainly a capable agent. The two comic heroes live their lives through representation, playing themselves as they would like to be and so avoiding the pitfall of identity: 'On joue les héros parce qu'on est lâche et les saints parce qu'on est méchant; on joue les assassins parce qu'on meurt d'envie de tuer son prochain, on joue parce qu'on est menteur de naissance.'²⁸⁸ Kean is the epitome of futile gesture, condemned in the vein of Sisyphus to a life of illusory distraction; and riled with anger at the fate of his profession, his outcry is one of particular despair: 'Voilà vingt ans que je fais des gestes pour vous plaire; comprenez-vous que je puisse vouloir faire des actes?'²⁸⁹ The distinction here is made with some clarity, and it shows that Kean is finally in search of authentic action, transcending the boundary from comic to potential hero.

For the genuine hero, authentic action comes in the form of *engagement*, Sartre's term for action not just '*dans le*' but '*au milieu du monde*'. Its translation into English proves testing, for the concept involves not only the idea of being 'engaged' in the world, as all men and women are condemned to be,²⁹⁰ but also, and more importantly, the necessity to be 'committed' to the world, to accept one's Historicity, and take an active part in socio-political life. For the Sartrean hero, thrown into the world, the only way to make sense of human life is to accept the logical crusade for liberation through an assumption of social duty and ethical responsibility. The opposite attitude to committed Engagement is that of neutrality, an illogical *conduite magique* akin to the Quietism condemned in *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme* and visible in many of Sartre's failed, comic, and anti-heroes.

The Sartrean hero is faced with the challenge of justifying his existence, and the recurrent problem of character identity, shattered by ontology and partly solved by action, is supposedly resolved by full, committed Engagement: 'Celui qui ne fait pas tout ne fait rien: je n'ai rien fait. Celui qui n'a rien fait n'est personne.'²⁹¹ In a typically Sartrean 'all or nothing' mentality, Frantz declares that he has lost his identity through his non-committal Engagement; in fact, as an anti-hero, his identity has been fixed, and he will be remembered by his peers as 'The Butcher of Smolensk'. His tragedy stems from his misunderstanding of the nature of action. Although he is right to connect it with identity, by linking it with destiny and regarding it as a means in itself, he acts in a Bad Faith which leads him to gratuitous evil:

Frantz: La guerre était mon destin et je l'ai voulue de toute mon âme.

²⁸⁷ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.99.

²⁸⁸ *Kean*, p.81.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.65.

²⁹⁰ We are condemned to *engagement* by the facticity of our birth: we are born into a concrete, not an abstract, world.

²⁹¹ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.311.

J'agissais, enfin! Je réinventais les ordres; j'étais d'accord avec moi.

Johanna: Agir, c'est tuer?

Frantz: C'est agir. Écrire son nom.²⁹²

Action without commitment is even more dangerous than no action whatsoever: it is certainly commendable to 'écrire son nom', but as a torturer (who has by definition no respect for the freedom of *autrui*), Frantz's identity is that of the Humanist anti-hero, brutal and oppressing instead of free and liberatory.

The Engagement of Sartrean Existentialism manifests itself in three main forms: intellectual, artistic, and political. The role of the intellectual agent has already been discussed, but intellectual agents who do not progress through the ontology of liberty and the ethics of action towards the committed Engagement of heroism become the focus of scorn in Sartre's fiction and theatre. Characters such as Roquentin and Hugo who have climbed the first step of the Sartrean ladder seem to stagnate in their own ideology, conceiving and aware, but achieving very little; engaged but not committed: 'Rien à faire! Je suis un gosse de riches, un intellectuel, un type qui ne travaille pas de ses mains.'²⁹³ Hugo's despair shows a depth of self-awareness: he is a product of his class rather than bastardised by his birth into it, and his inability to transcend his 'type' leads directly to his finitude. Hoederer's mistake is to incur his sexual jealousy, for in terms of ideology, his Engagement is restricted to words: 'Il faut le laisser dire. Chacun peut employer les mots qu'il veut.'²⁹⁴ Hoederer's realisation of the vast gulf between words and action is of great significance, and this conflict is a theme which runs throughout Sartre's work, separating hero from agent or even the agent from the puppet. The passive intellectualism of Roquentin and Hugo is mirrored by many other lesser characters, and it even enters the world of farce and illusion in its incarnation in Georges:

Véronique: Je crois vos mains. Voyez comme elles ont l'air bête:
vous n'avez jamais rien fait de vos dix doigts.

Georges: Je travaille avec la langue.²⁹⁵

The world of thoughts and words is that of the poet or, it seems, the prerogative of the dead:

Estelle: Ah! tu penses trop!

Garcin: Que faire d'autre? Autrefois, j'agissais.²⁹⁶

By contrast, action is credited as a life-giving force, for, as pointed out by Canoris, without the agency of concrete Engagement, *pour-soi* loses its utility and thus its reason to exist: 'Moi, je crois qu'il y a beau temps que nous sommes morts: au moment précis où nous avons cessé d'être utiles.'²⁹⁷ Unless it is successful and efficient, action is reduced to the passivity and *rêverie* of intellectual Engagement, which functions for Sartre merely as a precondition and catalyst for socio-political involvement; it must not become a substitute:

²⁹² Ibid., p.304.

²⁹³ *Les Mains Sales*, p.94.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p.91.

²⁹⁵ *Nekrassov*, p.85.

²⁹⁶ *Huis Clos*, p.82.

²⁹⁷ *Morts sans Sépulture, Théâtre I*, p.201.

S'il suffit de concevoir pour réaliser, me voilà plongé dans un monde semblable à celui du rêve, où le possible ne se distingue plus aucunement du réel [...]. La distinction entre le simple *souhait*, la *représentation* que je pourrais choisir et *le choix* étant abolie, la liberté disparaît avec elle.²⁹⁸

The fusion of the modes of human reality, of conceiving an act and carrying it out, is shown to counteract the concrete progressiveness of action. It is linked by Sartre with the surrealism of the oneiric, whose illusory abstraction threatens even the facticity of Freedom. Sartre's greatest heroes are therefore those who defend and represent the supremacy of Freedom, planted firmly on the route from the abstract to the real: 'Le chemin que suit Goetz est un chemin de la liberté: il mène [...] d'une morale abstraite, sans lieu ni date, à un engagement concret.'²⁹⁹ Abstract morality implies an ethics of non-Engagement, an intellectual ideology of acceptance and Absurdity, and characters who fail to transcend this ethic of passivity will be confined to the Nausea of Being explored so well in Roquentin.

The second manifestation of Sartrean Engagement is that of the artistic, the form which can be credited with Roquentin's salvation:

Je sens quelque chose qui me frôle timidement et je n'ose pas bouger parce que j'ai peur que ça ne s'en aille. Quelque chose que je ne connaissais plus: une espèce de joie.

La Négrresse chante. Alors on peut justifier son existence? Un tout petit peu? [...] Un livre. Naturellement, ça ne serait d'abord qu'un travail ennuyeux et fatigant, ça ne m'empêcherait pas d'exister ni de sentir que j'existe. Mais il viendrait bien un moment où le livre serait écrit, serait derrière moi et je pense qu'un peu de clarté tomberait sur mon passé. Alors peut-être que je pourrais, à travers lui, me rappeler ma vie sans répugnance.³⁰⁰

The prospect of artistic Engagement is an ultimate source of hope in a generally desperate novel, and for the central, autobiographical character it represents a positive chance of personal salvation. However, with the progression of Sartre's work and ideology comes a modification of both Engagement and salvation, and the ephemeral celebration of aesthetic creativity is vanquished by resolute insistence on *la littérature engagée*, which resounds so clearly in *Qu'est-ce que la Littérature?*. The seeds had been sown five years earlier when *L'Etre et le Néant* brought into question the very validity of creation: 'Ce que je crée – si j'entends par créer: faire venir matière et forme à l'existence – c'est moi. [...] La totalité de mes possessions réfléchit la totalité de mon être. Je suis ce que j'ai.'³⁰¹ The argument returns to *avoir*, *faire*, and *être*, for human creativity is consigned to the passive modes of having and being, and thence to the original desire to be God; art for art's sake euphemises art for the sake of the subjective Self, and its downfall lies in its solipsism and futility.

Sartre's third and final form of Engagement, that of political commitment, is a triumphant combination of action, Historicity, and ethics, and it has come to represent the hallmark of the authentic Sartrean hero. Oreste, Canoris, Hoederer, and Goetz are all engaged in political action, struggling as Humanists to improve the lot of those around them, and it is no coincidence that these worthy characters all champion the cause for liberation, engaged in a history ranging from the tyranny of Ancient Greece to the self-

²⁹⁸ *L'Etre et le Néant*, pp.562-63.

²⁹⁹ *Un Théâtre de Situations*, p.270.

³⁰⁰ *La Nausée*, pp.247-48.

³⁰¹ *L'Etre et le Néant*, pp.680-81.

interested politics of the recent Cold War. It is in this favoured form of Engagement that Sartre seeks an answer to the problem of solipsism, a problem which will lead him to his Being-for-Others. At this stage, however, the conflict of interests between the subjective individualist (the *solitaire*) and the committed political Humanist (the *solidaire*) is explored through the radically contrasting motivations of the intellectual idealist and the compromising realist:

- Slick: T'es pas fou? T'as pas le droit de te respecter si t'es pas au moins secrétaire.
 Hugo: Pauvres idiots! Si je suis entré au Parti, c'est pour que tous les hommes, secrétaires ou non, en aient un jour le droit.
 Georges:[...] Nous, mon petit pote, si on y est entré c'est qu'on en avait marre de crever de faim.³⁰²

Slick and Georges, like Nasty, are impulsively engaged, but despite the somewhat crass polarity of class, the working men of Hoederer succeed in ridiculing the bourgeois respectability of the introspective Hugo. Both motivations may well be autonomously valid, but taken on their own, they are of little common worth. Combined however in the political shell of Hoederer, a balanced composition of intellect and action, they work together to provide a worthy cause. With his balanced nature and his dirty hands, Hoederer is without doubt Sartre's most successful political agent; while retaining a much envied sense of Self, he succeeds in becoming an instrument of power:

- Hoederer: A quoi ça sert-il de fourbir un couteau tous les jours si l'on n'en use jamais pour trancher? Un parti, ce n'est jamais qu'un moyen. Il n'y a qu'un seul but: le pouvoir.
 Hugo: Il n'y a qu'un seul but: c'est de faire triompher nos idées, toutes nos idées et rien qu'elles.
 Hoederer: C'est vrai: tu as des idées, toi. Ça te passera.³⁰³

The image of the knife is particularly apt in the world of the Sartrean hero, for within the realm of political Engagement, and even in the midst of Hoederer's social realism, lies the explosive ethical issue of the justification of violence. For Sartre, violence and political progress are inevitable partners, and the ethics of passive resistance is treated with the disdain accorded to neutrality or non-Engagement. With the rejection of absolutes comes the ambiguous ethics of goodness and evil, and Sartre's greatest heroes provide effective demonstration of his ruthless decomposition of traditional morality:

- Goetz: J'ai voulu que ma bonté soit plus dévastatrice que mes vices.
 Heinrich: Et tu y as réussi: vingt-cinq mille cadavres! En un jour de vertu tu as fait plus de morts qu'en trente-cinq années de malice.³⁰⁴

Goetz provides a satire on the virtue of non-violence in a play which seems to reconfirm the necessity of war. Having completed his ethical progression, he is finally prepared to assume the role of the political hero, and to dirty his own hands in compromise and in

³⁰² *Les Mains Sales*, pp.84-85.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.191.

³⁰⁴ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.233.

blood: 'Je suis résigné à tuer [...]. Il y a cette guerre à faire et je la ferai.'³⁰⁵ The attitude of Sartre's soldiers is characterised by resignation and dedication to the cause. His heroes act in the knowledge of their own and others' mortality with their political end in constant sight, and they are not ones to shy away from the spilling of blood. Sartrean Humanism is marked then by ethical compromise and justified violence, but it also runs the risk of serious misnomer, as the human loses its humanity to the expectations of the cause:

Johanna: Un soldat c'est un homme.
 Frantz: C'est d'abord un soldat.³⁰⁶

Frantz lies on the outskirts of Humanistic ideology, but he portrays the efficacy implored by his creator, appearing at times, like many other memorable Sartrean creations, like a chess piece in a game. But this is no Beckettian Endgame, ruled by stasis and futility, but a tactical game of action for the stake of liberation. In his imaginary conflict with Klages, Frantz condemns once more the ethics of non-violence, linking Hoederer's pragmatic power with the ethical reality of Goetz: 'La guerre passe par toi. En la refusant, tu te condamnes à l'impuissance: tu as vendu ton âme pour rien, moraliste. La mienne, je la ferai payer. D'abord gagner!'³⁰⁷ The pejorative use of 'moraliste' confirms the break from the certainty of ethics, the transformation from agent to hero and the vital importance of political commitment. At this stage, commitment seems inextricably linked with an acceptance of the necessity of violence, and Sartre uses the situation of slavery to justify his Hegelian association of violence and Freedom: 'Puisque l'esclavage est l'ordre, la liberté sera désordre, anarchie, terrorisme. [...] Puisque le positif s'obtient par l'oppression, la liberté sera négativité pure. [...] La violence est négation de la négation.'³⁰⁸ The essential qualities of the Sartrean hero have now been traced, and in their final analysis, it remains to be seen if the ultimate goal of the Humanist hero, the exceptional challenge of Authenticity, is greater than or even equal to the sum of its own parts.

In many ways, Authenticity represents the golden standard of the Existentialist Humanist, and the truly authentic heroes of Sartrean theatre are few and far between. However, given the seeming importance of the term, Sartre has given it relatively little credence in his theoretical discussions, and the task of constructing a workable definition is tantamount to philosophical archaeology. The history of the term begins amidst the burning ashes of Good Faith in the notorious footnote of *L'Être et le Néant*:

S'il est indifférent d'être de bonne ou de mauvaise foi, parce que la mauvaise foi ressaisit la bonne foi et se glisse à l'origine même de son projet, cela ne veut pas dire qu'on ne puisse échapper radicalement à la mauvaise foi. Mais cela suppose une reprise de l'être pourri par lui-même que nous nommerons authenticité et dont la description n'a pas place ici.³⁰⁹

Authenticity is then a possible means of ontological escape from the apparent dead end of the *désagrégation intime* and the ultimate equilibrium of Good and Bad Faith, and it functions as a purification of self-putrefied being, presumably on the level of *pour-soi*'s reflection. The only other mention of the term in the work comes with reference to Heidegger's authentic and inauthentic projects, which involve a combination of

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.246 and p.252.

³⁰⁶ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.297.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p.303.

³⁰⁸ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, pp.418-19.

³⁰⁹ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.111, footnote.

ontology and ethics and which are (thus?) rejected by Sartre as non-fundamental, based as they are upon a subjective awareness of death rather than an original choice of life.³¹⁰ The *Cahiers* elaborate on this 'reprise de l'être', continuing the work of *L'Être et le Néant*: 'Puisque sincérité et mauvaise foi étaient renvoyées dos à dos pour jouer sur l'être et le n'être pas, il allait de soi que l'authenticité consistait à dévoiler l'être sur le mode de ne pas être.'³¹¹ This reference to 'dévoilement' of Being, highly reminiscent of the Heideggerian description of Man as the 'shepherd of Being' and perhaps influenced by Heidegger's objections to Sartre's misinterpretations of his philosophy addressed in the *Lettre sur L'Humanisme*, may add to the definition of Authenticity, but the concept remains shrouded in obscurity: how should Man unveil Being, and how does this affect the ethical process? Sartre's previous definition of the concept is more precise, and it succeeds in combining committed action with a positive and Humanistic ethic for life:

L'homme authentique ne perd jamais de vue les buts absolus de la condition humaine. Il est pur choix de ses buts absolus. Ces buts sont: sauver le monde (en faisant qu'il y a de l'être), faire de la liberté le fondement du monde, reprendre à son compte la création et faire que l'origine du monde soit l'absolu de la liberté se reprenant elle-même.³¹²

But, once again, the description is problematic. Firstly, it links the unveiling of Being with 'saving the world' without describing this process of creative revelation; and secondly, it again imposes Freedom as an ethical absolute, risking a contradictory return to Seriousness. This problem is merely compounded by Sartre's subsequent discussion on 'dévoilement', where we learn that 'le Pour-soi n'existe que comme dévoilement d'Être [...]. Par lui l'Être est sauvé du Néant, l'Être se manifeste: le Pour-soi surgit pour que l'Être devienne Vérité [...]. Le Pour-soi se perd comme soi pour coopérer à ce que l'Être soit.'³¹³ We are now confronted not only with a plethora of ethical and ontological absolutes, whereby Being equals Truth, but with a reminder of the inherent lack of status accorded to the human in Sartre's conception of Humanism.

Further insight is given by Sartre in his *Réflexions sur la Question Juive* which marks a definite movement from ontology to ethics:

L'authenticité [...] consiste à prendre une conscience lucide et véridique de la situation, à assumer les responsabilités et les risques que cette situation comporte, à la revendiquer dans la fierté ou dans l'humiliation, parfois dans l'horreur et la haine. Il n'est pas douteux que l'authenticité demande beaucoup de courage et plus que du courage. Ainsi ne s'étonnera-t-on pas que l'inauthenticité soit la plus répandue. Qu'il s'agisse de bourgeois, de chrétiens, la plupart sont inauthentiques, en ce sens qu'ils se refusent à vivre jusqu'au bout leur condition bourgeoise et chrétienne et qu'ils s'en masquent toujours certaines parties.³¹⁴

It seems here that Inauthenticity has become the ethical equivalent of ontological Bad Faith, with the significant proviso that its opposite attitude, that of Authenticity, is not rejected as fundamentally indifferent and flawed, but rather as a positive Sartrean value based on the familiar heroic virtues of lucidity, responsibility, and courage. But as with Bad Faith, Sartre claims that Inauthenticity is the default position, the most common

³¹⁰ Ibid., p.651.

³¹¹ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.490.

³¹² Ibid., pp.463-64.

³¹³ Ibid., pp.500-01.

³¹⁴ *Réflexions sur la Question Juive*, pp.109-10.

ethical state, and it is the few and not the many who transcend this common ground of morality, accepting the totality and truth of their condition and displaying with great strength the courage of their convictions.

In the light of Sartre's incoherent treatment of Authenticity in his philosophical theory, critics have been compelled to turn to the practical world of his theatre for a more comprehensive insight into this, his most elusive concept. Perhaps the most *authentic* of Sartre's creations is the heroic character of Hoederer, who represents a natural embodiment of the qualities demanded of a man of his type:

Tout ce qu'il touche a l'air vrai. Il verse le café dans les tasses, je bois, je le regarde boire et je sens que le vrai goût du café est dans sa bouche à lui. C'est le vrai goût du café qui va disparaître, la vraie chaleur, la vraie lumière.³¹⁵

The true, the genuine, and the authentic seem to be combined in the incarnation of this noble character, and if this is a source of regret and admiration for the inauthentic Hugo, it is one of fear and sexual intrigue for his wife: 'Vous êtes vrai. Un vrai homme de chair et d'os, j'ai vraiment peur de vous et je crois que je vous aime pour de vrai.'³¹⁶ For Jessica, Hoederer is the epitome of a *real* man, a man of potency, dominance and natural appeal who more than compensates for everything her husband lacks. The triangle of characters is reminiscent of *Huis Clos*, though this time the triangle is far from equilateral, as the magnetic appeal of Hoederer comes strongly to the fore. The inter-relationships are summarised effectively by McCall:

Hugo and Jessica are attracted to Hoederer for much the same reasons. Only Hoederer's confidence can make a man of Hugo; only Hoederer's sexuality can make of Jessica a woman. Both feel in Hoederer a solidity, a reality, that they fail to find in themselves; Hoederer seems at home in his body. From the stage set in which they live, Hugo and Jessica watch enviously as the world of real objects and real people comes into existence around Hoederer's presence.³¹⁷

The analysis is sensitive, but it fails to mention Authenticity as the subject of its study. It seems that Sartre, having singled Hoederer out as a candidate for Authenticity, then endows him with the qualities he perceives as being fitting. It is no coincidence, then, that McCall works retrospectively, for devoid of a theoretical definition, the critic is working in the dark. It is not clear whether Sartre's characterisation is consciously affected by Authenticity, but it is unlikely that the links between the theory and the practice are purely coincidental: 'Un type comme Hoederer ne meurt pas par hasard. Il meurt pour ses idées, pour sa politique; il est responsable de sa mort.'³¹⁸ The reference back to Heideggerian Authenticity reinforces Hoederer's privileged status amongst the best of Sartre's heroes, and it strengthens the case for a textual analysis of the plays to supplement the lacking theory.

The reality, sincerity, and truth of Sartrean Authenticity are explored further in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, where the central love interest is punctuated with an apparent search for an absolute:

Vous, vous êtes vraie. Quand je vous regarde, je connais que la vérité existe

³¹⁵ *Les Mains Sales*, p.123.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.224.

³¹⁷ *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.71.

³¹⁸ *Les Mains Sales*, p.244.

et qu'elle n'est pas de mon bord.³¹⁹

Il faut que nous nous aidions à vouloir la Vérité.³²⁰

Frantz's declarations lead him tumbling into Seriousness, into the ontological and ethical absolutism already rejected by Sartre in Sincerity and in the Value. However, Sartre seems to accept a certain absolutism in his personification of Authenticity, and it is certainly the case that his lesser characters are attracted, whether spiritually, sexually, or both, by the *vérité* of their greater fellows.

The farces again provide an illuminating foil for the theatrical exploration of Authenticity. The role-playing creations of Georges and Kean, who strive to evade the problem of identity, are perhaps not *inauthentic*, as the likes of Hugo and Frantz, but rather *anti-authentic* in their resolute rejection of truth and reality:

Éléna:	Une illusion? Kean n'est donc pas un homme?
Le Prince:	Et non, madame: c'est un acteur.
Éléna:	Et qu'est-ce donc qu'un acteur?
Le Prince:	C'est un mirage. ³²¹

By living his life on the set of a stage, Kean can totally circumvent the world of Authenticity with its eclectic concoction of heroic postulations; but his life is a constant *conduite magique*, and as he is reminded by the Prince, the hole at the heart of his being will therefore never be filled: 'C'est nous, c'est nous que tu poursuis en Éléna, nous les vrais hommes. C'est nous que tu veux posséder!'³²²

The Authenticity of Sartrean theatre can be seen to represent a broadening out of the term first encountered in *L'Etre et le Néant* to encompass a vast range of adjectival qualities of character. A close definition is naturally impeded by such a general sketch, and thus the only practical guide to the precise semantics of the term must come in the form of a list. The *authentic* Sartrean hero has been shown to be: true, genuine, natural, and real; powerful, appealing, confident, and dominant; and solid, comfortable, at home inside his body, and physically prepossessing. The demands are certainly demanding, and Sartre's Humanism appears to be crossing the line towards a mythically inspired and fictional doctrine, suitable rather for the super-human.

Sartre's critics seem to have left an open verdict on the question of Authenticity. Most can be seen to accept Sartre's terminology, however ill-defined, and to apply it to his theatre without question. Thus, for example, Bradby can claim that 'Hugo and Goetz represent respectively failure and success in the quest for authentic action' without elaborating on the concept of 'authentic action'.³²³ Greene's contribution that 'Authenticity requires of man not a code of conduct but a way of life' achieves some success in implying the impossibility of a normative ethics, but his attempt at a combination of the ethical and ontological leads to assumption and confusion: 'If anguish recalls the authentic man to his freedom and responsibility, the despair of nausea awaits the unauthentic.'³²⁴ The sentiments are noble, but they are Greene's, not Sartre's. Even Jeanson, the so-called privileged critic, cannot manage a definition, and in the place of a valid critique comes merely simplistic truism: 'L'attitude authentique ne saurait être qu'une attitude d'autonomie.'³²⁵ Recent criticism fares little better, and

³¹⁹ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.277.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.278.

³²¹ *Kean*, p.29.

³²² *Ibid.*, p.67.

³²³ Bradby, David, *Modern French Drama 1940-1990*, p.41.

³²⁴ *The Existentialist Ethic*, p.48 and p.59.

³²⁵ *Le Problème Moral et la Pensée de Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.272.

despite the recent flurry of interest in Sartrean ethics, the concept of Authenticity, which is proposed as the desirable mode of ethical conduct, remains relatively uncontested:

Sartre's authentic individuals must create their own values through their actions; moreover, they must recognise that their choice of these values is not a necessary one and is not supported or justified by anything whatsoever.³²⁶

Bell is covering familiar ethical ground, but by linking Authenticity with the ethics of 'play' and by converting the mode of being into the novel terminology of 'striving',³²⁷ she demonstrates the ability to 'imagine Sisyphus happy' and achieves considerable progress in the Authenticity of Sartrean theatre: 'Men like Hoederer [...] acknowledge and accept their freedom and the ultimate futility of their actions, yet enter the fray, resolved to control and change what they can.'³²⁸ Her progress was perhaps anticipated by Champigny, who favoured the logic of ontology, rather than play, in his choice of a framework for Authenticity:

Sartre's conception of the relations between ethics and ontology is philosophically quite classical. To act ethically would be to act authentically; and acting authentically would be acting according to the nature which ontology defines.³²⁹

Both methods are acceptable, but they are both guilty of avoiding, rather than confronting, the fundamental problems of Authenticity. Similar tactics are at play in the work of Anderson and Fretz, who, inspired no doubt by the *Cahiers*, seek their solutions in the conversion to pure reflection.³³⁰

Sartre's first invocation of pure reflection comes in *La Transcendance de l'Ego*, where apparently it 's'en tient au donné sans élever de prétentions vers l'avenir'. The example Sartre gives is that of hatred, where impure reflection would 'affirm more than it knew' in declaring "Je te déteste", while pure reflection, which is 'simply descriptive', would disarm unreflective consciousness and concede: "Ce n'est pas vrai, je ne te déteste pas, je dis ça dans la colère."³³¹ In this instance, pure reflection recognises the transience of the experience, acknowledging this 'Erlebnis' as an object outside consciousness, and treating it according to the transcendent ontology of temporality. On the ethical plane, impure reflection is said to undermine the necessity of action: 'Dans la réflexion morale complice, ce qui importe c'est l'être moral du réfléchi. Il s'agit de vouloir le Bien [...] pour être moral.'³³² The perfect example of such Bad Faith is of course Garcin, who believes he is no coward purely through his longing to be brave. However, Sartre informs us that the failure of complicit reflection, together with the very structure of alienation and the failure of the God-project, incites *pour-soi* towards pure reflection.³³³ This process, the acceptance of 'failure', is what he calls 'conversion', and he links it with assumption of 'la non-justification ou gratuité – l'ambiguïté – la tension – l'échec.'³³⁴ This insight takes us back to the acknowledgment of the Absurd,

³²⁶ Bell, Linda A., *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity*, p.113.

³²⁷ Ibid., p.127.

³²⁸ Ibid., p.129.

³²⁹ *Humanism and Human Racism*, p.32.

³³⁰ See Thomas C. Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity*, p.55, and Leo Fretz, *Het Individualiteitsconcept in Sartres Filosofie*, appendix, pp.268-69.

³³¹ *La Transcendance de l'Ego*, p.48.

³³² *Cahiers pour une Morale*, pp.12-13.

³³³ Ibid., p.489.

³³⁴ Ibid., p.486.

and it seems that if Sartre had defined Good Faith as simply the assumption of the 'désagrégation intime', he might have reached this conclusion much sooner. Indeed he goes on to describe the three changes effected by conversion to pure reflection as:

Nouvelle manière, 'authentique', d'être à soi-même et pour soi-même, qui transcende la dialectique de la sincérité-mauvaise foi [...].
Saisie thématique de la liberté, de la gratuité, de l'injustifiabilité.
Nouvelle relation de l'homme à son projet: il est dedans et dehors à la fois.³³⁵

There is nothing particularly original here apart from the new relationship between *pour-soi* and the project, which is subsequently elaborated upon:

Dans la réflexion pure [...] le Pour-soi veut toujours la fin pour elle-même mais il est conscient de soi comme voulant cette fin. [...] C'est ce double aspect simultané du projet humain, gratuit en son cœur et consacré par la reprise réflexive, qui en fait l'*existence authentique*.³³⁶

In this context, pure reflection resembles a simultaneous reflection achieved, as it were, by 'splitting' consciousness in two, so that *pour-soi* reflects on itself reflecting. Such a technique is reminiscent both of a *conduite magique* and of dissociation (*dédoublement*), and thus cannot be far removed from idealism and Bad Faith. Hazel Barnes equates the effect with 'fatigue, slight insobriety, or a sudden return to focusing on immediate surroundings after intense involvement in sustained nonreflective activity focused elsewhere', thus emphasising its magical and transient nature. She adds:

What pure reflection reveals – glimpsed over the shoulder, as it were, and only as a pseudo-object – is our perpetually active, impersonal intentional consciousness. [...] It manifests itself in a feeling that what is happening now is no more real than what was happening yesterday or will be tomorrow and that at the core of the experience there is no stable and enduring 'I'. To interpret pure reflection as the evidence of the presence in us of an impersonal, though individual, consciousness, is for Sartre both correct phenomenological procedure and the revelation of our existential freedom. It is this that makes it possible for human reality to effect even a drastic modification of the fundamental project.³³⁷

This definition is particularly interesting if used in conjunction with Catalano's understanding of Authenticity, according to which 'the authentic person does not consistently distract herself from these moments of pure reflection'.³³⁸

It seems, then, that Authenticity requires a conversion to a pure reflection which assumes gratuity, ambiguity, tension, and failure through a simultaneous acceptance of facticity and transcendence, and through a magical *conduite* of consciousness which leads it to reflect on itself reflecting, to accept the fluidity of temporality, and thus to deny any ownership of 'Self'. Despite the complexity, the only new aspect of this somewhat incoherent theory is a magical one, which in the final analysis cannot but prove contradictory. Thus far, therefore, Authenticity has managed to defeat and even

³³⁵ Ibid., p.490.

³³⁶ Ibid., p.497.

³³⁷ Barnes, Hazel E., 'Sartre's Ontology: The revealing and making of being', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, pp.13-38, (p.33).

³³⁸ Catalano, Joseph S., *Good Faith and Other Essays*, p.156.

outlive its critics, and ultimately we are left without the promised ethics of deliverance and salvation, and devoid of the radical conversion so apparent in *Saint Genet*.

What then can be salvaged from the Sartrean delineation of Heroic Man? The hero of Sartrean theatre has been scrutinised with reference to Humanism, bastardy, courage, mortality, Historicity, action, Engagement, ethical realism, violence, and Authenticity, and a clear picture has emerged of the Sartrean concept of heroism. Characters like Oreste, Hoederer, and Goetz undoubtedly represent the embodiment of this complex and demanding concept, and it is in their hands that lies the fate of the practical reality of Sartre's theatre, ontology, and ethics. Unfortunately, these characters have been mystified and almost canonised by half a century of generally favourable commentary and audience, and a critical eye is required if their qualities are to be challenged.

Firstly, the characterisation of the hero as a *bastard* must be contested, especially in relation to the successful portrayals of the contemporary hero evident in many modernist plays. The Sartrean propensity for bastardy is symbolic, rather than ontological or ethical, in origin, and in discarding philosophical logic for personal theatrical taste, Sartre alienates the ordinary being by excluding the potential heroism of Everyman, thus contradicting his declared intention to stage a theatre for the masses and denying an ethical tradition stemming back to at least medieval times. Secondly, the demand for heroic action and Engagement must be questioned: the modes of having and being may have been rejected for the cherished mode of doing, but the failure of Sartrean ethics to justify human action leaves the very choice of action both subjective and gratuitous. In this light, we may well ask why we should engage ourselves at all, why Sartre has cut the puppet's strings to create his Man of Action. The answer must be that Sartre is avoiding the reality of Absurdism in an elaborate *conduite magique* of his own creation, a view reflected also in the ideology of Camus: 'Pour m'en tenir aux philosophies existentielles, je vois que toutes sans exception me proposent l'évasion.'³³⁹ Sartre is guilty of escapism and flight, leaving behind the apparent despair of Absurdism for a transcendence based on an ontology of solipsistic liberty and on an ethics as inevitable as it is impossible. He is guilty of Seriousness on two counts: his Values of Freedom and action are taken as written in stone, and his coercion into political involvement, even when not explicitly Marxist, has the dictatorial force of the *salaud* which can easily lead the innocent to their death. The point is laboured by Camus:

Je vois beaucoup de gens meurent parce qu'ils estiment que la vie ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue. J'en vois d'autres qui se font paradoxalement tuer pour les idées ou les illusions qui leur donnent une raison de vivre (ce qu'on appelle une raison de vivre est en même temps une excellente raison de mourir).³⁴⁰

But whether they die from their exploits (like Hoederer) or live to fight another day (like Oreste and Goetz), Sartre's heroes are required to enter a political struggle which is always ostensibly one of Sartre's own, and which thus conflicts with their freedom as autonomous, if fictitious, beings. Hugo's misguided 'je ne respire que depuis mon entrée au Parti' effects a powerful paradox between his existential freedom and his Existentialist duty,³⁴¹ if Sartre's characters cannot breathe outside the realm of politics, it is surely because they are suffocated by the doctrine of their own creator. Sartre's case for political commitment amounts to little more than a crass attempt at combatting the ethical solipsism for which he was criticised in *L'Être et le Néant*, and the later theatre

³³⁹ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.50.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.16.

³⁴¹ *Les Mains Sales*, p.192.

sits uncomfortably on the throne of the earlier success.

The third objection must be levelled at Sartre's appeal for ethical realism, which is used as a euphemism for the justification of violence. Critics have rarely argued the Existentialist case for pacifism, even in the guise of devilish advocacy, and yet the Sartrean insistence on the necessity of violence cannot fail to be seen as another paradoxical threat to the autonomy of choice, and thus to the very ontology of the freedom of *pour-soi*:

Try to understand this at any rate: if violence began this very evening and if exploitation and oppression had never existed on the earth, perhaps the slogans of non-violence might end the quarrel. But if the whole regime, even your non-violent ideas, are conditioned by a thousand-year-old oppression, your passivity serves only to place you in the ranks of the oppressors.³⁴²

By linking pacifism with passivity, Sartre is not only guilty of semantic misrepresentation, but more seriously of undermining an ontologically valid choice of action, and in his defence of his characterisation of Goetz, he betrays a deep-set political preference for the ethics of means and ends: 'J'ai voulu montrer que mon héros, Goetz, qui est un genre de franc-tireur et d'anarchiste du Mal, ne détruit rien quand il croit beaucoup détruire. Il détruit des vies humaines, mais ni la société, ni les assises sociales.'³⁴³ If Sartre considers human lives as nothing, and humanity as just a means to an end, there can be little hope of a future for his Existentialism as a valid form of Humanism. Indeed any Humanistic claim concerning the even non-religious sanctity of human life, or even the contention that humanity is an end in itself, is treated with a level of disdain usually reserved for the Seriousness of the *salauds*:

Vous êtes un neutraliste qui s'ignore, un pacifiste honteux, un marchand d'illusions!³⁴⁴

Le Prince: La violence n'arrangera rien: il faut prendre une vue réaliste de la situation.

Karsky: Vous êtes un lâche: vous m'avez attiré dans un guet-apens pour sauver votre tête.³⁴⁵

The venomous reproaches of Mouton and Karsky reveal the white-feathered connection between the pacifist and the coward, and the image they portray is reminiscent of the despicable character of Garcin, condemned to the shame of hell for his cowardly flight into pacifism. The most comprehensive treatment of pacifism comes in *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, and even there, Sartre cannot refrain from parody:

Si, pendant mon absence, on voulait vous enrôler dans l'un ou l'autre parti, refusez de vous battre. Et si l'on vous menace, répondez aux menaces par l'amour. Rappelez-vous, mes frères, rappelez-vous: l'amour fera reculer la guerre.³⁴⁶

³⁴² Sartre's preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.21, cited in Dorothy McCall, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.34.

³⁴³ *Un Théâtre de Situations*, p.272.

³⁴⁴ *Nekrassov*, p.73.

³⁴⁵ *Les Mains Sales*, p.144.

³⁴⁶ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.197.

In this satirical reworking of the teachings of Christ, Sartre reaffirms his scornful disrespect for the pacifist, appearing almost to relish the resulting destruction of the masses. His stance on the issue does not only conflict with the freedom of choice, but also with his portrayal of the possible relations with *autrui*, in which both sadism and murder are shown to result in failure.

The repercussions of Sartre's obvious inner-conflict on his character portrayal are devastating, particularly in relation to his female characters. Through some inherent misogyny, Sartre links pacifism not only with passivity and cowardice, but also with his perception of women – perhaps an ethical misogyny to match the ontological consignment of women to the viscous and the *troué*. As a result, Sartrean Hero is always a Sartrean *Man* of Action, and Sartrean Woman is consistently demoted to secondary characterisation. Apart from in *Les Mouches*, where Sartre deliberately distorts the classical myth to demean the role of Électre, the most poignant example is that of Hilda, whose potential heroism is denied her because of her gender, and thus her pacifistic ideology (the two go hand in hand). However, she is a character of great stature and presence, and she stands as a strong and courageous model of free thought in a world oppressed by tyranny and blood:

L'Instructeur: Tu ne dis rien, mais tu nous regardes et nous savons que
tu ne nous approuves pas.
Hilda: Ne puis-je penser ce que je veux?³⁴⁷

She is also a committed Humanist, and while Goetz is undergoing his somewhat adolescent changes in life plan, Hilda is a constant source of virtue, a paragon of human care:

Goetz: Dieu est mort.
Hilda: Mort ou vivant, que m'importe! Il y a longtemps que je
ne me souciais plus de lui.³⁴⁸

She is at least one step ahead of Goetz for the majority of the play, until the typical moment of truth, the *situation limite*, when she is forced to lay her values on the line:

Hilda: Pourquoi veux-tu me rendre complice de tes crimes?
Pourquoi m'obliges-tu à décider à ta place? Pourquoi me
donnes-tu puissance de vie et de mort sur mes frères?
Goetz: Parce que je t'aime.
Hilda: Tais-toi. Ah! tu as gagné: tu m'as fait passer de l'autre
côté de la barrière; j'étais avec ceux qui souffrent, à présent
je suis avec ceux qui décident des souffrances. O Goetz,
jamais plus je ne pourrai dormir! Je te défends de verser le
sang. Refuse.³⁴⁹

Hilda makes the choice which Goetz is too weak to make, and her choice of pacifism is neither easy nor invalid. But the resolution of the play is one of committed, violent action, and by thus condemning her decision, Sartre strikes a blow at his own defence of ethical freedom and willingly misrepresents the respective merits of his creations:

Goetz may be the last act 'hero' of *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, but Heinrich,

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p.177.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p.240.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., p.195.

Nasty and Hilda, mystified as they appear, are right at his expense, for by far the greater part of the action; and even his 'conversion' is marked by an inglorious murder and a readiness to be both 'bourreau et boucher' in a revolution that is bound to fail.³⁵⁰

Hilda is of course not the only victim of this ethical prejudice and gender discrimination: Électre, Inès, Lucie, Lizzie, Véronique, and Johanna are all potential heroes who *fail* through an ultimate weakness, passivity, or capitulation, occasionally to a foreign set of values, but more usually to the irresistible dominance of heroic machismo. Even those with the underlying strength to be truly heroic seem to crumble back to the viscous once their potential is put to the test, serving as a clear reminder of the misogynistic characterisation evident in Sartre's theatre and fiction:

He is [...] revolted by women. There is something sickening about all the female characters in Sartre's plays and stories. Woman is seen as corrupt and corrupting; and in the very viscosity of the physical world, half-fluid, half-solid, Sartre discerns what is passive, yielding, and 'feminine'.³⁵¹

There is no room here for a thorough discussion of Sartre's perception and presentation of women, but it is interesting to note that his disdain for the passive is connected with both pacifism and femininity; neither 'disability' is deemed minor enough to produce a deserving hero.

Despite the lack of a pacifist hero, Sartre is obviously tempted by the less compromising ethics of pacifism, and there are times in his philosophy and even in his theatre when he seems, almost in spite of himself, to actively condone the non-violent:

Si le but est concret et fini, s'il est dans un avenir à mesure d'homme il doit exclure la violence [...] et si l'on est obligé d'y recourir pour l'atteindre au moins apparaîtra-t-elle comme injustifiable et *limitée*. Ce sera l'échec au sein de la réussite.³⁵²

The *Cahiers* reflect clearly Sartre's ambivalence towards the question of violence, revealing at times, such as in his discussion on slavery, the premise for the ethics of violent struggle central to the *Critique*, and at other times the commitment to pacifism reminiscent of *Les Carnets de la drôle de guerre*:

La violence implique le nihilisme [...]. Nous voyons que la violence n'est pas un moyen parmi d'autres d'atteindre la fin, mais le choix délibéré d'atteindre la fin par *n'importe quel moyen*. [...] Dans l'univers de la violence il y a renversement du rapport fin-moyen. La fin est justifiée par la violence.³⁵³

This apparent separation of violence and ethics is clearly echoed on the stage: 'Connais-tu plus singulière bouffonnerie: moi, qui hais le mensonge, je mens à mes frères pour leur donner le courage de se faire tuer dans une guerre que je hais.'³⁵⁴ The philosophical words of Sartre, echoed theatrically here by Nasty, establish a definite ethical contradiction, and point towards the Humanistic ideal of a heroism which could finally

³⁵⁰ Howells, Christina, *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom*, p.74.

³⁵¹ Cranston, Maurice, *Sartre*, p.111.

³⁵² *Cahiers pour une Morale*, pp.215-16.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.179-82.

³⁵⁴ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.249.

combine a clear conscience with clean hands. But this need not exist in a mythical character, for the unassuming Hoederer can fulfil both requirements: his conscience is clear despite his ethical compromise, and in terms of the spilling of blood, his hands are more than clean: 'In its political theme, *Dirty hands* is not ambiguous; it is confused. Hoederer's hands are not dirty and Hugo's hands are not clean.'³⁵⁵ Hoederer's actions succeed in saving a hundred thousand lives; he kills no one within the action of the play; and his final act is one of pacifistic love, lying to save the life of the man who has just shot him. In a play about political engagement and compromise, Hoederer ironically stands out as a hero of pacifism; though admittedly no pacifist, he achieves his success through the pragmatics of non-violence, and he even goes so far as to challenge the methods of Hugo: 'C'est le sang que tu regrettes?'.³⁵⁶ In many respects, Hoederer is the greatest of Sartre's heroes, and if Sartre feels the closest affinity towards him, it is probably because he strikes a perfect balance between a ruthless political agent and a humanitarian man of the people:

Je m'incarne en Hoederer. Idéalement, bien sur; ne croyez pas que je prétende être Hoederer, mais dans un sens je me sens beaucoup plus réalisé quand je pense à lui. Hoederer est celui que je voudrais être si j'étais un révolutionnaire, donc je suis Hoederer, ne serait-ce que sur un plan symbolique.³⁵⁷

It could well be that Sartre is changing with the times, adapting his ethics in the light of his Historicity. He conceded early in his life that 'les types d'engagement sont différents suivant les époques',³⁵⁸ and it seems that in the later plays especially, his view of violence in the modern era has darkened almost to despair. The bitter taste of the violence of the century is the lasting memory of *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, and *Les Troyennes* ends with a warning on the fatal Absurdity of war:

Faites la guerre, mortels imbéciles,
ravagez les champs et les villes,
violez les temples, les tombes,
et torturez les vaincus.
Vous en creverez.
Tous.³⁵⁹

Poséidon's warning should perhaps be heeded as the call for a new ethic for a new Time; the ethics of violence have finally gone too far.

The fourth and final point of contention concerns the ultimate challenge of Authenticity itself. Although progress has been made by linking the term with logic or the mode of play, or even by the references to pure reflection, such achievements are limited through their evasion of the concept, and are largely to the credit of Sartre's critics. By failing or declining to elucidate the term himself, Sartre is surely guilty of his dreaded mysticism: Authenticity has become an elusive term which is unclear in meaning and shrouded in mystery. In the theatre, it relates to areas of truth, sincerity, sexuality, and power, standing as an umbrella term for the qualities demanded at the lofty heights of Sartrean heroism; and philosophically, it remains as a broken promise, an unelaborated answer to the quandary of Bad Faith, and a dangling carrot as doomed

³⁵⁵ McCall, Dorothy, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.64

³⁵⁶ *Les Mains Sales*, p.187.

³⁵⁷ *Un Théâtre de Situations*, p.259.

³⁵⁸ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, discussion, p.105.

³⁵⁹ *Les Troyennes*, p.130.

as Good Faith.

It must then be assumed that Authenticity is devoid of meaning and thus can never be achieved. Even if it were a tangible goal, an attainable value, the problem of judgement would plague its success, for if it stood as a value judgement *of Man by Man*, it would have to be rejected by the Sartrean Humanist.³⁶⁰ The most severe objections, however, are on the ontological plane. How can *pour-soi* be *authentic* when it is what it is not and is not what it is? To what could it remain authentic in the absence of the Self, where “‘bien se connaître”, c’est fatalement prendre sur soi le point de vue d’autrui, c’est-à-dire un point de vue forcément faux.’?”³⁶¹ How can the *réalité humaine* attain the fixed state of Authenticity when its consciousness is fluid, when it is condemned to be free and to constantly reinvent itself? Does the principle of Authenticity not contradict the temporality, ambiguity, and distance of the *désagrégation intime*? These questions have all been raised by Sartre himself in objection to Sincerity, and it would seem that Authenticity is little more than a failed attempt at a reinvention of this already discredited term, dressed in borrowed robes and shrouded in a cloak of mystery. The failure of Sincerity prefigured and determined the inevitable doom of Authenticity, and the absence of both values leaves an impenetrable vacuum at the heart of Sartrean philosophy.

Sartre tries to circumvent the implicit contradictions surrounding his interpretation of consciousness by linking Authenticity with conversion and pure reflection. Pure reflection has been shown to be at best idealistic and at worst an impossible dissociation of consciousness, replacing any Bad Faith form of distractive self-awareness with a magical phenomenon of ‘fleeting glimpses’. As for conversion, even Sartre concedes that individual conversion is ultimately as impossible as ethics: ‘On ne peut pas faire la conversion *seul*. Autrement dit la morale n’est possible que si tout le monde est moral.’³⁶² Unsavaged, then, by conversion and pure reflection, Authenticity presupposes Bad Faith, dissociation, distraction, and Seriousness, and thus must surely be rejected as the goal of Sartre’s agent. A similar conclusion is reached by Greene, who states that Sartre ‘cannot [...] hold that authenticity is an absolute value of universal validity. [...] Since [he] denies the validity of so-called a priori moral principles it must be assumed that he does not intend to assert one.’³⁶³ Greene is right to exclude Authenticity from the realm of the categorically imperative, but his resulting assumption is somewhat over-lenient: Sartre’s ethics is ultimately one of paradox and self-refutation, as he attempts to both deny and assert the possibility of an absolute value of universal morality. If Authenticity has any validity whatsoever, it can only be in death, in the completed *en-soi* of the past where *pour-soi* has finally extinguished together with its Freedom, its transcendence, its fluidity and temporality:

La mort nous rejoint à nous même [...]. Au moment de la mort nous *sommes*, c’est-à-dire nous sommes sans défense devant les jugements d’autrui; on peut décider *en vérité* de ce que nous sommes, nous n’avons plus aucune chance d’échapper au total.³⁶⁴

Tirez sur moi, je vous dis. C’est votre métier. Écoutez donc: un père de famille, c’est jamais un vrai père de famille. Un assassin c’est jamais tout à fait un assassin. Ils jouent, vous comprenez. Tandis qu’un mort, c’est un mort pour de vrai. Être ou ne pas être, hein? Vous voyez ce que je veux dire.

³⁶⁰ See *L’Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, pp.90-94.

³⁶¹ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.69.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p.16.

³⁶³ Greene, Norman N., *The Existentialist Ethic*, p.58.

³⁶⁴ *L’Être et le Néant*, p.159.

Il n'y a rien que je puisse être sinon un mort avec six pieds de terre par-dessus la tête. Tout ça, je vous le dis, c'est de la comédie.³⁶⁵

Sartre reminds us that we cannot *be* anything until we are dead, for truth and totality, and thus Sincerity and Authenticity, are the preserve of *en-soi*, of objects, of things-in-themselves; and Hugo's triumph, appropriate for an intellectual, comes in the realisation that death is the final victory of Being, the last comic trick of the Absurd.

In the demise of Authenticity, it remains to be established what remains of Sartrean Humanism. It seems that we have come full circle: Sartre has led us from the precondition of Absurdity through the ontology of transcendence, which terminated in Bad Faith, towards the possibility of an Existentialist ethic, which came unstuck with Seriousness, and thence to the ultimate promise of Authenticity, which has been shown to culminate in the solipsism of death, the primary metaphysical condition of the Absurd. The zenith of Sartre's Humanism does not lie then in the mystical goal of Authenticity; if Sartrean Existentialism is to succeed as a valid form of Humanism, it cannot be in the form of a linear progression, from the despair of the Absurd to the heroic ethics of Authenticity, but rather through a divisive separation of ontology and ethics. Sartrean Humanism should thus be regarded as an ambivalent ideology, a two-sided coin: to be human is to be fluid, autonomous, and free; but it is also to choose values, and thus to define for oneself an active role amongst one's fellow beings in a world which is superficially socio-political, but fundamentally Absurd.

³⁶⁵ *Les Mains Sales*, p.155.

CONCLUSION

The choice of a combined and balanced focus on Sartre's philosophy and theatre has succeeded in providing a fresh insight into the Humanistic existence of the Sartrean agent, who has been explored in relation to the intellectual perception of the Absurd, the ontological logistics of freedom, the conflicting necessities of ethics, and the challenge of authentic heroism. The established criticism on central areas of Sartrean philosophy, particularly in the realms of heroism and ethics, has either been challenged or extended, and significant objections have been raised. The attempt was to trace a process, and the result has been to uncover a complex vicious circle.

In his philosophical foundation, Sartre builds on the Cartesian Cogito to assert that Man exists on a temporal plane, bringing nothingness into the world as a gap between its three extases of time; *pour-soi* exists as and at a constantly transcendent distance from itself. The intellectual agent perceives the resulting Absurdity of the human condition through its reflective consciousness. In order to progress, *pour-soi* must demonstrate a recognition of its facticity, of the metaphysical contingency of birth and death, and of the *given* conditions of Freedom, along with the constant necessity of choice and reinvention, and coexistence with *en-soi*. Such awareness leads to Nausea and Anguish, which can be conquered only through the ontological potential of transcendence.

The ontological agent must accept the ambiguity of its *désagrégation intime*, its conflicting facticity and transcendence, and strive to avoid the temptation of Bad Faith, the willing denial of this existential ambiguity. In the absence of the Self, the consistent psychological unit, *pour-soi* is forced to seek its identity in its choice of free projects, which leads it inevitably into action.

The ontological impossibility of Good Faith and Sincerity pushes *pour-soi* into the domain of ethics in its desperate search for salvation, but the inherent contradictions between its ethics and its ontology, evident in the basic conflict between autonomous, subjective freedom and the choice of common values, remove the prospect of salvation and indicate instead the necessity for a permanent separation of ontology and ethics.

The final chance of deliverance lies in the heroic goal of Authenticity, but Authentic Man proves to be as mythical as Prometheus and Sisyphus, and with the ultimate collapse of Authenticity comes Man's fall back down to earth, to the mortal reality of Absurdism and to a perpetual state of contingency and Anguish.

Despite the broken links and the ultimately circular nature of the process, Sartre's great achievements within its boundaries cannot be overlooked. He has succeeded in sketching a viable Humanistic ideology, if not admittedly a fully autonomous philosophy, which replaces an absent God with an impressive reinvention of Man, who is returned to his rightful place in the centre of his world as the creator of his own essence. Sartrean Man becomes free and autonomous, active and responsible, delineated on the page and on the stage as both a human and a social being, a concrete and historical existent in an increasingly political world. Regarded in isolation, Sartre's contributions to the areas and techniques of Absurdism, phenomenology, theatre, ontology, and ethics are truly considerable, and the lack of an overall synthesis must not detract from the genuine quality apparent in each domain.

However, his failures are of equal significance and have often been overlooked. His ontology is undoubtedly marred by his resolute insistence on the totality of Freedom, which leads him to the dubious and complete rejection of Essentialism, the unconscious, and the consistent personality, and into the crass substitution of the Fundamental Project and the harsh nobility of full responsibility. Self contradiction is evident in discussions of the *instant*, and the broad applicability of Bad Faith is surely

far too convenient as an in-built self-defence.

Although some progress has been made in the form of situation ethics, Sartre has unquestionably failed to deliver a viable and discernible code of normative ethics, despite repeated promises to this effect. This failure has been a constant source of frustration for Sartre, and it inevitably detracts from his cherished Existentialist philosophy: 'Pourquoi l'existentialisme ne devrait-il pas donner de directives? Au nom de la liberté? Mais, si c'est une philosophie orientée dans le sens indiqué par Sartre, elle doit donner des directives.'³⁶⁶ Sartre's ethical theory must be viewed as disappointing, for it leaves his agents in a complex moral vacuum. His attempts to overcome this problem have invariably ended in Seriousness, and no more so than in the assertion of the ontological reality of Freedom as a universal Value of ethics. The repercussions of such attempts on his theatrical characterisation are significant, particularly in regard to the delineation of the hero, and they include an underlying sense of misogyny and an unjustifiable prejudice against the ethics of non-violence. The final ethical failure lies in the mythical goal of Authenticity, which is ultimately reducible to the passive mode of being and therefore no better than the implied and impossible synthesis of *en-soi-pour-soi* or of the fated *Homme-Dieu*.

What then is the legacy of Sartrean philosophy? Sartre has failed to achieve the desired synthesis between the dictates of his mind (his Existentialism) and the demands of his moral self (his Humanism). This is mainly due to the incompatibility of his ontology and ethics, and the only means of progression in this area must lie in a reworking of this failed relationship, whereby the ontological is regarded as a stimulus or indication to the ethical, rather than an inflexible and logical determinant. The ethical could even be salvaged by a conscious overriding of ontology: '[Il s'agit de] chercher le salut en refusant de coopérer avec un processus ontologique et a-historique qui semble se servir de nous.'³⁶⁷

In his defiant refusal to accept the limitations of human freedom, Sartre has engaged himself in an elaborate *conduite magique*, in a complex process of flight, to escape from the apparent despair of Absurdism and the contingency of Man's facticity. Man is ultimately condemned, even by Sartre, to a futile chase after his own Self:

Notre vie n'est qu'une longue attente [...]. Etre soi, c'est venir à soi.³⁶⁸

Ainsi courons-nous après un possible que notre course même fait apparaître, qui n'est rien que notre course et qui se définit par là même comme hors d'atteinte. Nous courrons vers nous-mêmes et nous sommes, de ce fait, l'être qui ne peut pas se rejoindre.³⁶⁹

Le pour-soi est *effectivement* perpétuel projet de se fonder soi-même en tant qu'être et perpétuel échec de ce projet.³⁷⁰

Tout pour-soi est libre choix; chacun de ses actes, le plus insignifiant comme le plus considérable, traduit ce choix et en émane; c'est ce que nous avons nommé notre liberté. Nous avons maintenant saisi le *sens* de ce choix: il est choix d'être, soit directement, soit par appropriation du monde, ou plutôt les deux à la fois. Ainsi ma liberté est-elle choix d'être Dieu et tous mes actes, tous mes projets, traduisent ce choix et le reflètent de mille et

³⁶⁶ Naville in *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, discussion, pp.130-31.

³⁶⁷ Royle, Peter, *Sartre: L'Enfer et la Liberté*, p.131.

³⁶⁸ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.622.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.253.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.714.

mille manières.³⁷¹

Sartre's own conclusions to *L'Être et le Néant* ironically emphasise the failure of the transcendent project to escape from the Absurd, and they culminate in the vitally important realisation of the ultimate limitation of Freedom. Sartre has realised that there is no salvation and no deliverance, and if his initial drive was 'la passion de comprendre les hommes',³⁷² his final despair comes with the understanding of the fundamental passion of Man:

La passion de l'homme est [...] inverse de celle du Christ, car l'homme se perd en tant qu'homme pour que Dieu naisse. Mais l'idée de Dieu est contradictoire et nous nous perdons en vain; l'homme est une passion inutile.³⁷³

In the absence of salvation through Sartrean Humanism, we are reduced back to the futility of Sisyphus and the image of the donkey, carrot, and cart. With the demise of the agent, we are forced to seek some answers in the resurrection of the puppet, which will fall within the scope of Ionescan theatre and thought. It is to be hoped that an exploration of Ionesco's metaphysical Absurdism, combined with a comparative study of Being-for-Others, will succeed where the Sartrean trail has gone cold; Camus's words of advice may well be applicable to Sartre:

Le dernier effort pour les esprits parents, créateur ou conquérant, est de savoir se libérer aussi de leurs entreprises: arriver à admettre que l'œuvre même, qu'elle soit conquête, amour ou création, peut ne pas être; consommer ainsi l'inutilité profonde de toute vie individuelle. Cela même leur donne plus d'aisance dans la réalisation de cette œuvre, comme d'apercevoir l'absurdité de la vie les autorisait à s'y plonger avec tous les excès.³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ Ibid., p.689.

³⁷² See Francis Jeanson, *Sartre par lui-même*, preface.

³⁷³ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.708.

³⁷⁴ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.158.

CHAPTER THREE – THE IONESCAN PUPPET

INTRODUCTION

As the focus of the thesis shifts from Sartre's agent to the puppet of Ionesco, the aim is not to provide simplistic contrast, but rather to continue the scrutiny of the Humanist subject. As discussed, the shift in focus is actually a necessity, since the study of the Sartrean agent came full circle and plunged us back into the realm of the Absurd. If, then, Sartre's Existentialist theatre can provide us with 'no exit' from the Absurd, it is natural to turn towards the metaphysical theatre of Ionesco for answers to remaining questions and for a possible escape route or salvation from the seemingly constant human state of Anguish.

Chapter One outlined the nature of Ionesco's Absurdist Humanism and introduced its victim as the metaphysical puppet. Ionesco's concept of Humanism was shown to be far less defined than that of Sartre; to a large extent, Ionesco's plays must speak for themselves, for they are not backed up by rational philosophical treatises of the thinker turned dramatist. The Humanism of Ionesco is instinctive and unsupported, emanating from the 'humanness' of creations such as Béranger, who define it as they go along, often erring, always unsure. The focus is on the human plight, the universal imprisonment of Everyman. The absence of God is certainly the common factor, but although this serves to place Ionesco's characters, like their Sartrean cousins, back in the centre of their ontological and ethical universe, these agnostics are constantly in search of a lost Father or Mother, constantly subject to *la soif et la faim*.

The fundamental problems encountered in the study of the Sartrean agent proved to be caused by Sartre's resolute insistence on Freedom, by his outright rejection of the unconscious and Essentialism, by the self-contradictory notion of Authenticity, and ultimately by the obvious incompatibility of his ontology and ethics. The Ionescan puppet is everything but free: he is shown to be caught in a trap, a victim of cruel circumstance, plagued by his subconscious and restricted in his choice. Ionesco successfully avoids the danger of such incompatibility, for his ontology and ethics merge into a broadened metaphysics, even 'Pataphysics'.¹ Sartrean action, too, was shown to be ultimately fruitless, a failed attempt at escaping the given modes of being, and it thus remains to be seen how Humanism can be redefined in the light of Ionesco's preference for introspection, sequestration, and passivity.

The aim of the Sartre chapter was to trace the ethical process of the agent; with Ionesco, it is rather to delve the murky depths of his puppets' shared labyrinth. This is a natural result of the dramatists' widely variant styles, methodologies, and intentions. However, philosophical concepts will continue to take precedence over individual characters and separate plays, for Ionesco can be seen to stand proudly on his own as a great contemporary thinker, taking his place in the long tradition of classic philosophical theatre: 'Ionesco, ce maître de théâtralité, cet Aristophane moderne mâtiné de Beckett, est malgré toute apparence philosophe sous les masques du théâtre drôle.'² Ionesco's puppet will thus be explored in a philosophical light, which has the further advantage of providing fresh outlook. If Sartre's quest for Humanism failed on the route to Authenticity, it is to be hoped that Ionescan theatre will provide some insights into authentic human existence; in this respect, the scrutiny of Ionesco's puppet represents

¹ See Richard N. Coe, *Ionesco: A Study of his Plays*, pp.32-36.

² Vuarnet, Jean-Noël, 'Un Vieil Enfant Philosophe', *Magazine littéraire*, no.335 (1995), p.36.

the search for a *progression* from Sartre's agent, for an escape route from the Existentialist impasse.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.³

Au début, le monde m'avait plongé dans la stupéfaction. Je regardais moi aussi: 'qu'est-ce que tout cela?', puis, je me réveillais de ma stupeur: 'Qui étais-je?' et ce fut une stupeur nouvelle de me regarder moi-même. J'étais trop plein de ce monde. Trop plein de ce moi: je ne pouvais pas ne pas le dire, ne pas le crier. A qui? A moi-même, pour moi-même, ensuite aux autres. Cette question est d'abord solitaire. C'est à soi-même qu'on se le demande. Une solitude absolue qui interroge l'univers, sans figures. Enfin, après 'qu'est-ce que c'est que tout cela?', après 'qu'est-ce que je suis?', 'qui suis-je?', s'ajouta le 'pourquoi suis-je là entouré de tout cela?' Cette troisième question est déjà plus impure. Elle était moins métaphysique, plus pratique, plus historique, mais, déjà, dans la stupéfaction première, il y avait le sentiment de la menace, ce monde et moi-même m'inquiétaient jusqu'à la terreur. C'est avec cela que commence notre vie. Elle est passionnante tant que l'interrogation existe. Puis, on n'interroge plus, on s'en fatigue. La menace seule subsiste, cette inquiétude qui ronge. Le monde devient habituel et tout naturel. Il n'y a plus que la fatigue, l'ennui et la peur qui est toujours là, qui seule est restée depuis le commencement. La vie n'est plus miracle, elle est cauchemar. Je ne sais comment tu as pu garder intact le miracle. Pour moi chaque instant est à la fois trop lourd et vide. Tout est affreux. Je m'ennuie dans l'angoisse.⁴

i) A Puppet Come to Life: The Metaphysical Absurdist

Shakespeare's famous lines, often quoted by and in relation to Ionesco, form an appropriate preface in several ways: firstly, the metaphor connecting theatre and life introduces the genre of philosophical theatre which is about to be explored; secondly, the notion of protest is aired, a notion which is to characterise the œuvre of Ionesco; and thirdly, the whole context of the Absurd is underlined, complete with the folly of Man, the senselessness of life, and the bitter silence of death, showing that Ionesco's theatre follows in a long tradition of 'universal' human theatre, stretching back to Shakespeare and far beyond. The second part of the preface comes from one of Ionesco's latest plays and provides a useful and vitally important insight into the playwright's world-view and dramatic preoccupations, introducing themes such as wonder and surprise, innocence and naïveté, contingency and superfluity, uncertainty and solitude, gravity and evanescence, monotony and anguish. The scene has thus been set for a detailed exploration of Ionesco's theatrical puppet, of his roots, his anxieties, and his ultimate destination.

The image of the puppet is particularly apt to the Absurdist conception of Man, and from the very beginning, the notion of the puppet come to life (Pinocchio) or the woken doll (Coppelia) fits in comfortably with Ionesco's creative bent. The stylistic influence of *guignol* on Ionesco has been much explored, but in terms of his philosophy, it can be seen to affect not just his theatrical form, but, more importantly, his very

³ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.5.

⁴ Ionesco, *Le Vieux in Jeux de Massacre, Théâtre V*, pp.89-90.

conception of humanity. In Ionesco's theatre, Man becomes a short-lived trick of a vanished artisan, restricted in his freedom and controlled from far beyond. The trick remains a miracle as long as the sense of wonder and novelty prevails; when it fades, the trick becomes cruel conjury. As Man becomes aware that he is separate from his universe, that he has been, in the Sartrean sense, 'thrown into' an alien world, his surprise and amazement turn to anguish and a deep sense of loss.

It is with this consciousness that the world becomes Absurd. For Sartre, awareness of the Absurd was an intellectual perception; for Ionesco, it is predominantly sensual, and it is thus awoken far earlier in life. In Ionesco's case, this could well have taken place at the age of three, for this is the discrepancy he created between his real birth in 1909 and his claimed birth in 1912. If this is so, then it was soon followed by further revelations:

A l'âge de quatre ans quand j'ai appris la mort et que le monde pouvait être sans moi, ce fut le début du malheur. J'ai appris que moi et le monde nous n'étions pas un. Mais la conscience malheureuse la plus aiguë, je l'ai eue à l'âge de huit ans ou de sept ans je crois, quand je me suis regardé dans la glace et que je me suis découvert à moi-même. A ce moment-là, en sentant pour la première fois ma différence, en prenant conscience *que j'étais moi*, j'ai senti pour la première fois comme une sorte de tragique, de terrible séparation.⁵

The initial unhappiness, stemming from awareness of mortality, is compounded by the knowledge of the Self as self-contained and distinct from the world around it, and it leads the subject to a tragic neurosis reminiscent of Jungian separation. With this 'knowledge', the puppet is reborn; it is as if life begins again.

The theme is reflected in Camusian Absurdity: 'Commencer à penser, c'est commencer d'être miné',⁶ and it is strongly represented in Ionesco's theatre. For the departed (or non-existent?) son in *Les Chaises*, realisation seems to have come at the age of seven – 'il avait sept ans, l'âge de raison'⁷ – yet for Jacques, conscious life was blissfully absent until puberty, and with realisation came revolt:

Lorsque je suis né, je n'avais pas loin de quatorze ans. Voilà pourquoi j'ai pu me rendre compte plus facilement que la plupart de quoi il s'agissait. Oui, j'ai vite compris. Je n'ai pas voulu accepter la situation. Je l'ai dit carrément. Je n'admettais pas cela.⁸

So for Ionesco and his puppets, life comprises various states of being, ranging in extremity from wonder to despair. Knowledge of death is the certain catalyst for revolt and despair, and it perceivably invokes a new state of being, an almost Heideggerian (or Sartrean) *Sein zum Tode*.

However, the Ionescan perception of Absurdity is notably different from that of Sartre, and this is to be expected since the two thinkers display a different philosophical approach. Whereas *L'Être et le Néant* was an essay in phenomenological ontology, Ionesco's concerns are consistently metaphysical and predominantly transphenomenal:

Peut-on trouver des solutions aux problèmes fondamentaux? C'est-à-dire: Savoir ce que c'est que naître, vieillir, mourir, être là, être entouré par tout

⁵ *Découvertes*, p.81.

⁶ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.17.

⁷ *Théâtre I*, p.153.

⁸ *Jacques ou la Soumission, Théâtre I*, p.120.

cela que je regarde avec un étonnement qui ne m'a pas quitté, neuf comme au premier jour de la naissance de ma conscience.⁹

Although perception of the Absurd can diminish the spontaneous sense of wonder, it should not quieten the nagging metaphysical questions that beg to be answered. Ionesco's puppets are grounded in the metaphysical Absurd, and their fundamental questions are really only two: 'Deux choses sont inacceptables: d'être né [...] et ensuite de mourir.'¹⁰ For Sartre, these questions are too 'absurd' even to consider, and they remain conveniently beyond the scope of his ontology. But for Ionesco, they are a permanent presence, the origins of his Anguish, and thus for him, Sartrean Existentialism ignores the very essence of being: 'Être existentieliste c'est être prisonnier de logomachines, enfermé dans des mots tandis que l'être nous échappe.'¹¹ The Absurdism of Ionesco, though closely related to Sartre's, is therefore far more compatible with that of Camus, who is also quick to point out the shortcomings of phenomenology:

La phénoménologie se refuse à expliquer le monde, elle veut être seulement une description du vécu. Elle rejoint la pensée absurde dans son affirmation initiale qu'il n'est point de vérité, mais seulement des vérités.¹²

Indeed Camus reminds us that the very origin of the Absurd is precisely this lack of a Truth, a Truth which is constantly implied and consistently elusive: 'L'absurde naît de cette confrontation entre l'appel humain et le silence déraisonnable du monde.'¹³ Nevertheless, Ionesco's living puppet, his metaphysical Absurdist, seeks answers to the fundamental questions of being. Unlike Sartre's agent, he transcends the phenomena of the *vécu*; but like Sartre's agent, he rejects a single Truth, consciously perceives the Absurd, and lives in the constant awareness of his death. The link with Heidegger here is appropriate, for Heidegger can be seen to make no distinction between consciousness and the Absurd, showing that Care (or 'souci') is the only reality of an 'existence humiliée'.¹⁴

As with the Sartrean agent, perception of the Absurd leaves Ionescan Man in a constant state of Anguish. The more sensual nature of Ionescan Anguish is underlined by the dramatist's own declaration that Anguish lies beyond the realm of rational language: 'Mon angoisse n'a aucune explication possible, aucun logique puisqu'elle est au-delà de la parole. Dès que j'en parle, je ne suis déjà plus tout à fait dans l'angoisse mais dans la littérature de l'angoisse.'¹⁵ However, Ionesco's literature of Anguish provides a rare insight into the nature of Man's existential Angst: on the stage, he seems like Beckett to throw a spotlight onto human anxieties and frustrations, longings and unfulfilled desires; and on the page, he is as capable as Sartre of finding words to express the cruel nature of Man's condition: 'Je sentis mon cœur se serrer et l'angoisse me reprendre. J'avais peur. De rien. De tout.'¹⁶ The description is highly reminiscent of Roquentin, and it emphasises the fundamentally similar starting points of Sartre and Ionesco. In this one short phrase, Ionesco manages to convey the stifling claustrophobia of Anguish, as well as the blind fear and the senseless gratuitousness caused by its (here

⁹ *Journal en miettes*, p.89.

¹⁰ *Un homme en question*, p.24. According to Heidegger, these two existential *facts* are revealed to Man through Angst. See L. A. C. Dobrez, *The Existential and its Exits*, p.167.

¹¹ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.215.

¹² *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.63.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, pp.40-41.

¹⁵ *Un homme en question*, p.193.

¹⁶ *Le Solitaire*, p.58.

personalised) presence. In his theatre, the description is even more moving, evoking a natural pathos through audience identification with the victim: 'Toute ma vie, je sentais que j'étouffais.'¹⁷ This identification and empathy is reinforced by stage directions, which demand an emphasis on the pathetic and inhuman aspect of Anguish: '*Vers la fin, les voix seront très aiguës [...] plaintives, inhumaines, irréelles, ressemblant à des cris d'animaux souffrants.*'¹⁸ The portrayal of the human puppet as a suffering animal is a recurrent theme in Ionesco's theatre, and it reinforces the sensual nature of Man's Anguish. Ionesco constantly exploits the semiotic richness of theatre to recreate a 'whole experience' of the Absurd, an experience which he feels should dominate the stage:

Ionesco criticizes someone like Sartre in part because Sartre, as playwright, talks about the absurd but doesn't live it. Ionesco feels existential anguish felt by the author must possess his whole stage, not merely the words of his characters.¹⁹

The labelling of Ionesco as 'Absurdist' is of course controversial, since both Ionesco and many of his critics have rejected the term, particularly in the light of his later plays. However, there is no need to retrace the Absurdist influences on Ionescan theatre elucidated so comprehensively by Esslin; and philosophically speaking, there can be little doubt that Ionesco has provided one of the greatest articulations of the Absurd this century:

J'ai l'impression qu'il n'y a de raison à rien et que seule nous pousse une force incompréhensible.²⁰

Cruels sont les Dieux, terribles et folles les passions, malheureux les hommes.²¹

Such sentiments are surely inspired by a mind supremely conscious of the Absurd condition of Man. Indeed, they are more resolutely Absurd than those of either Sartre or Camus, who strive to imagine Man at least useful and at best happy. A theoretical analysis of the Absurd is undertaken by Ionesco himself, and there seems little point in trying to paraphrase a quotation which is in itself a concise summation:

Il y a plusieurs sortes de choses ou de faits 'absurdes'. Parfois, j'appelle absurde ce que je ne comprends pas, parce que c'est moi qui ne peux comprendre ou parce que c'est la chose qui est essentiellement incompréhensible, impénétrable, fermée, ainsi ce bloque monolithique du donné, épais, ce mur qui m'apparaît comme une sorte de vide massif, solidifié, ce bloc du mystère; j'appelle aussi absurde ma situation face au mystère; mon état qui est de me trouver en face d'un mur qui monte jusqu'au ciel, qui s'étend jusqu'aux frontières infinies, c'est-à-dire aux non-frontières de l'univers et que je ne puis pourtant pas ne pas m'acharner à escalader ou à percer tout en sachant que cela c'est l'impossibilité même; absurde donc cette situation d'être là que je ne puis reconnaître comme étant

¹⁷ Le Vieux, *Les Chaises*, Théâtre I, p.140.

¹⁸ *Amédée*, Théâtre I, p.285.

¹⁹ Grossvogel, David I., 'Ionesco: Symptom and Victim', in *The Dream and the Play: Ionesco's Theatrical Quest*, ed. Mosche Lazar, p.82.

²⁰ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.23.

²¹ *Un homme en question*, p.108.

mienne; qui est la mienne pourtant. J'appelle aussi absurde l'homme qui erre sans but, l'oubli du but, l'homme coupé de ses racines essentielles, transcendentales [...] Tout cela, c'est l'expérience de l'absurde métaphysique, de l'énigme absolue.²²

The Absurd is then multifaceted for Ionesco: it emanates from the senseless, the unknowable, the contingent Given, the mysterious, the religious, the infinite universal, the individual situation, the pointless striving, and the severed spiritual roots. This 'absolute enigma' has much in common with Sartrean Absurdism (concerning *le donné*, *la situation*, *la place* etc.), but the difference is again the focus on the transphenomenal. Yet both depart from the primal Absurdity of being *jeté dans le monde* without a choice. The history of the Absurd tradition is a long and complex one, and this too has been traced by Esslin, but a brief summary of Ionesco's philosophical influences is certainly not superfluous. Ionesco's Absurdism finds its recent origins in a tradition stemming back to Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God in his *Also sprach Zarathustra* of 1883, which had a profound influence on both literature and philosophy, both of which were subsequently concerned with a search for a way to confront a universe deprived of its very core, its source of reason and values. In philosophical terms, this vacuum combined with Kierkegaard's rejection of an absolute Truth which could salvage an existence which is impossible in itself, and with Jaspers's connection between failure and the very being of transcendence. In literary terms, it accompanied a somewhat paradoxical development from Naturalism to Expressionism, effected through a new desire to represent the *whole* of reality and influenced by the unconscious world of dreams explored by Freud and Jung, and dramatised effectively by writers such as Strindberg. Jarry and the 'Pataphysicians (such as Prévert) reflected this trend and, as we know, had a direct philosophical and stylistic influence on Ionesco; and the Surrealist movement, though more effective in the fine arts, cinema, and poetry, nevertheless encouraged a new angle of perception on the stage. Such literary influence inevitably affected the form of Ionesco's plays, but, as writers such as Dostoevsky, Kafka, and Joyce began to probe the universal through the subconscious, this influence became profoundly equally philosophical; and philosophers such as Wittgenstein, who also sought to deconstruct language, reflected the merging development of philosophical and literary trends. It is in this context, then, that Ionesco began to write his plays – a context which is perhaps best summarised as an uncomfortable and questioning exploration of a new-found sense of freedom. Ethical, psychological, artistic, and linguistic certainties had been permanently undermined, and the way had been cleared for the new theatre of the Absurd to illuminate this unease on the stage.

Ionesco's particular response to the *insolite* world in which he finds himself is initially one of *étonnement*. This state is perhaps the most inspiring creative force for Ionesco, and its fleeting transience is a central cause of Anguish: 'Je crois que je suis plus authentique lorsque j'exprime dans mes œuvres l'étonnement et le désarroi. C'est dans cet étonnement que plongent les racines de la vie.'²³ The link between *étonnement* and authenticity is an interesting one which will be explored in due course. It seems at this stage though that in 'wonder' lies the key to re-establishing Man's spiritual roots, the route perhaps to Ionescan Authenticity.

Another source of Anguish, caused again by severed roots, is the puppet's sense of abandonment and orphanage. Reminiscent of the Sartrean theme of bastardy, this theme of isolation functions on a theological level (the notion of an absent God), a social level (the paradox of isolation with *autrui*), and on an intimate level (the search for the departed father or mother). It is certainly a cause of dark neurosis for Ionesco,

²² Ionesco interviewed in Claude Bonnefoy, *Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco*, p.148.

²³ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.23.

and it originates in the persona of his father:

Je cherche dans mon souvenir les premières images de mon père.
Je vois des couleurs sombres. [...] Je crie.²⁴

The theme is widely reflected in Ionesco's theatre, both in the general depiction of faceless, deracinated puppets, and in the particular portrayals of the anxious psyche:

Le Vieux: Ah! où es-tu, maman, maman, où es-tu, maman?...hi, hi, hi,
je suis orphelin. (*Il gémit.*) ... un orphelin, un orpheli...
[...]

La Vieille: Mon orphelin, mon chou, tu me crèves le cœur, mon
orphelin.²⁵

Madeleine II: Je suis veuve, je suis orpheline, je suis pauvre, malade,
vieille, la plus vieille orpheline de la terre!²⁶

Joséphine: Je suis minuscule dans ce monde énorme. Je suis une
fourmi égarée, affolée, qui cherche ses compagnes. Mon
père est mort, ma mère est morte, tous ceux de la famille
sont morts. [...] Plus personne, il n'y a plus personne.²⁷

Again, the idea of Man as a suffering animal is present, but the underlying feeling is one of abandonment and fear. Ionesco's characters are consistently shown to be craving return to the womb,²⁸ or at least to early childhood, and their need for parenting seems never to subside. The concept is extended metaphorically in *L'Homme aux Valises*, where the protagonist becomes a global and metaphysical refugee, in search of a home, an identity, and probably a womb; he clearly embodies the metaphorical ant alluded to by Joséphine above.

The desire for protection from or regression beyond the world has its origins in the contingent nature of Man's birth. Though certainly not as outraged by the phenomenon of birth as Beckett, Ionesco consistently protests against the conditions into which we are born, and the whole procreative process is satirised in plays such as *Jacques* and *L'Avenir est dans les œufs*. Like Sartre, he concentrates too on the gratuity of our arrival:

Tu aurais pu ne pas être, tu aurais pu ne pas être! J'en ressentis une énorme
panique rétrospective; un regret déchirant, aussi, pour des milliards
d'enfants qui auraient pu naître, qui ne sont pas nés, pour les innombrables
visages qui ne seront jamais caressés, les petites mains qui ne seront tenues
dans les mains d'aucun père, les lèvres qui ne babilleront jamais.²⁹

The contingency remains a mystery, but here, birth is viewed as something positive, life as a touching existence on which the unborn are missing out. However, the phenomenon of birth itself is still under attack, especially since those who *are* born are born deceived: 'Nous sommes là. Nous ne savons ce que cela veut dire. Nous ne savons pas ce que veut

²⁴ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.9.

²⁵ *Les Chaises, Théâtre I*, pp.135-36.

²⁶ *Amédée, Théâtre I*, p.289.

²⁷ *Le Piéton de l'Air, Théâtre III*, p.180.

²⁸ Hence their love of sequestration. N.b. also the importance of the circle in Ionesco's plays, eg. the room in *Les Chaises*, the Nouveau Locataire's circular tomb, etc.

²⁹ *Voix du Policier, Victimes du devoir, Théâtre I*, p.205.

dire que cela ne veuille rien dire. Nous sommes nés trompés.³⁰ The attack soon extends to one on the inherent lack of logic,³¹ and *if* we are born, it is into a world that simply does not make sense, a far cry from the rationality of Cartesian logic (the starting point of Sartre's ontology). Such is the message of *Les Chaises*: in their speed to point out the lack of message and the ontological void uncovered in the play, critics often ignore the most obvious significance of the Orator's muteness. The fusion between philosophy and art is again apparent here, and it is appropriate that a philosophy of anti-logic should be expressed in a language which strives to undermine the powers of reason. The literary tradition of nonsense is also contributive here, for, as Esslin maintains, 'the literature of verbal nonsense expresses more than mere playfulness. In trying to burst the bounds of logic and language, it batters at the enclosing walls of the human condition itself.'³² The senselessness of life is indeed the dominant underlying theme in Ionesco's theatre, and it is voiced impressively by Bérenger on his discovery of death in the *Cité Radieuse*: 'Je me sens meurtri, fourbu!...Ma fatigue m'a repris...l'existence est vaine! A quoi bon tout [...] si ce n'est que pour en arriver là?'³³

Bérenger's enlightenment reminds us of the Absurdist conception of the futility of life, and this is interpreted by Ionesco, as by Camus, not just in terms of the ultimate vanity of human existence, but also in relation to the drudgery of everyday life. Like Sartrean Absurdism, this is also highly evocative of Camus's interpretation of the Myth of Sisyphus; like Camus, Ionesco and his puppets cannot return to the bliss of their former ignorance: 'A partir du moment où elle est reconnue, l'absurdité est une passion, la plus déchirante de toutes.'³⁴ However, far from being passionate, the lives of Ionescan characters are usually as futile and monotonous as that of Camus's hero, and there can be little escape from Anguish in the harsh conditions of the *quotidien*:

Mon métier m'obligeait d'errer sur toute la terre. Hélas, je me trouvais toujours, d'octobre à mars dans l'hémisphère nord, d'avril à septembre dans l'hémisphère sud, si bien qu'il n'y avait, dans ma vie, que des hivers. J'étais misérablement payé, mal vêtu, ma santé était mauvaise. Je vivais en état de colère perpétuelle.³⁵

La vie a été pour moi un long combat. La vie, c'est une lutte sans merci. On marche sur les cadavres.³⁶

The recurrent images of aimless wandering, coldness, anger, struggling, and death combine to paint a full and dark picture of human Anguish. If the Absurd is indeed a passion, it is less one of Sartrean action than of Beckettian monotony and emptiness; the literality in plays such as *Les Chaises* conveys with impact the cruelty and 'empty space' of human life, explored of course by practitioners such as Artaud and Brook. Accordingly, when inquisitioned by the curious monks, Jean's prevailing memory of Earth is the stagnant image of the labyrinth:

Frère Tarabas: Quelles images vous hantaient?

Jean: Pareil. Une plaine morose, une plaine grise, une plaine boueuse, une plaine sans fin, ou des sentiers menant nulle

³⁰ *Présent passé, passé présent*, p.138.

³¹ This theme is particularly evident in the early 'anti-plays' and in the extended satire on logic through the Logicien in *Rhinocéros*.

³² *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p.341.

³³ *Tueur sans gages*, *Théâtre II*, p.89.

³⁴ Camus, Albert, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.38.

³⁵ *Voix du Policier, Victimes du devoir*, *Théâtre I*, p.204.

³⁶ *Le Gros Monsieur*, *Le Tableau*, *Théâtre III*, p.232.

part; et puis la brume s'est étendue...³⁷

This sticky mass of Being is again evocative of Sartre, and confronts us with yet another origin of Anguish. In this instance, it is connected to the Sartrean concept of *nausée*, which is regarded by Ionesco not only as the craving for plenitude (*en-soi*) but also as the victory of 'anti-spiritual forces.'³⁸ This transphenomenal relationship with Being is linked with Sartre's material perception of resistance referred to as the Coefficient of Adversity; but whether interpreted spiritually or materially, Being is viewed by both as a potential threat to the freedom of Man:

Le plénitude que je ressentais était peut-être un peu ressemblante à la plénitude mystique. Cela débutait par le sentiment que l'espace se vidait de la lourdeur matérielle d'où le soulagement euphorique que je ressentais. Les notions se libéraient de leur contenu. Les objets devenaient transparents, perméables, n'étaient plus des obstacles, il semblait qu'on pouvait passer à travers. C'est comme si l'esprit pouvait se mouvoir librement, comme si aucune résistance ne pouvait plus l'empêcher.³⁹

Spiritual plenitude is associated then with material absence, and material plenitude with spiritual absence. In Ionescan theatre, this manifests itself principally in the beloved technique of proliferation: over the years, his audiences have seen the mass reproduction of noses, chairs, cups, bread, mushrooms, telephone calls, suitcases, furniture, eggs, rhinoceroses, plates and dishes, guillotines, glasses, and dead bodies. This distinctive technique explores the problem of matter on many different levels, for the paroxysmal repetition of objects, coupled with that of the characters' language (which itself becomes reified), reproduces not only the repressive wall of materialism and the monotony of daily life, but also the vertiginous symptoms of nausea:

(*Les appels se succèdent; l'heure avance; elle [Madeleine] dit:*) Je vous le passe... Je vous la passe... Je vous les passe... Allô, allô... allô... je vous le passe, je vous la passe... je vous les passe... Allô... Allô!...⁴⁰

The image here is verbal, visual, and audible, and, accompanied by the steadily increasing imposition of the corpse, the intrusive nature of Being is conveyed with profound effect. In *Le Nouveau Locataire*, the theme is explored in isolation, and in this potent allegory, it is not just the tenant's room that is invaded, but the stairs, the courtyard, the streets, and the spiritual lifeline of Paris itself: 'La Seine ne coule plus. Bloquée, aussi. Plus d'eau.'⁴¹

One of the closest points of convergence between Sartre and Ionesco is indeed on the question of Being, where Ionesco's hunger and thirst for the Absolute coincides with the Sartrean quest for the *en-soi-pour-soi* or the elusive *Homme-Dieu*. Sartrean psychoanalysis uncovers Man's desire to appropriate and to *remplir le trou* through pre-reflective consciousness of the nothingness at the core of human being, and Ionesco's reflections sit comfortably with those of the Existentialist: 'A peine ai-je aspiré une bouffée ou deux que j'ai envie d'en allumer une autre. C'est comme si je voulais que la

³⁷ *La Soif et la Faim, Théâtre IV*, p.135.

³⁸ See *Notes et contre-notes*, p.188: 'Le trop de présence des objets exprime l'absence spirituelle.'

³⁹ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.222. See also Richard N. Coe, 'La Prolifération', in *Les Critiques de notre temps et Ionesco*, ed. Raymond Laubreaux, p.81: 'La matière est l'ennemi le plus mortel de l'homme.'

⁴⁰ *Amédée, Théâtre I*, p.248.

⁴¹ *Théâtre II*, p.200.

fumée remplisse ce vide intérieur.’⁴² His thoughts are translated onto the stage on numerous occasions, perhaps most notably in Choubert’s forced mastication of bread, and the notable recurrence of the theme betrays its importance to Ionescan philosophy:

Je suis plein, mais de trous. On me ronge. Les trous s’élargissent, ils n’ont pas de fond. J’ai le vertige quand je me penche sur mes propres trous, je finis.⁴³

Je bois, je mange, je bois, je mange. J’ai encore soif, j’ai encore faim. Excusez-moi, j’ai l’air d’un trou.⁴⁴

Ionesco’s focus on the *nothingness* of Man is again tied to Sartre’s portrayal of Anguish, and both are fully aware that the search for plenitude will be in vain. Such is of course the message of *La Soif et la Faim*:

[Jean] gets nothing. He continues to be thirsty and hungry. His thirst cannot be slaked, his hunger cannot be sated. Why this emptiness? Because every man desires the absolute and the infinite but seeks them in what is relative and temporal. He is able to find nothing since all is wind and ashes.⁴⁵

For Ionesco, this Absurd desire pushes Anguish to the extreme reaction of neurosis and forces the puppet into a state of nostalgia; and it is seemingly in the state of neurosis that any search for truth should begin: ‘La vérité est dans une sorte de névrose... Elle n’est pas dans la santé, c’est la névrose qui est la vérité, vérité de demain contre la vérité apparante d’aujourd’hui.’⁴⁶ In Béranger’s musings on literature, ephemeral truth is contrasted with spiritual, metaphysical truth, and the comforting nest of nostalgia provides the neurotic with a solace from the constant thirst for truth: ‘Tu vas voir, on se fait un nid de tout, on se couvre de ses nostalgies. On se nourrit de ses désirs, on boit la coupe d’espérance et on n’a plus soif.’⁴⁷

The theme of nostalgia is never far away in Ionesco’s theatre and journals, and it can be seen to be divided into two types of nostalgia – universal and individual. Universal nostalgia encapsulates the sensation of the Lost Paradise, the Biblical Fall from grace, and it is associated theatrically with a loss of light and evanescence:

Je suis à la recherche d’un monde redevenu vierge, de la lumière paradisiaque de l’enfance, de la gloire du premier jour, gloire non ternie, univers intact qui doit m’apparaître comme s’il venait de naître. C’est comme si je voulais assister à l’événement de la création du monde avant la déchéance.⁴⁸

Many of Ionesco’s creations, including Choubert, Amédée, Béranger, and Jean, go in search of a lost world, a wondrous and luminous Edenic garden, with varying levels of success. The world which is sought is airy and light – the very antithesis of the sinking, gloomy labyrinth:

⁴² *Un homme en question*, p.131.

⁴³ Le Roi in *Le Roi se meurt*, Théâtre IV, p.54.

⁴⁴ Jean in *La Soif et la Faim*, Théâtre IV, p.125.

⁴⁵ Benmussa, Simone, ‘Hunger and Thirst: A conversation with Simone Benmussa’, in *The Two Faces of Ionesco*, ed. Rosette C Lamont and Melvin J. Friedman, p.197.

⁴⁶ *Le Piéton de l’Air*, Théâtre III, p.127.

⁴⁷ Marie-Madeleine, *La Soif et la Faim*, Théâtre IV, p.94.

⁴⁸ *Antidotes*, p.316.

Je savais qu'il existait dans notre ville sombre, au milieu de ces quartiers de deuil, de poussière, de boue, ce beau quartier clair, cet arrondissement hors classe, avec des rues ensoleillées, des avenues ruisselantes de lumière... cette cité radieuse.⁴⁹

Though Bérenger succeeds in finding his paradise, he is soon dispossessed of his utopian beliefs on discovering that the Radiant City too is subject to the metaphysical Given of death. This fall back down to Earth unites most of Ionesco's protagonists, and they are left, like Jean, with a diminishing memory of perfection, with naïveté turned to nostalgia:

Tout suffisait, tout était plein. Je n'avais pas faim, je n'avais pas soif, ou, plutôt, c'était cette joie qui était mon pain, qui était mon eau... Pourquoi, tout à coup, y a-t-il eu ce changement? Pourquoi, tout à coup, cette absence?⁵⁰

The lesson Jean learns is that his paradise existed where he already was, had he only maintained the precious gift to see it: 'En réalité – nous dit Ionesco – Adam n'a pas été chassé du paradis; mais après le péché originel, il a été condamné à la perte de sa capacité d'émerveillement.'⁵¹

Individual nostalgia works on a different time scale and is too personal to attain the realm of myth. Ionesco's Romantic focus on transience, on the passing of beauty, youth, and innocence, is one which moves him profoundly, and his protests ring out with the naïve simplicity of childhood: 'Nous naissons, nous croissons en force et en beauté et petit à petit c'est la dégingolade et nous voilà boiteux, laids, fragiles; comment cela est-il possible, comment cela est-il permis, et pourquoi?'⁵² With the irreversible process of ageing, the Absurd condition continues and the puppet's Anguish is embellished. The decrepitude of old age is arguably the greatest source of pathos in Ionescan theatre – one need only think of the old couples in *Les Chaises* and in *Jeux de Massacre* – and the theme is all the more poignant since it provides a constant memento mori: 'Le vieillissement se prolonge de plus en plus et se met à ressembler à la mort [...]. Le vieillissement est l'avant-garde de la mort.'⁵³ The indubitable fact is characterised in Jacques-Grand-Père, whose 'centenarian' protest songs on ageing⁵⁴ are soon reduced to words spoken from the grave.⁵⁵ In *Victimes du devoir*, personal nostalgia blends with the universal, as Choubert evokes the image of light to represent the beauty of the past: 'Comme tu as changé! Mais quand cela est-il arrivé? Comment n'a-t-on pas empêché? Ce matin, il y avait des fleurs sur notre chemin. Le soleil remplissait le ciel. [...] L'hiver est venu brusquement.'⁵⁶ Again, the protest and the sense of loss are clear. This negative aspect of the passage of time is stressed also by Bérenger: 'Je suis triste quand je pense que les années s'en vont comme des sacs que l'on retourne vides.'⁵⁷ It seems that with time, our sense of emptiness is just increased.

Time and temporality thus become another focus of Anguish for Ionesco, who is keen to underline their relative unimportance: 'D'ailleurs le temporel ne va pas à

⁴⁹ *Tueur sans gages*, *Théâtre II*, p.65.

⁵⁰ *La Soif et la Faim*, *Théâtre IV*, p.166.

⁵¹ Tobi, Saint, *Eugène Ionesco ou A la recherche du paradis perdu*, p.166.

⁵² 'Tout finit dans l'horreur', interview with Gabriel Liiceanu, *Magazine littéraire*, no.335 (1995), p.23.

⁵³ Malachy, Thérèse, *La Mort en Situation dans le Théâtre Contemporain*, p.31.

⁵⁴ See for example *Jacques ou la Soumission*, *Théâtre I*, p.99.

⁵⁵ See *L'Avenir est dans les œufs*, *Théâtre II*.

⁵⁶ *Théâtre I*, p.197.

⁵⁷ *Le Piéton de l'Air*, *Théâtre III*, p.160.

l'encontre de l'intemporel et de l'universel: il s'y soumet au contraire.'⁵⁸ Clocks are a prominent feature in Ionesco's plays and they reflect the dramatist's uneasy preoccupation with time. Whether parodied, as in *La Cantatrice chauve*,⁵⁹ crushing, as in *Le Nouveau Locataire*, or ticking away with relentless ominousness, as in *Amédée* and *Le Roi se meurt*, time is a constant enemy of the puppet, and the clock becomes a time bomb counting down the hours until death. Man is regarded as a puppet of Time, scared by the future and haunted by the past: 'Nous avons le passé derrière nous, l'avenir devant. On ne voit pas l'avenir, on voit le passé. C'est curieux car nous n'avons pas les yeux dans le dos.'⁶⁰ On this point, Sartre and Ionesco are naturally at odds: whereas Sartrean Anguish is caused by the freedom offered by the future, Ionescan Angst arises when the past creates an essence. Thus regret (a Sartrean *mauvaise foi*) figures strongly amongst Ionesco's puppets, and it is housed in the appropriate tense of the conditional perfect:

La Vieille: Tu aurais pu être quelque chose dans la vie.⁶¹

Le Vieux: Hélas! nous avons tout perdu. Nous aurions pu être si heureux, je vous le dis; nous aurions pu, nous aurions pu.⁶²

It is perhaps to eradicate regret that Ionesco attempts a deconstruction of time in this play – the contradictions of the couple demonstrate the unreasonable inaccuracy of the past – and it is certainly no coincidence that time is linked back once again to the atavistic myth of Paradise Lost: 'Indeed, the Fall in Christian mythology is precisely the Fall from timelessness into time, from immortality into mortality.'⁶³

Mortality soon becomes the hinge-pin of Ionesco's Absurdism, for, as we are reminded by Plato, the mystery of death has eternally formed the central focus of philosophy: 'Pour les hommes c'est un mystère: mais tous ceux qui se sont livrés véritablement à la philosophie, n'ont rien fait d'autre que de se préparer à la mort.'⁶⁴ And if we then bear in mind the title of Montaigne's 'essai' *Que philosopher c'est apprendre à mourir*, Ionesco emerges as a great and universal philosopher. As the ultimate focus of mortal Anguish and neurosis, the theme of death is a privileged one in Ionesco's theatre; it is indeed the ultimate trick of the Absurd:

La chose la plus absurde est d'avoir conscience que l'existence humaine est inadmissible, que sa condition est inadmissible, insupportable et pourtant s'accrocher désespérément à elle, en sachant et en se plaignant que l'on va perdre ce que nous ne supportons pas [...] écartelé entre l'horreur de vivre et l'horreur de mourir.⁶⁵

The language here is strong, and death, like life, is regarded as an outrage. But given that we *are* born, death is perhaps the only other Given worth contesting: 'Il s'agit de cette chose inadmissible, incroyable, que cela ait pu être, que cela ne soit plus.'⁶⁶ This contestation of the Given again emphasises the discrepancies between Sartre's Existentialist Humanism and Ionesco's Absurdist Humanism. Unlike Sartre, Ionesco is

⁵⁸ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.64.

⁵⁹ The 'pendule' has an 'esprit de contradiction', (*Théâtre I*, p.47).

⁶⁰ *Journal en miettes*, p.126.

⁶¹ *Les Chaises*, *Théâtre I*, p.135.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.151.

⁶³ Lane, Nancy, *Understanding Eugène Ionesco*, p.82.

⁶⁴ See Léon Chestov, *Sur la balance de Job*, p.27.

⁶⁵ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, pp.118-19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.38.

not content to accept the human condition as he finds it, and his Humanist stance provokes him to call into question the entire Creative act: 'Dites-moi que ce n'est pas vrai. C'est un cauchemar. [...] Pourquoi suis-je né si ce n'était pas pour toujours? Maudits parents. Quelle drôle d'idée, quelle bonne blague!'⁶⁷ As King, Béranger is enabled by Ionesco to ridicule the Creative flaw of mortality, and it seems likely that the Ionescan desire to create derives from a simple wish to 'start again'.⁶⁸

Like the black monk in *Jeux de Massacre*, death is almost omnipresent in Ionescan theatre, for when it is not the driving force of a whole play it is always at least waiting in the wings. As a result, this obsession of Ionesco is dealt with in all its aspects:

Commenter le théâtre de Ionesco c'est aborder le problème de la mort sous ses avatars multiples: dans la hantise et la fantaisie; dans la solennité et la dérision; dans la douleur et le plaisir; dans la jeunesse et le vieillissement; dans le suicide et dans le meurtre, dans la mort de l'un et la mort de tous.⁶⁹

Ionesco's characters range in their attitudes towards death, but common to them all is an awareness of death as a metaphysical phenomenon, rather than as a political tool or a Sartrean 'dirty hands' necessity: 'C'est ça la vie. On meurt.'⁷⁰ Such simplistic acceptance, almost oxymoronic truism, is however far from the norm, and the vast majority of Ionesco's characters are all too conscious of the gratuitous Absurdity of their mortal condition:

Le Fonctionnaire: Nous sommes accablés par une mortalité sans causes connues.⁷¹

Jeanne/Lucienne: Qu'avons-nous fait tous, pour qu'il en soit ainsi?
Jean/Pierre: Rien. On n'a rien fait. Il en est ainsi pour rien.⁷²

It is in *Le Roi se meurt* that the theme of death, Montaigne's philosophical apprenticeship, receives its finest treatment. The misty darkness, the crumbling walls, and the vanishing set contrive to reinforce the emptiness of death, the transition to nothingness, and the King's moliéresque reaction to the phenomenon (denial - anger - bargaining - depression - acceptance) is psychologically classic. He feels like an actor who has not learnt his lines, an ill-prepared student sitting an exam, and he begs the chance to *redoubler*.⁷³ But, as Marguerite points out, there is no second chance, and even Marie, with her romantic imagery, cannot evade the cruel transience of life: 'Ce ne fut qu'une courte promenade dans une allée fleurie, une promesse non tenue, un sourire qui s'est refermé.'⁷⁴ There is here a sense of being cheated, as in the Pompier's absurd tale of the woman who died by confusing her gas and her comb,⁷⁵ combined with a ruthless power reminiscent of *La Leçon*.

Although the social custom surrounding death is parodied in plays like *L'Avenir est dans les œufs*, parody is usually restricted to the human outrage at death itself, to the puppet's awareness that its strings will one day be cut. *Le Piéton de l'Air* finds this

⁶⁷ *Le Roi se meurt*, Théâtre IV, pp.36-37.

⁶⁸ Cf. Sartre's analogy of destruction and creation with the desire to be God.

⁶⁹ Malachy, Thérèse, *La Mort en Situation dans le Théâtre Contemporain*, p.81.

⁷⁰ *Le Patron*, *Ce formidable bordel*, p.162.

⁷¹ *Jeux de Massacre*, Théâtre V, p.26.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp.57-58.

⁷³ *Théâtre IV*, pp.32-33.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.37.

⁷⁵ *La Cantatrice chauve*, Théâtre I, p.42.

tragicomic balance, satirising mortal stoicism and using the shock tactic of infant mortality to undermine any resignation to death:

I^{re} Vieille Anglaise: Il faut s'habituer à mourir. C'est plus décent. Il faut partir poliment. Il faut avoir le temps de faire ses adieux. Sans trop pleurer.⁷⁶

(*John Bull vise, tire, les deux Enfants tombent*) [...]

Employé des

Pompes Funèbres: C'est comme une euthanasie. Pas tout à fait l'euthanasie, on peut dire que c'est une euthanasie préventive.⁷⁷

The antithesis of resignation is the desire for immortality, partly realised in Béranger the King, which would transform the modes of temporality into an eternal instant.⁷⁸ According to Camus, this is indeed the cherished desire of Absurdism: 'Le présent et la succession des présents devant une âme sans cesse consciente, c'est l'idéal de l'homme absurde.'⁷⁹ As the archetypal *homme absurde*, it is left for Béranger to state the case for immortality, to claim it as a right of Man: 'Nous pourrions tout supporter d'ailleurs si nous étions immortels. Je suis paralysé parce que je sais que je vais mourir.'⁸⁰ In the absence of immortality, death remains the main source of Anguish, which itself is a symptom of a world without sense. In the face of death, a maid and a king are levelled; if Humanism has elevated Man, his mortality reduces him back to dust: 'La pensée humaniste a fait de l'homme un roi mais c'est un roi déchu car il meurt, et meurt seul. La mort ôte à l'existence sa valeur.'⁸¹ It seems that Sartre too would agree with this last statement, for 'on rate toujours sa vie, du moment qu'on meurt',⁸² and Camus, in turn, pointed out that 'les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux';⁸³ as Ionesco's puppet becomes aware that he is a victim controlled from beyond, all he can do is cry out, like Job, in despair at the Absurd: 'Le Créateur s'est gouré.'⁸⁴

⁷⁶ *Théâtre III*, p.143.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.187.

⁷⁸ Sartre, too, mentions the eternal instant (see p.51), pointing out that if it existed, *pour-soi* could 'be', could have a constant essence.

⁷⁹ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.88.

⁸⁰ *Le Piéton de l'Air, Théâtre III*, p.128.

⁸¹ Abastado, Claude, 'L'Art réinventé', in *Les Critiques de notre temps et Ionesco*, ed. Raymond Laubreaux, p.169.

⁸² *Les Jeux sont faits*, p.56.

⁸³ *Caligula*, p.27.

⁸⁴ La Concierge, *Ce formidable bordel*, p.175.

ii) Controlled from Beyond: The Victim

What he destroys, none can rebuild;
Whom he imprisons, none can release.⁸⁵

If Ionesco's puppet is left to cry out in despair, it is essentially through awareness of his own helplessness in the face of a creating and determining power. The idea of imprisonment is central to this perception, and it will be shown how Man, imprisoned in his own nature, seeks refuge from Nature and from the outside world by sequestering himself within a labyrinth of walls. The aim of this study, then, is to explore the human *situation*, to trace the repercussions of the Absurd human condition on aspects of identity, language, and ethics.

Chapter One explored Ionesco's self-professed agnosticism, revealing a strangely paradoxical Humanism, according to which Man is both subject and object, paramount and yet victim of the cruel laws of determinism, whether at the hands of God, Nature, or simply Fate:

Je suis déterminé. En même temps, à mon tour je détermine: je décide, je ne décide pas, je change ou ne change pas, le fait que je ne change pas les choses fait qu'elles changent tout de même. Ma façon de déterminer est déterminée elle aussi.⁸⁶

This strong sense of determinism naturally precludes any escape from the Given in the form of the Sartrean ontology of Freedom and choice. The Ionescan puppet is controlled from beyond and thus remains, even ontologically, firmly grounded in the cruelty of the Absurd. Considering the vast restrictions on his freedom, it is indeed questionable whether Ionescan Man exists at all:

Je n'existe pas dans la mesure où je ne suis pas libre; dans la mesure où je suis conditionné, déterminé uniquement par des énergies extérieures, des poussées, des dynamismes dont je ne serais que le carrefour, le champ de bataille, un lien quelconque de rencontre.⁸⁷

For Ionesco, Man *is* before he *exists*, since he is captured both in his own and in a universal essence. The philosophical motif of the puppet can also be clearly appreciated here, for Man is described almost as the contents of a metaphysical crucible, a cyclone of conflicting forces, an image reminiscent of Classical Man who was the plaything of the gods. Indeed the imagery has hardly changed since classical times even if destiny has taken a back seat: 'Ce n'est pas la philosophie qui nous guérit ou qui nous rend malades. Nous sommes au gré des vents.'⁸⁸ This is a telling opposition, revealing simultaneously Ionesco's scepticism about the merits of philosophy (whilst himself indulging), and his deep pessimism concerning possible escape routes from the restrictions of the human condition. The puppet is also viewed as the slave of his drives and emotions, a far cry from the Sartrean agent who, at least in Good Faith, acknowledges the choice of his own passions:

⁸⁵ Job 12.14.

⁸⁶ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.81.

⁸⁷ *Journal en miettes*, p.251.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.129.

Je ne suis pas maître de mes désirs ou de mes tristesses ou de mes angoisses. [...] Je ne suis pas ces passions, semble-t-il, je suis celui qui voit, regarde, commente, considère. Je suis aussi celui qui, ardemment, désire un autre moi.⁸⁹

Again, the image is that of Man being invaded from without, cursed with the ability to turn the focus on himself and willing but unable to flee from what he finds.

Part of Ionesco's outrage is indeed caused by this gulf between desire and possibility – nostalgia for the un-recapturable, the will to fly, the quest for immortality – and it is expressed in the light of a cruel God or master playing a joke on his incarcerated slave: 'On ne peut rien faire. Mais qu'est-ce que c'est que cette condition de marionnette tirée par des ficelles, de quel droit se moque-t-on de moi?'⁹⁰ This fundamental awareness of bondage and restriction permeates the Ionescan stage to the point of neurosis. The characters in the early plays, particularly, demonstrate a high degree of self-recognition when it comes to their metaphysical condition:

Amédée: ...Il n'y a plus d'esclaves...
Madeleine: Je suis une esclave moderne, c'est simple!⁹¹

Although referring ostensibly to her time-consuming and monotonous employment, Madeleine's exclamation betrays the dual bondage of the human situation – the social and the metaphysical, or, in Sartrean terminology, the *pour-soi* and the *pour-autrui*. Ionesco's characters would be consistently condemned by Sartre for their *mauvaise foi*, for they extend their perception of restriction to the ontology of responsibility and choice, thus conveniently removing themselves from the judging gaze of *autrui*:

Jacques Père: Que voulez-vous que j'y fasse! C'est le sort qui l'a voulu ainsi.⁹²
Amédée: Je suis bien obligé! Pas le choix.⁹³

This is certainly a world where God (whatever the nomenclature represents) pulls the strings, and it can be seen already that Ionesco's Humanism, while concerning itself exclusively with the human condition and situation, refuses to elevate Man to the free, determining role previously occupied by God. Ionesco makes a mockery of Sartrean optimism, of free choice, the Fundamental project, and the open future, and his later plays progress to discuss the philosophy of Freedom itself:

Tripp: La liberté, c'est mon choix.
[...]
Frère Tarabas: Philosophe, malgré l'inanition! Vous allez mourir de faim, pauvre monsieur Tripp. Je pensais justement vous rendre la liberté. [...] Je voulais [...] vous rendre cette chose précieuse pour vous mais que vous ne pouvez définir: la liberté.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.53 and p.50.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.39.

⁹¹ *Amédée, Théâtre I*, p.241.

⁹² *Jacques ou la Soumission, Théâtre I*, p.115.

⁹³ *Amédée, Théâtre I*, p.300.

⁹⁴ *La Soif et la Faim, Théâtre IV*, p.151.

Freedom remains ill-defined as a philosophical concept, and it is evident that Ionesco remains unconvinced by arguments such as Sartre's that the Coefficient of Adversity provides no obstacle to Man's Freedom; for Ionesco, it so obviously does. However, there is some small concession to Freedom, as Ionesco's characters are shown not only to deny their Freedom, but also to lack the courage to pursue it: 'Je croyais être né pour être libre et triomphant. Je n'ai pas osé l'être. Je n'ai jamais osé aller jusqu'au bout. Je n'ai pas su me décider.'⁹⁵

Ionesco's philosophical analogy between humanity and puppetry is reflected ubiquitously on his stage, for the reciprocity of human and non-human 'actors' serves to populate the stage with a strange type of cross-breed, characters devoid of *person*. This was no experimental accident, as it was in fact the banal functionality of the individual which inspired the dramatist in the first place to create 'personnages sans caractère. Fantoques. Êtres sans visages'.⁹⁶ Again, the metaphysical bondage of the puppet is coupled with his inevitable imprisonment in society, which alienates any sense of self and disinherits him of his humanity:

Les caractères 'robots' [...] me semblent être précisément ceux qui appartiennent uniquement à ce milieu ou à cette réalité 'sociale', qui en sont prisonniers et qui – n'étant que 'sociaux' – se sont appauvris, aliénés, vidés.⁹⁷

From the closing scene of *La Cantatrice chauve* to the ballet scenarios of *Le Jeune Homme à marier* and *Apprendre à marcher* and beyond, characters' movement is of paramount importance, and whether robotic or grotesque, their limited stage life has more in common with the properties around them than with the audience sitting behind the fourth wall. This is indeed a natural extension of literality: if Ionesco wishes to convey the mechanical drudgery of the soulless modern Man, what better way than to diminish him into a choreographed automaton? The psychological repercussions of this are fascinating, for as characters are depersonalised, causal psychology is obliterated: 'En réalité, cette guignolade doit être jouée par des "Auguste" de cirque, de la façon la plus puérile, la plus exagérée, la plus "idiote" possible. Il ne faut pas donner aux personnages un "contenu psychologique".'⁹⁸ In the absence of such psychology, the puppet is not just now a slave to his emotions, but completely bemused by them, fluctuating manically like a circus clown:

Jacques Mère: Hélas! mon époux! j'ai cru bien faire! Je suis complètement et à moitié désespérée.⁹⁹

Character portrayal is revolutionised by Ionesco, the non-human exploited to give a satirical and even alienated insight into the quintessentially human. The innovation is ultimately so extreme that Ionesco's creations are occasionally barely recognisable as characters at all:

It is only because we are prisoners of a traditional terminology that we continue to speak about the "characters" in Beckett and Ionesco as if they were of the same nature as Medea, Hamlet, Woyzeck, or Mother Courage. On the other hand, even though they are projections of the writer's inner

⁹⁵ Le Vieux, *Jeux de massacre*, Théâtre V, p.94.

⁹⁶ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.251.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.141.

⁹⁸ Stage direction to *Le Tableau*, Théâtre III, p.229.

⁹⁹ *Jacques ou la Soumission*, Théâtre I, p.100.

world, they are not similar to the medieval personifications in the morality plays. These figures on the stage (masks, changing faces, puppets, grotesque icons) are 'metaphysical personae' or 'doubles'.¹⁰⁰

Ionesco illuminates Man through dolls and marionnettes, disguises him on stilts and behind masks, turns him into animals, frames him in pictures, hides him under furniture, and even makes him invisible. Numerous stage directions suggest replacing human actors with puppets and encourage any remaining humans to act like automata or mechanical dolls. Characters are replaced by functions, with policemen marching in caricature, couples frenetically procreating, and Madame Smith and Jacques-Fils replacing social intercourse with the 'Teuf! Teuf! Teuf!' of a steam engine.¹⁰¹ Edges become blurred as these 'metaphysical personae' merge and reproduce; the human has been reified:

Choubert: Est-ce bien toi, Madeleine? [...] Pauvre petite vieille, pauvre poupée défraîchie, c'est toi pourtant. Comme tu as changé!¹⁰²

The reification of the human is an extreme repercussion of Ionesco's Essentialism, for it is only because the dramatist believes in a human *essence*, independent from *existence* and removed from the dictates of temporality, that the human can be captured and objectified. This direct projection from philosophy to theatre clearly indicates that Ionesco's drama is far from formalistic, and it demands that he be regarded as a thinker in his own right. This is also the source of the greatest philosophical dichotomy between Ionesco and Sartre, as from the polarity with Existentialism stems Ionesco's rejection of Freedom, transcendence, and choice: 'For Ionesco, categorically, Essence precedes Existence: not all his fear and hatred of the late Jean-Paul Sartre was rooted in politics.'¹⁰³ The conflict with Sartre continues with the recognition of the personality and the Self. For Sartre, the future was both ethically and ontologically a blank canvas, and because the past was rejected both as a point of reference and as a source of justification, the Self became redundant, at least in the present and future, and Authenticity became a paradox. With Ionesco's reinstatement of the Self, the prospects of Authenticity thus look brighter:

On ne change pas; la situation change. On peut être mis dans des conditions meilleures ou pires, c'est toujours moi qui suis au milieu, le même dans mon essence intime. [...] Depuis toujours, on est; on ne devient pas; l'essence précède l'existence; les réactions diffèrent sans altérer cette essence. L'histoire ne nous fait pas.¹⁰⁴

The choice of language is certainly Sartrean, but the nouns have been inverted and the semantics are therefore antithetical. For Sartre, the *Pour-soi* is the agent of the situation and changes alongside it, with the ultimate goal of changing History; for Ionesco, Man is the passive victim of the situation, the core of rock shifted by the earthquake but resilient enough to maintain its essence. In Sartrean terms, the puppet is '*dans le monde*' but not '*au-milieu*', for, as Ionesco explains in his discussion of *L'Homme aux Valises*,

¹⁰⁰ Lazar, Mosche, 'Ionesco and His Doubles', in *The Dream and the Play: Ionesco's Theatrical Quest*, ed. Mosche Lazar, p.137.

¹⁰¹ See *La Cantatrice chauve*, *Théâtre I*, p.55 and *L'Avenir est dans les œufs*, *Théâtre II*, p.227.

¹⁰² *Victimes du devoir*, *Théâtre I*, pp.196-97.

¹⁰³ Coe, Richard N., 'Ionesco and the Vision of Childhood', in *The Dream and the Play: Ionesco's Theatrical Quest*, ed. Mosche Lazar, pp.13-14.

¹⁰⁴ *Journal en miettes*, pp.177-78.

his past actions betray a personality which will colour his future situations: '[Les valises] sont tous les obstacles auxquels nous nous heurtons. Elles sont le passé, la personnalité dont on ne peut se débarrasser. Plus l'homme voyage, plus les valises sont lourdes.'¹⁰⁵ This rare admission of symbolism is again indicative of Ionesco's philosophical intentions and it is wholly consistent with his Essentialist outlook. The theme is present too in his earlier plays, and, evidently conscious of his polarity with Sartre, he does not miss the opportunity to parody in the metatheatrical *L'Impromptu de l'Alma*:

Bartholoméus II:	Je suis costumitudiste, j'étudie l'essence du costume.
Bartholoméus I:	Il n'y a pas une essence du costume! La costumologie crée le costume...
Bartholoméus II:	C'est le contraire!
Bartholoméus I:	Ainsi, vous êtes donc essentialiste!
Bartholoméus II:	Ainsi, vous êtes donc phénoménaliste! ¹⁰⁶

Though apparently indulging here in self-parody as well, Ionesco is not always so philosophically reticent in his theatre, and the later plays particularly reveal a more confident engagement: 'Oublie que tu existes. Souviens-toi que tu es.'¹⁰⁷

The theme of universality is another major preoccupation of Ionesco, and it too stems from the Essentialist belief in a shared human nature, a core of human essence. One of our objections to Sartre resulted from his tenuous dissociation of a human condition and a human nature. With Ionesco, the problem disappears, for the two are inextricably linked – human nature is part of the Given, an object of the Absurdist's derision, and it unites all men in a common bond which transcends the barriers of time:

Les personnages que peint l'œuvre ne doivent pas être trop étroitement liés à leur époque sinon ils expriment une humanité insuffisante, limitée, c'est pourquoi une œuvre littéraire de valeur est à l'intersection du temps et de l'éternité, au point idéal de l'universalité. [...] Depuis deux mille ans, les hommes ressentent à certains moments cette vérité de l'absurde si l'on peut dire, et se posent les questions essentielles.¹⁰⁸

Ionesco's demands of ideal literature are again the very antithesis of Sartrean thought. The cornerstone of Ionesco's Humanism is indeed this universal bond; and, pessimist that he is, he focuses on the common human plight:

La souffrance d'un seul être est la souffrance de tous les êtres.¹⁰⁹

Tous les hommes meurent dans la solitude; toutes les valeurs se dégradent dans le mépris: voilà ce que me dit Shakespeare. 'La cellule de Richard est bien celle de toutes les solitudes.'¹¹⁰

Unlike Sartre's attempts to transcend the Absurd, Ionesco views it rather as a unifying force which defines what it is to be human. This belief in a human essence or nature is

¹⁰⁵ *Antidotes*, p.265.

¹⁰⁶ *Théâtre II*, p.54.

¹⁰⁷ Duncan, *Macbett*, *Théâtre V*, p.178.5

¹⁰⁸ Ionesco interviewed in Claude Bonnefoy, *Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco*, pp.141-42.

¹⁰⁹ *Le blanc et le noir*, p.17

¹¹⁰ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.67.

particularly interesting in the light of Sartre's rejection of the concept of a human nature: if we recall Sartre's claim that there cannot be a human nature since there is no God to conceive it,¹¹¹ then it seems logical to assume that Ionesco's Essentialist stance removes him from the agnostics towards belief in a creating God.

Another implication of Ionesco's universality and another source of conflict with Sartre is his ardent rejection of historicity and socio-political engagement:

Il faut être au-dessus de tout cela, survoler son temps, passer à travers pour ne pas disparaître avec lui [...]. Je ne serai pas une autre vague, mais un roc, peut-être, c'est-à-dire une permanence humaine, une sorte de conscience universelle, quelquefois recouverte par les vagues, mais toujours là.¹¹²

The imagery is effective and highly reminiscent both of Bérenger's last stand in *Rhinocéros* and of Sartre's analogy of consciousness and water. But Ionesco's 'conscience' is permanent and universal; it is the rock, not the water undulating over the top. Again, there is an implicit rejection of temporality, tied in with the quest for immortality, and the notion of flight from the Given is introduced. But the main thrust is the call for Man to be extra-historical, a demand repeated throughout Ionesco's work: 'On devrait vivre en dehors de l'Histoire et prier...La seule action possible en faveur de l'humanité est la prière. Il faut donc prier. Vivre en dehors de l'Histoire et prier Dieu.'¹¹³ Ionesco's desperate need for God is again apparent – it is perhaps most willingly that he believes in human essence – and again the spiritual and the universal take precedence over the historico-temporal. Ionesco's concerns are resolutely metaphysical, and, almost certainly inspired by Jung's theory of the collective unconscious,¹¹⁴ he believes that Man is the scene of a permanent battle between mythical time (which saves) and historical time (which destroys). In fact, he goes so far as to make the two mutually exclusive:

Lorsque l'homme ne se préoccupe plus des problèmes des fins dernières, lorsque seul l'intéresse le destin d'une nation politique, de l'économie, lorsque les grands problèmes métaphysiques ne font plus souffrir, laissent indifférent, l'humanité est dégradée, elle devient bestiale.¹¹⁵

This is naturally the subtext of *Rhinocéros*, and it reinforces the dramatist's preoccupation with the transphenomenal. *Rhinocéros* succeeds in staging the process of historical totalitarianism, demonstrating that when Man loses sight of the metaphysical and immerses himself in temporal phenomena, he does indeed begin to lose his humanity:

Bérenger: A-t-il donné une raison?
 Daisy: Il a dit textuellement: il faut suivre son temps! Ce furent ses dernières paroles humaines!
 [...]
 Bérenger: ...Suivre son temps! Quelle mentalité!¹¹⁶

However, given Ionesco's insistence on the Self, *le Moi* affected by the situation, the early plays and the secondary characterisation of the later plays reveal very little

¹¹¹ See *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.22.

¹¹² *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.63.

¹¹³ 'Tout finit dans l'horreur', interview with Gabriel Liiceanu, *Magazine littéraire*, no.335 (1995), p.24.

¹¹⁴ See Duckworth, Colin, *Angels of Darkness*, p.88.

¹¹⁵ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.64.

¹¹⁶ *Théâtre III*, p.98.

evidence of any sense of self. If Ionesco portrays Man as a puppet imprisoned inside his personality, as he unquestionably does, the personality is more often than not shared and universal rather than distinct and individual. The puppet's identity is thus somewhat mystified, and as the dignity inspired by the *name* and adhered to in traditional drama from Sophocles to Miller begins to disappear, the Self as an entity and as a philosophical concept becomes entirely meaningless; names and identities either merge or contradict: 'Élisabeth et Donald sont, maintenant, trop heureux pour pouvoir m'entendre. Je puis donc vous révéler un secret. Élisabeth n'est pas Élisabeth, Donald n'est pas Donald.'¹¹⁷ At this stage, the once fruitful hope of Authenticity is again diminished, for the deliberate dissociation of names and faces destroys any chance of a consistent personality. In fact nomenclature becomes totally redundant as language itself begins to be dethroned, with human characters and everything around them rendered by the single phoneme 'chat':

Jacques: Et Jacques et Roberte?
 Roberte: Chat, chat.¹¹⁸

The dehumanisation is appropriate, for when Man is portrayed as a puppet, his essence is identical to all other men and even to inanimate objects. In this particular play, he is reduced to the primal forces of the animal, as courtship, love, and communication undergo a definitive *reductio ad absurdum*. Again, movement has priority over character delineation, following Nicolas's dreams of irrationalist theatre:

Nous abandonnerons le principe de l'identité et de l'unité de caractères, au profit du mouvement, d'une psychologie dynamique... Nous ne sommes pas nous-mêmes... La personnalité n'existe pas. Il n'y a en nous que des forces contradictoires ou non contradictoires...¹¹⁹

On this occasion, personality is definitively annihilated in favour of dynamic spontaneity, and although this statement of intent rings true for most of Ionesco's early theatre, its engrossment with the visual indicates not so much philosophical conviction as formalistic innovation. However, to a large extent, the idea is a continuation of the conception of Man as automaton, and in plays such as *Le Maître* and *La Jeune Fille à marier*, characters' identities are determined solely by their functions (L'Annonciateur, Le Jeune Amant, Le Monsieur-Fille, etc.). Indeed, as Le Policier points out in *L'Homme aux Valises*, without a function, there is no identity: 'Au nom de mon gouvernement, je vous annonce, monsieur, madame, que vous n'avez plus de fonctions. Donc, plus d'identité' (p.67). The result is that characters are turned themselves into actors, and dramatic form is turned on its head: whereas traditional theatre ran neatly from exposition to resolution, the closing line of *Le Maître*, 'Comment vous appelez-vous?', reverses the order, undermining sincerity in recognition of deliberate role-play. The link with Sartre cannot be overlooked, especially since Sartre's comments in the *Cahiers* seem to underline the underlying message of *Victimes du devoir*: 'La personne qui agit par devoir ne se reconnaît plus dans son œuvre.'¹²⁰ But, as Jacquart points out, even though both show disdain for the Sincere Man, Ionesco's anti-psychology is much more deeply rooted: 'Si Sartre avait perdu la foi dans la psychologie, elle ne lui inspirait pas un dégoût profond, viscéral, comme ce sera le cas pour les 'nouveaux' dramaturges.'¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Mary, *La Cantatrice chauve*, Théâtre I, p.31.

¹¹⁸ *Jacques ou la Soumission*, Théâtre I, p.126.

¹¹⁹ *Victimes du devoir*, Théâtre I, p.226.

¹²⁰ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.267.

¹²¹ Jacquart, Emmanuel C., *Le Théâtre de dérision*, pp.60-61.

Ionesco's stance against the consistent personality originates in the opposite end of the philosophical spectrum from Sartre's. Just as his universality derived from his Essentialism, so does his destruction of the individual Self reflect his belief in a common human nature from which the Self is doomed to crave unattainable liberation. The human being is thus the victim of a restrictive essence, condemned *not* to be free, to be an individual deprived of individuality. In the same way that Sartre takes Existentialism to its fullest extreme, insisting on total Freedom, Ionesco extends Essentialism to disregard identity and call into question the very concept of human existence. Thus, at one stage, everything human becomes Bobby Watson, the multiplicity of this generic character providing not only a source of great amusement, but also a valid insight into Ionesco's early philosophy of character.¹²² This lack of individuality is compounded later in the play when in the famous scene of marital recognition (the impetus perhaps for the ending of *Le Maître*) M. and Mme Martin are shown to have regressed to anonymity. Such mockery and multiplicity of identity continues in *Jacques ou la Soumission*, where familial unity is threatened by the absurd portrayal of traditional family roles:

Jacques Grand-mère: Le fils de mon fils c'est mon fils... et mon fils
c'est ton fils. Il n'y a pas d'autre fils.¹²³

Robert Père: Nous avons prévu cet incident. Nous avons à
votre disposition une seconde fille unique.¹²⁴

The attempted abolition of the individual develops into the theme of human interchangeability, evident in the reversed roles of the married couples at the end of *La Cantatrice chauve*, in the circular procession of the forty pupils of *La Leçon*, and in the recurrent characterisation of characters like Mary/Marie the maid, Marie-Madeleine the wife, and, of course, Bérenger the Everyman. Women in particular are regarded as interchangeable, whether in the guise of the mother/wife duality in types like Sémiramis, the *nièce-épouse*, or the long-anticipated *cantatrice* who finally emerges in *Le Piéton de l'Air*.¹²⁵ In case we are left in any doubt, we are explicitly reminded by Mado: 'Personne n'est irremplaçable!'¹²⁶

The exploration of the repercussions of the Absurd Essentialist human condition on human identity has revealed that Ionesco views Man as a puppet controlled from beyond and as a victim determined by his universal essence. These conclusions form a natural progression from the dramatist's metaphysical Absurdism, but the philosophy regarding the personality emerges as blatantly self-contradictory. The problem is interestingly identical to that encountered with Sartre, who also both refutes and implies the existence of the coherent Self to suit the particular theory. Ionesco wants it both ways: on the one hand, Man is plagued by his past actions (*les valises*) which imprison him in his personality; on the other, he is devoid of personality, interchangeable, and controlled by a shared human essence. However, as declared by Nicolas following his rejection of the personality, Man is governed by 'contradictory and non-contradictory forces', and we can only assume that Ionesco is as outraged at the seemingly paradoxical duality of humankind as the narrator of *Le Solitaire*: 'C'est cela qui me paraît être une cruauté certaine de la divinité: chacun est à la fois unique et tout le monde, chacun est l'universel' (pp.107-08).

¹²² See *La Cantatrice chauve*, *Théâtre I*, p.22ff.

¹²³ *Théâtre I*, p.105.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.112.

¹²⁵ See *Théâtre III*, p.135.

¹²⁶ *Amédée*, *Théâtre I*, p.320.

If Man is a nucleus of conflict and contradiction, then so is the language that conspires to control him: if all words can be replaced by *chat*, it is not just identity, but language too that is emptied of all significance. In fact, identity and language go hand in hand, for in the absence of identity, language is denied its honour and resonance, and it becomes as paradoxical as the puppet through whom it is voiced:

M. Smith: Elle a des traits réguliers et pourtant on ne peut pas dire qu'elle est belle. Elle est trop grande et trop forte. Ses traits ne sont pas réguliers et pourtant on peut dire qu'elle est très belle. Elle est un peu trop petite et trop maigre.¹²⁷

It was of course a language manual that first inspired Ionesco to write for the stage and the power of language never seems to dissipate in his theatre. Language even tends to overtake the stage, whether in long, anguished diatribes or in monosyllabic nonsense. But whatever its form, Man becomes its instrument, and it, in turn, becomes one of the many contradictory forces that control the human puppet. The power of language is explored most effectively in *La Leçon*, where it is both the main subject of dialogue and the sole agent of change:

Le Professeur: Le mot front est racine dans frontispice. Il l'est aussi dans effronté. 'Ispice' est suffixe, et 'ef' préfixe. On les appelle ainsi parce qu'ils ne changent pas. Ils ne veulent pas.¹²⁸

Once personified, language is given free rein, and it goes on to become the vengeful angel of death, as Man (or rather girl) is reduced to its helpless victim:

Le Professeur: Répétez, répétez: couteau... couteau... couteau...
L'Élève: J'ai mal... ma gorge, cou... ah... mes épaules... mes seins... couteau...¹²⁹

The language dictates both the pace and the action, and this sadistic dictatorship is both sexual and megalomaniac. Like Man, language then becomes reified: it is the voicing of the word 'knife' rather than the actual tool which actually kills the pupil. The violence and danger of language is commented upon by Jacques in a play written later the same year: 'O paroles, que de crimes on commet en votre nom!'¹³⁰ The ironic misquotation serves of course to underline the theme. The conception of Man as the puppet of language is certainly not restricted to the early plays – the recurrent profession of the typist is an appropriate analogy, representing the machinery of dead, replicated language beyond the user's control.¹³¹ The obvious interest in mutism, explored most memorably in the Orateur of *Les Chaises* and in the Personnage of *Ce formidable bordel*, is perhaps a counter-attack on the power of language, for these two characters communicate as much, if not more, than their vocal counterparts.

Throughout his theatre, Ionesco demonstrates a profound mistrust of language; aware of its destructive power, he constantly strives to transmute it:

Je suis perdu dans les milliers de mots et d'actes manqués que sont 'ma vie',

¹²⁷ *La Cantatrice chauve*, Théâtre I, p.23.

¹²⁸ *Théâtre I*, p.80.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.89.

¹³⁰ *Jacques ou la Soumission*, Théâtre I, p.103.

¹³¹ Notably Daisy in *Rhinocéros* and La Fille-Monsieur in *La Jeune Fille à marier*.

qui désarticulent, qui détruisent mon âme. [...] Des milliers et des milliers de mots, des masques et des mensonges et des errements devront dire ce que le mot cache. Il ne me reste qu'à démentir toute parole en la désarticulant, en la faisant éclater, en la transfigurant.¹³²

Again, the unity of theme and form, of philosophy and theatrics is apparent: the linguistic innovation of Ionesco is truly astounding, and the reasoning behind it is now clear. It is the dramatist's expressed intention to 'faire dire aux mots des choses qu'ils n'ont jamais voulu dire',¹³³ and consequently language becomes both a theme and a property in itself; in no sense is it a means to an end. Word play is a salient feature of Ionescan theatre, and paronyms and polysemes proliferate along with other inanimate objects, aiding and abetting in the build up to paroxysm:

Dans cette parlerie où chacun parle pour ne rien dire, les mots défigurés, écorchés, estropiés, contrefaits, vidés de leur substance, les lieux communs éculés, les psittacismes, les quiproquos, les pataquès, les allitérations, les flatulences verbales, mènent un dissonant concert jusqu'à la cacophonie finale où, dans une kyrielle de coq-à-l'âne et de contrepèteries, la parlote s'achève en cacade. C'est l'inanité absolue, l'absurdité totale, l'éloquence de l'aphasie.¹³⁴

The reference is obviously to *La Cantatrice chauve*, but it is applicable to Ionesco's dramatic language throughout. In the absence of meaning, rhythm becomes paramount, and in the absence of meaningful conversation, dialogue becomes stichomythic. Words are repeated ad absurdum until any sense they might once have had completely disappears.¹³⁵ Conscious of his excessive deconstruction, Ionesco defends himself facetiously: 'Il est entendu que les mots ne disent rien, si je puis m'exprimer ainsi.'¹³⁶ His philosophy on language, unlike that on the personality, is both coherent and consistent. From his first to his last play, his characters and their language are disunited and antagonistic, his audiences bereft of the comfort of their tongues:

It is interesting to note that in the final monologue of 'Journey' Ionesco returns to the device he used at the end of 'The Bald Soprano', as though he wished to come full circle. In both instances Ionesco derealizes the signifier in order to sever language from any practical material intent. Assonance is privileged over logic and syntax. Our faith in what is behind the word, at the core of discourse, is shaken, as is that of Ionesco himself.¹³⁷

As with Sartre, there is a conflict between words and action, but in Ionescan theatre, words are not a tame, intellectual, bourgeois substitute for action, but rather a direct contradiction to the action they incite:

Le Pompier: Je veux bien enlever mon casque, mais je n'ai pas le

¹³² *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.242.

¹³³ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.252.

¹³⁴ Jean Delay, *Discours de Réception d'Eugène Ionesco à l'Académie française et réponse de Jean Delay*, p.60.

¹³⁵ A good example is 'anglais', which appears sixteen times in seven sentences in the opening stage direction to *La Cantatrice chauve* (*Théâtre I*, p.19).

¹³⁶ *Journal en miettes*, p.120.

¹³⁷ Lamont, Rosette C., 'Ionesco's Gnostic Dream Play', in *The Dream and the Play: Ionesco's Theatrical Quest*, ed. Mosche Lazar, p.118.

temps de m'asseoir. (*Il s'assoit, sans enlever son casque.*)¹³⁸

Le Vieux: Bois ton thé, Sémiramis.
*Il n'y a pas de thé, évidemment.*¹³⁹

The circular plots add to the careful eradication of meaning, for, again in a fusion of theme and form, they convey the perception of life as a stuck record, a karaoke machine on an endless loop.¹⁴⁰

The effects of the Absurd Given on the puppet's sense of identity and relationship with language have now been seen, and the question still remaining is how Ionescan Man, a being full of Anguish, a victim controlled from beyond, can function in the world of ethics. The connection between language and ethics is far from arbitrary, for in the absence of language, the prospect of any descriptive or normative ethics must seem particularly bleak: although Sartrean ethics could not be 'written in stone', at least they had the potential to be coherently voiced. The ethical language of Ionesco is as parodic and paradoxical as the rest of his language, and from the very beginning, while mocking traditional forms of ethical discourse, he accepts the inherent ambiguity in any system of morality:

Bartholoméus II: Il me paraît être de mauvaise foi, c'est-à-dire
 dialectiquement, de bonne foi...¹⁴¹

The snipe at Sartre is obvious, but the attack is also on the treachery of language, which can euphemise all kinds of evil, and in the character of La Mère Pipe (this time at the expense of Brecht), the satire on ethical and political jargon continues:

Nous ne coloniserons pas les peuples, nous les occuperons pour les libérer.
 Nous n'exploiterons pas les hommes, nous les ferons produire. Le travail
 obligatoire s'appellera travail volontaire. La guerre s'appellera la paix et
 tout sera changé, grâce à moi et à mes oies.¹⁴²

With the proliferation of meaningless political euphemisms, the image of *chat* again springs to mind.

It is not just the inevitable failure of language which strikes at the heart of a possible ethics. Man is consistently portrayed by Ionesco as a victim and a puppet, and as such it is to be expected that he will be unable to effect change. Throughout Ionesco's theatre, characters are shown to be victims of circumstance, imposed upon by objects, events, and other people, and no more so than in *Macbett*, where any ethical action is doomed to be in vain: 'Régner, régner, ce sont les événements qui règnent sur l'homme, non point l'homme sur les événements.'¹⁴³ The contrast with the Sartrean agent could not be more distinct. Ionesco's characters are passive in the face of change and upheaval, and, like their creator, they regard action less with fear than with disdain: 'Vivre hors de la contemplation, dans l'action, dans l'espoir, c'est la stupidité, l'aveuglement. [...] Agir? Trop lucide, pour le faire.'¹⁴⁴ For Ionesco, then, the lucid consciousness is aware of the futility of hope and action; in Sartrean terms, Ionesco

¹³⁸ *La Cantatrice chauve, Théâtre I*, p.40.

¹³⁹ *Les Chaises, Théâtre I*, p.133.

¹⁴⁰ This image is interestingly the basis of Dennis Potter's *Karaoke*, which explores the predetermined nature of the human condition.

¹⁴¹ *L'Impromptu de l'Alma, Théâtre II*, p.35.

¹⁴² *Tueur sans gages, Théâtre II*, p.138.

¹⁴³ *Macbett, Théâtre V*, p.190.

¹⁴⁴ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.239 and p.265.

immerses himself in the mode of being, somewhat disregards the mode of having, and removes himself completely from the mode of doing. A cause, or perhaps a result, of this is a general feeling of exhaustion: 'Une énorme fatigue m'accable. D'origine psychique vraisemblablement, qui pourrait sembler ne pas avoir de cause mais dont, moi, je connais la cause: la certitude ou presque que tout est vain.'¹⁴⁵ Ionescan Man is overcome with inertia, and, although certainly less static than his Beckettian counterpart, he betrays a definite antipathy towards any remotely ethical action:

Amédée: Je suis tellement las!
 Madeleine: Comme chaque fois que tu dois agir.¹⁴⁶

Like many of his fellows, Amédée is selectively and voluntarily inert, and the excuse he offers for his passivity is reminiscent of Sartre's Hugo: 'Je suis un sédentaire, moi, un intellectuel.'¹⁴⁷ But unlike Hugo, who strives to prove himself in action and who *is*, in any case, *intellectually* engaged, Amédée and others like him steer clear of any commitment. This sense of lethargy is a recurrent theme in Ionescan theatre, occasionally invoked as a flight from Anguish, always an escape route from the possibility of action:

Dany: J'ai besoin de me reposer définitivement.¹⁴⁸

Jean: Cette fatigue... cette fatigue qui m'empêche, mes jambes sont molles, ma tête lourde. La frayeur me reprend.¹⁴⁹

Such inertia and passivity reflect the deep sense of apathy and the deeply pessimistic outlook evident in the Ionescan puppet. If the Sartrean agent's optimism stems from his free, open future and his ethical belief in his ability to reap change, Ionesco's characters are left in a state of despair, for they are determined by their pasts and impotent in the present. For Ionesco himself, ethical pessimism makes a mockery of action and the overriding feeling is the '*à quoi bon?*':

Le 'comment' devient du 'faire', et le 'faire' ne peut pas ne pas aboutir au 'pourquoi', car le 'faire' n'est pas circonscrit, ne peut être isolé d'un contexte sans limites: cela ne s'arrête pas, cela ne s'arrête jamais. On veut faire une bonne société, une société meilleure, mais on ne peut pas ne pas se demander pourquoi on veut faire une meilleure société, et qu'est-ce que c'est qu'une meilleure société, et pourquoi une société serait-elle meilleure ou pire qu'une autre?¹⁵⁰

Chestov has pointed out the link between Plotinus's 'l'essence même de l'action est une limitation' and Dostoevsky's 'l'homme d'action doit être un esprit médiocre',¹⁵¹ and it seems that the Ionescan aversion to action is a well-reasoned continuation of this Classical ethical philosophy. Ionesco acknowledges the problem of ethical subjectivity delicately circumnavigated by Sartre, and the conclusion he reaches is that if action is the means to a subjective end, then it is not only questionable but invalid. The only valid

¹⁴⁵ *Journal en miettes*, p.29.

¹⁴⁶ *Amédée, Théâtre I*, p.271.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.282.

¹⁴⁸ *Tueur sans gages, Théâtre II*, p.81

¹⁴⁹ *La Soif et la Faim, Théâtre IV*, p.95.

¹⁵⁰ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.135.

¹⁵¹ *Sur la balance de Job*, p.37.

stance lies in apathy – ‘C’est ça la solution. Le “je-m’en-fichisme” absolu.’¹⁵² This is the stance adopted by most of Ionesco’s characters, and it is merely compounded by their mortal Anguish:

Sixième Docteur: Il y a des gens qui disent que toute action est inutile, toute révolution et toute évolution car, disent-ils, de toute façon, il y a la mort au bout.
Premier Docteur: C’est un argument à prendre en considération.¹⁵³

The direct link between metaphysical Absurdism and ethics, the continuation and coherence of thought, can be appreciated here; but it is not only death, but political cynicism that stands in the way of ethical progression, a cynicism clearly expressed by La Mère Pipe: ‘Je vous promets de tout changer. Pour tout changer il ne faut rien changer. On change les noms, on ne change pas les choses.’¹⁵⁴ In her bold bombast, she recognises both the treachery of language and the manipulative nature of politics, but even she is unlikely to succeed in the stage world of Ionesco, for her words will undoubtedly fall on nihilistic ears:

Le Monsieur: Faites comme moi, Madame, ne vous fiez à personne, ne croyez rien, ne vous laissez pas bourrer le crâne!¹⁵⁵

Le Gros Monsieur: Au lieu d’avoir des principes, vous feriez mieux d’avoir des coups de pied au cul! C’est préférable!¹⁵⁶

Their advice turns out to be vindicated in the brutal portrayal of violence and evil in *Macbett*, where those wielding political power are certainly not to be trusted and where the ominous chiasmus ‘video meliora, deteriora sequor’¹⁵⁷ is borne out by the anti-resolution delivered by Macol: ‘Ma pauvre patrie verra régner plus de vices qu’auparavant. Elle suffira plus et de plus de manières que jamais sous mon administration.’¹⁵⁸

It has been mentioned that Ionesco, unlike Sartre, recognises the subjective gratuitousness of ethics, and this is indeed one of the greatest strengths of his philosophy. Though constantly reproached by critics for leaving Man in a moral vacuum, the ethical stance taken by Ionesco is truly consistent with his agnosticism and with the central aspects of his metaphysical Absurdism: if we are abandoned in a cruel world by a potentially non-existent God, what can possibly be the source of our ethical values? Ionesco must thus be credited with remaining consistently in the Absurd, at least at this stage, for, as pointed out by Camus, with the absence of sense comes the inevitable absence of incontestable values: ‘La croyance au sens de la vie suppose toujours une échelle de valeurs, un choix, nos préférences. La croyance à l’absurde, selon nos définitions, enseigne le contraire.’¹⁵⁹ By this definition, and by Sartre’s too, Ionesco is innocent of Seriousness, of adherence to pre-existing values. Further insight into the impossibility of normative or descriptive ethics is given by the narrator of *Le Solitaire*, who points out that no moral code can be constructed from senselessness and nothingness:

¹⁵² *Un homme en question*, p.17.

¹⁵³ *Jeux de Massacre, Théâtre V*, p.86.

¹⁵⁴ *Tueur sans gages, Théâtre II*, p.137.

¹⁵⁵ *La Jeune Fille à marier, Théâtre II*, p.250.

¹⁵⁶ *Le Tableau, Théâtre III*, p.243.

¹⁵⁷ ‘I see better things, but I follow worse things.’ Deuxième Sorcière, *Théâtre V*, p.162.

¹⁵⁸ *Macbett, Théâtre V*, p.203.

¹⁵⁹ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.84.

Mais alors, sur quelles bases pouvons-nous fonder un avoir ou une morale? En aucun cas, cette base ne peut être l'ignorance et nous ne sommes que dans l'ignorance, nous n'avons comme base de départ, comme fondement, que le néant. Comment bâtir sur le rien? (p.69).

Ionesco's acceptance of 'the blank canvas of morality' has vital repercussions, for it undermines essential philosophical objectives such as justice, ethical judgement, and even truth itself:

Comment être objectif? Comment être juste? Comment être exact? Comment dire la vérité? Comment faire qu'il s'agisse là d'une vérité 'vraie', non pas que je veux, que j'impose? Cela est-il absolument un non-sens philosophique?

Sachant cela (façon d'interpréter à mon tour non pas vérité absolue), je suis indécis, conscient de la subjectivité de tous et de la mienne, me rendant compte que tout jugement est relatif, vrai et faux, impossible, etc., je ne puis que refuser de juger.¹⁶⁰

In direct contrast to the Sartrean agent, the puppet is condemned to ethical, if not ontological or transphenomenal, freedom; but this is no contradiction, for in the face of pessimism, apathy, and cynicism, ethical choice is as meaningless as ever:

Mme Martin: Quelle est la morale?
Le Pompier: C'est à vous de la trouver.¹⁶¹

Voix de la Concierge: Ne m'en parlez pas des philosophes [...]. Il faut trouver chacun sa solution. S'il y en avait, mais y en a pas.¹⁶²

One of the most sustained philosophical explorations of ethics comes in *La Soif et la Faim*, where *any* form of ideology is shown to be illogical and where ethical belief is presented as willing relinquishment of freedom, prejudiced self-incarceration:

Frère Tarabas: (*A Brechtoll*) Si personne ne nous voit et ne m'oblige à être bon, qui peut m'empêcher de vous laisser mourir de faim?
[...]
(*A Tripp*) Nous avons ni dogmes [...]. Ni principes, ni critères; nous sommes libres. [...] Si vous êtes enfermé, c'est parce que c'est vous qui avez une croyance, un critère, un dogme ou [...] une morale. Bref, des préjugés. Vous n'êtes pas notre prisonnier. C'est votre pensée qui vous enferme.¹⁶³

Tripp is a typical Ionesco character in the sense that he is his own jailer. Imprisoned in his language, his nature, and his condition, the puppet willingly chooses to imprison himself in a variety of ways, in a labyrinth of different walls. The image of the world as

¹⁶⁰ *Antidotes*, p.272.

¹⁶¹ *La Cantatrice chauve*, *Théâtre I*, p.43.

¹⁶² *Tueur sans gages*, *Théâtre II*, p.102.

¹⁶³ *Théâtre IV*, p.147 and p.150.

a prison is strongly recurrent, and it is an appropriate one for the Absurdist, since, as pointed out by Dobrez, 'To exist is to suffocate, to be enclosed in a room or stifled by objects or words or people.'¹⁶⁴ The imagery here evokes the metaphysical Anguish explored earlier; the enclosed sets and situations of Ionesco's creations can be regarded as a physical extension of existential anxiety, another victory for Ionescan literalism. Characters are thus imprisoned both literally and metaphorically, and, trapped as they are in their strange little worlds, they begin to resemble the insane or dead creations of Sartre: 'Les marionnettes raidies de *La Cantatrice chauve* ressemblent aux personnages objectivés d'*Huis Clos* [...]. La leur est "une vie morte" dirait Sartre.'¹⁶⁵ Indeed the puppets of Ionesco have much in common with the living dead of *Huis Clos*, for whom the past is determining and action futile. But, like the Nouveau Locataire, Ionesco's characters choose their own captivity; they lock their own doors and turn off their own lights. Claustrophobia is positively sought, whether individually or in a couple, the most striking examples being the old couple of *Les Chaises*, who maroon themselves on an island, and Amédée and his wife, whose agoraphobia is so entrenched they have to send a basket down for food. This microcosmic display of insecurity reflects their philosophical perception of the macrocosm, a world-view shared by many of their fellows:

Le Deuxième Malade: L'univers est pour moi une prison ou un bain.
Regarder le monde me fait mal. Je ne puis souffrir
la lumière, je ne puis supporter les ténèbres.¹⁶⁶

Le Monsieur: Nous vivons dans une sorte de prison qui est une
boîte. Cette boîte est emboîtée dans une autre
boîte, qui est emboîtée dans une autre boîte, qui
est emboîtée dans une autre boîte [...] et ainsi de
suite, à l'infini. Et l'infini, je vous le disais on ne
peut pas le concevoir.¹⁶⁷

The analogy of the Russian dolls effectively drives home the extent of the puppet's sequestration, both willing and imposed, and this is further reinforced by the stagecraft of the writer. Ionesco wittingly creates a theatre within a theatre within a theatre, where space itself becomes structurally imprisoned:

En structurant non seulement l'espace scénique mais aussi l'espace hors-scène, Ionesco accentue la clôture de l'espace. Sans doute, les portes et les fenêtres existent, qui donnent sur l'extérieur. Mais cet extérieur est sans référent: il s'agit d'un espace virtuel de même nature que l'espace actuel: c'est-à-dire d'un espace théâtral.¹⁶⁸

Enclosed within their labyrinthine walls, Ionesco's victims are as doomed as the Minotaur's prey; aware of the danger, they burrow deep to find their warren or climb skywards to find a nest. Their space becomes increasingly restricted, and they lie low to avoid intrusion, whether from a fireman, a rhinoceros, a corpse, or death itself. The ethical world created by Ionesco is thus beyond the terrain of the puppet, who,

¹⁶⁴ *The Existential and its Exits*, p.151.

¹⁶⁵ Malachy, Thérèse, *La Mort en Situation dans le Théâtre Contemporain*, p.83.

¹⁶⁶ *Macbeth, Théâtre V*, p.177.

¹⁶⁷ *Ce formidable bordel*, p.140.

¹⁶⁸ Pruner, M., 'L'Espace dans la dramaturgie de Ionesco', in *Ionesco: Situation et Perspectives*, ed. Claude Abastado, p.226.

imprisoned by the Given, his language, and his own walls, lies inert and apathetic in the expectance of inevitable disaster. 'C'est peut-être une hibernation', admits Ionesco: 'Je la recommande'.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ *Ruptures de Silence*, p.80.

iii) Rats on a Wheel: The Escapist

The image of the hibernating victim, though appropriate, is a profoundly static one, and as the puppet transmutes from victim to escapist, the hibernating animal awakens and endeavours to flee from the constraints of its claustration. The notion of flight is central to Ionescan theatre, and the aim of this section is to isolate its presentation of the various forms of flight from the human condition and situation, and to explore their philosophical origins.

The use of inhuman, animalistic imagery, terminology, and artistry to convey human Anguish and language has already been discussed, and the extension of the analogy in this context serves to fuse the complementary concepts of Absurdism ('Le monde n'est peut-être qu'une farce énorme que Dieu a jouée à l'homme') and incarceration ('La création n'est ni logique ni illogique, elle est gratuite et libre. C'est d'être déterminé qui est insensé, d'être pris dans le jeu.'¹⁷⁰) explored in the previous sections. The fusion of these two central concepts creates a whole which is unbearable for the puppet to sustain and which drives him into the realm of flight. The image of the rat on a wheel, though not of Ionesco's creation, is alluded to throughout his plays and journals, but the motif of the rat trap, which inspires the blocking and intrigue of *La Leçon*, is directly acknowledged in his most personal diary:

Pris dans ce piège. Comme un rat [...] pris dans ce piège entre la naissance et la mort.

Un piège? Ou un col étroit d'où on ne doit (re)partir que par le haut.¹⁷¹

Again, the anthropomorphic images abound, and one cannot fail to be reminded of Dostoevsky's 'mousehold' in his *Notes from Underground*.¹⁷² On the stage, it is not only oblique analogy which conveys the base condition of Man, but also the characters' self-perception as animals trapped in a prison-like zoo:

Un Autre Homme: Nous sommes pris au piège. Comme des rats.¹⁷³

Alexandre: J'ai l'impression de vivre dans une cage. Je suis même convaincu que nous sommes dans une cage.¹⁷⁴

As might be expected, such lucidity is reinforced by Adamovian literality, for in the play within *La Soif et la Faim*, cages descend from above, and Brechtoll and Tripp are caught in a trap, easy prey for the torturing monks.

The image is also sustainable in the portrayal of the Absurdity of the social condition, and, more particularly, of the modern worker; interpreted in this way, it is once again reminiscent of the monotonous toiling of Sisyphus, or here Bérenger: 'Je ne suis pas fait pour le travail que j'ai... tous les jours, au bureau, pendant huit heures, trois semaines seulement de vacances en été!'¹⁷⁵ Man is caught, then, in a dual trap: metaphysically, he is condemned to the Absurd imprisonment between the arbitrary boundaries of birth and death; and socially, he is left little choice but to strive,

¹⁷⁰ *Découvertes*, p.117.

¹⁷¹ *La Quête intermittente*, p.165.

¹⁷² See Rosette C. Lamont, *Ionesco's Imperatives: The Politics of Culture*, p.195. Interestingly, and not coincidentally, Dostoevsky's book is also the source of the term *anti-hero*.

¹⁷³ *Jeux de Massacre, Théâtre V*, p.110.

¹⁷⁴ *Voyages chez les Morts*, p.112.

¹⁷⁵ *Rhinocéros, Théâtre III*, p.12.

seemingly pointlessly, amidst the machinations of the current system. These philosophical convictions are transposed onto the stage in almost every conceivable way, and they even inspire the very movement of the characters: '*Le Premier Homme, tenant les deux valises dans les mains. Il va d'un bout de la scène à l'autre, il la parcourt plusieurs fois. De temps à autre, il dépose ses valises, s'éponge le front, puis repart, il joue le même jeu.*'¹⁷⁶ This aimless wandering, which accompanies the main theme of the play, is choreographed to the point of paroxysm, as characters enter and leave the stage chaotically until they can move no more and the Quatrième Homme is forced to cry, 'Quel embouteillage!'.¹⁷⁷ The man on the stage has become the rat on the wheel.

Anthropomorphism is prevalent in Ionescan theatre, and rats are by no means the only animals used to elucidate the plight of the puppet. At varying moments, the stage is overrun by rhinoceroses, geese, and eggs, as literality comes once more to the fore and characters metamorphose into the beasts most appropriate to their flawed ideologies, whether totalitarian (the rhinoceros), political (the goose), or socially conventional (the breeding bird). Jacques and Roberte are particularly good examples, for, in the course of their two plays, they lose their human identities first to the cat, then to the grotesque beast, and finally to the factory breeder. At the end of *Jacques*, their families too join them in their animalistic ritual.¹⁷⁸ Such transmutation is wholly consistent with the philosophy expounded in Ionesco's interviews and journals, where he betrays a definite urge to identify the human puppet with the ensnared beast:

Nous sommes pris dans une sorte de piège collectif et nous ne nous révoltons même pas sérieusement [...]. Nous sommes menés, nous sommes conditionnés, nous sommes traînés en laisse comme des chiens.¹⁷⁹

Je tourne en rond dans ma cage, derrière les barreaux, comme un fauve.¹⁸⁰

The bestial analogies proliferate like the eggs or the rhinoceroses, and there is a link also with the theme of *enlissement*, the sinking down into the soft earth of the moles and worms, the labyrinth of the classical bull, or the dank cellars inhabited by rats.

The form of the plays is also consistent with the portrayal of Man as a rat on a wheel. Ionesco's preoccupation with the circle has been mentioned in relation to the wish to be 'unborn', to the craving for the womb; but the same image can be appreciated in the light of the analogy explored above, which regards life as a fruitless tread-wheel and existence as a circular cage:

Le retour cyclique n'est pas un simple élément architectural placé hors du champ de la signification. Au contraire, sa raison d'être, c'est de *signifier*: l'existence n'est qu'un éternel retour absurde et sans solution. La structure cyclique illustre donc le thème majeur. La 'forme' épouse le 'fond' et constitue avec lui un tout indissociable.¹⁸¹

This unity of theme and form, one of the greatest achievements of the genre, is evident not only in the circular plots of *La Cantatrice chauve* and *La Leçon*, but also in the distinctive technique of paroxysm, by which Ionesco accelerates and slows down the

¹⁷⁶ Stage direction to *L'Homme aux Valises*, p.97.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.98.

¹⁷⁸ *Théâtre I*, p.127.

¹⁷⁹ *Journal en miettes*, p.50.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.97.

¹⁸¹ Jacquot, Emmanuel C., *Le Théâtre de dérision*, p.178.

action like a madman spinning a wheel: '*Le jeu ira très lentement au départ; déclamation; le mouvement s'intensifiera progressivement, durant la scène qui va suivre; se ralentira à la fin.*'¹⁸² This stage direction is typical, and could just as well relate to the balletic movement of furniture in *Les Chaises* or in *Le Nouveau Locataire*, to the mass production of eggs in *L'Avenir est dans les œufs*, or to the waitress serving tables in *Ce formidable bordel!*

Scenic space is also highly influenced by the shape of the circle, from the circular outer wall of *Les Chaises* to the circle drawn by the *Nouveau Locataire*, and the cyclical oscillations of brutal power in *Macbett* prove that even internal dramatic intrigue is highly dominated by this same image. The influence is certainly a deep one, and its symbolism, while plainly philosophical, has its origins in the world of dreams: 'L'idée d'encerclement, de vie prise au piège, constitue une des bases de l'onirisme de Ionesco. Ce cauchemar très obsédant [...] va orienter une dramaturgie dominée par l'idée du cercle.'¹⁸³ The nightmare can be appreciated in *Jacques*, where the horse in Roberte II's story can only gallop round in circles;¹⁸⁴ and the teratological vision we are left with is this same grotesque storyteller, crawling round the stage with her three noses, and the nine fingers of her left hand wagging like reptiles. The edges between puppet and animal are becoming increasingly blurred.

Ionesco's response to this seeming dead end is to explore the different methods of flight from the rat race, from the interminable Given. The concept of flight can actually be seen as a development of the theme of sequestration explored earlier: the failure of self-imposed isolation in terms of metaphysical escapism (the sequestered Amédée and old couple of *Les Chaises* continue to be plagued by existential Angst) has led to a renewed pursuit of freedom, to a longing for absence:

Être libre, être hors de l'Histoire, ne pas être dans l'ordre du monde, ne pas être un instrument de l'orchestre ou une note de la symphonie. Ne pas être sur la scène. Tout voir et entendre de la salle. Comme hors de l'univers. Si on est sur la scène, si on fait partie de l'orchestre, nous n'entendons que le tumulte, nous ne saisissons que les dissonances.¹⁸⁵

The musical, Platonic analogy points towards a desire for transphenomenal escapism, the only effective method of fleeing from the dissonant chaos of human existence towards the possible beauty and plenitude of human essence. However, this ardent desire for a new condition and situation will remain an oneiric wish-fulfilment until the existential rat-traps have been successfully overcome:

Jacques: Et comment sortir? Ils ont bouché les portes, les fenêtres avec du rien, ils ont enlevé les escaliers... On ne part plus par le grenier, par en haut plus moyen... pourtant, m'a-t-on dit, ils ont laissé un peu partout des trappes... Si je les découvrais... Je veux absolument m'en aller. Si on ne peut pas passer par le grenier, il reste la cave... oui, la cave... Il vaut mieux passer par en bas que d'être là. Tout est préférable à ma situation actuelle. Même une nouvelle.¹⁸⁶

The ontological contrast to Sartre here should not be overlooked: whereas for Sartre,

¹⁸² *Jacques ou la Soumission*, Théâtre I, p.122, stage direction.

¹⁸³ Vernois, Paul, *La Dynamique théâtrale d'Eugène Ionesco*, p.76.

¹⁸⁴ *Théâtre I*, p.124.

¹⁸⁵ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, pp.74-75.

¹⁸⁶ *Jacques ou la Soumission*, Théâtre I, p.121.

Man is a nothingness surrounded by plenitude, for Ionesco, the inverse is the case, the puppet a potential plenitude, imprisoned within walls of nothingness.

The most natural, and perhaps the most attainable, means of escape is that of humour. Practically absent from Sartrean theatre, humour is central to the world of Ionesco, and it presents itself in a variety of ways, from the playful and nonsensical to the bitterly satirical. For Ionesco, humour and freedom are mutually dependent, and he attacks the paradox of the bondage of Sartrean liberty: 'L'humour, c'est la liberté [...] et les sartrismes nous engluent, nous figent, dans les cachots et dans les fers de cet engagement qui devait être liberté.'¹⁸⁷ As in the world of Beckett, humour provides welcome distraction from the misery of the human situation; the catharsis of laughter which occasionally unites the stage characters and their audience seems to suspend the consciousness from perception of the Absurd in the same way that Sisyphus's toiling removes him from the misery of his plight. Laughter, then, provides solace and consolation, and its evocation leaves Ionesco doubly guilty of Sartrean distraction, for not only does he seek to avoid Anguish by uniting past and future actions, but he attempts to flee the present in the *conduite magique* of mirth. According to Ionesco, it is in humour, in whatever guise it may arise, that Man will find his peace: 'Nous sommes comiques. C'est sous cet aspect que nous devrions nous voir. Rien que l'humour, rose ou noir ou cruel, mais seul l'humour peut nous rendre la sérénité.'¹⁸⁸ If we accept along with Ionesco that comedy and tragedy are two sides of the same coin, then we must concede that humour is a particularly appropriate means of escape. Here again, Ionesco succeeds in uniting theme and form, for his existential philosophy and his theatrical theory both contend that paroxysm is the proof of the ultimate convergence of the tragic and the comic: pushed to its extreme, ridiculed and speeded-up, tragedy cannot fail to become burlesque; and comedy, when blackened and decelerated, is transformed to the realm of the tragic. Derision, the metaphysical farce, the tragicomedy, all terms regularly used in description of Ionescan theatre, testify to this unity in their unanimous acknowledgement that humour is indeed not only a valid means of escape but also the ultimate outlet of despair. In their more lucid moments, the characters on Ionesco's, as on Beckett's, stage are fully aware of their impulses to laugh in the midst of their own sorrow:

Nell: Rien n'est plus drôle que le malheur [...]. Si, si, c'est la chose la plus comique du monde.¹⁸⁹

Jean: La douleur de l'homme est ridicule pour l'homme.¹⁹⁰

In its successful rapprochement of laughter and despair, the Theatre of the Absurd has achieved the perfect escapism. Its only flaw lies in its transience, as the laughter soon turns back to bitter tears.

A less philosophical means of flight comes with the chemical escapism of alcohol, a more poetic device probably indebted to the Romantics. As with humour, the intention is not to physically escape but rather to nullify the consciousness and thus to flee from Anguish. Alcohol is also used to remove the consciousness from the encumbrance of the body, and there is a contrast here with Sartre's Authentic Man who was shown to be at home inside his skin: 'J'ai toujours eu une mauvaise cénesthésie: mal à l'aise dans ma peau. D'où la nécessité des euphorisants ou de la boisson.'¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.200.

¹⁸⁸ *Journal en miettes*, p.168.

¹⁸⁹ Beckett, Samuel, *Fin de Partie*, pp.33-34.

¹⁹⁰ *La Soif et la Faim, Théâtre IV*, p.115.

¹⁹¹ *Journal en miettes*, p.56.

Alcohol is perhaps not only a means of evasion of Anguish, but also a magical conduct, a fast-track route to Authenticity, reminiscent indeed of the Sartrean conversion to pure reflection.¹⁹²

The stage character who explores this route is of course the autobiographical Béranger, who in his awkwardness and physical weakness seeks strength and consolation in the bottle. He is chastised for this by several of his fellows, but no more so than by the totalitarian Jean, whose puritanism is soon exposed to be blatantly hypocritical. Béranger naturally does not succeed in removing himself from reality for long, as the secured inebriation is almost as temporary as the escapism into humour. There is obviously a link here too with the craving for plenitude of Being, and the consumption of alcohol thus fulfils a dual metaphysical role.

It is in the form of the novel, though, that the theme is examined most effectively. *Le Solitaire*, who is subsequently dramatised in *Ce formidable bordel!*, imbibes alcohol not merely to quell his social inadequacy but also to find a shelter from the imponderable questions of the Absurd, to cure his Roquentinesque *nausée*:

De nouveau cet affreux vertige. Je me dirigeai vers le buffet. Ouvris le battant, pris la bouteille de cognac. Je bus l'un après l'autre cinq verres. Dieu que c'était bon. Toutes les questions s'émoussent, je me sentis chaud, heureux, ou plutôt, non pas heureux, libéré de toutes ces questions. Je n'étais plus prisonnier du globe seulement, mais de cette couverture chaude de l'alcool qui vous enveloppe. Mais la nausée avait disparu. Je ne pense plus à l'impensable.¹⁹³

In a philosophical moment, he goes on to explore the different manifestations of flight, reaching the conclusion that his own preferred method of evasion is no less valid than the Sartrean escapism of action: 'Les gens qui s'agitent, qui agissent, qui déterminent les autres à agir, trouvent là-dedans une évasion, un oubli que pour ma part je trouvais dans l'alcool.'¹⁹⁴ His conclusion is of course identical to the one reached by Sartre himself in the closing pages of *L'Être et le Néant*.¹⁹⁵

Both philosophically and technically, the most important aspect of flight lies in the celebration of the unconscious, a preoccupation which fits in with Ionesco's Essentialism and which inspires his development of form. The influences of the Surrealists, of Freud and Jung, and of Strindberg in this area of Ionesco's dramaturgy have all been appropriately acknowledged, and it is more fruitful here to focus on the interesting contrasts with Sartre. One of the main problems in the exploration of the agent was Sartre's complete rejection of the unconscious in favour of the reflective and pre-reflective consciousnesses, a rejection which had dire consequences for choice, responsibility, and therefore for personal ethics. With Ionesco's puppet, his dreams and his unconscious unite him with his fellows, for they point towards a primal essence, a psychic underworld of being: 'Nos rêves essentielles ne sont-ils pas les mêmes? Ne révèlent-ils pas nos angoisses communes, nos désirs communs?'¹⁹⁶ Although, following Sartrean analysis, the puppet would be left in *mauvaise foi*, conveniently abdicating from ethical responsibility, Ionesco's rejection of the validity of action seems to remove the problems of choice and repercussion. The unconscious almost explodes onto Ionesco's stage, affecting dialogue, structure, and theme, and the role of the dream is central in exposing Man's primal desires of flight: 'Si les avions sillonnent aujourd'hui

¹⁹² See p.97 for Barnes's interpretation of pure reflection.

¹⁹³ *Le Solitaire*, p.53.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.141.

¹⁹⁵ See p.721: 'Ainsi revient-il au même de s'enivrer solitairement ou de conduire les peuples.'

¹⁹⁶ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.165.

le ciel, c'est parce que nous avons rêvé l'envol avant de nous envoler. Il a été possible de voler parce que nous rêvions que nous volions.'¹⁹⁷ The desire to fly inspires many dream sequences in the course of the plays, even in the absence of the plane, and the theme of levitation, of physical and metaphysical escapism, can be seen to transcend the restrictive limits of the dream play and, as in *Le Piéton de l'Air*, demand its place also on the conscious stage. We can also glean further insight into Ionesco's Humanism here, for if Sartre rejects the notion of judging Man's greatness by individual inventions such as the plane,¹⁹⁸ Ionesco's more collective Humanism accepts that personal inspiration is predated and outshone by essential, atavistic desires that lie deep within the psyche. Indeed Ionesco is convinced that these unconscious drives are more honest and reliable than conscious processes of thought, and that a *conscience heureuse* is one which accesses these drives through dream:

L'imagination ne peut mentir. Elle est révélatrice de notre psychologie, de nos angoisses permanentes ou actuelles, des préoccupations de l'homme de toujours et d'aujourd'hui, des profondeurs de l'âme. Un homme qui ne rêve pas est un homme malade.¹⁹⁹

It is thus the positive characters, such as Bérenger, who are the dreamers of Ionescan drama, and the negative characters, such as Jean, who remain closed to this therapeutic mode of self-removal:

Jean: Je ne rêve jamais...
 Bérenger: Le mal de tête a dû vous prendre pendant votre sommeil, vous avez oublié d'avoir rêvé, ou plutôt vous vous en souvenez inconsciemment!
 Jean: Moi, inconsciemment? Je suis maître de mes pensées, je ne me laisse pas aller à la dérive. Je vais tout droit, je vais toujours tout droit.²⁰⁰

Jean refuses to dream in the same way he refuses alcohol, for he is so firmly fixed in the world of actuality that he has even forgotten to be human. It is of course significant that by this stage Jean's horn has started to protrude, for as a rhinoceros, he will have no need to relocate his humanity, whether in the form of drink or dreams. Unaware of the need to escape, Jean freely relinquishes his human form and becomes a soulless animal, a rat trapped on its wheel.

The authenticity of the dream, and thus of the unconscious imagination, is highlighted particularly in the later plays, where the dream state is regarded as the default position of the puppet's consciousness: 'Pour être lucide, il faudrait passer sa vie en rêve.'²⁰¹ The direct contrast with Sartre is again striking, and it would appear that Ionescan Authenticity demands an openness to the unconscious, whereas for Sartre, such adherence would characterise Inauthentic Man. In Ionesco's last play, too, which is in itself an extended dream play, the timelessness and purity of the unconscious mind are clearly conveyed by Jean: 'Je suis toujours jeune, je me vois toujours jeune dans mes rêves. L'inconscient ne vieillit pas.[...] Dans les rêves, je te rencontre bien plus souvent que dans cette fausse réalité.'²⁰² The escapism of the dream can be seen to extend to a

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.210.

¹⁹⁸ See *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, p.91.

¹⁹⁹ *Antidotes*, p.176.

²⁰⁰ *Rhinocéros, Théâtre III*, p.69.

²⁰¹ Premier Homme, *L'Homme aux Valises*, p.25.

²⁰² *Voyages chez les Morts*, p.96 and p.117.

counterattack on Absurdity itself, for in his dreams, Jean can attain the eternal instant, successfully remove himself from transience, decrepitude, death, and temporality. Like humour and alcohol, the unconscious provides the puppet with a weapon to fight against the injustices of his situation and condition, and Sartre's lucid consciousness, which is destined to face its own problematics, is shown by Ionesco to be both false and temporally constrained. In fact the dream state becomes so normalised that conscious life and historical existence begin to induce delirium:

La Vieille: C'est bien lui, il existe. En chair et en os.
 Le Vieux: Il existe. Et c'est bien lui. Ce n'est pas un rêve!
 La Vieille: Ce n'est pas un rêve, je te l'avais bien dit.²⁰³

Like Choubert in *Victimes du devoir*, the old couple re-emerge from their subconscious thought with a new-found wonder at existence, and just as Choubert's consolation lies in bread, the hosts place their faith in salvation through the orator, whose status is probably diminished because he actually does exist. Throughout Ionesco's theatre, the dreamy world of unconscious desires is shown to be more real than its conscious counterpart, and although the flight it enables is again relatively transient, it lies at the very core of the writer's Humanism, uniting the temporal ages and testifying proudly to the essence of Man.

Another powerful means of escape is presented in the theme of metamorphosis and regression. The metamorphosis from human to animal, a form of symbolism no doubt inspired by Kafkaesque polymorphism, has been discussed and exposed as a negative aspect of flight, but metamorphosis from one human character to another, facilitated by characters' universal and often interchangeable identity, is also a common phenomenon on Ionesco's theatrical stage. Again there is a pleasing unity between theme and form, for the technique of literality allows Ionesco to reinforce his philosophy of character with powerful visual images: philosophical themes such as flight from the Self, whether the individual consciousness or the physical body, equated with Sartrean themes such as distraction, dissociation, reflection, and objectivation, are conveyed in the form of transmutation of character. Thus, in *Victimes du devoir*, Madeleine and Le Policier are transformed into Choubert's mother and father,²⁰⁴ thus La Jeune Fille à Marier is or has become a virile man with a large black moustache; in *Macbett*, La Première Sorcière turns into Lady Duncan; and at the end of the fabulesque *Tableau*, Le Peintre is conjured into a mythical prince:

*Le Gros Monsieur [...] tire un coup de pistolet sur le peintre; les vieux vêtements de celui-ci tombent soudainement, il apparaît en Prince Charmant. [...] L'éclairage fait que le décor aussi est métamorphosé: du plafond tombent des fleurs, des serpentins; des pétards, des feux d'artifice illuminent la scène.*²⁰⁵

The stage elements all work together and the positive semiotics underline the magical metamorphosis: the play has ended, and the myth will thus endure. For once, the escapism is permanent, for the successful evasion is theatre itself.

Simpler forms of metamorphosis involve flight within the same body. A common example of this is the regression to the child, a classical theme reminiscent of some of the greatest dramatic heroes such as Shakespeare's King Lear. With Ionesco, the theme is particularly resonant, since it fits in with the ludic nature of his theatre and

²⁰³ *Les Chaises*, Théâtre I, p.174.

²⁰⁴ See Théâtre I, pp.202-03.

²⁰⁵ Théâtre III, p.273, stage direction.

places the escapee back into the authentic state of wonder: the scales fall from aged eyes, literally and metaphorically. Examples abound on Ionesco's stage, from *La Leçon*'s Professeur, who cowers from his mother-maid after killing the fortieth Elève, to the Vieille Femme of *L'Homme aux Valises*, who longs to show her re-found mother to her 'petites camarades' (p.19). Like the world of the dream, childhood offers the puppet another chance to escape from false reality and from the pressing demands of Anguish. Thus the old couple of *Les Chaises* seek a remission from the torment of their emptiness which they discover in the mode of play:

Le Vieux: Fais semblant toi-même, c'est ton tour.
 La Vieille: C'est ton tour.
 Le Vieux: Ton tour.
 La Vieille: Ton tour.²⁰⁶

The language, though infantile, is no less ridiculous than the nonsense spouted in their adult existence; if anything, it is purer and more genuine than the anti-logical pretence of their usual discourse. Choubert too seeks comfort in regression, for once disavowed of the promise of the dream, he makes his wife into his mother to suckle him from his pain: 'Choubert, *la bouche pleine (il est au niveau mental d'un bébé de deux ans; il sanglote)*: Ma-ma-ma-de-lei-lei-ne!!!'²⁰⁷ But the most poignant example comes in *Le Roi se meurt*, where the King is under no illusion of the motive behind his own regression:

Marie: Il est comme un petit enfant. Il est redevenu un petit enfant.
 Marguerite: Un petit enfant barbu, ridé, moche. Que vous êtes indulgente!
 [...]

 Le Roi: Parlez-moi, au contraire, parlez. Entourez-moi, retenez moi. Qu'on me soutienne. Non, je veux fuir.²⁰⁸

As in *Les Chaises* and *L'Homme aux Valises*, this attempt to recapture lost childhood is intensely moving, for, though indulgent, as pointed out by the brutally honest Marguerite, it is caused by a refusal to face the cruel metaphysical condition with which the human puppet is unwillingly presented. In this case, it is death, the ultimate cause of Anguish, which proves too harsh to endure, and the King responds with petulance in his desire to become immortal: 'Un seul nom de baptême, un seul nom de famille pour tout le monde. Que l'on apprenne à lire en épelant mon nom: B-é-Bé, Béranger.'²⁰⁹ The symbolism of the proper nouns (*Bé-bé-ranger* and *Ma-ma-deleine*) reinforces the theme of regression and the recurrence of these symbolic characters shows its importance to Ionesco's theatre as a whole.

Another flight within the body comes with the magical conduct of madness and senility, which is of course an escape route shared with Sartre's sequestered agents. In Ionescan drama, though, madness presents itself as a stream or evasion of consciousness not dissimilar to that experienced in the dream. Given the nature of Ionesco's theatre, with its deconstruction of traditional character and its sustained attack on language, it is difficult to isolate the precise instances of madness, but there are certainly occasions where regret and nostalgia combine to effect a flight into self-induced insanity: 'Alors,

²⁰⁶ *Théâtre I*, p.132.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.228.

²⁰⁸ *Théâtre IV*, p.37.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.40.

on a ri. Ah!... ri... arri... arri... Ah!... Ah!... ri... va... arri... arri... le drôle ventre nu... au riz arriva... au riz arriva. [...] *Puis les deux Vieux petit à petit se calment.*'²¹⁰ Despite the familiar nonsense, the pain and hyper-excitation of the Vieux are striking, and they reveal the attempt of the couple to find comfort in the inner world of madness. However, as in Sartre's work, madness is occasionally a privileged position of consciousness, a more genuine world perception than the false actuality of reason. If *Le Roi* is reminiscent of a Shakespearean king, then the seemingly mad must call to mind his Fool, whose insanity often disguises an acuity of universal understanding: 'Pourtant nous savons depuis toujours que le clown n'est pas nécessairement gai, et que le fou du roi dans ses prétendus délires prononce souvent des vérités que nous préfererions ne pas entendre.'²¹¹

An additional form of heightened perception is revealed in the theme of temporality. Linked with the themes of dreaming and senility, the re-conception of the temporal modes to merge the present with the past and future provides another means of escape from the constraints of the actual present. Annoyed with the limitations of consciousness, Ionesco requests a relocation of the boundaries: 'Limité par les catégories de la conscience, espace-temps, je ne sais qui a fait, comment se sont faites ces catégories qui me limitent – et je voudrais être hors-limites.'²¹² Time on Ionesco's stage is inaccurate and dreamlike, and his Eastern influences can be perceived in his preference for space over time:

La Femme: Si nous ne sommes plus dans le même temps, nous pouvons nous rencontrer ailleurs. Dans l'espace.²¹³

This is indeed precisely what happens in *Voyages chez les Morts*, where the past is relived in the a-temporal world of the dream. Ionesco's reconstruction of temporal consciousness is once again in unity with his form, for his Artaudian preoccupation with *l'espace scénique*, revealed particularly in his use of vertical space, sits comfortably with his philosophy which celebrates the realm of space. This also ties-in with the theme of flight through regression to childhood, as one of the reasons for nostalgia is the yearning for the pre-awareness of time:

For if [Ionesco's] childhood was both 'magical' and 'abundant' [...] it was because of his acute awareness that, in his previous existence as a child, he stood 'outside time'. He had lived, as it were, a Beckettian 'instantaneous-infinite', a Self immobile at the centre of all Being, observing itself, observing itself observing a moving panorama of events circling that sentient point of immobility, *not in time but in space*.²¹⁴

The various methods of flight all stem from the same idea, from the desperate need to relocate the vanished sense of wonder.

The Eastern influences persist in Ionesco's exploration of mysticism and

²¹⁰ *Les Chaises, Théâtre I*, p.135.

²¹¹ Pouilloux, Jean-Yves, 'Nostalgie de la Lumière', *Magazine littéraire*, no.335 (1995), p.39.

²¹² *La Quête intermittente*, p.101.

²¹³ *L'Homme aux Valises*, p.53.

²¹⁴ Coe, Richard, 'Ionesco and the Vision of Childhood', in *The Dream and the Play: Ionesco's Theatrical Quest*, ed. Mosche Lazar, pp.4-5. Cf. also de Beauvoir's comments on Descartes's recognition of Man's nostalgia for childhood, which she interprets as nostalgia for pre-awareness of the demands of Freedom (see *Pour une Morale de l'Ambiguïté*, pp.67-68). This is linked, of course, with Sartre's ethics of play, and nb. also the connection between Sartre's pure reflection and the Ionescan/Beckettian 'instantaneous-infinite' which 'observes itself observing'. Perhaps Sartrean pure reflection would thus function ideally in childhood.

transcendence, which creates a whole new realm of possibilities of flight. In the Mystics, Ionesco finds an indication of certitude and plenitude, which he links, both philosophically and theatrically, with music, light, and levitation: 'Les images lumineuses des mystiques sont révélatrices d'un extra-conscient de plénitude et lumineux sur lequel les ténèbres ou le néant n'ont plus de prise.'²¹⁵ Again, the aim of flight is to extend the consciousness and return to a state of wonder, but now the escape becomes spiritual as images of light and darkness, of gravity and evanescence, enter the fray. This is the nature of Ionescan transcendence: though based, like Sartrean transcendence, on the premise of freedom, Ionesco's interpretation of freedom is one of contemplation rather than choice and action, and it transcends the Given not by engagement in the concrete situation but by removal of the Self from the confines of reality. Thus Choubert, once freed from the weight and darkness of his condition, can rise vertically in space and find both wonder and light: 'Je baigne dans la lumière. (*Obscurité totale sur scène*) La lumière me pénètre. Je suis étonné d'être, étonné d'être...étonné d'être...'²¹⁶ Though short-lived, Choubert's transcendence is perfect at this stage, for he has found his spirituality, rejected temporality for space, and rediscovered his childhood sense of wonder.

An effective way to explore this spiritual aspect of Ionesco's theatre is to divide it into a number of revealing binary oppositions. These oppositions, related to flight and to the polar extremes of consciousness, are incited by the dramatist himself:

Deux aspects de conscience fondamentaux sont à l'origine de toutes mes pièces: tantôt l'un, tantôt l'autre prédomine, tantôt ils s'entremêlent. Ces deux prises de conscience originelles sont celles de l'évanescence et de la lourdeur; du vide et du trop de présence; de la transparence irréaliste du monde et de son opacité; de la lumière et des ténèbres épaisses.²¹⁷

In philosophical terms, this polar opposition is not unlike Sartre's *désagrégation intime*, which divided the agent's consciousness into the ambiguous dichotomy of facticity and transcendence. With Ionesco, though, the emphasis is on transcendence (flight) rather than simultaneous acceptance of both, and the terminology thus transcends the ontological towards the mythical, religious, and metaphysical.

The hellish symbol of the labyrinth is used to expose dehumanisation and sequestration, and its Humanistic antithesis is found in the lost paradise of the Garden of Eden. This religious symbolism pervades Ionesco's drama and it synthesises the related oppositions of light and darkness, weight and weightlessness, and *enlèvement* and levitation. The spiritual goal of the human puppet is therefore to reach this transphenomenal paradise; the theologically orphaned agnostic is presented with transcendence in the symbol of Jacob's ladder, which offers a mythical Assumption, a mystical *Himmelfahrt* to salvation.

The three sets of oppositions mentioned above can be seen to work together in Ionesco's theatre, and they culminate eventually, at the end of the puppet's journey, in a unity of wonder and awe. The first opposition, between darkness and light, is the most poetic and the most religious, for, based on an early childhood experience of the playwright, it re-expresses the theme of the thirst for the absolute in relation to the puppet's abandonment and his floundering in the Absurd:

Mes personnages [sont...] à la recherche, consciemment ou non, de la lumière absolue. C'est parce qu'ils n'ont aucune indication sur la route à

²¹⁵ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.222.

²¹⁶ *Victimes du devoir, Théâtre I*, p.219.

²¹⁷ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.226.

suivre que mes personnages errent dans le noir, dans l'absurde, dans l'incompréhension, dans l'angoisse.²¹⁸

The Absurd, the world of questions, is symbolised by aimless wandering in darkness, and light is thus equated with the answers of certitude and salvation, with the absent God. The role of light in the plays themselves is vital, dominating the stage directions and working in tandem with the central themes. It is of paramount importance in plays like *Tueur sans gages*, where it distinguishes between the grey monotony of Béranger's world and the lofty promise of the 'Cité Radieuse', and *Le Nouveau Locataire*, where the final blackout is a direct response to the protagonist, who has finally been defeated by the anti-spiritual forces of material matter. Neither is it absent from the dialogue, for characters such as Jean possess the insight to acknowledge their need for luminosity: 'Alors pourquoi l'ombre revient-elle? Lumière, reste! [...] Est-ce que je ne rêve plus? Ou bien est-ce un cauchemar? De nouveau l'obscurité hante mon cœur.'²¹⁹ Light is linked here with the flight of the dream, and the darkness of its absence forms the living nightmare of daily existence.

The opposition between weight and weightlessness, gravity and evanescence, is a continuation of the exploration of Being, reflected most effectively in the remarkable proliferation of matter. Like darkness, the weight of the body and of external objects is a negative aspect of our Absurd condition, and, as revealed in *Le Nouveau Locataire*, weight and darkness can combine to further alienate the human puppet. This alienation at the hands of matter poses a significant threat to freedom and to flight; the world turns back into a prison whose walls are closing in:

La légèreté se mue en lourdeur; la transparence en épaisseur; le monde pèse; l'univers m'écrase. Un rideau, un mur infranchissable s'interpose entre moi et le monde, entre moi et moi-même, la matière remplit tout, prend toute la place, anéantit toute liberté sous son poids.²²⁰

Since heaviness and weight provide resistance to the freedom to escape, they are a major source of Anguish, trapping the puppet in its temporal place, but as the weight is lifted and the light filters in, the Anguish disappears and the puppet becomes euphoric:

Je me sens [...] ou bien trop lourd ou bien trop léger. La légèreté c'est l'évanescence euphorique qui peut devenir tragique ou douloureuse quand il y a angoisse. Quand il n'y a pas angoisse, c'est la facilité d'être. [...] Ainsi le thème de la condition malheureuse se traduit peut-être [...] par la lourdeur et par l'épaisseur.²²¹

The dual poles of consciousness are again evoked to reinforce the dichotomy between materialism and spirituality, which are perceived by the puppet as depression and euphoria respectively. This insight into human mood comes across plainly in the plays, as the protagonists, who indeed become so weightless as to venture off the ground, express sensations of freedom, plenitude, and luminosity which fill them with abundant joy:

Choubert: Je suis plus léger que l'air. Le soleil se dissout dans une lumière plus grande que le soleil. Je passe à travers tout.

²¹⁸ *Antidotes*, p.316.

²¹⁹ *Voyages chez les Morts*, p.99.

²²⁰ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.277.

²²¹ Ionesco interviewed in Claude Bonnefoy, *Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco*, pp.41-42.

Les formes ont disparu. Je monte... Je monte...²²²

Amédée II: Univers aérien... Liberté... Puissance transparente...
Équilibre.... Légère plénitude... Le monde n'a pas de
poids...²²³

Bérenger: Jamais je n'ai été si détendu; jamais je n'ai été si heureux.
Jamais je ne me suis senti si léger.²²⁴

This excess of weightlessness induces the third set of oppositions, namely *enlissement* and levitation. Like proliferation, these techniques are distinctive to Ionesco, and they form a natural conclusion to the themes of Being and flight. The desire, or even necessity, to sink into the earth continues the theme of sequestration, for as he finds himself submerged in the slimy bowels of the Earth, the puppet has become a prisoner of matter, a soulless animal. Ionesco's characters thus usually descend against their will, forced to the depths by matter, and even by their fellow men:

Choubert: Je marche dans la boue. Elle colle à mes semelles...
Comme mes pieds sont lourds! J'ai peur de glisser.
Le Policier: N'aie pas peur. Descends, débouche.²²⁵

It is no coincidence that it is the authority figure, the policeman-cum-father, who orders the protagonist to sink into the slime. On this occasion, the *enlissement* is not fatal, but in the short film *La Vase*, with Ionesco himself in the starring role, the final submergence is grotesque and complete, and in *Le Roi se meurt*, it is synonymous with death, with the process of annihilation, of being unborn:

Le Roi: J'ai peur, je m'enfoncé, je m'engloutis, je ne sais plus rien, je
n'ai pas été. Je meurs.²²⁶

The theme is again an influence of Dostoevsky, who, as Chestov explains, uses it to explore the possibilities of existence in the absence of God:

Dostoïevsky paraît suspendu entre ciel et terre. Le sol s'est dérobé sous ses pieds et il ne sait pas au juste ce que c'est: la mort ou une seconde naissance, miraculeuse. L'homme, peut-il exister sans s'appuyer sur quelque chose de stable? Doit-il s'anéantir, si les pieds ne se posent plus sur le sol? [...] Les Anciens disaient que les dieux se distinguent des hommes en ce que leurs pieds ne touchent jamais la terre, car ils n'ont besoin de point d'appui.²²⁷

The Humanist theme is again dominant, but for Ionesco, it is levitation rather than sinking that is expressly linked with triumph. *Enlissement*, on the other hand, is closely linked with all the other negative inverses of flight, such as gravity and darkness, but it is especially connected with the nightmare, for if the dream is liberatory, its darker side is primal and repressive:

²²² *Victimes du devoir, Théâtre I*, p.217.

²²³ *Amédée, ibid.*, p.288.

²²⁴ *Le Piéton de l'Air, Théâtre III*, p.155.

²²⁵ *Victimes du devoir, Théâtre I*, p.196.

²²⁶ *Théâtre IV*, p.43.

²²⁷ Chestov, Léon, *Sur la balance de Job*, p.42.

Jean: C'est mon cauchemar. Mon cauchemar. Depuis toujours, depuis que je suis tout petit, il m'arrive souvent de me réveiller le matin, la gorge serrée, après avoir rêvé de ces habitations affreuses, englouties à moitié dans l'eau, à moitié dans la terre, pleines de boue. Tiens, regarde comme c'est plein de boue!²²⁸

This nightmare of *enlissement* is inevitably a further source of Anguish, and in this case it is the image of collective submergence which torments the dreamer's unconscious. The torment is caused by the dominance of the material over the spiritual, which represents the victory of the Absurd. It becomes more poignant with age, for if death is the *final* victory of the Absurd, then the decrepitude which accompanies the ageing process is a slow *enlissement* into matter, during which flight towards the Absolute becomes increasingly impossible: 'The adult, the ageing man is trapped in what Ionesco often refers to as 'the warm slime' of existence. By sinking into matter man is no longer able to free himself for the mystical flight of transcendence.'²²⁹ This mystical flight is then by contrast the triumph of the soul over matter, and it is undoubtedly the apotheosis of escapism on Ionesco's stage. Perhaps inspired by the classical myth of Icharus, Ionesco is fascinated by the repressed or forgotten desire to fly, and the wonderful moments of levitation are certainly the high points of his theatre. The euphoria of the weightless has already been seen, and it is indeed their abundance of joy which secures their victory over matter:

Une Femme: Il s'envole! Il s'envole! Il dit qu'il veut pas, mais pourtant il a l'air bien content.²³⁰

Bérenger: Excusez-moi, Mesdames, Messieurs, je ne peux plus contenir ma gaîté. Elle déborde. [...] Elle m'emporte, elle me transporte.²³¹

Bérenger goes on to equate flying directly with happiness, and linking the notions of nostalgia, childhood, light, and spirituality, he laments the sad loss of Man's primal desire to fly:

Tout le monde doit savoir voler. C'est une faculté innée. Tout le monde oublie. Comment en ai-je pu oublier le procédé? C'est simple, pourtant, lumineux, enfantin. Quand on ne vole pas, c'est pire que si nous étions privés de nourriture. C'est pour cela sans doute que nous nous sentons malheureux.²³²

As a child, Marthe is the only character to fully understand her father's need to fly, for she has not yet lost the capacity for wonder, and her youth protects her from the desperate nostalgia that would turn her too into an escapist.

The most desperate examples of flight are seen in the occasional attempts to annihilate the consciousness through murder or through suicide. Much of Ionesco's political cynicism is due to the human massacres which inevitably stem from political commitment, and such destructive brutality is satirised in plays like *Macbett* and *Jeux*

²²⁸ *La Soif et la Faim, Théâtre IV*, p.78.

²²⁹ Lamont, Rosette C., 'Ionesco's Gnostic Dream Play', in *The Dream and the Play: Ionesco's Theatrical Quest*, ed. Mosche Lazar, p.96.

²³⁰ *Amédée, Théâtre I*, p.315.

²³¹ *Le Piéton de l'Air, Théâtre III*, p.160.

²³² *Ibid.*, p.166.

de Massacre. But the dramatist is also concerned with murder on a personal level, as in *La Leçon*, and it seems that the destruction of the Other, on whatever scale, is just a vain attempt to flee from death itself: 'On se fait tuer. On se tue dans l'autre. Ou peut-être on essaie de tuer la mort.'²³³ Political Man, then, has ultimately the same aim as Universal or Metaphysical Man: to kill the phenomenon of death, and in so doing attain immortality and escape from the clutches of the Absurd. Thus murder is as futile in Ionesco's drama as it is as the culmination of hatred explored in *L'Etre et le Néant*.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of relations with *autrui* is sexual love, which again in *L'Etre et le Néant* is shown to end in failure due in part to the fleeting possession which dissipates with the orgasm. Seemingly concordant with this view, Ionesco unites the flight into love with the flight into death (Freud's *eros* and *thanatos*), and he explores the sexuality of death both in *Macbett* and in *La Leçon*, where the structural and thematic paroxysm climaxes in orgasm and in murder. The attempt remains to escape from the consciousness, but flight through the Other is particularly short-lived.

The ultimate flight is of course that of suicide, the puppet's annihilation of its own consciousness. The most poignant dramatisation of this comes in *Les Chaises*, where the old couple, tired of their empty existence and basking in self-delusion, throw themselves out of the window and drown. Their fate is similar to the negative effect of *enlissement*, for not only do they sink back into matter, they become its sacrificial lambs, permanent victims of the Absurd. They are presumably stimulated by two main strands of Ionescan thought, namely to escape from temporality, and to put an end to their personal suffering:

Le temps n'est qu'une catégorie de la conscience subjective. Une fois la conscience abolie, il n'y a plus de temps. La mort éternelle n'est qu'un instant qui ne finit pas.²³⁴

Le Monsieur: Pourquoi a-t-on mis en nous [...] ce désir de vivre? Parce que le créateur qui a fait ce foutu monde a voulu que son œuvre survive. [...] Si on pouvait ne pas désirer vivre, ça se terminerait. [...] On devrait se suicider. C'est pas facile.²³⁵

The old couple overcome their desire to live and rise to Le Monsieur's challenge, but the premise for their suicide is the successful delivery of a message which cannot be delivered. Their deaths then, like their lives, remain senseless, and once again, the Absurd triumphs. Ionesco's conclusions thus concur with those of Sartre, for whom suicide was one of the greatest absurdities of all, and with those of Camus, who regarded suicide as both contradictory and ineffectual: 'On peut croire que le suicide suit la révolte. Mais à tort [...]. Je sais que pour se maintenir, l'absurde ne peut se résoudre. Il échappe au suicide, dans la mesure où il est en même temps conscience et refus de la mort.'²³⁶ The point is driven home by Grossvogel in his discussion of Camus's work: 'Suicide and faith are attempts to destroy the consciousness which man has of the absurd and, therefore, acknowledgements of it.'²³⁷ Ionesco concludes the discussion with an admission of the failure of suicide: 'Le suicide, c'est un échec

²³³ *Le Solitaire*, p.144.

²³⁴ *Antidotes*, p.195.

²³⁵ *Ce formidable bordel!*, pp.138-39.

²³⁶ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.77.

²³⁷ *Four Playwrights and a Postscript*, p.59.

inadmissible; or nous devons réussir.²³⁸

The various attempts at flight uncovered in a scrutiny of Ionesco's theatre – escapism through humour, alcohol, dream, the unconscious, metamorphosis, regression, timelessness, spiritual transcendence, murder, sex, and suicide – can be seen to be strongly related to aspects of Sartre's *être-pour-fuir*. In Sartrean terms, Ionesco's obsession with flight marks a willing acceptance of *mauvaise foi*, for rather than acknowledging the ambiguous ontology of the human subject, the *désagrégation intime*, Ionesco protests at the Given and seeks continuous escapism from facticity to transcendence. The “happy” medium of daily existence is firmly rejected, and no more powerfully than in *Le Solitaire*:

De la boue seulement, mais aussi un lac pur, mais aussi les neiges. Les gens normaux sont entre les deux. Ni la lumière, ni les ténèbres. Ils vaquent entre les deux à leurs affaires, à leurs soucis, leurs préoccupations quotidiennes, ils vivent de cela. C'est de cela qu'on vit. C'est cela l'humain. Moi je ne peux vivre qu'en état de grâce. Qui vit en état de grâce? Ne pas vivre en état de grâce pourtant est inadmissible. Pour moi, il n'y a pas de milieu entre la grâce et la merde. (p.101)

The puppet is left, then, like the agent, constantly seeking the unattainable, for freedom is illusory and the man who flies will soon fall back down to Earth. The plight of Man, like that of *Le Policier*, is one of endless vacillation: ‘On en est exactement au même point que tout à l'heure! De haut en bas, de bas en haut, de haut en bas, et ainsi de suite, et ainsi de suite, c'est le cercle vicieux!’²³⁹ As realised by Jean in *La Soif et la Faim*, ‘Le paradis trouvé est vite reperdu.’²⁴⁰ The rat is finally back on its wheel.

²³⁸ *Journal en miettes*, p.138.

²³⁹ *Victimes du devoir, Théâtre I*, p.221.

²⁴⁰ Malachy, Thérèse, *La Mort en Situation dans le Théâtre Contemporain*, p.84.

iv) From Puppet to Everyman: The Archetypal Anti-hero

The ultimate failure of flight means that Ionesco's characters are forced to find escape from within, and the result is a perceptible shift in characterisation, as the helpless puppet transforms before our eyes into the human Everyman. This final section of the chapter is concerned then with, it could be said, the most memorable characters of Ionesco's theatre, the archetypes and anti-heroes, who respond somewhat differently to the challenges of their condition and situation. As Ionesco's Humanism finally comes to the fore, the sense of Self is restored and Authenticity is back on the agenda. Questions of engagement and ethics thus resurface, as the thinking personality tries to make its way through the unsteady landscape of human existence, with its essence on its back and incertitude tied firmly around its neck.

Despite the fact that the puppet is in evidence in many of the later plays, its role is increasingly restricted to secondary characterisation, and it would appear that Ionesco's development as a dramatist is accompanied by the progressive humanisation of his characters: 'Read in order of composition the plays on the whole reveal a development of the Ionesco character from puppet to human being.'²⁴¹ This development is fascinating both on a dramatic and philosophical level. Dramatically, although these 'human beings' retain many of their predecessors' characteristics, their language tends to be more rational, their movement more naturalistic, and their behaviour more self-conscious. Philosophically, they begin to exist on an ethical plane, looking inside as well as outside for answers and escape, and they finally reveal a new-found sense of self. The distinction between archetype and stereotype is delicate, but Ionesco is careful to avoid the latter, the Molieresque stock character, drawing together his Essentialist convictions in the universal, the unconscious, and the atavistic to create the archetypal Everyman:

Ionesco who is deeply indebted to Jungian analysis is aware that he is working with archetypes [...]. Jung defines the archetype as a pre-existent form that is part of an inherited structure of the psyche [...]. The archetype is a *facultas præformandi*, a form which can be filled only with content when the conscious mind brings the material of experience to bear upon the psyche.²⁴²

Ionesco's archetypal characters are in some respects combinations of the agent and the puppet: although restricted by an essence, or inherited psychic structure, they are free to develop this essence through the Existentialist ensign of lived experience.

The Everyman who emerges from this fusion is ontologically complex, an ambiguous and intensely human character who is paradoxically simplistic due to Ionesco's evocation of the lost child. These later inventions are undoubtedly more autobiographical; their often childlike vision inhabits and dominates their archetypal selves, whether disguised under the pseudonym of Amédée, Bérenger, or Jean, making them intuitively identifiable as generic human beings. But the theme of the Everyman runs throughout Ionesco's theatre, from the *multiplicitous* Bobby Watson of *La Cantatrice Chauve* to the familiar dreamer Jean of *Voyages chez les Morts*. Bérenger is of course the Everyman incarnate, for as the most recurrent character on Ionesco's stage, he is seen to represent the broadest spectrum of humanity. But minor characters like Mary/Marie the maid walk the stage in several plays, and her fellows may change their

²⁴¹ Dobrez, L. A. C., *The Existential and its Exits*, p.188.

²⁴² Lamont, Rosette C., 'L'Homme aux Valises: Ionesco's Absolute Stranger', in *The Two Faces of Ionesco*, ed. Rosette C. Lamont and Melvin J. Friedman, p.247.

names, but their identities often remain the same. Even Ionesco's choice of proper nouns – Smith, Martin, John Bull, etc. – and his functional description of characters – Le Personnage, Le Premier Anglais – point towards a general or generic portrayal of Man, and if such characters communicate in aphorisms and clichés, it is because they embody The Human, the universal victim of identity and language.

The portrayal of gender in Ionesco's theatre is particularly interesting, ranging from the comic confusion or even merging of gender in *La Jeune Fille à marier*, which establishes a type of Everyperson, to the deliberate uniformity of the female, which serves to create an Everywoman who plays foil to her male counterparts. This universality of the female is symbolised effectively in the three-faced mask of Roberte II: 'C'est la femme qui n'a pas seulement trois visages, mais une infinité de visages puisqu'elle est toute femme.'²⁴³ Such characterisation can be appreciated in a comparison of the protagonists' wives, and even in the nomenclature of, say, Marie (*Le Roi se meurt*), Madeleine (*Victimes du devoir* and *Amédée*), and their hyphenated synthesis Marie-Madeleine (*La Soif et la Faim*). The wife in Ionescan drama is a multifaceted figure, whether pragmatic and scolding, or tender and loving, whether wife or mother, companion or foe. Each individual woman is indeed Everywoman, or at least has the capacity to become so, for her task is to support her partner through illusion and reality, flight and sequestration, regression to childhood, and veteran awareness of mortality. In this respect, her plight is harsher than the male's: she is steady and constant, and her feet remain firmly on the ground.

If Ionesco's female and secondary characters support the notion of an Everyman, it is undoubtedly Bérenger who is designed to explore the fullest repercussions of this traditionally stock characterisation, which has shaped ethical theatre since at least medieval times. It is thus appropriate that Bérenger is introduced in *Tueur sans gages* with the qualifications 'âge moyen, citoyen moyen',²⁴⁴ and that he subsequently declares himself to be at various stages of his own middle age: 'J'ai trente-cinq ans, Monsieur l'Architecte, trente-cinq... en réalité, pour tout vous dire, j'en ai quarante, quarante-cinq... peut-être même davantage.'²⁴⁵ His appeal is contrived to be as general as possible, and as the Bérenger cycle progresses, it even extends beyond the boundaries of mortality, for in *Le Roi se meurt*, Bérenger is said to have been at the forefront of human progression from classical times to the present day, outwitting Icharus and building Rome, writing Shakespeare's plays and splitting the atom.²⁴⁶ His seeming immortality (which expires in the course of the play) is consistent with Ionesco's theme of universality and it succeeds in upholding the power of the soul in its interminable battling with matter:

To be truly present to oneself, and to others, one must be of No Place and of Every Place, [...] No Man and Everyman. Only then can one found relations based on mutual reverence for the spirit, though it be assigned to this grotesque and vulnerable dwelling, mortal flesh.²⁴⁷

There is an implicit link here between the Everyman and Authenticity, for it seems that the way to reinstate the Self is to relocate one's universal spirit, to be a-historical, Man and No Man. In this respect, Bérenger is Ionesco's most Authentic character: he is universal; he reveres the human spirit; and he yearns to escape from the constraints of

²⁴³ Ionesco interviewed in Claude Bonnefoy, *Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco*, p.159.

²⁴⁴ *Théâtre II*, p.61.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.68.

²⁴⁶ See *Théâtre IV*, pp.57-58.

²⁴⁷ Lamont, Rosette C., 'L'Homme aux Valises: Ionesco's Absolute Stranger', in *The Two Faces of Ionesco*, ed. Rosette C. Lamont and Melvin J. Friedman, p.265.

his flesh.

Though a metaphysical puppet in many ways, Béranger has cut his ties with his predecessors and become the distinctive Everyman of Ionesco's theatre. As he struggles to find and uphold his sense of Self, he brings fresh hope to ethical questions like that of Authenticity, and he redefines his creator's understanding and exploration of Humanism. In vast contrast to the Humanism of Sartre, with its heroics and courageous men of action, Ionesco's Humanism develops from the premise that the average human being is equal to the greatest. Thus the hero of Ionescan theatre is the Everyman rather than the exceptional man, and as the Everyman incarnate, Béranger is carefully defined as the apotheosis of humanness. In some ways, his weaknesses are his strengths, for they underline his humanity and fallibility, increasing his appeal as an Everyman: 'Ce sont eux qui sont beaux. J'ai eu tort! Oh, comme je voudrais être comme eux. Je n'ai pas de corne, hélas! Que c'est laid, un front plat.'²⁴⁸ This significant moment of doubt in the midst of Béranger's resistance provides a fascinating insight into Ionesco's Humanism, for it is paradoxically in his momentary repulsion for humanity, in his inversion of human aesthetics, that his Humanist sensibilities are truly revealed. His weaker instinct, which makes him human, is to seek anonymity amongst the crowd (to be Inauthentic); but his stronger instinct, or rather intuition, which enables him to resist the bestial temptation, is the one which leads him to greatness:

Je ne suis pas calé en philosophie. Je n'ai pas fait d'études; vous, vous avez des diplômes. Voilà pourquoi vous êtes plus à l'aise dans la discussion, moi, je ne sais quoi vous répondre, je suis maladroit. Mais je sens, moi, que vous êtes dans votre tort... je le sens instinctivement, ou plutôt non, c'est le rhinocéros qui a de l'instinct, je le sens intuitivement, voilà le mot, intuitivement.²⁴⁹

Ionesco has stated that he gives greater importance to emotional reactions than to ideological convictions, and the embodiment of this ethic in Béranger is what makes him a credible Everyman.²⁵⁰ Indeed Béranger's emotion of anger at the Tueur – 'Pourquoi? Dites-moi pourquoi?!'²⁵¹ – is apparently indicative of his unconscious heroism: 'La colère, c'est le courage, cela peut même être l'héroïsme. C'est bien vrai que la colère est aveugle. L'héroïsme est inconscient.'²⁵²

Heroism is a complex issue in Ionescan theatre and it is neither as definable, nor as appropriate a label, as it is in the plays of Sartre. It is self-consciously introduced in *Tueur sans gages*, where it receives its first definition:

L'Homme:	Je suis... je suis pour... la réhabilitation du héros.
[...]	
Édouard:	Qu'est-ce que vous entendez par héros?
[...]	
L'Homme:	Héros? C'est celui qui ose penser contre l'histoire et qui s'élève contre son temps. ²⁵³

Although the drunken hiccups of this enthusiastic defender of heroism detract somewhat from the sobriety of his convictions, his stance is certainly consistent with Ionesco's

²⁴⁸ *Rhinocéros, Théâtre III*, p.116.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.94-95.

²⁵⁰ See *Ruptures de Silence*, p.38.

²⁵¹ *Théâtre II*, p.162.

²⁵² *Journal en miettes*, p.91.

²⁵³ *Théâtre II*, pp.139-41.

universal Everyman and presciently valid for the last man's stand of *Rhinocéros*. The Humanist hero is even more vividly evoked in *Le Roi se meurt*, where we are informed by the guard that Béranger too stole fire from the gods.²⁵⁴ This Promethean reference is reminiscent of Sartre's fire-stealing heroes such as Oreste, and it is a fitting acknowledgement of the Humanist heroism undeniably evident in Béranger himself. There is a marked development from Béranger, the would-be hero at the end of *Tueur sans gages*, who talks himself out of heroic counter-action, to the Béranger of *Rhinocéros*, who has finally understood in what sense he really is an unwilling *victim of duty*:

- Dudard: J'ai des scrupules! Mon devoir m'impose de suivre mes
Chefs et mes camarades, pour le meilleur et pour le pire.
[...] Mon devoir est de ne pas les abandonner, j'écoute mon
devoir.
- Béranger: Au contraire, votre devoir est de [...] vous opposer à eux,
lucidement, fermement.²⁵⁵

Béranger has now risen to the challenges of heroism, and as he begins to realise his own inner strength, his intuition to resist becomes more confident. This confidence and intuition sets him apart from his peers, and his sense of isolation evokes a bitter disappointment with his fellows: 'Je pensais tout de même que Monsieur Papillon aurait eu la force de mieux résister. Je croyais qu'il avait un peu plus de caractère!'²⁵⁶ As he discovers his own character, Béranger moves away from the condition of the puppet controlled from far beyond, and even flight is temporarily forgotten in the face of his problems on Earth. Towards the end of the play, he finally attains the status of the true Humanist hero, for he has combined his inherent resistance with a resolute acceptance of his own humanity:

Je ne vous suivrai pas, je ne vous comprends pas! Je reste ce que je suis. Je suis un être humain. Un être humain. [...] Contre tout le monde, je me défendrai! Je suis le dernier homme, je le resterai jusqu'au bout! Je ne capitule pas!²⁵⁷

However, Béranger's heroism is not quite as clear cut as this. His human weaknesses – his mental and physical clumsiness, his drinking, his doubts, and his raw fear – are certainly endearing, but they call into question his role as a modern hero, and the lack of hubris, and often of catharsis, removes him also from the heights of the classical tragic hero. As an Everyman, Béranger can never hope to attain traditional heroism, for his recurrence and transformations detract from his identity, and his uncomfortable relationship with death opposes him directly to the hero. As Lamont points out, 'All heroes are "half in love with easeful death". On the contrary, antiheroes wish to destroy within themselves this nihilistic love and fear of death that drives men of action to impart annihilation.'²⁵⁸ Unlike Sartre's heroes, Béranger fights from the soul, not with the sword, and his craving for immortality is too solipsistic to be deemed heroic. He is thus indeed more of an anti-hero than a hero, for as he explains to the Architect, he lacks the virtue, assertion, and completeness which would be necessary to reverse his rank: 'Je n'ai pas mauvais caractère. [...] Je ne suis pas, comme vous, un

²⁵⁴ *Théâtre IV*, p.57.

²⁵⁵ *Théâtre III*, p.103.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.91.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.115-17.

²⁵⁸ Lamont, Rosette C., *Ionesco's Imperatives: The Politics of Culture*, p.134.

homme complet.²⁵⁹ His status as an anti-hero is confirmed by the intuitive, emotional responses imposed on him by his creator, for his ideological neutrality prevents him from converting others:

Journaliste: Donnez-nous un message.
Béranger: Ils sont déjà donnés.²⁶⁰

He is even less didactic than the Orator of *Les Chaises*.

We are confronted in Béranger with a new form of hero who is fitting to Ionesco's Absurdist theatre – the archetypal anti-hero who has rightfully claimed his place among the greatest characters of twentieth-century theatre. Though Béranger graces the stage in only four of Ionesco's plays, his ghost haunts the characterisation of subsequent protagonists such as Jean, and the Premier Homme of *L'Homme aux Valises*, and he can be seen to have been influenced by aspects of Choubert and Amédée before him. This interesting lineage upholds the dedication to the Everyman and strengthens the development from the puppet to the archetype.

With the advent of this archetypal anti-hero comes a restoration of the personality, of the personal identity which was obscured by the strings of the puppet. Thus Choubert can delve into the depths of his own unconscious, as Béranger can self-analyse his own personality: 'Sincèrement, je vous le jure ce n'est pas dans mon caractère de faire des compliments.'²⁶¹ The implications of this humanisation of the character on questions such as Authenticity have been mentioned and will be concluded in the discussion on ethics; for the moment it suffices to confirm that there is indeed a Humanistic progression in the Ionescan character, a deliberate and acknowledged reinstatement of the previously contested phenomenon of Self: 'J'ai détruit le personnage dans mes premières pièces. Je l'ai réintroduit ensuite en incarnant, en donnant des visages à mes phantasmes.'²⁶² The final scene of *Rhinocéros* is where Béranger's personality is at its most integral, and his conduct at the close of the play thus enables the greatest comparison with the heroes of Sartre. The dramatists' conflicting interpretations of the scene illuminate their differences most clearly:

A ce moment-là, ce n'était pas sa pensée qui résistait, ce n'était pas des arguments qui lui venaient à l'esprit, mais c'était tout son être, toute sa 'personnalité' qui se rebiffait [...] Béranger ne sait donc pas très bien, sur le moment, pourquoi il résiste à la rhinocérise et c'est la preuve que cette résistance est authentique et profonde.²⁶³

Pourquoi y en a-t-il un qui résiste? Au moins pourrions-nous le savoir, mais nous n'en savons rien du tout. Il résiste parce qu'il est là, il représente Ionesco, alors il dit: 'Je résiste' et il reste là au milieu des rhinocéros, seul à défendre l'homme, sans que nous sachions très bien après tout s'il ne vaudrait pas mieux être rhinocéros.²⁶⁴

Once again, Ionesco places the human spirit over ideology and links the intuition of the personality with Authenticity; Sartre is unimpressed with Béranger's resistance, condemning its tokenism and ideological uncertainty, and there is an interesting

²⁵⁹ *Tueur sans gages*, Théâtre II, p.85 and p.92.

²⁶⁰ *Le Piéton de l'Air*, Théâtre III, p.126.

²⁶¹ *Tueur sans gages*, Théâtre II, p.65.

²⁶² *Un homme en question*, p.178.

²⁶³ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.274.

²⁶⁴ Sartre, *Un Théâtre de Situations*, p.129.

disregard for the human spirit which again undermines Sartre's Humanism. The irony here is that Béranger is in many ways more Existentialist than Sartre's own creations, for he demonstrates a personal liberty and a lack of Seriousness which has been shown to be absent in even the greatest Men of Action:

Béranger is not sure why he resists rhinocertitis, but he is a man free from ideologies and group slogans. His resistance arises from a deep natural element of man that seeks spiritual vitality and freedom of choice, and is unencumbered by preset notions.²⁶⁵

The question of Engagement too provides a revealing dichotomy between Sartre's heroes and Ionesco's anti-heroes. Although apathy and inertia prevailed in the puppet, as the Self begins to embellish the Everyman, the option of Engagement is no longer an impossibility. However, the heroic Engagement so evident on Sartre's stage, with its politics, compromises, guns, and revolutions, has no place in Ionescan drama; in fact, Ionesco is so opposed to ideological Engagement that critics have even claimed that his theatre lacks any form of positive Engagement whatsoever.²⁶⁶ Though Ionesco's Engagement is very different in form from Sartre's, if not diametrically opposed, to state that it is wholly negative or even non-existent is undeniably somewhat blinkered. In a return to the image of the rat on a wheel, Ionesco clarifies his position on spiritual Engagement:

Nous avons oublié ce que devait être la contemplation. Nous ne savons plus voir, nous ne savons plus nous arrêter dans l'agitation générale et regarder, immobiles un instant, cette agitation même. Nous ne savons plus regarder nos barreaux, ni la terre, nous n'en avons plus le loisir, et c'est pourtant en regardant autour de nous, en nous, c'est pourtant ainsi qu'on pourrait voir quelque chose apparaître.²⁶⁷

This defence of contemplation confirms yet again the development from puppet to Everyman, for Ionesco is now advocating, in the place of flight, reflection on our condition and reflection on our selves. This is certainly no contradiction to the passive ethics of the puppet, but rather an extension, as the anti-hero seeks an answer to his plight: 'Answers? Yes, if we consider wonder and contemplation as possible answers, the only ones which our mind can grasp and the only ones able to annihilate pride, self-love, and vanity.'²⁶⁸ Man's lost sense of wonder, his fall from paradise, is linked in with the need for contemplation, which seems here also to provide some answers to the problems of Being-for-Others. The theme of contemplation is explored from both angles in Béranger, who sets an example in *Le Piéton de l'Air* which he disregards himself in the *Le Roi se meurt*:

I^{er} Anglais: Il s'arrête. On dirait qu'il s'arrête.

I^{re} Anglaise: Oui, il s'arrête.

I^{re} V. Anglaise: Il s'arrête pour contempler.²⁶⁹

Marguerite: C'est ta faute si tu es pris au dépourvu, tu aurais dû t'y

²⁶⁵ Lewis, Allan, *Ionesco*, p.72.

²⁶⁶ See J. Guicharnaud, 'Un théâtre onirique et satirique', in *Les Critiques de notre temps et Ionesco*, ed. Raymond Laubreaux, p.86: 'Il n'y a pas le moindre "engagement" positif dans le théâtre de Ionesco.'

²⁶⁷ *Un homme en question*, p.73.

²⁶⁸ Ionesco, *The Dream and the Play: Ionesco's Theatrical Quest*, ed. Raymond Laubreaux, preface, p.viii.

²⁶⁹ *Théâtre III*, p.178.

préparer. Tu n'as jamais eu le temps. Tu étais condamné,
il fallait y penser dès le premier jour [...]
Le Roi: J'y avais pensé.
Marguerite: Jamais sérieusement, jamais profondément, jamais de tout
ton être.²⁷⁰

Contemplation is shown consistently to be a valid and indeed necessary means of Engagement to provide us with a solace from the cruel inexplicability of our condition. In *Voyages chez les Morts*, in a comparison reminiscent of Sartre's *avoir, faire, and être*, the protagonist is reminded by Le Gros Monsieur of what to *do* about his *being*: 'Jeune homme, la contemplation est supérieure à la possession.' (p.57). As with Sartre, the mode of having is consciously rejected, but it is replaced by Ionesco with reflection and introspection.

Introspection is also upheld in the unconscious Engagement of the dream, and Ionesco defends his position on this with an attack on Sartrean Engagement:

'L'engagement', tel qu'il est conçu, est une catastrophe. Peut-être est-il bon de militer pour quelque chose, de choisir dans la vie pratique. Il est encore plus nécessaire, sous peine de suffocation, de créer en liberté, d'ouvrir les portes et les fenêtres à l'air pur de l'imagination, il est indispensable de rêver.²⁷¹

Choubert's oneiric Engagement reinforces the point, but removed from the context of flight, the dream is revered as inspiration for creativity, which is perhaps the most important aspect of Ionescan Engagement, a corner stone of his Humanistic philosophy: 'Ce qui caractérise l'homme, a-t-on dit, c'est qu'il est l'animal qui rit; il est surtout l'animal créateur.'²⁷² Ionesco makes a clear distinction between flight and Engagement, insisting that the creative force of the imagination is reinvention rather than escapism: 'Imagination n'est pas évasion. Imaginer, c'est construire, c'est faire, créer un monde... A force de créer des mondes on peut "recréer" le monde à l'image des mondes inventés, imaginaires.'²⁷³ Whereas for Sartre the desire to create is linked with Man's yearning for plenitude, for *L'Homme-Dieu*, and is thus doomed to be in vain, Ionesco establishes the artist as a Creator-God, and art becomes one of the few pursuits worthy of Man's dedication.²⁷⁴ The reason for this is that art is another form of reflection and contemplation, another means of understanding our condition: 'Ancien, moderne, prophétique, c'est l'art qui révèle l'homme à lui-même.'²⁷⁵ In *Le Tableau*, art and aesthetics are again credited with defining the human spirit, and we are told that in their absence, the human is reduced to the bestial, the resistance of Bérenger rendered vain:

Le Gros Monsieur: Que sommes-nous, mon cher, sans la beauté, la
musique, la peinture, la poésie, le théâtre, la
gravure, l'art décoratif, le cinéma, la couture, le
dessin?
Le Peintre: Euh, nous serions, euh...
Le Gros Monsieur: Oui, que serions-nous, je vous le demande?
Le Peintre: Euh... je... je ne sais pas, Monsieur.

²⁷⁰ *Théâtre IV*, p.31.

²⁷¹ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.182.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p.84.

²⁷³ Ionesco interviewed in Claude Bonnefoy, *Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco*, p.106.

²⁷⁴ For a comprehensive study of this, see Saint Tobi, *Eugène Ionesco ou A la recherche du paradis perdu*.

²⁷⁵ *Un homme en question*, p.60.

Le Gros Monsieur: Je vais vous le dire... des brutes, Monsieur!²⁷⁶

It is of course ironic that the artist here (like Sartre) cannot articulate on the art for art's sake argument which is defended throughout Ionesco's theatre and journals. Ionesco is supported in his stance on artistic Engagement by Camus, who acknowledges its rightful place in the world of the Absurd and who recognises that within the context of this world, it is an appropriate substitute for Truth: 'La joie absurde par excellence, c'est la création. "L'art et rien que l'art, dit Nietzsche, nous avons l'art pour ne point mourir de la vérité."'²⁷⁷ Engaged in his art, Ionesco uses his medium to contemplate, reflect, and protest. The title of his early work *Nu* is particularly revealing: art is his revolt, his resistance, and his truth.

Nietzsche is invoked again by Camus to elaborate on the function of Engagement, and as Ionesco's Absurdist anti-hero is confronted with the problem of ethics, it seems that his first lesson is to engage himself consistently, whether philosophically, aesthetically, spiritually, or morally:

Quand Nietzsche écrit: 'Il apparaît clairement que la chose principale au ciel et sur la terre est d'*obéir* longtemps et dans une même direction: à la longue, il en résulte quelque chose pour quoi il vaille la peine de vivre sur cette terre comme par exemple la vertu, l'art, la musique, la danse, la raison, l'esprit, quelque chose qui transfigure, quelque chose de raffiné, de fou ou de divin', il illustre la règle d'une morale de grande allure.²⁷⁸

Unlike the puppet, who opted out of the world of ethics, Ionesco's Everyman or anti-hero is certainly engaged in the ethical world, even if his stance is again diametrically opposed to the Sartrean hero's. Due to its self-perception as a victim, the failure and incoherence of its language, and its ultimate despair and sequestration, the puppet was shown to be amoral; although the Everyman is equally aware of the inevitable subjectivity of ethics, his sense of Self prevents him from rejecting morality completely. But the ethics displayed by Ionesco's more human characters merely confirm them in their function of anti-heroes, for they are doubting and unsure, sceptical of everything but moral freedom. Ionesco interprets their aporia as a sign of their Authenticity, as the Cogito re-finds Descartes's '*je doute donc je suis*':

Ce qui est difficile et à la fois ce qui est authentique, c'est de ne jamais être sûr de rien. Je vous disais que la situation est inconfortable; en effet elle est à ce point inconfortable que je ne sais plus du tout à quoi m'accrocher.²⁷⁹

In the ethical world of the Everyman, the comfort of flight is abandoned, and the moral assertiveness of the Sartrean hero is seemingly condemned as both easy and Inauthentic. Ionesco again defends the moral vacuum he consciously establishes, and his ethics are thus uncomfortable, ambiguous, and contradictory:

Je ne crois pas qu'il faille surmonter, résoudre les contradictions. Ce serait s'appauvrir. Il faut laisser les contradictions s'épanouir en toute liberté.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ *Théâtre III*, pp.239-40.

²⁷⁷ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.130.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.89.

²⁷⁹ *Ruptures de Silence*, p.27.

²⁸⁰ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.170.

Ionesco: Je suis pour la contradiction, tout n'est que contradiction.²⁸¹

In Ionescan philosophy, then, Anguish stems from the gratuitous freedom of ethics as well as from the constraints of the human ontological condition.²⁸²

Even in the early plays, there is evidence of ethical uncertainty, for the Professeur's best lesson is an aphorism of doubt: 'Nous ne pouvons être sûrs de rien, Mademoiselle, en ce monde.'²⁸³ As the anti-heroes begin to dominate the stage, the sense of uncertainty increases, for when they are faced with ethical choices, there is nothing to support them but intuition. Thus, at the end of *Tueur sans gages*, when Bérenger assumes the task of moralising to the Killer, we are told that his morality 'se dégonfle comme un ballon',²⁸⁴ and he is ultimately overcome as much by his own self-doubt as by the sneering nihilism of his foe: 'Ce que vous faites est peut-être mal, ou peut-être bien, ou peut-être ni bien ni mal. Je ne sais comment juger. [...] Je ne sais plus du tout, moi, je ne sais plus du tout.'²⁸⁵ In *Le Piéton de l'Air*, he is a little more self-assured, but his daughter, filled with the uncorrupted wisdom of youth, knows all too well that his euphoric sense of certainty is as precarious as ever:

Bérenger:	Je suis enivré de certitude.
Joséphine:	Quelle certitude?
Marthe:	Ne lui pose pas de question, Maman, cela peut troubler sa certitude. ²⁸⁶

Ionesco and his Everymen are plagued with ethical uncertainty, and it is surely no coincidence that the final, resounding words of his theatre are Jean's unequivocal 'je ne sais pas'.²⁸⁷

Ionesco's metaphysical Engagement leads to a deep-rooted pessimism in the concrete world of ethics, and his anti-heroes are loth to engage themselves socio-politically, for they know that no political action can ever defeat the metaphysical pain imposed by the human condition:

Aucune société n'a pu abolir la tristesse humaine, aucun système politique ne peut nous libérer de la douleur de vivre, de la peur de mourir, de notre soif de l'absolu. C'est la condition humaine qui gouverne la condition sociale, non le contraire.²⁸⁸

By tipping the balance from politics to metaphysics, Ionesco seems to reduce the Everyman back to the ethical inertia of the puppet, for no matter what he does, his condition will remain unaltered. Unlike the Sartrean hero, there is no onus on the anti-hero to assume leadership in order to improve the social situation; indeed the temptation is to remain as apolitical as possible, for those who do progress to power are shown to be brutal, selfish, and corrupt:

Candor:	Duncan est-il un tyran, le croyez-vous vraiment?
Glamiss:	Un tyran, un usurpateur, un despote, un dictateur, un mécréant, un ogre, un âne, une oie, pire que cela. La preuve, c'est qu'il

²⁸¹ *L'Impromptu de l'Alma, Théâtre II*, p.19.

²⁸² This is the inverse of Sartrean thought, whereby Man is free ontologically but ethically repressed.

²⁸³ *La Leçon, Théâtre I*, p.62.

²⁸⁴ *Théâtre II*, p.62, stage direction.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.170.

²⁸⁶ *Théâtre III*, p.156.

²⁸⁷ *Voyages chez les Morts*, p.134.

²⁸⁸ *Notes et contre-notes*, pp.140-41.

règne.²⁸⁹

As in *Rhinocéros*, the political is associated with the bestial, and it thus becomes the opposite pole to the Humanistic Engagement in art.

Bathos is used in several of the plays to underline the futility of ethical Engagement and the ultimate lack of hope. The Orator of *Les Chaises*, this embodiment of emptiness, is the first powerful symbol of Man's helplessness in the face of his condition, and his bathetic role is subsumed by the Killer of *Tueur sans gages*, whose ethical nihilism finally defeats the virtue of the apprentice-protagonist. The comic anti-climax of *Le Maître* marks a continuation of the theme, for the image of the headless politician conveys not only the misguided allegiance of the Inauthentic crowd, but, more importantly, the folly and unsuitability of any political system. The final symbol of *Macbett* completes this cycle of bathos; the Chasseur de Papillons reminds us that in the totalitarian arena of political ethics, freedom and beauty are captured and repressed, and once again serves to polarise social commitment and aesthetics. All these plays at some point raise our hopes for a better world, and in all of them our hopes are dashed as we become the witnesses of empty chairs, the kneeling capitulants of death, the seduced political crowd, or butterflies caught in a net.

Ionesco's protagonists are all too aware of the dangers of any ethical system, for they have learnt Mme Smith's lesson that practice is more ambiguous than theory:

- M. Smith: Moi, quand je vais chez quelqu'un, je sonne pour entrer.
Je pense que tout le monde fait pareil et que chaque fois
qu'on sonne c'est qu'il y a quelqu'un.
- Mme. Smith: Cela est vrai en théorie. Mais dans la réalité les choses se
passent autrement.²⁹⁰

Ionesco's deconstruction of logic removes the possibility of any normative ethics, for the inherent randomness of life means that any predetermined set of values is bound to failure. The gratuitous subjectivity of ethical values and choices discussed earlier is a further source of moral antipathy for the Ionescan anti-hero. Conscious of their own ethical uncertainty, Ionesco's protagonists are reluctant to bring judgement on others; in contrast to their Sartrean counterparts, they refuse to condemn on the end result of action:

- Bérenger: On ne doit pas juger à la légère, je le confesse. On ne peut
connaître le cœur des gens...²⁹¹

Plus de jugement involontaire et permanent, car chaque fois il nous semble que cette machine universelle et que ces gens et que ces rues et que ces mouvements sont laids ou beaux, bons ou mauvais, favorables ou défavorables, dangereux ou rassurants. J'arrivais à obtenir une sorte de neutralité morale.²⁹²

With the reinstatement of the personality, ethical judgement becomes both subjective and impossible, for we can never fully understand the fundamental motives of the Other. In addition, the treachery of language and the fickle incertitude of subjectivity leave the anti-hero with little choice but to embrace a moral neutrality, which throws him into the

²⁸⁹ *Macbett*, *Théâtre V*, pp.122-23.

²⁹⁰ *La Cantatrice chauve*, *Théâtre I*, p.36.

²⁹¹ *Tueur sans gages*, *Théâtre II*, p.124.

²⁹² *Le Solitaire*, p.59.

lonely domain of the ethics of individualism.

In the true Absurdist tradition, ethics thus becomes a game: fixed beyond the realm of logic, coherence, and attainability, moral values are replaced with the ludic creativity of the child, which coincides appropriately with the aesthetic Engagement expected of Ionesco's protagonist. This ludic approach is consistent also with the Absurdist, and indeed Mystic, conception of Creation: 'La création cosmique est un "jeu", c'est-à-dire l'activité libre, spontanée de la divinité. Ce jeu cosmique devient le modèle de la spontanéité de l'imagination créatrice et de la liberté spirituelle.'²⁹³ If the 'cosmic game' provides the model for 'spiritual freedom', then ethics and the mode of play become ultimately interdependent. This interdependence is ubiquitous on Beckett's playful stage, with its clowns and their various Endgames, and the same idea is to be found in *L'Être et le Néant*, where Sartre links the ad hoc rules of the game with *pour-soi's* ethical choice. The game is central to Ionescan theatre, whether in the word play inherent to its texts, in the titles of plays such as *Jeux de massacre*, or in the intrigue itself.²⁹⁴ The old couple of *Les Chaises* are particularly indulgent, and it seems that for Ionesco and his anti-heroes, it is as difficult to determine a code of ethics as it is for the Vieux to 'imiter le mois de février'.²⁹⁵

The stance adopted by the Everyman is thus one of anti-ideology, for Ionesco is acutely aware of the problems and hypocrisy of replacing one ideology with another: 'Si j'opposais une idéologie toute faite à d'autres idéologies toutes faites, qui encombrant les cervelles, je ne ferais qu'opposer un système de slogans rhinocériques à un autre système de slogans rhinocériques.'²⁹⁶ This is of course the central message of *Rhinocéros*, and Ionesco's childlike conception of ideology 'cluttering the brain' is further advocacy of the free ethics of play. His attack on Sartre's oscillations strengthens his condemnation of ideological Engagement, for in Sartre, Ionesco sees personified the gratuitousness and interchangeability of ideological systems which affected him so deeply as a young man in Romania:

[Sartre] a dit que ce qu'il appelait l'existentialisme était aussi un humanisme, et il a de nouveau brouillé les cartes. Après, il a dit que le communisme pouvait être un humanisme, et maintenant il se déclare anti-marxiste. Il est la preuve que tous les systèmes que l'on propose sont fortuits et remplaçables les uns par les autres.²⁹⁷

This equivalence of ideologies is portrayed with great effect in *La Soif et la Faim*, where the monks playing Brechtoll and Tripp alternate each night, each knowing the other's role and ready to assume its ideology.²⁹⁸ Bérenger too is conscious of the underlying pretence of ideological conviction, but aware of the weakness of action, he refuses to play his part:

Les âmes faibles se donnent des raisons apparentes de leurs activités. Ils font semblant d'y croire. Il faut bien faire quelque chose, disent-ils. Je ne suis pas de ceux-là. Il y avait autrefois en moi une force inexplicable qui me déterminait à agir ou à écrire malgré un nihilisme fondamental. Je ne peux

²⁹³ Eliade, Mircea, 'Lumière et Transcendance dans l'Œuvre d'Eugène Ionesco', in *Ionesco: Situation et Perspectives*, ed. Claude Abastado, p.124.

²⁹⁴ Consider, for example, the game of hide and seek in *La Soif et la Faim* (*Théâtre IV*, pp.98-102) and the Sphinx's quiz in *L'Homme aux Valises* (pp.28-29).

²⁹⁵ See *Théâtre I*, p.133.

²⁹⁶ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.287.

²⁹⁷ *Ruptures de Silence*, p.50.

²⁹⁸ See *Théâtre IV*, p.163.

plus continuer.²⁹⁹

Another attack on ideology is based on the violent action which it inevitably inspires. Plays like *Macbett* and *Ce formidable bordel!* clearly satirise the brutal futility of political revolution (which is the hallmark of the Sartrean hero), and in the latter, Le Monsieur delivers a powerful condemnation of ideological intention: 'Les idéologies sont dépassées par la violence. Elles ne sont qu'un prétexte de la violence, un mystère. Tout est mystère. Et tout est violence.' (pp.138-39). In *Jeux de Massacre*, the sheer power of ideology is underlined, and it seems here that the only alternative to anti-ideology or nihilism lies in the Humanism of solidarity:

Émile: C'est ridicule. On peut presque tout pardonner, mais on ne peut pardonner à quelqu'un qui a d'autres idées que vous. Celui qui pense autrement est un ennemi.

Jacques: C'est parce que vous n'avez pas la vocation de l'amitié. L'amitié est plus forte que les idéologies.³⁰⁰

The contrast with Sartrean Humanism is again apparent. Ionesco's final thoughts on the matter are voiced through La Concierge in *Ce formidable bordel!* who laments the demise of metaphysics and suggests that ideological revolution is the poor man's excuse for genuine Absurdist revolt: 'Vous faites la révolution parce qu'il n'y a plus de métaphysique. Vous ne vous rendez pas compte, c'est la condition existentielle qui est mauvaise, la condition sociale et économique est à peu près supportable.' (p.172).

However, the fact that Ionesco and his Everymen take a definite ideological stand by rejecting ideology cannot be denied, and the Humanistic, or even political, Engagement advocated in *Rhinocéros* must be regarded as self-contradictory. Recent criticism has outlined the more ideological and political aspects of Ionesco's work,³⁰¹ aspects which the dramatist himself has even occasionally acknowledged: 'Il m'est arrivé de combattre pour des choses auxquelles j'ai cru moyennement; des combats politiques. J'ai même écrit des pièces plus ou moins politiques pour la liberté, contre le Mal.'³⁰² This positive *belief*, if indeed half-hearted, shines through particularly in Bérenger's Engagement in *Tueur sans gages* and in *Rhinocéros*. His role as a Humanist anti-hero has already been discussed, but there are certainly moments when his action and belief transform him into the committed hero. In *Tueur sans gages*, he chastises Édouard for an indifference which would have been the norm for the puppet of the earlier plays,³⁰³ and his desire to avenge Dany's death leads to an ethical revolt against evil: 'Je dois venger Dany. Je dois empêcher le mal! Oui, oui, j'ai confiance.'³⁰⁴ The aporia and ambivalence have vanished, and Édouard's timely reminder – 'Vous devenez un homme d'action'³⁰⁵ – reinforces this uncharacteristic and traditionally heroic Engagement. In *Rhinocéros*, Bérenger abandons his remaining doubts and fears and is transformed into the indubitable Humanist hero, firstly championing the ethical supremacy of Man, and subsequently defending the resulting necessity for action:

Jean: Après tout, les rhinocéros sont des créatures comme nous,

²⁹⁹ *Le Piéton de l'Air, Théâtre III*, p.125.

³⁰⁰ *Théâtre V*, p.36.

³⁰¹ See, for example, Rosette C. Lamont, *Ionesco's Imperatives: The Politics of Culture*, p.9: 'The time has come to do a revisionist study of Ionesco's œuvre, to decode the presence, at almost every turn, of the forces of history and politics.'

³⁰² *Un homme en question*, p.7.

³⁰³ See *Théâtre II*, p.123: 'Votre indifférence me révolte!'

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.160.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.133.

- qui ont droit à la vie au même titre que nous!
- Bérenger: A condition qu'elles ne détruisent pas la nôtre. Vous rendez vous compte de la différence de mentalité?
- Jean: Pensez-vous que la nôtre soit préférable?
- Bérenger: Tout de même, nous avons notre morale à nous, que je juge incompatible avec celle de ces animaux.³⁰⁶
- Bérenger: Il faut couper le mal à la racine.
- Dudard: Le mal, le mal! Parole creuse! Peut-on savoir où est le mal, où est le bien? Nous avons des préférences, évidemment. Vous craignez surtout pour vous. C'est ça la vérité, mais vous ne deviendrez jamais rhinocéros, vraiment... vous n'avez pas la vocation!
- Bérenger: Et voilà, et voilà! Si les dirigeants et nos concitoyens pensent tous comme vous, ils ne décideront pas à agir.³⁰⁷

In his defence of the human, Bérenger now differentiates between Man and animal in ethical rather than aesthetic terms, and his call for action is dangerously Sartrean.

This problem of positive Engagement is not even confineable to Bérenger, for the general political message of plays like *Rhinocéros* is one of anti-totalitarianism and anti-repression, and thus one of individual human freedom. There is also a consistent inclination towards pacifism in the plays, which is supported by the censure of the journals: 'Les idéologies révolutionnaires [...] donnent une justification du meurtre, ou invente une morale du meurtre, ou invente une "nécessité historique" pour l'appuyer.'³⁰⁸ Ionesco's ideology inclines towards atavistic conservatism rather than social revolution, and if his characters have blood on their hands, it is for the purpose of satire, not example. It is thus appropriate that Bérenger lowers his old, incongruous weapons at the end of *Tueur sans gages*, for ultimately, this gentle protagonist is a victim, not an angel, of death. It is also significant that La Vieille's rendition of her son's departure includes the story of his sensitivity to violence, his sense of betrayal at the slaughter of the birds, and his desperate cry: 'Le ciel est rouge de sang.'³⁰⁹ The pacifism continues in *Macbett*, where the grotesqueness of genocide is scrutinised in duplicate by the respective soliloquies of Banco and Macbett,³¹⁰ and parodied most effectively in the inappropriate juxtaposition of proliferated execution and the casual drinking of tea.³¹¹ Revolutionary political action is further satirised in *Jeux de Massacre* and in *Ce formidable bordel!*, where it is shown to be synonymous with violence and with mirth:

- Troisième Personnage: Dites-nous ce qu'il faut faire.
- L'Orateur: La révolte. L'action. La violence.³¹²
- La Serveuse: La révolution pour le plaisir!
- [...]
- La Femme: Viva la muerte!³¹³

These instances of heroism and ethical Engagement mark a departure from both

³⁰⁶ *Théâtre III*, p.75.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.89.

³⁰⁸ *Journal en miettes*, p.58.

³⁰⁹ *Les Chaises, Théâtre I*, p.153.

³¹⁰ pp.28-29 and pp.30-32.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.51.

³¹² *Jeux de Massacre, Théâtre V*, p.77.

³¹³ *Ce formidable bordel!*, pp.158-60.

the apathetic inertia of the puppet and the pessimistic doubt of the Everyman. But interesting as they are as rare examples of positive commitment or even didacticism, and despite the fact that they give a vital insight into the Ionesco's personal morality, they can only really be regarded as the exception that proves the rule:

Bartholoméus II:	Vous détestez qu'on vous donne des leçons et vous-même vous voulez nous en donner une...
Bartholoméus I:	Vous êtes tombé dans votre propre piège.
Ionesco:	Ah... ça, c'est ennuyeux.
Marie:	Une fois n'est pas coutume.
Ionesco:	Excusez-moi, je ne le ferai plus, car ceci est l'exception...
Marie:	Et non pas la règle! ³¹⁴

These Pharisees of theatre are quick to spot the contradiction, and Ionesco's apologetic promise is soon to be broken; but Bérenger is there to jump to his defence and to remind us that our judgement cannot disregard intent:

Journaliste:	Vous faites donc un théâtre à message? Un message qui n'est pas celui des autres mais qui en est tout de même un... Votre message...
Bérenger:	Hélas! C'est bien malgré moi. ³¹⁵

However, the problem is ultimately solved by Ionesco himself, who apparently accepts his hypocrisy, expressing regret for this departure from his deeper theatrical agenda:

Dans ma première pièce, *La Cantatrice chauve*, j'étais à l'encontre de Sartre qui disait: 'Engagez-vous!' et qui demandait aux hommes de prendre part à l'action. Moi je me mettais en dehors de l'action, je regardais comment je voyais, je disais comment les hommes se comportaient, leur comportement paraissait absurde... et absolument incompréhensible. Et si j'avais été plus profond et moins impressionnable, je serais resté comme ça jusqu'à la fin et j'aurais toujours dit ce que je crois finalement au fond de moi-même: que je n'arrive pas à y comprendre quoi que ce soit.³¹⁶

This late admission is certainly consistent with the 'je ne sais pas' that concludes Ionesco's theatrical journey; but, when regarded as a whole, his œuvre undeniably bears witness to some lasting seeds of hope: 'That Ionesco subscribes to the nihilistic way of thinking [...] there can be no doubt. But his adherence to it is uneasy, for he has not entirely given up.'³¹⁷

The important ethical question remaining surrounds Ionesco's philosophy on Authenticity, which was shown to be the flawed goal of Sartre's ethical philosophy. Coupled with the ethical potential of Essentialism, the reinstatement of the Self in the embodiment of the Everyman brought fresh hope to the possibility of Ionescan Authenticity. This hope is compounded by the journals' emphasis on the vital significance of the personal Self:

³¹⁴ *L'Impromptu de l'Alma, Théâtre II*, p.58.

³¹⁵ *Le Piéton de l'Air, Théâtre III*, p.127.

³¹⁶ *Ruptures de Silence*, p.51.

³¹⁷ Wellwarth, George E., 'Ionesco's Theory of Drama', in *The Dream and the Play: Ionesco's Theatrical Quest*, ed. Mosche Lazar, p.45.

Remettez tout en question. Soyez vous-même. N'écoutez aucun conseil: sauf celui-ci.³¹⁸

Etre soi-même n'empêche pas d'être universel.³¹⁹

The underlying virtues of genuineness and truth are readily apparent here, and the accepted compatibility of the individual personality with a timeless human nature removes the former barrier of confusion and contradiction. Indeed the notion of the genuine Self, the consistent personality, is extended into the philosophy of truth, and the problems of ethical judgement seem diminished by the attempted definition of objectivity: 'L'objectivité c'est être en accord avec sa propre subjectivité, c'est-à-dire ne pas mentir.'³²⁰ The origins of an ethic are again beginning to appear.

Ionesco's preoccupation with dreams, reflection, and the unconscious seems to indicate that his Authenticity comes from the essence within; unlike Sartrean Authenticity, it is totally removed from action. Again, Ionesco combines the Self with a universal Humanism in a desperate attempt to reinstate values such as wonder and even grace, and he declares his Absurdist sense of wonder to be the most Authentic perception of the world: 'Je crois que je suis plus authentique lorsque j'exprime dans mes œuvres l'étonnement et le désarroi. C'est dans cet étonnement que plongent les racines de la vie.'³²¹ Indeed reflection, which is shown to be a means of re-finding Man's lost sense of wonder, is even credited with providing a possible escape from the Absurd: 'Une seule issue peut-être. C'est encore la contemplation, l'émerveillement devant le fait existentiel.'³²² Dreams, unconscious contemplation, have already been revealed to be both more lucid and profound than the false reality of consciousness, and a positive means of the Everyman's Engagement. The dreamer is consistently portrayed on Ionesco's stage as the Authentic character, for in dreaming, he is united with the origins of his own personal essence (his childhood) and with the universal essence of Man (his archetype). This universal embodiment awakens in him a profound metaphysical perception which is lacking in the vast majority of his peers, the non-dreamers who are grounded in the false temporality of their social existence. Bérenger is, as usual, the prime example, for in *Rhinocéros*, it is his metaphysical strength which sets him apart from the crowd and leads him finally to Authenticity:

Bérenger's strength is his naïveté, his embryonic sense of wonder, the sense of 'angst.' Precisely because of it he sees what no one else does, the strangeness of the metamorphosis from man to beast. From the start and more clearly than Amédée, he sees the world of the "they" as falling apart, as insane and dangerous. Indeed it is the void of this world, its nothingness which hems him in at the end. Although initially hardly qualified to play the hero, he is in Heidegger's terms individualized or set apart by the experience of 'angst', no longer a Ionesco puppet, a rebel rather than a mere scapegoat; in short, he possesses a real identity as an authentic hero.³²³

His individual Angst leads him also to an awareness of death, the *Sein zum Tode* demanded also by Sartrean Authenticity, and in his Heideggerian analysis of Ionescan theatre, Dobrez goes on to suggest that Authenticity, Angst, and ethics are all ultimately

³¹⁸ *Antidotes*, p.14.

³¹⁹ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.152.

³²⁰ *Journal en miettes*, p.238.

³²¹ *Notes et contre-notes*, p.23.

³²² *Antidotes*, p.323.

³²³ Dobrez, L. A. C., *The Existential and its Exits*, p.161.

inter-linked:

For Heidegger authenticity requires that death be 'anticipated', that it permeate one's present. Man is a being-towards-death, finite not in the sense that he 'will die' some day but in the sense that he is 'made for dying', whether he likes it or not. Inauthentic man escapes the recognition of death as he escapes 'angst'. Authenticity means, among other things, an inward acknowledgement that one is being 'thrown' into existence and consequently 'falling' into the arms of death. [...] *Exit the King* [...] suggests [...] not only the horror of dying but a search for a positive ethic, an authentic acceptance of 'angst' and a preparation for death.³²⁴

Bérenger's Authenticity, his search for a positive ethic, is also apparent in his individualism, which opposes him to the collective. An artistic dreamer in *Le Piéton de l'Air*, a defender of human morality in *Tueur sans gages* and *Rhinocéros*, and an apprentice of death in *Le Roi se meurt*, he progressively raises himself above his fellows, displaying instinctive humanness, original thought, and, most importantly, a soul:

Ne pas penser comme les autres vous met dans une situation bien désagréable. Ne pas penser comme les autres, cela veut dire simplement que l'on pense.³²⁵

Celui qui a une âme ne ressemble pas à tous les autres.³²⁶

Ionesco distinguishes between his Authentic and Inauthentic characters by exploring the strength of their sense of Self, of their personal identities, and if the puppet is defined by its interchangeability, its faceless presence in the crowd, the Authentic Everyman is the character who flees from the crowd, who learns to die, whose skin does not change colour:

The Bald Prima Donna depicts man as immersed in the world in the form of the collective, that is, as an inauthentic of 'falling' being-with, a creature whose identity is in legion, one of the innumerable Bobby Watsons. [...] The crowd in *The Bald Prima Donna* differentiates, in later plays, into victim and aggressors, so that the stage is set for one of Ionesco's central concerns, the struggle of the authentic individual against the collective.³²⁷

The negative aspect of this individualism is of course the seclusion and sequestration which was encountered in the flight of the puppet. Although there is undoubtedly a marked progression from the puppet to the anti-hero, characters like Bérenger retain the weaknesses of their ancestors, yearning for the transcendence offered by flight, failing often to engage themselves in reflective contemplation, and regressing back to childhood to escape the inevitability of death. If Ionesco 'affirms the value and dignity of Bérenger's solitude',³²⁸ it is for contradictory reasons: on the one hand, he is championing the Authentic resistance of his Humanist hero; on the other, he is preserving the cherished isolation of his puppet, who opts out of language, ethics, and

³²⁴ Ibid., pp.167-68 and p.173.

³²⁵ *Antidotes*, p.11.

³²⁶ Ionesco interviewed in Claude Bonnefoy, *Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco*, p.138.

³²⁷ Dobrez, L. A. C., *The Existential and its Exits*, pp.155-56.

³²⁸ Ibid., p.161.

other people. The character who finally emerges is a synthesis of the two, a human contradiction, an Authentic Inauthentic, the archetypal anti-hero who appeals to us all.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this chapter was to continue the scrutiny of the Humanist subject by focusing on the Ionescan puppet and exploring Ionesco's Absurdist Humanism, with the intention of finding answers to the problems encountered with the Sartrean agent. In terms of Humanism, Ionesco's journals and stage characters reveal an obsessive preoccupation with the fundamentals of metaphysics, asking why Man exists and then why, existing, he must cease to exist – the two questions which form the parameters of Ionescan theatre: 'Ionesco has completed the cycle from the absurdity of life in *The Bald Soprano* to the absurdity of death in *Exit the King*'.³²⁹ Whereas the Sartrean agent was defiantly atheistic, Ionesco's puppets are uncomfortably agnostic, and in their common quest for plenitude and fulfilment, they betray a desperate sensation of orphanage, a constant nostalgia for the comfort of a God-figure. The other main challenge in the chapter was to attempt a redefinition of Humanism in the light of the demise of action inherent to Absurdist ethics.

Ionesco's characters have been shown to progress from the helpless puppet (the metaphysical Absurdist, the helpless victim, and the desperate escapist) to the Everyman, the archetypal anti-hero who is occasionally prone to action in spite of himself and his creator. Several images have been used to trace this visible development. The waking doll encapsulated the wonder and surprise of the puppet at 'being-there', this authentic state of being which is soon corrupted by the conscious perception of the Absurd, and turned into despair by the Anguish of metaphysical abandonment, the craving for the Absolute, nostalgia and regret, and the nagging awareness of mortality. The image of the puppet controlled from far beyond conveyed the characters' perception of themselves as victims who are determined by their common natures, helpless tools of the language they abuse, and prisoners of ethics, too inert and apathetic to ever effect any change. The symbol of the rat on the wheel was used to visualise the bestial entrapment of the human condition and situation, and the resulting temptation to flee. Freedom and transcendence became the goals of the puppets, as they sought to win the battle of their spirits over matter. However, the ultimate realisation of the transience of flight led to a revival of identity and a renewed sense of self. With the advent of the Everyman came positive Engagement, the occasional defence of ideology, and fresh hope in the promise of Authenticity.

These various, and sometimes contradictory, aspects of the puppet enable several conclusions to be drawn. With the exception of Bérenger, and his tendency towards heroics in his capacity as defender of Man, the Ionescan puppet remains consistently in the realm of the Absurd. He is a creature full of Anguish, plagued by his fellows, his own consciousness, and by the proliferating matter around him. In contrast to his Sartrean cousins, he is willing to remain in the default position of Bad Faith; his constant protest at the *désagrégation intime* leads him to a resolute rejection of facticity and to a spiritual yearning for transcendence. He acknowledges the inherent subjectivity of judgement and ethics, and ponders the universal, sneering pessimistically at the violence and futility of the socio-political.

This universal conception of humanity is demonstrated effectively in Bérenger, in whom the essentials of Ionesco's Humanism are most tellingly embodied. It has been said that as an anti-hero, Bérenger's strengths lie in his weaknesses, and this truth reveals the polarity between Sartre's and Ionesco's understanding of the merits of Humanism. Whereas Sartre is preoccupied with the 'ism', revolution through the courage of ethical action, Ionesco is interested in the 'human', the fear of living and

³²⁹ Lewis, Allan, *Ionesco*, p.77.

dying, the incertitude, the contradictions. For Ionesco, then, Humanism and action are totally disunited; with Absurdism comes the recognition that although Man is indeed the centre of his universe, his freedom and potential are limited, his call to action just another futile means of escape.

What, though, of the potential of Authenticity? Ionesco's criteria are certainly less contradictory than Sartre's, for the former consistently upholds the dreamer, the universal, and the vanished sense of wonder, which he then invokes to define an Authentic state of being. With Ionesco, there *is* eventually a self to which one can remain true. The compatibility of Ionesco's exploration of Authenticity with Heidegger's related terminology is even more encouraging: the necessity of Angst, the state of *Sein-zum-Tode*, and the support for the individual in conflict with the faceless crowd are all familiar elements in Ionescan theatre and thought, and they point towards a positive ethic, a possible *modus vivendi*.

Progress has been made, then, in the scrutiny of the Humanist subject. Trapped in the vicious circle of Sartrean Existentialism, the stage character has found some outlets in Ionesco's conception of Absurdism. But the emerging anti-hero is as isolated as Béranger at the curtain fall of *Rhinocéros*, and we are left to wonder if coexistence is possible at all:

Ionesco's people [...] are lonely where, according to any materialist philosophy, they have no right to be: in a social situation. In their families, their sitting-rooms, their offices, surrounded by their relatives, 'concierges', policemen and visitors, they discover willy-nilly an additional dimension to be lonely in.³³⁰

Both Sartre and Ionesco show evidence of a belief in the potential of ethics and both are certainly concerned with the interaction of the Self and the Other. If drama is indeed the progressive resolution of conflict, it is to be hoped that the world of Being-for-Others will provide some solutions to the problems of ethics and Authenticity. According to one critic, 'Béranger lui-même qui reste seul nous laisse espérer que de sa solitude naîtra une nouvelle communauté du bien. Comment cela se produit-il?'³³¹ The answer to this question will hopefully emerge in a detailed exploration of the two dramatists' portrayals of relations with *autrui*. Such a study is vital both to search for the possibility of a viable collective ethic and to complete the review of this comparative analysis of Humanism.

³³⁰ Coe, Richard N., *Ionesco: A Study of his Plays*, p.164.

³³¹ Liiceanu, Gabriel, 'Tout finit dans l'horreur,' *Magazine littéraire*, no.335 (1995), p.24.

CHAPTER FOUR – **BEING-FOR-OTHERS: TOGETHER ALONE**

Allons-nous trouver cette justification de l'être dans les autres pour-soi qui nous entourent? Y-a-t-il en nous, dans le pour-soi, une autre région d'être qui puisse rendre compte du sens de l'être de telle sorte que nous posséderions en nous une structure ontologique qui viendrait combler ce manque?¹

INTRODUCTION

In the previous two chapters, the agent and the puppet were independently and systematically explored as individuals. The aim of this chapter is to focus on these individuals in their relationships with others, to examine if and how they communicate and interact with their fellows – questions which are inevitably at the very core of any form of Humanism. Sartre's own stated aims on this new dimension of being serve well as an indication to the aspirations of the present study – namely to rescue the ethical by simultaneously avoiding the looming threat of solipsism and simplistic recourse to God: 'Il semble [...] qu'une théorie positive de l'existence d'autrui devrait pouvoir à la fois éviter le solipsisme et se passer du recours à Dieu.'² Indeed, the absence of God permeates much of the theory behind Sartre's concept of Being-for-Others, establishing the relationship between individual human beings as an 'internal negation' rather than a homogenous communion of sculpted images. Thus the ramifications of Humanist thought come once more to the fore, as Ionesco too works *against* or in spite of God in his consideration of the human community.

The methodology will also be modified to allow for a direct comparison of Ionescan and Sartrean thought, and it is to be hoped that this contrapuntal analysis will underline the profound similarities that undeniably exist between the two schools of thought, particularly in this area of *L'Etre-pour-autrui*. The terminology is Sartrean by necessity; the striking convergence of the two thinkers in this domain will hopefully justify its extension to Ionesco.

Although some progress was made in the quest to elucidate Authenticity in the analysis of Ionesco's puppet, the concept remained a little unclear and was certainly subject to the charge of solipsism. The course of ethics was even less smooth: whereas Sartre demanded of the agent political action which conflicted with his freedom of choice, Ionesco's rejection of the ethical, though generally consistent, was almost absolute. It remains to be seen if the world of Being-for-Others will throw fresh light on such issues; either way, a final analysis of the Humanist legacy left by the theatre and thought of Sartre and Ionesco cannot fail to emerge.

¹ Presseault, Jacques, *L'Etre-pour-Autrui dans la Philosophie de Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.39.

² *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.288.

i) The Presence of the Other

As might well be expected, it is Sartre, rather than Ionesco, who is predominantly concerned with the theory, and not just the reality, of the Other's presence. Indeed it is in the ontology of Being-for-Others that Sartre is at his most innovative and inspired – an achievement for which he has not always been truly credited. In the presence of the Other, Sartre recognises the need for a development of his ontology of *pour-soi*, for once confronted with the problem of *autrui*, the inevitability of a new mode of being cannot be overlooked:

Autrui ne m'a pas seulement révélé ce que j'étais: il m'a constitué sur un type d'être nouveau qui doit supporter des qualifications nouvelles. Cet être n'était pas en puissance en moi avant l'apparition d'autrui car il n'aurait su trouver de place dans le Pour-soi [...]. Mais cet être nouveau qui apparaît *pour* autrui ne réside pas *en* autrui; j'en suis responsable.³

The implications of this new type of being are thus foreshadowed from the outset: *l'être-pour-autrui* will pose no threat to the freedom of *pour-soi* and will therefore provide no cushion for the responsibility which I bear towards myself. This is to be expected, since Sartre considers it as the third *ekstasis*, the third separation from the Self, of the *Pour-soi*,⁴ along with temporality and reflection, and its modality is thus almost magical.

Sartre's approach to the existence of *autrui* constitutes no attempt to *prove* the Other's existence; rather, he accepts the presence of *autrui* as a *fact*, as part of the *Pour-soi*'s facticity or Given: 'L'existence d'autrui a la nature d'un fait contingent et irréductible. On *rencontre* autrui, on ne le constitue pas.'⁵ Following on from Heidegger, Sartre perceives the Other's presence as a 'meeting', a contingent repercussion of being thrown into the world. *L'autre* appears as 'le moi qui n'est pas moi' in an initial negation which sets us both apart.⁶ Proof is both superfluous and impossible, since the understanding of this negation is 'pre-ontological'. By this, Sartre means that the gratuitous existence of the Other is a question for metaphysics, for, like birth and death, it is Absurd in nature and 'unknowable' to the already-existing *Pour-soi*:

Si Autrui est par principe et dans son 'Pour-soi' hors de mon expérience, la possibilité de son existence comme un Autre soi ne pourra jamais être ni confirmée ni infirmée, elle ne peut ni croître ni décroître, ni même se mesurer.⁷

Although our ontological structures are the same, I can never ascertain that the Other exists, for there is a separation between our consciousnesses which leaves him eternally beyond the scope of my experience. Our relationship is reciprocal, but it is inevitably one of mutual exclusion: 'Ainsi le fait premier c'est la pluralité des consciences et cette pluralité est réalisée sous forme d'une double et réciproque relation d'exclusion.'⁸ Again, the presence of a 'plurality of consciousnesses' is stated as a fact, and the

³ Ibid., p.276.

⁴ Ibid., p.359.

⁵ Ibid., p.307.

⁶ Ibid., p.285.

⁷ Ibid., p.307.

⁸ Ibid., pp.291-92.

problem stated implicitly is how to overcome the exclusion in a successful coexistence.

Like his thought on subjectivity, Sartre's theory on *autrui* is based on development of the Cartesian Cogito, and on the philosophy of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. The Cogito is used as the starting point of Sartre's Being-for-Others, for it situates *autrui* simultaneously as a consciousness whose existence is certain, and as one which is *not* my own:

Ce n'est pas dans le monde qu'il faut d'abord chercher *autrui*, mais du côté de la conscience, comme une conscience en qui et par qui la conscience se fait être ce qu'elle est. De même que ma conscience saisie par le 'cogito' témoigne indubitablement d'elle-même et de sa propre existence, certaines consciences particulières, par exemple la 'conscience-honte', témoignent au 'cogito' et d'elles-mêmes et de l'existence d'*autrui*, indubitablement.⁹

The essential difference between Sartre and Descartes in this domain is that while the latter can rely on God for *proof* of the Other's existence and for negation between the Other and the Self (God *is* me; God *is* the Other), the former, as an atheistic Humanist, has to work in the absence of God to avoid realism, idealism, and Seriousness – charges he has levelled at the majority of his predecessors. The charge levelled at Hegel, though, is one of optimism,¹⁰ for in ignoring the subjectivity of the consciousness of the Self, Hegel considers solely the relationship between the consciousnesses of others. His optimism, according to Sartre, is both ontological and epistemological: Hegel maintains that the *truth* of the consciousness of the Self can appear, that truth of 'the All' already exists, and that truth regarding the Other is thus possible to obtain.¹¹ Hegel fails because he provides no basis for intersubjective knowledge, and he is left with a plurality of consciousnesses which can never be properly connected. His optimism lies in the illusion that this connection has been successfully established. Sartre's critique of Husserl is for leaving the Self in the clutches of solipsism: by defining the Other as an *absence*, Husserl destroys any chance for the Self to *know* the Other, leaving it enshrined within the boundaries of its own ontological core. Although largely influenced by Heidegger, Sartre charges him too with the inability to transcend solipsism. For Heidegger, indeed, the question of the Other is only of interest at all to those who have achieved 'authentic existence'. Sartre condemns Heideggerian theory as ontic and psychologistic, rather than purely ontological, and concludes that its inability to transcend *Mitsein* into concrete being-in-the-world leaves it too trapped in solipsism, even in its rejection of the Cogito.

Sartre's answer to these successive failures is to establish between the Self and the Other a relationship of internal negation. For realists and idealists, this relationship is essentially exterior, and I am separated from the Other as the table is separated from the chair. But again, Sartre's atheistic Humanism allows for no external witness (God) to *pour-soi* equivalent to a *Pour-soi* witnessing two objects (*en-soi*), and in the absence of this witness, the relationship between one *Pour-soi* and another can only possibly be internal. Interrelationships, then, are in the form of consciousness to consciousness rather than body to body, for as human beings, we are capable of recognising the space that exists between us, and able to choose and alter this distance in the freedom of our projects. The presence of the *body* is thus a secondary phenomenon: 'Autrui existe pour moi d'abord et je le saisis dans son corps *ensuite*; le corps d'*autrui* est pour moi une

⁹ Ibid., p.322.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.300.

¹¹ See Maurice Alexander Natanson, *A Critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's Ontology*, pp.31-34, for Sartre's interpretations of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger.

structure secondaire.¹² It is for the Self to choose how to perceive the body of the Other (as flesh, as transcendence etc.) and how to live out the external relationship, in the same way that the Self is forced to choose how to exist its *own* body. Cartesian duality is rejected as the body becomes part of *pour-soi*'s facticity in the form of *pour-soi*: although my body can be *en-soi* or objectified for another, it is too intimate to my consciousness to be *en-soi* for myself.¹³ As discussed, then, the relationship between the Self and the Other provides no threat to the freedom of *pour-soi*, for just as I am responsible for choices affecting myself, so am I entirely free to determine my coexistence with others.

However, the closest that this new mode of being comes to threatening the freedom of *pour-soi* is in its initial affront – namely *le regard*. With the *regard*, or the gaze, Sartre's philosophy on Being-for-Others shifts from the theory of the Other's presence and its internal negation with the Self to the reality of coexistence in the world and to the origins of conflict. It is through the gaze that I am perceived by the Other, who becomes a transcendent subject fixing me as a determined object – 'l'autre, comme regard, n'est que cela: ma transcendance transcendée'.¹⁴ The phenomenological description of the gaze is consistent with the theory of internal negation, for the penetration inflicted by the *regard* seems to emanate less from the eyes than directly from the consciousness itself: 'Ce n'est jamais quand des yeux vous regardent qu'on peut les trouver beaux ou laids, qu'on peut remarquer leur couleur. Le regard d'autrui masque ses yeux, il semble aller *devant eux*.'¹⁵ The gaze is almost reified as it becomes part of the facticity of *L'Etre-pour-autrui*; like the presence of the Other, it is a fact of coexistence: 'La présence à moi d'autrui-regard n'est donc ni une connaissance, ni une projection de mon être, ni une forme d'unification ou catégorie. Elle *est* et je ne puis la délivrer de moi.'¹⁶ The reason that I cannot judge the Other's eyes when *he* is regarding *me* is that the *regard* makes me into an object which has lost its faculty to judge. It is as if the Cogito is transformed in the mode of Being-for-Others into a subject-object duality of 'I see therefore I judge' and 'I am seen therefore I am'. The notion of judgement is central in the role of the *regard*, and as I live out my situation of 'regarded', my two original responses transpire as pride and its antithesis of shame:

C'est la honte ou la fierté qui me révèlent le regard d'autrui et moi-même au bout de ce regard, qui me font *vivre*, non *connaître* la situation de regardé. [...] Et ce moi que je suis, je le suis dans un monde qu'autrui m'a aliéné; car le regard d'autrui embrasse mon être et corrélativement les murs, la porte, le serrure; toutes ces choses-ustensiles, au milieu desquelles je suis, tournent vers l'autre une face qui m'échappe par principe. Ainsi je suis mon *ego* pour l'autre au milieu d'un monde qui s'écroule vers l'autre.¹⁷

At the receiving end of the *regard* I am forced to assume an attitude towards this imposed alienation from myself, this revelation of my third ekstasis. Whether I like it or not, whether I respond with pride or with shame, I have become objectified along with the *en-soi* which surrounds me, and in my Bad Faith, I can choose to use the gaze of the Other as a God-figure to endow myself with an essence and flee from the *désagrégation intime*. This desire to be judged is a conscious manipulation of *autrui*:

¹² *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.405.

¹³ Hence the Bad Faith of the woman who leaves her hand engaged in flirtation with the male and tries to objectify it to herself to avoid the implications of what is taking place. See *L'Etre et le Néant*, pp.94-95.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.321.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.316.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.331.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.319.

Nous avons besoin d'être jugés. Nous demandons au jugement d'autrui de donner à notre projet cette solidité objective dont il est si totalement dépourvu, de lui apposer un sceau de réalité qu'il est seul à pouvoir produire. Positif ou négatif, le jugement d'autrui nous est indispensable pour transformer nos gestes en actes, nos mythes en entreprises.¹⁸

Such are the projects of Garcin and Hugo, who in their terror of being condemned for their *lâcheté* seek constant justification in the Other. The result is of course an illusion, for I can only ever *be* anything in the eyes of another:

Inès: Tu es un lâche, Garcin, un lâche parce que je le veux. [...] Je ne suis rien que le regard qui te voit, que cette pensée incolore qui te pense.¹⁹

The cruelty of Inès's gaze fixes Garcin as the object he most detests, reinforcing the futility of his project. His Bad Faith is equivalent to the *être-corps* in which, like the masochist, I seize myself as the *en-soi* of flesh. The *regard* has thus been termed the Medusa Complex, for its project is to fix its object as stone:

En me conférant un caractère, autrui, comme le regard de méduse, me fige en objet, et du même coup me justifie; mais en acceptant cette justification, je suis coupable de lâcheté: car ce que j'accepte au fond, c'est l'aliénation permanente de mon être.²⁰

By accepting the judgement of *autrui*, I willingly relinquish my freedom in a self-deception which removes me from myself and therefore cossets me from full responsibility.

The *regard* is fundamental to Sartre's philosophy of Being-for-Others, and when it comes to life on the stage, its impact is truly formidable. As the basis of this new mode of coexistence, of this imposed plurality of consciousnesses, the theme is by no means limited to Sartre, and it is with this notion of the gaze that Ionesco's philosophy of the Other finally comes into play:

Journaliste: Il faut bien nous regarder, bien regarder nos visages et la vérité. Pour bien nous voir, il faut prendre une certaine distance, les uns vis-à-vis des autres... (*Il heurte légèrement le 2^e Anglais du coude en marchant*) Oh, pardon! Je vous ai heurté. Excusez-moi.²¹

The initial convergence of the dramatists' thought is already apparent here: Ionesco recognises the importance of the gaze and the distance or negation which it represents between the Self and the Other. Typically, he subverts the philosophy to point out the subtleties of its implications. Not only are the characters masked, so removing the sting from the *regard*, but the humorous contradiction between words and action, theory and practice, exposes it as both vulnerable and flawed – the journalist may well be seeking knowledge of the Other (and even of Hegelian Truth), but his judgement proves to be as clumsy as his movement.

¹⁸ Boros, Marie-Denise, *Un Séquestré: L'Homme Sartrien*, pp.83-84.

¹⁹ *Huis Clos*, p.91.

²⁰ Royle, Peter, *Sartre: L'Enfer et la Liberté*, p.98.

²¹ *Le Piéton de l'Air, Théâtre III*, p.179.

It is with regard to this theme of judgement that the gaze is at its most powerful on the Sartrean stage. *Huis Clos* dramatises brilliantly the infernal censure of *autrui*, where the characters' torment is intensified by the unblinking gaze of their fellows. Each is Medusa to the other, each one judge, jury, and torturer. The other plays too develop this important theme and reveal its ambiguity for the characters concerned. Thus Frantz and Goetz respond in opposite ways to the gaze of their judges, while acknowledging the inevitability of their respective objectification:

Frantz: Vous ne serez pas mon juge.

Le Père: Qui parle de cela?

Frantz: Votre regard.²²

Goetz: Hilda, j'ai besoin qu'on me juge. Tous les jours, à toutes les heures, je me condamne, mais je n'arrive pas à me convaincre parce que je me connais trop pour me faire confiance. Je ne vois plus mon âme parce que j'ai le nez dessus: il faut que quelqu'un me prête ses yeux.²³

The effect of Sartre's atheism on his description of relations with *autrui* has been mentioned, and Goetz goes on to develop the theme, revealing the repercussions on Humanistic coexistence. Once he has accepted the lack of an external witness, Goetz begins to appreciate both the meaning of internal negation and the power of the human *regard*:

Je te dis que Dieu est mort. Nous n'avons plus de témoin, je suis seul à voir tes cheveux et ton front. Comme tu es *vraie* depuis qu'il n'est plus. Regarde-moi, ne cesse pas un instant de me regarder: le monde est devenu aveugle; si tu détournais la tête, j'aurais peur de m'anéantir. Enfin seuls!²⁴

Two things are particularly interesting here: firstly, Goetz can only begin to love Hilda properly once he has progressed from religious absolutism to valid Humanism; and secondly, it is only with the death of God that he recognises her Authenticity, or at least her authentic existence. His need to be looked at, though, has become even more intense, and without God to watch over him, he fears that his existence will crumble. His Bad Faith is replicated by Estelle, who is reminded by Inès that her beauty is *only* in the eye of the beholder, that her Original Project of vanity and pride is worthless in the absence of the gaze: 'Si le miroir se mettait à mentir? Ou si je fermais les yeux, si je refusais de te regarder, que ferais-tu de toute cette beauté?'²⁵ Any project based on the *regard* is doomed to failure, for it supposes the impure reflection of *pour-autrui* rather than the pure reflection of *pour-soi*.

Ionesco's characters, on the other hand, seem eager to flee from the gaze:

Elle: J'étais aveugle quand je t'ai vu; je ne t'avais pas regardé. Je voudrais l'être quand je te vois.

Lui: Moi aussi, je voudrais être aveugle quand je te vois.²⁶

Inveterate escapists, Ionesco's men and women seek evasion from the inevitable

²² *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.339.

²³ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.230.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.241.

²⁵ *Huis Clos*, p.48.

²⁶ *Délire à deux, Théâtre III*, p.224.

fixation of the *regard* behind masks and closed doors, in the thick skin of an animal, and often by literally vanishing from the scene. The perfect example is perhaps the invisible guests of *Les Chaises*, who, if they indeed exist, can be judged solely on the noises they make at the end of the play. The question of the Other's existence, though far from central to Ionescan thought, does find some expression in the journals and in the novel *Le Solitaire*. For Ionesco, it appears, the reality of the Other's presence is essentially a question of faith: 'Moi, je ne suis pas, je ne me suis pas une illusion. Et je crois aussi que l'Autre est [...]. C'est là une foi.'²⁷ This anti-logician cannot be concerned with Cartesian proof, for his philosophy is filled with aporia and contradiction. Thus at various times, it seems as if *autrui* does not really exist at all: 'Les autres passaient dans la rue, dans une sorte de rue, dans une sorte d'espace, pour la première et dernière fois. Il n'y avait plus que moi à exister réellement. Le reste était indistinct, c'était "tout cela".'²⁸ Ionesco's agnosticism seems also to permeate his relations with *autrui*; but his awareness of the distance between the Self and the Other (the 'espace'), and his admission of his lack of knowledge of the Other (who is 'indistinct') once again unite him with Sartre. Like Sartre, Ionesco defines the Other as a negation of the Self and recognises the problems imposed by this original separation:

La présence des autres m'a toujours gêné. Il y avait une sorte de cloison invisible entre eux et moi.²⁹

En somme, tout est mystère: ainsi, la vie quotidienne, tout ce qui s'y passe. L'existence des autres. Les autres: le fait que je ne sois pas eux ou qu'ils ne soient pas moi.³⁰

By referring to others as a mystery, Ionesco continues the idea that the Other's existence is a faith rather than a fact, and he thus removes the problem from ontology, placing it firmly in the realm of metaphysics. But, like Sartre, he regards coexistence as Absurd, for the presence of others is as contingent and gratuitous as the presence of Being in general. Thus on the Ionescan stage, the Other is often portrayed as an object to flee from, like the Professeur of *La Leçon* or the herds of eponymous rhinoceroses. Like objects, people proliferate, expand, and multiply (one need only think of the mass production of *L'Avenir est dans les œufs* or the living corpse of *Amédée*), merely compounding the Coefficient of Adversity. Again, the similarities in thought between the two dramatists are striking; in this case, the theory of Sartre is dramatised effectively by Ionesco:

Si je ne suis pas point par point les indications fournies par les autres, je ne m'y reconnaitrai plus, je me tromperai de rue, je manquerai mon train, etc. D'ailleurs ces indications sont le plus souvent impératives: "Entrez par là", "Sortez par là" [...]. Je m'y soumetts; elles viennent ajouter au coefficient d'adversité, que je fais naître sur les choses, un coefficient proprement humain d'adversité.³¹

On Ionesco's stage, this threat to freedom, like the gaze, is avoided at all costs through disobedience, anti-logic, parody, and contradiction. As language is exposed as hollow and purely aphoristic, the Self can remove the straitjacket imposed on it by *autrui*.

²⁷ *La Quête Intermittente*, p.96.

²⁸ *Le Solitaire*, p.60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.66.

³⁰ *Un homme en question*, p.142.

³¹ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.593.

The closest link between Sartre and Ionesco, however, connected with the emergence of the Other lies in the symbolism which both employ to explain the Other's presence and to portray him on the stage. The Biblical symbolism of the Fall is used to explain the Self's existence in the presence of the Other: 'S'il y a un Autre [...] j'ai un dehors, j'ai une *nature*; ma chute originelle c'est l'existence de l'autre.'³² I become 'fallen' or, in the language of Heidegger, Sartre, and Ionesco, 'thrown' and 'inauthentic' because I share my existence with others; and through some Absurd irony, the plenitude or nature for which I yearn can only be invented by *autrui*. If eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge marks the birth of epistemology, then ontology must have its origins in my awareness of the Other. For Ionesco, this Fall is connected with the theme of Paradise Lost: Ionescan Man is constantly in search of angel's wings or Jacob's ladder to ascend from the Other to the Absolute, to turn back time and return to a state of grace. The reaction to the Fall is the feeling of shame described by Sartre:

La honte est sentiment de 'chute originelle', non du fait que j'aurais commis telle ou telle faute, mais simplement du fait que je suis 'tombé' dans le monde, au milieu des choses, et que j'ai besoin de la médiation d'autrui pour être ce que je suis. La pudeur et, en particulier, la crainte d'être surpris en état de nudité ne sont qu'une spécification symbolique de la honte originelle: le corps symbolise ici notre objectité sans défense. [...] La honte est appréhension unitaire de trois dimensions: 'J'ai honte de *moi* devant *autrui*.'³³

Again, it is the objectification of the *regard* which is the cause of the sentiment of shame. Ionesco continues this elucidation of shame by linking it also with Original Sin:

A sept ans enfin, j'ai revécu le péché originel. Je me suis regardé dans la glace et j'ai vu que j'étais nu, c'est-à-dire j'ai vu que j'étais différent, que je n'étais pas les autres, que je n'étais pas comme les autres. Entre moi et les autres il y avait un abîme infini, il me semblait qu'il était honteux de ne pas être comme les autres, qu'il était inadmissible et inconcevable d'être tellement autre que les autres. [...] Je ne m'aimais pas depuis que je m'étais vu et depuis que j'avais compris ma séparation, depuis cette rupture, ce péché fondamental [...]. J'étais anormal [...] j'étais monstrueux.³⁴

Ionesco's touching self-perception as 'monstrueux' evokes not only his own Bérenger at the end of *Rhinocéros*, but also the creation of another renowned Humanist – Camus's individualist martyr Meursault. Thus the Biblical Creation is reinterpreted by both Sartre and Ionesco in terms of the presence of the Other, and contingent reactions such as shame are reverted not to God but to *autrui* – an interpretation wholly appropriate for these two Humanists. Sartre, too, links the presence of others with the mythology of Original Sin, removing the fundamental reaction of guilt from the realm of the religious to *autrui*: 'Le péché originel, c'est mon surgissement dans un monde où il y a l'autre et, quelles que soient mes relations ultérieures avec l'autre, elles ne seront que des variations sur le thème originel de ma culpabilité.'³⁵

The striking convergence between Sartre and Ionesco at this early stage of Being-for-Others is readily apparent, but before going on to explore its effect on their respective analysis of coexistence, it is worth briefly extracting the negative symbolism

³² Ibid., p.321.

³³ Ibid. pp.349-50.

³⁴ *Découvertes*, pp.84-85.

³⁵ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.481.

used by both in their portrayal of the Other on the stage. The infamous image used by Ionesco in *Rhinocéros* is echoed by Sartre in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, which appeared just one year later: 'Quels crabes? Ah! oui. Eh bien, oui... Les crabes sont des hommes.'³⁶ The image of the crab appears also in Sartre's fiction, and, like the rhinoceros, it symbolises the impenetrability of *autrui*, the protective (if invisible) shell that separates the Self from the Other:

De seul je deviens solitaire, mais c'est que j'ai fait du néant qui me distinguait des autres une carapace irréductible dans laquelle je me suis emmuré et qui m'empêche de rejoindre ce qui se passe à l'extérieur. D'où la fréquence de la métaphore du crabe, qui a secrété sa propre prison et qui la transporte avec lui partout où il va.³⁷

The crab is thus a wonderful symbol of solipsism, but it is used in the play to represent the Other in general, and it is therefore particularly appropriate that the crabs serve the function of the judge. The symbolism employed by Ionesco in *Le Piéton de l'Air* is also remarkably similar:

Marthe:	Il y a tous les gens autour.
Joséphine:	Quels gens?
Marthe:	Les amis, nous avons beaucoup d'amis.
Joséphine:	Tu appelles ça des amis. Que suis-je pour eux? Que sont-ils pour moi? Non, non, ce ne sont pas des amis. Des objets vides dans le désert. Monstrueusement impénétrables, indifférents, égoïstes, cruels. Enfermés dans leur carapace. ³⁸

The added advantage of the crab and the rhinoceros is that they are both somewhat sinister and brutal, and both relatively indistinguishable to the human eye: as the temptation seems to be to hide from the *regard*, the prognosis for successful coexistence looks bleak.

³⁶ Frantz, p.279.

³⁷ Boros, Marie-Denise, *Un Séquestré: L'Homme Sartien*, p.236.

³⁸ *Théâtre III*, p.180.

ii) Attempts at Coexistence

The initial attitudes of shame and guilt which arise in the presence of the Other have been mentioned, but Sartre goes on to explore what he calls *authentic* responses to *autrui*, and he reduces them fundamentally to two:

Il y a deux attitudes authentiques: celle par laquelle je reconnais Autrui comme le sujet par qui je viens à l'objectité – c'est la honte; celle par laquelle je me saisis comme le projet libre par qui Autrui vient à l'être-autrui – c'est l'orgueil ou affirmation de ma liberté en face d'Autrui-objet. Mais la fierté – ou *vanité* – est un sentiment sans équilibre et de mauvaise foi: je tente, dans la vanité, d'agir sur Autrui en tant que je suis objet.³⁹

The only attitude, then, which is both authentic and in Good Faith is that of shame, the attitude in which the Self accepts its object status in the presence of the Other. The problem, of course, is how to deal with this shame, and this question lies at the heart of coexistence.

Even a quick perusal of Sartre and Ionesco's theatre provides the answer to how most of their creations react to their fundamental sense of shame. Indeed both dramatists have dedicated whole plays to the game of coexistence: an audience of *Jacques ou la Soumission* or of *Kean* will soon appreciate the importance of role-play, which is shown to be the most common, even the most viable, method of dealing with this shame. Role-play is discussed in both dramatists' philosophy, and it seems that both accept the inevitable 'clothing of being' which arises in the world of *autrui*:

L'être des existants est ordinairement voilé par leur fonction. Il en est de même pour l'être de l'Autre.⁴⁰

Ce que l'on connaît de chacun c'est, tout d'abord, sa politesse, sa retenue. Il ne faut pas aller plus loin, nous tomberions dans l'abîme. Qui as-tu tué, au moins en esprit, toi qui es vêtu en habit du dimanche?⁴¹

It is fascinating to compare Ionesco's thoughts with one of Garcin's speeches, for the language and the imagery are almost identical: 'De la politesse, pourquoi? Des cérémonies, pourquoi? Entre nous! Tout à l'heure nous serons nus comme des vers.'⁴²

Ionesco's use of masks and costume (the Pompier, the Policier, etc.) is central to this theme, for in this use of metatheatricality, he stages visually the temptation of the Self to revert to function and role-play in the presence of the Other. In *Le Maître*, all the characters are functions, from the Jeune Amant to the Maître himself; in *Macbett*, the doubling of roles results in Lady Macbett being dressed as the Première Sorcière before our very eyes;⁴³ and in *Délire à deux*, masking is used metaphorically to denote the subterfuge inherent to Being-for-Others, which here, as indeed elsewhere, inevitably culminates in violence:

Elle: Crétin! Séducteur!

³⁹ *L'Être et le Néant*, p.351.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.464.

⁴¹ *Journal en miettes*, p.125.

⁴² *Huis Clos*, p.52. The language is also reminiscent of Genet, who is preoccupied with the theme of role-play.

⁴³ *Macbett*, *Théâtre V*, p.187.

- Lui: Ne m'insulte pas. Ne m'appelle plus séducteur. Tu n'as pas honte.
 Elle: Je ne t'insulte pas. Je te démasque.
 Lui: Moi aussi je te démasque. Tiens, j'enlève tes fards. (*Il lui donne une forte giflle*)⁴⁴

Sartre's most famous example is of course the *garçon de café*, whose movements are just a little too rushed and contrived because, as we are told, 'il joue avec sa condition pour la réaliser'.⁴⁵ It seems, then, that role-play, like Inauthenticity, is our default position in the world of Being-for-Others, and thus many relationships on Sartre and Ionesco's stage are based on the premise of the *jeu*. The most self-conscious of these is probably that of Jessica and Hugo, whose inter-play seems to disintegrate into a sort of Beckettian stalemate:

- Hugo: Toi, tu joues à être sérieuse. Tu me l'as dit.
 [...]
 Jessica: Non. Tu joues à me croire.
 Hugo: Nous n'en sortirons pas.⁴⁶

Both are in Good Faith in this respect, for they recognise exactly what they are doing, but when Jessica warns Hugo with the words 'tu joues mal ton rôle',⁴⁷ it seems that the end of their love-game is imminent – a fact confirmed by Hugo's ultimate riposte: 'Est-ce que tu ne sais pas que notre amour était une comédie?'⁴⁸ The self-consciousness continues with Ionesco's self-incarnation as Nicolas d'Eu, the opinionated *theatrician* whose whole theory of character is determined by his recognition of the interchangeability of roles: 'Les caractères perdent leur forme dans l'informe du devenir. Chaque personnage est moins lui-même que l'autre.'⁴⁹ It is appropriate that this observation comes in *Victimes du devoir*, where characters are indeed the victims of their social duty, and once again there is convergence with Sartre who, following Rimbaud, declared in the early *La Transcendance de l'Ego* that '*Je est un autre*'. The implications of this interchangeability are emphasised throughout Ionesco's work, but they receive a bitterly ironic interpretation under the cynical observation of Goetz: 'Je suis militaire, donc je tue. Je les tuerai conformément à mon office et l'Archevêque leur pardonnera, conformément au sien.'⁵⁰ The phenomenon of role-playing appears to be as inevitable as it is gratuitous. But it can hardly come as a surprise, particularly in hindsight of the ontology of *pour-soi*, which 'is not what it is and is what it is not', and which is seemingly condemned not only to Freedom, but also to the vanity of any authentic identity. The solution to the conundrum seems to lie in the free assumption of this condemnation, to accept the role of actor and to play it to the full:

Celui, surtout, qui voudra utiliser sa liberté à changer sa situation dans le monde sera *obligé* d'assumer son être-pour-autrui, de jouer un rôle, pour que les décisions de sa liberté soient efficaces. Seulement, ce rôle il doit le jouer avec une lucidité et une bonne foi qui ne lui permettent aucune évasion dans des mondes imaginaires.⁵¹

⁴⁴ *Théâtre III*, p.206.

⁴⁵ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.98.

⁴⁶ *Les Mains Sales*, p.73.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.111.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.180.

⁴⁹ *Victimes du devoir, Théâtre I*, p.227.

⁵⁰ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.74.

⁵¹ Royle, Peter, *Sartre: L'Enfer et la Liberté*, p.99.

Si tel est le propre des relations humaines d'être un immense théâtre où les hommes doivent vivre comme acteurs, la solution définitive sera d'accepter d'être un acteur, d'assumer ce divorce qu'autrui insère en moi-même.⁵²

Such is the assumption of Genet, which in Sartre's eyes elevates him to sainthood; and if theatre is indeed the perfect arena for human relations, the next step must be to scrutinise the genre for answers to remaining questions of human coexistence.

The philosophical thinking behind the theatre of Sartre and Ionesco in the realm of Being-for-Others is built around the analysis of several original relationships between the Self and the Other. Both dramatists are strongly influenced by Heideggerian thought on *Mitsein*, which is one of their strongest points of contact, but whereas Sartre rejects much of Heidegger's terminology, its links with Ionesco are tangible. Thus the early 'anti-plays' of Ionesco (particularly) dramatise effectively the Inauthenticity of Idle Talk, where characters talk to each other 'pour ne rien dire',⁵³ of Curiosity, where they 'float away from what is ready-to-hand and towards the exotic, the alien and the distant',⁵⁴ and of Ambiguity, where the individual, thrown into a world of crowds, confuses authentic and superficial understanding. Confusion seems to permeate the very core of Ionescan Man, hence perhaps his desire in the later plays to free himself from his peers.

But on the whole, the dramatists are united in their portrayal of the various human relationships from the presumable nirvana of love to the ultimate conflict of hatred. Language and communication naturally form the premise for any potential relationship, and as dramatists, Sartre and Ionesco are inevitably fascinated with the complexities of verbal interaction. It is Ionesco, though, who has made of language his true craft. Although he admits that 'il y a un degré de communication entre les gens'⁵⁵ and insists that the message of *La Cantatrice chauve* was not to discredit human communication,⁵⁶ he later betrays his true feelings on language and the effect it has on *autrui*: 'J'ai voulu dire [...] que, tout en parlant, les hommes ne savaient pas ce qu'ils voulaient dire et [...] que le langage, au lieu de les rapprocher les uns des autres, ne faisait que les séparer davantage.'⁵⁷ Language is consistently shown to fail as a means of communion or solidarity, and the apparent misinterpretation of *La Cantatrice* is vindicated by any reading of the text:

M. Smith:	Hm.	<i>Silence.</i>
Mme Smith:	Hm, hm.	<i>Silence.</i>
Mme Martin:	Hm, hm, hm.	<i>Silence.</i>
M. Martin:	Hm, hm, hm, hm.	<i>Silence.</i>
Mme Martin:	Oh, décidément.	<i>Silence.</i>
M. Martin:	Nous sommes tous enrhumés.	<i>Silence.</i>

⁵² Presseault, Jacques, *L'Etre-pour-Autrui dans la Philosophie de Jean-Paul Sartre*, pp.182-83.

⁵³ See *Antidotes*, p.94.

⁵⁴ See Stephen Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Heidegger and 'Being and Time'*, p.106.

⁵⁵ Ionesco interviewed in Claude Bonnefoy, *Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco*, p.69.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Antidotes*, p.94.

- M. Smith: Pourtant il ne fait pas froid.
Silence.
- Mme Smith: Il n'y a pas de courant d'air.
Silence.
- M. Martin: Oh non, heureusement.
Silence.
- M. Smith: Ah, la la la la.
Silence.
- M. Martin: Vous avez du chagrin?
Silence.
- Mme Smith: Non. Il s'emmerde.
*Silence.*⁵⁸

When language breaks down in Ionescan theatre, it disintegrates from meaningless cliché to verbal nonsense, and thence from mime and physical expression to violence and then emptiness. Characters rarely communicate on Ionesco's stage; they merely take turns in expressing their anguish.

For Sartre, who speaks of a 'diversité incommunicable des consciences humaines' as a logical repercussion of the lack of a human nature,⁵⁹ this inability to communicate is perhaps less of a surprise. Although generally Sartre is concerned with preserving the dignity of rational language,⁶⁰ in the realm of Being-for-Others he too is ready to accept the failures of language as a means of communication: 'Le langage n'est pas un phénomène surajouté à l'être-pour-autrui: il *est* originellement l'être-pour-autrui, c'est-à-dire le fait qu'une subjectivité s'éprouve comme objet pour l'autre.'⁶¹ Like the *regard* of *autrui*, my own language serves to objectify me in the eyes and ears of the Other. Sartre adapts Heidegger's 'je suis ce que je dis' into 'je *suis* langage',⁶² for once my language is out of my mouth, it belongs to the essence of my past as an object at the mercy of *autrui*:

Le mot est *sacré* quand c'est moi qui l'utilise, et *magique* quand l'autre l'entend. Ainsi, je ne connais pas plus mon langage que mon corps pour l'autre. Je ne puis m'entendre parler ni me voir sourire.⁶³

Les mots vivent de la mort des hommes, ils s'unissent à travers eux: chaque phrase que je forme, son sens m'échappe, il m'est volé; chaque jour et chaque parleur altère *pour tous* les significations, et les autres viennent les changer jusque dans ma bouche.⁶⁴

My language, like my body, can even be at the mercy of myself, hence the anguish of Frantz (and Beckett's Krapp) when he hears his own words on tape. Ultimately, then, even Sartre's noble language provides no connection between two individual consciousnesses, and, like Ionesco's language, it can be seen to fail as a means of *rapprochement*: 'Le rôle du langage dans les relations humaines ne fait donc que

⁵⁸ *Théâtre I*, p.33.

⁵⁹ See *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.282.

⁶⁰ See *Un Théâtre de Situations*, p.64: 'L'un de nos problèmes a été de trouver un style de dialogue qui, tout en étant entièrement simple et en n'utilisant que les mots de tous les jours, puisse préserver cependant quelque chose de la dignité ancienne de notre langue.'

⁶¹ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.440.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.442.

⁶⁴ *Critique de la Raison Dialectique, I*, p.211.

redoubler cette aliénation de mon être que m'inflige la présence de l'autre.⁶⁵

Love is perhaps the most interesting relationship explored by the two dramatists, and if coexistence is to be redeemed after the brutal objectification of the *regard*, the fundamental sense of shame, and the impossibility of successful communication, it is surely in the guise of love that it will be so. But for Sartre, love is about possession: 'Ainsi l'amant ne désire-t-il pas posséder l'aimé comme on possède une chose; il réclame un type spécial d'appropriation. Il veut posséder une liberté comme liberté.'⁶⁶ The paradox is already apparent: freedom which is possessed is no longer freedom, and the conduct of love is thus in vain. The Self cannot possess the Other as a subject, and this is a semantic and ontological impossibility which characters like Werner learn the hard way: 'Je voulais une femme, je n'ai possédé que son cadavre.'⁶⁷ Sartre goes on to elucidate clearly the reasons for the failure of love:

L'amour est un effort contradictoire pour surmonter la négation de fait tout en conservant la négation interne. J'exige que l'autre m'aime et je mets tout en œuvre pour réaliser mon projet: mais si l'autre m'aime, il me déçoit radicalement par son amour même; j'exigeais de lui qu'il fonde mon être comme objet privilégié en se maintenant comme pur subjectivité en face de moi; et, dès qu'il m'aime, il m'éprouve comme sujet et s'abîme dans son objectivité en face de mon subjectivité. Le problème de mon être-pour-autrui demeure donc sans solution, les amants demeurent chacun pour soi dans une subjectivité totale; rien ne vient les relever de leur devoir de se faire exister chacun pour soi; rien ne vient lever leur contingence ni les sauver de la facticité. [...] Il suffit que les amants soient regardés par un tiers pour que chacun éprouve l'objectivation, non seulement de soi-même, mais de l'autre.⁶⁸

The outlook for love is bleak, for there appears to be no solution to the subject-object duality uncovered by the fix of the *regard*.

Ionesco, too, fails to find a solution, and while he appreciates Man's need and even craving for love, he acknowledges the futility of its design: 'L'amour est notre atmosphère vitale, notre pain quotidien. Hélas! l'atmosphère est viciée, le pain empoisonné.'⁶⁹ The analogy with bread works well, and in *Ce formidable bordel!*, Le Monsieur continues the religious motif, inverting the words of Christ to expose the *human* experience of love: 'On a dit "aimez-vous les uns les autres", en réalité on aurait dû dire "mangez-vous les uns les autres". C'est bien ce que ça veut dire d'ailleurs [...]. On mange ce qu'on aime.' (p.138). Like Sartre, Ionesco recognises the possessiveness and objectification inherent to the project of love; and in their *Good Faith*, characters of both dramatists are well aware of the futile escapism of love and of the magical ambiguity of its adoption:

Inès: C'est bon l'amour, hein Garcin? C'est tiède et profond comme le sommeil, mais je t'empêcherai de dormir.⁷⁰

Jacqueline: Malgré tout l'immense amour que j'ai pour toi, qui gonfle mon cœur à l'en faire crever, je te déteste, je t'exerte.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Boros, Marie-Denise, *Un Séquestré: L'Homme Sartrien*, p.67.

⁶⁶ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.434.

⁶⁷ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.246.

⁶⁸ *L'Etre et le Néant*, pp.444-45.

⁶⁹ *Journal en miettes*, p.137.

⁷⁰ *Huis Clos*, p.92.

⁷¹ *Jacques ou la Soumission, Théâtre I*, p.99.

The project of desire is similar to love, except that its intention is to possess the Other as pure transcendence *and* as pure facticity. In Ionescan drama, desire is parodied and shown to be as gratuitous and arbitrary as love and any other emotional flight. As in *Jacques ou la Soumission* or its sequel *L'Avenir est dans les œufs*, beauty and physical attraction are turned on their head and the 'act of love' is revealed as just relentless material production. Even Béranger's dalliances in *Tueur sans gages* and *Rhinocéros* end in disastrous isolation, as Dany's death is followed by the ultimate betrayal of Daisy. For Sartre, the failure of desire is inevitable since its ideal is an ontological impossibility: 'Tel est l'idéal impossible du désir: posséder la transcendance de l'autre comme pure transcendance et pourtant comme *corps*; réduire l'autre à sa simple *facticité*.'⁷² This vain ideal is clearly perceived by Johanna, who is aware of men's attempts to reduce her to the flesh on her body: 'Qu'est-ce que je suis, moi? Rien: un instrument de supplice. Chacun cherche sur moi les caresses de l'autre.'⁷³ The culmination of desire is of course the sexual act itself, and with the post-paroxysmal finitude which accompanies the orgasm comes the ultimate realisation of the vanity of desire:

La 'possession' charnelle en effet nous offre l'image irritante et séduisante d'un corps perpétuellement possédé et perpétuellement neuf, sur lequel la possession ne laisse aucune trace.⁷⁴

Le plaisir, en effet – comme une douleur trop vive – motive l'apparition d'une conscience réflexive qui est '*attention au plaisir*'. Seulement le plaisir est la mort et l'échec du désir. Il est la mort du désir parce qu'il n'est pas seulement son achèvement mais son terme et sa fin.⁷⁵

The violent pseudo-orgasm of Ionesco's Professeur testifies to this failure most effectively.

The opposite relationships of sadism and masochism are barely evident in the vast range of plays created by Sartre and Ionesco, but they are explored by Sartre in *L'Etre et le Néant*. Sadism differs from desire in that the sadist refuses his own flesh in the presence of the Other, seeks *obscene* incarnation, and demands *immediate* appropriation.⁷⁶ In Sartre's plays, its rare occurrence is in the form of torture (*Morts sans Sépulture*, *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*) or general pleasure at the suffering of others:

Inès: Moi, je suis méchante: ça veut dire que j'ai besoin de la souffrance des autres pour exister.⁷⁷

The attempt of the sadist is to flee facticity towards pure transcendence by becoming the master of the Other's facticity (flesh) and so enslaving his freedom. But again, the project is doomed to failure because the Other's freedom is permanently out of reach:

Le sadisme recèle un nouveau motif d'échec. C'est en effet la liberté transcendante de la victime qu'il cherche à s'appropriier. Mais précisément cette liberté demeure par principe hors d'atteinte [...]. Le sadique découvre

⁷² *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.463.

⁷³ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.265.

⁷⁴ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.668.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.467.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.469-70.

⁷⁷ *Huis Clos*, p.57.

son erreur lorsque sa victime le *regarde*.⁷⁸

The masochist's attempt is thus to flee transcendence towards pure facticity by becoming the victim of the Other's transcendence and so denying his facticity. The masochist seeks his *own* obscene incarnation in his desire to become the Other's object and to reassume the original experience of shame. In Sartrean theatre, it is generally women, as the *penetrated*, who, like Catherine in her relationship with Goetz, are shown to adopt the role of the masochist: 'Je veux être ton bordel!'⁷⁹ Her project is of course bound to fail, for it is always *the Other* who perceives the masochist as an object, and the masochist's own transcendence can never be buried for long:

Le masochiste a beau se traîner à genoux, se montrer dans des postures ridicules, se faire utiliser comme un simple instrument inanimé, c'est *pour l'autre* qu'il sera obscène ou simplement passif, pour l'autre qu'il *subira* ces postures; pour lui, il est à jamais condamné à *se les donner* [...] et plus il tentera de goûter son objectivité, plus il sera submergé par la conscience de sa subjectivité, jusqu'à l'angoisse [...]. Ainsi [...] l'objectivité du masochiste lui échappe et il peut même arriver, il arrive le plus souvent qu'en cherchant à saisir son objectivité il trouve l'objectivité de l'autre, ce qui libère, malgré lui, sa subjectivité. Le masochisme est donc par principe un échec.⁸⁰

With the failure of language, the 'positive' relationships of love and desire, and the opposing sexual relations of sadism and masochism, it seems logical to look to hatred for the final escape from the world of *autrui*. According to Ionesco, hatred of the Other is the result of human Anguish and a reaction to temporality: 'La haine est l'expression de notre angoisse, de notre manque de temps.'⁸¹ Like love and desire, hatred is parodied in Ionesco's plays, usually at the expense of political commitment and to underline the playwright's ethics of passivity and inertia. But the overwhelming message is that hatred never succeeds: Le Professeur can go on killing forty pupils a day, but there will always be another waiting in the wings to ring the bell. This is also the message of Sartrean philosophy, according to which hatred of the Other is hatred of *autrui* in general and an attempt to rid the Self of the very *existence* of others. The attempt is inevitably futile, for it contravenes the whole ontology of Being:

La haine, à son tour, est un échec. Son projet initial, en effet, est de supprimer les autres consciences. Mais si même elle y parvenait, c'est-à-dire si elle pouvait abolir l'autre dans le moment présent, elle ne pourrait faire que l'autre n'ait pas été.⁸²

The only option remaining is the attitude of indifference. In Sartrean terms, indifference involves a blindness towards *autrui* where the Self decides to 'regarder le regard' instead of perceiving the Other as a subject or an object. It is an attempt to simultaneously deny both the facticity and transcendence of *autrui*, even though its treatment of others resembles that of objects, thus again compounding the Coefficient of Adversity:

Je pratique [...] une sorte de solipsisme de fait; les autres, ce sont ces formes

⁷⁸ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.476.

⁷⁹ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.85.

⁸⁰ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.447.

⁸¹ *Journal en miettes*, p.137.

⁸² *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.483.

qui passent dans la rue, ces objets magiques qui sont susceptibles d'agir à distance et sur lesquels je peux agir par des conduites déterminées. J'y prends à peine garde, j'agis comme si j'étais seul au monde; je frôle 'les gens' comme je frôle les murs, je les évite comme j'évite des obstacles, leur liberté-objet n'est pour moi que leur 'coefficient d'adversité'; je n'imagine même pas qu'ils puissent me *regarder*.⁸³

The language and outlook are reminiscent of *Le Solitaire* and equally they culminate in solipsism. But even this last-ditch attempt at coexistence (by denying it) is doomed to ultimate failure, for it is nothing but a deliberate act of Bad Faith, an attempt of the Self to delude its own consciousness: 'Pourtant, l'Autre comme liberté et mon objectivité comme moi-aliéné *sont là*, inaperçus, non thématiques, mais donnés dans ma compréhension même du monde et de mon être dans le monde.'⁸⁴ Ionesco is totally concordant, and with his resolute rejection of indifference comes recognition of the failure of *all* relationships with *autrui*: 'Quelle est la bonne voie? Peut-être l'indifférence. Ce n'est pas possible; puisqu'on est là, on ne peut pas ne pas participer; on ne peut pas s'écarter de la manifestation puisque nous sommes plongés dedans.'⁸⁵

Sartre believes that all other possible relationships with *autrui* are mere variations of the original relationships described above, and it would thus appear that *any* attempt at coexistence, whether positive or negative, is ultimately doomed to failure. Ionesco, it seems, acknowledges the problem with equal insight: 'Il ne faut pas aimer, il ne faut pas haïr, il ne faut pas ni ne pas aimer ni ne pas haïr. Cela non plus il ne le faut pas.'⁸⁶ The problem seems to be one of incompatibility between the Self and the Other, or in the language of Sartre, that 'le pour-soi est inconnaissable par *autrui* comme pour-soi'.⁸⁷ In the same way that *en-soi-pour-soi* is constantly indicated and constantly out of reach, the ontological fusion of *pour-soi-pour-autrui* emerges as the oxymoron of a necessary impossibility. In Ionescan language, Man (or here Le Monsieur) is just a slave to his futile desires: 'Nous sommes des esclaves, des esclaves de nos désirs, nous dépendons les uns des autres, nous demandons toujours à l'autre de combler nos désirs. Chacun exige tout de chacun.'⁸⁸ With this desperate and mutual conclusion comes the greatest rupture with Heidegger, as the *Mitsein* is undermined and reversed to the disharmony of Hegelian conflict: 'C'est donc en vain que la réalité humaine chercherait à sortir de ce dilemme: transcender l'autre ou se laisser transcender par lui. L'essence des rapports entre consciences n'est pas le *Mitsein*, c'est le conflit.'⁸⁹

This theme of conflict predominates in the plays of Sartre and Ionesco. *Huis Clos* is in many ways an extended analysis of conflict with *autrui*, but in no means is the piece an exception:

Leni:	Qui de nous deux, père, a besoin de l'autre?
Le Père:	Qui de nous deux, Leni, fait peur à l'autre? ⁹⁰

Le Père's question is the more pertinent, and it reflects the prevailing tone of conflict which exists in Sartre's theatre not only in the domain of revolutionary engagement, but more disturbingly in the domestic arena of the family. Ionescan drama is equally one of overwhelming conflict, from the hostility which breaks out at the end of *La Cantatrice*

⁸³ Ibid. p.449.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.450.

⁸⁵ *Journal en miettes*, p.137.

⁸⁶ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.84.

⁸⁷ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.298.

⁸⁸ *Ce formidable bordel!*, p.139.

⁸⁹ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.502.

⁹⁰ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.105.

to the pernicious Professeur, from the *Tueur (sans gages)* to the bloodbath of *Jeux de Massacre*. This universal aspect of conflict is summarised effectively by Jacques: 'Des siècles et des siècles ont passé! les gens... ils avaient tous le mot bonté à la bouche, le couteau sanglant entre les dents...' ⁹¹ In his last play, Ionesco develops his theme of individual imprisonment into a nightmarish image of collective incarceration, and it is clear that the cynicism of Jacques has not diminished on its journey to the lips of Alexandre: 'Nous sommes poussés par les autres. Ils arrivent en masse, ils remplissent la cage. Ah, avoir une autre cage, moins encombrée!' ⁹² The analogy is hellish, and indeed Hell is the lasting image of our forced coexistence with *autrui*. From Garcin's now infamous 'l'enfer, c'est les Autres' ⁹³ has sprung a whole new philosophy on Being-for-Others; his words have proved highly controversial, and even Sartre has reneged on them a little, ⁹⁴ but this new aphorism, which one can imagine a future Ionesco parodying most mischievously, still stands as a neat summation of the theme of coexistence on the stage of both Ionesco and Sartre. The former's journals serve to reinforce the image: 'Comment se fait-il que la Société qui devait être la plus favorable à l'homme soit devenue la plus aliénante, la plus mauvaise, le tribunal, la prison, l'enfer?' ⁹⁵ Whatever Sartre's subsequent disclaimers on the issue, the combination of the ontology of *L'Être et le Néant* and the dramatisation of coexistence in the plays reveals the meeting of the Self and the Other as a conflictual confrontation of freedoms. The misery of Georges at being rescued from the river clearly conveys the fact that the initial response to *autrui* is perhaps less one of shame than one of brutal fear: 'Néron arrachait des esclaves à leurs épouses pour les jeter aux poissons; et toi, plus cruel que lui, tu m'arraches aux poissons pour me jeter aux hommes.' ⁹⁶ The closing words on the living Hell that is the Other should be left to two of the dramatists' most perceptive social analysts:

Inès: Le bourreau, c'est chacun de nous pour les deux autres. ⁹⁷

Le Monsieur: Ne croyez-vous pas que nous vivons en enfer? Que l'enfer est ici? Nous sommes tous des assoiffés, des affamés, des désireux. ⁹⁸

The repercussions of both Sartre and Ionesco's philosophical stance on relationships with others are vast, but they have particular implications for politico-ethical issues and for the portrayal of women in the plays. In the world of politics, Sartre's ontological conviction that the Other must appear as a subject or as an object leads him to the ethical position of treating the Other as a means to an end: 'Si je pars [...] du corps d'autrui, je le saisis comme un instrument et [...] je puis en effet l'utiliser pour parvenir à des fins que je ne saurais atteindre seul.' ⁹⁹ This ethic is one of Good Faith, for although I may be denying the transcendence of the Other, this provides no contradiction to my perception of him in my *regard*. The ethic is expanded upon in *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, where the scarcity of the *pratico-inerte* is shown to culminate in the increasing necessity of social conflict. The ethic is also compatible with

⁹¹ *Jacques ou la Soumission*, Théâtre I, p.121.

⁹² *Voyages chez les Morts*, p.112.

⁹³ *Huis Clos*, p.93.

⁹⁴ See Sartre, cited in Peter Royle, *Sartre: L'Enfer et la Liberté*, pp.42-43: 'Quelque soit le cercle d'enfer dans lequel nous vivons, je pense que nous sommes libres de le briser, et si les gens ne le brisent pas, c'est encore librement qu'ils y restent, de sorte qu'ils se mettent librement en enfer.' (p.43).

⁹⁵ *Antidotes*, p.278.

⁹⁶ *Nekrassov*, p.25.

⁹⁷ *Huis Clos*, p.42.

⁹⁸ *Ce formidable bordel!*, p.139.

⁹⁹ *L'Être et le Néant*, pp.384-85.

the ethical choice of *pour-soi*, for whom the end was shown to justify the means. Ionesco's politics are very different, and his reaction to the inevitability of conflict is generally one of pacifism. Thus the *authentic* Ionescan character endeavours to *avoid* violent conflict (which is ubiquitously parodied) by removing himself from the crowd and even from the social situation. This escapism has been well documented, but in the context of Being-for-Others, it assumes the Heideggerian slant of flight from the *Menge*, which is consistently portrayed as both dangerous and inauthentic. Such is the context of *Rhinocéros*, where even the less authentic characters like Botard are aware of the peril of the crowd: 'Psychose collective, monsieur Dudard, psychose collective! C'est comme la religion qui est l'opium des peuples!'¹⁰⁰

There is sadly no place here for a thorough analysis of the dramatists' portrayal of women, but the implications of their philosophy of 'Otherness' for their similar characterisations of women cannot go unmentioned. Women seem to add to the existing problems of conflict between the Self and the Other in a variety of ways. Firstly, they are the main victims of the process of objectification, for, as pointed out by de Beauvoir, 'la femme est un existant à qui on demande de se faire objet'.¹⁰¹ This generic 'on' certainly applies to Ionesco and Sartre, for the women in their plays are rarely the agents of the *regard*; their characterisation is usually secondary, their role-play defined as a function of the male's. Ionesco's perception of the Everywoman became apparent in the discussion on the puppet, but it is clear that both Sartre and Ionesco conceive of women as highly duplicitous, and their creations, accordingly, inevitably confuse their roles:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Le Vieux: | Hi, hi, hi! Ma maman! Où est ma maman? J'ai plus de
maman. |
| La Vieille: | Je suis ta femme, c'est moi ta maman maintenant. ¹⁰² |
| Werner: | Un lâche, hein, un lâche: c'est comme cela que tu
m'aimes, tu pourras me consoler. Maternellement.[...] |
| Johanna: | Comme tu me détestes! ¹⁰³ |

As for Frantz, he concentrates on the other aspect of female duplicity, explaining to Johanna that: 'Une femme est un traître, Madame.'¹⁰⁴

The dramatists' misogyny is evident throughout their theatre, and although few critics have dedicated much time to a sincere analysis of its prevalence, the odd exception has pointed out the nature of this misogyny – in this case with reference to Ionesco:

Women tend to be strongly associated with guilt, either through marital infidelity (as in *Amédée*) or filial neglect (in *The Chairs* or *Man with Bags*), and their relationship to the protagonist is usually conflictual. If the male protagonists are visionary, artistic idealists who long to escape the confines of earth and time, women are often practical figures who condemn the male characters' search for an Edenic state of grace as impractical and tie them to the Earth (as in *Victims of Duty*, *Amédée*, *A Stroll in the Air* and *Hunger and Thirst*).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ *Théâtre III*, p.52.

¹⁰¹ See *Le Deuxième Sexe*, II, p.172.

¹⁰² *Les Chaises*, p.136.

¹⁰³ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, pp.246-47.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.269.

¹⁰⁵ Lane, Nancy, *Understanding Eugène Ionesco*, p.19.

In terms of the female body, Ionesco often associates women with the grotesque, such as the virile and hirsute *jeune fille à marier*, and Roberte with her superfluous fingers and faces, which again underlines her duplicity. For Sartre, women and the grotesque appear to be inseparable, and femininity enters his philosophy in relation to nausea and viscosity:

Le visqueux apparaît comme un liquide vu dans un cauchemar et dont toutes les propriétés s'animent d'une sorte de vie et se retourneraient contre moi. Le visqueux, c'est la revanche de l'En-soi. Revanche douceâtre et féminine.¹⁰⁶

Sartre goes on to denigrate Woman as *trouée*, again defining her as an object which both craves and tempts penetration:

L'obscénité du sexe féminin est celle de toute chose *béante*: c'est un *appel d'être*, comme d'ailleurs tous les trous; en soi la femme appelle une chair étrangère qui doit la transformer en plénitude d'être par pénétration et dilution.¹⁰⁷

This ontology of womanhood as somehow lacking in Being leaves women subject to possession by the men that exist around them. Women, in particular, are shown to long for plenitude and even for assimilation in the project of the Jonah Complex. The conflictive relationships continue as Sartre's male characters persist in viewing women as monstrous temptresses who, like the viscous jam jar which traps the wasp, contrive to lure all men towards their deaths:

Georges: Une porte qui se referme, un nœud qui se resserre, un couperet qui tombe: c'est la femme.¹⁰⁸

This violent imagery is in its turn linked back to nausea, as the women on the stage of both dramatists are perceived by the male, and even by themselves, as dirty, yielding, and obscene:

Garcin: Je ne veux pas m'enliser dans tes yeux. Tu es moite! tu es molle!¹⁰⁹

Roberte II: Dans mon ventre il y a des étangs, des marécages...¹¹⁰

Goetz: Moi qui répugne à toucher du doigt le fumier, comment puis-je désirer tenir dans mes bras le sac d'excréments lui-même?¹¹¹

This misogyny is of course connected to the Ionescan flight of *enlissement*, and it seems that women provide just yet another means of escape for the anguished male protagonist. But the final impression of womanhood is best conveyed by Ionesco's *Solitaire*, whose perverted consciousness of women expresses the overwhelming fear

¹⁰⁶ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.701.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.706.

¹⁰⁸ *Nekrassov*, p.93.

¹⁰⁹ *Huis Clos*, p.85.

¹¹⁰ *Jacques ou la Soumission, Théâtre I*, p.125.

¹¹¹ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.225.

and distrust which permeates the philosophy of Ionesco and of Sartre:

Le sexe féminin m'a toujours paru être une sorte de blessure au bas du ventre entre les cuisses. Quelque chose comme un gouffre, mais surtout comme une blessure ouverte, énorme, inguérissable, profonde. Cela m'a toujours fait un effet de pitié et de peur: un gouffre, oui, c'était cela.¹¹²

The repercussions of both dramatists' philosophy of failed relationships on politico-ethical and women's issues are severe, and they serve merely to underline the all-embracing and seemingly irreparable conflict between the Self and the Other.

The lasting images of coexistence are undoubtedly Sartre's infernal triangle and Ionesco's sequestered couple. The motif of the torturous triangle of characters is not just the preserve of *Huis Clos*. Threesomes form the basis of conflict in Sartrean theatre, from Hugo, Jessica, and Hoederer to Hilda, Goetz, and Catherine, for like Werner, Johanna, and Frantz, they suffer their Hell in the company of their two ideal hangmen:

Johanna: Nous allons souffrir l'Enfer.
Frantz: Qui?
Johanna: Werner, vous et moi. Il reste ici par jalousie.¹¹³

Ionesco opts in favour of the couple to portray Man's mutual isolation:

Le dramaturge fait au couple une place à part. Les Smith et les Martin, Jacques et Roberte, Choubert et Madeleine, les vieux, Amédée et Madeleine, Bérenger et Daisy ou Joséphine, le roi et les deux reines, Jean et Marie-Madeleine, Duncan et Lady Duncan posent avec acuité le problème des rapports entre deux êtres. Ils expriment l'usure des sentiments, l'impossibilité de se connaître, la solitude à deux, le piège de la sensualité, le piège de l'ordre, le piège de l'enfant.¹¹⁴

His couples hide from the rest of society, so sequestered that, like the Martins, they do not even recognise each other out of the safety of their lair. Their isolation and frustration comes across in their bickering and violence, and their dead yet desperate love is symbolised effectively by empty chairs or by a living corpse. Life for them becomes a game of hide and seek – they find themselves alone, but cannot play without the other:

Marie-Madeleine: Je ne peux pas jouer ce jeu toute seule, il faut être
 deux; il me cherchait lui aussi, je suis seule
 maintenant. C'est bien pour cela que je ne le
 trouve pas.¹¹⁵

Their lives together are trapped and paradoxical, and they make the ethics of Humanism appear particularly remote.

¹¹² *Le Solitaire*, p.122.

¹¹³ *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, p.260.

¹¹⁴ Kamyabi Mask, Ahmed, *Ionesco et son théâtre*, pp.105-06.

¹¹⁵ *La Soif et la Faim, Théâtre IV*, p.102.

iii) The Search for a Collective Ethic

With the collapse of all viable human relationships, the main problems remaining are how to salvage Humanism from the vicious circle of solipsism and how to define Authenticity in the context of the collective. These challenges mark an extension of the analysis of ethics from personal or individual ethics to the realm of Being-for-Others, and are thus a final attempt to determine a viable code of Humanist morality.

Despite the clear evidence of Ionesco and Sartre's belief in the impossibility of successful coexistence, both dramatists refute the charges of individualism and solipsism. Sartre's 'defence' of *Huis Clos* and Ionesco's of *La Cantatrice chauve* have both been discussed in this respect, and in an attempt to circumnavigate the ethical problems caused by the breakdown of human relationships, both turn their attention to the ontology of the *nous*, both as the subject and object of action: 'Pour être authentiquement moral, je dois vouloir, à proprement parler, non le bien d'autrui mais notre bien.'¹¹⁶ For Sartre, the *nous*-subject reinstates the plurality of consciousnesses which first appeared with the initial presence of the Other, and it gives rise to the *être-avec*, or Heideggerian *Mitsein*:

Dans le 'nous' sujet, personne n'est objet. Le *nous* enveloppe une pluralité de subjectivités qui se reconnaissent les unes les autres comme subjectivités. [...] Le nous est une certaine expérience particulière qui se produit dans des cas spéciaux, sur le fondement de l'être-pour-l'autre en général. L'*être-pour-l'autre* précède et fonde l'*être-avec-l'autre*.¹¹⁷

This *nous*-subject is re-formed in each new situation and appears to found a communion of human subjects. But again, the contradiction with previous comments on relationships and the apparent reinstatement of *Mitsein*, which had been rejected in favour of conflict, cannot be overlooked. However, the Sartrean *nous*-subject is a logical inversion of the *nous*-object, which is wholly consistent with the ontology of the *regard*. In this context, Sartre's comments on love cohere, for it was the arrival of the *tiers* which objectified the lovers in the eyes of each other, and thus *any* group of people perceived by an outsider is inevitably objectified *together*:

Ainsi ce que j'éprouve c'est un être-dehors où je suis organisé avec l'Autre en un tout indissoluble et objectif, un tout où je ne me *distingue plus* originellement de l'Autre mais que je concours, solidairement avec l'Autre, à constituer.¹¹⁸

With this first mention of solidarity comes fresh hope for a collective ethic, or at least for a successful coexistence along the lines of Heideggerian *Stimmung*. In his more euphoric moments, Ionesco is also willing to conceive of a human collectivity, determined like his puppet, but on a larger scale: 'Le "nous" n'est qu'un autre "moi"; il est le fruit d'un conditionnement plus vaste; les groupes aussi sont déterminés, "mis en situation".'¹¹⁹ The language may be Sartrean, but Ionesco goes on to explore the spiritual aspect of human communion, relying on faith or monistic Being to unify his anguished individuals:

¹¹⁶ Royle, Peter, *Sartre: L'Enfer et la Liberté*, p.226.

¹¹⁷ *L'Être et le Néant*, pp.484-86.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.489.

¹¹⁹ *Journal en miettes*, pp.251-52.

L'esprit doit s'infuser dans tous les êtres et dans tout l'être. Nous sommes tous 'un'. Les barrières n'existent peut-être pas, me dis-je, dans les moments d'euphorie et de croyance. Il m'arrive de croire que nous sommes tous 'un' dans le multiple. Et que tout est communicable, que la pensée imprègne tout être, l'autre et moi. Je communique à moi. L'altérité s'intègre dans mon ipséité.¹²⁰

It seems that with age, Ionesco's euphoria was strengthened, for in his last journal, the fusion of the Self and the Other seems finally to be complete:

Arriver à mon âge pour enfin comprendre que je suis les autres, que les autres sont moi, que je n'existe que par les autres, que les autres existent par moi. Je les crée, ils me créent: les autres, c'est-à-dire l'autre.¹²¹

Existons, co-existons...les uns sur les autres, 'soyons' ...¹²²

The distance and the failed relationships experienced between the Self and the Other, and the individualism of *Rhinocéros* seem forgotten or surpassed, as the *nous*-subject is incorporated into later Ionescan thought. But the idea is also consistent with the earlier theme of interchangeability, for in this fusion of existence it is to be expected that one individual can simply replace another. The Humanist ideal of the self-creating human essence is also hinted at here, and it links in with Sartre's collective facticity which links all men together in a human solidarity:

La facticité s'exprime [...] par le fait de mon apparition dans un monde qui ne se révèle à moi que par des techniques collectives et déjà constituées [...]. Ces techniques vont déterminer mon appartenance aux collectivités: à l'espèce humaine, à la collectivité nationale, au groupe professionnel et familial.¹²³

This notion of 'belonging to a human collectivity' is explored in greater detail in *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, whose title betrays the speaker's attempt to rescue his philosophy from the impasse of solipsism and to rekindle the hopes for a successful collective ethic:

Avant que vous ne viviez, la vie, elle n'est rien, mais c'est à vous de lui donner un sens, et la valeur n'est pas autre chose que ce sens que vous choisissiez. Par là vous voyez qu'il y a possibilité de créer une communauté humaine.¹²⁴

This rare outburst of optimism is highly significant, for it affirms the possibility of transcending the Absurd through a personal ethic, which in turn is granted the potential of establishing a Humanist ethic by creating a successful and solidary community. It seems, then, that Sartrean thought has found in Being-for-Others an ethical solution to both Absurdism and solipsism that has so far eluded the individual agent; and the extension of the ontology of Freedom and Engagement apparently confirms this positive ethic:

¹²⁰ *La Quête intermittente*, p.31.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.52.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.91

¹²³ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.594.

¹²⁴ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, pp.89-90.

En voulant la liberté, nous découvrons qu'elle dépend entièrement de la liberté des autres, et que la liberté des autres dépend de la nôtre [...] dès qu'il y a engagement, je suis obligé de vouloir en même temps que ma liberté la liberté des autres.¹²⁵

Lest we still be in any doubt, de Beauvoir's defence of Sartrean Existentialism supports the view that the philosophy is both individualistic *and* collective, and by equally stressing the mutual dependence of separate individual Freedoms, she too decries any charge of solipsism:

Une telle morale est-elle ou non un individualisme? Oui, si l'on entend par là qu'elle accorde à l'individu une valeur absolue et qu'elle ne reconnaît qu'à lui seul le pouvoir de fonder son existence [...]. Mais elle n'est pas un solipsisme, puisque l'individu ne se définit que par sa relation au monde et aux autres individus, il n'existe qu'en se transcendant et sa liberté ne peut s'accomplir qu'à travers la liberté d'autrui.¹²⁶

The same balance between the individual and the collective is proposed also by Barnes, who poses this awkward philosophical compromise as the *sine qua non* for the success of Sartrean Humanism: 'Humanistic existentialism [...] balances the needs of the "We" with the jealous preservation of each differentiated "I".'¹²⁷

Sartre's philosophy of Being-for-Others appears now to be establishing the possibility of a *nous*-consciousness and even communion. But the infamous rift with Camus cannot be forgotten, and this was partly due to Sartre's refusal to accept the binary choice of *solitaire/solidaire* as a dichotomy rather than a fusion.¹²⁸ 'Where Sartre sought unity, Camus spoke of harmony',¹²⁹ and with Sartre's rejection of Camus's more spiritual, emotional solidarity, such as that expounded in *La Peste*, came a rejection of any possibility of human communion. Sartrean Humanism was shown to reject any intangible human qualities as impossible repercussions of an absent human nature, and the distinction was thus irreparably drawn between the false idealism of communion and the necessary reality of solidarity:

Je compterai toujours sur des camarades de lutte dans la mesure où ces camarades sont engagés avec moi dans une lutte concrète et commune, dans l'unité d'un parti ou d'un groupement que je puis plus ou moins contrôler [...]. Mais je ne puis pas compter sur des hommes que je ne connais pas en me fondant sur la bonté humaine ou sur l'intérêt de l'homme pour le bien de la société, étant donné que l'homme est libre, et qu'il n'y a aucune nature humaine sur laquelle je puisse faire fond.¹³⁰

Freedom, then, does have its limits in the collective world of *autrui*. Sartre's preference is for Engagement in common projects with common goals, where solidarity is totally dependent on each separate, concrete situation. The nature of this solidarity is thus political rather than idealistically Humanistic, but it nevertheless serves to unify disparate individuals and unite them in common action:

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.83.

¹²⁶ *Pour une Morale de l'Ambiguïté*, p.218.

¹²⁷ Barnes, Hazel E., *An Existentialist Ethics*, p.463.

¹²⁸ For a detailed account of the rift see Germaine Brée, *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment*.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.248.

¹³⁰ *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, pp.51-52.

Ainsi, puis-je dire 'Je me bats contre l'Autre' en l'absence du Tiers. Mais dès qu'il paraît, les possibilités de l'Autre et les miennes propres s'étant nivelées en mortes-possibilités, le rapport devient réciproque et je suis contraint d'éprouver que 'nous nous battons'. [...] Le projet du combat a germé dans son esprit comme dans le mien et, pour le tiers, il s'unifie en *un seul* projet.¹³¹

Again, the *nous*-subject is invoked by the cause of common projects, and the boundary situations that arise in Sartrean theatre underline the necessity for a collective, if situational, ethic:

Garcin: Est-ce que nous ne pourrions pas essayer de nous aider les uns les autres? [...] Aucun de nous ne peut se sauver seul; il faut que nous nous perdions ensemble ou que nous nous tirions d'affaire ensemble.¹³²

Garcin's plea is not perhaps as doomed as it may appear, for when the door does open, the solidarity of a common project could well have led to mutual salvation. It seems that even in Hell, the Fundamental Choice of solidarity is the only viable means of progression, the only viable ethic. In the living Hell of revolution, solidarity is shown to be a necessity, and Sartre's most revolutionary characters like Nasty rarely fail to incite collective action among the masses:

Il y a deux espèces de pauvres, ceux qui sont pauvres ensemble et ceux qui le sont tout seuls. Les premiers sont les vrais, les autres sont des riches qui n'ont pas eu de chance. [...] On sert le Bien comme un soldat [...] et quel est le soldat qui gagne une guerre à lui tout seul?¹³³

The intimation here is that collective action is both more Authentic and more ethical than individual action, and that it is certainly more effective. Nasty's (and Sartre's) ethics of means and ends are best served by the collectivity, and Goetz extends this appreciation of solidarity to propose a solution to the problem of coexistence in the form of a redefinition of love: 'Je voulais l'amour pur: niaiserie; s'aimer, c'est haïr le même ennemi.'¹³⁴ Again, the idealism of Humanism, rejected in both *L'Etre et le Néant* and *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*, and parodied in the character of Hilda, is dashed as political solidarity takes precedence over emotional human harmony. As a pacifistic Humanist, Hilda treats all men as ends in themselves, and her conscience is most at ease when she feels part of the wider human community rather than marginalised as a political revolutionary: 'Mes frères je ne vous reproche pas votre bonheur, mais je me sentais plus à l'aise quand nous étions malheureux ensemble, car notre malheur était celui de tous les hommes.'¹³⁵

With the publication of *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* and *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* Sartre's Humanism became increasingly geared towards Marxism. At this stage, Sartrean philosophy on Being-for-Others becomes increasingly dominated by the politics of class and the struggle of the oppressed against the social phenomenon of scarcity. The earlier prospect of the *nous*-subject and consciousness is diminished as the

¹³¹ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.490.

¹³² *Huis Clos*, p.63.

¹³³ *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*, p.122 and p.124.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.245.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.184.

masses become the collective object of the permanent gaze and oppression of the ruling classes, which control the *pratico-inerte* and alienate their poorer victims. But the potential for this development was apparent from the very beginning:

Si une société, de par sa structure économique ou politique, se divise en classes opprimantes, la situation des classes opprimantes offre aux classes opprimées l'image d'un tiers perpétuel qui les considère et les transcende par sa liberté.¹³⁶

With this political focus, the Other is finally defined as a concrete subject, and as Fretz's analysis points out, Sartre's belief in this progress provided sufficient grounds for him to contend that his ethics had been salvaged from the recurrent problem of solipsism:

According to what Sartre says it is not till the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* that he has solved the problem of solipsism in a satisfactory way. It seems that this discontent at the solution of this problem in *Being and Nothingness* was also a reason not to publish the first ethics, which was inspired by this work. As long as he could not give an incontestable proof of the existence of the other as a concrete 'subject', this ethics could only inevitably break down in an abstract and individualistic, not to say a mystifying approach, while according to his utterances in *Existentialism and Humanism* an existentialist ethics should on the contrary respect the concrete subjectivity, i.e. the freedom of the other, in his social context.¹³⁷

This new social context serves to strengthen the unification of the masses, for the more the 'subject classes' strive to increase the scarcity of matter, the more the 'object classes' will feel antagonised and thus forced into common action. For Sartre, this phenomenon shattered the seeming impasse of solipsism, and the prospect of successful coexistence was finally recovered from the grave: 'En fait, les "relations humaines" sont des structures interindividuelles dont le langage est le lien commun et qui existent *en acte* à tout moment de l'Histoire. La solitude n'est qu'un aspect particulier de ces relations.'¹³⁸ This ethical development gives rise to fresh hope on two levels: firstly, by shifting the ontological focus from the personal individualism of *L'Etre et le Néant* to the impersonal or historical inter-individualism of the *Critique*, Sartre saves Man from the solitude caused by the failure of all relationships; and secondly, by focusing on the social phenomenon of scarcity, he unwittingly intimates that conflict is contingent, for if scarcity, which is feasibly contingent in itself, could be abolished, then conflict, which is shown to arise through scarcity, must also be transcendable.¹³⁹ However, this new philosophy must be regarded as more of a contradiction than a positive development. The relationships which in *L'Etre et le Néant* were *proven* to culminate in failure have been salvaged by a phenomenon which is itself a contradiction:

Comment reconnaître à la matière le privilège d'engendrer la réciprocité des relations, alors que les pour-soi ne pouvaient l'assurer eux-mêmes, et que la matière assumée par les pour-soi semblait être la véritable consécration du divorce entre les pour-soi? N'y a-t-il pas contradiction à soutenir que la matière est le lieu privilégié de la rencontre des pour-soi, alors qu'elle nous

¹³⁶ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.492.

¹³⁷ *Het Individualiteitsconcept in Sartres Filosofie*, p.243.

¹³⁸ *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, I, p.212.

¹³⁹ For a fuller analysis of this reasoning, see Doubrovsky, J. S., 'J-P. Sartre et le mythe de la raison dialectique', *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 10, no.106 (1961), pp.687-98.

était apparue comme la source de la véritable aliénation?¹⁴⁰

This untenable position on solidarity is seemingly even parodied by Ionesco, whose torture scene in *La Soif et la Faim* can be regarded as an attack on the ethics of Sartre's *Critique*:

Frère Tarabas: à Brechtoll Malheureux! Vous ne croyez pas en Dieu!
Voilà pourquoi vous vous imaginez que les hommes sont
méchants. Voilà pourquoi vous inventez une solidarité
humaine improbable.¹⁴¹

Disregarding, then, the attempts of the *Critique*, the closest Sartre gets to transcending the failure of coexistence comes in the *Cahiers*, where we learn that sadism and masochism 'n'ont de sens – comme d'ailleurs la lutte des consciences – qu'avant la conversion. Si nous avons assumé le fait d'être liberté et objet pour autrui (ex.: le Juif authentique) il n'y a plus aucune raison ontologique de rester sur le plan de la lutte.'¹⁴² The conversion to pure reflection was discussed in relation to personal ethics and shown to represent a complex *conduite magique*, but in terms of *autrui*, it attempts to finally overcome the continuing problems of solipsism and conflict. Indeed, as Catalano reminds us, 'Sartre consistently maintains that we have an intimate bond with others in the sense that "each person needs the other in order to be human".'¹⁴³ If this is the case, how does this collective Humanism work?

In the *Cahiers* Sartre was shown to link Authenticity with the unveiling of Being, and in the realm of *autrui*, he extends this conception of Being to include the Other: 'Dans l'authenticité je choisis de dévoiler l'Autre. Je vais aussi créer les hommes dans le monde. [...] Ceci ne peut être [...] que sur le fondement de la reconnaissance de l'Autre comme liberté absolue.'¹⁴⁴ Thus the post-conversion project of creation becomes an authentic one which creates not only the existence of the Self, but, more importantly, the existence of the Other, which is then assumed as free. This project subsequently clears the way for successful relations with *autrui*: 'En ma liberté, elle [la finitude de l'autre] est à l'abri: je suis celui qui voit son dos et qui détournera de son dos le danger qu'il ne peut voir (ceci sans me détourner de mes fins propres – sinon ce serait sacrifice et négation de l'homme en moi).'¹⁴⁵ There is certainly an element of altruism here, and Sartre's appended qualification, though raising the question of directly opposing ends, does not obliterate the presumed contingency of 'détournera', for which '*peut détourner*' would be a welcome replacement. However, this is perhaps not as shocking as it may appear, given that earlier in the notes Sartre had explicitly spelled out the successful relationships of understanding, help, and even love.¹⁴⁶ Here we learn that 'la compréhension est une structure originelle de la perception de l'Autre' (p.289) and that 'l'appel est *générosité* [...], refus de considérer le conflit originel des libertés comme impossible à dépasser' (p.293). This '*générosité*' extends to an assumption of reciprocity, that the Other will actively seek 'la libre reconnaissance de sa liberté par une liberté' (p.294), and that 'par cette reconnaissance réciproque, nous faisons apparaître un certain type d'interpénétration des libertés qui pourrait bien être le règne humain' (p.302). As justification, Sartre gives the example of the man running for a bus, who stretches out his hand and receives mine as a '*moyen-liberté*' (p.299). At this

¹⁴⁰ Presseault, Jacques, *L'Etre-pour-Autrui dans la Philosophie de Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.210.

¹⁴¹ *Théâtre IV*, pp.149-50.

¹⁴² *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.26.

¹⁴³ *Good Faith and Other Essays*, p.20.

¹⁴⁴ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.515.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.523.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.285-306, responses to the '*appel*'.

moment, he maintains, the human relationship of help comes into being (or, rather, is unveiled as Being), and the man discovers my freedom in the heart of his very own.

Such optimism prefigures Sartre's subsequent discussions on ethics with Benny Lévy, where inter-penetrating consciousnesses are again on the agenda, but the notion of 'generosity' can surely not go uncontested. In 'refusing' to accept the internal negation of consciousnesses as inevitably conflictive and in 'assuming' reciprocity, 'generosity' is surely a project of Bad Faith which is grounded purely in idealism; and, as Simont argues, its relationship with Being (here *en-soi*) is also idealistic:

We can question intrinsically the meaning of 'generosity' [...]. It transforms being which is what it is into being-for and affixes to the indifference of the in-itself a kind of finality in the second degree. We should recall here the operation of the artist, "mystification": giving form to being in such a way as to make it point to an absent finality.¹⁴⁷

But Sartre continues in a similar vein, describing authentic love as a successful project combining the feeling of love ('sentir') and the pursuit of love ('vouloir') with the 'angoisse' that the love might cease. For this would assert our Freedom by providing a willed defence against the future, and thus constitute an authentic 'amour comme tension'.¹⁴⁸ However, Sartre had seemingly disabled this very project less than seventy pages earlier:

Pas d'amour sans reconnaissance plus profonde et compréhension réciproque des libertés (dimension qui manque dans l'EN). Cependant tenter de faire un amour qui dépasserait le stade sadico-masochiste du désir et de l'envoûtement, c'est faire disparaître l'amour, c'est-à-dire le sexuel comme type de dévoilement de l'humain.¹⁴⁹

The contradictions again abound, and Sartre is tying himself in philosophical knots, particularly on the question of 'dévoilement'.

Sartre's final attempt in the *Cahiers* to transcend the solipsism of his earlier work comes in the form of an ethic of leading by example: 'C'est la subjectivité concrète (le sujet isolé ou le groupe, le parti) qui doit faire le Bien en face des autres, pour les autres et en exigeant de la diversité des autres qu'ils le fassent aussi.' (p.575). The problems with this are manifest: the *nous*-subject has suddenly transformed into a singular concrete subjectivity; the ethical aim remains gratuitous, imposed, and absolutist; and the means of forcing compliance remains a deliberate mystery. But objections are superfluous, for the failure is willingly conceded:

Le Bien [...] est nécessairement la quête des subjectivités concrètes existant dans le monde au milieu d'autres subjectivités hostiles ou simplement diversement orientées. Non seulement il est mon idéal, mais c'est aussi mon idéal qu'il devienne l'idéal d'autrui. (p.576).

With this acceptance of double idealism, Sartre recognises once again that he has led us down an ethical blind alley.

The only remaining attempts to restore the viability of a collective Sartrean ethic merely replicate the unworkable solutions attempted with personal ethics. The first is the recourse to the Kantian Categorical Imperative, invoked in *L'Existentialisme est un*

¹⁴⁷ Simont, Juliette, 'Sartrean ethics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, pp.178-210, (p.193).

¹⁴⁸ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.493.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.430.

Humanisme to circumvent the problem of ethical freedom. The problems with this have been discussed, but the main objection here must be the obvious contradiction between the universality of the Kantian model and the situational aspect of Sartre's own ethics which provided his only real potential for solidarity. The second attempt lies in the 'radical conversion' of pure reflection which is said to lead to Authenticity. In the context of Being-for-Others, this depends on our own response to our objectification in the eyes of the Other,¹⁵⁰ and on living out this objectification to the full.¹⁵¹ The objection to this remains the lack of elucidation of Authenticity and the inherent contradiction of Sartre's terminology. As Howells remarks, even Sartre is aware of the futility of both attempts:

Sartre uses Genet both as a test-case for his view that conventional morality is alienating, and as a vehicle for the exploration of his interest in ethical inversion and paradox. In a sense, Sartre has pitted Genet against Kant in an attempt to reveal the inadequacies of both.¹⁵²

The only option left is thus to freely *assume* the failure, for as Sartre himself declares, 'L'échec peut conduire à la conversion.'¹⁵³ This is the option favoured by both Jeanson and de Beauvoir, and it is potentially a solution also to the central problem of Authenticity, for it encourages an acceptance of the *désagrégation intime*, thus providing an alternative to Bad Faith which is unaffected by Sincerity: Man's only Authentic choice is to transcend what is transcendable and to freely assume what is not.

Ionesco's attempts at securing a collective ethic are unsurprisingly multifarious. With Ionesco, too, there is direct contradiction with the previous demolition of human relationships, as love and friendship are invoked in a desperate attempt to find solace from the isolating pain of metaphysical Anguish: 'La seule petite consolation au grand malheur d'être né, c'est quand même l'amitié.'¹⁵⁴ Ionesco associates love with spirituality and grace, and the theme again links in with the craving for Paradise Lost. It was in his moments of euphoria that he transcended from the "I" to the consciousness of the "we", and if his euphoria could be sustained, it seems that authentic love could indeed be resurrected. Man's tragedy, perhaps, is that he has forgotten how to love, and that this is the true significance of the Second Fall. Ionesco's plays are filled with the tragedy of the loss of love, both in the context of society at large and within the nucleus of the sequestered couple, and the temptation is to believe that if only we knew how to love, we would be able to fly even higher than Bérenger and re-enter the true paradise, unlike the misguided Jean. Love and evanescence are as inseparable as violent hatred and gravitation or sinking, and the message of *La Soif et la Faim* is surely that the Absolute craved by the protagonist is the restoration of authentic love.

On a personal level too, Ionesco clearly associates love with the plenitude of Being, for he refers to his life-long partner as an 'île d'être entourée par le chaos du rien',¹⁵⁵ and goes on to declare his belief in the undeniable reality of love: 'Mon amour n'est pas irréel, l'amour n'est pas irréel. La vie de l'amour est d'une réalité irréfutable. Je suis certain, maintenant, que l'amour est éternellement irréfutable.'¹⁵⁶ Although again at odds with the pessimism of the earlier plays and journals, this re-found belief in love finds some consistency in later Ionescan thought. It is certainly evident in the later plays, where the increasing conflict actually necessitates a counterbalance in the form of

¹⁵⁰ See *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr* for Sartre's psychoanalytical exploration of the theme.

¹⁵¹ See *Réflexions sur la Question Juive* and earlier comments on Authenticity.

¹⁵² *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom*, p.44.

¹⁵³ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.42. See also Chapter Two, pp.96-97.

¹⁵⁴ *Un homme en question*, p.11.

¹⁵⁵ *La Quête Intermittente*, p.33.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.34.

love:

In the later plays of Ionesco the theme of love has assumed an increasing importance as the answer to what he has come to recognise as in many ways the most distressing cause of human misery: man's cruelty to his fellows, something which is not imposed upon mankind from without and the more terrifying for that.¹⁵⁷

Love is Ionesco's answer to Sartre's common action and pure reflection, and serves again to underline their very different forms of Humanism. The only authentic 'love' relationship to be found in Sartrean theatre is arguably that between Hugo and Hoederer, for Hugo's love, at least in retrospect, seems selfless, genuine, and even desperate:

J'aimais Hoederer, Olga. Je l'aimais plus que je n'ai aimé personne au monde. J'aimais le voir et l'entendre, j'aimais ses mains et son visage et, quand j'étais avec lui, tous mes orages s'apaisaient. Ce n'est pas mon crime qui me tue, c'est sa mort.¹⁵⁸

Hugo's grief reminds us of the relative inauthenticity of his relationship with Jessica, and it is surely no coincidence that the most authentic relationship is struck between two men, thus avoiding the inevitability of objectification and reinforcing the misogyny. Ionesco, on the other hand, does succeed in creating loving relationships, or at least loving interdependence, between members of the opposite sex: 'Pour [Ionesco] l'affection existe, bien qu'elle se détériore au fil des années. L'époux, ou l'épouse, est un être sur qui l'on peut s'appuyer, ou du moins avec qui l'on peut gémir.'¹⁵⁹ Although this deterioration from authentic love to affectionate companionship, encapsulated most effectively in *Les Chaises*, marks the general pattern of the Ionescan couple, there are occasions in Ionesco's theatre where love thrives in the face of adversity and where it actually blossoms with age:

La Vieille: J'ai bien appris l'amour, mon chéri. Je t'aime de plus en plus, chaque jour un peu plus. Tu es le seul que je ne comprenne pas, c'est pour cela que je t'aime avec une si grande douleur.¹⁶⁰

Apart from this most touching scene, the most genuine love is usually portrayed in the autobiographical triangular relationship of the father, mother, and daughter. *Le Piéton de l'Air* attests to the potency of this heartfelt mélange of paternal, maternal, and filial love, and it is taken up again in *La Soif et la Faim*, where it is realised all too late by the unfortunate protagonist:

Jean: à *Marthe et Marie-Madeleine* Attendez-moi, vous que j'aime par dessus tout. La tendresse que j'ai pour vous dépasse les cimes des montagnes.¹⁶¹

Thus Ionesco's ultimate focus on love is both romantic and spiritual, and highly un-Sartrean. Love is reinstated as a Humanist goal and value, and in a return to the theme

¹⁵⁷ North, R. J., *Eugène Ionesco: An inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Birmingham*, p.7.

¹⁵⁸ *Les Mains Sales*, p.234.

¹⁵⁹ Jacquart, Emmanuel C., *Le Théâtre de dérision*, p.121.

¹⁶⁰ *Jeux de Massacre, Théâtre V*, p.92.

¹⁶¹ *Théâtre IV*, p.170.

of the radiance of childhood, it is appropriately another young Marthe who teaches us that love is the answer to the problems of human conflict: 'Aime les gens. Si tu les aimes, ils ne seront plus des étrangers. Si tu n'en as pas peur, ils ne sont plus des monstres. Ils ont peur aussi, eux, dans leur carapace. Aime-les. Il n'y aura plus d'enfer.'¹⁶² Love is then for Ionesco both the sharp tool to pierce the shell of *autrui*, and the only means of exit from the Hell of coexistence.

The collective ethic that results from this new emphasis on love is a Humanist one which is characterised by treating Man as an end in himself and thus, for Ionesco, by pacifism: 'Toute vie doit être sauvée, toute vie est source de souffrance, mais aussi de joie et de contemplation.'¹⁶³ Ionesco respects the value of human life above the politics of, say, scarcity and alienation, and like Camus and Hilda above, his Humanism can be seen to be much more universal than Sartre's:

Je dois convaincre les hommes de ne plus se détester. En somme, s'il y avait l'amitié entre eux, sinon l'amour, tous les autres problèmes pourraient se résoudre facilement. Il y a déjà quelqu'un qui a voulu faire cela: c'est Dieu. Il a échoué. Il faudrait être plus fort que Dieu.¹⁶⁴

Ionesco's mission here is messianic, and in this respect highly uncharacteristic. But it clearly defines the challenges for his Humanism and invigorates fresh hope in the promise of solidarity. Even Ionesco's earlier plays testify to this collective ethic of Humanism, and in *Tueur sans gages* Bérenger's attempts to convince the Killer of his error, despite the fact that they culminate in failure, at least provide the basis for a Humanist code of morality:

Vous êtes un être humain, nous sommes de la même espèce, nous devons nous entendre, c'est notre devoir... au bout de quelques instants, je vous ai aimé, ou presque... car nous sommes frères..., et si je vous déteste je dois me détester moi-même... Ne riez pas: cela existe, la solidarité, la fraternité humaine, j'en suis convaincu, ne vous moquez pas...¹⁶⁵

The same ethic is expounded by Frère Tarabas in *La Soif et la Faim*, who points out the necessity of Humanism for a successful avoidance of solipsism and solitude:

Nous nous devons des services les uns aux autres. Nous sommes des humains. Nous avons des obligations les uns vis-à-vis des autres, à moins de préférer la cage de la solitude. Mais cela n'est pas un endroit confortable. Vous ne pouvez y tenir ni tout à fait debout, ni tout à fait assis.¹⁶⁶

Ionesco's final attempt at solidarity marks a return to his obsession with the Absurd. Following Heidegger, Ionesco creates a 'fraternity of Anguish' which resembles the Heideggerian notion of Care, based on a perception of the human condition as 'being fated to a self and to a world of other selves and objects about which one cannot choose not to be concerned'.¹⁶⁷ For Ionesco, though, the Anguish is metaphysical, and in solidarity lies the key to a better, if admittedly not Edenic, passage through the turbulence of life:

¹⁶² *Le Piéton de l'Air*, Théâtre III, p.181.

¹⁶³ *Antidotes*, p.18.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.185.

¹⁶⁵ *Théâtre II*, p.166.

¹⁶⁶ *Théâtre IV*, p.164.

¹⁶⁷ See Stephen Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Heidegger and 'Being and Time'*, p.112.

Une fraternité fondée sur la métaphysique est plus sûre qu'une fraternité ou une camaraderie fondées sur la politique. [...] C'est le sentiment de l'étonnement et de l'émerveillement face au monde que nous contemplons, lié au sentiment que tout est, en même temps, souffrance, c'est cela qui peut constituer la base fondamentale d'une fraternité et d'un humanisme métaphysique. L'enfer c'est les autres, est la formule célèbre d'un écrivain et philosophe contemporain. Les autres c'est nous-mêmes, peut-on répondre. Si nous ne pouvons faire un paradis de notre vie commune, nous pouvons en faire un passage moins désagréable, moins épineux.¹⁶⁸

The contrasts with Sartrean Humanism are directly apparent, and in invoking the idea of collective suffering, Ionesco seeks an outlet from the previous failure of any successful coexistence. Ionesco's early protest at the astonishing cruelty of the human condition becomes collective in the world of Being-for-Others, and it seems that his characters are *forced* into mutual understanding by the common condition which unites them:

Qu'ils le veuillent ou non, les hommes comprennent tous les autres hommes: la faim, la soif, la mort, l'amour, la haine, l'angoisse, la peur, l'avarice, l'envie et la jalousie, la curiosité, le désir de posséder ou de se retirer, le besoin de Dieu, tout se comprend, des uns par les autres.¹⁶⁹

La souffrance d'un seul être est la souffrance de tous les êtres.¹⁷⁰

Of all these sufferings and causes of Anguish the most significant for Ionesco is of course the outrage of mortality, for it is the fear and reality of death above all else that ultimately forms the true community of Man. Philosophically speaking, Ionesco's insistence on a universal human nature provides the strongest basis for fraternity and a collective human ethic. The theme is explored in *L'Impromptu de l'Alma* by the character of Ionesco himself:

Comme je ne suis pas seul au monde, comme chacun de nous, au plus profond de son être, est en même temps tous les autres, mes rêves, mes désirs, mes angoisses, mes obsessions ne m'appartiennent pas en propre; cela fait partie d'un héritage ancestral, un très ancien dépôt, constituant le domaine de toute l'humanité. C'est, par-delà leur diversité extérieure, ce qui réunit les hommes et constitue notre profonde communauté, le langage universel.¹⁷¹

Man's inevitable coexistence in the world is described here as a shared experience of universality, and the basis for a Humanist ethic thus seems complete. But a basis is all that it transpires to be, for it is neither consistently upheld nor clearly defined.

As with Sartre, then, Ionesco's attempts at establishing a collective ethic can only be regarded as intermittent and contradictory. His desire to unite rather than sequester humanity can be seen to be dependent on his mood, and the whole issue of coexistence is ultimately at the mercy of the Ionescan *désagrégation intime*: when feeling euphoric, the emphasis is on fraternity; when sinking into despair, coexistence is irreparably doomed.

¹⁶⁸ *Antidotes*, pp.325-26.

¹⁶⁹ *La Quête Intermittente*, p.30.

¹⁷⁰ *Le Blanc et le Noir*, p.17.

¹⁷¹ *Théâtre II*, p.57.

Although both dramatists certainly have the will to determine a collective Humanist ethic, both can be seen to fail through blatant self-contradiction. Later Ionescan thought does reveal a persistent pursuit of peaceful coexistence in advocating the value of love, but even the later plays are dominated by a cycle of brutality and a violent apathy which, like that of the Tueur (sans gages), laughs in the face of Humanism and triumphs. In Sartre's attempts to secure a workable morality for the masses, the same problems are encountered as with personal ethics: any attempt to install an Existentialist ethic conflicts with personal freedom and falls prey to the trap of Seriousness. Neither playwright finds an answer to the problem of ethical judgement, for in the absence of God, the role of moral arbiter lies vacant. Indeed the only potential judge transpires to be the crab, who judges both Sartre's Frantz and Ionesco's Joséphine, and with the re-emergence of the crab, we appear to have come full circle.

For both Sartre and Ionesco, the philosophy of *nous* crumbles inexorably into nothingness. The acknowledgements of Ionesco's Vieux to 'la solidarité universelle de tous les hommes'¹⁷² prove to be as empty as his room; and Sartre's Lucie reaches the same conclusion as Ionesco – that coexistence is all very well, but it is annihilated by the irreducible fact that she will face her death alone: 'Notre vie, oui. Notre avenir. Je vivais dans l'attente, je t'aimais dans l'attente. [...] Je n'ai plus d'avenir, je n'attends plus que ma mort et je mourrai seule.'¹⁷³ Even the ontology of Sartre's *nous*-subject is shown to culminate in failure, and with the condemnation of this emotional Bad Faith comes a final rejection of *Mitsein*:

L'expérience du nous-sujet est un pur événement psychologique et subjectif en une conscience singulière [...] qui n'apparaît pas sur le fondement d'une relation ontologique concrète avec les autres et qui ne réalise aucun 'mitsein'.¹⁷⁴

The *nous*-object must also be rejected, for in the absence of God, the only permanent *tiers*, the collective's objectivity can only possibly be transient and situational. Even solidarity, then, is doomed, for the *Pour-soi* is alienated as a stranger among *autrui*, and the Humanist ethic remains elusive:

Celui qui s'éprouve comme constituant un *Nous* avec les autres hommes se sent englué parmi une infinité d'existences étrangères, il est aliéné radicalement et sans recours. [...] Ce 'nous' humaniste demeure un concept vide, une pure indication d'une extension possible de l'usage ordinaire du nous.¹⁷⁵

The possible morality of utilitarianism explored in the realm of personal ethics – the greatest freedom for the greatest number – is also condemned by Sartre, since even the attempt to 'respect the Other's freedom', invoked also in the post-conversion project of creation, fails for the same reasons as love, and the opposite morality of indifference is reconfirmed as a definite impasse:

Le respect de la liberté d'autrui est un vain mot: si même nous pouvions projeter de respecter cette liberté, chaque attitude que nous prendrions vis-à-vis de l'autre serait un viol de cette liberté que nous prétendions respecter. L'attitude extrême qui se donnerait comme totale indifférence en face de

¹⁷² *Les Chaises, Théâtre I*, p.176.

¹⁷³ *Morts sans Sépulture, Théâtre I*, p.246.

¹⁷⁴ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.497.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.491 and p.495.

l'autre n'est pas non plus une solution: nous sommes déjà jetés dans le monde en face de l'autre, notre surgissement est libre limitation de sa liberté et rien, pas même le suicide, ne peut modifier cette situation originelle.¹⁷⁶

Ethics and successful Humanistic coexistence prove then to be illusory and elusive for both Ionesco and Sartre, and in the final analysis, any attempt at securing them can only be regarded as a flight from the Absurd, from the failure of all relationships.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp.480-81.

iv) Solitude and Isolation

The failure of indifference and the ontological impossibility of the ideal fusions of *en-soi-pour-soi* and *pour-soi-pour-autrui* leave the Self in the Absurd position of being forced to live out an impossible coexistence with others. The world of Being-for-Others can be seen to merely compound the Anguish of *pour-soi*, which is fated in isolation never to catch up with itself,¹⁷⁷ and doomed in the collective to a ceaseless oscillation between the subject and the object of the Other:

Ainsi sommes-nous renvoyés indéfiniment de l'Autre-objet à l'Autre-sujet et réciproquement; la course ne s'arrête jamais et c'est cette course, avec ses inversions brusques de direction, qui constitue notre relation à Autrui.¹⁷⁸

Sartre's definition of Man as a 'passion inutile' seems particularly apt in the light of the revelations of the futile nature of attempts at coexistence. The tension or precarious balance which seems to characterise the relationship between the Self and the Other is also a feature of Ionesco thought, which acknowledges the necessary impossibility of life in the collective:

Chaque moi affirme et nie le groupe. Chaque moi est social-antisocial.¹⁷⁹

Il faut être moitié tout le monde, c'est-à-dire, un peu tout le monde, moitié les autres, moitié soi-même. Le 'tout le monde' c'est le 'on' impersonnel, c'est le vide. Il faut être personnel. Moi, c'est ce qui s'oppose aux autres, les autres sont ceux qui s'opposent à moi. C'est cette opposition, cet équilibre qui constitue le personnel.¹⁸⁰

Ionesco's definition of 'the personal' is fascinating here, for it is reminiscent of Jeanson and de Beauvoir's answer to the problems of coexistence, assuming, rather than negating or transcending, the failure and the tension, and linking once again with the *désagrégation intime*. However, on the stage, the tension is assumed again as Hell, and Bérenger's protest at the Absurd contradiction reinforces the terrible problems which inevitably arise in the presence of the Other: 'Lorsqu'il n'y a pas un accord total entre moi du dedans et moi du dehors c'est la catastrophe, la contradiction universelle, la cassure.'¹⁸¹ He could just as easily be the mouthpiece for Sartrean thought: 'Ces deux tentatives que je suis sont opposées. Chacune d'elles est la mort de l'autre, c'est-à-dire que l'échec de l'une motive l'adoption de l'autre.'¹⁸² Again one is reminded of the polar ambiguity of *pour-soi*'s facticity and transcendence, an ambiguity which dominates the ethical and which is merely replicated in *l'être-pour-autrui*.

This permanent state of ambiguity, tension, and oscillation which is conveyed most powerfully in the theatre of both thinkers ceases only in death, the phenomenon which obsesses Ionesco and which marks the gratuitous cessation of Sartre's temporality and nothingness. If the Self has been revealed as a victim at the mercy of *autrui*, then the phenomenon of death must represent not only the extinction of personal existence, but the victorious and inescapable triumph of the Other:

¹⁷⁷ See *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.253.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p.479.

¹⁷⁹ *Journal en miettes*, p.254.

¹⁸⁰ *Présent passé, Passé présent*, p.61.

¹⁸¹ *Tueur sans gages, Théâtre II*, p.73.

¹⁸² *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.430.

La mort, en tant qu'elle peut se révéler à moi [...] n'est pas seulement le projet qui détruit tout les projets et qui se détruit lui-même, l'impossible destruction de mes attentes: elle est le triomphe du point de vue d'autrui sur le point de vue *que je suis* sur moi-même.¹⁸³

In this context, *Huis Clos* is an exemplary *pièce à thèse*, for its dead characters are finally fixed in their essence, and the objectifying gaze of their two fellows is therefore all the more judgmental. As Garcin remarks, their Anguish is not even restricted to the claustrophobic Hell which they inhabit, for their essence, their past, and its significance lie also in the hands of their acquaintances on Earth: 'Ils ne m'oublient pas, eux. Ils mourront, mais d'autres viendront, qui prendront la consigne: je leur ai laissé ma vie entre les mains.'¹⁸⁴ Garcin's *jeux sont faits*, and he can do nothing but observe as others tear him apart in their judgements: 'Etre mort, c'est être en proie aux vivants.'¹⁸⁵

Again there is a replication between the modes of *pour-soi* and *pour-autrui*, for if death is the final victory of *en-soi* in terms of the individual consciousness, in the realm of Being-for-Others, it marks the victory of the pole of facticity. Because transcendence extinguishes with the death of the consciousness, the Self becomes fixed, which is ironically and absurdly the state it craves during its lifetime. Thus Authenticity, like Sincerity and Good Faith, comes into play with the phenomenon of death, for judgements can finally be made on a finite number of projects and a complete course of action. In Bad Faith, of course, this judgement is precipitated, as *pour-soi* submits in advance to the objectification of *autrui*: 'La caractéristique d'une vie morte, c'est que c'est une vie dont l'Autre se fait le gardien.'¹⁸⁶ For Ionesco, too, death is doubly Absurd: for the puppet, it is the ultimate senseless outrage of metaphysics; and in the social world of coexistence, its paroxysmal proliferation in the later plays merely reinforces its futility, showing clearly that murder profits nobody, that it fails.

Aware of the tension brought into the world by the existence of the Other and the inevitable victory of *autrui* effected by the Absurdity of human mortality, the Self is naturally disposed to seek refuge in the form of flight. As the Ionescan puppet is in any case inclined towards solitude and sequestration, its modes of flight are the same whether fleeing *coexistence* or *existence* itself. Thus the puppet escapes from the Other through levitation, *enlissement*, metamorphosis, regression, alcohol, suicide, and the unconscious. The failure of these has been discussed, but the recent comments on death bring a fresh futility to the project of suicide; and metamorphosis, say, into a rhinoceros has particular poignancy in the context of Being-for-Others, since the uniformity of the thick skin provides the character inside with an effective barrier from the threat of the *regard*. The most interesting development of the flight tendency, though, is the aspect of humour, which is used consistently by Ionesco's characters – especially by Béranger – to counteract the inevitability of future conflict. For Sartre, who is primarily concerned with the agent engaged in the concrete situation, flight is condemned both for *pour-soi* and *pour-autrui*. However, the *conduites magiques* uncovered in the doomed attempts of *pour-soi* to flee from *autrui* are occasionally quite different from those of *distraction* – the attempt of *pour-soi* to flee its own consciousness. They involve blinking (hence the suppression of blinking in *Huis Clos*), Ionescan-style sequestration behind doors, walls, and objects (like that of Frantz, and Pierre in *Le Mur*), madness, fainting, and suicide. But the *conduite* absent from the ontology of *L'Etre et le Néant* but very evident in the plays is that of action: given that action has been shown to be superfluous

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp.624-25.

¹⁸⁴ *Huis Clos*, p.82.

¹⁸⁵ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.628.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.626.

and futile (for all acts are equivalent), then a project of action such as Goetz's at the end of *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* can only be interpreted as another means of flight from the reality of Being-for-Others – in this case, from Hilda.

A common form of flight for both Ionesco and Sartre is the Heideggerian flight into the crowd (*Menge*). This contradictory flight *from* people *into* people is of course Heidegger's hallmark of Inauthenticity. It is another obsession of Ionesco, who is fascinated by the plight of the authentic individual pitted against the inauthentic collective explored so well in his *Rhinocéros*. But it is not exclusively an Ionescan theme, for the oppressive classes of Sartrean theory and theatre, such as the torturers of *Morts sans Sépulture* and the white bourgeoisie of *La Putain Respectueuse*, are equally condemned for the inauthenticity of their existence. The crowd, however, provides little solace, and perhaps the most distressing aspect of both dramatists' philosophy of Being-for-Others is that characters are lonely especially in company:

Il y a la solitude en commun. C'est celle-là qui est mauvaise. La vraie solitude est moins isolement que recueillement.¹⁸⁷

Ionesco's characters may be isolated and lonely in a metaphysical sense, but they are by no means the tramps and outsiders of Beckett and Adamov, and this, in some sense, increases the despair and the absurdity of their isolation – they are lonely in spite of being members of what ought to be an organic community.¹⁸⁸

Ionesco thus makes a distinction between isolation and sequestered contemplation, declaring that true (Authentic) solitude is discovered in the latter. But it seems that generally, his characters are prey to the former, lonely in their drawing rooms, in their marriages, and even in their dreams. Indeed the wonder is that they choose to stay together: couples like the generic Lui and Elle may tear each other apart, both verbally and physically, but they appear to prefer their *délire à deux* to total isolation. Invariably, then, Ionesco's creations are together alone, yearning for communal happiness, but finding nothing but collective isolation.

Sartre's stage characters are equally lonely within the crowd. Although united in a common project, characters such as Hilda and Nasty, and Olga and Hoederer are isolated by their ethical convictions; although of common blood, Electre and Oreste, and Frantz and Le Père fight like total strangers. The occasional attempt, like that of Lizzie, to join and win the favour of the crowd also culminates in failure, effecting merely an increased sense of isolation. Even Sartre's heroes, rather than leading the united masses, tend to operate alone or even disappear completely:

La plupart des héros sartriens se heurtent à l'impossibilité de communiquer avec autrui, à ce mur invisible qui les prive de tout contact immédiat avec les êtres et les choses. Oreste est seul (il ne parvient pas à entraîner Electre dans sa libération), Garcin est seul, irrémédiablement seuls Lucie, Frantz, Goetz.¹⁸⁹

If any common ground can be established on the issue of Authenticity between Ionesco and Sartre, then it is surely in the link between Authenticity and individualism. If most of Sartre's heroes find themselves alone, then so does Ionesco's Everyman, kneeling at the mercy of the Killer, protecting himself from the rhinoceroses, and

¹⁸⁷ Ionesco interviewed in Claude Bonnefoy, *Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco*, p.135.

¹⁸⁸ Esslin, Martin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p.198.

¹⁸⁹ Boros, Marie-Denise, *Un Séquestré: L'Homme Sartrien*, p.179.

crawling back onto his throne to face the fate of death. According to Sartre, it is only in isolation that *pour-soi* is in complete control of its own destiny: 'Avec le regard d'autrui, la 'situation' m'échappe ou, pour user d'une expression banale, mais qui rend bien notre pensée: je ne suis plus maître de la situation.'¹⁹⁰ It is of course the Existentialist goal to be the master of one's own situation, and if *autrui* poses a threat to this goal, then the first step to Authenticity must lie in solitude. The picture of Authenticity which is built up in *Réflexions sur la Question Juive* is also based on individualism. Sartre suggests here that the Authentic Jew is the one who lives out his condition to the full, in defiance of the Other, and in a revolt so self assured that it will terminate only in martyrdom; and Inauthenticity, by contrast, is characterised by the negative attributes of flight, distraction, and adherence to the crowd. Again, Sartre's adulation of Genet springs to mind, as does Goetz's powerful conclusion to *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*: 'Je resterai seul avec ce ciel vide au-dessus de ma tête, puisque je n'ai pas d'autre manière d'être avec tous. Il y a cette guerre à faire et je la ferai' (p.242). The fate awaiting him is surely one of lonely martyrdom.

The close connections with Heideggerian Authenticity cannot be overstated. We have seen, in relation to Ionesco's fraternity of Anguish, that 'anxiety individualizes',¹⁹¹ and Anguish is thus one means of overcoming Inauthenticity through the 'recuperation of self-putrefied Being' invoked by Sartre in *L'Etre et le Néant*. For Heidegger too, Authenticity is linked with solitude, and Inauthenticity with the 'lostness' of *Mitsein*:

If Dasein is always thrown into a world whose roles and categories are structured in inherently impersonal ways, in which idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity predominate, then absorption in the they-self will be its *default position*. It may then be able to find itself, but only by recovering itself from an original lostness. In this sense, authenticity always involves overcoming inauthenticity.¹⁹²

Heidegger is a common source of influence for Sartre and Ionesco's thinking on Authenticity, and Ionesco's plays provide a powerful demonstration of both the ethical and ontological virtues of solitude. Ionesco is particularly unequivocal in his love and defence of solitude: 'Les gens [...] ont un besoin profond de solitude. Ce dont souffre le monde moderne, c'est de l'absence de solitude.'¹⁹³ Indeed this absence of solitude is shown to culminate in violence, brutality, and war, which define the Authentic Man as the outsider, the contemplator, and the gentle pacifist; and with the victory of violent conflict over love and sensibility, the collective ethic is replaced by solitude, inertia, and despair:

Quand l'amour, la bonté, la générosité, la sensibilité, l'amitié, la morale et la religion ont été écrasés sous les roues des canons de la guerre et ont disparu, à quoi sert d'être écrivain engagé ou de ne pas l'être, à quoi bon parler de l'amour et de l'amitié?¹⁹⁴

Authenticity is thus the absent goal of *Being-for-Others* and collective ethics, and with its final downfall in the realm of the Other comes a severe threat to Humanism and an inevitable return to solipsism.

¹⁹⁰ *L'Etre et le Néant*, p.323.

¹⁹¹ Heidegger, M., *Being and Time*, 40: 235. See Stephen Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Heidegger and 'Being and Time'*, p.110.

¹⁹² Mulhall, Stephen, *ibid.*, p.108.

¹⁹³ Ionesco interviewed in Claude Bonnefoy, *Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco*, p.135.

¹⁹⁴ Kamyabi Mask, Ahmed, *Ionesco et son théâtre*, p.46.

In *L'Etre et le Néant*, Sartre defines ontological solipsism as 'se débarrasser entièrement du concept de l'autre et prouver qu'il est inutile à la constitution de mon expérience' (p.284). It goes without saying that neither Sartre nor Ionesco is guilty of ontological solipsism. However, Fretz's analysis of Sartre's concept of the individual in the same work leaves the philosopher guilty of egoism, metaphysical solipsism, and epistemological solipsism,¹⁹⁵ and in the light of Sartre's ontology of relationships and of his failure to construct a viable collective ethic, it seems difficult to contest this condemnation. The links between the modes of *pour-soi* and *pour-autrui* have been consistently apparent, and both transpire to be equally doomed, for if in the former Man is condemned to be free, and thus devoid of personality, Authenticity, and justified ethics, in the latter he is condemned to be alone, and the consequences are exactly the same. The futile Absurdity of this reveals salvation in *autrui* as just another dangling carrot:

Comme la conscience est définie en termes de manque, néant, détotalisation, les relations entre les pour-soi apparaissent sur leur mode propre d'être et se voient condamnés à chercher les consciences sans jamais les atteindre.¹⁹⁶

It was certainly more of a utopian desire than an expressed intention of Ionesco to overcome the problem of solipsism. Thus the critique of Tynan, the champion of Sartre and Brecht, is doubly ironic: 'Le danger qui menace M. Ionesco est de s'enfermer dans cette galerie des glaces, connue, en philosophie, sous le nom de solipsisme.'¹⁹⁷ Ionesco is certainly well aware exactly what solipsism is, for it is a response to coexistence which dominates his journals and explodes with all his Anguish onto his stage. Ionesco's response to Tynan makes his position unequivocally clear: 'In his last bout with Tynan, Ionesco parrots his "bête noire", Jean-Paul Sartre, to prove his point: *C'est un enfer le social, un enfer les autres*.'¹⁹⁸ The irony is completed with Ionesco's inspired use of Sartre as a weapon of attack against his defender, and again, it underlines the convergence between the two thinkers, this time on the theme of solipsism. It has been said that the Hell described by Sartre is dramatised by Ionesco, and when Hell becomes solipsism, it is not only conveyed by literality (as in *Le Nouveau Locataire*) and by the absent communication of silence (as in *La Cantatrice*), but verbally articulated by the victims themselves. Thus when Daisy informs Bérenger that 'la vie en commun n'est plus possible',¹⁹⁹ this is reasoned by Joséphine in a play written three years later: 'Je suis abandonnée, j'ai peur, tellement peur. Je suis égarée. Errante... On ne me connaît pas, on ne m'aime pas, je ne suis rien pour les autres. Je ne compte pas pour eux. Je ne compte pas pour eux.'²⁰⁰ Joséphine's perception of her social and metaphysical orphanage marks her as a victim of the solipsism of *autrui*, and it foreshadows its inversion which is established in *Le Solitaire*:

J'étais le seul à être. A mesure que les autres passaient et s'éclipsaient, je me sentais unique dans ce tourbillon qui ne pouvait être réel. Le réel devenait une sorte d'espace vide que je remplissais. Une dilatation euphorique du moi, et plus il me semblait que 'tout cela' n'existait qu'à peine, plus cela me confirmait dans ma certitude d'être. (p.60).

¹⁹⁵ *Het Individualiteitsconcept in Sartres Filosofie*, p.250.

¹⁹⁶ Presseault, Jacques, *L'Etre-pour-Autrui dans la Philosophie de Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.9.

¹⁹⁷ See *Notes et contre-notes*, p.145.

¹⁹⁸ Jacquart, Emmanuel C., 'Ionesco's Political Interplay', in *The Dream and the Play: Ionesco's Theatrical Quest*, ed. Mosche Lazar, p.67. The reference is to *Notes et contre-notes*, p.159.

¹⁹⁹ *Rhinocéros, Théâtre III*, p.114.

²⁰⁰ *Le Piéton de l'Air, Théâtre III*, p.181.

The novel's title merely reinforces the theme, and its solitary protagonist is dicing not only with ontological solipsism, but also with complete indifference.

At the end of their philosophical journeys, then, the Sartrean agent and the Ionescan puppet have reached a destination identical to the one from which they sprang: they have come full circle, via different routes, through an elaborate labyrinth of vicious circles. Both have returned to the ontological or metaphysical sequestration which they encountered with their perception of the Absurd, and Absurdity becomes the final cruel victor. The Anguish suffered by both the agent and the puppet in isolation is merely compounded in their forced coexistence, as life is transposed from the solitude of philosophy to the rat race portrayed on the stage:

Georges: La vie, c'est une panique dans un théâtre en feu. Tout le monde cherche la sortie, personne ne la trouve, tout le monde cogne sur tout le monde.²⁰¹

The metaphor is particularly effective, conveying not only the pain of being abandoned together alone, but also the aptitude of the genre of theatre to elucidate the philosophy of life.

The final conclusion of both Sartre and Ionesco seems to be that there is ultimately no escape from the Absurdity of the human condition, that *autrui* provides nothing but an unwelcome distraction from the Self's desire to *be*:

Le désir d'être, qui est en effet la structure la plus fondamentale du pour-soi, se traduit nécessairement, sur le plan du pour-autrui, en conflit: on ne cherche pas à être en-soi-pour-autrui, mais en-soi-pour-soi.²⁰²

La dramaturgie de Ionesco n'a comme préoccupation que de rendre sensible l'impossibilité absolue de compter sur l'autre pour échapper aux contraintes primordiales de l'existence.²⁰³

In the light of the resounding failure to construct a collective ethic and of the renewed failure of Authenticity, the Humanist ideal aimed at by the dramatists must be severely challenged. If their philosophies of Humanism succeed at all, it is only on the level of individualism, and ideally in sequestration, and even then they are characterised by insufficiency and contradiction. Both Sartrean and Ionescan Humanism prove ultimately to be closer to an elusive Buddhist Nirvana than to either committed collective action, or universal and fraternal Angst. But the revelation of the very presence and existence of the Other as contingent, pre-ontological, and Absurd perhaps anticipated this inevitable doom. The perception of life as a futile and isolated path towards death, staged to varying extents by both playwrights, is voiced with great poignancy by Sartre's Sibilot: 'Ma vie n'a été qu'un long enterrement, personne ne suivait le cortège.'²⁰⁴ The words could just as easily have been voiced by Ionesco's Roi, and they condemn the agent and the puppet alike to the desperate plight of Camus's Sisyphus, to their initial departure point of the Absurd.

²⁰¹ Nekrassov, p.29.

²⁰² Royle, Peter, *Sartre: L'Enfer et la Liberté*, p.138.

²⁰³ Vernois, Paul, *La Dynamique théâtrale d'Eugène Ionesco*, p.266.

²⁰⁴ Nekrassov, p.109.

CONCLUSION

The aims of this chapter were ambitious: they included the potential of uncovering a solution to the problems encountered in individual Being, the hope of rescuing the ethical from the threat of solipsism, while simultaneously avoiding simplistic recourse to God, and the desire to find a workable definition for Authenticity in the world of the collective. The ultimate ambition was to redefine Humanism in the light of successful coexistence and to assess the Humanist legacy left by Sartre and Ionesco.

The contrapuntal methodology has succeeded in its aim of underlining the vast similarities in the two very different dramatists' philosophies of Being-for-Others, in terms of outlook, themes, and even terminology. However, notable differences have also emerged, namely in regard to the inevitability of collectivism: whereas Sartre draws on the collective for political gain and equality of freedom, Ionesco invokes a universal collectivism to establish a fraternity of Anguish and revolt, and to keep alive the prospect of partnership and even love. Where Sartre seeks revolutionary solidarity, Ionesco dreams of pacifistic communion.

On the whole, though, the philosophical convergence between Sartre and Ionesco, the agent and the puppet, is astoundingly strong in this new mode of Being. The thinkers are united in their perception of the distance between the Self and the Other, of the gratuitous Absurdity of the Other's very presence, of the theatrical symbolism of *autrui*, of the unavoidable failure and conflict of all relationships, and of the inevitability of violence and war. Both betray an inherent disgust for women and are inclined to objectify her as nothing but a role; both embroil themselves in a vain attempt to secure a collective ethic; both dramatise the temptation of flight as a reaction to awareness of the Other; and both uncover an elaborate vicious circle within which the Self is trapped in a permanent tension with *autrui*, isolated within society and the home, and condemned to ontological, metaphysical, or physical sequestration: both the agent and the puppet are together alone – 'l'unité avec autrui demeure irréalisable. Nous demeurons seuls, ensemble.'²⁰⁵ There appears to be no outlet from this vicious circle which characterises the life-cycle of both dramatists' stage characters, and the warning is given early in Ionescan theatre:

Bartholoméus I:	C'est un cercle vicieux.
Ionesco:	Le cercle vicieux peut aussi avoir ses vertus!
Bartholoméus I:	A condition de s'en tirer à temps!
Ionesco:	Ah, oui, ça, oui... à condition de s'en tirer.
[...]	
Bartholoméus II:	On ne s'en tire du cercle vicieux qu'en s'y enfermant. Ainsi, n'allez pas ouvrir la porte, le cercle vicieux se refermerait davantage... sur vous. ²⁰⁶

Sequestration seems to be the only valid option, and with the privileged emphasis which both men place on solitude comes the indubitable failure of their hopes for collective Humanism.

The only valid conclusion to be drawn is that for both Sartre and Ionesco, Humanism and its ideal of Authenticity can only succeed, if at all, as an individualist ideology or nirvana. The legacy left behind is then ambiguous: if Humanism is to be

²⁰⁵ Presseault, Jacques, *L'Etre-pour-Autrui dans la Philosophie de Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.228.

²⁰⁶ *L'Impromptu de l'Alma, Théâtre II*, p.18.

redefined as a purely individualistic ideology, then not only is its potential vastly limited, but the prospects for a valid ethics look irreparably doomed. The Humanistic and ethical processes of both the agent and the puppet have been nothing but an elaborate flight, or, in Sartrean terms, the ultimate *conduite magique*, from the reality of the Absurd. Man's only options, apart from sequestration, are to assume or choose the Absurdity of his failed condition, to 'continue' (like Garcin), to strive (like Bérenger and Goetz), or to laugh, along with the Tueur. If the French *concierge* is an acknowledged source of wisdom, then it is fitting to leave the final words to La Concierge of Ionesco, who reduces the findings of Ionesco and Sartre to two most humble sentences: C'est mauvais de vivre tout seul. C'est encore pire que de vivre à deux ou à plusieurs.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ *Ce formidable bordel!*, p.175.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Before drawing any definitive conclusions from this extensive comparative study, it may well be advisable to restate briefly the original aims and aspirations of the thesis. The most central of these was of course to compare and contrast the efforts of Sartre's Existentialism and Ionesco's Absurdism to throw light on the human condition through a thorough examination of both philosophers' plays. The initial aspiration, presumably shared by the dramatists themselves, was to uncover some meaning to human life and so to determine the best way to live it.

Other stated aims included the ambition to effect a greater understanding of Sartrean and Ionescan Humanism, the desire to contribute to the topical debate on Sartrean ethics, the necessity to refocus attention on the underlying philosophy of Ionesco's plays, and the determination to explore the common ground on Ionesco and Sartre's philosophies of Being-for-Others. The final task projected for the thesis was to assess the combined achievements of both dramatists in relation to existential and Humanist philosophy, and the ultimate aspiration was less to provide an answer to metaphysical questions on the meaning of life than to reinvigorate critical reception of Sartre and Ionesco, and to incite further comparative analysis, which would inevitably hasten the rapprochement of the genres of philosophy and art.

What, then, has the thesis achieved? First of all, it has clarified the generally misunderstood or even unacknowledged relationship between Sartrean Existentialism and Ionescan Absurdism. By focusing on the dramatists' plays and philosophies, it has traced the ethical journeys of Sartre's agent and Ionesco's puppet, and placed the spotlight on the human subject and condition. It has been shown that Sartre's Existentialism and Ionesco's Absurdism share the same origins – namely in their common prerequisite of perception of the Absurd – and that Sartrean philosophy takes Man full circle, via Freedom, Engagement, ethics, heroism, and Authenticity, back to the Absurd, its original point of departure. Sartre concluded at the end of *L'Être et le Néant* that Man was a useless passion, and he has been shown to have engaged himself in an elaborate and self-refuting *conduite magique* in a vain attempt to flee from the Absurd. In this respect, it can be concluded that Ionescan Absurdism is the more authentic philosophy, remaining true to its origins and consistently Absurd.

Secondly, it has outlined the origins, nature, and significance of Ionescan and Sartrean Humanism. The most basic philosophical link between Sartre and Ionesco, and thus the underlying inspiration for a comparison of the two, is their almost obsessive preoccupation with the fate of the human subject, who is placed by both back in the centre of his universe, and granted dramatic and ethical primacy. Nevertheless, two very different conceptions of Humanism have been uncovered: where Sartre's Humanism is secular, Ionesco's is religious; while Sartre views Man as a means to an end, Ionesco regards him as an end in himself; whereas Sartrean Humanism is defined and coherent, Ionescan Humanism is ill-defined, eclectic, and ambiguous. But both the Existentialist and the Absurdist place their faith in the Humanist ideal of Authenticity, and both focus first and foremost on precisely what it means to be human.

The conclusions they reach have been discussed, but now is the time to draw them all together. The motifs of the agent and puppet were evoked to convey the philosophical polemic that exists between Ionesco and Sartre on the fundamental question of human freedom. Inevitably, Sartre's agent emerged as 'condemned to be free', and the Ionescan puppet as a victim controlled by forces beyond his own control. But, fascinatingly, this diametric opposition resulted in philosophical accord and in a common human fate: the human subject was characterised by both as desperately in

need of an ethical code but abandoned by any objective moral arbiter, and as desperately craving loving coexistence but condemned to a life of role-play and isolation.

The final main achievement of the thesis concerns its very choice of subject, for it has shown beyond all reasonable doubt that a comparative analysis of Sartre and Ionesco was not only long overdue, but inherently valid. Its technique of 'confrontation analysis' has uncovered both thought-provoking differences in outlook and consistent philosophical convergence, particularly in the area of Being-for-Others, which has hopefully cleared the way for subsequent comparative study. The inter-disciplinary approach, combining philosophy with theatre, has demonstrated not only that the common separation of the genres is misguided, formalistic, and arbitrary, but that theatre is exceedingly apt in its elucidation of the philosophy of life.

But there are three questions remaining: What exactly are the legacies of Ionescan and Sartrean Humanism? Is there a future or possible salvation for the Humanist ideal of Authenticity? And if indeed we are back where we started, doomed to an Absurd life and an inevitable death, what can be gleaned about our potential options?

The legacies of Ionescan and Sartrean Humanism can only be said to be mixed. The collective Humanism explored in Chapter Four must certainly be acknowledged as a failure, for it produced neither a collective ethic nor even a means of successful coexistence. It condemned its human subjects to live together alone, yearning for love and fraternity, but faced with the reality of isolation. But as individualistic ideologies, both conceptions of Humanism achieved a certain degree of success. Sartrean Humanism succeeded in replacing God with an inspired and inspiring reinvention of Man, who usurps the divine role to become the creator of his own essence. This human agent was depicted as free and autonomous, active and responsible, and he was charged with the social duty to improve his world both for himself and for his fellows. Ionescan Humanism thrived in its universal focus on humanness, which it explored in all its aspects – strong and weak, lofty and debased. It remained on the whole true to its own values, maintaining a consistent tone of protest, acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of ethics, and betraying no elaborate attempt at self-deception or even a false salvation. Its anti-hero emerged as an archetypal Everyman with whom all could readily identify and who, if in spite of himself, emerged as a defender of Man and of the human.

However, even as philosophies of individualism, the failures of both Humanisms are readily apparent. By insisting on the absolute totality of human Freedom, Sartre deprives his Humanism of a personalised subject, for his agent is a 'nothingness', devoid of Self and therefore of any valid code of ethics. Another repercussion of the elevation of Freedom is to render ethics and ontology fundamentally incompatible, which leads Sartre to fall into his own trap by imposing Freedom as an ethical, not just ontological, Value. The end result of this is that Freedom must be pursued at all costs, leaving Man a pawn in an ethical game and deprived of inherent value. The failure of Ionesco's Humanism lies in its shambolic lack of coherence. The Ionescan Humanist is unsure and self-contradictory: if he acts or resists, it is instinctively, not reflectively, and wherever remotely possible, he seeks to escape from all that is human. As Humanists, Ionesco's puppets commit the ultimate sin of craving the divinity of a Lost Paradise over a better human world. Such is the legacy left by Ionescan and Sartrean Humanism, and the challenge for the next generation of Humanist thinkers is to build on their remarkable successes and to strive to overcome their deeply inherent failures.

The future of the Humanist ideal of Authenticity is thus exceedingly doubtful. The failure of Sartrean Authenticity on both the individual and collective level was again an inevitable repercussion of his ontology of Freedom. It was unelaborated by Sartre, plagued with self-contradiction and even mysticism, and surely subject to the same condemnation as its forerunning concept of Sincerity. *Pour-soi* can only ever be anything in death, and this ontological restriction must certainly apply to the state of

‘being Authentic’. The prospects of salvation for Sartrean Authenticity apparently lie in two areas. Firstly, if as a concept it can only come to life in the past, then it could in theory be successfully applied in retrospect, when the *Pour-soi* is dead and nothing but the sum of its choices. The problem with this is of course the lack of objective criteria, and the only solution to this lies in the notion of ‘coherence’ uncovered in discussion on Sartrean ethics, which would ally the concept with the idea of ‘integrity’. Secondly, the solution proposed by Jeanson and de Beauvoir to interpret Authenticity as ‘free assumption’ of the *désagrégation intime* and of ethical ambiguity succeeds in providing an alternative to Bad Faith while avoiding the traps of Sincerity and Seriousness. This is surely the most successful interpretation of Sartre’s Authenticity and ‘pure reflection’, and it is to be hoped that future progress on this elusive area of Sartrean philosophy can eventually be made in this direction. Another critical alternative would be to place the primary focus on later Sartrean thought, based, for example, on the concept of alienation uncovered in the *Critique* and applied to a socio-political reading of the plays. Such an approach lay beyond the scope of the present thesis, but the potential of comparative links between social and metaphysical alienation is a fascinating one, and one which could well lead to very different conclusions.

The fate of Ionescan Authenticity is somewhat different. In terms of coherence with its related theory, it is certainly more successful than its Sartrean counterpart, for it consistently upholds the dreamer, the universal, and the vanished sense of wonder as the desirable criteria for an Authentic state of being. According to Ionescan thought, there is also a Self, an essence, and even a ‘humanness’ to which one can aim to remain true. The compatibility between Ionescan and Heideggerian Authenticity is also encouraging: in the collective environment of Being-for-Others, there is convergence on the concept of Angst, which individualises, and on the Inauthenticity of Idle Talk, Curiosity, and Ambiguity of the *Menge*, which leaves the individual again in conflict with *autrui*. But again, the concept is ill-elaborated and wavering in Ionescan theatre and philosophy, and, like Sartre’s, it is exclusively individualistic. It does indeed show potential as a individualist ideal, but in leaving Man irreparably isolated, it threatens the very roots of Humanism and heralds a potential return to solipsism.

Again, the only hope of escape for Authenticity from this unfortunate impasse lies in further, comprehensive research on the precise history, tradition, philosophy, and application of the concept, from its introduction to the present day. The influences of Renaissance philosophy and theatre, and Kierkegaardian and Heideggerian thought, appear to be particularly strong, and the application of the concept on the post-war French stage – in the theatre of not just Sartre and Ionesco, but of Camus, Beckett, and Genet – is undeniably among the most rich. It seems then that a certain success will be assured in the comparative analysis of these particular domains.

The final question remaining surrounds the ‘remnants’ of the dramatists’ philosophies: What, precisely, are we left with? Whatever we are left with, answers to our remaining questions will presumably not be found in theatre, for another conclusion shared by the two men is that dramatic art, at least for them, has reached its limit: both *Voyages chez les Morts* and *Les Troyennes* testify to a frustrated and pessimistic sense of finitude, borne out by Ionesco’s ultimate decision to express the Absurd in painting. However, both men’s words have profoundly revealed the Absurdity of the human condition, and Sartre’s no less than Ionesco’s:

L’homme est l’être qui a à être pour donner un sens à l’Être. Il ne donne pas ce sens à un témoin; il ne manifeste l’Être à aucun Dieu: il le manifeste à soi. Mais c’est qu’il est – sans le vouloir, sans le choisir – par son simple surgissement l’être qui fait que l’Être pourrait bien n’avoir aucun sens. [...] L’homme est donc l’être qui, en se mettant en question dans son être, met en

question pour lui le sens de l'Être.¹

The final tone can only be one of pessimism, for both dramatists have left Man deprived of a God, of a moral example and arbiter, and yet strangely 'conditioned' to a life of futility, from which any escape is nothing but illusion. The Self is left in the Absurd position of being forced to live out an impossible coexistence with others, which merely compounds its Anguish, and its metaphysical questions remain unanswered because the Absolutes it desires are either absent, unattainable, or both. Indeed as Marie reminds her Roi, these unanswered questions are perhaps Man's only Truth:

L'impossibilité de répondre est la réponse même, elle est ton être même qui éclate, qui se répand. Plonge dans l'étonnement et la stupéfaction sans limites, ainsi tu peux être sans limites, ainsi tu peux être infiniment. Sois étonné, sois ébloui, tout est étrange, indéfinissable.²

Like the Roi, Man is condemned to a death without salvation – a death which marks the victory of Sartre's *en-soi* and facticity, Ionesco's proliferating matter, and the final and ultimate victory of the Absurd itself. The situation is desperate for those who are brave enough to see it: 'However we regard the prisoner of the existential, we are bound to admit his tenacity and his ingenuity. Existential consciousness is like a straightjacket; it is, quite simply, "insufferable".'³

The one problem thus persisting is how to suffer existential consciousness, and it is a problem acknowledged by Bell in her analysis of Sartre:

Sartre places all human beings in the frustrating position of Sisyphus. We are haunted by the 'value', by the desire to be God, by the need to achieve community; yet inevitably our efforts fail as we try to coincide with our values, with ourselves and with others. Because of the kind of being we are, an unbridgeable gap remains. The problem of futility is how to live with this realization.⁴

Her succinct gloss could equally apply to Ionesco, for both men leave the human being in this existential vacuum. They do, however, point towards various existential options. The first of these is suicide, but this project has been shown to fail by both Sartre and Ionesco, and must thus be disregarded. A second option is to 'strive' in the direction of our choice, following the philosophy of Fichte's *Streben*. Sartre's comments in *Réflexions sur la Question Juive* linked Authenticity with living out our condition to the full, and if Sartrean theatre interprets striving in the light of socio-political improvement, Ionescan theatre puts its energies into re-finding Man's lost sense of wonder and grace. Another alternative lies in the 'free assumption' of the human condition mentioned earlier in regard to Authenticity. If Man accepts the polar ambiguity of the *désagrégation intime*, then the only workable solution is to transcend what is transcendable and to freely assume what is not:

Il y a un type originel d'attachement à l'être qui n'est pas la relation: vouloir être, mais bien: vouloir dévoiler l'être. Or, ici il n'y a pas échec, mais au contraire succès: cette fin que l'homme se propose en se faisant manque d'être, elle se réalise en effet par lui... C'est à dire que, dans sa vaine

¹ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.464.

² *Le Roi se meurt, Théâtre IV*, p.41.

³ Dobrez, L. A. C., *The Existential and its Exits*, p.374.

⁴ *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity*, p.109.

tentative pour *être* Dieu, l'homme se fait *exister* comme homme, et s'il se satisfait de cette existence, il coïncide exactement avec soi. Il ne lui est pas permis d'exister sans tendre vers cet être qu'il ne sera jamais: mais il lui est possible de vouloir cette tension même avec l'échec qu'elle comporte. Son être est manque d'être, mais il y a une manière d'être ce manque qui est précisément l'existence.⁵

This is presumably what Sartre meant by his cryptic 'l'échec peut conduire à la conversion',⁶ and it succeeds in assuming the Absurd while clearing the way for a revisionist exploration of both Humanism and Authenticity. It is also reminiscent of Heidegger's appeal to finally refocus the Humanist debate, and of Jaspers's linking of failure and the being of transcendence.⁷

But the most tempting alternative must be to laugh in the face of Absurdity and to enter into the cosmic joke along with Ionesco, Beckett, and even God: 'Il m'est plus facile de croire que Dieu est, plutôt que de croire qu'il n'est pas. Cet univers et nous, qui en faisons partie, serait donc [...] une farce énorme. Soyons-en les comédiens et entrons dans le jeu de Dieu.'⁸ Humour is paradoxically a serious option, for as Ionesco himself points out, it combines an existential consciousness of the Absurd with a refusal to try and transcend it: 'L'humour, c'est prendre conscience de l'absurdité tout en continuant à vivre dans l'absurdité.'⁹ We have then an alternative to pessimism, inaction, and despair, for this fundamental concept of humour can be seen to provide an exit from the surrounding impasses of the Absurd. Sartre too leaves us with a residual sense of hope, reminding us clearly that all is not yet lost:

Dans la vie la plus misérable
il reste au moins l'espoir.¹⁰

Both the agent and the puppet are far from being condemned.

⁵ Beauvoir, Simone de, *Pour une Morale de l'Ambiguïté*, pp.18-19.

⁶ *Cahiers pour une Morale*, p.42.

⁷ See Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, where Jaspers is cited on p.51: 'L'échec ne montre-t-il pas, au-delà de toute explication et de toute interprétation possible, non le néant mais l'être de la transcendance?'

⁸ *Un homme en question*, p.194.

⁹ Ionesco interviewed in Claude Bonnefoy, *Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco*, p.152.

¹⁰ *Les Troyennes*, p.69.

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