



MODERN EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY  
AND THE WORK OF  
BECKETT, IONESCO, GENET AND PINTER

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PART III

GENET'S SOLITUDE

CHAPTER 11GENET : SOLITUDE AND THE SARTREAN LOOK

La solitude, comme je l'entends, ne signifie pas condition misérable mais plutôt royauté secrète, incommunicabilité profonde mais connaissance plus ou moins obscure d'une inattaquable singularité.<sup>1</sup>

Genet.

Giacometti's portrait of Genet represents a head shrinking back from the observer and from itself, straining back and upwards into the space of the picture so that the effect is both concentrated presence and flight. It is a portrait of a skull emerging into focus even as the flesh recedes, as if the representation were turning itself inside out, the whole in constant state of movement and yet locked tight in an unbearable tension. Comparable to it and to other paintings by Giacometti are the well-known sculptures with their small, elongated heads. The artist has explained that during the war years his figures became minute in size even to the point of disappearing at the last stroke of the knife. Clearly, as in the case of the skull-like portraits, the guiding principle is one of merciless reduction:

On songe donc avec nostalgie à un univers où l'homme, au lieu d'agir aussi furieusement sur l'apparence visible, se serait employé à s'en défaire, non seulement à refuser toute action sur elle, mais à se dénuder assez pour découvrir ce lieu secret, en nous-même, à partir de quoi eut été possible une aventure humaine toute différente.

L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti, p. 9.

This is Genet himself commenting on Giacometti's work and offering at the same time a valuable comment on his own. Just as the Duthuit interview is of primary importance to an understanding of Beckett and Notes et Contre-Notes a necessary adjunct to Ionesco's plays, so L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti (The Workshop of Alberto Giacometti, 1958) provides one with a simple and direct entry into the world of Jean Genet. Genet dreams of a universe where man, instead of concentrating on the surfaces of things, will lay bare that secret place within himself and reveal possibilities of an altogether different life. Giacometti's work speaks of just such a revelation. His statues seem to have passed through a terrible fire which has devoured all but the core, "elles sortent d'un four, résidus d'une cuisson terrible" (p. 30). The Platonic echo is emphatic: "découvrir ce qui restera de l'homme quand les faux-semblants seront enlevés" (p. 10). As Genet sees it, Giacometti wishes to uncover, to remove the inessential, to reach the heart of things. If he could, he would do it to himself, he would reduce himself to elemental dust (p. 52).

Concisely stated, the aim is as follows:

Il n'est pas à la beauté d'autre origine  
que la blessure, singulière, différente pour  
chacun ... que tout homme garde en soi, qu'il  
présERVE et où il se retire quand il veut quitter  
le monde pour une solitude temporaire mais  
profonde ... L'art de Giacometti me semble  
vouloir découvrir cette blessure secrète ....

pp. 10-11.

The important words are "wound" and "solitude." At the heart of man is the true source of beauty, a secret wound, a point of utter solitude. Giacometti's art seizes this presence, "la solitude de chaque être et de chaque chose" which is man's glory, "notre gloire la



plus sûre" (p.19) and in uncovering it opens up to us the timeless world of the dead (p. 13). Genet elaborates. When I examine the beauty of a face I isolate it from its surroundings and see it in its particularity. In a work of art this process is initiated by the artist who in effect depicts not continuity but the discontinuous:

C'est donc la solitude de la personne ou de l'objet représentés qui nous est restituée, et nous, qui regardons, pour la percevoir ... devons avoir une expérience de l'espace non de sa continuité, mais discontinuité.

p. 20.

It is difficult not to be reminded of Beckett's object "perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family" and so "a source of enchantment." We have reached a point where man is returned to what is irreducible within himself, "ce point précieux où l'être humain serait ramené à ce qu'il a de plus irréductible: sa solitude ..." (pp. 23-24). Solitude is singularity, the autonomy or separateness of a given thing or, let us say, its integrity in a sense not unlike the Scholastic integritas spoken of by Stephen Dedalus. At the same time it encompasses something more, approaching Stephen's claritas or essence, the radiance of a thing which manifests what it is or rather, as Genet suggests, the fact that in being itself a thing totally excludes all that is not itself:

La solitude, comme je l'entends, ne signifie pas condition misérable mais plutôt royauté secrète, incommunicabilité profonde mais connaissance plus ou moins obscure d'une inattaquable singularité.

Solitude, conceived in this way, has nothing of the wretched about it. It is a secret stamp of royalty. With this definition in mind we can understand Giacometti's statement to Genet. One day, he says, he saw

a napkin resting on a chair and suddenly felt its solitude, its absence of weight so that it hardly seemed to touch the chair. Had the chair been removed the napkin would have remained suspended:

Un jour ... je regardais une serviette posée sur une chaise, alors j'ai vraiment eu l'impression que, non seulement chaque objet était seul, mais qu'il avait un poids - ou une absence de poids plutôt - qui l'empêchait de peser sur l'autre. La serviette était seule, tellement seule que j'avais l'impression de pouvoir enlever la chaise sans que la serviette change de place. Elle avait sa propre place, son propre poids, et jusqu'à son propre silence.

pp. 30-31.

The napkin is itself and only itself in its place, weight and silence. Thus it is alone. The point is that Giacometti reveals this inalienable solitude in all his work, taking off layers of appearance until the object is left in all the rigour of its simplicity, its mere presence. Furthermore, such nakedness manifests the glory of the object, however mean or insignificant. With Giacometti at a café Genet meets a half-blind, idiotic Arab. The creature has no wife, he masturbates himself. And yet Genet knows that Giacometti believes the Arab to retain a quality which makes him the equal of all men and more precious than the rest of the world:

Je sais qu'il sait comme moi que ce misérable conserve ... ce point qui le fait identique à tous et plus précieux que le reste du monde: ce qui subsiste quand il s'est reculé en lui-même ... comme lorsque la mer se retire et abandonne le rivage.

p. 50.

Giacometti's statues, Genet adds, are like this. They have left the shore and withdrawn to the secret place in which each man is more valuable than all else, "à cet endroit secret" (p. 50).

Solitude is certainly not to be identified with personality. It is a numinous identity hidden beneath the surface of the personal since, like Beckett and Ionesco, Genet's interests are metaphysical rather than psychological. The question arises: how does one attain solitude? Obviously one must undergo the same purifying fire which has consumed the statues of Giacometti.

This process is described minutely in Le Funambule (The Tightrope Walker), published in the same year as the reflections on Giacometti. The tightrope walker is his own work of art, escaping himself and seeking himself like the Genet of the portrait, "et toujours dans cette solitude mortelle et blanche" (p. 194). Indeed he is nothing other than solitude (p. 182) and, as in L'Atelier, to become solitude is to become one's secret wound, a wound which cannot heal because it is oneself:

C'est dans cette blessure - inguérissable  
puisque'elle est lui-même - et dans cette  
solitude qu'il doit se précipiter, c'est là  
qu'il pourra découvrir la force, l'audace et  
l'adresse nécessaires à son art.

p. 182.

One does not reach oneself except through a rigorous process of asceticism, even a mutilation. Thus the tightrope walker lives not for himself but for his wire, for the moment when an admiring audience will say: what an astonishing wire!

Ton fil de fer charge-le de la plus belle  
expression non de toi, mais de lui ... non pour  
ta gloire mais la sienne.

Que le public émerveillé l'applaudisse:  
- Quel fil étonnant!

p. 177.

Or, again, he lives in order to incarnate an image of himself, of his deepest being, that is, of solitude. This is not egotism. Rather it is death (pp.179-180). The artist is a dead man, dead to self, emptied of frivolity. It is not he but the image or perhaps the wire which dances (p. 180): "Celui qui dansera sera mort ... C'est alors que ta précision sera parfaite" (pp. 180-181). Only in a perfect medium, one dead to self, can beauty be manifest. Giacometti's art is great because the artist obliterates himself. So also the artist on the wire, himself his own work of beauty, must become abject - that is the practical meaning of his dying - in order to be possessed by art alone. He must be a transparency, offering no resistance to the light which shines through him. The principle is that of the prophet-saint, unworthy medium of divinity, and, the more unworthy, the better medium, the greater God's glory. To be an artist is to die in order to attain a higher level of being, a life-in-the-Other. It requires other-worldliness, a rejection of all comfort, indeed, a veritable contempt for society. One must smell so foully as to frighten off the world:

Pour acquérir cette solitude absolue ...  
il écarte tout curieux, tout ami, toute  
sollicitation qui tâcheraient d'incliner son  
oeuvre vers le monde ... autour de lui il  
lâche une odeur si nauséabonde, si noire qu'il  
s'y trouve ... à demi-asphyxié lui-même par  
elle. On le fuit. Il est seul.

p. 187.

Genet will go so far as to advise the artist to limp, to cover himself in rags and lice, to stink, since the greater his abjection, the brighter shines the image of solitude, an image inhabited by a

dead man:

J'irais même jusqu'à lui conseiller de boîter,  
de se couvrir de guenilles, de poux, et de puer.  
Que sa personne se réduise de plus en plus pour  
laisser scintiller ... cette image ... qu'un mort  
habite. Qu'il n'existe enfin que dans son apparition.

p. 184.

At the heart of Genet's ideal is a perpetual tension. The artist on the wire dies not once but many times or rather maintains himself at every moment in an excruciating, and so beautiful, equilibrium of living and dying, like Bernini's St. Teresa, pierced by the seraph's dart. Genet addresses him excitedly as a creature on fire:

... toi qui brûles, qui dure quelques minutes.  
Tu brûles. Sur ton fil tu es la foudre ... un  
danseur solitaire. Allumée je ne sais par quoi  
qui t'éclaire, te consume, c'est une misère  
terrible qui te fait danser.

p. 195.

Genet concludes: "Bande, et fais bander" (p. 196). Rigidity, tautness is the essence of the tightrope walker's art, of his glory, its symbol being the wire itself or the erect penis, a sign of austere nobility and poise. Thus: "Ton corps aura la vigueur arrogante d'un sexe congestionné, irrité" (pp. 191-192).

To summarize. Giacometti has uncovered the place of solitude where every given thing is itself, singular, god-like, and has revealed it in the meanest of objects. The tightrope walker, a secular ascetic, sets out to incarnate solitude, to become alone and god-like by a systematic obliteration of his everyday self. In abjection, a spiritual death, he shines or rather offers no impediment to the light

which shines through him. This is what it means to be a work of beauty, to exercise that perfect control transcending mere human effort which for Genet is best exemplified by the rigidity of the penis, combining as it does power and the ardour of sexual desire.

We may ask why Genet chooses such a term as "wound" to describe the uniqueness of the individual. The fact is that the arduous search for solitude does not begin as a search or an ascesis. It begins as a flight. To reach into one's own depths is glorious in the rich sense of the French gloire because it means the attainment of divine beauty. Yet the artist is first driven to solitude, wounded by his fellow men, as Genet clearly suggests. Solitude is a place of sorrow, a reality due to the pressure of the Other. Only subsequently does it become a place of safety and a refuge from the Other:

Je me demande où réside ... la blessure secrète  
où tout homme court se réfugier si l'on attente à  
son orgueil, quand on le blesse? Cette blessure ...  
c'est elle qu'il va gonfler, emplir. Tout homme  
sait la rejoindre, au point de devenir cette  
blessure elle-même, une sorte de coeur secret et  
douloureux.

Le Funambule, p. 181.

The paradox implicit in this passage summarizes the pattern of Genet's vision. Genet's simple, constant aim in all his work is to represent a search and an escape or, better, an escape which by its nature becomes a search. The Other wounds me and I escape to the refuge of solitude. But, as it happens, solitude is found to be also something objectively desirable, a positive. Thus escape becomes ascesis, a willed progress to a predetermined goal. I begin to desire the wound which leads to solitude, I wrench myself from my everyday self which is my life with others so that my wound, original cause of my escape, becomes the goal of my pilgrimage, a sign of separateness from other

men and so of my deepest self. At this point solitude, the wound, one's uniqueness are all one and the same, the wound is self-inflicted, not simply through masochism - although, as we shall see, masochism plays an important part in the Genet ascesis - but through openness to divine election, willingness to be consumed in glory. Thus solitude is a curse which turns into a blessing. Genet's wounds are holy, like those in the poems of John of the Cross, and, like those of Crashaw's Teresa, they metamorphose into precious stones:

All thy sorrows here shall shine,  
 All thy SVFFRINGS be diuine.  
 TEARES shall take comfort, & turn gemms  
 and WRONGS repent to Diademms.

A Teresian ecstatic, raised far above the ground and, in this case, far above the crowd, the tightrope walker escapes the Other to discover his singularity in beauty, power and death.

If we look more closely at the nature of the wound which is inflicted in Genet's world we can see why the ascesis of solitude begins as an escape from society. In the Barrio Chino district of Barcelona Genet is invited to a table of French officers. A middle-aged lady is with the group and, smiling, she addresses a question to him:

- Vous aimez les hommes?
- Oui, madame.
- Et ... à quel moment ça a commencé?<sup>2</sup>

Genet instantly represses his sense of humiliation, since there is nothing he can do. A comparable experience occurs when he attempts a bold entry in woman's dress. Acutely sensitive to possible slight, he wears his trousers under the skirt. A moment later the material is torn by a clumsy young man who apologizes with a touch of irony and,

amid the laughter of observers, Genet can only whisper a mild "faites attention" (Journal, p. 72). In that is compressed enough anger and shame for a tragic stage. Nothing happens, though. As in the other incident, emotion is turned inwards and contained. Genet leaves and, as he puts it, drowns the dress in the sea nearby. His revenge would be comic if it were not so brutal. The fact that these examples relate to Genet himself is beside the point, of course. We are concerned not with biography but with the world of Genet's fiction and it happens that much of Genet's work is to a certain extent autobiographical. Examples from the novels and plays, some relating to fictional creations, substantiate the above pattern. The Genet character is wounded by other men, subjected to humiliation and suffering. As stiff in his sense of honour as a character of Corneille, he is open to continual affronts upon his dignity. Inevitably, emotion is disguised, intensified by being driven inwards. This represents an escape before a foe one is too weak to face directly. At the same time, however, the inward movement reveals new riches and opens new possibilities for fulfilment: we are now in the world of the tightrope walker. The rest of this thesis on Jean Genet will trace this pattern more closely as it is suggested in the novels and plays, but we may already state that the basis of the desire for solitude in Genet's work is society's treatment of the individual. A more positive ascesis to solitude and self-respect comes after. The full truth of these statements will emerge as we proceed, however.

Some, though not all, of the most important points to be elaborated in these chapters are not new. From a biographical point of view they have been treated in Sartre's study, Saint Genet, comédien et martyr. One may disagree with aspects of this work, even reject completely its philosophic assumptions, the assumptions of L'Etre et le Néant. It remains notwithstanding vastly superior to anything else in the field and obviously relevant to the present thesis. Sartre has interpreted Genet's development as man and artist in terms of the philosophy of the pour soi. My aim is to concentrate on Genet's work,



on the whole regardless of biography, in terms of Sartrean thought. In so doing I shall not be unduly concerned to stress the relevance of Saint Genet to a study of Genet's work, but shall try to relate Genet's novels and plays to Sartre's thought in general. It must be evident even at the start that one cannot expect Heidegger to loom very large in these chapters. Genet's characteristic approach resembles Sartre's rather than that of any other existential philosopher, although, as we shall see, there is a point where a comparison with Heidegger is vital. With Camus there is no significant parallel. Despite Esslin's valiant attempts to annex Genet's plays to the Absurd - and I shall return to this subject - the comparison with Camus, while it may well serve some purpose in a more general survey, is useless to anyone proposing a detailed analysis of Genet.

Sartre's study, published in 1952, does not cover Genet's most important plays, an examination of which will take up the greater part of these chapters. At the same time one of its most central arguments must be made the basis of the present thesis, although, as explained above, this thesis is not primarily concerned with the man Genet. Sartre's point is as simple as it is perceptive: Genet has been a victim of le regard, the Look.

In Sartre's philosophy man, as consciousness, is pour soi, a void, utterly unlike anything that is, the en soi. To be nothing at all is to be free, a subject or centre of outward-going activity, above all, a power of negating. We recall that the pour soi observes a table and in that act of consciousness constitutes the table as an object, as something that is, in short, being, en soi. By the same token it constitutes itself as nothingness, pour soi: I am conscious of the table, so I am not the table, I negate it. The table stands as passive object to my free subjectivity. No other activity than this is possible for consciousness, since nothingness cannot do anything positive; it can only say: I am not this, not that, and so forth. This activity is also at the basis of human relations, of course. I,

John, am conscious of Peter. Consequently I constitute myself as negative, pour soi, and Peter as positive, en soi. I, as subject, have objectified Peter. At this moment, insofar as he is gazed at, Peter is an object. If Peter has the initiative and gazes first at me, I am aware of my being objectified by my feeling of helplessness. It seems as if my world has a drain-hole in the middle of its being, through which it flows away: "... il semble qu'il est percé d'un trou de vidage, au milieu de son être, et qu'il s'écoule perpétuellement par ce trou."<sup>3</sup> My freedom seems to escape me on all sides. The Other appears to me for the first time as the one responsible for my being objectified, for the loss of my freedom which I feel as an internal flow or a hemorrhage, as the one

qui détermine un écoulement interne de l'univers,  
une hémorragie interne; il est le sujet qui se  
découvre à moi dans cette fuite de moi-même vers  
l'objectivation.<sup>4</sup>

Sartre's classical example is the ontology of Shame. I am peeping through a keyhole, pure activity, subjectivity, consciousness, that is, pour soi, nothingness. Suddenly I am discovered and instantly I am acutely self-aware, a something, an object to myself and to the Other who watches me, in short, I feel shame. To be a victim of the objectifying Look is to be enslaved, to be placed in a situation of danger in which one's subjective consciousness slips away and comes under the control of another. As pour soi I am free precisely because I am nothing at all. As object in the Look of the Other I am vulnerable because, en soi, I acquire an outside, something which gives the world a hold on me. For example, I become predictable, I become John who does such and such or has such and such a character. Of course as subject I am always free to change and, strictly speaking, have no character. As object, that is, in the eyes of Peter, I am more or less fixed as, for example, timid or bold, intelligent or stupid. But I can never be bold or timid or anything else to myself

since to myself I am nothing, pure outward-going consciousness of - something other than myself. Thus insofar as I am forced to accept a nature or label or character I am forced to see myself as Peter sees me. I am forced to be other to myself. Sartre calls this an alienation, my original Fall, "ma chute originelle."<sup>5</sup> Of course its effect is felt at all times, even when I am alone, since the Other's gaze, once experienced, stamps me for ever. It follows that under these circumstances human relationships can only exist as conflict. Either I objectify the Other or he objectifies me. There can be no mitsein. Either I am subject or object, no middle way is possible since to unite John and Peter in what Heidegger calls being-with implies a union of subject and object and for Sartre these are as incompatible as pour soi and en soi. We are left with the master-slave relationship, analysed in an earlier section of this thesis, as the one possibility.

In Saint Genet the author convincingly analyses the psychology of Jean Genet in the above terms, although these are at no time overtly stated. Genet is haunted by a childhood incident which made him a hoodlum and throughout his life returns to it as if it were the basis of a liturgical drama: "Voici l'argument de ce drame liturgique: un enfant meurt de honte, surgit à sa place un voyou; le voyou sera hanté par l'enfant."<sup>6</sup> Shame, in this context, recalls the situation of "being looked at." To die, of course, is to be fixed as an object. Genet's drama is therefore that of one who has died of shame, who is made object by the Look and struggles to react. The subject in this case is the Other in the widest sense, society. Sartre's analysis is fascinating enough to warrant retelling. It begins with an examination of Genet's childhood. Genet is an orphan, ward of the state, on loan to a family of peasants. He is from the first aware that his origins are suspect, that, without his knowledge, society has already fixed him with its gaze. As he explains in the Journal du Voleur (The Thief's Journal, 1949) at the age of twenty-one he

obtained his birth certificate, discovered his mother's name, his father's anonymity and the address of his place of birth, 22 rue d'Assas. It was simply a maternity hospital (p. 46). Sartre comments. Each time that Genet moves to discover his origins he comes up against a gesture of refusal. From birth he has been rejected, first, by the mother to whom he is not son but a form of excrement, later, by the whole of society:

Chaque fois ... que l'enfant veut remonter ...  
jusqu'à ses origines ... il trouve que sa naissance  
coïncide avec un geste de refus ... Plus tard,  
c'est la société entière qui le rejettera de son  
sein mais ce refus social est en germe dans le  
refus maternel ... il n'est pas le fils de cette  
femme: il en est l'excrément.<sup>7</sup>

Thus from the first Genet has no sense of freedom, of subjectivity. Rather he is aware of himself as powerless before the Other. He plays at pilfering to make up for his spiritual and material poverty. Of course he is not "stealing," but he is caught in the act, "pris la main dans le sac"<sup>8</sup> and from that moment his identity is inescapably objective: he is a thief. The Other catches him stealing, fixes him in that act by the Look and gives him a positive being for life: "Genet apprend ce qu'il est objectivement. C'est ce passage que va décider de sa vie entière."<sup>9</sup> The Other's logic is unassailable. He who steals is a thief. Nothing can prevent the transition from pour soi to en soi. Sartre stresses that Genet's undoing is that he is still a child. Had he been older he might have managed to counter the Other's view of him. As it is he has complete trust in the adult world. If they say he is a thief then he believes it and if they say that theft is evil then he believes that he is evil. This is the extent of his alienation from himself. Not only does the Other objectify him and steal his freedom but he continues to do so, forcing Genet into a future of further theft. The Look is installed within Genet's own mind so that he becomes his

own accuser, an Other to himself. Thus on the one hand Genet becomes a criminal because the power of the Other, who insists that he is as it were eternally a criminal, is too much to resist. On the other, he accepts the law he breaks, he loves his accusers and is the first to take their part and to condemn his own acts. Quite simply, his trouble is that he has been named, reduced to a passive object: "Son aventure, c'est d'avoir été nommé: il en est résulté une métamorphose radicale de sa personne ...."<sup>10</sup> The Look transforms. As Sartre sees it, whatever Genet does from this point can only lead him, as in fact it does, to the reformatory and, finally, to prison. Freedom and futurity are synonymous in existential philosophy and Genet has lost both.

Sartre's analysis resembles pirandellismo and the fact is worth mentioning because it is true that insofar as Genet's work is amenable to Sartrean interpretation it is also comparable to Pirandello's. This is not sufficiently stressed by Genet critics, although some - notably Robert Brustein - have made the comparison.<sup>11</sup> The unknown girl of Come tu mi vuoi (As You Desire Me), Mrs. Ponzia of Così è (se vi pare) (Right you are (if you think so)), both victims of a Look which makes them what they are, are willing to assume identities perhaps not their own. In varying contexts, a great many of Pirandello's characters find themselves in this situation. As in Sartre, to be someone (as in Quando si è qualcuno, When you are Someone) is to be fixed, to die in the sense in which a work of art is dead. One has only to think of Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore or a lesser play like Diana e la Tuda (Diana and Tuda) and to substitute for the pour soi-en soi dualism the Pirandellian antithesis of Life and the Mask. I shall return to these comparisons in relation to Genet's work later in this thesis.

Sartre's conclusions in Saint Genet are, as I have said, not simply literary ones. I want to make use of them in an exclusively literary context, since what I have termed Genet's desire to escape

the Other and to find refuge and fulfilment in solitude may be discussed entirely in terms of Genet's work.

The theme of objectification is especially evident in Les Bonnes (The Maids, 1947) and in the plays following it. Genet, however, goes beyond a mere presentation of human relationships in terms of the Look and seeks to probe the reason for social objectification. His answer is a variation of Blake's "without Contraries is no progression." To "prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion" Genet adds "so maids and mistresses, blacks and their white masters, criminals and law-abiding men depend upon each other for existence." The phenomenon is analysed by Sartre in Saint Genet in terms of "projection" and it follows from the assumptions of L'Être et le Néant. No man is good or evil ( or anything else ) since man is nothing. In order to be, to be good for example, I must first invent an evil man. For this purpose I will project all that I fear or dislike upon another. This enables me to objectify or reify evil, to localize it in another who is the object of my Look. By a process of negation I am now able to regard myself as good. The other man is evil; I am not that man; it follows that I am good. Of course the conclusion is in bad faith, because it overlooks my freedom just as the rest of the process overlooks the freedom of the other man. It is a case of one illusion propping up another. Nevertheless it is effective and it enables me to regard myself as honest because there are thieves, white because there are blacks and so forth. Clearly society, viewed in this way, cannot do without its underworld, whether this be the world of servants or criminals or racial inferiors. In Les Bonnes the relationship is sketched from the start. On the one hand is the darkness, the world of the servant about which respectable folk know little, "notre nuit à nous,"<sup>12</sup> as Solange puts it, degradation and despair. On the other is Madame, with her vulgar and ostentatious nobility. Speaking for Madame, Claire expresses concisely the respectable man's attitude to his own dark side:

Je hais les domestiques. J'en hais l'espèce odieuse et vile. Les domestiques n'appartiennent pas à l'humanité ... Ils sont une exhalaison qui traîne dans nos chambres ... nous entre par la bouche, qui nous corrompt. Moi, je vous vomis.

IV, p. 171.

The servant - and we are here speaking of the underdog in general, even of the criminal - stands for all that the righteous wish to forget. Once vomited out of the respectable man's mouth, he becomes a mirror in which his master may see not himself, but himself as he is not. Thus Madame is not filth - because the maids are that, "nos miroirs déformants, notre soupape, notre honte, notre lie" (IV, p. 171).

But the exact nature of this relationship is presented most successfully in a later play and one not yet written at the time of Sartre's study, Le Balcon (The Balcony, 1956). The first few scenes illustrate some of the sexual fantasies practised in madame Irma's brothel. A bishop and a judge, among others, are shown in relation to their social complements, the sinner and the thief. Let us for the present ignore the fact that all the roles are imaginary, that the dignitaries are clients and the victims madame Irma's girls. Everything depends on the Look without which social differences would be impossible. Society divides into two parts, the master and the slave. Just as in objectifying the maids Madame constitutes herself as mistress, so bishop and judge constitute themselves in opposition to the sinner and the thief. As scene two opens the thief is "caught in the act," like Sartre's Genet. The proof is on her: she has stolen. Consequently, she is a thief, "tu es une voleuse" (IV, p.47). The judge's sense of security is the other side of the picture. If the girl is a thief, it follows that, as he condemns her, he becomes a judge. Thus, referring also to the executioner, he tells the thief: we are all three tied together, "nous sommes liés: toi, lui, moi"

(IV, p. 49). Everything depends on the existence of a complementary opposite. The world is an apple, as the judge argues, which he cuts in two, the good and the bad. This is his sublime function in the service of justice and it is made possible by the thief's willingness to be evil:

LE JUGE ... Fonction sublime! ... Juge! Je vais  
 être juge de tes actes! ... Le monde est  
 une pomme, je la coupe en deux: les bons, les  
 mauvais. Et tu acceptes, merci, tu acceptes  
 d'être la mauvaise!

IV, p. 51.

The danger is that the thief may not cooperate - it would annihilate the judge:

Il suffirait que tu refuses ... que tu refuses d'être  
 qui tu est ... pour que je cesse d'être ... et que je  
 disparaisse, évaporé ... Mais tu ne refuseras pas,  
 n'est-ce pas? Tu ne refuseras pas d'être une voleuse?  
 Ce serait mal. Ce serait criminel. Tu me priverais  
 d'être!

IV, pp. 52-53.

So at the end of the scene the judge crawls before the thief, licking her feet, imploring her to be a thief: he needs her. So also with the bishop who is a bishop because he is not the penitent kneeling before him. Good springs into being only at the appearance of evil. The bishop is justified in the act of absolution he performs since this act, even as it forgives sin, confirms the sinner as evil - at least for that moment, otherwise there would be no need for absolution. It is interesting to note in this context that Genet as a confirmed thief could not bring himself to steal in Nazi Germany, or so he claims in the Journal. It was a country of thieves, hence theft was



impossible. In Genet's words, "je vole à vide" (p. 131). One cannot steal except under the gaze of the just man which has the power - no theft alone can do it - to make one a thief.

However, it must be stressed that the relationships depicted in Genet's work and involving an interdependence of complements are entirely one-sided. It is true that judges need their thieves but this does not mean that the two sides have achieved parity. I shall modify some of these conclusions a little with respect to Le Balcon in a later chapter but at this point a sharp distinction must be drawn between the two halves of Genet's world. One is object, the other subject. In spite of their tendency to label themselves in bad faith, judges and bishops escape being named in the sense in which thieves and sinners are named. They remain subjects, they retain the initiative, the power, in short, the Look. In Sartrean terms they are pour soi, free - free to act - for that is precisely what it means to be a subject, to exercise the sovereignty of the Look. On the other hand, as objects, thieves and sinners can only undergo passively: their place is to be condemned or to be forgiven. And this is especially true in the context of mistress and maids in Les Bonnes. Sartre calls an active-passive social relation of this kind the relation of the Us-object and the We-subject (le nous-objet, le nous-sujet).<sup>13</sup> The We is that part of society which has the initiative. Certainly it cannot exist without its complement. Nevertheless the Us always retains an inferior status in the relation. The Us has no sense of solidarity, it exists only as passive, as acted upon: its only cohesion is the bond of the oppressed, dependent at every instant upon the continuance of oppression. Genet's notion of the underdog, expressly stated in the Journal (p. 105) and made clear in the plays, is similar to Sartre's. Claire and Solange, the servants of Les Bonnes, are anonymous from a philosophical point of view. The object is simply there to provide a context in which the subject may act and so be himself. Thieves are that only so that judges may exercise

their sublime function of condemnation, sinners are that only in order to provide bishops an opportunity for using their power of forgiveness, Claire and Solange are there so that their bad smell may differentiate Madame from them.

It is here that the full impact of the Look becomes obvious. The object exists to serve another's subjectivity. To be object is to be something one is not except in the eyes of the Other, it is to be Other to oneself, to be alienated from oneself. In the especially relevant case of Les Bonnes the unequal subject-object relation of mistress and servant means that Madame is emotionally self-sufficient, in Sartrean terms free of her servants even though without them she could not be. Claire and Solange, on the other hand, are mere objects, not free human beings. Their existence is felt as that of a parasite or fungus. They depend entirely on Madame's Look whereas she exists as a kind of primum mobile. This means that while Madame is indifferent to her maids, they themselves are emotionally involved in the relationship. Of course they cannot hate Madame. They accept their status as objects; consequently they see themselves through Madame's eyes, not their own, and so hate themselves. For Madame they feel love, or rather a confused love which turns into hate and a hate which turns into love. It is the child Genet's reaction to society, as Sartre sees it. Thus Madame (speaking through Claire) complains of Solange's attentions. But Solange is not being purely ironic in her reply as she insists "je désire que Madame soit belle" (IV, p. 140) or, more simply, "je vous aime." Of course she loves her "comme on aime sa maîtresse" (IV, p. 142), that is, with intense hatred. Claire's soliloquy expresses this perfectly:

Car Madame est bonne! Madame est belle! Madame est douce! Mais nous ne sommes pas des ingrates, et tous les soirs dans notre mansarde ... nous prions pour elle ... Ainsi Madame nous tue avec sa douceur!

Avec sa bonté, Madame nous empoisonne. Car Madame est bonne! Madame est belle! Madame est douce!

IV, p. 168.

All this is true. Madame poisons the maids with her goodness in which they truly believe. She allows them a weekly wash in her bath; with her discarded clothes she will dress them like princesses (IV, p. 162). In fact she loves them - as she loves her pink lavatory:

CLAIRE: Elle, elle nous aime. Elle est bonne.

Madame est bonne! Madame nous adore.

SOLANGE: Elle nous aime comme ses fauteuils. Et encore! Comme la faïence rose de ses latrines. Comme son bidet.

IV, p. 149.

It follows that the maids detest each other since each reminds the other of her own degradation:

SOLANGE: ... Et nous, nous ne pouvons pas nous aimer. La crasse ...

CLAIRE, c'est presque dans un aboiement : Ah!..

SOLANGE: ... N'aime pas la crasse.

IV, p. 149.

Filth cannot love filth. Each maid is a mirror to the other, the other's bad smell:

SOLANGE: Je voudrais t'aider ... mais je sais que je te dégoûte. Je te répugne. Et je le sais puisque tu me dégoûtes. S'aimer dans le dégoût, ce n'est pas s'aimer.

CLAIRE: C'est trop s'aimer. Mais j'en ai assez de ce miroir effrayant qui me renvoie mon image

comme une mauvaise odeur. Tu es ma mauvaise  
odeur.

IV, pp. 155-156.

The last phrase expresses perfectly the only human bond that is possible in Genet's world of the alienated. It is the bond of the Sartrean Us, a shared ignominy. Madame has viewed both maids with the Sartrean Look and that is what Claire and Solange have in common.

It is now possible to return to the question of solitude as an ideal in the works of Genet with new perspectives. The theme of solitude, so far examined in L'Atelier and Le Funambule, is inexplicable except in terms of that other major theme of Genet's, the theme of personal alienation and the Look. In other words the search for a metaphysical goal which is to be charted in these chapters must be seen on the backdrop of a struggle against the Other. Genet's characters are wounded by society and forced into themselves. Just as Genet in the Barrio Chino internalizes his despair, so they withdraw to a point which they hope will prove impregnable. But the movement is not merely escapism. It is a negative which naturally transforms itself into a positive. The next four chapters will trace this progress, as it is found in Genet's work. In so doing they will establish the importance of the idea of solitude in the novels and plays - an importance which has been noted by critics like Richard Coe and Jean-Marie Magnan<sup>14</sup> but which has not been investigated in the terms I propose - and also the relevance of Sartre's thought, as expressed in Saint Genet and, more importantly, in L'Etre et le Néant, to an understanding of the Genet ascesis. It must be added that, in spite of a great indebtedness to Saint Genet, these chapters will not restate Sartre's thesis but will pursue an altogether different line.

CHAPTER 12GENET AND SARTRE : THE MURDERER - FAKE SADISM

Je veux chanter l'assassinat, puisque j'aime les assassins.

Notre-Dame des Fleurs, II, p. 53.

Genet's literary ascesis has five phases, that is to say, Genet depicts five distinct character types in his work, each of which represents a particular solution to the problem of the Other. Where the Beckett subject progresses gradually from the situation of the tramp to that of the Unnamable and the Ionesco subject moves from inauthentic to authentic existence, Genet's hero seeks a gradual emancipation from other men and the fulfilment of solitude. Of course it is obvious from what has already been said that solitude is not here synonymous with a mere being alone in the everyday sense. Nor is it synonymous with mere self-sufficiency, understood psychologically, or even with self-respect. Solitude is a metaphysical reality, a being-oneself even as one transcends the narrow bounds of the personal. It involves being alone in less exalted senses of the word but, ultimately, necessitates a movement to the superhuman. Thus the five types are something more than mere solitaries. All of them are outcasts and rebels, with the exception of the fourth type who nevertheless also seeks to rise above other men. All of them react, though in different ways, to the Look, and so in a general way are comparable to the figure of Genet in the Barrio Chino (actually, as we shall see, this figure comes into the category of the second type). Finally, all of them achieve a kind of glory, a particular kind of solitude.

Genet's first literary attempt to realize his ideal is the least convincing yet, at first glance, the most obvious from a

Sartrean viewpoint. If the Other has me pinned down by the Look the simplest thing for me to do is to transcend his gaze, to return the Look. Two Sartrean Looks cannot meet for that would mean a subject-object synthesis which is a contradiction in terms. If the Other looks at me he is subject and I am object. If I look back the situation is reversed, but either way neither he nor I can be subject and object at the same time. Let us assume that I have regained the initiative. There are various ways in which this may be expressed and they are outlined in L'Être et le Néant, but in Genet's case one of Sartre's categories is here applicable above all others and that is aggressive hate or, as I shall call it, sadism. For Sartre, hatred is a resolute decision to treat the Other only as object, to abolish him as a free subject in his own right, to wipe him out as pour soi. This amounts to murder and the reason for this is clear if we recall that to objectify is to fix, to reduce a dynamic human freedom to the passivity of a corpse. Death, after all, in the Sartrean system, represents the final hardening of the personality, the definitive conversion of nothingness into being, of pour soi into en soi. Genet's first move, then, is a direct assault on the Other, an appeal to sadism and, not surprisingly, its representative is the murderer.

Two things must be noted here. First, the murderer is an outcast, an enemy of society who has been a victim of the Look. He has been named by society, that is, he has been labelled a criminal. Like Harcamone, who will shortly be considered, he has been violated by the righteous man. Second, he responds to the outrage with cold hatred and in a symbolic act murders a representative of society (the particular identity of the victim is utterly unimportant). Theoretically, society is now made a helpless object in the body of the victim and, as object, it may be assimilated and so totally obliterated. Thus Boule de Neige (Snowball), the legendary negro of Genet's first play, eats those he has killed. In Sartrean terms the Look has been

overcome. At this point the murderer is free of the Other, he has won a spiritual victory, he is at the end of an ascetic journey, comparable in his glory to Genet's tightrope walker - and this not simply because he has broken a law but because he has transcended it. To kill is not merely to defeat the Other, it is to negate otherness within oneself, that is, to proclaim oneself as a being-alone. In view of this metaphysic, Genet's fascination for the killer is comprehensible. "Je veux chanter l'assassinat, puisque j'aime les assassins" is a statement which must be taken seriously. Genet's first novel is dedicated to Pilorge, a soldier who murdered his lover, and commemorates other criminals known to Genet: Ange Soleil and Weidmann. In it the author describes how he cuts out photographs of his idols and pastes them on the wall of his cell. Inevitably, it is the transcendent, superhuman quality of the murderer which is stressed, his cold, empty eyes, the spiritual detachment expressed in Weidmann's phrase: "Je suis déjà plus loin que cela" (Notre-Dame, II, p. 12). It should be added that for Sartre this is an impossible proclamation. The Other is ontologically part of me, I cannot exist without him. Genet, however, is as yet undeterred.

A striking example of Genet's treatment of the killer occurs in Miracle de la Rose (Miracle of the Rose, written in 1943), Genet's second novel. Miracle de la Rose revolves about the murderer Harcamone, silent in his death cell, awaiting the guillotine. Genet - the book is in some respects autobiographical - reaches the prison of which he also is to be an inmate and anticipates a meeting in the most extravagant terms. Harcamone is a creature of beauty, of superhuman glory: "... les crimes et la mort d'Harcamone me montrèrent ... le mécanisme de cette gloire enfin atteinte. Une telle gloire n'est pas humaine" (II, p. 190). The first meeting is described as a religious revelation and in it the murderer appears as a Christ figure, his chains garlands of roses (II, pp. 197-198). But for the most part Harcamone is not seen. From his cell he exercises a secret

power which dominates the entire prison. Of course his physical seclusion underlines his moral superiority, his achievement of true solitude.

Harcamone's struggle with the Other is minutely described in symbolic terms at the end of the novel. As the moment of the execution approaches, Genet in his own cell determines to share the murderer's experience. He has a series of dream visions, the last and most powerful being the following. He dreams that Harcamone is awakened by four men in black, the judge, lawyer, executioner and chaplain. But as Harcamone awakens he begins to swell in size, breaking through the walls of the cell, then those of the prison, until he seems to fill the universe. Compared to him the four accusers are now the size of fleas. Notwithstanding, they climb into his body through the mouth and ear. Inside they find another and more mysterious universe. Terrified, they stumble into forests, over stones, through fields of flowers, asking "le coeur, avez-vous trouvé le coeur?" (II, p. 390). Eventually they are in a luminous corridor lined with mirrors and reach a door, itself a mirror, on which is scratched a heart pierced by an arrow. The four enter. It is a bare, white room, empty save for an adolescent beating a drum. The men continue through another door. They are now at the deepest centre of Harcamone and this centre, guarded by the boy with the drum, is a giant rose, like Dante's rose of paradise. In this holy place the tiny representatives of society rush about excitedly, lifting the petals of the flower as if they were petticoats. But the grandeur of the rose overpowers them and, as they stare into its depths, they become dizzy and fall. The dream-vision ends here. Clearly it images the actual execution of Harcamone, in short, his victory over society even as it destroys him. Other elements of the vision suggest the entire Genet pattern. Society enters into the very soul of the killer and, of course, it has always done so. As the four representatives of the righteous approach the heart they are shown reflections of themselves: it is



they who have made the heart as it is. Moreover, the door of entry carries the emblem of love, a wounded heart. The symbolism is transparent. Harcamone, like the tightrope walker, bears in his deepest self a wound inflicted by the Look of the Other. But it is a wound of love, suggesting the original alienation of the victim of the Look. Furthermore, the killer is a child, an innocent, perhaps frightened child watching over the drumbeats of the heart. We are reminded not only of Harcamone's first crime at the age of sixteen but, more importantly, as Bettina Knapp suggests in her analysis,<sup>1</sup> of the sixteen-year-old Genet who has just been branded a criminal and sent to Mettray reformatory. Harcamone, however, is not conquered. Even as he dies he affirms the ultimate inviolability of the heart, that is, of solitude, and the ultimate glory of the murderer. The rose is a place of beauty, of divinity, and it is no wonder that the four should be unable to bear the weight of the revelation. Thus the Other swoons into the mystery of Harcamone, the rebel who has already overcome him in the symbolic act of murder.

Of course under these circumstances our definition of murder must be rigorous. A soldier, for example, or a madman, or even a jealous man will not do. Gil, who commits a crime of passion in Querelle de Brest (Quarrel of Brest, 1947) is thus an object of scorn. Murder must represent a real transcending of the Other, it must be, as we shall see, an obscurely religious act, it must echo the asceticism of the tightrope walker. This question is raised most explicitly in Genet's first play, Haute Surveillance (Deathwatch, first published in 1947), a relatively short, tightly-knit work, set in a single cell and involving for the most part only three men. Yeux-Verts (Green Eyes) is about to die for his crime, like Harcamone. Maurice and Lefranc admire his power and attempt to discover its secret. In the background is another killer who is never seen, the negro Boule de Neige, idol of the prison. This last already has the highest glory. Far from being a prisoner he is a kind of deity about whom the entire

prison orders itself as a system around its sun: "Il brille, il rayonne. Il est noir et il éclaire les deux mille cellules" (IV, p. 184). Yeux-Verts is a lesser god, but he too has the glory of the murderer. Like Genet's Weidmann he too is "déjà plus loin que cela," beyond the law, beyond life and death, set apart from men in the realm of solitude:

YEUX-VERTS ... Je ne suis plus vivant, moi! Maintenant  
je suis tout seul. Tout seul! Seul!

IV, p. 193.

In a sense Yeux-Verts is already dead. Like the tightrope walker he has initiated an asceticism which involves a death to self and a god-like life outside oneself. In the course of the play the exact nature of the asceticism is revealed. Strictly speaking, the murderer does not seek his own glory. Just as the tightrope walker dances in order to exalt the wire so the murderer kills not for himself but for a higher power. Put a little differently, he does not kill for any human reason or from any human motive but in order to fulfil an obscure commission from above or, better still, he does not kill but is led to murder. In Genet's system this represents a simple transposition of the Pauline "not I but Christ lives in me." I do not mean to suggest that Genet is a theist in the conventional sense. Solitude represents a depth self which escapes the narrow limits of personality so that it may be regarded at once as one's true self and as a divine, transcendent power, a more-myself-than-I-am. This is why Genet can talk in Notre-Dame des Fleurs (Our Lady of the Flowers, written in 1942) of "cet état surhumain ou extra-lucide, de l'assassin aveugle" (II, p. 18). The killer possesses a unique insight precisely because he is blind; he sees through God's eyes as it were and not his own, those empty blue eyes which so fascinate Genet in the photographs of Pilorge and Weidmann. In Haute Surveillance Yeux-Verts describes this state. Like St. Teresa in

ecstasy he is falling but so gently carried away that he cannot resist, "si doucement, ce qui me fait tomber est si gentil que par politesse je n'ose pas me révolter" (IV, p. 196). He is in the arms of Providence or Fate. On the day of his crime a passer-by raises his hat to him. Everything is ordained and it is as if the whole world knows it. Yeux-Verts is not abandoned for a moment; he has to do nothing, things move on their own initiative: "... les choses se sont mises à bouger. Il n'y avait plus rien à faire" (IV, p. 197). And yet after the murder he panics and seeks to resist that Destiny that will now lead him to the guillotine. Murder has made him a different man, it has given him a new burden of responsibility - of glory - which is not easy to bear. So he struggles against Fate, seeking to be anything at all, a dog, a cat, a horse, a tiger, a table, a stone, anything but what Fate imposes on him, the identity of the murderer:

J'ai vu le danger ... de me retrouver dans la peau d'un autre. Et j'ai eu peur. J'ai voulu revenir en arrière ... Impossible! ... J'essayais toutes les formes pour ne pas devenir un assassin. Essayé d'être un chien, un chat, un cheval, un tigre, une table, une pierre!

IV, p. 197.

Of course it is all to no purpose and Yeux-Verts is forced to accept the complete unfolding of his act. He resigns himself, like Peter in the last chapter of John's gospel, going through the motions of living while another acts for him: "J'ai fait les gestes qui devaient me mener le plus tranquillement possible à la guillotine" (IV, p. 198). The entire episode, from the murder to its sequel, has an air of inevitability, of rightness. Yeux-Verts' hands, not Yeux-Verts, killed the girl:

C'est la fatalité qui a pris la forme de mes mains ...

Et pour moi tout est devenu simple. La fille  
 était déjà sous moi. Je n'avais qu'à lui poser  
 une main, délicate sur la bouche et une sur le  
 cou, délicatement. C'était fini.

IV, p. 198.

His part is simply to have the courage of solitude, "le courage  
 d'être tout seul" (IV, p. 205).

Genet underlines his theme in that section of the plot,  
 particularly the climactic end of the play, which concerns Lefranc's  
 attempt to emulate Yeux-Verts. Lefranc is the antithesis of the  
 killer, "pas de notre espèce" (IV, p. 195), as Maurice says, even  
 if he were to kill a man. In fact he kills Maurice. But it is a  
 meaningless crime, done for Lefranc's personal glory and not in  
 response to the demands of Fate. Yeux-Verts expresses his contempt:

YEUX-VERTS ... Et tu te croyais capable de devenir  
 ... sans le secours du ciel, devenir aussi grand  
 que moi! ... Je n'ai rien voulu, tu m'entends,  
 rien voulu de ce qui m'est arrivé. Tout m'a été  
 donné.

IV, p. 213.

Yeux-Verts did not choose his Fate, it chose him: "Il m'a choisi"  
 (IV, p. 213). Thus Lefranc is left without any feeling of support  
 at the end of the play. The crime is his own, only he is responsible.  
 A willed act carries no sense of rightness with it. At least on the  
 face of it Lefranc cannot call himself a murderer since he has not  
 died to self. Sartre summarizes the issue neatly in Saint Genet.  
 One kills in order to be a criminal but it would be vain to try if  
 one were not already a criminal: "... on tue pour être criminel,  
mais il serait vain d'essayer seulement de le devenir si on ne  
l'était d'avance."<sup>2</sup> Lefranc kills but this is not enough to make him

a killer. One must first be chosen. We are in the realm of the theology of Grace: it is not my act which justifies me but the "prevenient" Grace of God, which enables me to perform the act which justifies me. In order to become one of the elect I must be one already: "you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John, 15.16).

Harcamone of Miracle de la Rose is, in fact, in a position comparable to Yeux-Verts'. Lacking the strength to commit suicide he kills a prison guard and so delivers himself by a simple act into the hands of Fate: it will now lead him to his death, which, as already seen, represents an apotheosis:

Harcamone choisit de commettre un acte ... qui, par la conduite d'un mécanisme ... plus fort que sa volonté, le ferait mourir ... On sait qu'Harcamone mourut noblement pendant les quatre mois qui suivirent cet assassinat. Il fallut qu'il élevât son destin comme on élève une tour ... unique, solitaire et que de toutes ses minutes il le construisît.

II, p. 224.

The latter part of the passage is of some importance because it clarifies the nature of the killer's ascesis. Destiny must be sustained, it must be carried on one's shoulders like a cross or, as Genet puts it, it must be reared up like a great tower. Of course the effort required for this spiritual victory is enormous; indeed it is nothing less than death, a dying daily which, in Harcamone's case, lasts four months. Once he has surrendered to his Fate, the murderer must die totally to self in order to reach the secret place which belongs to the tightrope walker and the statues of Giacometti. Clearly the killing of the victim is only a sign of the real death that is taking place: the spiritual oblation of the murderer himself.

Murder remains a revenge upon society, but in the very act of revenge the killer transcends the issue of the Other and enters a new sphere where the killing ceases to be a merely negative act, a reaction to the Look, and becomes a positive ascent to spiritual fulfilment, an ex-stasis or going beyond oneself and the bounds of the human. Thus Harcamone even as he kills dies to self to be reborn in the solitude of the death cell, awaiting the inevitable final consummation.

Comparable things may be said about all of Genet's heroic murderers. In Notre-Dame des Fleurs the youth Notre-Dame strangles an old man with his own tie. As with Yeux-Verts the killer is not responsible. In this case, it is the tie. Knotted just a little tightly about the old man's neck it demands to be made tighter still. Besides, the youth is chosen from the start, "il sait que son destin s'accomplit" (II, p. 52). As Sartre's Genet, at the moment of his being caught, becomes the thief he has always been, so Notre-Dame, a chosen killer, confirms his eternal election at the moment of his crime. Genet depicts his glory when he confronts society at his trial: it is as if the crowd were Bernadette and the murderer Our Lady, his namesake, uttering the famous words of Lourdes: "Je suis l'Immaculée Conception" (II, p. 151). In the same novel a negro, Village, murders his mistress. He is now faced with a simple choice, to surrender himself to the police and so, in effect, negate his crime by refusing to bear its spiritual implications, or to bear the burden of solitude, to elevate the killing to the level of the inevitable, of Fate, in short, to transcend himself in an ascetic death. Village chooses the latter. Poised on a fine point of tension he allows himself to be possessed by a spirit which saves him from collapse:

Par un effort puissant de volonté, il échappa à  
la banalité, - maintenant son esprit dans une région  
surhumaine, où il était dieu, créant d'un coup un

univers singulier où ses actes échappaient au  
contrôle moral. Il se sublimisa.

II, p. 89.

Village transcends the moral considerations of society and transforms his act of violent revenge into a religious ritual. By an immense effort he remains calm and walls the body of the victim.

Many lesser examples could be cited from Genet's work, but in each case the pattern would be similar. The murderer is a victim of society, like Harcamone. At the same time, he is one who returns the look in the symbolic act of murder. Once the act is committed, moreover, a new dimension of fulfilment is made possible. Yeux-Verts, Harcamone, Notre-Dame and Village raise themselves to the spiritual heights of Fate. At this point a further and most significant death takes place. The murderer dies the ascetic death of self, surrenders himself into the arms of a higher power. He has now achieved the glory of solitude.

But we are faced with an insurmountable obstacle. In spite of all that has been said the eulogy of the murderer does not ring true and this not for any reason extrinsic to the novels and plays. On the contrary, Genet himself has second thoughts. Let us take the example of Querelle, the thug in Genet's last novel, Querelle de Brest, who has just killed a man: "L'assassin se redressa. Il était l'objet d'un monde où le danger n'existe pas - puisque l'on est l'objet" (III, p. 211). The significance of the repeated term "object" cannot be overlooked. Querelle has killed a man and, in Sartrean terms, he has reduced the man to the status of an object. But in a sense, as Sartre sees in Saint Genet,<sup>3</sup> it is the killer who is now really objectified. The whole world, the whole weight of the inevitable, now bears down on him. He has committed a murder. In that act is contained a whole chain of inescapable consequences: capture by the police, imprisonment, the death sentence. As Genet

stresses, the murder condemns its author to death, to kill and to die are two sides of the same coin: " ... il sait que cet acte le condamne à mort." Thus Querelle is "un joyeux suicidé moral" (III, p. 212). There is no alternative. Of course he will be executed: it is all contained in his initial act. Standing over the corpse, he anticipates the coming of the police, the trial and the verdict of guilty. Like Yeux-Verts, he tries to escape his Fate, not by attempting to be a dog or a cat but by forestalling the inevitable. Perhaps, if he executes himself - symbolically, of course - he will magically divert his real punishment. The answer is a profound humiliation, a dying to self but not at the hands of the police: he offers himself as a passive homosexual.

The problem of the Look is now acute. Who has been objectified, the victim, that is, society, or the killer? As in all of Genet's work the victim counts for very little, it is the death of the murderer that is of real concern. It is true that, as we have seen, this death is a necessary ascesis to glory. But is it not society which is in control of the whole process? The killer dies to self to be reborn in glory but we cannot overlook the fact that it is society, the Other, which, far from being a passive spectator, initiates the movement that leads to the murderer's death. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the act of murder does not objectify the Other. Rather it has the effect of once and for all objectifying the killer, of reducing him to the status of a passive creature, meekly advancing, that is, being led, to the guillotine. This statement may seem confusing in view of the previous argument put forward in this chapter - that it is Fate which takes the murderer by the hand and leads him to a realm where he is free of the Other's Look. The fact is that Fate at this stage is suspiciously indistinguishable from the police, from those same social forces which the killer is attempting to conquer. The suggestion, therefore, is that murder is no solution to the problem of the Look. Far from liberating



the criminal who is the object of society's gaze, murder simply confirms the status quo by more than ever reducing the outcast to an object. It is, in that case, suicide not in the glorious sense of a higher ascesis but in the sense of a submission to the power of the Other. Thus Genet's entire presentation of the killer as a victorious hero begins to take the appearance of an argument which, on the whole, fails to convince Genet himself.

The same ambiguity which one finds in Querelle de Brest is present in the depiction of other Genet murderers so far discussed. Harcamone, we recall, delivers himself into the hands of Fate in the act of killing a prison guard, but clearly Fate here, as in the case of Querelle, means the police, society, the righteous man, the very power which the killer is seeking to overcome. In fact, if we look more closely at what Genet calls Fate we shall see that Fate means the loss of Sartrean freedom. To be a subject is to be free, to initiate, to be master of the Look. The killer has none of these characteristics. On the contrary, his crime condemns him to pure passivity. It is as if he were now en soi, a something, and this is precisely the case. Even as he kills, the criminal is being named, he is being objectified, that is, labelled for life. Notre-Dame's first thought after the crime is "murderer" (II, p. 52). The omnipresent Other gazes at the murderer and fixes him in his persona for ever, and this explains why the killer is so anxious to escape the inevitable processes of his Destiny. Yeux-Verts seeks to escape the meaning of his act, refusing to be a "murderer." Thus he will seek to be an animal or a stone. Similarly Village, at the time of his crime, requires superhuman strength to refuse the Other's interpretation of his act. He will not see it as murder, since that would make him a "murderer," but as a transcendent, religious ritual. In each case, however, there appears to be an element of Sartrean bad faith. Whatever his reactions, the killer, like the child Genet, has received an identity and cannot pretend otherwise. Harcamone,

Yeux-Verts, Notre-Dame in any case submit. One last sophism remains to be disposed of. It may be argued that society, which appears to conquer, is merely an agent for a higher power, the will of Fate itself; that the criminal submits no more to society than did the Christian martyrs to their tormentors, but rather to a divine power acting in and through society. The only answer to this objection is that Genet seems to only half believe in it. In spite of his eulogy of their glory, Genet's presentation of his murderers is ambiguous. It is at least likely that far from returning the Look the killer submits to it further, convinced that in some magical way he is the victor, but in reality a captive of the Other, deprived of freedom - that is, of himself - and led to the true and final alienation, death beneath the guillotine.

There are strong hints that this is so, particularly in Haute Surveillance. So far I have stressed only one aspect of the play, the idealization of Yeux-Verts. From this viewpoint the conscious, willed action of Lefranc in killing Maurice seems to be a failure. However, the moral of Haute Surveillance is scarcely so clearcut. Yeux-Verts, the chosen killer, is a simple illiterate with the natural dignity of this type. Lefranc, on the other hand, is a self-conscious man, a man divided within himself, lacking in spontaneity - even something of an intellectual. Whereas Yeux-Verts is a "man," Lefranc, plagued by Sartrean consciousness, acts the part of a man (IV, p. 204). In Maurice's words he is false in all he does (IV, p. 211). The Sartrean pattern is simple. Lefranc exemplifies the free man, the pour soi, the initiating subject forced to pretend, to play a role, precisely because he is free, because he has no fixed identity, because he has not been named. Yeux-Verts, by contrast, exemplifies the passive object, the criminal who is frozen in his identity, unable to shake off the effects of society's Look. Now if Genet has any doubts about the glory of the unthinking murderer, they emerge in the above contrast. While, on the face of it, Yeux-Verts is the idol of the cell, Genet suggests that Lefranc is successfully

undermining his position. Bettina Knapp, who in Jean Genet argues that Lefranc is the real hero of Haute Surveillance, puts the case a little too strongly. In fact Genet will not quite make up his mind. But the emphasis is significant. Lefranc writes the murderer's letters to his girl since Yeux-Verts is illiterate and this puts the latter at his mercy. As the play proceeds Yeux-Verts slips from his pedestal; Lefranc is "swallowing him up" (IV, p. 200), as Maurice comments. Under these circumstances, the murderer's boast of solitude is empty, an admission of insecurity and even his admirer Maurice doubts him: "Mais tu as perdu de ta force, ta belle force criminelle" (IV, p. 206). The final scene, a confrontation of Yeux-Verts and Lefranc after Lefranc has killed Maurice, restates all the ambiguities of the play. Yeux-Verts is contemptuous of the other. Where he killed because Fate willed it, Lefranc killed freely, consciously and, of course, clumsily. Who then is the true murderer, the man who has attained to true solitude? Once again, on the face of it, the hero is Yeux-Verts. But the suggestion is inescapable that a free, a willed and so utterly human murder requires greater courage, that the man who acts without the promptings of Fate is the true solitary. If this is so, Lefranc's last words - the last words of the play - may be taken to affirm that ultimately glory belongs not to Yeux-Verts but to Lefranc:

LEFRANC: Je suis vraiment tout seul!

IV, p. 213.

Two things emerge, then, from an analysis of Haute Surveillance; first, that Yeux-Verts, the murderer, appears as an object in the Sartrean sense of the word, and, second, that Yeux-Verts' glory is questioned through the agency of a second type which has so far not been discussed in these chapters. The suggestion, here and elsewhere in Genet's work, is that, in the final analysis, the murderer's claim to the glory of solitude is doubtful. His achievement is a fake because his revolt against society is no revolt at all. In Sartrean

terms it is possible to transcend the Other's Look and to seize the initiative. Sadism, Sartrean "hate," represents such a move. But Genet's killer does not return the Look. Far from undermining the power of society, he strengthens it and Genet suspects this from the start. Querelle reduces his victim to an object but the result of this is not a victory over the Other because it is Querelle who is objectified by his act. That Fate which will lead him to death is nothing but the final demonstration of the Other's power. Querelle has been named, like the child Genet, long before he commits his crime. Indeed, the crime is simply a confirmation of society's will, it is a death and leads to a death which follows logically from the original death of the social outcast when he suffered the gaze of the Other for the first time. That gaze made him a murderer, chose him for murder long before the event and for prison and the death cell. Actually Querelle adroitly transforms his Fate and so escapes it. If die he must, he will die the death of sexual humiliation instead of the other. Yeux-Verts, Harcamone, Notre-Dame, Village and others are not so ingenious. In each case - and this will emerge further in the next chapter of this thesis - the murderer has a radical flaw which makes his entire achievement questionable. Thus Genet's first attempt at depicting a type of solitude is a failure. What appears as an act of sadism and aggression is in reality passive, masochism, and what appears as an ascesis to the supernatural is in reality a further submission to the Look. Yeux-Verts, Harcamone, Notre-Dame, Village, all in effect surrender to the guillotine. Genet's "j'aime les assassins" is in one sense at least misleading. Compared to the true assassin the intellectual Lefranc is far more active and Lefranc, although he has killed, is not and can never be a murderer. He is not the type, which is to say he is not chosen because he chooses for himself, because, in Sartrean terms, he is free, pour soi, nothingness. Thus Lefranc suggests a second Genet type and it is on this type that Genet's interest is in fact focussed. A simple question points to the direction in which Genet is moving: how do I know that the murderer achieves a unique glory? The answer is that all our knowledge of the

murderer and of his fulfilment comes to us through the medium of an altogether different character type. It is through Divine's eyes that Notre-Dame and Village are seen as triumphant in Notre-Dame des Fleurs; in Miracle de la Rose Harcamone's glory is described for us by Genet, a character in his own novel. Now Divine and the Genet of the Miracle are the antithesis of the murderer type. Rather, they resemble Lefranc. In the later plays especially such characters are dominant and the figure of the murderer is completely discarded. Murder is no way out. It does not remove the Other, it does not attain solitude. As sadism, it is a fake. Even in the earlier work, alongside his experiment with the murderer, Genet is already transferring his hopes to a different solution to the problem.

CHAPTER 13GENET AND SARTRE : THE SAINT - FAKE MASOCHISM

Jean Genet, le plus faible de tous et le plus fort.<sup>1</sup>

Genet.

Genet's second solution to the problem of the Other runs concurrently with the first which it eventually replaces and it involves the creation of another character type. As before, we begin with the social outcast, the victim of the Look who is objectified either by society in general or by a particular individual in this case representing the Other. But from this point all similarity with the murderer type ceases. The new approach consists not in attempting - unsuccessfully, as it proved with the murderer - to return the wound inflicted on one by the Other, but in accepting this wound and entering deeper into it. In other words, the victim of the Look refuses to fight the Other. Rather he sides with the Other against himself, he acknowledges that he deserves to be an outcast, he strives to be ever more an abject creature. It is in this spirit that Genet writes in the Journal du Voleur:

De la planète Uranus...l'atmosphère serait si lourde que...les bêtes se traînent écrasées par le poids des gaz. A ces humiliés toujours sur le ventre, je me veux mêlé.

p.47.

On the planet Uranus the atmosphere is so dense that the animals drag themselves along on their bellies, crushed by the pressure. Genet wishes to be one of these. If, by a miracle of metempsychosis, he is to be reborn, he will choose to inhabit Uranus, where among fearsome

reptilian forms, he may continue forever to die, without the respite of sleep, always more conscious of his horrifying predicament. Thus a new ascesis is postulated, an ascesis of shame and misery reminiscent of the tightrope walker's, though not identical with it. As well, a second ideal of solitude or rather a second means of attaining the same goal is envisaged. Instead of the murderer, a heroic - if disappointing - type, Genet depicts the lowest of the low, the outcast among criminals.

In Sartre's system this represents another possible approach to the Look. If the murderer, who seems to oppose the Other, is a fake, it may be that masochism will succeed where sadism did not. Of course masochism is implicit in the situation of the Look. As object of the Look I am alienated from myself and, as already shown, this means that I am liable to love, as much as hate, my oppressor and to hate, as much as love, myself. Still, from a Sartrean standpoint, masochism, like sadism, represents a move to overcome the Look. The difference is that where sadism seeks to transcend the Look, to return it and so regain the initiative and freedom by objectifying the Other, masochism accepts the Look and wishes to retain for itself the status of an object. The Other objectifies me, turns me into a thing. Very well, then I will be just that. This attitude is not to be understood merely as a surrender, however. On the contrary, masochism is more ambitious than sadism. Whereas the sadist is satisfied to objectify and so dismiss his opponent, the masochist wishes to possess the Other, not merely as a thing but as free, to possess him in his subjectivity, as pour soi. In order to do this the masochist submits to the Other, allows himself to be turned into an object and, as object, seeks to enslave the Other. Among Sartre's examples is that of love. The beloved, as Sartre sees it, overcomes the Other, makes the Other, a free subject, freely surrender himself to the object of his love. A beautiful woman, for example, cultivates her passivity before the male's

aggressive initiatives. Yet, in her very passivity, as an object of love, she captures the male who willingly, that is, as subject, commits himself to her. Of course this means that the woman is a masochist in Sartre's terms. In order to ensnare the Other, the dominant male, she accepts a form of alienation, she wills to be what she is not - a thing, an object, en soi. Masochism, then, means that instead of asserting my freedom I acquiesce to the Look, hoping, like the Christian martyr, to conquer in defeat.

Masochism in Genet's work differs a little from the above, however, and takes a related form analysed by Sartre in Saint Genet. Unlike the woman who seeks to ensnare her male in the situation just described, the Genet masochist is less interested in the Other than in himself. While he is ready to captivate the Other by his charms, therefore, his primary concern is with his own freedom and self-assertion. As a result of this the following pattern emerges. Masochism represents a disguised aggression, a subtle form of one-upmanship, born of frustration and despair: the Other dominates me with the Look and I have no means of escape; in order to turn the tables in this hopeless situation I determine to freely accept the Look, to will my inferior status. In this way I am able to remain one move ahead. The Other makes me a slave - then I will to be a slave; the Other drives me to new depths of abjection - then I will new depths of abjection. It is a way of snatching a minimal dignity out of my abjection or a possible victory out of defeat, since whatever the Other imposes, I determine to assent to it. Of course I have no choice, the Look is all-powerful, I must submit. But in the very act of willing my submission do I not recover a little of my autonomy? The Other is master but if I will to be his slave, even though I have no choice, does not my slavery become self-imposed? In this case I am no longer a slave, I regain my freedom and, conceivably, make a fool of my master. Thus the mechanism of escape, if it succeeds, achieves two aims. On



the one hand the masochist hopes that if he wills to be the object he is forced to be, he is in fact exercising his freedom, that is, by a sleight of hand, he is no longer being an object but a free subject. On the other, he hopes to hoodwink the Other, to use him as a means of self-assertion. Thus the more the Other dominates me, the lower I sink, the more I will my utter poverty, the more I assert my spiritual triumph, the more indebted I am to the Other for his unknowing cooperation. It is the martyr's indebtedness to his tormentors.

The masochist, Genet's second character type, adopts a new form of asceticism which differs from that of the murderer. The goal is still the same: to regain the initiative over the Other and, more important, in so doing to find one's true self in the glory of solitude. At this stage, though, solitude must be envisaged as the solitude not of the heroic criminal but the abject "saint." Genet chooses the term deliberately and we shall use it from now on without quotation marks on the understanding that we refer to Genet's own definition of it. The saint in Genet is one whose seeming passivity disguises real initiative. This is the opposite to the murderer who masquerades as active subject when in fact he is passive Object. The saint loves his enemy - society - in order to transcend it. Like Margaret Mary Alacoque, he accepts all the humiliations placed in his way by Providence - in this case, by society. The result is a dying to self and a spiritual resurrection. It is a making use of suffering for higher ends: "La sainteté c'est de faire servir la douleur" (Journal, p.217). Thus the sole basis of sanctity is renunciation: "il me semble qu'elle ait pour base unique le renoncement" (Journal, p.222). Instead of submitting to Providence or to the Other, as does the killer, however, the saint cooperates and so in a way rises above the constraint of the situation: he wills his Fate, as Sartre has seen in Saint Genet. Thus we have an embracing of total abasement, even of failure, the ethic of the passive homosexual, the petty criminal and

the squealer or traitor, a eulogy of suffering unsurpassed by any conventional ascetic: Genet will give all his worldly goods for "la réalité du suprême bonheur dans le désespoir" (Journal, p.221). Even the example of "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" which comes to mind is insufficient to illustrate the ideal. Genet himself uses that of Hitler at the moment of failure (Journal, p.221) and this because he considers that the conventional asceticism of the religious figure does not go far enough. Christ, after all, is not a sinner: how, then, can his humiliation be complete? Genet's saint must be the lowest of the low (and so perhaps the highest, according to the Christian saying), lowest in every sense, a saint who is a sinner of the worst kind. Of course there is a reward and it is implicit in the asceticism. The way of abject sanctity leads to solitude because, like beauty, sanctity implies singularity: "Comme la beauté . . . la sainteté est singulière. Son expression est originale" (Journal, p.222).

Genet's finest example of the saint is his first, Divine of Notre-Dame des Fleurs. Divine is graceful, fragile and beautiful but terms like these must be understood in the Genet context. That is to say, if the life of Divine, as Genet describes it in his first novel, is that of a butterfly or a flower, it is also that of a despairing and tormented homosexual among brutal men in a dingy quarter of Paris. Divine, always spoken of in the feminine gender, is actually Louis Culafroy. She exists as a combination of fantasy and real squalor, degradation and spiritual splendour. This is the fundamental ambivalence of the whole novel and it reflects Genet's feelings about the glory of abasement, that is, the glory of the saint. It emerges in every episode of the book but is most strikingly captured in the description of Divine's arrest, which combines multi-layered irony and genuine lyricism. Divine is drunk, singing the Veni Creator "d'une voix aigüe" (II, p.41). Her march to the station in the company of two

police is a nuptial procession, followed eagerly by excited crowds of fairies. Back the next day, Divine recounts her marvellous adventures. She was on the verge of swooning and the police had to hold her up, fanning her with their check handkerchiefs, wiping her holy face like so many attentive Veronicas:

- Mon Dieu, mes Belles, j'ai failli m'évanouir.  
 Les gendarmes m'ont soutenue. Ils étaient  
 tous autour de moi à m'éventer avec leurs  
 mouchoirs à carreaux. Ils étaient les Saintes  
 Femmes qui m'essuyaient la face. Ma Divine  
 Face . . . .

II, p.42.

Like Christ, Divine is a religious martyr, but with the difference that she goes by the way of sin and not of virtue. Hers is an ascetic way to total self-transcendence, even self-annihilation, as she offers herself to the night in order to be devoured for ever: "Divine s'offrait à la nuit afin d'être dévorée de tendresse par elle et jamais plus vomie" (II, p.24). Not surprisingly, then, the novel is a record not of her life, but, as befits a hagiography, of her journey to death. In Genet's words: "Lentement, mais sûrement, je veux la dépouiller de toute espèce de bonheur pour en faire une sainte" (II, p.40). Divine, like Teresa, will die many times over "a death more mysticall & high" before her final consummation. Of course it is a death which transforms itself into glory, just as the indignity suffered at the hands of the police is metamorphosed into a triumph.

As in the case of the murderer, the saint's life is ordained by a higher power. Sometimes Divine discovers this in a minute accident. Walking in the park, she spontaneously breaks into a dance step - which is instantly spoiled by the vulgar dragging noise of her torn sole.

This returns Divine to herself. Deliberately she cultivates the sense of her own poverty and shame, hanging her head and murmuring theatrically, "Seigneur, je suis parmi vos élus" (II, p.104). Poverty and meanness is the sign of her divine election. It is this sense which transforms her actions in the tawdry garret into angelic operations, operations of Fate or Providence, since "pour Divine, les anges sont des gestes qui se font sans elle" (II, p.32). But the appeal to Fate in fact constitutes only a superficial similarity to the murderer. As we shall see, Divine's reverence for a higher power is not as sincere as Yeux-Verts', for example. In any case the approach to Fate is different in the two cases. One of the most famous episodes of the novel illustrates this very well. Divine is in a bar frequented by pimps and fairies. On her head she wears a small tiara of false pearls, her crown. Suddenly she laughs and the tiara falls to the ground and is smashed. Ironic condolences pour in from every side: "La Divine est découronnée!" At this point of humiliation Divine is possessed by a desperate courage: "Alors, Divine pousse un rire en cascade stridente. Tout le monde est attentif: c'est son signal." She snatches her false teeth from her mouth and places the new tiara on her head to replace the old:

- Eh! bien, merde, mesdames, je serais reine quand même.

II, p.101.

This grotesque act is Divine's triumph and it exemplifies all her victories. First there is the moment of shame, then that of glory, painfully realized through a willed deeper immersion in shame. In the terminology of Saint Genet Divine "wills her Fate." If abjection there must be, her glory will lie in a daring, perhaps extravagant gesture which places her above shame. If she cannot avoid a humiliation then she will go one better, she will intensify it and so demonstrate her ultimate inviolability. It is the masochist's solution to the problem

of shame, an attempt to assert freedom and dignity in an impossible situation in which they are not merely threatened but already lost. If I say "let them be lost, I will their loss" I have salvaged an essential minimum of my self-respect, I have outwitted Fate - or the Other - and turned my passivity into an assault. This is Divine's approach.

Indeed, it is the basis of her life which has always been one of degradation. Divine has walked the streets, rummaging in bins for food, waiting for the opening of churches in the early morning so that she might find shelter. But she does not stop here. She cultivates a taste for pain:

Culafroy et Divine, aux goûts délicats, seront toujours  
contraints d'aimer ce qu'ils abhorrent, et cela constitue  
un peu de leur sainteté, car c'est du renoncement.

II, p.79.

This psychology is evident when Divine overcomes her revulsion and forces herself to touch Alberto's snakes (II, pp.78-79). Most of all, however, it is evident in her relationships. Divine is a passive homosexual, content to exist as an object for another man, maltreated, as it were raped in the most humiliating circumstances. Genet tells the story of her coming to Paris with light irony. Her love affair with Mignon is at times given the appearance of delightful fantasy so that the reader is liable to forget that she is a man leading an unpleasant life of intimacy with a thug. In fact Divine is both human refuse and angelic being, her affair is both vulgar and ugly and a triumph of Grace and this because Divine deliberately transforms her life into a martyrdom. She submits totally to her lovers, as Teresa submits to the seraph. Mignon, a petty thief, an informer and a pimp, is allowed the role of master and the initiative of the Look which

reduces Divine to a thing of no consequence. As he goes by Genet comments: "Passa l'Eternel sous forme de mac" (II, p.14). This divinity in the shape of a pimp does not even despise Divine. He scarcely knows of her existence, as Madame in Les Bonnes scarcely dreams of her maids: "Pour Mignon, Divine est à peine un prétexte, une occasion." Genet adds: "Mais pour Divine, Mignon c'est tout" (II, p.45). Of course, Divine is abandoned by Mignon. An ageing homosexual, she suffers loneliness and jealousy. Living with a negro and the youth Notre-Dame, she ministers to them from a position of abasement and anguish.

Yet it must be stressed that from Genet's point of view Divine triumphs, since her every act of masochistic self-destruction aims at forcing a way out of a hopeless situation. Speaking of Teresa, Crashaw wrote in "The Flaming Heart":

Loue's passives are his actiu'st part  
The wounded is the wounding heart.

Genet's saint is no different in his own peculiar context. Divine submits to her lovers only because she is stronger than they are and able to destroy them by her very submission. This fact is stressed by Genet: Divine is subtle and devious, she lays gins and traps of love for all about her. Just as her surrender is really one-upmanship, so her love is a form of hate. As Sartre notes, the effect of such love is to weaken the Other, to absorb him and destroy him. In short, Divine eats her victims more effectively than does the murderer Boule de Neige. Even as she allows the Other to dominate her she retains the upper hand and makes an ass of him. This process is all the more evident in her choice of lovers. Divine submits to males whose weaknesses she carefully conceals. Indeed she submits not so much to the real lover before her as to an ideal who bears very little relation to the other. Thus she as it were creates and preserves in being the

supposedly heroic thugs whose power she so much admires - she must create them if they are to dominate her and so give her the requisite opportunity of freely willing her subjection to them. Notre-Dame, the glorious killer, for example, is in many ways a fabrication of Divine's; in himself, we are given to understand, he is a rather banal creature. This is not to say that Divine's predicament is entirely a product of her imagination. On the contrary, Divine is a victim of society and it is for this reason that she seeks a victory - to some extent a symbolic victory - over society in the form of the lover who dominates her. The lover functions as did the murderer's victim, the difference being, of course, that whereas the killer attacks his victim directly, the saint does so indirectly, by the way of submission. It must be said that Genet is uncertain in this early novel: he has not quite decided who is to be his real hero, the murderer Notre-Dame or the saint Divine. In spite of the title, however, the direction in which he is moving is clear enough and it is favourable to Divine. Notre-Dame kills blindly, his is the glory of a dummy. Divine, on the other hand, exists throughout as a vital centre of consciousness, alert to every change in her situation. In order to see how favourably she compares not only with the murderer Notre-Dame but also with other supposedly dominant males it is enough to refer to a theme noted by Sartre, that of "hollowness." I have already commented on Genet's predilection for the term bander. The tough male, whether a murderer or a petty criminal, who functions as master in the relationship with the passive saint and so represents society, the dominant Other of the Look, is like an erect, aggressive penis. Like the Chief of Police in Le Balcon, he may be symbolized by a giant phallus. His attributes are power, hardness, self-sufficiency. By contrast, the passive homosexual is like an airy sylph, a "Mimosa . . . Première Communion, Angela . . . Régine" (Notre-Dame, II, p.13) and so on. Yet Mignon and Notre-Dame, the one active homosexual and aggressive thug, the other a murderer, are also rendered suspect by their names. Indeed

Genet suggests that all the toughs are "hollow," creux. Village, the killer, makes hollow tin soldiers while in prison (II, p.85). When Divine tempts God by rifling the tabernacle of a church, there is no punishment from heaven and the conclusion is that God too is hollow, a little hole surrounded by something, like a tin soldier or, we might add, a penis:

Dieu était creux. Seulement un trou avec n'importe quoi autour. Une forme jolie, comme . . . les petits soldats, qui étaient des trous avec un peu de plomb mince autour.

II, p.88.

Genet adds: "Ainsi, je vivais au milieu d'une infinité de trous en forme d'hommes" (II, p.88). This is his real comment on Mignon, on all of Divine's lovers, and, above all, on the killers discussed in an earlier chapter of this thesis, Village and Notre-Dame. It is also his comment on that Providence or Fate so revered by the murderer. Genet's point of view of course coincides with Divine's, that is, with the saint's. Divine despises that Providence which chooses her for abasement - it is, after all, society under the guise of a deity and identical, for her, with the hollow male whom she allows to rule over her. In fact Divine works assiduously to undermine Fate, God, society, the Other, any power which threatens her integrity as a unique being, even as she appears to submit entirely to it. She is clearly comparable to Lefranc in Haute Surveillance, a fact which confirms the argument against the glory of the murderer in the previous chapter. There seems little doubt that Genet's preference in the struggle to achieve solitude is for the conscious hero, who, like Lefranc or the saint, wills his own future in spite of all and so affirms - where the murderer does not - his ultimate individuality, his revolt against society.

Thus the achievement of solitude appears to belong to the saint,



the object of the Look who, as object, seeks to destroy the Other - not by hate but by insidious love. It is, in the terminology used to describe the life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a Little Way, a seemingly inglorious way to paradise and it has its own Magnificat, Divine's song of victory:

Elle chante qu'elle se fait enculer par goût.

Elle vole et trahit ses amis.

Tout concourt à établir autour d'elle - malgré elle - la solitude.

Elle vit simplement dans l'intimité de sa gloire,  
de la gloire qu'elle a faite toute petite et précieuse.

II, p.167.

Divine is the first of a line of similar characters, saints of abasement who undermine the authority of those they serve, the toughs and murderers whose glory is, after all, hollow. In the Journal du Voleur, an entirely autobiographical work, Genet depicts himself as the masochist hero. I have already discussed the episodes of the Barrio Chino in chapter eleven of this thesis without making this point but it is stressed by Genet. The humiliation suffered, for example, on the occasion when he dresses as a woman must be taken in the context of the saint's ascesis. As Genet explains:

J'ai donc été ce petit misérable qui ne connut que  
la faim, l'humiliation du corps, la pauvreté, la  
peur, la bassesse. De tant d'attitudes renfrognées,  
j'ai tiré des raisons de gloire.

p.118.

This could be a description of Divine. Genet too is a victim, an object, and he reacts to his situation by willing the worst, by living a life which is willed necessity, "nécessité voulue" (p.20), beginning with

his decision at Mettray reformatory. At the institution he suffers all the indignities society heaps upon the young offender: the cropping of the hair, the uniform, the environment. In order to save himself he elaborates a discipline. Whatever is done to him he will accept as merited, whatever accusation is brought against him, whether just or unjust, he will acknowledge from the bottom of his heart. If he is labelled the lowest of the low he will be that:

Je souffrais. Cruellement j'éprouvais la honte d'être tondu, vêtu d'un costume infâme, d'être consigné dans cet endroit vil . . . Afin de survivre à ma désolation . . . j'élaborais . . . une rigoureuse discipline . . . à chaque accusation portée contre moi, fût-elle injuste, du fond du coeur je répondrai oui. A peine avais-je prononcé ce mot . . . je sentais le besoin de devenir ce qu'on m'avait accusé d'être . . . Je me reconnaissais le lâche, le traître, le voleur, le pédé qu'on voyait en moi . . . Je devins abject . . . j'avais réussi. Mais quels déchirements n'avais-je pas connus!

pp.185-186.

The Journal tells the story of what happened in the years after Mettray, when the mechanism of willing one's abjection is tested in Genet's adult life. Inevitably, it involves a paradoxical conquest-in-defeat. Genet wanders throughout Europe, prostitute, thief and beggar, servile before his lovers, notably Stilitano. But Stilitano, the dominant partner in the homosexual relationship, is "hollow," a creation of Genet's superior intelligence, a coward and a liar and yet revered by Genet because, like Divine, Genet needs to be an object for someone. Towards the end of the book Stilitano's insignificance is clearly illustrated. He is caught in a maze of mirrors, screaming with frustration while the spectators laugh. Finally, he gives up and refuses to

continue. Criticism has noted here a parable of Genet's search for himself in a hall of Pirandellian reflections and there is some justification for this. In its immediate context, however, the image serves to illustrate the truth about the heroic thug in Genet's work: the supposedly aggressive criminal is a fraud. The real hero is the saint, in this case, Genet, who is able to mould his Fate by devious means and so achieve fulfilment.

This thesis is concerned with Genet as a character in the Journal and in some of the novels, rather than with Genet the man. Nevertheless continued reference is necessary to the more biographical approach of Saint Genet. Basing himself on material of the sort discussed above, Sartre analyses Genet's life in terms of the mechanism of "willing one's Fate," beginning, of course, with the crucial childhood experience of theft. In an earlier chapter I mentioned the Sartrean thesis that Genet is frozen by the Look, determined as a thief by the very label "thief." But this is only half the story of Saint Genet. For Sartre - as for Genet himself in his work - the important thing is not the social determinism but the individual's response. Thus Sartre stresses Genet's own choice to be the thief he is forced to be. The paradox needs no elaboration, since it has been thoroughly analysed with reference to the Genet saint earlier in this chapter. What we cannot overlook is the fact that for Sartre Genet's early life corresponds exactly to that of some of his fictional creations. Saint Genet studies the consequences of the Genet choice to be the man society sees in him and they are the choice of "evil," the choice of crime, above all, the deliberate choice of failure, passivity and ignominy. Moreover it examines the life of homosexuality and theft described in the Journal and in the novels and its conclusion is the one I have emphasized, that Genet's passivity represents a search for freedom, an attempt to regain the initiative lost in childhood to the Other. For Sartre this is summed up in the phrase -

Genet's own - "Jean Genet, the weakest of all and the strongest":

"Jean Genet, le plus faible de tous et le plus fort."

So far little has been said of the saint in the novels after Notre-Dame des Fleurs. The pattern is similar to that found in the first novel and in the Journal, that is, in each case Genet's hero is the passive homosexual, the self-conscious man, rather than the murderer or the thug. In Miracle de la Rose it is Genet himself, in search of sanctity, of that same abandoning of worldly things which the church requires of its heroes: "Pourtant la vie que je mène requiert ces conditions d'abandon des choses terrestres qu'exige de ses saints l'Eglise . . ." (II, p.215). Once again it is a way of degradation, pride realized through shame: "Il faut que votre orgueil sache passer par la honte pour atteindre sa gloire" (II, p.345). Genet offers himself to those about him. At Fontevrault prison he idolizes Harcamone, the murderer, and he makes himself the plaything of the stronger boys at the reformatory. From beginning to end, however, he submits to his lovers, Villeroy, Divers and Bulkaen, precisely because he towers above them in intelligence. Genet is weak only by virtue of his strength, his power to will his own weakness. Even as he admires the qualities of others he is aware of their real status: "Ils ne sont plus que l'outrageante caricature des beaux criminels que j'y voyais quand j'avais vingt ans . . ." (II, p.208). In truth the criminal is a charlatan. If there is glory in his achievement, it is a glory which depends entirely on the presence of the passive saint for its existence. Without Divine there would be no Notre-Dame, without Genet no Stilitano or Harcamone. The criminal is a myth invented by the saint, a dummy which the saint requires in order to be a saint. This emerges clearly in the dream-sequence which climaxes Miracle de la Rose, since it is Genet's dreams, not Harcamone's, which we witness. Genet, in his cell, informs the other's progress to the guillotine with splendour, controlling in his imagination every move

he makes. Thus Harcamone's glory and his solitude are really Genet's. The saint reveres his master only to destroy him and to reassert his own initiative and this is the significance of the theme of betrayal which is highlighted in the novel. Genet betrays Harcamone, morally speaking, by sleeping with Divers, the man who gave Harcamone up to the police, even as Harcamone awaits his execution. Thus he becomes Divers' accomplice, one with his baseness, "abjection où se tenait Divers" (II, p.375). The betrayal is complex, and may be taken as a type of many subject-object relationships in Genet. Genet is betraying one whom he really loves, otherwise there would be no masochism in the act. By betraying Harcamone, he makes himself more than ever morally abject, able to despise himself for what he does. At the same time, he transcends the murderer because he wills to be more than ever abject before him. By a curious reversal extreme humility turns into pride, ultimate abasement reflects superiority. Of course there can be no real pride without real abasement. In the very act of rising above the Other Genet must believe in the Other, must genuinely respect him. And this is so. Genet really admires the unthinking dignity of the fools he betrays. In the final analysis, though, they are simply pawns, hollow creatures whose function is to shine in order that by contrast Genet might be dark and, in his darkness, brighter than ever. The betrayal of Harcamone simply brings into the open the eternal strategy of the Genet saint, which is to pursue the passivity of the object to the point where it becomes its opposite, active subjectivity. By the same token masochism turns into sadism and servility into a proud assertion of freedom.

Nowhere in this strategy more evident than in Pompes Funèbres (Obsequies, 1947), Genet's third novel. Again the author is the protagonist of a semi-autobiographical work. Genet's lover, a member of the Résistance, has been killed by a French militiaman fighting for the Germans and Genet is desolate. His solution to his grief is

similar to that in Miracle de la Rose: he will transcend his love, that is, the power of his lover over him, by a betrayal. He finds a way while at the cinema. Paris has just been freed and the film is a documentary of the fighting. It shows a captured French traitor, one of the despised militia. As the audience hisses Genet spontaneously sees that this militiaman, whom he dubs Riton, may, to all intents and purposes, be regarded as his lover's killer. Genet will betray his dead lover, Jean Decarnin, by falling in love with Riton, his murderer. He will be a traitor to Decarnin as in the earlier novel he is a traitor to Harcamone, by joining his enemy. In this way he will be as gloriously abject as the defeated militia, hated and vilified by the whole of France. Thus the rest of the novel depicts Genet's spiritual participation in the life of the militia and the Germans, particularly during their last days in Paris, when their humiliation is at its peak. Clearly, Genet is betraying not only Decarnin but also France whom he loves as he lives the story of Riton, above all, as he shares the abjection of Hitler, a hero of degradation and so of solitude, a saint of evil. Genet is willing what he could not avoid, willing the inevitable. Decarnin is dead and France prostrate. In order to free himself of his grief, that is, of his love for Decarnin and France which enslaves him, Genet places himself on the other side, he accepts the loss, he wills it, he becomes an accomplice to the Germans, in short, he regains his freedom: it is as if he had killed Decarnin and destroyed France. At last he is self-sufficient, rid of his chains, alone, and that is the meaning of "la solitude, ou sainteté" (III, p.102). It is important to see that such betrayal is implicit in the very nature of the saint's relation to the Other. Genet regains the initiative by undermining the Other's power, that is, by eroding his love for the Other. The masochist saint loves his master and through that love humiliates himself before him in order to intensify his solitude, that is, to will it freely. As he does so he hoodwinks his master and becomes a free man again, able to transcend

his love, that is, his masochism. With this perspective we may say that Divine's dramatic response to the loss of her tiara exemplifies the mechanism of betrayal: the Other thinks it is the saint who is being humiliated but he is wrong, the saint has fooled him. An incident in Pompes Funèbres illustrates this perfectly. Pierrot puts a maggot in his mouth by mistake. Instantly the choice presents itself: either to admit defeat and submit to disgust or to savour the experience, to will the inevitable which has already occurred. Pierrot chooses the latter:

Il se trouva pris entre s'évanouir d'écoeurement ou dominer sa situation en la voulant. Il la voulut. Il obligea sa langue . . . à éprouver savamment, patiemment, le contact hideux.

II, p.67.

The saint who betrays the Other is in exactly this position.

The pattern is more complicated in Genet's last novel, Querelle de Brest, since in this case the distinction between murderer and saint has been blurred: Querelle is a murderer intelligent enough to transform himself into a saint. After he murders his companion, he avoids the Fate which leads the unthinking killer to his end and chooses the way of homosexual abjection and betrayal instead - and he is successful. In order to forestall his Fate, he wills it - in a different form, as a death to self rather than as a death beneath the guillotine. Thus he remains "l'ange de la solitude" (III, p.177) and his degradation becomes "singularité créatrice" (III, p.257). One other character in the novel attains to this, Madame Lysiane, a forerunner of Irma in Le Balcon. She too rises above herself by allowing herself to be turned into an object of shame.

From Divine onwards, then, Genet's saint is one who sinks to depths unknown to the murderer or the aggressive thug, who searches

for subjectivity in the very act of being an object of the Look. From a Sartrean standpoint this approach cannot succeed. It is impossible, in the terms of L' Etre et le Néant, to find oneself as subject in the situation of being an object. Either I return the Look and so reassert my subjectivity by objectifying the Other or I remain an object of the Look, in which case I cannot dominate the Other. Any other alternative is out of the question because it would necessitate the union in one person or in one act of subject and object, nothingness and being, freedom and determinism, pour soi and en soi. Of course it is precisely this union which the Genet saint seeks. He wishes to be free by means of submission, to will what is already determined by Fate or God or society: his degradation. In like manner, Sartre argues in Saint Genet, Genet wills to be the thief and outcast he already is in the eyes of society. But for Sartre the subject-object synthesis is an unrealizable dream, as explained in an earlier section of this thesis. If these poles could be joined one would achieve a unity of activity and passivity, of freedom and determinism, one would be one's nothingness, in short, as Sartre puts it, one would be God. Sartre believes that this is impossible. To be and to be conscious are two separate things. In Genet, these two poles are identifiable as the murderer and the saint, the one an unthinking creature moved by Fate - a something, dense and passive like Yeux-Verts - the other a self-conscious, deliberate, active force, like Lefranc or Divine. But Genet would like to combine the characteristics of these opposed types in the single figure of the masochist saint. He is caught in what is termed in Saint Genet a tourniquet or whirligig.<sup>2</sup> Sartre argues that the mechanism of willing one's Fate cannot really work, that one cannot hoodwink the Other by means of masochism, that one cannot will oneself an object: it would be like freely willing one's non-freedom. In spite of everything, the saint who tries to destroy the Other cannot possibly make any real progress.



What is impossible in a Sartrean context may, of course, be possible in Genet's work. Certainly Genet is aware of the problem, if not exactly in the straightforward terms proposed by the philosopher. After the four novels, the journal and Haute Surveillance, therefore, the question is raised anew: is masochism a genuine way to solitude or does it fail as does the fake sadism of the killer? Genet is uncertain and summarizes his ambiguous conclusions in his second play, Les Bonnes.

Les Bonnes has already been discussed in terms of the Sartrean Look and it is clear now that the maids, Claire and Solange, belong to the second Genet category, that of the saint. They are alienated from themselves, masochists who love Madame and despise themselves. But there is more to their behaviour than this and we are now in a position to view their masochism not simply as a given, something the maids are forced to practise, but also as a deliberate choice, a willed degradation. Like other Genet saints, the maids submit to the Other, in this case Madame, and accept their inferior status. When Madame is out they dress in her clothes and act out the maid-mistress relationship, heaping upon themselves the abuse and scorn that represents Madame's, and society's, attitude to them. In short, they want to be, they work towards being, the dregs they are said to be, they further and aid the effect of Madame's Look upon themselves. Of course the game is supposed to end in the humiliation of the mistress - but it never does. The two are so obsessed with the preliminaries, which concern their humiliation, that they never reach the goal of their ritual. Yet it remains a fact that the game represents a way out of the situation, an act of self-assertion, an assault upon Madame, since the maids' search for abjection reveals a desire for transcendence and a resentment of their lot as servants. Eventually, Claire and Solange move to destroy the mistress openly. They scheme to get at her through her lover, the plot fails and necessitates an attempted poisoning of Madame. Not surprisingly, this does not come off either. The maids cannot escape

the Look by direct, active means, they must do it by a form of activity-in-passivity, by the way of the masochist. So they return to their game. Solange, the dominant partner, will kill Claire dressed as Madame. In this way "Madame" will die, Solange, now a murderer, will achieve the glory of other Genet killers and Claire, as victim, the glory of the saint, a death of love: after all, she will die as Madame, identified with Madame. It is as if Genet were playing all his cards at once, testing once and for all both of his character types, the murderer and the saint. In Claire's words, "nous serons ce couple éternel, du criminel et de la sainte" (IV, p.156). Solange looks forward to her apotheosis, anticipating, like all the killers, her judgement and execution. She mocks society - in the person of Madame, naturally - in advance: "Maintenant . . . je suis votre égale. Je porte la toilette rouge des criminelles . . . Madame s'aperçoit de ma solitude!" (IV, p.173). But Solange, a curious mixture of the passive saint and the aggressive thug, is, as we might expect, hollow, and Genet is relying on the true saint, Claire, after all. When the game turns into reality Solange loses courage. In the end she kills Claire but only because Claire insists so that Claire in effect commits suicide and reveals herself as the stronger of the two. The important thing, however, is not the comparison of the two Genet types but Claire's death, that is to say, her spiritual confrontation with Madame. "Nous irons jusqu'à la fin," Claire argues, "nous serons belles, libres et joyeuses" (IV, p.176). Does this in fact happen?

Claire dies, dressed as Madame. But it is by no means clear whether the maids' strategy has succeeded or not. Who has died, Claire or Madame? Madame has died symbolically, it is true. We may go further and say that Claire's love for Madame has died, that Claire has killed Madame's power over her, that is, Madame-within-herself, by asserting her own inalienable dignity - much as Genet kills Decarnin in Pompes Funèbres or Harcamone in Miracle de la Rose. But to kill

Madame-in-Claire is not the same as killing Madame. Moreover, there is a real corpse, and it is Claire's. The question is unresolved. Claire's way is the masochist ascesis of all of Genet's saints and it involves an interior victory over the Other, a triumph of the spirit when, on the face of it, all is lost. We cannot deny that a victory of sorts is won. After all, the power of the Look is installed within the victim to alienate him from himself, to make him love the Other and despise himself. Claire appears to have disposed of this interior Madame, this Other at the heart of herself. But it is at the price of her own final destruction - as if, we may speculate, she and Madame were one, as if the masochist were unable to eradicate the Other from his own soul except by suicide. Thus the solution is more extreme than the problem. This ambiguity cannot be ignored and we must return to the facts: it is Claire who has died, not Madame, the victory of the saint is more than dubious. All that Claire has done is to will upon herself the worst that the Other could do to her. We are thrown back on the original equivocation: if I will my being an object, do I regain the initiative? Is the masochist solution a way to metaphysical solitude? Although Genet leaves the issue open, it seems that the saint's way is questionable. Doubt has been cast on the achievement of the murderer, from Notre-Dame to Solange. The killer fools himself. Convinced that his is the aggressive solution of the sadist, he is, in fact, a fake sadist, a masochist in disguise. The saint fools other people. He pretends to be a masochist but he too is a fake since his masochism disguises an aggressive stand, a form of sadism. And yet in the final analysis he fools himself also. For all his efforts, he remains an object, a masochist whose only success is suicide. Divine, the Genet of the Journal, of Miracle de la Rose and Pompes Funèbres and, finally, Claire, all end on an equivocal note. It seems that fake sadism and fake masochism lead to the same impasse. Solitude remains an obscure goal yet to be reached. In Sartrean terms, it appears unattainable. Not surprisingly, at this point in his writing career, Genet begins to panic.

## CHAPTER 14

GENET AND SARTRE : THE IMAGE - REAL MASOCHISM

La lutte ne se passe plus dans la réalité, mais  
 en champ clos . . . C'est le combat des allégories.

Le Balcon, IV, pp.94-95.

After the publication of the novels and plays so far discussed, as well as the journal and various minor works, Genet is silent for some six years. The Gallimard edition of the Oeuvres Complètes began to come in 1951, Saint Genet (oddly enough published as volume one of the Oeuvres Complètes) came in 1952 and Genet's next play, Le Balcon, only in 1956. The gap between Les Bonnes (1947) and the Journal du Voleur (1948) on the one hand and Le Balcon on the other represents a turning point in the author's life. The crisis was obviously of some magnitude. To a large extent, as argued by Jean-Marie Magnan,<sup>1</sup> it must have been prompted by Saint Genet, whose revelations no doubt proved too much for a Genet unused to being the object of such sustained merciless analysis - so much of it relating to Genet's private life as homosexual and criminal and all of it embarrassingly accurate. On the other hand it is likely that the real crisis came from Genet himself. In 1948 he was liable to life imprisonment for his numerous petty crimes. Some of the most influential literary figures in France petitioned successfully for his release and he received a presidential pardon. It meant, though, that his life of vagabondage and theft was over, that a Genet who had been painfully constructed over many years had to die and a new Genet be born. Sartre describes the funeral. All concerned are present, Sartre delivers the oration - but the grave is empty, Genet is hiding behind a cypress. He has wept a little, now he will go off whistling, he will live.<sup>2</sup> For Sartre, Genet, at this point, has already saved himself from the legacy of his early years

and he has done so by becoming a writer: "Dix ans de littérature qui valent une cure de psychanalyse."<sup>3</sup> His progress, as outlined in Saint Genet, is that of a boy who is forced into a life of hopelessness but decides to fight society by willing the degradation he cannot avoid. Thus he wills to be the thief he is said to be, he wills to be "evil," he wills passivity. But the project is an impossible one and he is caught in a world where reality blurs with fantasy. Once again, he wills the inevitable, he wills a life of illusion, partly abandoning the old criterion of evil or crime and substituting for it that of beauty. Slowly he progresses from being an aesthete to being a writer and, as a writer, he finally escapes being an object, in Sartrean terms he acts, he initiates, he has regained his subjectivity or freedom, the self-administered psychoanalytic cure is over.

No one who has made a thorough study of Genet's work could doubt that Sartre's chart is at least very close to the truth. But Saint Genet follows Genet's progress only up to 1951 and, in Genet's later work, from 1956 onwards, it is clear that old preoccupations are still being aired. Genet the man, whose problem, in Sartrean terms, is one of freedom, may well have found a solution by 1951. In the plays, however, the search continues and it is still a search for solitude. Certainly, something has happened to Genet in this period of silence. The later plays, beginning with Le Balcon, are far more self-conscious, more intellectually lucid, more outward looking than the previous work. If the earlier work is a little like Cocteau, Genet's one-time mentor, the later reminds one of Brecht because of its new social and political dimension. But the problem is always the same, the struggle with the Other, the attainment of singularity.

Genet is obviously dissatisfied with the impasse of Les Bonnes. He now panics to the extent of questioning the possibility of a way out of his predicament. In Le Balcon he reasons in the following way.

Granted that the basic issue is one of retaining the initiative over the Other, that is, turning the Look back upon the Other, is it not true that, even as I struggle with my opponent, I am in fact reliant on his being there? Solitude, if it is attainable, means complete autonomy. But there can be no autonomy in the relation of the Look since, even if I escape being object and objectify the Other instead, I cannot be a dominant subject without the existence of a corresponding object. The very struggle against the Other suggests that he is necessary, that I need him even as he needs me. This in turn suggests something more disquieting, that each side exists only in the other, that I am only insofar as I relate to the Other and that he is only as related to me, in short, that to be is to act out a part. Now the struggle of subject and object takes on the appearance of a ghostly duel, a battle of roles, each entirely dependent for its existence on a complementary opposite, a mirror. Thus I play the role of object made possible by the Other who plays the role of subject made possible by me - and so on, ad infinitum. The struggle for solitude has degenerated to a play of shadows, a giuoco delle parti. No real victory or defeat is possible because the rules of the game require two players. Solitude is by definition unattainable, either as an escape or as an affirmation of one's uniqueness, because one cannot eliminate either of the players or because, if one were to do so, one would be left with nothing at all. Genet has tried to free himself of the Other by recourse to the fake sadism of the murderer, then to the fake masochism of the saint. The former way has been discredited, the latter is also in doubt. As he attempts a third time Genet wonders if the project is not impossible. Thus the relationship of self and Other is now envisaged as a relation between two images, two mirrors, each existing only as a reflection of the other, and the struggle as fought not between society and the criminal individual but between illusion (or appearance) and reality. Actually, this formulation of the problem is already explicitly present in Genet's earlier work, in the novels

and especially in Les Bonnes. The murderer, as we have seen, is creux, hollow. We may now say that he is a mere exterior, an appearance, a reflection of the society which condemns him - and, of course, we recall the Genet vision of Harcamone's heart, the corridor lined with mirrors and the door to the heart, itself a mirror. The saint too, in his own way, as Sartre has seen, plays a game of appearances, making gestures of revolt, acting out his revolt, like Solange and Claire when Madame is out. In spite of this, though, it remains true to say that the theme of the mirror really comes to the fore in Le Balcon and it is in relation to this play that I wish to consider it. One other point may be worth making at this stage. The theme of the mirror by no means presupposes a concern with the Absurd, as Esslin imagines, at least not in any precise sense of the term "absurd." It does not recall Camus and if it recalls Sartre it does so in the wider context of Sartrean philosophy indicated in this thesis.

The first few scenes of Le Balcon, discussed in a previous chapter, illustrate Genet's new predicament. The point has already been made that Genet is here depicting an interdependence of opposites. Subject and object, that is to say, bishop and sinner, judge and thief need each other. The full significance of these scenes goes beyond this, however, and we must now add that mutual need suggests to Genet a mirror game in which each term of the relation exists only by virtue of the reflection. If the bishop is a bishop only because he gazes at the sinner and sees that he is not that, may not the formula be reversed? We could say that the sinner is a sinner only because she is not the bishop. In that case the bishop would be a bishop only because he is not the sinner who is herself only because she is not the bishop. The difficulty is obvious. There are no people, only mirrors. A exists only by virtue of B which exists only by virtue of A. The master-slave relation established by the Look is now seen simply as a game of roles. The master, whether bishop or judge or general, plays

the sadistic role, that is, the role appropriate to the Look, the slave plays the masochistic role of submission to the Look. Whatever the advantages of being a free subject and the disadvantages of being reduced to an object, a certain relativity has been introduced in the relation and while we may leave its consideration until the end of this chapter, a brief mention is necessary here. The maids, although they perceive that Madame plays a role just as they do, cannot really feel Madame as relative, they cannot envisage, for example, an exchange of roles. Madame may be a mask, a mere appearance, but to them she is absolute, her role will always have a power which is forever denied theirs. In Le Balcon Genet challenges this assumption and suggests precisely that, insofar as they are all roles, all roles are in a way equal. But the point I wish to stress for the moment is simply that Le Balcon represents the struggle for power as a game and bishops, judges and generals as roles to be played.

In the first scene of the play, the bishop is gazing at his own reflection in the mirror and commenting: "Or, évêque, c'est un mode d'être . . . Mitre, dentelles, tissu d'or et de verroteries, génuflexions . . ." (IV, p.44). Again: "Ornements, dentelles, par vous je rentre en moi-même" (IV, p.45). The mystery of bishophood owes nothing to what one does, least of all to one's personal attributes. It is a power one assumes. A bishop is his appearance, as the above passages suggest, his mitre, his lace and so on, something one puts on as one puts on clothes. The same is true for the judge and the general. This is why the judge sees himself as a dead man, along with those he condemns: "Roi des Enfers, ce que je pèse, ce sont des morts comme moi" (IV, p.51). He is dead in a Pirandellian sense because he has assumed a mask, because his life is frozen in an image - that of judge. Likewise the judged has become fixed in the role of thief. In the next scene, the general too dies to become an image, an appearance and no more: "Homme de guerre . . . me voici dans ma pure apparence."



Rien, je ne traîne derrière moi aucun contingent. Simplement, j'apparais" (IV, p.60). This "pure appearance" could not exist without its complement, in this case, the general's men who go to their deaths for him. And this is true of bishop and judge also. If the bishop were that by virtue of something innate, he could be a bishop by himself. But a bishop, like a character in Pirandello and Sartre, is nothing at all in himself. He is only as a role and the role depends, in Genet's work, on someone else assuming an opposite role. It is not surprising that the judge has to beg the thief to steal. Without her he would have no being: "Tu me priverais d'être!" (IV, p.53).

But, of course, bishop, judge and general are fakes. They are visitors at Madame Irma's establishment who wear elaborate clothes and gaudy makeup to create their parts. Even as they play these parts machine gun fire outside proclaims the reality they are attempting to exclude. Later, a further complication is introduced. As the revolution proceeds and the chief religious, judicial and military figures are killed, it becomes necessary for the fake dignitaries of the brothel to assume the roles of real bishop, judge and general. In these new roles they are able to quell the revolt. Why not? If role is everything, then a fake bishop acting the part of a real bishop is a real bishop, since a real bishop is simply one who acts the part of a bishop. Genet has made his point twice. First he presents us with a fake dignitary playing the part of a true one. Already the implication is that real dignitaries too are actors. To underline the conclusion, Genet goes further and actually demonstrates the interchangeability of true and false. As the envoy puts it: if the queen is dead - long live the queen. Since the queen is no more than a mask, Madame Irma can be queen as well as anyone else. A similar reasoning is assumed by the photographers in scene nine. When they take a picture of the (once fake, now real) dignitaries, it is the image they seek, the ideal dignitary, in short, the role. They want

a picture of the new bishop taking communion. In the absence of a genuine wafer, they use the general's monocle. Does it matter, in a world where all is illusion?

Similar conclusions emerge from another major relationship of the play, that of the Chief of Police and Madame Irma. It is, in one sense, the old subject-object relation. The police, representatives of society, need the brothel for reasons already gone into - and, of course, the inmates of the brothel need the police. Once again, what is at stake is power, the domination of the Look and, as in Genet's earlier work, sexual relationships best exemplify the master-slave polarity. But neither brothel nor police exist in themselves, each is an illusion, an appearance bolstering the other. Irma can see this and here differs from the traditional Genet underdog. Since each half needs its mirror in order to exist, then each has no identity of its own; since one can only determine identity with the help of complements, truth is indeterminate, everything is equally real and equally unreal. Real functionaries play roles and so do false ones: there are different kinds of roles, different kinds of illusion, but that is all. Irma and the Chief accept this and take their stand upon illusion. This is why the Chief wants to "die," to become a pure image and for this purpose - and I shall return to this - builds a giant mausoleum for himself, a temple dedicated to illusion. This ambitious dream, perhaps inspired by Franco's tomb (Le Balcon obviously reflects Genet's memories of Spain), is matched by Irma's temple, the brothel, a "maison d'illusions" (IV, p.70), filled with mirrors. It is a "balcony," that is, a façade, a place of show, in a sense a fake, nothing besides appearance - like the real world, its complement. Thus Irma can say: "Je ne joue plus," meaning that she is in earnest, and then add: "Ou plus le même rôle, si tu veux" (IV, p.81). All behaviour is play-acting. To be serious is simply to take up a new role. Even the establishment's pimp, killed by a stray bullet on the day he is preparing to act

the part of a corpse, has merely exchanged one appearance for another. One last point should be noted here with respect to the Chief of Police and his role of authority. In contrast to those of the bishop, judge and general, the Chief's role has little tradition behind it, it is historically recent. The Chief's power is very real, of course - it is he who leads the conservative forces against the rebels - whereas bishop, judge and general are merely figureheads. And yet it is thanks to the figurehead, to the dignitaries and to Irma in the role of queen, not to the Chief, that the revolution is crushed. Illusory power, power based on a myth, on mere convention, is more effective than actual power. And the Chief knows it. He is aware that real power is worthless unless it is operative in the realm of appearances, that is, of fantasy, that what one must have is not actual power but a powerful image, a power-filled role. So whereas the bishop, judge and general find their fantasies become reality the chief, a real Chief of Police, wants to progress from reality to fantasy. His dream is to witness an impersonation of himself in the brothel: if men wish to impersonate him it means that the authority of the police image now extends to the mind. But, to begin with, he is disappointed: those who visit the brothel want to impersonate only traditional figures of power.

There is a third relationship to be considered in this play. In addition to that of bishop and sinner, judge and thief and so on and that of police and brothel - relationships still largely based on a submissive attitude to authority on the part of the underdog - Le Balcon presents us with the conflict between revolutionaries and the establishment. The revolutionaries are not simply planning to destroy the old régime, the court, the church and so forth. Their primary aim is to do away with the game of roles, to substitute reality for illusion. For this reason they are enemies of the brothel as well as of the police and the sound of their gunfire, entering the house of illusions,

exemplifies the basic contrast of the play. Moreover, whereas the usual Genet rebel, from Divine and Notre-Dame to the maids, accepts the law he breaks, the revolutionary seeks to go beyond the law, beyond all mere forms, all appearance. This means that the revolutionary, although an enemy of society in the tradition of the murderer and the saint, represents a new type in Genet's work. His way represents a sadist solution, not the fake sadism - submission in the guise of aggressiveness - of the killer, but a genuine attitude of Sartrean hate, a real attempt to overcome the Look of authority not by any form of submission but by a direct assault. The revolutionary tries to do what the killer fails to do, to transcend the Look, objectify the Other, and regain the initiative of the subject. In other words he tries to achieve Sartrean freedom by a direct confrontation. From the standpoint of the mechanism of willing one's Fate the change in tactics is simple: instead of adopting the masochist solution, the revolutionary seeks to alter his Destiny, not to submit to it, to alter what the Other has decreed, in short, to will freedom. This represents yet another Genet attempt to realize the ideal of solitude in a particular character type and I shall return to it in due course.

At this stage it must be said that the revolution in Le Balcon is a failure. From the start the Chief of Police sees it as still another illusion:

LE CHEF DE LA POLICE: La révolte est un jeu . . . chaque révolté joue. Et il aime son jeu.

IRMA: Mais si, par exemple, ils se laissaient emporter hors du jeu . . . et qu'ils sautent sans s'en douter dans . . .

LE CHEF DE LA POLICE: Tu veux dire dans la réalité?

IV, pp.86-87.

The Chief's scepticism is justified. Far from breaking out into reality the revolutionaries are in danger of capitulating to illusion. For one of them, Roger, Chantal who has left the brothel to join the uprising is already no more than an image, a symbol, Joan of Arc of the revolution:

Elle n'est plus une femme . . . C'est pour lutter  
 contre une image que Chantal s'est figée en image.  
 La lutte ne se passe plus dans la réalité, mais  
 en champ clos . . . C'est le combat des allégories.  
 Ni les uns ni les autres nous ne voyons plus les  
 raisons de notre révolte.

IV, pp.94-95.

In order to combat an image Chantal has herself become an image. The struggle is no longer between appearance and reality, the revolutionaries have lost their original ideals. One mystique has simply been replaced by another: it is a struggle of myths, old and new, a battle between two illusions, a contest of mirrors. The revolutionaries are themselves acting out a part, like their enemies. In fact the uprising is a failure because Irma and her clients are able to impersonate the dead queen and her dignitaries. But this is beside the point. The revolution fails because it is betrayed from within. When the final confrontation takes place, the conflict is between Irma, the image of a queen, and the people's image, Chantal. In this contest of symbols, the old proves stronger, but even if the case had been reversed the revolution would have been defeated because its ideal of reality has been compromised. Once Chantal is frozen into a symbol she is already dead and the victory goes to the forces of illusion, the Chief of Police and the brothel, established society in its twin facets.

Genet now toys with the idea of a new solution to the problem

of the Look. Since appearance has the victory, since all is illusion, perhaps one may go to solitude by way of appearance and illusion. If every action represents the acting out of a part it may be that there is an ultimate role to be assumed, that solitude itself is a role. Conceivably, one might retreat into pure appearance, one might become a symbol or an image and, discarding all else, exist in a pure heaven of eternal Ideas. What if by this means one might reach a state of independence from the Other? An image is not a vulnerable human being, it is dead, a mere shell containing nothing. Perhaps it exists in an impregnable Platonic paradise, utterly alone, utterly perfect. Clearly the great symbol of the victorious establishment and of victorious illusion in Le Balcon is the Chief of Police. Thus the Chief comes to represent a third Genet character type, following the murderer and the saint, and his way a third alternative for the attainment of solitude. Strictly speaking not a social outcast like his predecessors, he nevertheless seeks, like them, to detach himself from society and to discover himself in glory. In this case, however, it is the glory of the perfect symbol, the pure image.

Not surprisingly, then, the Chief allies himself with death. The image is a mask in the Pirandellian sense, a role, like that of bishop or judge, which immobilizes life and preserves it against the pressures of time. To be pure appearance is to be death itself. Thus the chief chooses immortality within a splendid tomb which is also a maze of mirrors, each mirror reflecting another and all mirrors ultimately reflecting the Chief - himself nothing more than a reflection. It is a temple dedicated to illusion:

L'ENVOYÉ: Celui qui l'aura y sera, mort, pour  
l'éternité. Autour, le monde s'ordonnera . . .  
des miroirs renverront à l'infini . . .

LE CHEF DE LA POLICE, dans le sens: "d'accord": Je  
marche!

L'ENVOYÉ: L'image d'un mort.

IV, p.107.

The Chief will live for ever in death. He will be the ultimate illusion, a legend, a sign, and represented, as we might expect, by the phallus, in this case a giant phallus, symbolic of power over other men and also of appearance, since the penis is "hollow." His victory over the Other or, again, his triumphant self-assertion in the solitude of the mask will be shown by the fact that millions will come to his tomb to impersonate him, that is, to reflect his glory by assuming his role. All the while he himself will be the one-and-only, the basis of all lesser illusions: "Non le cent millième reflet d'un miroir qui se répète, je serai L'Unique, en qui cent mille veulent se confondre" (IV, p.119). This is the glory desired by the general earlier in the play and it has its own ascesis, a dying to self so that one might live in death, a living not for oneself but for one's appearance, for the image:

Je ne suis plus que l'image de celui que je fus  
 . . . je veux être général dans la solitude. Pas  
 même pour moi, mais pour mon image, et mon image  
 pour son image, et ainsi de suite.

IV, p.61.

Like the general, and indeed more so, the Chief will be a Chief of Police in solitude, not for himself but for the sake of the ideal Chief of Police, for the sake of the legend.

Of course this is the solitude of a work of art. Art too is dead, it represents a fixing of life, it is an appearance of life, a form or an image emptied of life itself. There can be no doubt that the Chief of Police, the tightrope walker and the statue or painting by Giacometti belong in the same category. Le Balcon came in 1956,

L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti and Le Funambule in 1958 and in each of these works Genet concentrates on the image and, in the figures of the tightrope walker and the Chief of Police, on what I have termed the third Genet character type. Like the Chief, the tightrope walker is comparable to a penis (Le Funambule, pp.191-192). Like the tightrope walker the Chief pursues an asceticism that leads to death and raises one high above the admiring multitude. In each case it is not simply a question of dying in a moral sense but, more specifically, of dying in order to incarnate the ideal of beauty, to be a work of art, an image of solitude. Thus the Chief is comparable to the Giacometti statue which, we recall, belongs to the realm of the dead. He is not in every respect like the tightrope walker in that the latter is an abject creature and so retains in his makeup elements of the saint. But the difference is insignificant when set beside the similarity. Again and again Genet speaks of the tightrope walker as one who exists only for his image:

Que sa personne se réduise de plus en plus pour laisser scintiller, toujours plus éclatante, cette image . . . qu'un mort habite. Qu'il n'existe enfin que dans son apparition.

p.184.

The artist on the wire must diminish himself in order that the image might shine. He must allow the image to act through him: "c'est ton image qui va danser pour toi" (p.180). Above all he must seek to be that image and nothing more: "C'est pourtant cela qu'il cherche: ressembler plus tard à cette image de lui qu'il s'invente aujourd'hui" (p.185). In each of these passages Genet could be speaking of the Chief of Police, "cette image . . . qu'un mort habite," a sign inhabited by a dead man. One hides behind an image, obliterating oneself in favour of the image in which one finds refuge from the Other



or through which one transcends the Other.

And yet, in Le Balcon, L'Atelier and Le Funambule, Genet is throwing us into confusion. Despairing of ever realizing his ideal of solitude he opts once more for a very dubious solution. The resemblance between the image and the murderer type should put us on our guard. In each case we are concerned with a power that is essentially "hollow." Thus, while the emptiness of the Chief may not be quite the same as that of the murderer, Genet's scorn for the latter suggests that we should hesitate to accept at face value the glory of the former. The triumph of the Chief is the triumph of illusion, which, as argued at the beginning of this chapter, would seem to be incompatible with the realization of solitude. It is the triumph of the game of mirrors, the I-depend-on-you-and-you-depend-on-me relationship, a veritable negation of the possibility of solitude. It could not be otherwise. Role implies the status of the object. A role, an image, an appearance, all these presuppose the Other. One appears in order to be seen - by someone else. The man who plays a role is making himself objective, a something others can point to and identify as, for example, a Chief of Police or an artist. Thus one's role is a way of being for other people, an exterior, something directed towards the Other: role-playing is a social pastime, not something one can do for oneself. And Genet sees this. He admits that the solitude of the tightrope walker is something of a paradox because it cannot be without the help of the artist's audience: "La solitude . . . ne saurait t'être accordée que par la présence du public . . ." (p.188). The ambiguity reappears when Genet speaks of "le public - qui te permet d'exister," and adds "sans lui tu n'aurais jamais cette solitude dont je t'ai parlé" (p.201). The confusion is evident. It is not solitude that requires an audience but the image. The image is an appearance and so designed to be seen, like Irma's brothel. For that very reason it excludes the possibility of the

autonomy and self-reliance which Genet wants. The Chief, for all his supposed glory, is simply objectifying himself, and, since an object can only exist in relation to a subject, that is, since an image can only live on in other men's minds, making himself utterly dependent on the Other. If no one impersonates him, if there is no one to reflect his glory, the Chief ceases to be. As pure image he is entirely at the mercy of the Other, an absolute slave, there to be made use of for all eternity. Clearly there is a link here between the image and the murderer. In each case the attempted escape from the Other has led only to self-deception. The image in fact represents a new form of the masochist solution. Just as the killer dies to self to be reborn as an object, a passive instrument of society, so the image exists as a mere reflection of the Other's objectifying Look. The killer is a fake sadist, in reality a masochist; the image, whether Chief of Police or tightrope walker, represents pure masochism: he is all object, a being who is nothing for himself, everything for the Other. It follows that his claim to solitude is even more questionable than the murderer's.

Thus the Chief-Irma relation must be referred back to the Mignon-Divine or Harcamone-Genet or Solange-Claire couples. In each of these earlier cases the real search for solitude is associated not with the "hollow" dominant figure - who is inevitably revealed as a passive object in disguise - but with the saint, whose passivity conceals aggressive initiative. In Le Balcon it should be Irma. In fact it is that other complement to the Chief, the revolutionary Roger. The Chief's victory confirms the power of the mirror. If we wish to trace Genet's development of the theme of solitude we must turn to Roger. So far it seems that Genet has driven himself into a corner. In every respect the revolution and its ideal of reality have been defeated. We appear to have reached a position reminiscent of Pirandello. In Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore, for example, all the

characters have made roles for themselves, what the author calls costruirsi. There are the actors, real actors playing the part of actors. There are the six characters, actors playing the part of characters who are themselves, that is, who are Genet images, masks, literary creations. There is also the audience, of course, who play a role in everyday life. The question arises: who is not playing a role or attempting to fix life into a mask? The same question arises in Enrico IV. Enrico fears life and adopts a mask, that of a dead emperor, and in so doing hopes to withdraw into the fixity of history. His visitors are called upon to join the masquerade. But they are all of them play-actors in their own lives. Who then is not an actor? Only the madman, perhaps - although even madness may be turned into a mask - or the man who acts on impulse, as Enrico does when he kills Belcredi. Then again the effect of the killing is precisely to fix Enrico more than ever in a role: now he is required to pursue the pretence of being a lunatic for the rest of his life. Mutatis mutandis Genet's position in Le Balcon is comparable to Pirandello's in a number of plays. Pirandello's characters - for example, Ersilia of Vestire gli Ignudi (Naked) - need masks but do not always find them. Without a mask or role to play they are nothing, a shifting flux of life. At times the mask is thrust upon them. In Le Balcon Genet's characters have no choice: to be is to be a mask. And in both cases, the frozen immobility of the role is likened to death and to the work of art: Irma's house of illusions is like a theatre, a place of show, and Pirandello's masks always suggest analogies with art, not only in well-known plays such as Sei personaggi but also in lesser works, Questa sera si recita a soggetto (Tonight we improvise) and Diana e la Tuda (Diana and Tuda). It is to be expected that the similarity with Pirandello is also a similarity with Sartre. Just as in Pirandello one is nobody in oneself and somebody as a mask, so in Sartre one is a nothingness, pour soi, until one pretends to be something, en soi. Since being and nothingness are incompatible one fools oneself that

one is something. Thus all roles - even necessary ones - are acted in bad faith. The waiter who is conscious of it is not in fact a waiter, he is merely pretending. A dog does not play a part: it is self-identical, without consciousness of itself. To be conscious of oneself is to admit that one is not self-identical. Consequently all human behaviour insofar as it requires role-playing - that is, all behaviour except action, when freedom, one's being-nothing, is exercised - is a game in mauvaise foi. But it should be noted that it is possible to escape the role in Sartre's philosophy - by doing - as in Pirandello it is possible to perform a spontaneous act expressive of life and not of the mask. In Le Balcon no way out of this sort is envisaged. However, Genet chooses what appears the most promising avenue even if the possibility of success is slight. In Sartrean terms, victory over the Look is achieved by affirming one's freedom as subject. Since neither murderer nor image, that is, neither Genet's first nor his third character types give promise of success, Genet returns to the second, the saint. Of all Genet's characters the saint is the one who most approximates to the ideal of solitude. For all his radical weaknesses he remains more convincing as a rebel than the other two types. Genet now attempts to create a true rebel from the model of the saint, a fourth character type who might be expected to achieve the end sought in vain by the revolutionaries.

In Le Balcon this type is represented by Roger, initially one of the revolutionaries. Unfortunately Roger is no improvement on Claire of Les Bonnes. At the end of the play he comes to the brothel and impersonates the Chief of Police - to the latter's gratification. Roger appears to have lost all hope after the defeat of the revolution and to have capitulated to the forces of illusion. He wishes to be the Chief, to merge his own Destiny with that of the other: ". . . j'ai le droit . . . de confondre son destin avec le mien . . ." (IV, p.132). At the crucial moment of the impersonation he castrates himself. Like

all Genet saints, he wills his Fate, confirming by a free act what has already come about, namely, defeat. Like Claire's suicide, though, this action raises problems: who is castrated, the Chief or Roger? On the one hand it looks like a final submission, a masochistic acknowledgement of failure, as if the revolution admitted the impossibility of breaking out into reality and bowed to the sexual power of the Chief. On the other, it may be interpreted as an act of self-assertion, like the suicide of Claire, that is, it may be said that Roger has emasculated himself as Chief, in short, emasculated the Chief in himself and so rid himself of the power of illusion - and the illusion of power. Of course the significance of the act is meant to remain ambiguous. Like the ending of Les Bonnes which it so closely resembles, Roger's castration is a victory-in-defeat, something of a victory and something of a defeat. But this thesis has already questioned the validity of the masochist solution and it is clear that Genet is even more ~~dis~~satisfied with it in Le Balcon than in the earlier play. Claire, after all, dies with dignity. Roger's act is surreptitious and sudden and there is little suggestion of glory about it. Le Balcon ends on a note of despair. Reality has been overcome by the image, the revolt has been crushed and the rebel has turned to a solution already partly discredited in Les Bonnes. At the end of the play a new revolution is under way and it seems no more likely to succeed than the other. Irma, the voice of relativism, has the last say.

In spite of overwhelming frustration and failure, something of a positive nature does occur in Le Balcon, however. Earlier in this chapter I noted an important difference between Le Balcon and Les Bonnes and this point requires amplification. Genet's timid attempt to create a fourth character type - the revolutionary, a real sadist in the Sartrean sense of one who overcomes the Look - fails because Genet undermines it by means of the theme of illusion and the image. This ensures a reversion to the doubtful masochist solution at the

end of the play. And yet in one way Genet's preoccupation with the maze of mirrors upholds the sadist solution and the reason is as follows. If the subject-object relation established by the Look is such that each side plays a role, is nothing in itself but exists only in its complementary opposite, then of necessity there is a certain parity between subject and object. Where the maids and Madame have a one-sided relation in which the subject, Madame, is essential, and the object, Solange-Claire, is simply a parasite or secondary phenomenon utterly contingent upon the first, relations in Le Balcon presuppose an equality of terms. A judge needs a thief as much as a thief needs a judge. Neither is possible without the other. If this is so, then the masochist approach has lost its force. While neither partner in the equal relationship is free of the relation itself, the one who plays the role of object to the other's subjectivity is free of the disadvantages of being an object. He is no longer alienated from himself. How could he be? He is no longer an object, he plays the part of an object, just as the other plays the part of the subject. Whether one is subject or object begins to be a matter of indifference. The maids hate themselves and love Madame because Madame is absolute and they are relative to Madame. But the underdog in Le Balcon is as necessary as his master. Consequently he has his own kind of dignity in the relationship: Irma is not a masochist in relation to the Chief, as the maids are in relation to Madame. Genet is beginning to transcend the masochist stance precisely because his insistence on the theme of illusion leads in the direction of relativism.

This is the positive achievement of Le Balcon: that for the first time Genet is suggesting that the subject, master of the Look, is simply the object in reverse. The Genet of the novels and early plays accepts society: the murderer acknowledges the law he breaks and the saint is ambivalent about it. Now it becomes possible for

Genet to visualize a type of character - not the image, of course, since he too, as we have seen, is a masochist - who does not acknowledge the power of the Other, in short, a true sadist, the revolutionary. That the sadist revolt is betrayed and crushed in Le Balcon simply reflects the author's indecision. Le Balcon is a transition play. From now on the figure of the revolutionary in Genet's work is more and more conceived along sadist lines. By sadism we mean, of course, a real sadism as distinct from the fake sadism of the murderer, a movement to directly and unambiguously overcome the Look, as willing one's Fate is replaced by the mechanism of willing freedom, of forcibly altering one's situation.

As Genet works his way out of the masochist impasse, however, he necessarily raises up a new obstacle to the search for solitude: the problem of the role. If all existence is role-playing, masochism, as we have seen, is abolished. At the same time, if all role-playing requires a partnership, solitude too is abolished. Out of the masochist's chamber of horrors, Genet finds himself in the maze of mirrors. In his next two plays this issue is worked out.

CHAPTER 15

GENET AND SARTRE : THE REVOLUTIONARY AND THE  
INDIFFERENT - REAL SADISM AND THE IMPOSSIBLE NULLITY

Mais, qu'est-ce que c'est donc un noir? Et  
d'abord, c'est de quelle couleur?<sup>1</sup>

SAÏD: . . . A la vieille, aux soldats, à tous, je vous  
dis merde.<sup>2</sup>

Genet.

Les Nègres, clownerie (The Blacks, 1958) sees the emergence of the fourth Genet type, the revolutionary. Genet's blacks seek to free themselves from the Look and to objectify the enemy. And indeed the play presents us, for the first time, with a revolt which is successful. The solitude of the object is replaced by the solitude of the subject, the solitude of the victorious revolutionary. It remains to be seen whether Genet is satisfied with this move.

Les Nègres is dominated by the struggle of black against white. White denotes Sartrean subjectivity, the aloofness of Madame in Les Bonnes:

Depuis deux mille ans Dieu est blanc, il mange sur  
une nappe blanche, il essuie sa bouche blanche avec  
une serviette blanche . . . Il regarde tomber la  
neige.

p.31.

God is white, he watches the snow fall. His representatives on earth are the white court, the queen, her valet, the governor, judge and missionary. On the other side are the victims of the Look, the



Sartrean Us-object, "Afrique aux millions d'esclaves royaux . . . bloc de nuit, compact et méchant, qui retient son souffle, mais non son odeur" (p.93). As in other Genet plays the central action is a ritual, in this case a ritual of hate. The blacks have killed a white woman, representative of the white race. She is lying in a catafalque on stage and her murder is to be reenacted.

Genet calls upon his entire repertoire of ambiguities. There is, first of all, no escaping the fact that the ritual recalls the masochism of the murderer. Even if we overlook this, there remains a disturbing echo of the masochism of the saint. The blacks announce that their aim in committing and reenacting the crime is to deserve the judgement the whites have already pronounced on them: "nous devons mériter leur réprobation . . ." (p.40). In other words the blacks are acting in such a way as to become what the whites have already made them. This is the old mechanism of willing one's Fate and, indeed, the victims know it: "Nous sommes ce qu'on veut que nous soyons, nous le serons donc jusqu'au bout . . ." (p.152). They are black. Very well, they will be more so, they will make themselves worthy of blackness in the ascesis of the saint. In keeping with this attitude, reminiscent of the masochism of the maids, the blacks find it difficult to hate the enemy. In fact they feel a fascination which is dangerously close to love. Village, who has murdered the white woman, is accused of having done it because he loved her (p.36). "Inventez non l'amour, mais la haine" (p.34), is the cry of encouragement. Only true sadism can save the underdog and it seems necessary, at least for a time, to hate all things, to reject, in any sphere, the least show of love. Village is required to hate Africa itself: "Ténèbre, mère auguste de ma Race . . . vous êtes l'Afrique, ô Nuit monumentale, et je vous hais" (p.46). Of course the ambiguity is still there: the maids also hated themselves - and so loved Madame. In spite of this, though, it can be stated that the tone of Les Nègres is very different

to that of earlier plays. It is as if the masochist forms were being perpetuated, but emptied of their previous contents.

ARCHIBALD (grave) Je vous ordonne d'être noir jusque dans vos veines . . . Que les Nègres se nègrent. Qu'ils s'obstinent jusqu'à la folie dans ce qu'on les condamne à être, dans leur ébène, dans leur odeur, dans l'oeil jaune, dans leurs goûts cannibales. Qu'ils ne se contentent pas de manger les Blancs, mais qu'ils se cuisent entre eux.

p.66.

This is not the language of masochism but of aggressive Sartrean sadism. The blacks are encouraged to negrify themselves, to persist to the point of madness in their blackness, to be all that the whites say they are and more, to eat each other as well as their enemies. This amounts to a reaffirmation of the suicidal ethos of the saint, but in its new context it cannot be confused with it. For the first time in Genet to will to be oneself is to will one's dignity, to hate oneself is to become hate itself. The blacks, for all their hesitancy, learn what is most difficult in Genet, to overcome one's fascination for the enemy and to oppose the Look.

But we have hardly begun to enumerate the ambiguities of Les Nègres. When the murder is reenacted, a black (man, not woman) is chosen to represent the dead woman - who may in any case have been black and not white. This sudden substitution does not surprise. Diouf, the black victim of the ritual, has been converted to the white's religion of love and is therefore a traitor to his people. When he gives symbolic birth the dolls which emerge are replicas of the white court. In short, Diouf represents whiteness. Thus the ritual killing -

and here the parallel with earlier plays is strong - is not the killing of a white, but of a black who stands for whiteness, that is, it represents the destruction of whiteness in the negro, just as Roger's castration represents the Chief's death in Roger and Claire's suicide the death of Madame in Claire. At the same time, in spite of these echoes, there are important differences. In this case the purge is successful, whiteness is conquered and without the need for a black sacrifice, since Diouf's death is merely symbolic. The tone of the play is not defeatist. At the end it is the whites who are masochistically seeking suicide, fascinated by the darkness of Africa. In Les Bonnes the underdog pays. In Les Nègres he gradually transcends the desire for degradation and failure and offers it to the Other. As the whites proceed into the forest they fall into a trap. Expecting to condemn the blacks for the murder of a white woman they discover there is no corpse. The catafalque is a fake, no crime has been committed except that of hate. This places the whites in the situation the judge in Le Balcon is so anxious to avoid. If there is no thief there can be no judge. The blacks have taken upon themselves all the guilt assigned to them by the white man's Look. But it was all a lie. There is no crime, there can be no guilt. The white queen states her case: in exchange for a crime she will give her pardon: "En échange d'un crime nous apportions son pardon et l'absolution du criminel" (p.123). But the only crime is blackness, which is no crime at all: "c'est toute l'Afrique . . . mon crime!" (p.125). The whites surrender and die ceremonially one by one. It is true that the whites are actually blacks wearing white masks, a fact which has been apparent all along, so that the ritual concerns only blacks from beginning to end. But the significance of the ritual is unchanged. Les Nègres dramatizes a rejection of guilt, rather than an actual struggle with the Other, that is, it is concerned, like earlier plays, with the expulsion of the Other from oneself. In this case no black is killed and whiteness is expelled, first in the ritual murder of Diouf, then in the mass suicide of the "white" court. The

blacks reject their status as objects and so achieve an inward liberation which is denied to the maids. The masochist's desire to regain the initiative and to transform submission into aggression is in the process of being realized as the ritual of the saint gives way to that of the revolutionary.

There is a final complication. It appears that, while the ritual is going on, a real drama is being enacted. The ritual performed on the stage has simply expressed the spirit of the actual revolution going on elsewhere. Not that Genet allows any facile conclusions. Even the real event off stage involves only blacks. In fact it is an exact, but real, counterpart of what has taken place on stage: a black traitor has been tried and executed. We are back to the meaning of the stage ritual. The blacks' revolt consists of the judgement and execution not of a white man but of a negro, it consists of the obliteration not of whites but blacks who have gone over to the enemy, that is, of whiteness in the negro. In this bewildering series of about-turns, what are we to conclude? Who has paid, the white man or the black? Does Les Nègres go at all beyond the futile masochism of Les Bonnes? All that can be said is that in spite of Genet's game of boxes-within-boxes, in spite of the obvious links with Genet's earlier work, Les Nègres does represent an attempt to overcome the Look. The revolt of the blacks has come off insofar as whiteness is defeated. The blacks, whether or not they are politically free of their oppressors, are emotionally free of them in a sense in which the saints are not. Certainly, a black and not a white woman has been executed. To that extent we witness all over again the fate of Claire and Roger. But despite this, there is a new spirit in the rebel, a sense that alienation from oneself has been overcome, a baptism of hate. The blacks are Sartrean sadists, aggressive and confident. Not that Les Nègres actually offers us a picture of the white man as object of the negro's Look. Still, the suggestion is that this is to happen and there seems

little doubt that the blacks are on the way to becoming Sartrean subjects. In fact Genet's next play confirms this conclusion.

Granted that Les Nègres manages to find a way out of the masochist dilemma, one other problem remains, however, and that is the problem of illusion. The fact that the real revolt of the blacks exactly parallels the stage ritual of revolt suggests that both may be fakes, that, as in Le Balcon, there is no clear distinction to be made between what is reality and what is merely appearance or illusion. Genet criticism, from the generalized kind of Martin Esslin to the more detailed analyses of Bettina Knapp, has usually recognized this and a close reading of the play supports the view. "Mais qu'est-ce que c'est donc un noir?" Genet asks, "et d'abord, c'est de quelle couleur?" Blackness may in fact be any colour. It simply represents the oppressed. Thus a white man could be black and it is possible that behind the white mask stands a trembling negro, "que derrière la masque d'un Blanc pris au piège tremble de frousse un pauvre Nègre" (p.73). If blacks can play the part of whites by wearing white masks, then whiteness, like blackness, is simply a mask. From the start Genet reminds us that we are watching a performance. Everyone is garishly made up. We are obviously back to the game of roles of Le Balcon. The white queen is a Pirandellian self-construct, an actress, fixed eternally in her role and so dead:

LA REINE . . . Et je n'ai pas fini de me sculpter . . .  
Eternelle . . . c'est la mort qui me compose . . . .

p.126.

To be a negro is to be an actor also. Indeed at times the blacks seem to be attempting the ascesis of the image, that is, to embody an image of hate rather than to actually hate their oppressors. If both sides are playing roles - which, as we expect, are relative to each other - the problem of illusion raised in Le Balcon has not been solved. "Tell

them that without us their revolt could not exist," "que sans nous, leur révolte n'aurait pas de sens - et même qu'elle n'existerait pas" (p.149), the white queen argues. Likewise the black Félicité knows that whiteness cannot do without its complement. If the white queen were to obliterate blackness she would have nothing to set her in relief:

LA REINE: Je vais vous faire exterminer.

FÉLICITÉ . . . Soitte, que vous seriez platte, sans cette ombre qui vous donne tant de relief.

p.127.

What the black revolutionary envisages is not a destruction of whiteness, which is not possible, but an exchange of roles - black is to be white and white, black:

Pour vous, le noir était la couleur des curés, des croque-morts et des orphelins. Mais tout change. Ce qui est doux, bon, aimable et tendre sera noir. Le lait sera noir, le sucre, le riz, le ciel, les colombes, l'espérance, seront noirs . . . .

p.130.

From now on black will not be the colour of clergymen, undertakers and orphans but of milk, sugar, rice, the sky, doves, hope and so on. If this is to be the case, however, if black and white are no more than interchangeable masks, the sadist revolt achieves very little. It has all become a struggle of ghosts. The oppressed have overcome the Look, subject and object have changed places. The two are still mutually dependent, only in this case with the black as master of the Look and the white as object. Masochism did not lead to solitude, although it asserted the dignity of the individual in a roundabout way. Sadism also asserts this dignity and it does so directly. But in each case the Other remains essential and so the search for solitude is

frustrated. Real sadism, that is, the regaining of one's subjectivity and freedom, leads us no closer to the goal than did Genet's previous solutions. At the end of Les Nègres the author is uneasy. He is not satisfied with his triumphant blacks and feels the reality of their victory eluding him. It is Le Balcon over again, with a ghostly failure now replaced by ghostly success. From a Sartrean viewpoint, of course, the attainment of subjectivity is a positive achievement, indeed the ultimate human achievement: Saint Genet depicts Genet himself as moving to this goal. For Sartre there is no way of escaping the subject-object relationship, since this is part of the structure of human ontology. One may overcome the Look, certainly, but not escape human relationships altogether or abolish the opposition between subject and object, an opposition based on that of pour soi and en soi, nothingness and being. At this point it is evident, then, that a Sartrean framework cannot adequately explain the pattern of Genet's imagination. The ascesis of the fourth Genet type leads to Sartrean freedom but it no more suffices to encompass the dimension of solitude than do those of murderer, saint and image. Genet's only alternative is to grope towards a fifth type, as it happens, his last. Significantly, we are drawn to the unknown black traitor of Les Nègres, the one man who is said to actually die. In Genet's next play, Les Paravents (The Screens, 1961), this character is revived and further developed.

Before considering this character we may note that Les Paravents clarifies other conclusions arrived at in earlier plays. It appears that the revolt of the blacks is a success and that, even as a success, it leads nowhere: Les Paravents confirms these two assumptions. The opposition is now between French and Algerians, on the one hand the arrogant stupidity of the colonial, on the other, the degradation of the Arab. On this plane all finer distinctions are lost. Thus when an Arab is ostracized by his fellows - for stealing - the colonial is

indignant: "Alors, qu'il vous vole ou non . . . c'est un Arabe comme les autres" (p.92). He explains his difficulty:

. . . comment ferions-nous . . . la subtile distinction: un Arabe voleur et un Arabe non-voleur? . . . Si un Français me vole, ce Français est un voleur, mais si un Arabe me vole, il n'a pas changé: c'est un Arabe qui m'a volé, et rien de plus.

p.98.

If a Frenchman steals, he becomes a thief, he stands in opposition to decent society. If an Arab steals, nothing changes, he is simply an Arab who has stolen. How could he be a thief when, as Arab, he is already an outcast? Once more Genet is depicting the subject-object relation of the Look. It follows that in this case as in previous cases each term of the opposition implies the other. Frenchmen and Algerians go together, as subject and object, the one allows the other to stand out. "C'est que plus ils sont sales plus je suis propre" (p.233), says a Frenchwoman of the Algerians. The dirtier the one, the cleaner the other - and, of course, this works in reverse. The natives have run a comb over their masters, they take the dirt with them and leave respectability behind:

Comme la mer se retire, eux ils se retirent de nous, emportant avec eux . . . toutes leurs misères, leurs hontes, leurs croûtes . . . Ils nous ont passés au peigne fin.

p.233.

However, the Algerians are in revolt, like the blacks they are in the process of challenging the Look. As the colonials talk in scene ten their orange trees, drawn on the screens which act as a backdrop,



are going up in flames, that is, Arabs are drawing fires on the screens. In scene twelve a white child is murdered: the act is symbolic. At the same time, while the French are preoccupied with pinning medals on a dummy, Kadidja, an Algerian reminiscent of the women in Les Nègres, exalts the atrocities being committed by her people: "Et n'ayez pas honte, mes fils! Méritez le mépris du monde" (p.134). This is the old language of willing one's Fate but there is in fact no masochism here. As Kadidja tells the French, "votre force ne peut rien contre notre haine" (p.129). The revolt is completely a sadist revolt, an act of aggression and destruction. The Arabs feel only one emotion, hate, there is no Arab victim among the revolutionaries: those who die, die fighting the French. Not only is the revolt successful, but it is all depicted on stage - it was not in Les Nègres. In every respect, therefore, Les Paravents underlines trends present in more ambiguous form in the other play.

Again, the theme of illusion appears, not so as to altogether negate the development which has taken place from Le Balcon onwards, but to indicate the relativity of the revolutionary achievement. Here too, Les Paravents confirms the conclusion of Les Nègres. The conflict of French and Arabs is a war between images. Genet depicts the colonials as "hollow," as fake masters, images of power devoid of reality. When Sir Harold walks away from his Arab workmen, for example, he leaves his glove behind as a sign of his presence. Actually the glove is filled with straw. Blankensee, another figure of white dominance, wears a pad under his clothing: ". . . il faut bien truquer un peu" (p.95). The power of the French thus depends upon an appearance, an image which is, in itself, invincible: "La France a déjà vaincu, c'est-à-dire qu'elle a proposé une image ineffaçable" (p.155). If the revolutionaries in Le Balcon had won they would nevertheless have been morally defeated by the image of the establishment insofar as they took it over and made it their own. In Les Nègres the rebels

won and it seems probable that they also joined the enemy by taking over his role. This is unmistakably the case in Les Paravents. The Arabs are overcoming the French and, as they taste success, cease to be objects of the Other's Look. They become subjects, conscious of their dignity. "Il y a autre chose que merde et crasse" (p.176), comments one of them. To the women this appears a betrayal of the one thing which gives the outcast and rebel strength, his suffering and abjection. "Passe de l'autre côté . . . Mais c'est peut-être fait, vous y passez," they reply. "Etre leur reflet c'est déjà être eux" (p.176): the Arab has gone over to the other side, even as he defeats the French he begins to look like them and to be one of them, in short, he steps into the French role. This move, foreseen in earlier plays, is now out in the open. To exchange roles with the Other is a victory in one sense in that it means a regaining of the initiative and an objectification of the Other. In another sense, though, it is a surrender. At the end of the conflict the Algerian, now master, requires someone to play the part of the slave. Thus new creatures of abjection come into being to provide a complementary opposite. The Arab village is split in two. At the centre is the brothel, a place of sin, about it live the respectable: "Autour c'est la vertu. Au centre c'est l'enfer" (p.224). Those who work in the brothel serve as objects in a society once composed entirely of objects. Later, Warda the whore is killed, a victim of Algerian righteousness. Saïd, the Arab outcast, is shot by the same forces of decency. In short, in spite of the outcome, the revolt has been betrayed from within, as in Le Balcon. No matter who is master and who is slave, the Look remains. In their special part of the stage, the dead - characters who have died in the course of the play - laugh at the spectacle. Among them Arabs and French mingle freely. It is clear that the entire conflict was utterly relative. Everything is a "screen," as the title of the play suggests, a game, a show, like Irma's brothel. Genet has depicted a successful sadist revolt and has shown that it can achieve

only an exchange of places between subject and object. The Look has simply been reversed, subjectivity, far from freeing one from the Other, merely perpetuates the old relationship in a new form. Thus Genet's fourth character type represents a very limited advance over the other three. Solitude, as predicted in Le Balcon and Les Nègres, remains unattainable.

There is only one thing for Genet to do and that is to return to the abject hero once more with the insistence of a Beckett returning to his tramps. This time there are new combinations. Warda the whore, a development of Madame Irma, combines the abjection of the saint with the search for the ideal, the image, characteristic of the Chief of Police; la Mère is both abject and aggressive; Leïla and Saïd represent a development of the saint in an altogether new direction. In each case the old masochism is gone. All of these characters act coldly and deliberately and without the emotional ambivalence of the earlier saints.

Warda seeks to be the ideal whore, to identify entirely with her role of whore, much as the Chief in Le Balcon identifies with his role of power. She becomes a mask representing the life of shame, with her bracelets and leaden weights in the hem of her skirts, "putain totale" (p.28). It is a gradual asceticism, like that of the tightrope walker, and Warda has taken twenty-four years to reduce herself to this: "Vingt-quatre ans! . . . Une putain ça ne s'improvise pas, ça se murit" (p.24). It goes without saying that Warda fails in her search for solitude and for reasons which have been gone into already. Precisely because she exists as a role she serves a social function, her being-a-whore is relative to an Other. Indeed, her difficulty comments retrospectively on the situation of the Chief of Police. Warda's death at the hands of the Arab women reflects her total helplessness before society. She boasts of her martyrdom but

the dead - whom she now joins in another section of the stage - merely smile. Warda is an object, like the Chief of Police or the tightrope walker, and so utterly dependent on an audience, that is, on the Look. It is ironic that at one point the war of liberation threatens to make her respectable, a free Arab, the one thing she labours not to be. Nothing could reveal more clearly the way in which the image escapes his own control. Before the war Warda is an image of shame, during the war she may become a patriot, she may perhaps cease to be an image at all and become a human being through no fault of her own. "J'ai travaillé pour n'être . . . qu'une espèce de mannequin doré" (p.169) she moans, and later: "Je suis de moins en moins quelqu'un" (p.181). As long as to be an Arab is to be a fighter for freedom, Warda is less and less a Pirandellian qualcuno, less and less a someone, an object, and more and more a free pour soi, nothingness. Fortunately the revolution ends and things return to normal. The point, however, has been made once again. Solitude does not belong to the image. In this respect la Mère surpasses Warda. She has known only the meanest of lives. Yet from beginning to end she thrives on insults, fiercely able to defend herself, encouraging her son, Saïd, in his way of abasement and theft, neither seeking to be an image, like Warda, nor a free subject, like the revolutionaries, a curious combination of Genet saint and Sartrean sadist. At the end she is wandering by herself, aware, as he puts it, that she has always belonged to the family of nettles (p.149). She succeeds in achieving a certain anonymity in death and to that extent comes closer to the ideal of solitude than anyone before her:

WARDA: Plus personne ne sait que tu as existé.

LA MÈRE: C'est bien.

p.225.

But she ends by being accepted, not rejected, by the society of the

dead. Her asceticism, it seems, has not gone far enough.

The real outcasts of Les Paravents are Saïd and his wife Leïla, and their struggle is twofold: on the basis of the saint's asceticism of abasement to attain to glory by avoiding the pitfalls which lie before the victorious Arabs and by escaping the fate of the image. Saïd is the very lowest of the low. He is driven to marry the poorest and the ugliest woman in the region. At times the family lives in the village dump. Saïd steals and is ostracized by the Arabs, he moves in and out of the local prison. Of course it is deliberate: he wants his degradation since it is essential to the way he has chosen. Leïla imitates her husband and with similar consequences. She becomes used to the contempt she receives from all sides and welcomes it, aiming to achieve the same glory as Saïd, "celle de puer toujours plus" (p.83), as la Mère puts it. "Je veux," Leïla tells Saïd, ". . . que tu sois sans espoir. Je veux que tu acceptes toutes les humiliations. Je veux que tu choisisses le mal . . ." (p.144). He must lose all hope, accept all humiliation, choose only evil. The reason is familiar: "Nous sommes ici . . . pour que ceux qui nous y envoient sachent bien qu'ils ne le sont pas . . ." (p.144). It is still the reasoning of the saint. Saïd and Leïla are what they are in order that society may define itself as respectable by means of the contrast. In short, they are objects and as such they fulfil a vital social function, they are essentially related to the Other. Saïd wishes to go beyond this, to be free of the relation altogether. He will not go the way of the killer, of course, nor of the saint. His approach is not submissive in any sense, it does not involve an ethic of passivity, even though it superficially resembles that of Divine or Claire. Saïd half blinds his wife. During the war of liberation he betrays his people to the French. But this betrayal is not comparable to, say, Genet's betrayal of Harcamone in Miracle de la Rose. Genet betrays the killer because he loves him and in order to be free of him. Saïd does not love the

French. He loves nobody, he is self-sufficient and herein differs from all earlier heroes of abjection. He steals and betrays for one reason only: to detach himself totally from other men. Thus he will have nothing to do with the colonials or with the victorious Algerians. There is one last difficulty, the temptation to become a legend, an image. Ommou, one of the women, sees Saïd's value as a sign to his people, as an image of that degradation from which the Arabs have risen. She wants him to be preserved in legend, afraid that the triumphant Arabs will forget their origins and, having expelled the French, turn to respectability. Thus "rien ne doit être protégé comme un petit tas d'ordures" (p.248). Saïd must be embalmed, he must not be lost as a symbol. Even as refuse, he has the possibility of fulfilling a social function, for all eternity both dead and living, like the Chief of Police:

SAÏD (furieux): C'est me laisser mort pour vivant!

p.251.

A second temptation is being offered at the same time. The victorious Arab fighters offer forgiveness; presumably Saïd has the choice of being a free subject, a respectable member of the newly-established society. His final reply to Ommou and to the soldiers is categorical: "A la vieille, aux soldats, à tous, je vous dis merde." He is shot as a traitor but does not enter the area reserved for the dead. The dead themselves - his mother among them - wait in vain: neither Saïd nor Leïla will be seen again:

LA MÈRE: Alors, où il est?

KADIDJA: Chez les morts.

p.259.

The play ends on this ambiguous note. Saïd is dead and so "chez le morts," but it is clear that in fact he is not with the other dead.

Perhaps he lives on in legend, but that too seems unlikely, since he has rejected that possibility. It appears that he is alone, inhabiting a region of death made only for him. A similar fate is no doubt reserved for Leïla. From the point of view of all the other characters of Les Paravents Saïd has simply vanished.

The significance of this strange conclusion to the play must not be lost. Saïd is a development of that important character in Les Nègres whom we never see, the black traitor who is judged and executed by his people. Already in Les Nègres Genet senses that once the rebel blacks triumph he will lose all interest in them. The point is clarified in Les Paravents: as the Arabs exchange places with their oppressors, Genet's allegiance shifts to Saïd, to a rebel who remains that to the end, who chooses to be only an outcast and to stand utterly alone. Saïd represents what Genet has wished to depict from the beginning. He has remained an underdog and in this sense has carried the ascesis of the saint to its conclusion. Nevertheless there is none of the masochism of earlier saints in his makeup: he does not abase himself in order to justify society. Equally important, he does not hate either. As one of the characters points out, the Arabs committed their outrages in fury, Saïd did not: "Saïd, c'est autre chose. Il était seul" (p.246). Saïd has committed his crimes for no human motive, for no social or political cause, only in order to detach himself from other men, to be alone. He does not will his Fate, like the saint, nor does he seek to alter it, like the revolutionary. He acts neither as object nor as subject. He does not appear to care, he is indifferent, and this is the essential element of his achievement. It is supreme indifference that keeps him from joining either side in the revolutionary conflict, indifference that leads him to refuse Ommou who wishes to use him for didactic ends. This attitude must be clearly distinguished from that of Warda the whore or the Chief of Police in Le Balcon. The image seeks to withdraw into legend in order

to be admired and emulated for all eternity. Thus his aloofness is a fake: in reality he is utterly dependent on his audience, as is the tightrope walker. Saïd has gone beyond this position. He has refused to be a mask, his indifference is real. He has died to self more truly than any previous Genet type, teaching others "comment on doit se perdre" (p.246). We must see why this is so. So far all attempts to escape the subject-object relation have failed and they have all been based on an attitude either of masochism or of sadism, Sartrean love or Sartrean hate. Through indifference Saïd breaks out of the relationship of the Look, he finds a way out of the maze of mirrors. As long as one takes a stand which depends on a social complement, one is playing the game of roles and neither a sadist attempt to destroy the Other nor a masochist attempt to undermine his power will succeed in realizing the ideal of solitude. But to be indifferent is to refuse to play the game: "A la vieille aux soldats, à tous, je vous dis merde." The problem of appearance and reality is transcended. If Saïd does not care - and we must take Genet's word for this - he has in effect refused a role in the game of love and hate and has achieved that inward liberation from the Other sought in vain by Claire or Roger or the revolutionaries. He seeks neither to rule nor to be ruled. The Other may still be there, but Saïd is alone; the maze of mirrors may still be a reality, but it makes no difference to Saïd. Since the Other cannot touch him, Saïd is free, not in the Sartrean sense in which the Arab revolutionaries are free - they are free to act upon their complementary opposites and so not free of the relation of the Look - but free of both activity and passivity, neither acting nor being acted upon. Of course other characters in Les Paravents see the relativity of human endeavour and so reach a state of indifference. The dead, for example, smile at the conflict of French and Algerians. And yet this discovery is simply a restatement of the Chief of Police's belief that all is illusion, mere appearance. Saïd goes beyond this to



see the relativity of all things, even of the game of illusions. For this reason he cannot join the dead when he is shot, he must be utterly alone in death. There is only one solution: he must disappear altogether. Genet has from the start seen that only absence can convey the truth about solitude. The murderer Harcamone, Boule de Neige in Haute Surveillance, are rarely or never seen; the black traitor of Les Nègres does not appear; in a sense the image - for example, the tightrope walker - vanishes behind the mask. But in these and other similar cases the absence of the protagonist is deceptive. Unlike his predecessors, Saïd really disappears. In the indifferent hero, Genet's fifth character type, we are offered a probable example of solitude achieved.

We may summarize by recapitulating the phases of Genet's search. Everything begins with the Look. The Genet character is a victim, objectified by the Other's gaze, who searches for a way out of his situation and, in addition, for something more, solitude understood not simply as a retreat but as a form of glory, an ultimate assertion of one's uniqueness which goes beyond mere self-assertion and involves a dying to self, an asceticism. The first attempt to achieve this goal is represented by the murderer. But the killer is a fake. His supposed challenge to the Other turns out to be masochist submission in disguise. Far from challenging the Look, the killer surrenders to it, his sadism is not genuine. Genet attempts to deliver the victim of the Look by another way: the saint tries to overcome the Other by willing his own submission. In this case masochism is a deliberate disguise for a form of aggressive sadism, the saint is a fake masochist. Once again, however, the result is dubious. Genet begins to despair, the entire struggle appears as a game of roles. Characteristically, he wonders if he cannot find a solution where it is least to be expected: perhaps the road to solitude is the way of the image, the creature who transforms himself into a myth or a work

of art, a mere appearance void of any substance. This solution too, is ambiguous. The image, after all, is a pure object, utterly dependent on the Other, in short, a true masochist. A fourth solution presents itself in the form of the revolutionary. If the struggle against the Other is no more than a game of roles, then the role of object is no different from its counterpart, the role of subject. Masochism now appears futile. Genet relies upon a new hero, a true sadist, who overcomes the Other and regains his freedom. But the certainty that being a subject is simply the reverse of being an object robs the revolutionary solution of any finality. The revolutionary has done no more than exchange places with the old oppressor. Genet's search therefore continues. Solitude, it seems, is a kind of absence, a withdrawal from the subject-object relationship. The emotional stance corresponding to absence is indifference. In the figure of Saïd such ascetic detachment from all human ties is for the first time realized so that we may conclude that Saïd, of all Genet's characters, comes closest to the attainment of solitude. It would be easy, perhaps, to criticize this dénouement. Les Paravents is one of Genet's finest plays, yet its ending is not altogether satisfying and Saïd, for all his importance, lacks the appeal of earlier Genet characters. Genet's solution of total indifference to the Other may seem anti-climactic after the complexities and subtleties of the struggle. In one sense it represents a remarkably simple conclusion and one which is, in a rather different context, a platitude of religious thought. Nevertheless, it would be short-sighted to criticize Genet on these counts. If the conclusion is simple it is also hard-won. Once we return to the perspective afforded by the whole of Genet's work, the solution of the problem in Les Paravents does not fail to convince.

At this point the comparison with Sartre breaks down completely.

In L'Être et le Néant indifference is regarded as a variant of hate. Moreover it is in bad faith. I can pretend that I bear no relation to an Other, that the Other does not exist: that is indifference. But I cannot sustain this attitude for long. The Other does exist and in relation to me, so that my defence of indifference is bound to be pierced. For Sartre no escape from the Other, that is, from the subject-object relationship, is possible. Genet, on the other hand, sees indifference precisely as a way of achieving this escape. It is clear that solitude as conceived by Genet cannot be squeezed into a Sartrean category. Genet's goal is not Sartrean freedom, it is something different - as Genet's scepticism about the revolutionary hero who attains to Sartrean freedom shows. This fact is implicit in the novels and plays from the start and becomes more and more evident after Le Balcon. Solitude implies a transcending of human relationships which is incompatible with the fundamental assumptions of the philosophy of pour soi and en soi. We can state the same thing from another point of view. Sartre's universe is a secular one and, if we are to believe Saint Genet, so is Genet's by about 1950. On this count, however, Sartre has been hasty: in fact Genet continues to evade Sartrean categories to the very end. From Notre-Dame des Fleurs to Les Paravents he envisages the ideal in metaphysical and religious terms. Solitude is a glorious state, an approximation to divinity, reached, from beginning to end, by means of an otherworldly ascesis. Of course the context is hardly that of conventional theism. God, the conventional deity, is "hollow," as Divine discovers in Genet's first novel. Nevertheless the numinous is not banished by this discovery. In the very heart of man a spiritual refuge remains and this is the goal of Genet's search. Thus Sartre's philosophy proves inadequate as a tool of analysis the moment we focus on the Genet concept of solitude.

Solitude has an aura of the absolute about it. It does not

necessarily imply solipsism. Although statements of this sort are rare in Genet's work, it is suggested that one solitude may speak to another, that, each safe in his uniqueness, two demi-gods may communicate in the following terms:

Je suis seul . . . donc pris dans une nécessité contre laquelle vous ne pouvez rien. Si je ne suis que ce que je suis, je suis indestructible. Etant ce que je suis, et sans réserve, ma solitude connaît la vôtre.

L'Atelier, p.57.

But Genet's concern is not with possibilities of this sort. The important fact which he wishes to stress is solitude itself, that state of being oneself and nothing else and so "indestructible." We are reminded of the Beckett Irreducible, that absolute particular. Genet is obsessed with the figure of the rebel and hopes, through a total rejection of relationships which compromise human autonomy, to enter a realm where revolt itself turns into an absolute, an area deep within the human being where revolt ceases to be revolt against, a mere reaction to an outside stimulus, and becomes something in its own right, an affirmation of particularity, absolute difference, singularity. It is not surprising that at this point Genet, like Beckett, is driven to a language of negatives. In the early novels the glorious criminal, Genet's first and, as it happens, unsuccessful attempt to realize the ideal of solitude, is often characterized by absence. Later, Genet speaks of the image or work of art in similar terms. The tightrope walker strives to be "bloc d'absence" (p.183), a sign of absence, an appearance without a corresponding reality. In Les Paravents this process reaches its climax with the disappearance of Leïla and Saïd. Saïd withdraws into himself, vanishing not behind a mask but into his own transparency, swallowing himself, as Genet tells us he would like to do:

Il m'est arrivé . . . de désirer m'avalier moi-même  
 en retournant ma bouche démesurément ouverte  
 par-dessus ma tête, y faire passer tout mon corps,  
 puis l'Univers, et n'être plus qu'une boule de  
 chose mangée qui peu à peu s'anéantirait . . .

Notre-Dame, p.24.

There is a sense, then, in which solitude, like Beckett's Irreducible, is an impossible, a blend of being and nothingness, as if Genet were to sever one after another all the bonds which link him to the Other: eventually he would reach a threshold, on one side, minimal relations, on the other, nothing, since, as we have seen, an absolute particular is nothing at all. Solitude, as Genet conceives it, must be seen as residing in that no-man's-land which is the domain of irreducibles. It is here that spiritual presence expresses itself as a form of absence and here that all true communication between one solitude and another is achieved. Genet's search, therefore, is for a being-alone analogous to Beckett's being-nothing, an absence which is not mere nothing but a nothing which is: "l'Impossible Nullité," the Impossible Nullity, as it is termed in the Journal (p.100).

Insofar as the parallel with Beckett holds and that with Sartre proves inadequate it seems reasonable to suggest some similarity between Genet and Heidegger. Solitude, the Impossible Nullity, is not like the Sartrean néant any more than is Beckett's Unnamable. For Sartre, nothingness is simply human consciousness, human freedom, and it precludes being. Solitude, however, belongs to the sphere of the supra-human, it is an affirmation of positive being expressing itself most fully in absence. Moreover, it is the very basis of all reality, that place in which all men find themselves. To this extent, and like the Beckett Irreducible, it recalls what Heidegger calls Being. Genet's search, for all its Sartrean echoes, is ultimately comparable to the

obsessive search we find in the work of Beckett and Ionesco and is best expressed in Heideggerian terms. This is not to deny the obvious relevance of Sartre's philosophy of the Look. It is simply to emphasize that the constant orientation of Genet's novels and plays is towards a goal which is inconceivable to Sartre. At this point a further issue presents itself: how far may Genet's movement away from the Sartrean be regarded also as a movement away from the existential? This thesis has argued that a movement towards the Romantic and Idealist origins of the existential is visible in Heidegger's thought insofar as it progressively abandons the sphere of being-there or dasein and concentrates on Being. Such a movement seems also to characterize the work of Beckett and Ionesco. It may plausibly be argued that a comparable tendency exists in Genet's work. Of course in one sense solitude is not a denial of relationships, that is, of the sphere of existential being-with. And yet the consistent drive in Genet is to leave all relations behind in order to explore the region of absolute singularity. Existence is defined as a relation, as being in relation to a "there," as being in relation to other men. But Genet, like Beckett, seeks the ultimate misfit, the alolon, "ce point précieux où l'être humain serait ramené à ce qu'il a de plus irréductible" (L'Atelier, pp.23-24). If this is not exactly Idealism it at least represents a longing to effect a Romantic escape from time and place, that is, from the human situation which, in Genet, is largely conceived as a co-existence with the Other. Where Beckett coils inwards in order to disappear, where Ionesco makes his escape by flying out of the restrictive space, Genet hopes to make a less exalted exit: he will be excreted out of Existence, like Saïd.

PART IV

THE APPROACH TO ART

CHAPTER 16

BECKETT AND HEIDEGGER : THE TASK OF SAYING NOTHING

If I could speak and yet say nothing, really nothing?

The Unnamable, p.305.

But that which remains, is established by the poets.<sup>1</sup>

Hölderlin, quoted by Heidegger.

So far fundamental and important similarities between the work of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet have emerged, partly as a result of the comparison with modern philosophy. The next few chapters will add to this some conclusions in the sphere of the theory and practice of art. We shall see that the approach of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet to art is essentially existential and in significant ways comparable to Heidegger's and, at the same time, that it tends constantly towards Romanticism in the same way as the existential tends towards Idealism. It is vital that a consideration of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet should not, at this point, be limited by restrictive criteria. It is all too easy to speak of a revolt from the conventional theatre, for example, and, with this perspective, to dispose of the above writers with general comments about the absence of character, plot and so forth. This thesis has consistently avoided approaches of this sort and consequently the present chapters will concentrate on those qualities in the work of a given writer which are unique to that writer. Only on this basis is a subsequent comparison of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet possible.

Beckett's approach to art is to some extent implicit in what has so far been said about the Beckett subject, the Irreducible. Art concerned with a being-nothing must be an art of saying nothing. The



interview with Georges Duthuit, already discussed earlier in this thesis, makes this point clearly. The painting of van Velde is inexpressive, it expresses nothing at all, it is simply itself, which is as much as to say, of course, that it is nothing. Thus van Velde may be said to say nothing in his work. By the same token it may be said that Beckett, who names the Unnamable, names nothing that is in any way positive, and so says nothing also. Saying nothing is not easy:

who may tell the tale  
of the old man?  
weigh absence in a scale?  
mete want with a span?  
the sum assess  
of the world's woes?  
nothingness  
in words enclose?

Watt, p.247.

Nor is it, of course, synonymous with silence. Saying nothing is no more to be identified with silence than being-nothing with nothingness. Rather it is a tension, a constant reduction towards a silence which is never reached. Beckett does not stop speaking but his speaking is characterized by a perpetual tending towards cessation. This aspect of Beckett's work has already been adequately analysed in terms of the Irreducible so that we may pass over it quickly here. From the point of view of Beckett's approach to art it may be defined as an attempt to make an end of words, an attempt which is never successful but always almost so. Thus the tramp groans, "how many hours to go, before the next silence, they are not hours, it will not be silence, how many hours still, before the next silence?" (Texts, p.100) - always anticipating the end, "my voice and silence, a voice of silence, the

voice of my silence" (Texts, p.121). The Unnamable searches "for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech" (p.301), tantalized by the one thought: "If I could speak and yet say nothing, really nothing?" (p.305). Sometimes it seems easy: ". . . all you have to do is say you said nothing and so say nothing again" (Texts, p.99). In the words of the narrator of "The Calmative": "All I say cancels out, I'll have said nothing" (p.26). But it is a heartrending task. The Beckett subject is forced to deny every word he utters since it represents a betrayal of the silence. But to deny the word is to affirm it, to say "no" is to utter yet another word. Consequently the pattern of denial followed by affirmation followed by denial continues indefinitely. As argued in an earlier chapter, this should not be interpreted as a pattern of failure and frustration. The Unnamable cannot be named in one sense. But its negative presence can be evoked, it can be indirectly named as the substratum of silence without which there would be no words and to which all words point. Thus we return again to the essential paradox of the Beckett task, that the word is as unavoidable as the silence to which it refers. "Words have been my only loves, not many" (p.147), says the tramp of From an Abandoned Work. At times the word wearies and disgusts. It becomes that "convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace" (Molloy, p.88). "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent" (p.32), shouts Clov and Mr. Rooney is puzzled: "Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language" (All that Fall, p.35). The Unnamable speculates: "Would it not be better if I were simply to keep on saying babababa . . .?" (p.310). In the end, however, the word is necessary, not to maintain a Tantalus condition, but to preserve in existence the mystery of Being and art, "drops of silence through the silence" (The Unnamable, p.386). So the panting of Lucky or the narrator of How it is mirrors the primary quality of

art as Beckett conceives it, an art which stops to begin again and begins again to stop, preserving indefinitely the state of miracle.

It is immediately obvious that one cannot say nothing deliberately. I shall return to this subject later in this chapter but some reference to it is necessary at this point. The argument is simple. If art is inexpressive, if it really is a saying nothing, it cannot be willed - otherwise it becomes an expression of something, an attempt to say something. Thus Beckett pictures its genesis in the following terms: I cannot express myself or anything else, I fail to do it if I try and in any case I do not try. It is not a matter of wanting to succeed, as some have supposed, or of wanting to fail. What then am I doing when I write? Duthuit would call it self-expression perhaps. But how could I express anything since I have no wish to and doubt if I could even if I so desired? The work of art cannot be something created by the artist but only something wrenched from an unknown region through the artist's unwilling cooperation. Beckett has said nothing, but nothing has been said, there is the proof of it, the non-event of the work of art, Winnie's nothing-happening, Watt's fall of sand. Why did it happen, this failure of something to happen, and why did Beckett cooperate, even if the exact nature of this cooperation is obscure? The only answer, it seems, is the fact of the non-event, the existence of a nothingness, the working, the work of art - interpreted as a necessity, something undergone by the artist, thrust upon him. So it is not so much a matter of depicting a negative, of naming the Unnamable, as of accepting the fact that, impossibly, inexplicably, this has occurred. Beckett's notion of art is of an act no less incomprehensible than its subject, the Irreducible. Indeed, artistic creation and the work of art are precisely irreducibles, as Beckett explains to Duthuit:

The situation is that of him who is helpless, cannot act, in the event cannot paint, since he is obliged to paint. The act is of him who, helpless, unable to act, acts, in the event paints, since he is obliged to paint.

p.119.

Or, as Molloy puts it:

Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never to stop saying . . . that is the thing to keep in mind, even in the heat of composition.

p.28.

The basic tenets of Beckett's art, then, are two: art is defined as a saying nothing and the artist relegated to the role of an amazed spectator, that is, reduced to doing nothing. Before considering in greater detail some of the implications of this position, however, I wish to return to the philosophers.

Sartre and Camus, for all their differences, agree in assigning to art and the artist an important social role. Since this aspect of the question is given overwhelming prominence we can say at once that there is no real parallel between the theory of art which we find in these thinkers and that which we find in Beckett. Once again, it is more profitable to turn to Heidegger. Heidegger has written a great deal about the meaning of art. Indeed, the interest becomes so dominant in the later work that the entire philosophy of Being is given a literary perspective. Heidegger's concern with art focusses on the work of the poet Hölderlin, in whom the philosopher has, by his own

testimony, found a kindred spirit. It follows - and this is of some significance if we are to compare Beckett's and, later, Ionesco's and Genet's approaches to art to Heidegger's - that Heidegger's speculations about art have a specifically Romantic tone.

Heidegger's theory of art centres on the notion of erschlossenheit or disclosedness which is elaborated in Being and Time. Dasein is a being-there and this implies an openness on its part, a power to embrace its "there," that is, its world, to take it up into itself and in so doing to reveal it or disclose it. Dasein is illuminated, it is its own light, lighting up the "there" which is a part of it. This notion of revelation is closely bound with what has already been said about being-in-the-world. If man is defined in terms of his milieu, it follows that the world is defined in human terms: man and his world, in short, are not to be regarded as separate entities. From an epistemological point of view we could say that Heidegger inherits the legacy of Kant and, in a general sense, of the German Idealists and Romantics. The mind is not passive in the act of perception; rather it helps to mould that which it perceives: in Heideggerian terms, it reveals it. We are not suggesting that dasein is a creator in the sense in which the term is applied to the deity. As explained in chapter four of this thesis, brute matter is chronologically prior to man - but it does not constitute a world. Before man there is, strictly speaking, only an undifferentiated mass. Man's role is precisely to differentiate this mass, to illumine it, to reveal it, and this involves much more than mere perception of what was there before. Rather, man's disclosure of things, his power to confer thereness or presence on his world, is something without which the world would remain impoverished. The world is more itself, in other words, for being gathered up into the Existence of man. Thus when I use wood to build a house, for example, I reveal the nature of wood, I disclose wood as hard or soft, rough or smooth, able to be

shaped into planks and so forth. This is not mere subjectivity. The wood is those things which I perceive in utilizing it and it is only fully itself when I have utilized it: until then it is hard or soft only in a shadowy sense (which the Aristotelian would term "potential"). To those unsympathetic towards the tradition of thought to which Heidegger belongs these ideas are not congenial. To the student of literature they at least do not come as a surprise insofar as the creative relationship between man and his world here envisaged bears considerable resemblance to the same relationship as visualized, whether explicitly or implicitly, in a good deal of Romantic art.

The way in which the Heideggerian disclosure of the world is practically effected has been suggested in the above example of the utilization of wood. Man is a being of futural projects and schemes whose realization requires a concrete world of tools and equipment. Everything man discovers in his world becomes either help or hindrance in relation to his schemes, it is revealed either as utilizable or as an obstacle. Thus man confers meaning on objects, that is, differentiates his world even as he acts to achieve his practical ends. None of this, however, is possible without language. In the essay "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" Heidegger argues that being-there and language are synonymous. Man is language, he is his own speech, since it is speech which as it were exposes man to his world. Language is a form of action, it does not merely express an act, it is itself that, just as man is himself essentially active. Thus we may say that man differentiates the world by naming it, he reveals it by language. It follows that the word is not a passive label, something added to an object. On the contrary, to name is to disclose, to cooperate actively - or creatively - in the revelation of the nature of a thing. In this sense the naming of a thing alters that thing, a given object may be said to be its name. Of course a name may reveal

the object falsely, it may disguise its true nature. Moreover as, by the power of habit, my grasp of the reality of a thing deteriorates and fades, I will more and more tend to obscure that reality by means of language. The word now becomes everyday, it loses the power of revealing and, as the reality of the world slips from it, so too does the reality of the ground of things, Being itself. Language, then, is a means of disclosing oneself in one's world, of revealing beings and, in addition, of revealing the Heideggerian Being of beings, the mystery of things. At the same time language degenerates very easily and serves to disguise the truth. Clearly this deterioration of the word is indistinguishable from that forgetfulness of Being which has been discussed earlier in this thesis. Man is language and inauthentic man becomes inauthentic language. The creative Word now becomes the Idle Talk of the "they." Two questions arise at this point: who originally reveals reality by naming it? Who rediscovers or renames it once it has been lost? The answer in both cases is the poet.

For Heidegger, language is rooted in poetry, it has its origins in it. Thus the poet is the first of men to speak:

The poet names the gods and all things . . . This naming does not consist merely in something already known being supplied with a name; it is rather that when the poet speaks the essential word, the existent is by this naming nominated as what it is. So it becomes known as existent.<sup>2</sup>

The poet is an unacknowledged legislator, one who, by means of the word, opens man out towards the world and in turn enables the world to disclose itself to man. Poetry thus becomes identical with dasein or being-there. The essence of man is poetry, source of language. Poetry and language are not expressions of human reality, they constitute it:

man is a poetic animal. The connection with what has been said about angst earlier in this thesis is obvious. Angst, like the poetic word, reveals Existence and, beneath it, the mystery of Being. Thus angst belongs properly to the poet as well as to the thinker. The poet too asks the Metaphysical Question. In the very act of naming reality, he questions the inauthentic view of things, he wrestles with inauthentic language in order to return to the truth. In the words of Hölderlin quoted by Heidegger: "But that which remains, is established by the poets." That which remains is, above all, Being itself, forgotten by the "they." The task of the poet is to awaken man to his poetic Existence, to his da-sein, his place in the world and, beyond this, to his ultimate ground, Sein.

"Remembrance of the Poet," another of Heidegger's essays on the work of Hölderlin, illustrates this point. It proceeds as a philosophical commentary on the elegy "Homecoming" which describes Hölderlin's return to his native Swabia. For Heidegger the journey over Lake Constance is a return to man's true home, to Being itself. The poet, advancing over the lake, names what is about him and Heidegger argues:

The Bodensee is also called "the Swabian Sea," and if we think of it in a geographical or commercial context . . . then we mean the lake which lies between the Alps and the upper reaches of the Danube . . . Thus we still think of this water unpoetically. And how much longer are we going to? How long are we going to imagine that there was first of all a part of nature existing for itself . . . and that then with the help of "poetic experiences" this landscape became coloured with myth?<sup>3</sup>

Heidegger's point is that there is no such thing as nature without man,



that poetry is not something added on to nature but the revelation of nature itself. The imagination of the poet - and we must use the term "imagination" in the strong, the Romantic sense - reveals the lake for the first time, the real lake, in all its complex reality as gathered up into the world of man, the sphere of thought and feeling. This is the lake, the geographical lake is an indefinite, neutral thing, a non-lake called Constance, something analogous to the indefinite "they" which is everyone and noone. Only with the advent of the poet is the true, the individual lake disclosed. This point is worth emphasizing because it relates to a concept which is fundamental in Heidegger's philosophy and it necessitates a brief digression.

The poet reveals things as they are, he does not merely give them an alien "human" colouring. In this he resembles the Heideggerian philosopher and indeed exemplifies the assumptions of Phenomenology. We recall that the existential thinker mediates between the Idealist position and that of the empiricist. Man, who perceives reality, neither reduces it to thought, that is, to himself, nor does he stand passive in relation to it. He does something of both: he perceives actively in such a way as to disclose reality as it really is in itself, he both perceives (passively) and helps to bring about that which he perceives. Thus the phenomenon is defined in Being and Time as something manifest or revealed, "that which shows itself in itself."<sup>4</sup> Unlike many philosophers and, in a way, Husserl, Heidegger does not wish to distinguish between appearance and reality, between the thing as it is for me and as it is in itself, between the Kantian phenomenon and noumenon. Rather - and this is to be Sartre's approach also - a thing is its appearance, the phenomenon as I perceive it or, better, reveal it, is the thing itself. Phenomenology thus becomes "to let that which shows itself be seen" and is expressed in the motto: "To the things themselves!"<sup>5</sup> This "letting-be" is crucial. To reveal is not to manipulate reality but to stand back from it, to actively allow it to

show itself. The principle applies as much to poetry as to philosophy and is discussed in the essay "On the Essence of Truth." One may discern in it something fundamentally similar to the Keatsian negative capability or, more generally, to the Romantic concept of the imagination as a force not to be tampered with. The poet, like the thinker, must be faithful to reality, he must act as a creative medium through which reality may express its true nature. This means that to reveal is not to exhaust reality, to name it once and for all. On the contrary, the poet must name in such a way as to preserve the essential mystery of things. We now return to the essay on Hölderlin's poem, "Homecoming." The poet reveals the landscape of the lake and mountains as mysterious because, ultimately, what he seeks to disclose is not simply the world of beings but Being itself. To reveal things as they are is to evoke the presence of their mysterious ground. Thus the poet who names the world and its Being, who seeks to evoke the meaning of "home," that is, of the essential nature of things, reveals the truth as hidden, as poetic and allusive, not to mystify the reader but out of reverence: ". . . we never get to know a mystery by unveiling or analysing it; we only get to know it by carefully guarding the mystery as mystery."<sup>6</sup> Being is the Reserved<sup>7</sup> and the poet like a cloud which filters the light down to the world beneath.<sup>8</sup> The closer the poet comes to the light of Being, the more intense the darkness becomes. Once again, language, insofar as it corresponds to the poetic reality of things, must stand back in awe from the truth, must let the truth be and so disclose reality as mysterious.

While the tone of Beckett's work contrasts strongly with the Heideggerian, important similarities exist between Beckett's and Heidegger's theories of art and ones which make it possible for us to relate them to a common Romantic source. Before returning to the aesthetic of saying nothing, though, we must reconsider briefly the role of the Beckett hero.

The voice of the tramp and of the Unnamable is, as we have seen, that of consciousness itself. But it may also be regarded as the voice of the artist and from this point of view it is true to say that all of Beckett's work is about art. This is not surprising in a man who carries on the tradition of James Joyce, of Proust and Flaubert and it has been investigated to some extent, notably by Raymond Federman.<sup>9</sup> The Beckett subject emerges time and time again as the Heideggerian poet who asks the Metaphysical Question and, supremely conscious, suffering the torments of angst, reveals the world of human reality. This issue has already been adequately discussed in this thesis, though not in terms of art and the artist, and relatively little needs to be added. Beckett, like Heidegger, is a modern Romantic in his approach to art. Of course the heady quality of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Romanticism is gone: Beckett, like many modern writers, is a Romantic disillusioned by one hundred and fifty years of frustration. But an essential element remains and it expresses itself in an aesthetic similar to Heidegger's. Sam, in Watt, appears as the writer who will attempt to illuminate the complex and confusing "what?" of things, working in conjunction with the protagonist of the novel. The Beckett artist is a storyteller, one who, by an act of consciousness, brings into the light of day an existential world. In a sense, he creates or invents this world, as the Unnamable, understood as an Idealist Absolute, creates the finite universe. But strictly speaking the voice of consciousness, which is that of the artist, is not identical, as we have seen, with the Unnamable. Rather, the role of the voice is that of an agent. The artist gives visible form to a mystery which envelops him, he does not really invent his stories, he merely utters a series of denials and affirmations; he does not create but, like Heidegger's poet, discloses and, of course, he discloses his own situation, that of consciousness or Existence and, by implication, the further sphere of Being, the Unnamable. In this way Molloy is an

artist and so is Moran, writing his report. Malone writes in his room - with a blunt pencil - the voice of the Unnamable tells its endless stories, like the narrator of How it is. Pozzo's voice too is that of the artist, as is that of Hamm. More centrally, Lucky's outburst is an image of poetic creativity and Krapp appears as one who composes - and, it seems, whose compositions have the same excremental status as those of Shem the Penman in Finnegans Wake. Many more examples of the storyteller and the artist may be found in Beckett's work. Henry of Embers possesses creative powers, Winnie sings her song, Croak of Words and Music improvises on a theme. Even the tortured voices of Play are, from one point of view, illustrative of the artist's situation. In each case the voice is responsible for the revelation of an entire world of tramps with their bicycles, their crutches and so on. The Beckett artist shows us "how it is," in Heideggerian terms he names things. But of course he has no wish to name things. In a sense his whole task is to deny all positives and by this means to name the one important truth, the Unnamable. Thus the world is named by mistake as it were: it is named as a result of the failure to name the Unnamable. There is a close parallel here with the situation of the Heideggerian poet and I shall return to it shortly.

One last point must be made with respect to the Beckett storyteller. If the voice of the artist is identical with that of consciousness or Existence we may also say that for Beckett, as for Heidegger, man is his own speech and that that speech is poetic or artistic. To be is to be made of words, to exist is to be a poet:

. . . the words are everywhere, inside me, outside me  
 . . . impossible to stop, I'm in words, made of words  
 . . . the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the  
 ceiling, all words, the whole world is here with me . . . .

The Unnamable, p.390.

Without words there is no revelation of oneself as a being in a situation, there is no world. Thus language is supremely active, it is that which it represents: in the terminology of conventional literary criticism, form and content are one. Beckett has always stressed this point of view. As early as in his (otherwise unimportant) essay on Joyce, "Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . . Joyce," he praises Joyce's writing because it "is not about something; it is that something itself."<sup>10</sup> A similar emphasis is found in Proust: "For Proust . . . style is more a question of vision than of technique . . . Indeed he makes no attempt to dissociate form from content" (p.87-88). It is scarcely necessary to add that this is also Beckett's great achievement, not only in Waiting for Godot, where the waiting of Vladimir and Estragon becomes the waiting of the audience and, finally, of all men, but in all the novels and plays in which the mystery of human consciousness is indistinguishable from the mystery of the word on the page.

The point has been made that if the Beckett artist reveals a world he does so by mistake since, ultimately, he wishes to reveal only the negative presence of an irreducible beneath or behind the world. A parallel with Heidegger on this score is easily available. The Heideggerian poet reveals the world only in the act of negating it in the experience of angst, that is, in the act of affirming the reality of Being, the ground of all things. We now return to the concept of art as a saying nothing. In the final analysis, the Beckett poet or storyteller is bound to argue that his stories are untrue, that the entire exercise in speech is a lie. So Moran explains: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining" (Molloy, p.176). So also the narrators of The Unnamable and How it is reject all that they have said. Art, in a way, is rubbish, like the

heap in which Biddy the hen scratches in Finnegans Wake, "krapp," something utterly degrading, fit only for creatures like Shem the Penman or Malone. Why not? Beckett will have nothing to do with the limited aims of literary realism, "the penny-a-line vulgarity of a literature of notations" (Proust, p.76) and has only contempt for "the realists and naturalists worshipping the offal of experience, prostrate before the epidermis and the swift epilepsy, and content to transcribe the surface, the façade, behind which the Idea is prisoner" (Proust, pp.78-79). Art is not concerned with the surfaces of things. Its wish is to penetrate beneath the positive, to negate even itself, that is, to negate the word itself in order to suggest a reality transcending all language. In this context the word becomes a hindrance, a sluggish and imperfect medium which serves to conceal rather than to reveal. If we are to say nothing or, in Heideggerian terms, to utter Being,<sup>11</sup> art must rise above itself, language must be renewed, distorted and, finally, rejected, not in favour of silence but of a razor edge of statement and denial. Art thus becomes a lie by means of which truth is spoken. As in Heidegger, the word reveals the truth as concealed, as mysterious, it reveals Being, the Irreducible as it really is, Reserved, unknown, inexplicable. Beckett's tendency is exactly that of the Heideggerian poet: to speak the silence of Being without compromise, to preserve the negative as negative.

Such an approach necessarily implies an equivalent to Heideggerian "letting-be." I have already argued that in Beckett the work of art is not willed but simply happens and this point must be elaborated further in the light of Heidegger's theory of art. For Beckett, the artist does not force reality to yield its secrets. The trouble with the painter Masson, he tells Georges Duthuit, is that he wants to paint the void, he has "the malady of wanting to know what to do and the malady of wanting to be able to do it" (p.17). Beckett's logic is simple: how can I paint nothing deliberately? In order to do

it I must desire nothing at all and then, perhaps, it will happen that in my passivity something will occur, the void will paint itself through me. The Romanticism of such an attitude is as obvious as in the case of Heidegger's "letting-be." In each case the artist must not will, he must stand back and allow the truth to be revealed. Beckett sees this as a characteristic of Proust for whom the work of art is "neither created nor chosen, but discovered, uncovered, excavated, pre-existing in the artist" (Proust, p.84). Again, "Proust . . . is almost exempt from the impurity of will. He deplures his lack of will until he understands that will, being utilitarian, a servant of intelligence and habit, is not a condition of the artistic experience" (p.90). This is a description of Beckett himself who, like Macmann of Malone Dies, "in helplessness and will-lessness" (p.279), and like van Velde, "who is helpless, cannot act," brings about creation without the least desire for control of the imaginative process. The Beckett artist, as we find him in the novels and plays, is indifferent, and this indifference, which derives partly from the Stoic detachment characteristic of the philosophies of Spinoza and Geulinx and partly from the shock produced by angst (indeed, it is a Stoicism reinterpreted from an existential standpoint) represents an openness, a wise passiveness towards the real. Thus the artist is a loafer, like Belacqua or Murphy or Vladimir or Estragon or Malone, he is a contemplative, in the secular and in the religious sense, gazing attentively at the darkness, close to the source of things. There is, of course, an element of compulsion in the act of artistic creation and to a large extent the question has already been discussed in this thesis under the heading of "freedom." Art offers a picture of the human condition. I do not desire to be conscious and yet I am, I do not desire to speak and yet I do. The facticity of Existence operates also in the sphere of art and all art, like life, is an impossible, a miracle. Thus: "It is I who write, who cannot raise my

hand . . . I am Matthew and I am the angel" (The Unnamable, p.303). The artist is possessed by the voice of inspiration as man in general is tyrannized by the anguished voice of consciousness and in each case this voice is that of truth, the voice of madness. To be is to be a poet. Inspiration dictates to the artist and turns him into an agent. Thus the lunatics of Murphy's asylum are "feverishly covering sheets of paper with . . . verbatim reports of their inner voices" (p.116). Watt hears voices, no less than a mixed choir. By the time we reach Beckett's mature work the voice compelling the schizoid is recognizable as the voice of the muse. This is the case with Lucky's inspired utterance and with the speech of the narrators of the novels and stories. "All I say will be false and to begin with not said by me, here I'm a mere ventriloquist's dummy" (p.109), comments the speaker in one of the Texts for Nothing. So the voice of the Unnamable is forced to speak and Molloy is possessed by a Hypothetical Imperative (p.87) no less categorical than the Kantian one. The command is always the same, naturally, as the "messenger . . . returns with his orders, namely, Continue" (The Unnamable, p.373).

It is possible to conclude that the essentials of Beckett's and Heidegger's theories of art are identical. In each case we begin with man as a poetic creature, with the identification of consciousness and artistic inspiration. In each case existential man, represented by the artist, reveals a twofold reality in a pattern of denial and affirmation. Heidegger's poet negates the world (and so constitutes it) in order to affirm its ground, Being: Beckett's voice rejects all positives (and so affirms them) in order to unearth the Irreducible. Just as the Heideggerian artist is bound to preserve the integrity of the mystery, so Beckett's is committed to an austere programme, the task of saying nothing. Moreover, as the one stands back from reality, "lets it be" or allows it to manifest itself in its true nature, so



the other undergoes a purification of the will, submits to reality and permits the impossible coming into being of the work of art.

In the final analysis Beckett's artist is surprisingly analogous to Heidegger's. For the latter, the poet does not choose his vocation, he is chosen by Being. Poetry, like Existence, is a "gift."<sup>12</sup> It entails suffering: "The poet is exposed to the divine lightnings . . . The excessive brightness has driven the poet into the dark."<sup>13</sup> "'Cast out' . . . from everyday life,"<sup>14</sup> standing uncomfortably in a no-man's-land, exposed to excessive light and detached from the inauthentic, the artist "intercepts" the signs of the gods and offers them to men.<sup>15</sup> In Hölderlin's words:

. . . the bold spirit, like an eagle  
Before the tempests, flies prophesying  
In the path of his advancing gods.<sup>16</sup>

Thus the poet is a prophet, a man of vision, an Oedipus with "one / Eye too many perhaps,"<sup>17</sup> driven to madness - like Hölderlin - "one who has been cast out - into that Between, between gods and men."<sup>18</sup> In spite of the great difference in tone, the situation of the Beckett artist adheres to this Romantic archetype. Beckett's artist is a madman and a prophet, driven by an unknown force which gives no rest and separates him not only from other men but from all created things, a reject from society, a tramp or voice in solitude, cursed with the gift of vision and the burden of an obscure commission. In the words of a passage which is as applicable to Beckett's characters as to Proust's:

For the artist, who does not deal in surfaces, the rejection of friendship is . . . a necessity. Because the only possible spiritual development is in the sense of depth. The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction. And art is the apotheosis of solitude.

Proust, p.64.

We are led to the situation of the wanderer or the tramp in his little room or the voice in the skull, in each case an alogon, the impossible scribe of an impossible message from an impossible source.

Beckett's artist is a prophet possessed by a No. In the Hölderlin essays Heidegger conceives of the modern poet along similar lines. We live in an age, he argues, when "Holy names are lacking," when a poem can only be "a song without words,"<sup>19</sup> because this is an "age when the god is lacking."<sup>20</sup> God, in Nietzsche's words, has died, and man lives in a time of transition, a time when Being has been "forgotten" and has not yet been rediscovered:

It is the time of the gods that have fled and of the god that is coming. It is the time of need, because it lies under a double lack and a double Not: the No-more of the gods that have fled and the Not-yet of the god that is coming.<sup>21</sup>

It follows that the vision of the modern poet, who stands between the no-more and the not-yet, can only be a negative one, that Being can only be experienced as Reserved:

The time is needy and therefore the poet is extremely rich - so rich that he would often like to relax in thoughts of those that have been and in eager waiting for that which is coming and would like only to sleep in this apparent emptiness. But he holds his ground in the Nothing of this night. Whilst the poet remains thus by himself in the supreme isolation of his mission, he fashions truth, vicariously . . . for his people.<sup>22</sup>

But this fashioning of truth is, for the time being, unrewarding, an exercise in patient endurance, and the poet is forced to "remain near

the failure of the god, and wait."<sup>23</sup> Beckett's artist too is waiting - for nothing - staying close to the No, a negative as austere as Heidegger's "double Not," and his only message concerns an impossible, an absence. He is not a pious prophet, like Heidegger's, but a complaining one, however, a rebellious and disheartened one, eager to avoid the imperative, like Jonah before Nineveh or Elijah in the desert when his morale is at its lowest. The tyrant is the Irreducible, truth, the muse, Being, Beckett does not care to specify. But his fidelity to his negative mission is extraordinary. Perhaps the short radio play, Cascando, sums up the nature of the task better than many more familiar works.

Cascando consists of an Opener who prompts Voice to tell the story of its search for the tramp Woburn who is himself engaged in an obscure quest. In an earlier chapter I described this as the movement of the Irreducible out of itself, into the voice of consciousness and the figure of the tramp and, at the same time, as the Irreducible's attempt to return to itself through the voice's search for the tramp and the tramp's search for his own origins. From the point of view of the Beckett aesthetic, though, another interpretation of the play is possible. The Opener may be regarded as the artist and Voice as the artistic utterance whose content is the story of Woburn, that is to say, the eternal story of the search for Being. Opener appears to be in control but in fact is simply an agent:

What do I open?

They say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it's in his head.

They don't see me, they don't see what I do, they don't see what I have, and they say,

He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it's in his head.

I don't protest any more, I don't say any more,  
 There is nothing in my head.  
 I don't answer any more.  
 I open and close.

p.43.

The argument to Georges Duthuit is clearly evoked. Opener, as artist, brings nothing out of his own mind, as people imagine. On the contrary, he is a medium, possessed by a higher power - by the exigencies of the muse, by Being - and his role is merely one of opening and closing. When he opens, Voice pants its confused speech, retelling the old story of the artist's burden, his attempt to define the most elusive reality of all:

- story . . . if you could finish it . . . you could  
 rest . . . not before . . . the ones I've finished  
 . . . thousands and one . . . all I ever did . . .  
 saying to myself . . . finish this one . . . then  
 rest . . . no more stories . . . no more words . . . .

p.39.

The consummatum est in this story of a search for a negative is never heard. If it could be uttered the Reduction would be completed, the task of the poet and philosopher done.

CHAPTER 17BECKETT : LESS AND MORE - POETRY AND THE SITUATION

I mean that on reflection, in the long run rather, my verbal profusion turned out to be penury, and inversely.

Molloy, p.34.

Everything that has here been said about Beckett's concerns and his approach to art has its implications in the practical sphere of his writing and, of course, many of these implications have been touched upon. Some further comments about Beckett's manner are required, however. Beckett's art exemplifies perfectly that interpenetration of form and content which the writer values in the work of Joyce and Proust. In fact it can be said of Beckett too that "style is more a question of vision than of technique" (Proust, pp.87-88), although in view of Beckett's interest in language such a statement may surprise those who imagine that Beckett's work is technique and little else. In the light of the comparisons with philosophy drawn in this thesis, it may plausibly be argued that all considerations of Beckett's dazzling technique should begin with the more fundamental question of vision.

Reduction is Beckett's guiding principle and from the point of view of style it determines the essentials of the artist's use of language and his approach to larger structures such as plot. This chapter will examine each of these in turn but before that an important quality of Beckett's manner must be noted. Beckett's style is characterized by a development towards ever greater simplicity - a development which corresponds to the Reduction - but simplification alone is not the key to an understanding of the movement. Reduction,

as we have seen, leads not to a mere void but to a tension, an impossible. Thus the simplification of style leads, not unexpectedly, to a seeming paradox: the simpler Beckett's style grows, the more complex it becomes. This phenomenon exactly parallels the literary and philosophical patterns observable in Beckett's work. Angst, I have argued, involves the dual revelation of beings and of Being, of multiplicity and of unity, of complexity and simplicity. In different terms, the Reduction involves the dual revelation of the complex world of the tramps and of consciousness and, beneath this, of the sphere of simplicity itself, the Unnamable. It is important to see that the two aspects of this vision go together. To reveal the transparent simplicity of the Irreducible is necessarily to highlight, by contrast, the endless and tormenting complexity of the life of consciousness. To affirm simplicity is to negate complexity; to negate complexity is to affirm it once again and, by an inexorable mechanism, to negate simplicity. Thus the pattern of affirmation and denial continues, alternately hiding and revealing the object of the search, Beckett's Unnamable, alternately focussing on the Many and on the One, on words and on silence. It is therefore a characteristic of the Beckett style that the more one affirms the less one affirms and, more significant for the purposes of this chapter, the less one affirms, the more one does so: "I mean that on reflection, in the long run rather, my verbal profusion turned out to be penury, and inversely." But it is not only a question of more words or less words. What Beckett achieves is a less and more within the word itself or rather within the basic unit of his speech. By the same token he manages to strike an extraordinary virtuoso balance of less and more in the unit of action or plot-construction. I shall examine these in turn now under the respective headings of "saying nothing" and "doing nothing."

With respect to language the paradox of saying more by saying less is unmysterious. It simply means that, as it is pruned and

simplified, Beckett's writing becomes more poetic. As poetry its range of suggestiveness is, of course, increased. Thus Beckett will use less and less words, simpler and simpler words and, at the same time, achieve in his units of language all the complex allusiveness that goes with the poetic. Like Joyce, Beckett is one of the most significant poets of the century and one who chose the medium of prose; his verse writing, though not without merit, cannot be compared to the novels and plays.

The movement towards a simpler and more poetic prose begins in Murphy, where Beckett uses a style that is not unconventional and yet already prefigures later developments:

At this moment Murphy would willingly have waived his expectation of Antepurgatory for five minutes in his chair, renounced the lee of Belacqua's rock and his embryonal repose, looking down at dawn across the reeds to the trembling of the austral sea and the sun obliquing to the north as it rose, immune from expiation until he should have dreamed it all through again, with the downright dreaming of an infant, from the spermarium to the crematorium.

p.56.

The rhythms of Watt also evoke the sense of the poetic though the style is still not Beckett's final and distinctive product:

Watt had watched people smile and he thought he understood how it was done. And it was true that Watt's smile, when he smiled, resembled more a smile than a sneer, for example, or a yawn. But there was something wanting to Watt's smile, some little thing

was lacking, and people who saw it for the first time, and most people who saw it saw it for the first time, were sometimes in doubt as to what expression exactly was intended. To many it seemed a simple sucking of the teeth.

p.23.

In the Stories and in Molloy and Malone Dies the characteristic panting, broken utterance begins:

I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there. Perhaps an ambulance, certainly a vehicle of some kind. I was helped. I'd never have got there alone.

Molloy, p.7.

I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all. Perhaps next month. Then it will be the month of April or of May.

Malone Dies, p.179.

This is a new poetry of spareness, of fine juxtaposing of brief phrases which are used, as in Waiting for Godot, as motifs:

VLADIMIR: Charming evening we're having.

ESTRAGON: Unforgettable.

VLADIMIR: And it's not over.

ESTRAGON: Apparently not.

VLADIMIR: It's only beginning.

ESTRAGON: It's awful.

VLADIMIR: Worse than the pantomime.

ESTRAGON: The circus.



VLADIMIR: The music-hall.

ESTRAGON: The circus.

pp.34-35.

It reaches its first perfection in the tortured rhythms of The Unnamable:

. . . you must go on, I can't go on, you must go on,  
I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are  
any, until they find me, until they say me, strange  
pain, strange sin, you must go on . . . .

p.418.

Here Beckett needs only the comma and even that is scarcely necessary, the pauses come so naturally between the self-contained units of his speech. It is a poetry whose effect is cumulative, like that of a symphony in which themes, here represented by verbal patterns, appear and reappear in various disguises, moving about the central stylistic pattern, the struggle of pause and speech, word and silence. This is the language - sometimes adapted for dialogue - of many of the plays, particularly Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape and Happy Days. The real line of development, though, is to the utterly simplified, unpunctuated - there is no need for punctuation - poetry of How it is:

suddenly we are eating sandwiches alternate bites I  
mine she hers and exchanging endearments my sweet  
girl I bite she swallows my sweet boy she bites I  
swallow we don't yet coo with our bills full

my darling girl I bite she swallows my darling boy  
she bites I swallow brief black and there we are  
again dwindling again across the pastures hand in

hand arms swinging heads high towards the heights  
 smaller and smaller out of sight first the dog then  
 us the scene is shut of us

pp.33-34.

So much for a lovers' picnic. Beckett attempts variations of this kind of style, in Imagination Dead Imagine and, more strikingly, Ping, although nothing written after How it is has the same sustained inspiration:

All known all white bare white body fixed one  
 yard legs joined like sewn. Light heat white floor  
 one square yard never seen. White walls one yard  
 by two white ceiling one square yard never seen.  
 Bare white body fixed only the eyes only just.  
 Traces blurs light grey almost white on white.  
 Hands hanging palms front white feet heels together  
 right angle.

Ping, p.165.

Simpler language than this could hardly be imagined. Yet the rhythmical virtuosity, the lucid beauty of Beckett's units of speech creates equally the sense of verbal richness, even extravagance, a complexity, a musical quality, an allusiveness which is normally associated with poetry. Waiting for Godot, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, How it is, no less than Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, constitute perhaps the greatest poetry this century has produced.

The unlikely union of less and more is as evident in the dramatic construction of the novels and plays as it is in the unit of language. Beckett simplifies his action and reduces it to a minimum and yet the movement towards doing nothing, like that to saying nothing, results in a new complexity. In this case Beckett combines

seeming opposites by achieving a sense of situation rather than action, that is, by compressing the essentials of an action into a situation. The concept of the situation has been examined philosophically earlier in this thesis, but it is equally relevant in the context of a discussion of literary form.

The sense of situation, the reduction of succession to an instant, is often conveyed by an image of stasis, such as Winnie's sandpile, or of a closed space, such as Malone's room, but it does not rely on such obvious techniques. Likewise it is more explicit in novels and plays concerned with characters who are unable to move, but is equally present where Beckett's tramps are free to wander from one place to another. It does not exist from the first in Beckett's work. Murphy, for example, is concerned with a story, an action - if an uncomplicated one. Already in Watt, however, this approach is being more and more modified. Watt comes to Mr. Knott's and then leaves but the reader is not really offered an image of progression. Rather, the entire novel, regardless of its plot-sequence, registers as a single image, that of a man struggling to order his world or, more concisely, it offers us the single situation of "questioning," a protracted, agonized "what?" The trilogy moves away from even the minimal action of Watt. Strictly speaking, Molloy does not search, he is in a situation of eternal searching, he does not move but exists in a situation of motion. In The Unnamable there is no movement, no action, and we are left with the situation of existing, of being conscious or, if we prefer, of speaking. The single, utterly simple act is examined, varied like a musical theme until, without the addition of action, it acquires the richness, the allusive breadth of a poetic image, the structural complexity of a novel or play. In Waiting for Godot little or nothing happens yet, as Beckett simplifies the traditional plot to a point beyond which it would be difficult to go, he gains in complexity precisely because he has turned action into the poetic stasis of

situation. The character does nothing, he simply is. This is ontological or existential theatre with a vengeance. Beckett does not develop his plot. He offers us an initial situation and then revolves it before our eyes so that we see it from all sides. As in Malone Dies, we begin and end with "waiting." Nothing has happened beyond that but the original situation has been enriched. Even the Pozzo and Lucky interludes add nothing to the flow of events - they simply help to pass the time while we wait. The only relief from pure stasis is the circularity of the structure and even this merely underlines the fact that there is no action, that the end returns us to the beginning or rather that we have not moved at all but are still keeping the same vigil. Similar comments could be made about the other plays. Even All that Fall, on the face of it more conventional than, for example, Endgame, resolves itself into a single image of decay, a situation of "falling" - into old age, into the arms of death.

To a greater or lesser degree in all the above cases nothing has happened, a situation has been elaborated, has revolved before our eyes like a many-faceted sphere so that its full dramatic potential has been revealed. Beckett has carried off another impossible, he has shown the situation as single, that is, he has reduced it to a unitary phenomenon, like a poetic image whose multiple connotations are grasped simultaneously. He has allowed us to read a novel or see a play all at once, as it were. In a way he has squared the literary circle and carried the Romantic principle of organic form, of the part in the whole and the whole in the part, to its logical conclusion. From the point of view of the theatrical, of course, the situational approach may well call for "total" theatre. Beckett uses any device that will underline the sense of unity, that is, he allows every aspect of the situation to speak. Thus, in addition to language, décor, dance, song, jokes, mime, knockabout farce, all have a part to play - suitably simplified for the austerity of the Beckett stage. It is true, however, that most

of these are used very sparingly in plays other than Waiting for Godot. In some radio plays - Words and Music and Cascando - Beckett relies considerably on music. In other works, notably Play and Krapp's Last Tape, the concept of the all-at-once is given a uniquely concrete form. In Play Beckett achieves a new kind of simultaneity by orchestrating the voices of the three characters. At certain points the three actually speak at once so that three action strands are running simultaneously and dramatic language is treated with a freedom normally reserved for music. In Krapp - to take a less striking but equally ingenious example - Beckett does not run his characters together but divides the single character in two in order to simultaneously offer two views of one man by the simple yet theatrically brilliant device of the tape.

In the hands of Samuel Beckett the work of art becomes an irreducible, an impossible which combines in an extraordinary equilibrium the contraries of less and more. From the point of view of language, the movement towards saying nothing leads to a poetic tension between speech and silence. From the point of view of dramatic structure the movement towards doing nothing leads to the theatre of situation or, more generally, to theatrical and novel forms which rely on the concept of situation and may for this reason be termed existential. Here the tension is one of doing and nothing in a rhythm that reduces doing to nothing and elevates nothing to doing. In other words again, Beckett manages to combine the poles of succession and simultaneity, of time and timelessness, of multiplicity and unity. Of course perfect simultaneity of action, total unity of the work of art means the abolition of action and Beckett does not reach this extreme any more than he reaches that of silence. Rather he compresses everything to an irreducible zero, that unstable point of uncertain metamorphosis which in his hands becomes a reliable point

of reference in defiance of every law. The situation is neither static nor dynamic but something of both. It represents a state of things such that, beyond a certain point, the tendency to stasis is transformed into action and vice versa. Each new angle, like a new camera shot of a single indivisible phenomenon, is a new negation of its irreducibility, of the organic unity of the novel or play, of stasis, a new affirmation of multiplicity and fragmentation, of what the work of art is not. Thus every word sins against silence, every act is a crime against the void. So Beckett denies the word and the action and so says and does nothing once more, he reaffirms the situation, the simplicity of the work of art. Thus the work unfolds by the familiar process of affirmation and negation, the more coiled in the heart of the less, that is, by an action that affirms the part and negates the whole, followed by a return to situation that negates the part and affirms the whole, an oscillation between the poles of extended temporality and simultaneity. In the final analysis the dynamism is not even an oscillation between two points but a paradox of motion and stasis, a vibration about a fixed point, a constant pull of expansion and contraction which resolves itself to a fine trembling. This pattern corresponds to the metaphysical or philosophical tension in Beckett's work between being and nothingness and it is, of course, the fundamental "shape" or "rhythm" of Beckett's inspiration. The work of art, by its very form, reveals the twofold reality of things, on the one hand the sphere of the Many, Existence, on the other that of the One, Being - Existence revealed only to be overwhelmed by the encroaching presence of Being, Being revealed even as Existence reasserts itself and returns us to the inconceivable shore.

CHAPTER 18GENET AND THE MASS : SACRAMENT AS EFFICACIOUS SIGN

. . . le plus haut drame moderne s'est exprimé  
pendant deux mille ans et tous les jours dans le  
sacrifice de la messe.<sup>1</sup>

Genet.

The close parallel which exists between Beckett and Heidegger cannot be drawn between Heidegger and Genet. Nevertheless, there are some basic similarities in the approach to art. Like Beckett, Genet is a modern Romantic where aesthetics are concerned, although in his case the Romantic quality is modified as a result of other influences. Moreover, as in the case of Beckett's work, we are justified in speaking of existential form in Genet, once again with the proviso that Genet derives his inspiration from a variety of sources. Genet's approach to art has little affinity with that of Sartre or Camus. Certainly, the Genet play or novel is envisaged as an act of revolt and Sartre and Camus tend to see the work of art primarily in these terms. On the other hand, where the latter regard revolt as a supremely human action and so exclude the numinous from the sphere of art, Genet emphasizes precisely the element of religious mystery. To this extent he moves away from Sartre and Camus and in the general direction of Heidegger.

Throughout this thesis, the comparison with Pirandello has helped to clarify Genet's position and this is also true where Genet's attitude to art is concerned. Pirandello's feelings about art are equivocal. On the one hand art is a form of death, a fixing of life, a limitation, so that the statue of Diana falls far short of its original, the model Tuda. On the other hand art may heighten life,

it may discover unknown possibilities for man. This latter view, tending to neo-platonism is found in such late works as I Giganti della Montagna (The Mountain Giants). Genet is also somewhat ambiguous in his attitude. Much of Notre-Dame, for example, is treated as a disrespectful game in authorial asides. Of his first play Genet writes in 1967: "Il m'est difficile de me souvenir quand et dans quelle circonstance je l'ai écrite. Probablement dans l'ennui et par inadvertance" (Oeuvres, IV, p.179). Of his second: "Mais que dire d'une pièce dont j'étais détaché avant même qu'elle fut achevée?" (Letter to Pauvert, p.142). Again, speaking of the same play: "ma pièce fut donc écrite par vanité, mais dans l'ennui" (Letter to Pauvert, p.144). There is the Pirandellian ending of Le Balcon, in which Irma tells the audience that the show is over, that they are to go home "où tout, n'en doutez pas, sera encore plus faux qu'ici" (IV, p.135). Art is false, it is an appearance, like Irma's balcony. But these words may be read in another way. "Encore plus faux" may equally be taken to mean that the falsity of art is less than that of life. The way is open for a more positive assessment of the function of art. Either way, however, the approach is essentially Romantic: if art fails in its appointed task, it is because a great deal is expected of it. I shall return to this point presently.

In one fundamental respect Genet views art in Heideggerian terms, as a revelation, a disclosure. Art reveals solitude, of course, the particularity of things, their uniqueness, their hidden glory or divinity. The perfect example is the work of Giacometti as seen through Genet's eyes and also the art of the tightrope walker. And yet, as we have seen, the work of art is a fake - "hollow" - and its representatives, from the Chief of Police and the tightrope walker to Warda the whore, fail to embody the ideal of solitude. This is because the object of the revelation of art is a negative, as it is for Beckett. Speaking of Giacometti's work in L'Atelier, Genet stresses that it is



not the line of a drawing which is beautiful but the white space it contains: "ce n'est pas le trait qui est élégant, c'est l'espace blanc contenu par lui. Ce n'est pas le trait qui est plein, c'est le blanc" (p.42). Ultimately the glory of Giacometti's draughtmanship is not the stroke of the pencil, it is the blank page; the pencil is there simply to reveal an absence, to give sensible shape to a negative. Thus Giacometti shows as much respect for the mystery of the piece of paper as he does for the work he will produce:

. . . Giacometti cherche à donner une réalité sensible à ce qui n'était qu'absence - ou si l'on veut, uniformité indéterminée - c'est-à-dire le blanc, et même, plus profondément encore, la feuille de papier. Il semble . . . qu'il se soit donné pour mission d'ennoblir une feuille de papier blanc qui, sans ses traits, n'eût jamais existé . . .

Pourtant, alors qu'il a épinglé devant lui la feuille blanche, j'ai bien l'impression qu'il a autant de respect et de retenue en face de son mystère qu'en face de l'objet qu'il va dessiner . . .

Toute l'oeuvre du sculpteur et du dessinateur pourrait être intitulée: "L'objet invisible."

pp.42-43.

Such a description fits Genet's own work and certainly recalls Heidegger. The artist's task is to ennoble, to thrust into the open, a white piece of paper - by his drawing. In the end, the drawing points to something beyond itself, to the invisible object of the work of art, "l'objet invisible." In the same way the Genet hero, whether murderer or saint or image or rebel or "indifferent," embodies the elusive reality of solitude. Of course he embodies it most perfectly when, like Saïd, he disappears, since solitude is essentially mysterious,

like Heidegger's "reserved" Being. Thus Genet dreams of an art where nothing is said and everything is evoked, "un langage où rien ne serait dit mais tout pressenti" (Letter to Pauvert, p.142). It would have to be an art of suggestion, not unlike that of the Symbolist poem. But it is clear that the solution offered through Saïd, that of actual absence, cannot serve as a basis for Genet's practice any more than actual silence can serve as a basis for Beckett's art. Solitude may be a negative but the role of art is to reveal, that is, to suggest the negative by means of the positive. For Genet, as for Beckett, then, the achievement of the artist is necessarily always ambiguous. On the one hand art has the exalted role of opening the door to the unknown, on the other, it is a fake, a failure, like the Chief of Police or the tightrope walker, a mere appearance devoid of any reality, an image - of nothing. Once we are clear about the limitations of art, however, we may use it to advantage. The tightrope walker may not embody solitude, like the absent Saïd, but he does reveal it. The price paid is high. It is not possible to be alone and to communicate solitude in the same breath. The artist chooses the latter alternative and his way is one of exalted failure. Mutatis mutandis, this is the choice of the Beckett voice of consciousness. In each case what we witness is a traditional Romantic dilemma still operative in the mid-twentieth century: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter . . . ."

In terms of action and passivity the choice presents itself as follows. Either one opts for real, that is, efficacious solitude or for an image of solitude which, inevitably, will have no active power, only the power of an appearance. Of course art represents a choice for the latter alternative. But Genet would like to have it both ways, he would like to offer us an image that acts upon us. We are returned to Beckett's predicament. If art is obsessed with a spiritual presence,

an elusive negative reality, it must constantly fail, it must strive for an impossible goal. And Genet's impossible goal is to make solitude communicable, to show that, in spite of evidence to the contrary, the image or work of art is a living power and not simply an appearance or mask.

This involves Genet in an approach to art which is essentially sacramental. Genet's fascination for the Mass is well known. In Notre-Dame Divine reacts strongly to it:

Le Dimanche, Divine et lui [Mignon] vont à la messe.  
Divine porte un missel à fermoir doré . . . Ils arrivent  
à la Madeleine . . . Ils croient aux évêques en ornements  
d'or. La messe émerveille Divine.

II, p.31.

A less equivocal statement occurs in the letter to Pauvert:

. . . le plus haut drame moderne s'est exprimé pendant  
deux mille ans et tous les jours dans le sacrifice de  
la messe . . . Sous les apparences les plus familières  
- une croûte de pain - on y dévore un dieu. Théâtralement,  
je ne sais rien de plus efficace que l'élévation.

pp.145-146.

Theatrically, there is nothing more dramatic and moving than the moment of the elevation of a piece of bread - which is a god to be eaten by men. Genet's dramas inevitably model themselves on this Christian ritual. Moreover, the Mass, as Genet realizes, is rooted in Eucharistic theology. A piece of bread becomes God. In the language of the Thomist its "accidents" remain unchanged - it continues to look like bread - its "substance" turns into divinity. In other words, God appears as bread but, because he is that bread, is able to act through

it. Thus a sacrament may be defined as a natural vehicle for divinity, nature unchanged in its appearance and radically altered in its substance. It is not merely a symbol in the usual sense of the word. A symbol is generally regarded as a passive sign. But a sacrament has the power to act upon the recipient: it is an "efficacious," a living sign. The transposition of these ideas to the Genet context is not difficult. Genet reveals solitude by appealing to the sacramental mentality. He does not choose between image and act: he combines these. Solitude is revealed in the work of art as pure appearance - which works, is efficacious. A play is a show, a façade with nothing behind it and yet it is expected to act miraculously upon the audience, to be an efficacious sign, an active symbol, "enchevêtrement profond de symboles actifs" (Letter to Pauvert, p.142). This is why Genet wants an audience of believers, not people who seek entertainment:

Une représentation qui n'agirait pas sur mon âme est vaine. Elle est vaine si je ne crois pas à ce que je vois . . .

J'ai parlé de communion. Le théâtre moderne est un divertissement.

Pauvert, p.146.

Under special conditions a true theatre is possible, in the catacombs, for example, if only the participants are able to discover a common enemy, a raison d'être for their ritual of revolt:

Un théâtre clandestin, où l'on viendrait en secret, la nuit et masqué, un théâtre dans les catacombes serait encore possible. Il suffirait de découvrir - ou de créer - l'Ennemi commun . . . .

Pauvert, p.147.

This is exactly what Genet's work attempts to do. Genet offers us, in each of his novels and plays, a clandestine ritual, a sacramental drama of love and hate. Its aim is to effect an emancipation from the power of the Other, as if it were a Mass for rebellious slaves or - it amounts to the same thing - to realize the active presence of solitude, the individual's uniqueness. This effective movement, however, works through mere appearances, through "hollow" gestures. Claire's sacrifice, for example, does not achieve a real liberation from Madame, at least not in one sense. The same may be said of the ritual of hate in Les Nègres, which aims at the undermining of white authority, or of Roger's castration in Le Balcon or of the ritual of betrayal in the novels. In Miracle de la Rose Harcamone is sacramentally devoured by Jean Genet, betrayed, deprived of his power. Pompes Funèbres is a similar celebration of Genet's cannibalism, the victim being the dead Jean Decarnin. In each case a gesture of self-assertion attempts to effect the presence of solitude, that is to say, to exorcize the Other, the figure of authority. It is a movement akin to the Christian concept of transubstantiation. Just as Christ's passion is reenacted and actualized once more in the Mass, so Genet reenacts in each of his works the archetypal struggle against the Look, the defeat of the Other - often through a symbolic sacrifice - and the victorious confirmation of man's inalienable solitude. Of course Genet's sacramentalism suffers from the same ambiguity present in the ritual of the maids or the blacks or Roger. It has all been an empty show, Irma assures us at the end of Le Balcon, nothing real has been achieved. The sceptic may well suggest that the sign is not efficacious, that the work of art in presenting an image of solitude necessarily sacrifices the living power of true solitude. Genet's position is secure, however. One must be a believer. If I believe in the empty gesture it becomes endowed with effective power. It may be objected that we have returned to the

self-deception of the saint. If I believe in the criminal it is because I choose to: in himself the criminal - or the Chief of Police - is a fake. Be that as it may, Genet insists that, mysteriously, a work of art possesses active power if the audience suspends its disbelief. Doubtless in the short run the ritual achieves nothing. Claire dies, not Madame, Roger is sacrificed, not the Chief. But, indirectly, something is achieved and, impossibly, solitude is realized through the work of art. Thus the ritual reenactment of the struggle for liberation leads to eventual liberation, the saint takes us to the revolutionary, the maids to the blacks and these in turn to the Algerians, the "hollow" image leads to Saïd. Moreover, if one is to accept Sartre's thesis that Genet's career has been "dix ans de littérature qui valent une cure de psychanalyse," it is clear that his own rituals have been Genet's salvation. Analogous things may be said of the childhood experience in which Genet is labelled a thief. Ultimately, perhaps, the Look is effective only because I believe in its power. Notwithstanding, it is effective, it has the sacramental power to make me a thief. So also with the work of art. For all its limitations, the work of art is indirectly active, its mere gesture transformed into an act. No wonder, then, that Genet sees art as a form of crime. To name is to influence what is named. On this score Genet recalls not only the Pirandellian and Sartrean belief in the power of the label but also Heidegger's insistence that to name is to reveal, to constitute reality.

In some important **ways** the artistic principle so far outlined resembles that of Antonin Artaud. It seems unlikely that there should be any question of an "influence," as Roger Blin, one of Genet's first directors, emphasized in an interview with Bettina Knapp.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless the similarity between the two writers is very great. The question has been investigated, notably by Robert Brustein in The Theatre of Revolt, but it is worth a brief reconsideration here.

Artaud's famous definition of the theatre as a plague is at the centre of his influential Le Théâtre et son Double. Artaud sees European civilization as corrupt and repressive. Theatre is a way of bringing the disease to a crisis or, again, of draining the sore:

Il semble que par la peste et collectivement un gigantesque abcès, tant moral que social, se vide; et de même que la peste, le théâtre est fait pour vider collectivement des abcès.<sup>3</sup>

The theatre therefore serves a therapeutic function:

Le théâtre comme la peste est une crise qui se dénoue par la mort ou la guérison. Et la peste est un mal supérieur parce qu'elle est une crise complète après laquelle il ne reste rien que la mort ou qu'une extrême purification.<sup>4</sup>

In a sense, then, theatre is "cruel." It shocks man into a renewed contact with his inner life. Its working is analogous to magic and, if one is willing to believe, it has an efficacious power, it alters, it acts. The parallel with Genet is obvious. Moreover, for Artaud, the theatre reveals a "double" and this double is not a mere mirror, as realism would have it, but an inhuman reality hidden within man, a metaphysical dimension: theatre reveals secret truths, mysteries of depth. We could be speaking of Genet and the revelation of man's hidden glory. In each case, of course, the approach is fundamentally Romantic, although its origins vary: where Genet turns to the Mass for inspiration, Artaud is impressed by the Balinese theatre. Either way necessitates a rejection of surface realism. As in Beckett, the concern is with metaphysical man, although Genet's interest in ritual stylization distinguishes him sharply from Beckett. Genet discards the realist convention from the start. He cannot define theatre

positively but he knows what it is not: a description of everyday objectivity:

Sans pouvoir dire au juste ce qu'est le théâtre, je sais ce que je lui refuse d'être: la description de gestes quotidiens vus de l'extérieur: je vais au théâtre afin de me voir . . . tel que je ne saurais - ou n'oserais - me voir ou me rêver, et tel pourtant que je me sais être.

Comment jouer Les Bonnes, IV, p.269.

Consequently Genet has tried to obtain

l'abolition des personnages - qui ne tiennent d'habitude que par convention psychologique - au profit de signes . . . Bref, obtenir que ces personnages ne fussent plus sur la scène que la métaphore de ce qu'ils devraient représenter.

Pauvert, p.144.

What is called for is a theatre of living signs, not men. All natural effects must be avoided, as in Artaud. In his stage direction for Haute Surveillance Genet states:

Toute la pièce se déroulera comme dans un rêve.  
Donner aux décors et aux costumes . . . des couleurs  
violentes . . . Les acteurs essayeront d'avoir des  
gestes lourds ou d'une . . . incompréhensible  
rapidité. S'ils le peuvent, ils assourdiront le  
timbre de leur voix.

IV, p.181.

The play must unfold as if in a dream. Colours and lights will be



brilliant, voices will be distorted, motions will be either unnaturally slow or unnaturally rapid. In Les Paravents, the acting must be precise, there must be no superfluous gestures (p.10). We are reminded of the tightrope walker's poise, the perfection of self-control which Genet conveys by his use of the term bander, of the celebrant in the Mass and the Balinese dancer.

The fact that Genet's imagination is influenced by the patterns of the Mass does not mean that, in the final analysis, his approach to artistic form differs radically from Beckett's. On the contrary, it leads to the same goal. In order to see this we must return to the idea of a work of art as an incarnation of the divine, as a making-present of the deity - solitude - in and through a theatrical performance, for example. As a ritual, the Genet play (or novel) is not concerned with history, with events in secular time. Just as the moment of consecration in the Mass represents an intersection of the planes of eternity and time as God enters into the stream of history and becomes present to the believers, able to act out an eternal mission in time, so in Genet the dramatic moment is not of time but partakes of temporality and eternity. Genet calls it "temps dramatique" (L'Etrange mot d' . . ., IV, p.10). While a play is being performed time has no beginning and no end: "Dès le début de l'événement théâtral, le temps qui va s'écouler n'appartient à aucun calendrier répertorié" (L'Etrange mot d' . . ., IV, p.10). Yet at the same time the ritual itself is an action and so temporal. If it were not there would be no point in repeating it. Like the Mass, Genet's drama presents us with an act which is both real and unreal, merely a gesture and yet active, a sign and a deed, in short, an eternal recurrence or a recurrence in eternity. Genet wants once again to combine opposites of action and passivity, reality and image. He wants, finally, to give an effect of static perfection and to combine this with movement. A stylized ritual is one way of doing it. Of course the approach derives

all its power from the sense of tension, the simultaneous pull of stasis and dynamism, the timeless and time. We are surprisingly close to the inspiration of Samuel Beckett. After all, solitude is an irreducible, an impossible, like the Unnamable and like that other wonder (in Descartes' words), "the Man who is God."<sup>5</sup> Seeking to realize concretely an absence, a spiritual reality, Genet is driven, like Beckett, to an aesthetic of impossibility and to a form which mirrors this aesthetic. It is the dilemma of Christianity, a religion founded on the notion of an interplay of divinity and humanity. Not surprisingly, although he chooses a different road, Genet arrives at the same point as does Samuel Beckett. Again, the form of a work of art reflects a Romantic and existential tendency towards unity or rather towards unity-in-diversity. I have already termed this approach "situational." Like Beckett and for similar reasons - and this in spite of his different starting point - Genet presents us not with action but with situation, that is, with a paradox of action and inaction. As in the Mass, nothing happens - it is mere show, ritual. But the ritual is effective and so nothing really does happen. In the Mass Christ's death is impossibly repeated; in Les Bonnes, for example, the archetypal victory-in-defeat of the Genet saint is impossibly repeated, perhaps, as Sartre argues, the eternal crisis of Jean Genet, child hoodlum, is reenacted.<sup>6</sup> As in Beckett's work - and Artaud's - there is an appeal to "total" theatre, a theatre of organic unity. Artaud speaks of "briser le langage pour toucher la vie,"<sup>7</sup> of a "langage physique,"<sup>8</sup> a language of signs and gestures, of "poésie dans l'espace,"<sup>9</sup> of "spectacle total,"<sup>10</sup> a theatre in which words, actions, costumes, lighting, backdrops and music come together to express a vision of the whole man. All of this applies to Genet's work. The difference is that Artaud is a child of Freud and Jung who cannot see beyond the archetypal myth whereas Genet, for all his use of similar techniques, is after something more rarefied and philosophical. In the end the Genet play appears less as a series

of events which have taken place than as a single event, a sign or metaphor, something which happened-in-eternity, that is, something which happened all at once. It is as if by "un enchevêtrement profond de symboles actifs," a tangle of living signs, Genet hopes to link all the parts of his drama, to link everything so tightly that the sense of part is lost altogether, that, by means of an alchemic transformation, part and whole coalesce and the play appears as an indivisible unity. It is a matter of joining the parts so tightly that all movement comes to a halt - only to begin again, impossibly, with the cry of the Beckett hero: e pur si muove. So we progress by a series of alternations comparable to Beckett's, in this case the tension being one of realism and ritual, of event and non-event, of time and time abolished. In its simplicity born of extreme complexity, the Genet situation will evoke the presence of the paradoxical being, solitude. The existential has been reached by the unexpected route of the Mass.

A final aspect of Genet's approach to art must be considered: the role of the artist or the actor. The artist in Genet is a priest, as in Heidegger. He does not initiate, he transmits, and in this respect resembles the work of art. Just as the celebrant of the Mass possesses the power to transform bread into divinity not through personal merit but as an agent of the divine will, so the artist in Genet, whether a sculptor like Giacometti, a tightrope walker, an actor or a writer, is not himself responsible for his creation, at least not overtly. The artist, and this point needs no stressing since it is implicit in all that has been said of the image in this thesis, is empty of self, at least in one way passive. Genet complains that European realism will not permit the actor such a role: "L'acteur occidental ne cherche pas à devenir un signe chargé de signes, simplement il veut s'identifier à un personnage de drame ou de comédie" (Pauvert, p.143). The difficulty is the actor's habitual lack of

discipline, his careless attitude to his art: "Au lieu du recueillement, les gens de théâtre vivent dans la dispersion d'eux-mêmes" (Pauvert, p.145). Genet wants his actors to be recollected in the religious sense of the word implying a state of ingatheredness in prayer. This means, as in the case of the tightrope walker, a dying to self, not egotism:

Tu es un artiste . . . Mais c'est d'autre chose que de coquetterie, d'égoïsme et d'amour de soi qu'il s'agit. Si c'était de la mort elle-même? Danse donc . . . c'est ton image qui va danser pour toi.

pp.179-180.

It is not the tightrope walker but his image which moves on the wire. In self-obliteration and passivity the artist becomes efficacious, as if an alien power - his solitude is that - were working through him. So with Giacometti:

Son rêve serait de disparaître complètement derrière son oeuvre. Il serait encore plus heureux si c'était le bronze, qui, de lui-même, s'était manifesté.

L'Atelier, p.36.

Giacometti, like the tightrope walker, leads an abject life. It is not his own glory he seeks but the glory of his material. His drawings aim at setting off the beauty of the piece of paper, his statues, that of the original metal. If he could hide altogether behind the work of art, he would be satisfied. Genet's attitude to his own writing is similar. Such a view may appear surprising in view of the fact that it is so easy to discover Genet in every page of his work. And yet in the novels and plays a supremely personal vision is revealed by means of an ascesis away from self; Genet leaves himself to discover

an alien identity within himself which he calls solitude. The protagonist of the novels and plays is therefore not Genet himself but the other Genet who rises to the surface when the author does not interfere:

Quand, à la Santé, je me pris à écrire ce ne fut jamais afin de revivre mes émois ou de les communiquer mais afin, de l'expression d'eux imposée par eux, que je compose un ordre (moral) inconnu de (moi-même d'abord).

Journal, p.181.

At the Santé prison, Genet writes not in order to relive or to communicate experience but in order to step into the unknown. It is true that such a description of the creative process is more suited to his early work. But it applies to Genet even when he writes in a more self-conscious vein. Genet holds a theory of art, which he seems to put into practice, reminiscent of negative capability, the Romantic attitude of passivity before inspiration. We are reminded not of Sartre but of Heidegger's analyses of Hölderlin and above all of the idea of "letting-be" which is at the centre of Heidegger's notion of art as revelation, erschlossenheit.

Genet's attitude to art hinges on three things. Art is a revelation of solitude. The revelation is sacramental, that is, embodied in a ritual involving efficacious signs. It is effected through the passive artist. In his method Genet recalls Artaud and, even more obviously, the Catholic liturgy, although the end result is existential drama akin to Beckett's drama of situation. Like Beckett - and Ionesco - Genet stands closer in his approach to art to Heidegger than to Sartre or Camus. Where Beckett evokes irreducible Being as an absent presence, as the ground of the existential situation, Genet evokes irreducible solitude as a presence hidden behind the

visible sign and paradoxically revealed in it, as divinity is revealed and made present in the Christian ritual. The religious bias is far more explicit in Genet than in Beckett and expresses itself in surprisingly conventional terms. If the gods are absent in the universe of Beckett and Heidegger they are very nearly present in Jean Genet's.

CHAPTER 19

IONESCO : THE FREE IMAGINATION

Il ne faut pas empêcher le déploiement libre  
des forces imaginatives. Pas de canalisations,  
pas de dirigisme, pas d'idées préconçues, pas  
de limites.

Notes et Contre-Notes, p.104.

Although Ionesco, like Genet, regards art as a form of subversive action, that is, as revolt, the context of his work differs from Sartre's and Camus' no less than does Genet's. Once again the direction of the aesthetic is towards the more Romantic Heideggerian position. The present chapter will examine the question of poetic inspiration and the role of the artist, chapter twenty, the Ionesco approach to form.

The Heideggerian pattern of art as revelation outlined so far holds good for Ionesco's attitude to his work. Where Beckett seeks to reveal the Unnamable and Genet the mystery of solitude, Ionesco sets out to reveal the wonder of things. In the philosophical terms of this thesis it is as if Beckett attempted to dramatize the fact of Being and Ionesco its "uncanniness." Once wonder or the Uncanny is acknowledged as the fundamental orientation of Ionesco's work it is not difficult to see why Ionesco's feelings about art revolve about the concept of the New, not in the sense of mere novelty but of vision, of authentic insight. It is the aim of a Ionesco play to make us see anew - in Heideggerian terms, to reveal the everyday as uncanny. The point needs no amplifying since it follows from all that has been said about angst, that revealer of Existence and Being. Ionesco wants us to see the world as his protagonists see it, as too heavy or too light,

as unusual. For Heidegger, art ultimately discloses what is normally "forgotten" or "covered over," the ground of things. Again and again Ionesco struggles to show us this ground in the terms in which he conceives it, either as frightening or intoxicating, as awesome, even monstrous, an impossible proliferation of things, a stifling void of matter, or as joy in a transfigured world, evanescence and plenitude.

The task of the play is to embody an elusive vision, to communicate the incommunicable:

Une oeuvre d'art est l'expression d'une réalité incommunicable que l'on essaie de communiquer, - et qui, parfois, peut être communiquée. C'est là son paradoxe, - et sa vérité.

Notes, p.75.

This recalls the dilemma of Beckett and Genet and may be expected to lead to a notion of art as triumphant failure. Indeed Ionesco argues that for some time art has not succeeded in adequately representing reality:

Mais je dois dire que depuis un certain temps, la littérature me semble être très en dessous de la violence et de l'acuité des événements; elle ne peut plus les saisir, les enregistrer, les éclairer.

Entretiens, p.174.

Again,

. . . l'expression artistique est trop faible, l'imagination trop pauvre pour égaler l'atrocité et le miracle de cette vie, de la mort . . . .

Notes, IX.



We may interpret this as a reaffirmation of the visionary's sense of the inadequacy of words. But Ionesco, unlike Beckett and Genet, speaks of a historical crisis in which the magnitude of events puts art to shame: can one translate into concrete forms the hopes and fears of modern man or poeticize the bomb? Art too is questioned, then - "questioned" in Heidegger's sense - in this limbo of "no more" and "not yet." But this fact must not be overstressed. Ionesco's Romanticism is tinged with existential doubt and yet an element of optimism remains: the incommunicable, after all, is communicated, art, however feebly, captures a reflection of the wonder of Being.

Like Heidegger, Beckett and Genet face the difficulty of revealing a mystery as mystery, as "reserved," and, in a different context, this is Ionesco's problem also. Since it is his aim to preserve not the negativity but the strangeness of reality, Ionesco is committed to the New. On the one hand this necessitates a struggle against conservative forces, against art which does not surprise and is based on preconceptions. On the other, it implies a continuing assertion of the value of the free imagination. For Ionesco, "l'imagination n'est pas arbitraire, elle est révélatrice" (Notes, p.32). Imagination is not mere fantasy. Rather it is something to be trusted, something which cannot lie if it is allowed to express itself without interference. It is logic which becomes unreasonable if given free rein. As a character in Tueur puts it, "la réalité, contrairement au rêve, peut tourner au cauchemar" (II, p.80). Dreams, unlike everyday consciousness, reveal the true nature of things. "Lorsque je rêve," Ionesco explains, "je n'ai pas le sentiment d'abdiquer la pensée. J'ai au contraire l'impression que je vois . . . des vérités . . ." (Notes, p.93). The same point is made to Claude Bonnefoy. Logic may turn into madness, dreams do not:

Le rêve est naturel, il n'est pas fou. C'est la logique qui risque de devenir folle; le rêve, étant l'expression

même de la vie dans sa complexité et ses incohérences,  
ne peut pas être fou.

Entretiens, p.129.

This is Ionesco's version of Romantic negative capability or of Heidegger's "letting-be" with the added perspective of Freud and the surrealists. Imagination, the dream, these pierce through the falsity of the everyday: "Le rêve démystifié" (Journal, I, p.55).

It follows that the artist must not force his inspiration along predetermined lines but must bow before the authority of mystery, of spontaneity. The alternative is ideological art, the counterpart of rhinoceritis in the socio-political sphere. Ionesco demands once more the Béranger-Amédée flight above the mass. Art must not be tampered with, it must not be reduced to a "message." Ionesco dwells obsessively on this theme in Notes et Contre-Notes. It is true that all writers are propagandists; the great ones are those who have gone beyond this point (p.9). Art is the realm of passion, not of pedagogy (p.18). The writer does not teach: "L'Auteur n'enseigne pas: il invente" (p.24). Practically, this stand implies a conflict between the New and the cliché. In Ionesco's words, what is is already out-dated and surpassed: "Une chose dite est déjà morte, la réalité est au-delà d'elle" (p.27). Only by producing something new is the author able to escape the repetitiveness of the cliché and to communicate in real terms:

Au fond une chose est incommunicable au début parce qu'elle n'a pas encore été communiquée et à la fin parce que les expressions qui lui servent de support sont usées.

Entretiens, p.182.

The artist is thus committed to pure invention and also to the restora-

tion of what has been disfigured. We are not far from the artist's "uncovering" of what is "forgotten" in Heidegger. Ionesco sums up his feelings about the freedom of the imagination as follows:

Il ne faut pas empêcher le déploiement libre des forces imaginatives. Pas de canalisations, pas de dirigisme, pas d'idées préconçues, pas de limites. Je pense qu'une oeuvre d'art en est une dans la mesure où l'intention première est dépassée; dans la mesure où le flot imaginatif est allé au-delà des limites ou des voies étroites que voulait s'imposer, au départ, le créateur: messages, idéologies, désir de prouver ou d'enseigner.

Notes, p.104.

Of course the enemy in this context is the writer with a specific purpose. Ionesco records with indignation his meeting with an English critic - presumably Tynan - who congratulated him on being very nearly the greatest living playwright. "How can I become the greatest?" Ionesco facetiously asked. "C'est bien simple," was the answer, "on attend de vous que vous nous délivriez un message . . . Soyez brechtien et marxiste!" (Notes, p.48). This is the burden of Tynan's and Ionesco's well-known critical exchange in The Observer. Ionesco's stand is that there is no point in repeating Brecht or Marx or anyone else and he takes frequent opportunity of saying so. Brecht is something of a butt in this context:

Le théâtre de Brecht est un théâtre qui achève d'installer les mythes d'une religion dominante défendue par les inquisiteurs et qui est en pleine période de fixation.

Notes, p.208.

If the attack is somewhat unjust - one may enjoy Brecht without being a Marxist - it is consistent, since for Ionesco there is no theatre without a new revelation, "sans secret qui se révèle" (Notes, p.113). It comes as no surprise that Ionesco dislikes Sartre and admires Beckett and for reasons given above. Art is freedom and spontaneity: the rest is politics, ideology, moralizing (Notes, p.242). It follows that the best way to write a play is to allow the play to write itself. Will-lessness, as in Beckett, becomes a primary artistic virtue. Ionesco has described his method of writing:

La création suppose une liberté totale . . . Quand j'écris une pièce, je n'ai aucune idée de ce qu'elle va être. J'ai des idées après. Au départ, il n'y a qu'un état affectif . . . L'art pour moi consiste en la révélation de certaines choses que la raison, la mentalité quotidienne me cachent. L'art perce ce quotidien.

Notes, p.109.

Of course the muse is angst, as this passage clearly indicates, that state in which everydayness is transcended and the truth is revealed. The important thing is that the revelation cannot be artificially induced. Like Pirandello, Ionesco argues that his characters escape his control and concludes that the author's one duty here is not to intervene (Notes, p.175). The writer whose control is excessive offers only propaganda, like Brecht. But more than a mere technique is here at stake. It is, as Ionesco sees it, an assertion of meta-physical depth as against surface, of imagination in the Romantic sense: "La leçon du théâtre est au-delà des leçons" (Notes, p.107).

Not surprisingly, the attack on everyday logic, on that kind of art which expresses only surface realities, becomes an attack on artistic realism. For Ionesco, "boulevard" theatre, which offers the

audience what it expects, means any theatre which has recourse to the realist convention. It may be Broadway or socialist drama or any kind of theatre without novelty of form:

J'ai . . . toujours pensé que la vérité de la fiction est plus profonde . . . que la réalité quotidienne. Le réalisme, socialiste ou pas, est en deçà de la réalité. Il la rétrécit, l'atténue . . . notre vérité est dans nos rêves, dans l'imagination . . . .

Notes, p.4.

In the end realism kills the theatre because it is profoundly unreal, "l'irréalisme bourgeois d'un côté, l'irréalisme dit socialiste de l'autre" (Notes, p.130). On the other hand Ionesco's own work may, in this context, be regarded as realistic. Thus Amédée is "une tranche de vie" (Notes, p.174). If we object that this play is hardly a slice of life in the accepted sense, the reply is categorical and places Ionesco beside Beckett and Genet: ". . . je réfute cette sorte de réalisme qui n'est qu'un sous-réalisme . . ." (Notes, p.174).

This is Ionesco's final defence of the imagination. The imagination is not everyday vision but realism in the most vital sense since it tells the truth about man's deepest fears and desires. Any drama which can ignore these in order to amuse or instruct the public is sub-realism.

It has already been pointed out that inspiration, as Ionesco conceives it, is a form of insight resembling the phenomenon of angst. As in the case of Beckett and Genet the artist is not a mere craftsman but a Romantic hero. Where Beckett's is a cursed, insane prophet and Genet's a possessed priest, Ionesco's is both visionary and rebel. His major task is to renew, of course, to overcome the obstacle of "le déjà fait, le déjà dit" (Notes, p.33). The enemy is always the

"they," the collective and it is also ideology, the weight of the past, history. A true artist is of necessity avant garde. He acts against the collective, against the present and the past. But because he deals with the fundamentals of the human situation, his isolation is only apparent. By being ahead of his times he expresses more truly the problems of the present, by thrusting forward he rejoins the past. In short, he transcends history and joins the community of all mankind in all places and at all times. Again and again in Notes et Contre-Notes the argument must be seen in the context of the eternal French debate between Classicism and Romanticism, between l'art pour l'art and doctrines of social utility, between the rival claims of history and the ahistorical, popular and élitist theatre. The writer, says Ionesco, speaks for himself and by so doing speaks also for others - not the contrary (p.29). By abandoning tradition he rediscovers it (p.34), by being himself he joins the Other. There is an echo of Genet in the following statement: "En exprimant mes obsessions fondamentales, j'exprime ma plus profonde humanité . . . J'exprime ma solitude et je rejoins toutes les solitudes . . ." (p.34). It is not difficult to link this approach to the existential. In Heidegger authentic being-one's-self is also mitsein, being-with, and project into the future is creative "repetition" of the past. But the important link with Heidegger and with Beckett and Genet is the stress on artistic solitude, on visionary revolt. The artist rises above history in the Marxist sense. That is why for Ionesco, "c'est le roi Salomon qui est mon chef de file; et Job, ce contemporain de Beckett" (p.134). It is an assertion of final individuality, a rejection of that inauthentic society which is responsible for the writer's horror of claustrophobia. Like Ionesco's many heroes, the artist must break free by the power of the imagination and fly above the restrictions of the past, of ideology, of other men. Like Heidegger's poet he must stand apart, a prophet

with a single message. In this case the message too is Heideggerian: the gods have departed but a glimpse of them is possible in the experience of joy. It is a message of the Fall - "A partir de quel moment les dieux se sont-ils retirés du monde . . . ?" (Journal, II, p.235) - and of a longed-for, if unlikely, Redemption.

Ionesco's feelings about art are given some expression in the plays. Victimes du Devoir is the first and most obvious example here, since Choubert's search (for the mysterious Mallot) is, above all, a statement about drama. All plays ever written, argues the naïve hero early in the play, are whodunits, realistic detective thrillers, stories about problem and solution:

CHOUBERT. - . . . Toutes les pièces qui ont été écrites  
 . . . n'ont jamais été que policières. Le théâtre  
 n'a jamais été que réaliste et policier. Toute  
 pièce est une enquête menée à bonne fin. Il y a  
 une énigme, qui nous est révélée à la dernière  
 scène . . . On cherche, on trouve.

I, p.179.

This is naturalism, "théâtre d'Antoine" (I, p.179), drama which sets out with clear goals and which achieves them in due course. Choubert's ideas, a parody of Ionesco's real feelings about art as revelation of mystery, represent the opinion of the philistine and of artistic realism of the kind Ionesco despises. The truth is an object to be appropriated as an object, or so the detective imagines as he sends Choubert in search of Mallot, an unknown whose identity is never revealed. Thus the artist's quest for Being is reduced to a crime drama. But Mallot is more elusive than is supposed. The detective, here representative of the realist or the Brechtian, that is, of those who, in Ionesco's eyes, regard art as a medium for ideology and

clichés, finds no simple answer to the riddle. At the same time Choubert proves Ionesco's point, that drama is indeed a search, but one which leads to man's mysterious depths, not to ideology. At one point the image of the theatre becomes concrete. Choubert is an actor, telling his audience - Madeleine and the detective - what Ionesco's protagonists always tell their audiences, the story of man's dreams, his fear of claustrophobia and his desire for liberation. Madeleine reacts with everyday common sense: it would be more entertaining, she tells the detective, to spend the evening in a cabaret (I, p.204). Later, when Choubert attempts to fly, she and the detective seek to restrain him with arguments which subordinate art to social criteria. Something similar is involved in Amédée's flight also. Amédée is a playwright and his embarrassment at his levitation is expressed as a conviction about Social Realism in art: ". . . je désire être utile à mes semblables . . . Je suis pour le réalisme social . . ." (I, p.307). In this context the flight clearly represents the abandonment of realism and ideology for a more imaginative approach to art. But this is only partly the theme of Amédée, whereas it is central in Victimes. After his escape is thwarted, Choubert is joined by Nicolas d'Eu who promises to be an ally, since his notions of art are substantially Ionesco's own. Significantly, however, the mood of the play remains oppressive. Nicolas argues against a theatre dominated by reason and for the validity of the dream. But as he speaks Choubert is being choked with dry bread. The detective opposes the views of Nicolas and continues to maintain that Mallot can be found, that is, that all mysteries can be solved. Obviously Ionesco will have neither Nicolas nor the detective, as attention focusses on Choubert who is suffering agonies as the others argue. This is made even more clear when Nicolas kills the detective and takes his place as Choubert's tormentor. Ionesco will accept no ideology at all, not even one which supports his own views. In the end he will identify



himself with no point of view in the debate but sides with the helpless Choubert, the pathetic rebel and visionary of the play and so the true figure of the artist and spokesman for the freedom of the imagination.

In one sense Ionesco is forced to see himself as his own worst enemy insofar as he too is prone to putting forward a limiting viewpoint concerning art. This is why the avant garde Nicolas torments Choubert no less than the conservative detective. The same point is made in L'Impromptu de l'Alma ou le caméléon du berger (Improvisation, 1955), Ionesco's one play which is didactic, if facetiously so. Ionesco, writing at his desk, is interrupted by the entry of the critic Bartoloméus I, full of scientific theories about drama. Bartoloméus asks about the play which is being written and Ionesco gives evasive answers. It is coming of its own accord, Ionesco does not know quite where it is going:

Toute pièce est, pour moi, une aventure, une chasse,  
une découverte d'un univers qui se révèle à moi-même,  
de la présence duquel je suis le premier à être  
étonné . . . .

II, p.13.

At any rate it hinges on the scene in which a shepherd embraces a chameleon. The shepherd is Ionesco embracing - the theatre. Bartoloméus is scornful and as Ionesco begins to read his play (it is a repetition of what is, in fact, taking place) a second, then a third Bartoloméus appears. Follows a long assault upon the playwright on the part of the (proliferating) critics who lecture Ionesco on themes of commitment with Sartrisms, leftist jargon, theories of theatre and general confusion. The critics, themselves divided on details, represent the view that art should be didactic, that it should reflect social norms. Luckily Ionesco is rescued by Marie the housekeeper -

representing the theatre-goer - who hustles the critics out and, once alone, the playwright begins to air his so far repressed views about art, those views expressed so copiously in Notes et Contre-Notes. But as he continues, he forgets himself. The play has become didactic with a vengeance, Ionesco himself has become a pedagogue. He is rebuked by Marie and apologizes to the audience. The chameleon, we gather, should be left to change colour at will, the theatre must be bound by no rules, not even Ionesco's. This is Ionesco's recurring problem, of course, to defend himself from dogmatism without himself becoming dogmatic, and we find it in other plays. Bérenger of Le Piéton is a playwright who does not want to offer his audience a message. Yet, at the end, that is precisely what he offers, a warning of impending catastrophe - which is ignored. Jean of La Soif ends by being an unwilling witness at a frightening performance when brother Tarabas presents a play about freedom. The fact that one of the protagonists is called Brechtoll speaks for itself. The play comments not only on totalitarian politics but also on ideological art. But then it is precisely here that Ionesco is in real danger of preaching to his own audience and so of effectively negating his point.

CHAPTER 20

IONESCO : EXISTENTIAL FORM

. . . il faut réaliser une sorte de dislocation du réel, qui doit précéder sa réintégration.

Notes et Contre-Notes, p.13.

Ionesco's approach to literary form mirrors the fundamental tenet that the imagination must be freed. Narrow doctrines of art - what Ionesco calls "realism" - recall the claustrophobic. Freedom and release, on the other hand, go with the sense of strangeness and newness. Clearly, in order to liberate art one must learn to see anew, one must discard outdated conventions. In Ionesco this is expressed as a dislocation of normality. The form of the work of art must reflect the strangeness of reality when seen as if for the first time. In short, the work of art must incarnate the vision of angst, it must suggest the same radical rearrangement of normality:

Pour s'arracher au quotidien, à l'habitude, à la paresse mentale qui nous cache l'étrangeté du monde, il faut recevoir comme un véritable coup de matraque. Sans une virginité nouvelle de l'esprit . . . il n'y a pas de théâtre, il n'y a pas d'art non plus; il faut réaliser une sorte de dislocation du réel, qui doit précéder sa réintégration.

Notes, p.13.

Ionesco's attitude emerges in his handling of the theatrical. In Notes et Contre-Notes he admits that he disliked theatre before he became a playwright. What embarrassed him was the material presence of the actors, incompatible, or so it seemed, with the imaginative dimension of art. And yet he enjoyed Punch and Judy:

Je me souviens encore que . . . ma mère ne pouvait  
 m'arracher du guignol au jardin du Luxembourg . . .  
 C'était le spectacle même du monde, qui, insolite,  
 invraisemblable, mais plus vrai que le vrai, se  
 présentait à moi sous une forme infiniment  
 simplifiée et caricaturale . . . .

pp.7-8.

Here he found the solution to the problem of theatre. If the discrepancy between life and art is embarrassing, it is better to make it more so rather than to attempt to hide it. Realist theatre, with its carefully prepared stage replicas of the world outside, with its pretence that the actor is not playing a role, appears, to Ionesco, as an attempt to stifle a glaring truth - that there is something strange about the theatrical situation and, perhaps, about life itself. Realist acting and décor aim at suppressing this strangeness, at achieving the illusion of normality. Ionesco's concern is to prick the bubble of the "they," to reveal the theatre and so life itself in all its embarrassing strangeness, to use the stage to evoke the vision of wonder. Punch and Judy is one way of doing this. Guignol exaggerates reality and Ionesco's art is, above all, an art of exaggeration. Art must evoke the Uncanny, not conceal it. Where Beckett reduces to a fine point, Ionesco sets out to amplify reality to monstrous and wonderful proportions: negative theology becomes superlative theology. Where Beckett underlines the inescapable concreteness of the human situation by his stress on the fact of being, Ionesco does it by daubing reality with garish colours. If, he argues, the value of theatre is its exaggeration, then this exaggeration must be even further accentuated, whatever is odd must be made to seem more so, everything must go to the point of paroxysm:

Si donc la valeur du théâtre était dans le grossissement des effets, il fallait les grossir davantage encore, les souligner, les accentuer au maximum . . . Il fallait . . . aller à fond dans le grotesque, la caricature . . . Pas de comédies de salon, mais la farce . . . Pousser tout au paroxysme . . . Faire un théâtre de violence: violemment comique, violemment dramatique.

Notes, pp.12-13.

Of course this is above all a description of the early plays, but it remains valid for the more Romantic later work. In every case the formula is: "Le théâtre est dans l'exagération extrême des sentiments, exagération qui disloque la plate réalité quotidienne" (Notes, p.13). If the actor fails to convince us of his naturalness, Ionesco continues, he must give up trying to appear natural. He can, for example, act against the text, play a tragic part as if it were comic and vice versa. In addition, other forms of contradiction and contrast can be employed to heighten the sense of surprise. As in La Cantatrice, a character can say one thing and do another or contradict himself in his speech. The play can profit from the juxtaposition not only of comedy and tragedy but of prose and poetry, the everyday and the surreal. In Victimes comedy is swamped by tragedy, in Les Chaises it is the other way round, Ionesco explains. Jacques begins as a "naturalist comedy" and ends as a nightmare and Amédée is based on the contrast of the everyday and the fantastic (Notes, p.14). In the Bonnefoy interview Ionesco recounts his early difficulties in making producers understand his formula. Peter Hall, who wanted to produce La Leçon in 1955, could swallow everything except the daily murder of forty pupils. He and Ionesco settled for four. "Quatre c'était possible, quarante ce n'était pas possible" (Entretiens, p.111),

Ionesco comments. In a similar spirit the first producer of Rhinocéros could accept a mass metamorphosis but insisted that Bérenger could not, in all politeness and making allowance for American custom, visit Jean in the second act without telephoning first - in act one (Entretiens, pp.111-112). In the original production of Les Chaises the German producer refused to allow more than a dozen chairs on stage. Ionesco wanted fifty and for obvious reasons (Entretiens, p.112).

The same dislocation and heightening of reality which Ionesco advocates in his formulas for theatre is evident in his use of language. If everyday speech disguises strangeness, then it must be broken down and reconstituted. Thus, like the Heideggerian poet, Ionesco sets out to restore words in order to restore man's relation to the wonder of Being. It is the old struggle against propaganda, the cliché. We must make the word theatrical, says Ionesco, which is to say that we must strain and exaggerate: "le verbe lui-même doit être tendu jusqu'à ses limites ultimes, le langage doit presque exploser, ou se détruire, dans son impossibilité de contenir les significations" (Notes, p.15). In La Cantatrice this "désarticulation du langage" (Notes, p.13) has the function of undermining the commonplace in a world where language falls apart: "La parole se brise . . . les mots retombent, comme des pierres, comme des cadavres . . ." (Notes, p.141). "Le yaourt," Mme. Smith tells us, "est excellent pour l'estomac, les reins, l'appendicite et l'apothéose" (I, p.19). Gradually even this kind of speech disintegrates to:

M. SMITH. - C'est!

Mme. MARTIN. - Pas!

M. MARTIN. - Par!

Mme. SMITH. - Là!

M. SMITH. - C'est!

Mme. MARTIN. - Par!

M. MARTIN. - I!

Mme. SMITH - Ci!

I, p.53.

But already in this breakdown of speech we sense a restoration and in later plays this is marked. Jacques uses language in the same way as La Cantatrice but the movement towards poetry is less ambiguous. In Les Chaises the couple will invite everyone to their soirée, as, for example, "le Pape, les papillons et les papiers" (I, p.135). Already it is not so much the strangeness of the cliché that is being revealed as the wonder of words in general. Plays like Amédée, Tueur, Le Piéton and La Soif - a series which illustrates growing Romanticism - differ from the early work in that their use of language is more conventional. Mere dislocation turns into poetry. But the rationale is unchanged. Poetry is itself a dislocation and heightening of the commonplace, a freeing of language, a return to the truth. As in Heidegger, man lives poetically, poetry is simply the spontaneous expression of Being, language forever renewing itself.

But it is in Ionesco's approach to the structure of his plays that his bias is best exemplified. Art reveals the truth when it is not dominated by message, when its form is free of so-called realism. The result is a variety of l'art pour l'art reminiscent of Beckett's and Genet's in which form is given precedence over content. This means that Ionesco will be concerned less with plot as story and more with plot as shape. In order to escape the control of the everyday, of the rational mind with its petty restrictions, or, in Heideggerian terms, to allow the truth to be itself, to let-be, Ionesco turns to abstract patterns of drama, to dramatic shapes rather than to dramatic actions. It is another way of dislocating the everyday and obviously analogous to the approach of many painters in the fifties. This aspect of the Ionesco play went largely unappreciated by early

audiences and critics but is gradually being recognized. Ionesco's theatre is abstract theatre. What "happens" in it is meaningful only as part of a larger structure. It is the author's long-standing grievance against the critics that this has been overlooked and that the plays have been judged according to inappropriate criteria. In L'Impromptu the critics harangue Ionesco in the following terms:

BARTOLOMÉUS III. - Qu'il le prouve, par son oeuvre.

BARTOLOMÉUS I. - Non point par son oeuvre.

BARTOLOMÉUS II. - L'oeuvre ne compte pas.

BARTOLOMÉUS I. - Seuls comptent les principes.

II, pp.31-32.

The work counts for nothing, only ideas are important: "J'ai l'impression," Ionesco complains, "d'avoir été jugé non pas par des critiques littéraires . . . mais par des moralistes" (Notes, p.61).

In fact his real concern has always been not for ideas but for artistic forms:

La vraie pièce de théâtre, pour moi, c'est plutôt une construction qu'une histoire: il y a une progression théâtrale, par des étapes qui sont des états d'esprit différents . . . .

Notes, p.102.

A play is not a story, a sequence of events, but an abstract progression through various phases. Thus Ionesco dreams of structures without specific content, of "théâtre abstrait. Drame pur" (Notes, p.161).

The point is already made in his first play:

Mme. MARTIN. - Quelle est la morale?



LE POMPIER. - C'est à vous de la trouver.

I, p.41.

La Cantatrice does not tell a story. Rather it depicts a movement towards ever greater density. Speaking of this, Ionesco explains:

Il faut arriver à libérer la tension dramatique  
sans le secours . . . d'aucun objet particulier  
. . . le sens particulier d'une intrigue dramatique  
cache sa signification essentielle.

Notes, pp.160-161.

Insofar as it tells a story, a plot is liable to simplify, to rationalize unduly, to fix and stunt the immediate complexity of things. But if a play is treated like a symphony, if language, action, backdrop are all treated as components of a larger abstract dynamism, the shape of the plot will allow for complexity, the sense of wonder will be preserved, the imagination will not be bound. Thus abstract and "total" theatre go hand in hand and this is as much the case in subsequent plays as in La Cantatrice. The movement towards density or claustrophobia characteristic of Ionesco's first play is reproduced in La Leçon, Jacques and L'Avenir. Les Chaises is a little more complex. The play moves towards a simultaneous density and emptiness. In Victimes the movement is first towards density and complication, then towards light and space and, finally, back again. The analysis of the plays in terms of an abstract dynamism is implicit in the approach of this thesis and need not be repeated here. It has been conducted - in terms quite different from those of this thesis and somewhat laboriously - by Jean-Hervé Donnard in his book, Ionesco Dramaturge. In the context of this chapter it is enough to recall the interplay of the euphoric and the claustrophobic and to reaffirm that Ionesco sees all his work primarily as movement and progression - from

one emotional pole to another. The dynamism of a given play thus states very little and at the same time illustrates, in heightened form, the rhythms of life as Ionesco conceives it. In short, the shape of the play does not limit reality but allows full scope for its expression. Since Ionesco, as we have seen, regards human existence as a tension of joy and claustrophobia, authenticity and inauthenticity, freedom and restraint, the play itself becomes an oscillation between these poles, a rhythm of angst, revealing different aspects of reality in turn and, ultimately, the poles of Existence and Being, the tension of the human situation and the desire to escape, the existential and the Ideal. The similarity with Beckett and Genet hardly needs to be pointed out. In each case the work of art exists as an oscillation between distinct points and in each case the movement back and forth reveals the nature of things as the author conceives it, "how it is."

Ontological theatre, theatre which mirrors the structures and dynamisms of existential reality, is, for Beckett and Genet, theatre of situation. The same may be said for Ionesco. When the latter focusses on the abstract shape or pattern of a play and, like Beckett and Genet, rejects the idea of sequences of events, of plot as succession of actions, he does so because he wants to capture reality as a whole. It is a Romantic and existential tendency towards the principle of organic unity. Thus, as in Beckett, nothing "happens" in a Ionesco play, there is no history to be recounted. Rather, the audience is offered an all-inclusive and, in a sense, static image, that of existential reality, the wonder of things. Within this image there is movement, of course, but, strictly speaking, no succession. We observe reality in terms of situation, that is, as a state of affairs rather than as a series of events. In order to capture the complexity of the situation we examine it from various angles - as dense or evanescent, as claustrophobic or euphoric, as too heavy or

too light and so forth. While little happens, everything is. Once again the idea of the all-at-once, the idea of a work immediately grasped as a totality, dominates the approach to art. This point has been sufficiently stressed in earlier chapters, however, and needs no further amplification.

There is another sense in which we may speak of the form of Ionesco's work as existential. Chapter two of this thesis has explained the basis of the phenomenological approach in Heidegger and Sartre and related it to the fundamental assumptions of existential thought. Moreover, this approach has been represented as a via media between the extremes of Idealism and empiricism. The point is worth elaborating. Once the Cartesian rift between subject and object, that is, between the mind and its object of knowledge - the world - is effected, it becomes extremely difficult to reassemble the epistemological Humpty Dumpty. One can give up in despair and adopt the Occasionalist stance: reality is then fundamentally twofold and nothing - except an outrageously interfering deus ex machina - can hold it together. But there are two other possible reactions to the Cartesian dilemma. One is to emphasize the second half of the epistemological relation of subject and object, mind and its world. It is the empiricist solution in which the mind is regarded as somewhat passive before its objects of perception. Empiricism tends towards the elimination of the subject or mind in the search for truth. The goal is the point of view of the object, to know the table as the table would know itself, if it could. This is more usually described as an elimination of subjectivity, the bias of the mind to colour reality, and as a striving for objectivity. Subjectivity has become mere subjectivity, something one cannot altogether obliterate, of course, but which it is necessary to neutralize. Objectivity becomes the criterion of truth and that ever-receding goal towards which the

empiricist is bound to strive. But if it is possible to strive towards the objective detachment of the empirical observer, it is equally possible to argue for another kind of detachment. Instead of emphasizing the object of knowledge or perception, one emphasizes the mind, that is, the subject in the act of knowing. It is the Idealist solution in which the mind is regarded as active rather than passive. Suddenly the whole world, which the empiricist would like to reduce to matter and to mechanical processes, is now reduced to mind and to spiritual processes. Instead of things, we speak of ideas expressing themselves in material form. In the final analysis, everything becomes the temporal and finite expression of an eternal and infinite thought. The surprising thing is that extremes are liable to meet, that the Idealist, in one respect, comes to resemble the empiricist. In each case one postulates the possibility of a detachment from the world. Where the empiricist attempts to take the point of view of a disinterested spectator, the Idealist attempts to take the God-like viewpoint of the Absolute. The difference is, of course, that the former has done his best to banish the subject from the subject-object relation, whereas the latter has sought to diminish the reality of the object, that is to say, the reality of the material world.

The existential approach, as I have said, steers a middle course between philosophical extremes. This is already evident in Kierkegaard's reaction against Hegel and in his affirmation that man exists concretely in a concrete world. The new stance is perfectly expressed in the famous definition of truth as passionate inwardness or subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> In order to reach a given truth the Idealist and the empiricist assume a role of detachment - in the one case the detachment of objectivity, in the other, that of absolute subjectivity, the subjectivity of God. Kierkegaard's passionate subjectivity implies a disagreement with each of these alternatives. The mind and

its objects of knowledge exist in a common world which is inescapable, mind inescapably involved with what is other than itself. We have returned to the existential stance as described earlier in this thesis, to Heidegger's definition of man as being-in-the-world and to the idea of situation. The mind is ontologically related to its world or, as Husserl puts it, consciousness is always consciousness of something. Without a world there can be no mind. It follows that the Idealist's Absolute is inconceivable, that the detachment of pure Thought is a Hegelian myth. Likewise, it follows that the objective detachment of the empiricist is quite unattainable. In terms of subjectivity and objectivity we can characterize the existential approach as a fine balance. Of course the empiricist conceives of subjectivity and objectivity as distinct, even as opposed. To reach truth one must overcome the bias of the mind, what is disparagingly referred to as mere subjectivity. The Idealist goes to the opposite extreme: in his case objectivity is swallowed up and disappears in the gorge of the Absolute. Passionate subjectivity implies a respect for each term of the epistemological relation. For the existential thinker, subjectivity and objectivity are not opposed, nor is the objective criterion lost. Truth is grasped when one is deeply committed to it, not when one is neutral and detached. At the same time it is not wholly a product of the mind but a harmony of mind and its world as object of knowledge. This is Heidegger's approach in "On the Essence of Truth." Speaking in a way that recalls Coleridge's description of the imagination, Heidegger wants to allow the mind active participation in the revealing of truth, not mere passive perception. And yet it is a question of revealing the world as it really is, independently of the mind. Truth becomes a cooperation of mind and world, of subject and object, in which neither term of the relation dominates the other. The mind allows the world to be as it is, it lets it be. One does not simply see the truth, one helps to

make it, not by arbitrary invention but by revealing what is there. Such creative interaction between man and his environment is, of course, the essential viewpoint of all Existence philosophies. Husserl spoke of it as Transcendental Subjectivity in an attempt to suggest that subjectivity is not synonymous with a limited outlook on things but is in fact the only means of moving beyond narrow personal boundaries. It was Husserl who called this Phenomenology, and when Heidegger defines Phenomenology as "To the things themselves!"<sup>2</sup> he is being true to the original inspiration of Husserl and, further back, Kierkegaard. Passionate subjectivity implies a situation in which subjectivity and objectivity, mind and its object of knowledge, each equally real and equally active, are one in the moment of perception. The phenomenon of the world is encountered in man's committed subjectivity and encountered objectively, in keeping with its true nature. In simpler terms it is enough to say that I know a given truth not when I assume a disinterested stance but, on the contrary, when I care about it. Subjectivity is not mere subjectivity in the existential framework: it is a way to objectivity. The more subjective I am, the more objective because, in the final analysis, man and his world are ontologically one. To be, in short, is to be there, dasein, to be single is to be legion, mitsein. To be oneself is to be universal since in one's deepest being one rediscovers the Other, the objective world. Truth belongs not to the neutral observer, empiricist or Idealist, but to the poet and the lover. It may be objected that subjectivity leads to self-deception. The existential answer to this charge can only be that empirical neutrality may also distort the truth. It is all a question of applying one's method correctly, that is, of remaining in the sphere proper to one's method.

The relevance of this discussion to the form of a Ionesco play emerges when we consider its dreamlike quality. All of Ionesco's work

is more or less explicitly based on the oneirical. Of course the recurring dream pattern is that of release and claustrophobia but there are other dream mechanisms such as the sudden metamorphosis, the tendency for characters to blur and merge, the phenomenon of repetition and the acceleration or slowing down of action. In La Cantatrice the sense of growing anxiety seems inexplicable until its oneirical logic is recognized. La Leçon belongs to that class of dreams in which a sense of security is gradually turned into a nightmare, Les Chaises to the class of wish-fulfilment dreams. The Jacques plays also contain strong dream elements, including specific Ionesco dreams such as those of the flaming horse and the guinea pig (Entretiens, p.85). Even the ludicrous formula of submission "I love potatoes" etc. recalls dreams in which irrational statements are endowed with affective significance. Among other things Jacques is an erotic dream with overtones of nightmare. The oneiric pattern of later plays is more dynamic. Choubert's dream search is suggestive of an unconscious synthesis, the working out of a problem by means of dream symbolism. This is also the pattern of Amédée whose power of conviction stems from the fact that its action appears as a substitute, at the level of the unconscious, for a struggle in the conscious sphere. In short, the audience feels that the real action is going on somewhere else. So in silence and by moonlight Amédée and Madeleine evict the strange corpse that fills their home, working its huge bulk out of the window. The dream now becomes euphoric. Another play of the same period, Le Tableau, guignolade (The Painting, 1954), involves patterns of eroticism and wish-fulfilment and a multiplication of identical characters, this last usually a sign of claustrophobic threat in Ionesco. Tueur, Le Piéton and La Soif are all euphoric dreams which turn into nightmares. Tueur in particular is characterized by a dream blockage, the desire one has in a dream to carry out an obscure task of great importance, matched by a

frustrating inability to do it. As in other plays the dominant problem is not explicitly stated but lurks in the background as a vague anxiety which gradually comes to dominate the entire mood of the play.

Of course Ionesco appeals to the oneiric because it enables him to reveal the everyday in a new light, as unexpected, mysterious and strange. Dreams reveal, freely and without the interference of the conscious mind, the uncanniness of life. They create a world of depth reality, complex and contradictory, by the dislocation of surface reality. The point to be stressed here, however, is that the viewpoint of the dream is also an existential viewpoint. We must return to what has been said about subjectivity and objectivity in this chapter: the essence of the phenomenological and existential approach is contained in the belief that reality is composite, a harmony of subject and object such that one arrives at true objectivity by the road of passionate subjectivity. The existential stance assumes that the subjective and objective viewpoints are not opposed but complementary in the sense that the former leads unerringly to the latter. This is precisely the assumption which is implicit in the dream form of the Ionesco play. Ionesco deliberately blurs the distinction between inner and outer reality, between what a character feels about an event and about that event as such. At any moment we are not sure about the reality-status of a given action. A teacher murders his pupil. Actually, it is a verbal murder, not a real murder in the empirical sense. And yet Ionesco has no hesitation in presenting us with an actual murder, as if to underline the point that a murder at the level of feeling is a murder in fact. It is the viewpoint of the dream: subjectivity, truth-for-me, truth as I experience it, is also objectivity, truth as independent of me. It happens that the audience experiences this focus as a dislocation of normal perspectives. Ionesco would argue that normal perspectives are



inadequate and, from a philosophical point of view, we can say that this is so because one normally distinguishes sharply between subjectivity and objectivity, between emotion and fact. I do not mean to suggest that existential approaches are necessarily and at all times oneiric. At the same time it is clear that there is a connection between the ideal of Phenomenology and the viewpoint of the dream as presented in the Ionesco play. Ionesco gives us no external reference points for judging events: it is as if we were inside his plays, as if no outside view of things were possible. We cannot ask: are forty pupils actually murdered each day, do people actually turn into rhinoceroses, are the invisible guests actually present at the old couple's soirée, is the killer a real individual haunting the radiant city, does Amédée actually evict a giant corpse - or does everything happen only at the level of emotion, that is to say, within the mind? Of course the answer is that pupils are actually murdered - at the level of feeling - that human beings do turn into beasts - at the level of feeling - and that what happens at the level of feeling, that is, of subjectivity, is very real, objectively real. Thus the oneiric and the existential viewpoints coalesce. What men feel to be true is existentially true for men. It may not be true for the neutral observer, whether empiricist or Idealist, but it is true for all beings involved in a given situation. Man cannot shed his ontological skin, he cannot survey his world from above as it were, because he is a being-in-the-world. Once again, the truth about the human situation belongs to the lover or the poet, rather than to the scientist, and the existential reveals its affinities with art.

Ionesco's existential structures may, of course, be termed expressionist. In rejecting what he terms sub-realism Ionesco rejects a purely objective standpoint and expressionism is above all character-

ized by the blurring of different levels of reality, that same deliberate blurring which emerges in existential thought as the reconciliation of subjectivity and objectivity. The parallel between expressionism and the existential should not surprise. If we may trace Ionesco's inspiration to Strindberg, that source of twentieth century expressionist forms, we may also, and with little difficulty, trace Strindberg's inspiration to Romanticism. Existential thought, as I have argued throughout this thesis, has strong affinities with the Romantic and indeed represents a development of early nineteenth century philosophies.

Up to a point much of what has been said about Ionesco's relation to the existential is applicable to Beckett and Genet. Like Ionesco's plays, the novels and plays of Beckett and Genet may be termed situational, as we have seen. In Ionesco's case, however, existential form may also be regarded in terms of what I have called the phenomenological or existential viewpoint, that is, in terms of the oneirical and expressionist viewpoint which reconciles the extremes of the subjective and the objective. Ionesco's plays, in their very form, assert the existential unity of man and his world. Thus theatre of situation in which action is presented as whole, as an "all-at-once" phenomenon becomes also phenomenological theatre in which different levels of reality are simultaneously projected on the stage. To some extent we may say that Beckett's and Genet's work is phenomenological in the above sense. Beckett certainly makes little effort to distinguish between inner and outer reality in his novels and plays. This is particularly true in a Kafkaesque and expressionist novel like Watt but also true in the later work. And yet it would be misleading to term Beckett an expressionist in the strong sense in which we may term Ionesco that. Certainly the action of Malone Dies or Waiting for Godot suggests a partial distortion of normality, a surreal viewpoint on reality. At the same time Beckett's

viewpoint is not specifically dreamlike. If Ionesco's affinities are with the affective visions of Strindberg and the German expressionists from Büchner to the early Brecht, Beckett's are with the more contemplative and intellectual French tradition. Perhaps much the same may be said of Genet. Although Genet's plays - and his novels - recall the expressionism of the dream (and it is at this point that they most resemble Artaud's work) and although Genet at times deliberately sets out to incarnate spiritual truth, that is, to give objective reality to the subjective, to externalize or project on stage the inner dynamisms of the soul, the intellectual bias of his art links it with Beckett rather than with Ionesco. In spite of important differences, though, it is possible to maintain that all of the writers so far considered in this thesis express an existential approach to reality in the form of their work. In various ways Beckett, Ionesco and Genet relate to the source of all modern avant garde, Romanticism. The literary line is paralleled by the philosophical line from nineteenth century Idealism to twentieth century existential thought. And, of course, the two lines cross at many points, although the present thesis is able to focus on one point only: that point at which the systems of Heidegger and Sartre and the works of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet meet.

The present chapter leads directly to a discussion of Harold Pinter's plays in the course of which what has here been said will be reaffirmed and elaborated. A brief summary of chapters sixteen to twenty is necessary first, however. In these chapters the Heideggerian concepts of art as revelation and as "letting=be" have been shown to be of some relevance to the aesthetics and to the work of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet. Beckett's ideal of saying nothing leads to a notion of art as vision or as a revelation of an unknown - the Irreducible. In Genet art reveals sacramentally, as an efficacious

sign, it makes the mystery of solitude present as the Mass makes present the historical sacrifice of Christ. As in Beckett, the difficulty is to incarnate a spiritual presence, to realize concretely an elusive negative. In Ionesco the stress is also on art as a revealing but here the object of the revelation is regarded not as a negative but as positivity or plenitude. Art reveals the New, it affirms the transforming power of the imagination. Once art is defined in terms not of technique but of vision, the role of the artist is also visualized in essentially Romantic terms. Heidegger's poet is a solitary and a prophet. Beckett's artist is will-less, a mouthpiece for the gods or, more accurately, the medium of an impossible event: the birth of a work of art. Genet's is a priest, an actor possessed by a higher power. Ionesco's is a visionary rebel, enemy of the conventional and the ideological and spokesman for the freedom of the imagination and the truth of dreams. In each case the approach implies a rejection of literary realism and a movement towards what I have termed existential form and theatre of situation. In Beckett the aesthetic of the "all-at-once" is expressed as a tendency towards a curious drawing together of the opposites of simplicity and complexity. The result is poetry and the situational plot. In Genet it appears as a reduction of succession to simultaneity, a ritual bringing together of the poles of eternity and time. In Ionesco we find it in the stress on heightening effects and effects of dislocation and distortion which lead to abstract theatre, to theatre of situation and, above all, to an expressionist dream perspective which may also be termed a phenomenological viewpoint. Of course the existential quality in each case also represents a link with Romanticism. The approach to art of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet has now been firmly situated in a philosophic and literary tradition. At the same time, while we may discard that misleading label, "theatre of the Absurd," we need not feel bound to offer a replacement. This thesis has

consistently attempted to avoid limiting definitions of the work of art.

At this point the discussion of existential forms in literature remains incomplete. In order to see the matter in a clearer perspective we must concentrate on Pinter and this because Pinter alone of those writers considered in this thesis develops an essentially phenomenological approach in an unlikely direction. The next four chapters will discuss Pinter in terms of existential thought and at the same time comment on the form of Pinter's plays. As in the present chapter, the analysis will be based on the philosophical concepts of subjectivity and objectivity.

PART V

PINTER AND THE PROBLEM OF VERIFICATION

CHAPTER 21PINTER AND PHENOMENOLOGY : THE SUBJECTIVE-OBJECTIVESYNTHESIS (I)

The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied.<sup>1</sup>

Pinter.

Pinter's artistic search is for something less extraordinary than Beckett's Unnamable or Ionesco's experience of joy or Genet's solitude. It is simply a search for knowledge, a concern for verification. Of course it is possible to verify - to arrive at reliable knowledge of something - in various ways. Pinter's distinction, in the context of this thesis, is that he has tried, at different times, to do it in three widely divergent ways.

Writing in Evergreen Review in 1964 he sets out to make his position clear. The argument recalls Ionesco and, in the long run, Pirandello. Truth is not easily arrived at, the search for verification leads to varying points of view, to difficulties with simplistic labels, to the shifting basis of reality. "I'm not a theorist," Pinter begins,

I'm not an authoritative or reliable commentator on the dramatic scene, the social scene, any scene . . . So I'm speaking with some reluctance, knowing that there are at least twenty-four possible aspects of any single statement, depending on where you're standing at the time . . . A categorical statement, I find, will never stay where it is and be finite.<sup>2</sup>

As in Pirandello the great enemy is the label which fixes truth in a straitjacket: "We don't carry labels on our chests, and even though

they are continually fixed to us by others, they convince nobody" (p.80). Follows a passage which is a restatement of Pinter's famous manifesto - the programme sheet given to the audience who saw The Room and The Dumb Waiter at the Royal Court Theatre on the eighth of March, 1960. In spite of its being so well known, a section of the manifesto needs to be quoted:

The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false. The assumption that to verify . . . presents few problems I take to be inaccurate.

There is a forced quality in this writing which betrays the man who is not at home with ideas. And yet this very self-consciousness also gives Pinter his tone of conviction. This is no academic debate but a deeply personal commitment to the problem. Pinter applies his formulations to his own plays:

A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives, is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things.

In the Evergreen Review version of the above argument the point is elaborated. The unequivocal is highly suspect, as it is for Ionesco. Unlike Ionesco, however, Pinter does not specify Brecht as an offender:

Apart from any other consideration, we are faced with the immense difficulty, if not the impossibility,



of verifying the past. I don't mean merely years ago, but yesterday, this morning. What took place, what was the nature of what took place, what happened?

p.81.

We are in the world of Watt, examining the fall of sand, or in Endgame, where "something is taking its course." There is no doubt that Pinter's own profound curiosity becomes eloquent through contact with Beckett:

If one can speak of the difficulty of knowing what in fact took place yesterday, one can I think treat the present in the same way. What's happening now? We won't know until tomorrow . . . and we won't know then, we'll have forgotten, or our imagination will have attributed quite false characteristics to today. A moment is sucked away and distorted, often even at the time of its birth. We will all interpret a common experience quite differently, though we prefer to subscribe to the view that there's a shared common ground....

p.81.

Pinter does not deny the existence of a criterion of truth, a "common ground," though, as Esslin is bound to assume in order to justify the absurdist thesis. To deny this would be to undermine the search for verification and, indeed, to make nonsense of Pinter's sustained concern for the truth. Thus Pinter continues:

I think there's a shared common ground all right, but that it's more like a quicksand. Because "reality" is quite a strong firm word we tend to think, or to hope, that the state to which it refers is equally firm, settled and unequivocal.

p.81.

Clearly, if by the truth we mean something forever immutable, a restricting of reality, there is no certainty possible in Pinter's world. But one may seek for verification of a different order and one may do so in various ways. Pinter, as we shall see, experiments with three. Like Beckett he will search for that shifting, elusive and yet very real point where something may be ascertained, a point between the incompatible areas of the namable and the unnamable:

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

pp.81-82.

The "territory worthy of exploration" is Pinter's sphere of operations. Here the phenomenon of reality is subjected to processes of verification in the course of which certain conclusions become possible.

It is the aim of these chapters to examine Pinter's strip of territory - which is, in its way, an irreducible - in relation to existential thought and to any other philosophical approach which seems relevant. I shall not undertake a systematic comparison between Pinter and Heidegger or Sartre or Camus, however, in order to avoid repetition of arguments put forward earlier in this thesis. In any case Pinter's relation to the existential is best approached in general terms, that is, in terms of a small number of fundamental concepts which are common to Heidegger and Sartre and, indeed, to all existential or phenomenological thinkers. At the same time it must be stressed that Pinter belongs also to another philosophical tradition. The Evergreen Review article, after all, recalls unmistakably in its

arguments the scepticism and the concern with verification of the scientist. Indeed "verification" itself is a term more likely found in the pages of an empiricist than of an existential philosophy. Pinter's importance in this thesis is precisely that his work manages to straddle the poles of the existential and the empiricist, that, at times more, at times less successfully, it brings together Pirandello and Hume.

But it must not be forgotten that the immediate source of much of Pinter's inspiration is, as has already been suggested, Samuel Beckett. Pinter has made no secret of this. As he told an interviewer:

. . . there is no question that Beckett is a writer whom I admire very much . . . If Beckett's influence shows in my work that's all right with me . . .  
 However, I do think that I have succeeded in expressing something of myself.<sup>3</sup>

In opening the Beckett exhibition at Reading university on the nineteenth of May, 1971, he singled out Watt for comment and also admitted the keeping of a copy of Murphy borrowed from a library:

Sometime in 1949, somewhere in Ireland, I happened to pick up a copy of a magazine . . . and came across a passage . . . I continued to read . . . my hair standing on end. The title was "Extract from Watt" by Samuel Beckett. I had never heard of him . . . Not even the Westminster Public Library knew the name. But eventually they unearthed a book, Murphy . . . I . . . took possession of it; my one criminal act . . . I still have the copy. I am therefore very glad to open this Exhibition

. . . to pay tribute, from a very personal point of view, to the greatest writer of our time.<sup>4</sup>

Pinter's stress on the Beckett novels is significant (the Evergreen Review article ends with a reference to The Unnamable), partly because it links the Beckett influence to the also acknowledged influence of Kafka: "when I read them [Beckett and Kafka] it rang a bell . . . within me. I thought: something is going on here which is going on in me too."<sup>5</sup> What Kafka and the Beckett of the novels, particularly Watt and The Unnamable, have in common is a concern with meaning and order. Pinter at times borrows the nightmarish quality from Kafka. From Beckett he derives the questioning doubt and the obsessive analytical drive towards truth. It is this debt which is the really important one. Of course there are differences. Pinter lacks Beckett's fine lucidity, his intellectual power is inferior and rather more of the order of Ionesco, Beckett's aporia, that systematic doubt doubtfully proposed in the first page of The Unnamable, belongs to a very diverse and sophisticated tradition, owing much to Descartes, comparable to Husserl's radical beginning, to Heidegger's experience of the ground of things and, finally, to the via negativa of mystical theology. Pinter's scepticism and his search for true knowledge, in spite of its echoes of Beckett and the Continental tradition and of British empiricism, lacks this richness of associations and this depth. Nevertheless the link with Beckett suggests the seriousness with which we must regard Pinter's quest.

Briefly, the search involves above all the question: how to arrive at the truth? But for the most part Pinter prefers to see the issue primarily in emotional terms, that is, not in terms of knowledge but of what relates closely to it, security. Security is linked to the question of human identity. Identity, in its turn, has to do with human relationships. Thus the quest for verification, the concern with security, human identity and relationships inevitably go together.

They are basic to any understanding of Pinter's work and especially to an understanding of his work in the philosophical terms of reference proposed by this thesis.

The Dwarfs was performed on the B.B.C. in 1960 and serves to define something of a boundary between earlier and later Pinter styles. Here it is best to consider it first, however, since it furthers the understanding of other plays. Actually The Dwarfs,<sup>6</sup> looking back as it does to the unfinished and unpublished novel of the same name - a novel which preoccupied Pinter in the early and middle fifties - may be seen as underlying all of Pinter's work to a greater or lesser extent. It is not a popular play. Hayman calls it "hardly a play at all" and rather unjustly stresses that "it shows us in their crudest form some of the themes . . . developed in the plays."<sup>6</sup> It is true that thematic material which is submerged in other work becomes visible here but the effect is not crude. The Dwarfs is a fine radio play. Its chief fault is that it has put facile critics to sleep. When Esslin notes that it "contains some of Pinter's most interesting, significant and beautiful writing"<sup>7</sup> he comes closer to an adequate appraisal of it than Hayman.

The Dwarfs depicts a rather cryptic relationship between three men, Pete, Mark and Len. Pete and Mark are unpleasant characters (this comes as a surprise in the case of Mark who is clearly reminiscent of the author), Len appears to be a victim. At the beginning of the play Mark is away, in a hospital or an asylum, at the end it is Len's turn. The scene shifts from one house to another as we alternate between Len's room and Mark's. Beneath the frequently casual conversation a fight for survival is taking place. The pattern of the action is simple and what we have come to expect from Pinter. We begin with an insecure man, threatened by others. Gradually external pressures mount and we reach a point of crisis. It is not clear why Len is terrified, although his difficulties obviously relate to attitudes taken by his friends. In a brief soliloquy he expresses his anxiety:

LEN: There is my table. That is a table. There  
 is my chair. There is my table. That is  
 a bowl of fruit. There is my chair . . .  
 This is my room.<sup>8</sup>

Len is in the process of losing his grip on everyday certainties.  
 More and more insecure, he clings to his room, image of safety:

This is a journey and an ambush . . . This  
 is the deep grass I keep to. This is the  
 thicket in the centre of the night and the  
 morning. There is my hundred watt bulb  
 like a dagger. This room moves . . . It  
 has reached . . . a dead halt. This is my  
 fixture . . . I have my compartment. I am  
 wedged. Here is my arrangement, and my  
 kingdom. There are no voices. They make  
 no hole in my side.

pp.96-97.

Only in his room is Len able to feel that a dangerous "movement" of  
 reality is being arrested. The room is a fixture, a thicket in which  
 one is safe from ambush. And yet there is an awareness of imminent  
 danger, as if everything in the room were liable to be lost, drained  
 away through a hole in Len's side. And indeed rooms have doors and  
 doors let other people in. A moment later the doorbell rings and  
 Mark enters. Everything reverts to an image of confusion and fear:

LEN: The rooms we live in . . . open and shut . . .  
 They change shape at their own will.

p.99.

As the play proceeds it becomes evident that in an obscure way Pete  
 and Mark are in the process of destroying Len. The tone of the play

becomes more and more violent and this violence is imaged in the mysterious ever-present dwarfs:

LEN: . . . They yowl, they pinch, they dribble, they whimper, they gouge, and then they soothe each others' orifices with a local ointment, and then, all gone, all forgotten, they lark about, each with his buddy, get out the nose spray and the scented syringe, settle down for the night with a bun and a doughnut.

p.106.

Len characterizes each of his companions in turn. Pete is the gull who swoops down on a rat by night: "Gull screams, tears, Pete, tears, digs, Pete cuts, breaks, Pete stretches the corpse, flaps his wings . . ." (p.108). Mark's hatred is more stealthy and spider-like: "Mark lies, heavy, content . . . smiles at absent guests, sucks in all comers, arranges his web . . ." (p.110). Inevitably, the dwarfs stand and watch. They represent the scurrying, elusive resentments and insincere overtures of friendship which underlie the relations of the three men.

It is not surprising that Len's vision of horror and disintegration should go hand in hand with his own breakdown. His crisis of security ("Why haven't I got roots . . . Why haven't I got a home?" p.111) eventually expresses itself unambiguously as a crisis of identity. In an important passage Len realizes that his apprehensions focus on the question of selfhood:

LEN: The point is, who are you? . . . It's no use saying you know who you are just because you tell me you can fit your particular key into a particular slot, which will only receive your particular key because

that's not foolproof and certainly not  
conclusive.

p.111.

At this point the face beneath the mask is revealed. Pete's dream of a world in which faces peel off and fall away (pp.101-102) is realized for Len. Beneath the everyday façade is something quite different. It is important to see that Len's vision represents not only a crisis of security but also one of identity and, in addition, that it takes the form of a verification crisis, a terrifying awareness that everyday certainties will not hold. The situation is overtly Pirandellian:

LEN: Look at your face in the mirror. Look.  
It's a farce. Where are your features?  
You haven't got any features.

p.103.

Len sees that beneath the social mask man has no simple, fixed identity. Human beings pretend to recognize each other in what amounts to "a joint pretence" (p.112):

We depend on these . . . contrived accidents, to  
continue . . . What you are, or appear to be to me  
. . . changes so quickly, so horrifyingly, I  
certainly can't keep up with it and I'm damn sure  
you can't either. But who you are I can't even  
begin to recognize, and sometimes I recognize it  
so wholly, so forcibly, I can't look, and how  
can I be certain of what I see? You have no number.

p.112.

Pinter goes from a Pirandellian emphasis on the flux of life to a more explicit concern with verification:



Where am I to look . . . so as to have some surety . . .? You're the sum of so many reflections. How many reflections? Whose reflections? Is that what you consist of? What scum does the tide leave? What happens to the scum? . . . I've seen what happens. But I can't speak when I see it. I can only point a finger. I can't even do that. The scum is broken and sucked back . . . What have I seen, the scum or the essence?

p.112.

Len goes to "hospital." Like Stanley of The Birthday Party and Aston of The Caretaker, he is utterly broken. The dwarfs have gone, the yard is cleared of their rubbish, only images of sterility and defeat remain: "Now all is bare. All is clean. All is scrubbed. There is a lawn. There is a shrub. There is a flower" (p.117). Len's identity has been effectively lost. We have gone from insecurity provoked by human relationships to a crisis of identity. Significantly, a theme of verification, a concern with the truth - about human beings, their behaviour towards each other and their ultimate identification - parallels the action and echoes the arguments of Pinter's article in the Evergreen Review.

It is tempting to view Pinter's presentation of Len's crisis in the terminology of R.D. Laing. The latter, writing about certain kinds of schizophrenia in The Divided Self, argues as follows:

. . . a basically ontologically secure person will encounter all the hazards of life . . . from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity. It is often difficult for a person with such a sense of his integral selfhood and personal identity, of the permanency of things, of the reliability of natural processes . . .

of the substantiality of others, to transpose himself into the world of an individual whose experiences may be utterly lacking in any unquestionable self-validating certainties.<sup>9</sup>

I wish to refer to Laing's ideas not because some of them have become fashionable but because they are very definitely connected with existential philosophy and because there are real parallels with Pinter. The important notion, of course, is that of "ontological insecurity." Laing argues that emotional security and insecurity is a phenomenon not of psychology but of ontology. This means that if insecurity - what is frequently termed emotional instability - goes beyond a certain point the result is not merely a psychological collapse, something as it were on the surface of the personality, but a depth phenomenon, a loss of being, of one's own being, a loss of Self or identity. To be insane is not to be in a certain state of mind or in a certain emotional state. Insanity is an ontological state, in short, a way of being or existing - without an identity. The schizophrenic who assures me that he is nobody must be taken at his word, his statement must be regarded not as metaphorical but as statement of fact. The point to be stressed here is that the Pinter pattern of insecurity leading to crisis of identity - not simply to a psychological but to an ontological crisis in which selfhood may actually be lost - corresponds closely to Laing's theories. Insofar as this is so, moreover, it becomes possible to say that Pinter's approach to the question of human identity in The Dwarfs is existential. If I am so made as to be liable to lose my Self, understood ontologically as my very being, I may be said to be ontologically open. In short, I am in such a way as to be exposed to an outside, ontologically exposed because it is possible for me to lose my very being. My identity is not something which closes me off from the outside, quite the contrary. I am not an Ego, something one may name or reify and set against the

outside world. What I am reaches out to the outside world and at a certain point blends with it. If this were not so, how could I lose my being, how could it slip out of me? Like Laing, himself following Heidegger and Sartre, Pinter depicts Len's identity as a continuum of Len and his world. More correctly still, he suggests that Len is a relationship, that he is his world about him. Just as Len's being reaches out to relate with the world, so the world reaches into the deepest part of Len.

Len's identity may be defined in terms of two things - the room and human relationships - and each of these categories corresponds to an important concept in existential philosophy. For the existential thinker, as we have seen in earlier sections of this thesis, man is not an entity, something more or less sealed off from what is around him. On the contrary, he is a being who exists in a situation. This means that man and his situation form an indissoluble unity, that man is an exposure to the world, openness, in short, relation. Thus Heidegger refuses to use words like "man" or even "consciousness" because they suggest something self-contained and separate and defines man as dasein or being-in-the-world. Man is not a being who happens to exist in a world: his "there" is ontologically part of him. In Sartre, of course, there is the corresponding notion of situation. In each case the assumption is that we cannot regard man as a thing - even as a mental thing, a psyche or Ego. Laing follows Heidegger and Sartre here and of necessity breaks with the Freudian tradition. The two alternatives are mutually exclusive. Either I am an Ego, a creature determined largely by my past and a possible object of the science of psychology, or I am a being-there, a freedom thrusting my way into the future, a subject rather than an object, an ontological phenomenon rather than a psychological one. Of course if we accept the existential approach and define man as being-in-the-world we must acknowledge that his world is largely made up of other people. To say that I am a being-there is to

say that I am other people, that self-identity goes hand in hand with the fact of there being other people besides myself. More concisely, otherness is a part of me, the Other reaches deep inside me. Thus my name is legion, my "me" includes the being of other men. It is for this reason that Heidegger calls dasein also mitsein or being-with and makes it clear that the two terms are synonymous.

The present argument is that Pinter in The Dwarfs approaches the question of human identity in terms equivalent to dasein and mitsein, that a character like Len is open in such a way as to be his environment and, in particular, his friends, Pete and Mark. Of course we are speaking of Pinter's implicit approach to Len's identity as it emerges from the pattern of the action of the play itself. For Pinter Len is defined first in terms of place, then in terms of his relationships. Now "place" in this context cannot be understood in a purely spatial sense. Len is indissolubly or organically linked to his room, his room is actually an extension of himself. The room is Len's area of operations, in short, his "there." This means that to leave the room or to lose it leads not simply to an emotional crisis, a crisis of ownership, but to a total loss of Self: if we separate Len from his room we undermine his sense of identity. In the light of this statement we may return to passages already quoted from the play. When Len clings to the objects in his room, seeking to define them by naming them, he is in effect clinging to his own identity: "There is my table. That is a table. There is my chair. There is my table . . . This is my room" (p.96). The room is a "fixture" (p.96), it guarantees one's selfhood: "Here is my arrangement, and my kingdom" (p.97). Unfortunately, rooms have doors. To be a relationship, a being-there, is very dangerous, it represents an exposure. As in Heidegger, to exist is to stand out or ex-sist, to be in the light, to stand revealed. Being-there leaves one open to threat or, in Sartrean terms, it gives one an outside. In Pinter language, "The rooms we live in . . . open and shut" (p.99).

Thus Len, Christ-like, has a "hole in his side" through which the Other has ready access to his deepest being, through which the objects in the room and Len's very identity are liable to flow away. In other words Len is a place and because he is a place, a being-there, he is also a relation, being-with. It would be as inadequate to assert that Len has relations as it would be to say that he has a place. Len is these qualities. When Mark enters Len's room he enters Len, he installs himself within Len:

LEN: You're trying to buy and sell me . . . You've got me pinned to the wall before I open my mouth . . . Both of you bastards, you've made a hole in my side, I can't plug it . . . I've lost a kingdom . . . I can hide nothing. I can't lay anything aside. Nothing can be put aside, nothing can be hidden, nothing can be saved, it waits, it eats, it's voracious, you're in it, Pete's in it, you're all in my corner. There must be somewhere else!

p.107.

Of course, from the existential viewpoint, we are all in each others' corners and there is no somewhere else. Len is a public being, he is such as to be open to Mark and Pete, ontologically open. The Other is able to enter Len at will, through the hole in his side, to deprive him of his kingdom, of his room, of his identity, to reduce him to the level of "ontological insecurity," the state of schizophrenia or loss of Self described by R.D. Laing. The Sartrean echoes are strong. Len is object of the Look, "pinned to the wall," destroyed by the presence of the Other and, as in Beckett, "l'enfer c'est les autres," the hell of one's relationships is inescapable because it is part of one's very being. Of course what Mark and Pete can do to Len Len can do to them. Indeed, earlier in the play it is Mark who is in "hospital." The point

is that the characters of The Dwarfs cannot escape each other, that Pinter's assumptions about the nature of human identity in this play are those of Heidegger and Sartre.

Len's question - "The point is, who are you?" - has been answered, though not explicitly. Identity in The Dwarfs is being-in-the-world. In view of this it is not surprising that from the point of view of verification we are faced with difficulties. Selfhood is dynamic and elusive, like Len's room it is in a state of motion. But this is not to say that we must have unthinking recourse to the concept of the Absurd, as some would wish. It is enough to say that for Pinter, man cannot be given a facile label. At this point Pinter rejoins Pirandello and Sartre. Beneath the social mask, worn in bad faith, beneath the "joint pretence" (p.112) is a complex reality, an existential reality which can be defined in the flexible terminology of Heidegger, for example. But it is worth noting that a different point of view is put forward by Pete, one of the three protagonists of the play. When Len complains, "there is a different sky each time I look" (p.101), Pete warns of the dangers of subjectivity:

You've got no idea how to preserve a distance between what you smell and what you think about it. You haven't got the faculty for making a simple distinction between one thing and another. Every time you walk out of this door you go straight over a cliff . . . How can you hope to assess and verify anything if you walk about with your nose stuck between your feet all day long?

p.101.

This is the voice of the empiricist arguing for objectivity and detachment. Pete's criterion is pragmatic: "You know what I want? An efficient idea . . . One that'll work" (p.105). As he crumples before

this aggressive self-assertion, Len speaks of crushed insects and dead birds. In return he is told about the properties of nutcrackers: "You press the cracker and the cracker cracks the nut" (p.105). There can be no doubt that Pete's approach is not that of The Dwarfs as a whole. Pete is presented as a limited and destructive person and as one lacking in Len's insight. At the same time it must be stressed that, insofar as Pete's viewpoint is that of the objective spectator rather than of the involved, existential subject, it represents a valid alternative approach to the issue of identity and one which, as we shall see, is found acceptable in other Pinter plays.

I have spoken of "the approach of The Dwarfs as a whole," and this phrase requires further explanation. It refers, of course, to the implicitly existential treatment of human identity in the play, but it also refers to the form of the work. The Dwarfs, like the plays of Ionesco and, in a slightly different context, those of Beckett and Genet, is situational theatre. This means that sequential action is replaced by the presentation of a total situation, that Pinter sets out to present not a series of events but a state of affairs. The situation is complete from the start. All that remains is for us to view its many facets. Once again, the operative principle is that of the "all at once." We are not concerned with particular actions performed by Pete, Mark and Len, only with an enduring state of tension, a state of human relationships, of insecurity, of threatened identity. The only real action of the play, the constant change of setting from Mark's room to Len's, merely emphasizes Pinter's formal approach: as in Ionesco, it is the pattern, the shape that counts, not the succession of events.

The parallel with Ionesco is even more close, however. The Dwarfs, like La Leçon, may be termed a phenomenological play and for similar reasons. When Pete suggests that Len's point of view on reality is subjective and so inadequate he is putting forward an argument for objectivity which is not in keeping with the viewpoint of The Dwarfs

itself. That is to say, the play as a whole has a phenomenological viewpoint. We cannot clearly distinguish between actual events and events which may be taking place within the mind - presumably Len's. Thus we cannot ask whether the threat to Len's identity is actual or imaginary. The fact is that there is a mental collapse and that Len's friends are inextricably bound up with it. Does it matter whether they are directly or indirectly responsible? Insofar as Len feels threatened he is threatened: the rest is a quibble. The Dwarfs presents a total phenomenon, a single entity which can be examined in various ways but which cannot be divided into separate parts: the phenomenon of Len's-being-in-the-world or, better, Len's-having-relations-and-consequently-losing-his-identity. In other words, Pinter's presentation offers us the subjective and objective as complements, it stands with Kierkegaard's definition of truth as passionate subjectivity, not with the empiricist's definition of it as detached objectivity. This is not to say that the viewpoint of The Dwarfs is altogether dreamlike, although there are elements of nightmare in the play. Pinter differs a little from Ionesco here, but the essential approach is similar. We see this when we reflect that in this play Pinter shows no interest in psychology, in patterns of motivation - the causes and effects which are the stuff of psychological drama. Of course a psychological approach implies an objective criterion. It implies a certain reification of man, in short, the notion of the Ego (or Id or Superego) as Freud understood the term. Pinter rejects psychology and - since psychology and the convention of literary realism are closely related - a realist viewpoint as well, and he does it because, like the existential thinker, he wishes to evoke the sense of a composite reality, a world in which man's feelings have objective validity. We return to the R.D. Laing approach to schizophrenia as a valid existential choice or to Kierkegaard: in each case it is a question of regarding a passionately subjective experience as compatible with objective truth, indeed, as a means of reaching the truth. The argument is simply summed up by saying that if we wish to



verify the facts of the Mark, Pete and Len situation we do not refer ourselves to a detached empirical observer. On the contrary, we accept the committed viewpoint of the protagonists themselves - above all, the viewpoint of Len. Consequently Pinter in The Dwarfs offers no external reference point according to which one might interpret or understand the play, he offers us, for example, no framework of psychological causes and effects. The Dwarfs must be taken as a whole, like one of Ionesco's plays, as consistent only with itself, as referable only to itself. This is as much as to say once again that it offers a situation or subjective-objective totality. Certainly there is a great deal of surface realism - in the dialogue of the protagonists, for instance. But at the same time everything is modified by the sense of shifting reality, by the subjective or inward view implicit throughout. The characters are not viewed from the outside, in terms of psychology, but from the inside, in existential terms of freedom, the inexplicable and the unexpected. This is felt by the audience as an absence of reference point, as action oddly surreal or expressionist. The Dwarfs moves, like Len's room, it will not submit to observation from a single philosophical angle. It places the audience in the same situation as Len, for example, that is, in the situation of dasein which gazes at its world as one already in it, as one whose objective viewpoint is necessarily grounded in subjectivity. This is not simply to say that everything in the play is seen through Len's eyes. The point is that no detached explanation for events in The Dwarfs is forthcoming, that whatever objectivity is available is contained by the play and does not contain it. It should be added that if The Dwarfs belongs to a larger expressionist tradition which includes the work of Ionesco, it does not follow that there is a specific debt to plays like La Leçon. Pinter denies reading Ionesco at a time when his work might have been influenced by him. On the other hand he is enthusiastic about Kafka and Beckett. I would suggest that what he finds attractive in Beckett is something which is not central in Beckett: the expressionist,

Kafkaesque mood of, for example, an early novel like Watt.

The Dwarfs is a play about security, about human relationships, about identity, about truth. Security and identity go together and identity is defined in terms of relations. Thus Pinter depicts his characters, notably Len, in existential terms - as beings-there and beings-with - and reflects the existential approach in the very form of the play. If Len is a being-in-the-world it follows that we cannot know the truth about Len from the outside. On the contrary, the truth is to be found by gazing at reality through Len's own eyes. So Pinter provides a simultaneously subjective and objective viewpoint on the action of the play which, as a consequence, evokes a sense of the surreal or expressionist.

The Dwarfs would not be important, however, if it did not exhibit, in more obvious form, central characteristics of other Pinter plays. The next chapter will examine four plays in which the existential and phenomenological viewpoints predominate.

CHAPTER 22PINTER AND PHENOMENOLOGY : THE SUBJECTIVE-OBJECTIVESYNTHESIS (II)

ROSE. This room is occupied.<sup>1</sup>

Pinter.

A number of early Pinter plays fall into the category of The Dwarfs and may be discussed in similar terms. The questions they pose are variations on the theme of identity, although for the most part this is not made explicit. Likewise the concern with verification is not as explicit as it is in The Dwarfs. Rather, it is approached by way of the theme of insecurity. We recall, of course, that in The Dwarfs intellectual uncertainty and emotional insecurity are closely related and that human identity, as in Laing's book, is itself defined in terms of ontological security.

Anxiety is the dominant mood of The Room, The Dumb Waiter and The Birthday Party. These three plays, the so-called "comedies of menace," may be taken together. In each case the central image is that of the room and the basic pattern the playing off of security and threat, inside and outside. In Pinter's words:

Two people in a room - I am dealing a great deal of the time with this image . . . The curtain goes up on the stage, and I see it as a very potent question: What is going to happen to these two people in the room? Is someone going to open the door and come in?<sup>2</sup>

The Room, Pinter's first play and written for a performance in 1957, introduces the basic situation. In The Dumb Waiter, written in the same year but not performed in English until 1960, this situation is

given a surprising twist. In The Birthday Party (performed in 1958) it becomes considerably more complex. The area of the room - in The Birthday Party it has grown to a house - is inevitably a place of security and stability. We are at once reminded of the closed spaces in Ionesco's plays and, even more strikingly, of Beckett's diminishing areas. Outside the room is a threatening presence: the Other, an unknown with power to destroy. With the hindsight provided by the analysis of The Dwarfs we may boldly state that the room represents one's identity, always a precarious possession in Pinter, that is, oneself as a dasein or being-there. By the same token the door, avenue for the entry of the Other, represents oneself as a mitsein or being-with. In these early plays the characters exist as ontologically exposed, then, and the door images a weakness built into the very structure of the personality. I shall return to this point later in this chapter.

The Room is very reminiscent of Kafka with its small area of security surrounded by a great and mysterious house and by the darkness and the cold. As Rose, fussing around Bert, puts it: "It's very cold out, I can tell you. It's murder . . . Just now I looked out of the window. It was enough for me" (p.7). Rose is in a state of total ignorance as regards what is outside her room: "I've never seen who it is. Who is it? Who lives down there?" "Whoever it is," she adds conclusively, "it can't be too cosy" (p.8). With the room, on the other hand, "you know where you are" (p.8), "you stand a chance" (p.11). The moment of tension comes when someone is at the door, that source of uncertainty and uneasiness. It turns out to be the landlord, however. Again the sense of threat is suggested by the lack of information about things. It is as if no one were able to verify what takes place in the strange house:

ROSE. How many floors you got in this house?

MR. KIDD. Floors. (He laughs.) Ah, we had a good few of

them in the old days.

p.14.

Mr. Kidd's knowledge of things is a fragmentary as Rose's. He "wouldn't be surprised" to learn that his mother was a Jewess (p.15). Later in the play Rose's anxiety grows when other visitors arrive. As always, uncertainty and confusion add to the tension. The visiting couple are looking for the landlord but his name is not Mr. Kidd. "Maybe there are two landlords" (p.19), someone suggests. Inside the room Rose and the newcomers rapidly move to resentment:

ROSE. You won't find any rooms vacant in this house.

p.24.

A moment later the issue is out in the open:

ROSE. This room is occupied.

p.24.

As in the later The Dwarfs the underlying fear is that the room may be lost and one's own Self with it.

In The Dumb Waiter two thugs, awaiting orders in a room, are startled by the demands introduced by the dumb waiter, an obvious variant of Pinter's door. Gus, the more insecure of the two, keeps asking questions about the job to be done. When the waiter begins its impossible demands Gus' insecurity grows. The situation in The Birthday Party is reversed. Ben and Gus, now the aggressors, have become Goldberg and McCann. Petey, Meg and Stanley make up the timid inhabitants of the room - in this case a dingy seaside boarding house. Meg has made the place as "cosy" as Rose's. Moreover, she mothers Stanley as Rose does Bert. In each case the room is both secure and claustrophobic. Stanley is a run-down individual who refuses to face the threatening outside world, in need of Meg's haven and yet hating

Meg insofar as she encourages his weakness. His reaction to the news that two visitors are expected is barely disguised fear:

STANLEY. They won't come . . . Forget all about it.  
It's a false alarm.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever else one makes of them - and mystery is essential to their power to terrify - Goldberg and McCann stand for the world which rejected Stanley and which he left behind to crawl into his shelter. Clearly, Stanley's effort to construct a small world from which the threatening Other is excluded can only fail. The coming of strangers is as inevitable as the opening of a door.

One of Pinter's poems, dated 1953, speaks of "the stranger / That strangered the calm."<sup>4</sup> It is tempting to see the element of fear in the early plays as something akin to angst. Unease - as in The Dwarfs - makes the environment appear alien and uncanny and this takes the characteristic Pinter form of a juxtaposition of normality and the abnormal, of Meg's breakfast cereals and the sense of underlying horror. A toy drum becomes a mysterious object, a dumb waiter, a threat. But the striking thing about Pinter's characters is not their angst but their inauthenticity. If we wish to see them in relation to Heidegger we must stress that they stand on the edge of the void but never quite go over. They are all of them experts at evading the experience which is the normal state of Beckett's and Ionesco's characters. This means that, while they cannot escape simple facts, they work hard to render this knowledge inoffensive. It is true that they are exposed, beings-in-a-room which is accessible to the Other. But it is possible to ignore the threat, to manoeuvre in such a way as to avoid any real communication with the outside, to allow the Other no glimpse of oneself. Heidegger calls this escape into the bosom of the anonymous crowd "falling" and stresses that, from the point of view of language, inauthenticity involves the substitution of Idle Talk for a genuinely

communicative speech. Quite simply, Idle Talk may be defined as speech whose function it is not to reveal but to conceal, to create ambiguity, to confuse.

Pinter characterizes the speech of his creations in these terms in the Evergreen Review article:

Language, under these conditions, is a highly ambiguous business. So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken . . . You and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling.

pp.81-82.

Evasion, the article continues, may be of two kinds. It may involve silence or a mass of words calculated to fill the void of things:

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a . . . smoke screen which keeps the other in its place . . . One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.

p.82.

We recall Rose's compulsive chatter to a silent Bert at the beginning of The Room and Meg's prattle to an uncommunicative Petey, very like Rose's and yet closer, in its arrangement of recurring phrase motifs, to the poetry of Waiting for Godot:

MEG. I've got the cornflakes ready . . . are they nice?

PETEY. Very nice.

MEG. I thought they'd be nice . . . .

p.9.

Comparable to this is the confrontation of anxious talkativeness and grim reticence in The Dumb Waiter. In each case, as Pinter suggests in his article, it is not a question of failure of communication, that favourite theme of modern criticism, but of evasion:

I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence . . . and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rear guard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility.

p.82.

But, as Heidegger argues, the truth cannot be concealed. It can be revealed either as it is or as disguised but either way it needs must be revealed. This is precisely what happens in Pinter. The more one tries to hide one's insecurity and fear, the more evident it becomes. Gus of The Dumb Waiter, Rose of The Room and Meg of The Birthday Party all simultaneously disguise and lay bare their anxiety by their speech. In The Dumb Waiter an argument about the correctness of the expression "light the kettle" threatens to reveal the tension in the two men. In The Birthday Party Meg, unable to face the truth about her relationship with Stanley, is nonetheless embarrassingly revealing:

MEG . . . Was it nice?

STANLEY. What?

MEG. The fried bread.

STANLEY. Succulent.



MEG. You shouldn't say that word.

STANLEY. What word?

MEG. That word you said.

STANLEY. What, succulent - ?

MEG. Don't say it!

STANLEY. What's the matter with it?

MEG. You shouldn't say that word to a married woman.

p.17.

Meg, like Stanley, is a master of illusion. Just as the latter boasts of his success as a pianist and tries, unconvincingly, to account for his failure, she lives in a world of fairy tale and birthday parties and persists in her blindness to the end. Yet her very insistence on unrealities, her belief that the house is "on the list," that she is the "belle of the ball" and so forth, betrays her inauthenticity. Like many Pinter characters, Meg seeks to convince herself, as much as anyone else, that all is well.

Fantasy and escapism cannot ward off the inevitable Pinter threat for very long, however. At the end of The Room Rose's fears materialize in the mysterious visitor from the basement. The blind negro has little to say: "Come home, Sal" (p.30). Bert returns to beat him, Rose goes blind. As in The Dwarfs the pattern is from insecurity to crisis and the crisis is provoked by the entry of the Other into the room. Also as in The Dwarfs there is a clear suggestion that the crisis is one of identity: who is Rose, perhaps Sal? This is not to say that the blind negro may be regarded as an aggressor, as the Other who breaks into the room to rob its inmates of their identity. It seems likely that his function is rather to recall Rose to her true Self, to her past life, perhaps - as Sal. This fact explains his symbolic quality as a figure arising from the depths of darkness, like the Freudian Id or the Jungian Shadow, that is to say, the repressed side of the

personality. Like Meg, Rose does not wish to face the truth about herself. Her blindness at the end of the play simply images this fact, the truth that Rose, as Rose, has no real identity.

If the situation depicted in The Room is slightly different from that in The Dwarfs, the pattern of an external threat to one's identity leading to a crisis is given unambiguous expression in The Birthday Party. Stanley, previously threatened by Meg's motherliness, is now subject to a sadistic assault from the outside. Goldberg, the aggressor, is a more complex version of Pete in The Dwarfs and his strength lies in his identifying himself with normality and objectivity. Overwhelmingly paternal, giving all the appearance of confidence, sentimental, brimming with platitudes, he immediately takes control of Meg's house: ". . . I know what it is to wake up with the sun shining, to the sound of the lawnmower, all the little birds, the smell of the grass, church bells, tomato juice - " (p.45). His "True? Of course it's true. It's more than true. It's a fact" (p.28) could well be the motto of the Heideggerian "they." Goldberg stands for conventional things but normality disguises many horrors and Stanley's party becomes the setting for the victim's total collapse, a game like the game of corners in The Dwarfs in which one is liable to lose one's Self. Of course Stanley loses his identity, as in The Dwarfs insecurity is a matter of ontology, of one's very being. At this point the room, or rather the house, emerges clearly as an image of Stanley's Self. When the visitors enter it is to effect the victim's mental collapse, to reduce Stanley to Len's position. Thus Stanley, like Len, may be said to be ontologically placed, ontologically exposed to the Other, in short, a dasein and a mitsein. Stanley is hardly the only insecure person in the play. Even Goldberg and McCann mask their deep anxiety with a show of force. But it is Stanley who is most open to assault and whose loss of identity is complete. Significantly, his glasses are broken. If there is doubt about the exact meaning of Rose's blindness, there can be none here. We are not surprised to find that in a 1958 poem entitled "A View of

the Party" Pinter speaks not of a dislocation of the personality - that is understood - but of a dislocation of the room. Thus Goldberg and McCann "imposed upon the room / A dislocation and doom" (Poems, p.18). Again, the last stanza of the poem sees the whole struggle for identity as a contest for the room. Stanley has lost his eyes, or, if we prefer, the light of reason, his Self; Goldberg has taken possession:

A man they never knew  
 In the centre of the room,  
 And Stanley's final eyes  
 Broken by McCann.

p.19.

We must recognize the full significance of the victim's being led away at the end. In leaving his room, Stanley takes leave of himself. Like Lulu, whose fate comments on his, he has been seduced.

In the light of plays like The Dwarfs and The Birthday Party it is not hard to see the end of The Dumb Waiter in the above terms. Ben dominates Gus as Goldberg does McCann or, again, Stanley. Gus' crisis comes about as the waiter begins to make its outrageous demands and, as in other plays, insecurity relates closely to the question of verification. Like Rose who is presumably uncertain about the identity of the negro and Stanley who knows nothing about his accusers, Gus is completely in the dark throughout the play. The real crisis is the one we hardly see, Gus' realization in the final scene that he is the victim. It is not exactly a crisis of identity, of course, since it seems that Gus is to be killed. But the pattern resembles that of other plays and once again it is plausible to suggest that the image of the room, which dominates the action, recalls the theme of identity, that is, the existential approach to human identity in terms of ontological openness or being-in-the-world.

The parallel between The Dwarfs and the early plays discussed in this chapter is close. The Room, The Dumb Waiter and The Birthday Party deal with the issue of truth and its verification only indirectly, that is, in their concern with the unknown. At the heart of each play, however, is Len's question: "The point is, who are you?" Rose, it seems, leads a double life; Stanley may be in a similar position - at any rate the play depicts him as vacillating between alternative identities, sometimes as Meg's child, sometimes as the embittered failure and, finally, as the submissive patient, ready for the asylum. Even The Dumb Waiter may be supposed to raise the question of Gus' identity, if only implicitly: is Gus one of the aggressors, a Pete or a Goldberg, or does he belong with the Pinter victim? In each play, as in The Dwarfs, human identity is revealed even as it is lost and it is revealed in the experience of ontological insecurity as being-in-the-world, as definable in terms of the room and in terms of human relationships. Like Len, Stanley, Rose and Gus are presented as existential characters, beings open to the world around them and so liable to assault from the outside, that is, from the Other.

Let us add that the viewpoint of The Room, The Dumb Waiter and The Birthday Party is that of The Dwarfs, the viewpoint of Phenomenology. Of course one expects a more objective presentation on the stage than on the radio. Nevertheless, while it is possible to point to realism of detail in all these plays - there is the dialogue, for example, notably in the breakfast scene of The Birthday Party - it is necessary to see that Pinter does not provide the external or objective reference point which is a prerequisite for artistic realism. I shall discuss the relation between literary realism and philosophical empiricism at some length in the next chapter of this thesis, however. The point to be stressed here is that in these existential or phenomenological plays Pinter rejects any possibility of a detached viewpoint on the action. As in The Dwarfs we are presented with a total situation, the phenomenon

as a whole and as self-sufficient. In other words Pinter offers us reality as a conjunction of inwardness and outwardness, subjectivity and objectivity. Insofar as an objective viewpoint exists it is contained by the plays and not vice versa. Thus while we may discern psychological patterns in the relations of Pinter's characters we cannot explain the given play as a whole in these terms. Put differently again this means that Pinter sees the truth of a given situation as embedded in that situation so that if one wishes to verify it one can only do so from the inside, that is, from within the situation itself. And of course one can verify certain facts in The Room, The Dumb Waiter and The Birthday Party, objectivity is possible - but not independently of its complement, subjectivity. For this reason simple explanations are unavailable, there are no answers supplied from above to the many questions which arise. The Birthday Party, for example, presents us with action viewed from the involved and emotional viewpoint of its protagonists. More precisely, what we see is an action in which external events and externalized emotional responses to these events are indistinguishable - as in The Dwarfs or Ionesco's La Leçon. Under these circumstances we cannot be certain that much or all of it is actual; it may be taking place in Stanley's mind, or Meg's. We may be witnessing not an actual confrontation but a parable or, better still, a projection of Stanley's insecurity and fear. But then we are not concerned to distinguish between subjective and objective truth. The truth is that Stanley is in danger of being destroyed by a force from his world, that Stanley's insecurity and his loss of identity are real. As in Kierkegaard, truth - objective truth - cannot be separated from human emotions, from the committed human being, that existential being-there. If this is the case in The Birthday Party is it equally the case in The Room and The Dumb Waiter. Is the blind negro, for example, a distinct personality or simply a projection of Rose's conscience? Are we to regard the room in all of these plays as an actual space or as an area within the mind, as the inner space of the human being?

We must conclude that such questions are here irrelevant. What is in the mind, what is true in one's emotional life, is also factually or objectively true.

At the same time the effect of the dual lens of Phenomenology is, as in The Dwarfs, surreal or expressionist. Even when the pattern of Pinter's dialogue and action appears to be normal, that is, appears to correspond to patterns of everyday living, there is something odd about it and the audience feels that it is not quite in realist focus. Sometimes the symbolic intrudes as it does at the end of The Room with the entry of the negro. But this kind of intrusion is rare in Pinter whom we may believe when he states categorically: ". . . I wouldn't know a symbol if I saw one."<sup>5</sup> It is not the glaring symbol which militates against realism in the plays under discussion but the surreal juxtaposition of normality and the abnormal which is the result of a simultaneous presentation of inner and outer reality. Dali will paint a realistic giraffe - but set its neck on fire, or a realistic leg where one would expect to find an arm, and so on. If the comparison with the surrealist breaks down we may think of an expressionist landscape in which the colour is unnaturally bright and betrays the emotional or spiritual lens through which external nature is being examined. Pinter offers us a breakfast scene or a birthday party and then turns it into a nightmare; or he offers us the image of a dumb waiter sending down orders - to a pair of thugs who have no way of executing their orders; again, he presents us with an interrogation not "all that surrealistic and curious because surely this thing . . . has been happening in Europe in the last twenty years"<sup>6</sup> - and yet word the interrogation as follows:

STANLEY. I had a headache!

GOLDBERG. Did you take anything for it?

STANLEY. Yes.

GOLDBERG. What?

STANLEY. Fruit salts!

GOLDBERG. Enos or Andrews?

STANLEY. En - An -

GOLDBERG. Did you stir properly? Did they fizz?

STANLEY. Now, now, wait, you -

GOLDBERG. Did they fizz? Did they fizz or didn't  
they fizz?

p.48.

Language used in this way recalls La Cantatrice Chauve. In each case it is not the content of speech but the emotion which counts and this because the phenomenon is being examined from the inside. The interrogation is real, it is an objective fact, but it is a fact of subjectivity, a matter of feeling. If fruit salts succeed in conveying the sense of menace then they serve quite well as objective correlatives for Stanley's situation, for reality as it presents itself to Stanley. More simply, Pinter does not wish to contemplate the interrogation from the viewpoint of a detached observer. What interests him is the objectivity of the interrogation process as registered on the subjectivity of the victim such that the interrogation and its impact on the victim are presented as a single, total phenomenon.

It will be readily evident in the context of this thesis that Pinter's phenomenological plays presuppose a theory of "letting-be" and this is in fact the case. If subjectivity is to be objective, that is, if it is not to distort, it must be seen as performing the function of "revealing" or, again, as the condition in which things are allowed to be what they are. For the phenomenologist, as for the poet, the scene about Tintern Abbey is unable to be itself, is incomplete, without an observer who perceives and half creates what he perceives. Subjectivity is a condition of genuine objectivity, as when Heidegger's Hölderlin observing Lake Constance sees not a geographical entity but

a poetic lake and in so doing reveals the true lake. Pinter's stance towards the work of art is of this order: like Ionesco, he refuses to manipulate his creation and stresses that the artist's role is to allow the truth to emerge after its own fashion. It is true that in arguing along these lines Pinter is thinking of his later and, as we shall see, non-phenomenological work as well as of plays like The Dwarfs. Nevertheless, while it may be said that any artist - existential or otherwise - must and does allow an essential freedom to his inspiration, the fact remains that existential forms of the kind described in this thesis presuppose a special degree of "letting-be." What Pinter has to say about the role of the artist is no doubt applicable to the whole body of his work but is particularly applicable to the phenomenological plays.

Examples of statements putting forward Pinter's version of the idea of "letting-be" are numerous. First of all there is the Ionesco and Beckett paradox that one writes for oneself alone and yet that one is not, for that reason, in control of one's inspiration:

Writing is, for me, a completely private activity  
 . . . What I write has no obligation to anything  
 other than to myself. My responsibility is not to  
 audiences, critics, producers, directors, actors or  
 to my fellow men in general, but to the play in hand,  
 simply.

Evergreen Review, p.80.

This precludes any form of art amenable to propaganda: "To supply an explicit moral tag to an evolving and compulsive dramatic image seems to be false, impertinent and dishonest" (Evergreen Review, p.81). More specifically:

. . . the explicit form which is so often taken in  
 twentieth century drama is . . . cheating. The



playwright assumes that we have a great deal of information about all his characters, who explain themselves to the audience. In fact, what they are doing . . . is conforming to the author's own ideology. They don't create themselves as they go along, they are being fixed on the stage . . . to speak for the author who has a point of view to put over.<sup>7</sup>

Writing along the same lines elsewhere Pinter argues:

Given characters who possess a momentum of their own, my job is not to impose on them . . . The relationship between author and characters should be a highly respectful one, both ways. And if it's possible to speak of gaining a kind of freedom from writing, it doesn't come by leading one's characters into fixed and calculated postures, but by allowing them to carry their own can . . . This can be extremely painful. It's much easier . . . not to let them live.

Evergreen Review, p.82.

At times Pinter seems to carry his laissez faire to extremes which the unsympathetic will interpret as affectation. Speaking to Laurence Kitchin he stresses that his plays are as obscure to him as to anyone else.<sup>8</sup> Inevitably, he explains the genesis of his work as follows:

I start off with people, who come into a particular situation. I certainly don't write from any kind of abstract idea.<sup>9</sup>

I have usually begun a play in quite a simple

manner; found a couple of characters in a particular context . . . I've never started a play from any kind of abstract idea or theory and never envisaged my own characters as . . . allegorical representations. . . .<sup>10</sup>

All I know is that blank sheet of paper in front of me, and then, when it's filled, I can't believe it.<sup>11</sup>

In a striking passage Pinter makes it clear that his method is not to be taken as implying uncontrolled spontaneity. On the contrary, what is involved is precisely what Heidegger calls "letting-be"; one exercises one's control in order that the work of art may exercise its own, one struggles to allow the work to be itself:

I'd like to make it quite clear . . . that I don't regard my own characters as uncontrolled, or anarchic. They're not. The function of selection and arrangement is mine . . . But I think a double thing happens. You arrange and you listen, following the clues you leave for yourself, through the characters. And sometimes a balance is found, where image can freely engender image and where at the same time you are able to keep your sights on the place where the characters are silent and in hiding.

Evergreen Review, p.82.

Arranging and listening means adapting oneself entirely to the autonomous object: "If I write about a lamp, I apply myself to the demands of that lamp. If I write about a flower, I apply myself to the demands of that flower . . . I do not intend to impose or distort . . . ." <sup>12</sup>

From a phenomenological standpoint this is the strength and objectivity of Pinter's method. Of course from a different standpoint the method, as applied in plays like The Dwarfs and The Birthday Party, looks like a strange refusal to look at things as they are - as if, rather arbitrarily, Pinter chose to withhold information from the audience. One can only reply to this charge that its premises are incompatible with those of Pinter's phenomenological plays. If Pinter's approach is accepted as valid, then it is evident that the author is not withholding anything, that everything is there, out in the open, that there is nothing to add. In short, there is no merely objective viewpoint. The mystery is essential or rather the mystery is that there is no mystery, simply a determination on Pinter's part to focus on reality from an existential point of view and not from a position of empirical or scientific detachment.

One other play ought to be mentioned in the category of those so far discussed, A Slight Ache, first performed on the B.B.C., and on stage two years later in 1961. Edward, the protagonist, has a vague awareness of something wrong. The irritating wasp which he kills and the unknown matchseller outside his gate both image this unease. Of course Edward's insecurity is heightened by his uncertainty regarding the matchseller's identity and his intentions. Inside his affluent country house - another of Pinter's rooms - Edward becomes increasingly anxious and the situation is not improved by his wife, Flora. The latter mothers him as Meg does Stanley. In addition his eye affliction recalls Rose in The Room and, of course, Stanley in The Birthday Party. Eventually Edward calls the matchseller inside in an attempt to exorcize him. What happens is that the decrepit old man has nothing to say and, as elsewhere in Pinter (or as in the final scene of Tueur sans Gages), insecurity, faced with silence, degenerates into panic. Babbling compulsively, Edward breaks down. Husband and matchseller change places and Flora goes off with the old man.

Like Len, Edward is broken and deprived of his identity by an outside force and once again the question of truth and of its perception is uppermost, particularly in view of the fact that Edward is a philosopher and has a Kantian interest in space and time (p.17). Later, he explains his collapse in these terms:

. . . it was not so much any deficiency in my sight as the airs between me and my object . . . the change of air, the currents obtaining in the space between me and my object, the shades they make, the shapes they take, the quivering . . . Sometimes . . . I would take shelter, shelter to compose myself . . . Nothing entered, nothing left my nook.

p.38.

The poetry of this is very like that of Watt and the subject is also similar: the breakdown of everyday modes of perception. We are also reminded of Len's statements in The Dwarfs. Edward, like other Pinter victims, has crawled into a small shelter which defines him, which provides him with an identity, a nook or room gained "after . . . long struggling against all kinds of usurpers" (p.35). But the room is open to the Other who enters in the form of the matchseller and, in destroying Edward's security, destroys his identity. The existential pattern is identical to that of other plays already discussed. Moreover in this case also the form of the play, that is to say, its viewpoint, is phenomenological. Like Edward, the audience cannot verify the action from an outside standpoint. We cannot ask whether the matchseller is a real character or merely a projection of Edward's fears. Edward interprets the old man's movements in terms of his own expectations and Flora too sees the matchseller in terms of her situation, that of a sexually frustrated woman, so that where the intruder appears menacing to Edward he appears as repulsively desirable to Flora. The existential truth, of course, is that the old man is what others

feel him to be, that objective truth is indistinguishable from passionate subjectivity. A Slight Ache, like The Dwarfs, is an expressionist play.

We may conclude this and the previous chapter by stressing that Pinter, like Beckett, is seeking to define a "territory worthy of exploration," more particularly, to discover a criterion for verification. Pinter is aware of the difficulty involved. In The Dwarfs, The Room, The Dumb Waiter, The Birthday Party and A Slight Ache he implicitly accepts the phenomenological or existential conclusion that reality is objectively grasped only in and through the subjective experience of it. Man is a being-in-the-world, a creature whose identity is openness to the world and so liable to be lost. It follows that human reality cannot be evaluated from the standpoint of a disinterested spectator. Man knows his world from the inside only, that is to say, as a part of it; he judges a given thing to be true as emotionally involved in it. It should be noted, however, that the scientific viewpoint, described in an earlier chapter, according to which truth is relegated to the sphere of non-involvement and pure objectivity, is at times implied in the phenomenological plays. There is Pete's diagnosis of Len's trouble as "mere" subjectivity ("You've got no idea how to preserve a distance between what you smell and what you think about it") and, more significantly, Edward's own tendency to suggest that his crisis involves a failure of empirical objectivity, a loss of objective vision. It is true that the scientific viewpoint is subordinated to existential structures in each case. Nevertheless, its embryonic presence cannot be dismissed and is prophetic of further developments in Pinter's work.

CHAPTER 23PINTER AND BRITISH EMPIRICISM : PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISMAND THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

SOLTO: I got hold of this photo of you, see? So  
 I got hold of the photographer. He told  
 me what club it was, and here I am.<sup>1</sup>

Pinter.

Up to this point we have concentrated on those plays in which Pinter focusses on metaphysical man and, like Beckett, Ionesco and Genet, adopts an existential approach to reality. But in much of his work Pinter adopts an altogether different stance, that of the empiricist, and this question must be gone into in detail.

Phenomenology regards subjectivity and objectivity as complementary terms. The popular scientific or empiricist view, mentioned in chapter twenty of this thesis, separates them and declares them to be opposed. The result of this shift is that subjectivity now implies a limitation, and objectivity - understood as diametrically opposed to subjectivity - becomes the sole criterion of truth. In this transition from Phenomenology to empiricism we have gone from Kierkegaard to the British tradition of philosophy, from the committed subject of existential thought to the dispassionate outside observer. At the same time we have, not surprisingly, modified the existential definition of human identity as being-in-the-world. We have postulated the possibility of non-involvement in the world and so effectively split the entity being-in-the-world into its component parts. Man and his world no longer imply each other. Certainly, we do not find the one without the other but we are able to consider each as ontologically distinct. Having isolated the phenomenon man, moreover, we are able to objectify him, to name him in terms not of his milieu but of his own distinctness.

Man becomes, for example, an Ego, as in the Freudian system, or, more generally, a Self - whether defined in purely material terms or not. The link between empiricism and the science of psychology points to a further link between empiricism and literary realism, that is to say, between the objective approach and psychological realism. This pattern of relationships is especially obvious in the nineteenth century novel, of course - George Eliot provides the best example in English - but it is also observable in the drama from the naturalism of Miss Julie and the realism of Ibsen's middle period to the present day. Just as psychology, regarded as a science, presupposes that a human being may be studied objectively as part of a larger framework of causes and effects, so realism in art presupposes the objective viewpoint. Of course literary realism does not do away with subjectivity. It merely keeps it from usurping the place of honour and distorting the objective focus. Where the line between subject and object begins to blur, on the other hand, we move from the world of George Eliot to that of Proust, Joyce or Beckett or from dramatic realism to the expressionist or surreal. Pinter reverses this movement by beginning with a form of expressionism and moving back towards a more empirical approach. He does so, of course, because a tendency to objectivity exists in his work from the start.

We cannot raise the issue of psychological realism in Pinter, however, without a glance at some notable critical opinions on the subject. John Russell Taylor argues in Anger and After that Pinter's work is always more or less realist and becomes more so as it continues. The difficulty with plays like The Room is overcome in a somewhat suspect fashion: "it is not that the motives are unknowable, but simply that the author will not permit us to know them."<sup>2</sup> In other words, while Pinter's plays are realistic, some represent what might be termed "incomplete" realism. The information is there, but the author chooses to withhold it. On the other hand, Esslin, committed to the absurdist

thesis, is anxious to minimize the importance of realist touches in the plays to stress what he sees as the vital thing, their mythical and symbolic dimension. Thus where Taylor speaks of psychological motivation unavailable in fact, Esslin suggests that it is unavailable in principle. The whole issue is complicated and obscured, though, by the fact that both critics use the term "realism" in a very loose fashion. Esslin, for example, takes the view that life itself withholds information from us. I see two men arguing in the street. I know nothing of their characters or lives and yet the scene is perfectly explicable to me.<sup>3</sup> Ergo, when Pinter refuses to motivate his characters he is in fact being a realist. Now it may be true that life itself is surreal. To conclude from this that surreal literature is realist is quite misleading. Realism in art has nothing to do with life "as it is," or, if it has, this is not something one can naïvely take for granted, especially when, like Taylor,<sup>4</sup> one makes the gross blunder of identifying life with the uneventful and ordinary - whatever that is. Of course realism in art is a way of seeing things, to a large extent an empiricist way, it is a convention, like expressionism or surrealism. Above all, it is a convention which presupposes a minimum availability of data within the compass of the work of art. We cannot argue that Pinter is a realist when he withholds information from us - because a realist is largely defined as one who, insofar as he is able, does not withhold information but, on the contrary, sets out to make it available. Life may not tell us everything but realism does its best to do so. For this reason Taylor's argument is highly questionable and on the whole fails to do justice to Pinter's expressionist plays. In this case the Esslin view, in spite of its limitations, seems nearer to the truth. But if Taylor's approach is unable to cope properly with what I have termed the expressionist or phenomenological Pinter it is more successful in dealing with the empiricist Pinter and with plays which Esslin cannot easily explain in terms of the Absurd. The present thesis owes little to either Taylor or Esslin but it accepts Esslin's view insofar as it maintains that some of



Pinter's work cannot be regarded as realism in the literary sense. At the same time it accepts Taylor's view insofar as it sees Pinter's development in terms of a movement towards realism. In the philosophical context of these chapters the shift may be regarded as a change in the relation between the subjective and objective viewpoints. Pinter begins by depicting them as complementary and goes on to oppose them.

In A Night Out and Night School we have good examples of the way in which Pinter transforms the existential phenomenon into an empiricist one. A Night Out, first presented on the B.B.C., then as a successful television play, came in 1960, the same year as The Dwarfs. It is, however, a very different work. All the earlier Pinter preoccupations are there, but transformed by their context. Albert, an insecure and timid character, is the victim of a possessive mother. He wants to go to a party and the mother wants to keep him at home. When he does go he is unjustly accused of making indecent advances to one of the girls. Humiliated before other people, he leaves the party and eventually ends in a prostitute's flat. But the prostitute obviously recalls Albert's mother with her domineering ways. Albert asserts himself, winning a vicarious triumph over the mother figure represented by the whore. Soon after, he is home again and probably once more submissive to his mother. The themes which we find in The Birthday Party and The Dwarfs are unchanged. There is the insecure victim, the crisis followed by probable capitulation. The crisis is one of identity, moreover, since A Night Out poses the question: how autonomous an individual is Albert? As before, the crisis is provoked by the pressure of the Other, in this case the mother. But while the themes are unchanged, their treatment is no longer existential.

Albert is identified with a room or rather, a house, and the play concerns his going out. But leaving the room does not mean loss of identity in this case. Albert is not a being-there, his relation to his home is largely spatial; the home is simply an important area

where certain things happen. Likewise Albert is not a being-with. His mother is a power within him, certainly, but she does not exist within him as Mark and Pete exist within Len, that is, Albert is not defined by his mother any more than he is by his room, he is conceivable without his mother and his room. Albert is an empiricist individual: he is first himself and only subsequently engaged in human relationships. His relations are external to him, distinct from his very being. Unlike Len or Stanley, Albert meets the Other in empirical space rather than in the space of his own inner world. Thus the crisis does not involve a loss of identity. The Other cannot enter Albert and Albert does not become insane - he simply suffers emotionally. We have gone from the sphere of the existential and the ontological to that of the psychological. A Night Out is psychological drama, in it human identity is no longer defined in terms of situation. On the contrary, Pinter offers us a human individual - an Ego - who has relations, of course, but who is in himself an entity distinct from his relations. The single unit being-in-the-world is now divided into two parts: on the one hand the human being, on the other, the world. There is commerce between these, but subject and object are conceived of as separate.

The implications of this attitude to the form of the play are many. To begin with, there exists now an external point of view, that is, a reference point situated outside the play itself. We may ask certain types of questions with regard to The Dwarfs but without expecting to find answers: it does not matter whether the action is real or a projection of interior neuroses, for example. But we can expect answers to questions raised by A Night Out. While a certain kind of complexity is compatible with the approach to this play, the fact remains that there are explanations for every character's behaviour in terms, broadly, of Freudian interpretations of reality. These explanations are objective in the scientific sense, they are objectively verifiable, there is no unknown. The mother's insistence that Albert remain at home is clearly motivated in the terms of her Oedipal relation

to her son. The latter's two-mindedness about going is equally so: on the one hand, like one of Ionesco's characters, he would like to escape, on the other, he is confused and guilty about his duty to his mother. The problem is focussed on in conversation such as this:

MOTHER . . . Albert!

ALBERT: What?

MOTHER: I want to ask you a question.

ALBERT: What?

MOTHER: Are you leading a clean life?

ALBERT: A clean life?

MOTHER: You're not leading an unclean life,  
are you?

ALBERT: What are you talking about?

MOTHER: You're not messing about with girls,  
are you? You're not going to go  
messing about with girls tonight?

p.47.

With a mother-son relationship of this kind of course there will be consequences. Albert will fear women and feel guilty about sex. He will become a social failure and his failure will constantly drive him back to the original stifling Oedipal situation. If he is accused of making indecent advances to an office girl he will be humiliated in an area in which he is most vulnerable. If he threatens violence to a prostitute it is because he seeks to overcome his mother in a symbolic way. Naturally he has no difficulty in identifying the maternal and the sexual in the figure of the whore because the two roles are blurred in his own mind. One does not need to analyse this play in detail to see how fundamentally it differs in its viewpoint from a work like The Dwarfs. A Night Out is explicable in terms of psychological motivation, of causes and effects. It is not an expressionist or dream play in spite of echoes of The Dwarfs or The Birthday Party. There is no

question of viewing the action from two angles and Taylor is quite right in observing of it: "Here . . . the question of verification and its problems does not arise; the motivation of all the characters is made quite clear, and even the one or two points on which some doubt exists are rapidly cleared up . . . ." <sup>5</sup> More precisely, the issue of verification is still a vital one, but the difficulty of verification has been removed once we accept the objective standpoint. I shall return to this question, however. A Night Out is a straightforwardly realist play. In terms of literary form this means that the levels of action and feeling have been separated. What is true - emotionally true - for Albert is not confused with external reality. The two are related, obviously, but distinct. In philosophical terms, subject and object are distinguished. Neither is over-emphasized, each sphere, that of subjectivity and feeling and that of objectivity and facts, is given its due. But they are not one. And it is precisely this which makes psychological realism possible as an art form. In The Dwarfs inward and outward reality blur. Consequently there is no possibility of sorting out causes and effects : everything is equally cause and effect, it is a question of the chicken and the egg, there is no point in asking what comes first. Once we detach the subject from his world, however, and speak of him as an Ego, for example, we are in a position to observe the way in which he acts upon the world or, more likely, the way in which the world acts upon him. The way is open for the interpretation of reality in the empiricist and determinist terms of a Freud: we may now speak of psychological causes and effects, that is, of motivated (rather than free) behaviour. The existential, ontological and expressionist approach of The Dwarfs has been replaced by the empirical, the psychological and the realist.

What has been said of A Night Out is applicable to Night School, a television play also produced in 1960. Walter, released from jail, returns home to find that his room as been let to a young and attractive

schoolteacher. Like any Pinter character, he is uneasy about this and takes a special interest in the girl. Very little is known about her. Walter, using a photograph, sets out to verify her story. The photo, taken from Sally's room, shows a girl in a nightclub. If this is Sally then the supposed schoolteacher is in fact a club hostess. Walter gives the photo to an older man, Solto, with instructions to trace the club and the girl but Solto, once he does so and confirms Sally's position as a hostess, becomes interested in the girl himself and does not reveal the truth to Walter. Finally, Sally, afraid of being discovered, leaves Walter's room. Walter is now alone, completely in the dark about the facts of the whole situation. Parallels with other plays so far discussed are easy to find. Sally recalls Albert's respectable prostitute, a woman leading a double life. Walter, who loses his room and then Sally, recalls the insecure victim. The whole play is concerned with the truth and the truth in question relates to identity: who is Sally? Is she the girl in the photo, is she a teacher or a stripper? The characters, all of whom are adept at playing roles, are reminiscent of other Pinter characters who are anxious to avoid communication for fear of revealing themselves. But it is clear that there is no mystery in Night School, as there is in the phenomenological plays. We begin by being in the dark about certain facts and we end by verifying them completely. As Solto tells Sally when he finds her, "I got hold of this photo of you, see? So I got hold of the photographer. He told me what club it was, and here I am." Moreover, as in A Night Out, verification simply means objective explanation. To the simple question regarding Sally's identity we may reply that she is a club hostess. This being so, Sally's evasive behaviour towards Walter is clearly motivated, as is Walter's reaction to the loss of his room or his interest in Sally, as is Solto's suppression of the facts. Night School is a brief, realist analysis of a group of people and it offers us unambiguous criteria for truth. As in A Night Out the action is depicted from the outside, that is,

as witnessed by an objective observer rather than by someone involved in the situation itself. Consequently there is no sense of the surreal.

In the two plays discussed in this chapter Pinter chooses to work within an empiricist and realist frame of reference. Insofar as this involves a redefinition of the terms subjectivity and objectivity it also involves a shift in the definition of the term verification. Whereas the existential thinker insists that one can only verify from the inside as it were, that is, as involved in a given situation, as passionately subjective, the empiricist envisages verification in terms of dispassionate detachment, as objectivity divorced from subjectivity. It follows that verification and objectification are made synonymous and that only what is observable or, more correctly, measurable, is subject to verification. In the case of Pinter's play one may ask about Sally's identity but one may only expect a strictly limited answer: in terms of psychology Sally is not that dynamic and elusive reality known as dasein or mitsein but an entity more or less sharply defined by her past, a particular Ego, in this case, a stripper. Obviously, by comparison with the phenomenological plays, something has been lost. We now achieve an objectivity of sorts but have lost interest in man as a depth phenomenon. Our sights are set on the surfaces of things, since psychology cannot represent the whole man, the ontological, existential man, but only the play of his mind and feelings. Thus, while there are now psychological or scientific or objective answers to psychological questions we may well object that these answers reveal very little. The reason for this is evident. Psychology weighs motives as physics weighs particles. It provides answers but these answers can only be probable ones because science does not deal with certainties. Science is concerned with the approximate and the probable because it relies on measurement and no measurement is ever final. One may add to one's information and so to one's accuracy but one cannot hope for a final, conclusive statement.

As a result of this, literary realism, insofar as it adopts the scientific viewpoint, becomes an impossible game of accumulation. The realist novel of the nineteenth century becomes longer and longer, indeed, a series of novels becomes a necessity for a Balzac or a Zola. The field is infinite, like that of the scientist's, psychological motivation exists as a never-ending chain of causes and effects representing an immeasurably complex pattern, and evidence is always, inevitably, incomplete. In order to understand Dorothea we must come to terms with nothing less than what George Eliot refers to as "that tempting range of relevancies called the universe." In the drama, where time is limited, we must be satisfied with a slice of life, with a small cross-section of the phenomenon of life. But whether in the novel or the play we can expect only probable and in this sense partial or limiting answers to the questions we wish to ask about reality. The advantage of the existential approach of The Birthday Party, for example, is that it achieves finality. Passionate subjectivity yields absolute certainty. Of course the truth escapes objectification, it cannot be given a name, it is known from the inside, as experienced. We understand The Dwarfs intuitively and as a whole because as a work of art it folds back into itself, it is self-sufficient, complete. In other words, the very distinction between a question and its answer is blurred in this case, the play is both question and its own answer, it must be taken as a single, total experience. As already stressed, there is no point in questioning Len's view of reality, or Stanley's. Within its phenomenological context it must be true, it cannot be false, the very question of its possible falsity is irrelevant. The empiricist, however, is not satisfied with this approach. Insisting on an objective or external reference point, he by the same token has to settle for probabilities. If I experience a given situation as my own, I am in no doubt as to its actuality-status. If I observe it from the outside I must weigh the chances of my judgement being correct or not. Thus the verification of

truth in A Night Out or Night School is partial and incomplete, not in the sense that it leaves us without objective answers to our questions about the identity or motivation of a given character, but in the sense that its questions and their answers are strictly limited by an empirical criterion of truth.

This thesis has linked the work of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet to a philosophical tradition which includes Descartes, the Idealists and existential thought. In the case of Pinter we must distinguish between different plays or even between various elements in a given play. While some of Pinter's writing may be termed existential or phenomenological it is important to note that in vital respects Pinter stands within a native British tradition - in spite of his European origins - that tradition which is characterized by a bias towards objective knowledge and which has dominated English thought at least from the days of Newton, Locke and the Royal Society. The significance of Pinter to this thesis, of course, is that he helps to clarify the relation between two major philosophical lines, above all shedding fresh light on the existential approach as it is contrasted with its twentieth century alternative, empiricism. By the same token, tensions within his work help to define both psychological realism and the more avant garde forms used by Beckett, Ionesco and Genet. In Pinter the existential element gradually gives way to the empiricist. It is noteworthy that, in different ways, Beckett, Ionesco and Genet are also anxious to leave the existential behind, as if motivated by a desire to escape the limits of the human situation as visualized by modern man. Where the latter seek to transcend the existential sense of enclosure by a partial return to the historic origins of the existential weltanschauung, Idealism and Romanticism, however, Pinter makes his escape by another door. It must be stressed that the change in Pinter's plays is neither sudden nor clear cut. The movement towards a more empirical approach is evident when we consider



the plays as a whole. At the same time it is true that Pinter has no qualms about returning to the existential viewpoint on occasion, even in his latest work. Moreover, for the most part the plays are a mixture of styles, sometimes tending back to expressionist structures, sometimes away from these. Broadly speaking, though, it is possible to argue for a movement towards objectivity and, more specifically, for three distinguishable phases or styles in Pinter's work. The first and second have already been characterized as respectively expressionist and realist. The third will be discussed in the course of chapter twenty-four.

CHAPTER 24

PINTER AND BRITISH EMPIRICISM : THE LURE OF OBJECTIVITY

RUTH . . . Look at me. I . . . move my leg. That's  
all it is. But I wear . . . underwear . . .  
which moves with me . . . it . . . captures  
your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The  
action is simple. It's a leg . . . moving.<sup>1</sup>

Pinter.

In order to realize how difficult it is to neatly categorize Pinter's plays we need only recall that The Caretaker belongs to the same year as The Dwarfs and A Night Out. The Caretaker, probably Pinter's finest work, maintains a balance between the tendency to expressionism on the one hand and that to realism on the other, in other words, it stands between The Dwarfs and A Night Out. If, in the last analysis, it points away from the early work, it nonetheless remains an example of the phenomenological approach as well. Moreover, in order to reveal its existential qualities we need not go to absurd lengths, like Ruby Cohn who felt it necessary to read a Heideggerian pun in the title, the caretaker being the taker-on-of-Care.<sup>2</sup> Actually The Caretaker is existential, at least to a degree, because it exhibits some of the characteristics of plays discussed earlier in this thesis. It is true that it is also amenable to a psychological analysis. Thus Taylor argues that in it "psychological realism overtly won out."<sup>3</sup> If we ignore some of the naïvete of Taylor's view (Taylor actually suggests that the play is realistic because its ending is not violent) we may well agree with much of what he says. Aston acts with shy reserve because of his hospital experience, Mick is concerned about him. Davies, standing between the brothers, arouses Mick's jealousy. Mick leads Davies on until the latter loses Aston's friendship and then helps to turn him out. It seems a straightforward enough story about

a threefold relationship involving a gentle lunatic, an aggressive, jealous brother and an insecure tramp, anxious to establish himself in a room and yet unable to adjust to other men. At the same time, Taylor's view seems to miss a quality of density which is present in the play. Esslin is less prone to oversight:

The Caretaker is the first of Pinter's plays to have achieved this complete synthesis between utter realism in the external action and the poetical metaphor, the dream image of eternal archetypes on the deeper - or higher - levels of impact.<sup>4</sup>

Of course we need not follow Esslin along the road of Freudian and Jungian archetypes in order to agree with him. From the viewpoint of the present thesis it is enough at this stage to acknowledge that The Caretaker, for all its psychological realism, goes beyond the more narrow realist bounds of A Night Out.

As in other plays the psychological element in The Caretaker is contained within a larger framework. Like the characters of The Dwarfs and The Birthday Party, Davies, Aston and Mick do not emerge as three separate Egos, three psychic and material objects reacting to each other in objective space. On the contrary, the play suggests a poetic presence and interaction which Esslin seems to sense but is not successful in evoking and which is best defined as existential or phenomenological. Davies, Aston and Mick are organically bound - that is, bound absolutely and finally, not by a web of external, psychological connections but simply, once and for all, in their very being - with each other and with the space in which they exist, the room. It would do injustice to the poetic density of the phenomenon of the three men to see it in any terms but these. The three are their room, they are each other, unable to avoid each other, in short, beings-there, beings-with. Only an assumption of this kind can explain the richness

of this simple play. The realist novelist needs hundreds of pages to evoke the complexity of life; the realist playwright, with less time at his disposal, must end by telling the audience relatively little. But Pinter's method is not one dependent on addition and subtraction. Rather it depends on the evocation of an added dimension, more or less absent in realist art, a dimension of density or depth best likened to poetic vision. Thus what we are offered in The Caretaker is not, strictly speaking, an action but a situation. Davies, Aston and Mick have very little to do: they are not characters - in the usual sense - enacting a plot, but three men existing, living out the implications of their situation.

Of course the three are faced with the issue of their identity and, like many Pinter characters, they are anxious to avoid it. This is true in a special way of Davies for whom Sidcup is that legendary place where all questions are answered and where one knows who one is. Davies' life may be summed up as a going to Sidcup in such a way as never to get there:

ASTON: Why do you want to get down to Sidcup?

DAVIES: I got my papers there!<sup>5</sup>

The rush of absurdly improbable explanations recalls earlier Pinter characters, avoiding communication in a quantity of words:

DAVIES: A man I know has got them. I left them with him. You see? They prove who I am! I can't move without them papers. They tell you who I am. You see! I'm stuck without them.

ASTON: Why's that?

DAVIES: You see, what it is, you see, I changed my name! Years ago. I been going around under an assumed name! That's not my real name.

Aston asks how long "the man" has had the papers:

DAVIES: What?

ASTON: How long's he had them?

DAVIES: Oh, must be . . . it was in the war . . .

must be . . . about near on fifteen year ago.

p.21.

But Mick's accusing "I can take nothing you say at face value" (p.73) is as true of Mick and Aston as of Davies. Aston does not actually lie, yet his search for himself is as unreal and inauthentic as Davies', based as it is on projects which are unlikely to be carried out. Mick, quite apart from his devious, alternately violent and cajoling treatment of Davies, is adept at evasion and disguise. His dream of modernizing the house is as theoretic as Davies' journey or Aston's shed. Clearly, like the inmates of Meg's boarding house, these three are living in a world of illusions, intent on keeping the reality of angst at a distance. Identity, which in this case, as elsewhere in Pinter, involves a particular settlement of relationships and of the issue of the room, is never faced.

It is partly the horror of the truth which drives the three to torment each other, and which results in ever greater insecurity. Aston hides in his cluttered room, seeking solace among objects, recalling with resigned terror his experience of shock treatment. A being-with in the same sense as Stanley or Len of The Dwarfs, he has been broken, the Other has robbed him of his Self. And indeed Pinter wishes to stress this. By focussing on Aston's long speech at the end of act two he goes far towards turning the whole play about this point in the action and so, thematically, about the experience of depersonalization which is at the heart of earlier plays. Unlike his brother, Mick reveals his insecurity by his aggressive behaviour. In his case

the point of crisis has not been reached. Davies, of course, himself not a broken man like Aston, is the most insecure of all. This emerges in all that he says and does, the fear that the authorities are after him -

They might be there after my card, I mean look at it, here I am, I only got four stamps, on this card, here it is, look, four stamps, that's all I got, I ain't got any more, that's all I got, they ring the bell called Caretaker, they'd have me in, that's what they'd do, I wouldn't stand a chance.

p.44.

- the unconscious projection of his inferiority upon the "blacks," the neurotic inability to be honest, to accept a gift without in the same breath masochistically rejecting it. Aston offers a cigarette, Davies refuses, then, unable to resist, asks for tobacco; he wants a room but complains of the draught; demands shoes ("Shoes? It's life and death to me," p.13), refuses Aston's on the dubious grounds of a bad fit, is offered a new pair, refuses on the old grounds, weakens, accepts them - then argues that there are no laces. Davies is in terror not only of the authorities and of Mick but also of Aston. The final result of fear, of course, is that all lose by it, Davies his room, Aston companionship, Mick his brother's possible return to normality. The three fight because the insecurity of each brings out the same insecurity in others. Like Len, Pete and Mark of The Dwarfs, they drive each other to a point of crisis.

Although it is implicit in what has so far been said, it needs stressing that the struggle for security is an ontological one in this play, as in The Dwarfs, not merely a psychological one. What is at stake is selfhood, understood as a relation, a going out of oneself

into the existential sphere of the room and of the Other. Although there are no crises of personality here as in other plays - Aston's is in the past - it is precisely loss of identity which all the characters fear as they manoeuvre for possession of the room. In spite of its realist echoes, The Caretaker cannot be classified with A Night Out. Just as in Waiting for Godot waiting becomes an image of the human condition, so here the struggle for security transcends the psychological: Aston, Mick and Davies do not simply express their particular reactions to particular problems, their struggle is an expression of their existence, it is the form taken by their existence. Of course verification of the ambiguities of motives along objective psychological lines is possible and it leads to reasonable answers. The drawback is that these answers fail to take stock of the overall effect of the play. It does not help a great deal to say that Davies is strictly explicable as a tramp, Mick as a jealous brother and Aston as a lunatic. These are not the central issues of The Caretaker. What is involved is a special way of approaching human identity and also verification such that, at the end, the objective answer to the objective problem is unsatisfactory. In this play, as in the phenomenological plays, answers are tied to the teasing complexity of questions, the known and the unknown, the knowable and the unknowable are both absolute - and complementary, not opposed. We have returned to the argument for subjective objectivity put forward earlier in this thesis, though in a slightly different context. The important thing in The Caretaker is the total situation, of which the objectively verifiable is only a part. Put more simply, the play does not encourage a psychological analysis of character motivation beyond a certain point, it discourages all over-specific questions and it is for this reason that I wish to employ terms like "density" or "poetry" to describe its effects. Because a realist viewpoint is contained in The Caretaker it does not follow that this is simply a realist work. On the contrary,

the situation, however mundane, evokes a sense of the surreal (a fact which indicates that this effect is not dependent on the overt juxtaposition of normality and the abnormal as in The Birthday Party) or rather it appears as simultaneously everyday and strange, like that in Waiting for Godot. We are justified in feeling that the action reflects interior realities as well as external ones, that is, that it exhibits a phenomenological blurring of the subjective and objective viewpoints. At the same time, unlike The Birthday Party and like Waiting for Godot, a play it greatly resembles in form, The Caretaker externalizes inward reality without distorting unduly the external, realist focus: it is not an expressionist or dream play.

After 1960, the year of The Dwarfs, The Caretaker and A Night Out, Pinter's movement away from the phenomenological continues, although by fits and starts. The Collection, televised in 1961, is a realist play and of particular interest in that it represents one of Pinter's most explicit references to the problem of verification. James accuses Bill of sleeping with his wife, Stella, claiming that Stella has confessed. Bill denies it, then admits to an indiscretion and, finally, to the whole story. In a scene with her husband, Stella sticks to her story but differs from Bill in the details. Understandably confused, James complains: "I can see it both ways, three ways, all ways . . . every way."<sup>6</sup> His relationship with his wife's seducer is becoming complicated through a sense of respect he feels for Bill. While the two men are together, Bill's friend goes to see Stella who tells him that the whole story has been fabricated by her husband. He returns to face Bill and James with this. Bill now agrees: the seduction never took place. Finally he promises: "I'll . . . tell you . . . the truth" (p.44). He met Stella and talked to her about making love. The seduction was only imagined. James now goes home to Stella:

JAMES . . . You just sat and talked . . . That's what  
you did.



Pause.

Didn't you?

Pause.

That's the truth . . . isn't it?

STELLA looks at him, neither confirming nor denying.

p.45.

It is impossible not to be reminded of Mrs. Ponza in the final scene of Così è (se vi pare). The issue is the same: what exactly is the truth? It is also, as in Pirandello, closely tied to the question of identity - in this case Stella's - since we may ask of Stella, as of the schoolteacher in Night School: is she respectable or not? As in Così è the method is to alternate points of view, to offer a "collection" of opinions. The suggestion of a theme of identity is visually underlined in Pinter. There are two houses and the action switches from one to the other, emphasizing not only that there are two (or more) explanations of things but also that an explanation amounts to a personality, that what is at stake is a choice of identities. As one might expect, the question of security relates to that of truth and much of the play involves characteristically Pinteresque patterns of relationships of evasion and disguise, of defensive and offensive expressions of insecurity. James threatens Bill by entering his house, Bill's friend retaliates by entering James' home. Of course the concepts of dasein, mitsein and ontological insecurity are irrelevant here. The Collection offers us a single, external, objective point of view on the action as a whole. It stresses the complexity of the truth and the difficulty of objective verification without, however, deviating from a realist and psychological perspective. Truth is sought as if it were a matter of accumulation of evidence, a matter not of passionate subjectivity but of aggregates, of more and less, in short, of opinions. The fact that no objective answer is immediately available may seem to

suggest a lack of confidence in the empirical approach, but this is not the case. On the contrary, the suggestion is the empiricist one described in earlier chapters, that truth is a matter of approximation and probability. The empiricist asks for as many opinions as possible and adds these up - statistical method applied to the sphere of the personal would have horrified Kierkegaard - in order to arrive at the truth. Naturally this truth does not pretend to certainty and the scientist is satisfied with a probability. In The Collection Pinter accepts the limitations of this approach. James never discovers the truth but he begins the long journey to objectivity. If this were an existential play he would have to see that truth is not in itself merely objective, merely a matter of facts. As it is, he has only to carry his investigations further, to uncover more and more facts in order to know the truth about Stella with greater and greater certainty. It is true that, like the scientist's, or the realist novelist's, this field is infinite, so that in one sense the truth remains a will-o'-the-wisp. But there is no suggestion in The Collection of an alternative approach to verification.

The Lover (1963), Pinter's next television play, resembles The Collection. Once again there are echoes of Pirandello and, in this case, also of Genet. It is a game of roles, a giuoco delle parti, with a twist reminiscent in a small way of Le Balcon. Like the first scene of Genet's play, Pinter's opening deceives the audience:

RICHARD (amiably). Is your lover coming today?

SARAH. Mmn.

p.49.

Of course the lover is Richard himself. Husband and wife live a fantasy in which they become different people, lover and whore. The play poses a clear issue of identity with the added Pirandellian and Genet

emphasis on role-playing: who is the real Richard, the lover or the husband, who is the real Sarah, the mistress or the wife? As usual, identity is a question which relates to a small space - the room in which all the action is set - and to a relationship. As well it relates to the more general question of truth. Richard, as Max the lover, tells Sarah that his wife does not know of his affair. Sarah objects that if the wife knew she would not mind:

MAX. She'd mind if she knew the truth, wouldn't she?

SARAH. What truth? What are you talking about?

p.70.

We are in Irma's maison d'illusions, asking the speaker to specify which truth he is referring to. As Richard and Sarah act out their parts, however, certain truths emerge and, not unexpectedly, they involve the feeling of insecurity. The pathos of Sarah's insistence on the pretence is directly related to her fear that without the role of whore she has no hold on her husband. As it happens, the play ends on a note of triumph for her, although there is no guarantee that this will last. The pretence goes on, the truth remains hidden beneath a mask. In spite of ambiguities, though, in spite of the play's insistence at one level on the elusiveness of the truth about human identity, The Lover, like The Collection, is closer to psychological realism than to the phenomenological plays.

It is not till we reach The Homecoming that what I wish to term the third phase of Pinter's development becomes apparent. This full-length play, performed in 1965, ranks with The Birthday Party and The Caretaker as one of Pinter's best works. It has met with some criticism. Ronald Hayman sees its plot as utterly gratuitous. Of Lenny's meeting with Ruth while the house sleeps he comments:

Like so many things in this play, this speech [Lenny's seeming digression about his clock] is . . . unexplained, arbitrary and structurally functionless . . . self-indulgent speeches like this are put in for the sake of deliberate mystification . . . .<sup>7</sup>

Hayman feels that the behaviour of the characters is arbitrary throughout, consisting of "a series of unexpected, separate actions, each one either disconnected from the last or at a tangent with it."<sup>8</sup> Martin Esslin and John Russell Taylor convincingly refute these conclusions. The background of the characters in The Homecoming is one of violence and prostitution, argues the former. Lenny's digressive chat with Ruth helps to establish this and quickly clarifies what these two have in common. Ruth, wife of Lenny's brother - the academic Teddy - has been a model, perhaps a whore. It is not surprising that her visit to Teddy's family should become her homecoming, that she should steer her way through the rivalries of the men and return to prostitution under the protection of the family, leaving Teddy to return to respectability on his own. For Taylor this is the realist play which proves his general thesis. Far from behaving arbitrarily, the characters act as we would expect and the struggle is that of an educated man and his family past.

There is no immediate reason to quarrel with this view of the play. If we compare it with the early plays the differences are striking: The Homecoming falls into the category of empiricist works. At the same time the original issues are unchanged. The Homecoming, focussing on Teddy and Ruth who have, in different ways, come "home," poses the question of identity and does so in terms of place and relationships. "The point is, who are you?" may be rephrased as: "where is your home, your family?" Ironically, Ruth, who has a dubious

background, very like that of Teddy's family, belongs with them in a way in which Teddy himself does not. Teddy, passive in the face of attack, is one of the line of insecure Pinter victims. Far from being the emancipated observer he would like to be, he is deeply involved with the others and has to escape to avoid being crushed - leaving his wife behind, a prize for the family. The issue is not presented in intellectual terms, of course, although it is true that Teddy, who is after all a philosopher, is concerned with the correct approach to truth: "To see, to be able to see!" (p.62). On the whole the problem is one of security, a struggle between Teddy and the others for possession of Ruth. Teddy does not have a crisis of identity, like Stanley, he merely loses his wife (an extension of himself) who plans to work as a prostitute for the family, taking the place of the dead mother, herself a whore. In order to realize Teddy's helplessness we need only recall some of the more striking examples of the family's animal aggressiveness, Lenny's story of how he beat the woman who approached him, Max's arguments with Sam, the flow of ready insults from one character to another, the ironic references to the dead mother, the easy cynicism with which Ruth is set up as a whore, the fight in which Joey and Sam are casualties, above all, the inexorable logic of the brothers' undisguised advances to Ruth while Teddy looks on. But while the thematic patterns are those of the early plays, the action of The Homecoming is clearly motivated from a realist viewpoint. As in The Lover, there is no mystery once we see the nature of the forces set against each other. Nor is there any question of a phenomenological link between the space of the action, the room or house, and the protagonists or between the protagonists themselves.

And yet Taylor's view of the play as strictly realist is not quite correct. The Homecoming is explicable as a psychological study of the A Night Out type. But there is a difference and it is this which distinguishes Pinter's third phase both from the existential-

expressionist and the empirical-realist one. Even at first reading one cannot accept the realism of The Homecoming at face value; there is something strange about it. This does not mean that we need to adopt Esslin's symbolic approach to the play, however. Actually, Taylor provides a clue to the essential quality of The Homecoming. Speaking of A Night Out, he points out:

. . . the myopically detailed, obsessive quality of his [Pinter's] observation is just as much in evidence here as before and the effect is to charge a story which could be treated in a simple, conventionally "realistic" fashion . . . with the sort of feverish intensity which Alain Robbe-Grillet at his best sometimes achieves. In fact, the play demonstrates again a basic fact in Pinter's work - that it often seems least realistic when it is closest to actuality.<sup>9</sup>

Let us pass over Taylor's inability to express exactly what is in question. "Actuality" is here so vague a term that the point is almost lost in a sterile paradox. What Taylor wants to say is, in fact, more relevant to The Homecoming and it is this: that the kind of obsessive surface treatment of reality characteristic of The Homecoming is not realist, though it may have its origins in the realist convention. In order to pinpoint the nature of Pinter's method it is best to turn to the play itself and, specifically, to that scene in which a philosophic issue is explicitly raised. Lenny is taunting Teddy, the academic philosopher who cannot discuss philosophic ideas:

LENNY. Well, for instance, take a table.

Philosophically speaking. What is it?

TEDDY. A table.

LENNY. Ah. You mean it's nothing else but a table.

Well, some people would envy your certainty

. . . For instance, I've got a couple of friends . . . and they're always saying things like that, you know, things like: Take a table, take it .

p.52.

Ruth enters the argument:

RUTH. Don't be too sure though. You've forgotten something. Look at me. I . . . move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear . . . underwear . . . which moves with me . . . it . . . captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg . . . moving.

pp.52-53.

It is all the more vital to follow the argument here in view of Esslin's completely confused rendering of it in The Peopled Wound.<sup>10</sup> Esslin thinks that Pinter is here concerned with the reality behind the words we utter, with the way we take a table rather than with the word "table." He misses the fact that Ruth is disagreeing with Lenny and supporting her husband and misunderstands Ruth's example of the moving leg. What Ruth is saying is simple and empirical and it is precisely the opposite of what Esslin suggests. She moves her beautiful leg and all males present gape. Do they see a mere leg, a mere physical object? Certainly not, they see an entire sexual metaphysics. But it is only a moving leg, the sexual interpretation is irrelevant, let us even say subjective in the sense in which the term is used by the empiricist. Objectively speaking there is nothing there to make anyone gape. In other words Ruth is saying what Teddy has said: a table is just a table, Lenny's complex metaphysics "takes" the table nowhere. Things, whether tables or moving legs, are just things. Why foist human interpretations,

subjective emotions on them? Why not just accept the simple, natural material presence of things?

The relevance of this passage to Taylor's observation about the rather unrealistic quality of a seemingly realist play now begins to emerge. The Homecoming (rather than A Night Out, as Taylor suggests) represents a new phase in Pinter and the Lenny-Ruth argument provides a vital clue about the philosophic point of view taken by the author and indeed about the form of the play as a whole, a clue which explains why Pinter's realism does not ring true at this stage. In this play Pinter focusses obsessively on things. If one describes a tea party in realist terms one does not concentrate on a moving hand, a cup passing from the table to someone's mouth, a mouth sipping tea. One concentrates on the psychology of the situation, taking certain things for granted. Of course at a tea party there are cups, there are hands holding cups, there are mouths. But realism demands that one gloss over this and take it for granted that, for example, everyone has a hand and a mouth and so forth. If one focusses on the cup or the hand or the mouth as a pure material presence, an absolute object, realism is lost and the effect is surreal. Likewise if one thinks of the moving leg as an attractive part of Ruth the effect is realist, if one thinks of it as a pure presence, a moving object utterly without human connotations, the effect is surreal. The leg is suddenly strange. It could do anything, turn into a scorpion for example or, most mysterious of all, it could just go on being its own inconceivable self, a thing, an object, something quite impervious to reason. I want to suggest that Pinter's approach in The Homecoming as a whole is comparable to Ruth's attitude to her leg or to the table, that in this play Pinter's emphasis on the external goes so far as to work against the realist convention. Every character in The Homecoming is reduced to a material presence, every utterance to a vibration of particles, every action to a change in the arrangement of incomprehensible objects. This is not to deny



the realist framework of the play. On the one hand the psychological structure, the human significance is there, on the other, Pinter approaches it in such a way as to make it appear strange. Every act or speech is seen in itself as it were and this is why Hayman reacts as he does to The Homecoming. Everything seems gratuitous, unexpected, violently disjointed - not because psychological explanations are lacking, as in The Birthday Party or The Dwarfs, but because Pinter shrugs his shoulders at these explanations. A character strikes another, two people chat during the night: we know why, yet we are encouraged to observe as if watching a strange ballet. In spite of the obvious realist placing of the events within a comprehensive structure, the effect is gratuitous because Pinter looks at it from a viewpoint of total detachment in a way no realist will do.

Of course in this context the very notion of human identity is lost. People are just material presences and that is all. Neither the existential nor the realist definition of identity remains, Ruth is neither a being-in-the-world nor an Ego, only a mysterious res. In terms of subjectivity and objectivity what has happened is that Pinter has totally divorced the subject from the object and then obliterated the subject. There are no human beings, no minds, only things, objects which argue and fight and suffer, incomprehensibly. In one sense there are no relationships - how can there be, when one term of the subject-object pair is missing? There are collisions, of course, but no meetings. Objects are totally alone, self-contained in a world of atomic particles, each particle supremely itself and only itself, inexplicable, there. In his search for truth Pinter has adopted the point of view of the object and has taken empirical objectivity to its logical conclusion. The result is that we know tables as tables know themselves, that is to say, we know nothing at all, verification has come up against a wall. Things are there and we look at them in a world emptied of subjectivity, of mind and feeling and, indeed, of significance, since meaning is something conferred by

the mind upon the object of knowledge. Superficially, The Homecoming suggests a return to earlier expressionist or surreal styles, but this is not the case at all. Rather it is a play of the kind David Hume might have advocated and this because in it Pinter takes empiricism, the apotheosis of the object, to a Humean point. Hume saw that if we take a truly objective point of view we cannot justify the law of cause and effect. A is always followed by B but this does not mean that A causes B, simply that A is always followed by B. Thus fire does not cause a burn. It is simply the case that the act of holding my hand in the fire is always followed by the sensation of burning. Empiricism, taken far enough, leads to philosophical scepticism and this is certainly the case in Pinter. Just as Hume reduces cause to proximity and by the same token human identity to a collection of sensations, so Pinter reduces his characters to pure presences and their actions to an impossible ballet. In each case too the quest for truth leads to a point where the possibility of verification is lost. If I focus obsessively on the objective and eliminate totally the element of subjectivity then knowledge is no longer conceivable. The world becomes an incomprehensible Newtonian body. Things no longer hold together. Relations, connections, human intercourse, psychological structures, meanings conferred upon reality - all dependent on concepts like that of causality - these fall apart along with the atomic universe. We have returned to Leibniz's monads or even to that distant cousin of British empiricism, Continental Occasionalism. Of course Hume will not go so far. But the entire process is visible in Pinter in whose work we see clearly the way in which a limited empiricism leads to psychological realism and a total empiricism beyond realism, to the pure materiality of things. It is a curious return to something like Heidegger's Uncanny by an unexpected philosophical route and also an oblique acknowledgement of Beckett's influence in an un-Beckettian context:

But when the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family, when it appears independent of any general notion and detached from the sanity of a cause, isolated and inexplicable in the light of ignorance . . . .

Proust, pp.22-23.

Pinter's reductio ad absurdum of the empirical search for objectivity recalls the collapse of causality in Watt. But that took place in an existential context, whereas Pinter's does not. Pinter pursues his quest for truth in a way quite unlike that of Beckett or Ionesco or Genet: he begins by accepting the existential or phenomenological postulate of truth as passionate subjectivity, as subjectivity made objective, then, by moving steadily in the direction of the empirical, completes the circle by returning to the impossibility of objective verification. But the final phase is very different from the phenomenological; it represents Pinter's version of a Humean scepticism and it recalls the work of another writer who seeks to be objectif, Robbe-Grillet. Indeed the Robbe-Grillet aesthetic of chosisme perfectly defines Pinter's position and underlines the distance Pinter has travelled between The Birthday Party and The Homecoming.

What has been said about The Homecoming is to some degree true of all of Pinter's plays. Chosisme remains embryonic in the phenomenological works and emerges more and more unambiguously in the realist ones - to the extent that some of these, notably The Homecoming and, less evidently, The Collection and The Lover, may be thought of as representing a distinct third phase in Pinter's formal development. Even The Caretaker, a play I have called phenomenological, shows some signs of chosisme, although its form is nearer to that of the earlier work. But it is in Pinter's screen plays that the movement to an aesthetic of objectivity is most pronounced and for an obvious reason:

chosisme is an approach encouraged by the medium of films, a medium which is intrinsically suited to an emphasis on the outside of things, the visual, mindless aspect of reality. It is hardly surprising that, after a number of television experiments, Pinter, like Robbe-Grillet, should turn to the film.

Pinter has written five screenplays (in addition to his adaptation of The Caretaker for the screen) from 1963 onwards, the last of these being released in 1971. In each case the approach is close to that adopted in The Homecoming. Although the originals are not Pinter's work - each screenplay is an adaptation of a novel - Pinter obviously chooses what is congenial to him and makes his presence felt in the final result. The Quiller Memorandum is an insignificant piece in a hackneyed genre but The Servant, Accident and The Go-Between, directed by Joseph Losey, and The Pumpkin Eater, directed by Jack Clayton, are of a standard comparable to the rest of Pinter's work. The Servant is a Pinteresque story involving a struggle for assertion and a change of identities and, to a lesser extent, the other screenplays also explore this theme. There is Jo in The Pumpkin Eater, searching for herself in the context of motherhood and, notably, Leo in The Go-Between, who discovers himself in the transition from Innocence to Experience. In all the screenplays the stress is on the objective: subjectivity emerges as a limiting vision, as opposed to objectivity, particularly in The Go-Between where it is identified with the child's imperfect vision of reality. If, at times, these films possess a surreal quality it is because, as in The Homecoming, Pinter's emphasis, and the director's, is excessively empirical, because the camera lingers on the object and the entire treatment of character, plot and dialogue is designed to give precedence to the visual. The result is that at the end one feels that one knows everything and, at the same time, that there is nothing to know, or, like Lenny, that one asks what is a table only to be told, a table. Pinter has commented on this with regard to

Losey's treatment of Accident:

I do so hate the because of drama. Who are we to say that this happens because that happened, that one thing is the consequence of another . . . The most we know for sure is that the things which have happened have happened in a certain order: any connections we think we see, or choose to make, are pure guesswork.<sup>11</sup>

A statement such as this is illuminating with regard to many of the plays. It explains how at times Pinter can provide the psychological chain of causes and effects which is the essence of the realist convention and yet subtly undermine it at the same time. The chain is there but, as Hume asserts, the links are "pure guesswork." Teddy and Ruth behave according to a meaningful pattern insofar as the order in which things happen explains their meaning, but this is as far as objective certainty can go. Speaking of Accident, Pinter continues:

In this film everything happens, nothing is explained . . . I think you'll be surprised at the directness . . . Just a level, intense look at people, at things. As though if you look at them hard enough they will give up their secrets. Not that they will . . .<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, mystery is not ruled out by Pinter's growing concentration on the object. In The Birthday Party the psychological framework is vague and yet we know a great deal about Stanley. In The Homecoming and the films the psychological context is carefully delineated and yet at the end we know very little about the characters. We see their behaviour, as we see that of Skinner's rats, but their inward life, their subjectivity, is out of reach.

One other play should be considered in the same category as The Homecoming and that is Tea Party (1965), a television play not very striking in itself but relevant to a discussion of the empirical strain in Pinter. Even in The Dwarfs and A Slight Ache, plays whose form is essentially existential, Pinter toys with the scientific approach to the question of subjectivity. Thus Pete accuses Len of distorting reality and Edward, in A Slight Ache, at times suggests that the whole trouble emanates from his own imagination. It is the empirical approach to the issue of truth in which, as already argued, subjective and objective points of view are sharply distinguished and set against each other and in which subjectivity is made synonymous with fantasy or at least assumed to be fallible and objectivity equated with truth. In this vein it could be argued that the empirical standpoint is embryonically present wherever Pinter's characters, at the height of their crisis, lose the use of their eyes, that is, lose their intellectual vision: the examples of Rose and Stanley come to mind, as well as those of Len, Edward and Teddy in The Homecoming (who is preoccupied with vision). But the most unambiguous example of this approach is Disson of Tea Party. Disson, a business man, is in a long line of aggressive Pinter characters: "I like clarity. Clear intention. Precise execution" (p.19), he argues. Not surprisingly, his confidence masks a deep insecurity. Disson is afraid, threatened by his environment, afraid of the Other, of a loss of self-control. As the play proceeds, he feels that everyone is conspiring against him, undermining his authority, even his virility. At the end he collapses, broken by his fears. But the point to be stressed is that he loses his sight as he approaches the moment of crisis and, even more significant, that he begins to see double. Pinter's handling of the phenomenon perfectly illustrates the shift to an empirical definition of subjectivity. Disson is playing ping-pong. Suddenly the camera sees two balls instead of one. Then it returns us to normal. Disson is gazing lecherously at

his secretary. Suddenly her body swells threateningly. Then all is as before. There is only one possible explanation. Tea Party, for all its expressionist effects, is not an expressionist play. It is not reality which is grotesque but Disson's subjective view of it. Pinter is suggesting, by the simple use of double camera shots, that objective reality is unchanged and, at the same time, that Disson's imagination is responsible for the rest. We have come a long way from the phenomenological plays. In Tea Party the scientific downgrading of subjective truth is taken for granted and this is especially evident at the climax of the play where the camera alternates continuously from Disson's to the general and objective point of view. No plainer example of the empirical approach to truth could be imagined. Subjective and objective have drawn apart, the camera moves from one point of view to the other, underlining their fundamental incompatibility. It should be added that Pinter's empiricism in the form of this play is as extreme as it is in The Homecoming. On the face of it, Disson's breakdown is psychologically motivated - Disson has feelings of social inferiority and his sexuality is in question - so that we may regard Tea Party as an exercise in realism. And yet, as in The Homecoming, the final effect is confusing and evasive. Once again, it is the object that fascinates Pinter, the empirical phenomenon, the naked presence - and the result is not psychological realism but chosisme.

In spite of his general trend, however, Pinter is capable of returning to earlier styles and this fact cannot be overlooked. The Basement was written in 1964 to run with Beckett's Film but ended by being televised three years later. It looks back to the prose fragment Kullus, written as far back as 1949 but unpublished till 1968 and to a short story, The Examination, dated 1959. All of these are concerned with ownership of a room. In The Basement Law allows Stott and his girl Jane to enter his home. They quickly take over but while Law

loses his room his rivalry with Stott results in his taking Jane from him. At the end we begin again: Stott owns the room and allows Law and Jane to enter. The pattern will doubtless repeat itself. But the important thing is that the treatment of this film returns us to the earlier expressionism. In direct contrast with Tea Party, The Basement depicts reality in phenomenological terms, it blurs the empirical distinction between inward and outward reality, giving concrete form in certain scenes to the emotional rivalry between Law and Stott until the audience is uncertain whether a given action is to be regarded as actual or as taking place in the mind. Of course, as in the early plays, this blurring is deliberate and reflects an existential focus, the assumption that subjectivity is not distorting, that what someone feels is a valid part of objective reality.

Three stage plays remain to be discussed: Landscape, heard on the B.B.C. in 1968 - the censor hampered a theatre production - Silence and Night, performed in 1969. Night is a slight piece reminiscent of the Sketches Pinter wrote ten years before but Landscape and Silence are among his best works and, not unexpectedly, they owe a lot to Beckett. It is not easy to classify these plays in the terms of reference of the present thesis. Perhaps it is least misleading to say that they represent a partial return to the phenomenological style without the specifically expressionist bias of the early work. In each case there is no action, only reminiscing. In Landscape Beth and Duff think aloud, in Silence there are three characters in this position - Ellen, Rumsay and Bates - and in Night two, simply called Man and Woman. Pinter does not differentiate the mental image from the external one and, in these plays, reality is always conveyed as composite, the "landscape" that is being described is both actual and imagined. Thus in Silence Bates can complain: "I walk in my mind. But I can't get out of the walls . . . ." <sup>13</sup> Beth of Landscape evokes the image of a love scene on a beach. Perhaps it is pure fantasy but this is beside



the point since it represents the truth about Beth, it represents Beth phenomenologically - as she is - the phenomenon of Beth, memories, desires, fantasies, all rolled into one organic whole. The same is true of the memories of Man and Woman in Night. As one would expect, this renewed emphasis on man as a whole - in sharp contrast to the empirical schizophrenia of Tea Party - coincides with a return to a more poetic style. Of course it sounds like Beckett:

ELLEN

There are two. One who is with me sometimes, and another. He listens to me. I tell him what I know. We walk by the dogs. Sometimes the wind is so high he does not hear me. I lead him to a tree, clasp closely to him and whisper to him, wind going, dogs stop, and he hears me.

pp.33-34.

If the protagonists of these later plays are beings-in-a-situation in the technical sense, beings open to their world and one with it, they are also beings-with, involved with each other in the same way as Pinter's early characters. But the stress is entirely on evasion and conflict, above all, as in Beckett's Play, on solitude. Even so, the characters cannot escape each other and the underlying pathos is always their hunger for companionship. Beth and Duff of Landscape talk at cross purposes, Duff directing his remarks to Beth but not noticing hers, Beth neither addressing him nor listening to him. The last words of the play define the theme: "Oh my true love I said" (p.30). As in Happy Days love is a "touch." It is also a silence of understanding and communion never attained by Duff and Beth. In Silence Ellen, Rumsay and Bates alternate in speech but rarely manage a dialogue. Ellen seems to want Rumsay who does not want her and not to want Bates who does want her: "There are two. I turn to them and

speak. I look them in their eyes . . . and touch them as I turn" (p.35). The touch or meeting never eventuates. In Rumsay's words: "Sometimes I see people. They walk towards me, no, not so, walk in my direction, but never reaching me, turning left, or disappearing . . ." (p.40). Relations have disintegrated to the Beckettian point where all that remains is the hole in the human being caused by the loss of the Other.

In these later plays the search for truth, for security and for oneself goes on. At this point, however, a major stumbling block is that given in Pinter's Evergreen Review article: "Apart from any other consideration, we are faced with the immense difficulty, if not the impossibility, of verifying the past" (p.81). But the scientific sense of the term verification has been dropped and there is no question of objective perspectives. The Man and Woman of Night, Ellen, Rumsay and Bates of Silence and Beth and Duff of Landscape observe their past like Beckett's characters. The past has been lost and with it an old Self so that the difficulty of recalling the one mirrors the difficulty of recapturing the other:

BETH

Of course when I'm older I won't be the same as I am,  
I won't be what I am . . . .

p.24.

Again, in Ellen's words: "But I'm never sure that what I remember is of today or of yesterday or of a long time ago" (p.46). Ellen asks all the Pinter questions: "Such a silence. Is it me? Am I silent or speaking? How can I know? Can I know such things?" (p.43). In Night the couple recall their first evening together, but each remembers it differently. The stress on sense perception does not help. The two recall the details, various sensations - "I felt the railings . . .

behind me. You were facing me . . . My coat was closed. It was cold" (p.60) - but in the end everything is vague: "Another night perhaps. Another girl" (p.59). If memories are confused, identity too is an abyss: "I drew a face in the sand, then a body . . . The sand kept on slipping, mixing the contours" (p.20). We are again in the existential and poetic context of The Caretaker, where questions are asked in such a way as to preclude a scientific answer or, more accurately, where questions and answers are indistinguishable in the totality of the situation as it presents itself.

Pinter's milieu differs considerably from that of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet. From Beckett, to a large extent, Pinter receives encouragement to depict reality in existential terms but this approach is modified by a strong native influence which helps to bring out the empiricist in Pinter. The end result is a gradual and discontinuous development which I have broken down into three major phases. At every phase the primary concerns are unchanged. Pinter is fascinated by the phenomenon of human identity and its concomitant, human relations, by the insecurity of man and his collapse in the face of the Other and, above all, by the verification of truth, the truth about man's relations and his identity. But there are at least three distinct ways of verifying the truth and different plays presuppose a different philosophical method. In plays like The Dwarfs and The Birthday Party we begin with the phenomenological assumption that subjective and objective viewpoints are reconcilable. In plays like A Night Out subjectivity and objectivity draw apart and face each other as adversaries. By the time we reach The Homecoming the process is complete, subjectivity has been obliterated, only the object remains and the victory of the empirical is absolute. And yet the lure of objectivity has resulted in a curious return to a stress on the mystery of things. Whereas in the phenomenological plays truth, defined as passionate subjectivity, may be immediately grasped in its dynamic

totality, known in all its mystery with utter certainty, and whereas in the psychological plays objective truth is attainable in a context of approximation and probability, truth in one sense ceases to be an issue in plays like The Homecoming. We may put it as follows: whereas in The Dwarfs questions and answers are confounded and in A Night Out objective answers are available to objective questions, in The Homecoming and in plays like it Pinter has assumed the viewpoint of the object to the extent that no knowledge is possible and we cease to ask questions at all. Predictably, the movement towards objectivity has led to total scepticism and the annihilation of mind. In terms of the quest for human identity the threefold shift may be described as a movement from an ontological perspective where man is defined as dasein and mitsein, one with his room and with the Other, to a psychological one where he becomes an Ego related to the Other not in his very being but externally, in a web of causes and effects, to, finally, a perspective in which empiricism empties the notion of identity of any meaning and reduces man to an object, an unrelated presence, stumbling across the Other in a series of inexplicable motions reminiscent of the Occasionalist dynamism. Of course Pinter's altered philosophic stance cannot but be reflected in the form of the plays. Thus the movement towards objectivity is imaged in a gradual shift from expressionism to psychological realism to something resembling Robbe-Grillet's chosisme.

Pinter's unique importance in this thesis is his ability to span two widely divergent world views, the poles of the existential and the empirical, in a way none of the other writers here considered are able to do - moving, as one of his poems puts it, "in a hostile pause in a no man's time."<sup>14</sup> Pinter does not have the stature of Beckett or Genet, perhaps, in the final analysis, not quite that of Ionesco either. The fact remains that he is the only significant writer of the period to have managed the leap across the Channel.

### CONCLUSION

The applicability of the term "literature of the Absurd" has not been properly investigated by criticism and, in setting out to analyse the work of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter in relation to existential thought, I have attempted to redefine the exact nature of an important literary field which has received a largely cavalier treatment since the pioneering efforts of Martin Esslin. It is true that a great deal of valuable detailed work has been done by recent critics, particularly in the area of Beckett studies. Noone, however, has so far tried to tackle the complex question of philosophical perspectives on the work of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter in a way that is both comprehensive and specific and which combines a respect for literary criticism and its methods with a concern for accuracy in the area of philosophy. I have approached each writer in this thesis in terms of his peculiar uniqueness and sought to discover patterns of similarities and relationships with other writers only on this sound basis. Beckett has been examined in terms of his obsessive interest in the Reduction and its end product, the Irreducible, Ionesco in terms of the interplay of the euphoric and the claustrophobic, Genet of a devious and fascinating movement which is both an escape from the Other and a search for solitude and Pinter, of related themes of verification, identity, security and human relations. As a result of the comparison with existential thought a number of significant facts have emerged. To begin with, the relevance of Camus to the work of the writers in question is clearly minimal. Sartre and Heidegger must be regarded as the philosophical counterparts of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter and even here it must be added that, in the final analysis, the literary point of view of a Beckett, Ionesco, Genet or Pinter is Heideggerian rather than Sartrean. Heidegger is useful in elucidating the attitudes to art of the four figures considered

in this thesis. Even more obviously, his philosophy is relevant to an exhaustive study of these writers' fundamental concerns. Beckett's progress towards the Irreducible may be expressed philosophically as a movement, effected by the disintegrating and revelatory vision of angst, from Existence to Nothingness or Being. In this context we may, without presumption, give the Unnamable a tentative philosophical name - Sein - and compare the Beckett quest with the Heideggerian search for negative Being, a twentieth century deus absconditus. We may also view Ionesco's dynamism in terms of angst, as a motion between the poles of existential reality, on the one hand, dasein as free, on the other, as inauthentic and imprisoned in the stifling and restrictive space of the "they." Thus Ionesco's leitmotif appears as the struggle of the authentic individual to free himself of the collective, to surmount the fear of death and find ultimate fulfilment in the experience of Being. Although in the case of Genet the key concepts of the Look and the vital mechanisms of sadism and masochism are of Sartrean origin, here also we must increasingly focus on the writer's movement towards a negative, numinous reality - solitude - which is more easily explicable in Heideggerian terms. In each of these three writers we are justified in speaking of an existential or phenomenological vision of the world in which man appears as a being-there or being-in-the-world and, particularly in Genet, as a being-with or mitsein. But the most striking element Beckett, Ionesco and Genet have in common with each other and with Heidegger is the unwearying, single-minded search for an unknown. The gods have withdrawn from men, leaving behind a wound of separation which is best scrutinized in a modern equivalent, or a series of modern equivalents, of the language of negative theology. The writer is not satisfied with this austerity, however. Beckett, Ionesco and Genet all show a desire to escape the frustrating existential sense of the bounds of life and to break out into the sphere of the infinite and the eternal. I have called this a longing for the Absolute, a nostalgia shared also by

Heidegger for the Romantic and Idealist origins of various movements in modern art and philosophy.

This thesis has tackled Pinter on his own, partly in order to highlight the degree to which his work differs from that of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet. In spite of this, Pinter is emphatically shown to deserve a place in the present study. In Pinter's plays, no less than in the work of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet, we find an obsessive search - in some ways inspired by Beckett - for truth, the truth about human identity, and for a means of verifying it. To begin with, at least, the landscape is phenomenological, a world of dasein and mitsein. Moreover, there is the same tendency to effect an escape from the existential cage. Unlike Beckett, Ionesco and Genet, however, Pinter does not seek to evade existential categories by a reaffirmation of Romanticism. On the contrary, he opts for an extreme solution, abandoning his earlier styles in favour of a major twentieth century philosophical alternative to the existential: empiricism. In charting this unusual development we are enabled to complete the picture of philosophical movements which serve as a backdrop to the analyses of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter: the Cartesian tradition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, empiricism, Idealism and the existential via media, from Kierkegaard in the nineteenth century and Husserl in the twentieth to Heidegger and Sartre.

We may conclude that the comparison with modern existential thought quickly leads to the most central issues in the work of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter, provided that we are careful, at every stage of analysis, to safeguard the respective rights of philosophy and literature. Of course the comparison yields different results in the cases of different writers. Beckett is an artist of very considerable stature and one who will increasingly receive the recognition he deserves. Not surprisingly in view of its literary

breadth, his work demonstrably illustrates little less than a history of post-Renaissance thought, viewed not from the standpoint of a detached historian but of an agonized participant in a long struggle. Genet's work, which is scarcely inferior to Beckett's, and that of Ionesco and Pinter, which must be rated somewhat lower, cannot offer a comparable philosophical perspective. In these cases also, though, the parallel with the existential is rewarding, perhaps as much from the point of view of philosophy as from that of art. We are returned to Descartes' comment, quoted in the introduction to this thesis: "It might seem strange that opinions of weight are found in the works of poets rather than philosophers . . . there are in us seeds of knowledge, as [of fire] in a flint; philosophers extract them by way of reason, but poets strike them out by imagination, and then they shine more bright." Although this thesis is not ambitious enough to propose any conclusions about the relation of philosophy and art as such, it may be that a judgement emerges from it nonetheless: that the relation of these two disciplines is, in cases like those considered above, much more intimate than we are normally given to understand, either by philosophers or artists or literary critics. This is certainly Heidegger's belief, expressed in a passage given at the beginning of this thesis: "Out of long-guarded speechlessness and the careful clarification of the field thus cleared, comes the utterance of the thinker. Of like origin is the naming of the poet."



## NOTES TO CHAPTERS

Throughout this thesis I have followed the procedure of supplying a single complete reference to given works by Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter. All subsequent references for quotations from these works are to the edition originally cited and are given in the text of the thesis.

### INTRODUCTION

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### CHAPTER 1

1. Samuel Beckett, Proust and Three Dialogues (London, 1965), pp.22-23.
2. Samuel Beckett, Endgame, a play in one act, followed by Act Without Words, a mime for one player (London, 1964), p.27.
3. Martin Esslin, "Samuel Beckett," in The Novelist as Philosopher: Studies in French Fiction, 1935-1960, ed. John Cruickshank (London, 1962), p.129.
4. Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett, a Critical Study (New York, 1961), p.13.
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8. Samuel Beckett, Watt (London, 1963), p.140.
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10. Samuel Beckett, No's Knife, Collected Shorter Prose, 1945-1966, trans. Samuel Beckett and Richard Seaver (London, 1967), p.13. All references to Beckett's Stories, Texts for Nothing, From an Abandoned Work and Ping are to the No's Knife collection and will be given in the text.
11. Samuel Beckett, Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, trans. Samuel Beckett and Patrick Bowles (London, 1959), p.25.
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