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

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SUMMARY

As its title indicates, this thesis is a comparison of the writing of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter with existential thought. The work divides into five major sections. Part one deals with Beckett as follows:

chapter 1: analysis of Beckett's central concern, a reduction of reality to a mysterious negative *sine qua non*, the Irreducible. The Irreducible is to be examined in philosophical terms. This chapter finds Cartesian and other seventeenth and eighteenth century approaches inadequate for the purpose.

chapter 2: introduction to the basic concepts of existential philosophy, beginning with Husserl and moving to Heidegger and Sartre.

chapter 3: the Beckett Reduction and Irreducible discussed in Sartrean terms. This includes an investigation of Beckett with the aid of the Sartrean concepts of the *en soi* and *pour soi*, facticity, nausea, freedom and human relations. The conclusion is that Beckett, while resembling Sartre in some respects, differs from him in fundamentals. The Irreducible is not a *pour soi* or Sartrean void. In the course of this chapter the inadequacy of a comparison with the Camus Absurd is also noted.

chapters 4 to 6 examine Beckett from a Heideggerian viewpoint. Beckett's world is discussed in terms of being-in-the-world (chapter 4), *angst* (chapter 5) and the concepts of Existence, nothingness and Being (chapter 6). The essential point of the argument is to relate Beckett's Reduction to the vision of *angst* and the Irreducible to Heideggerian Being. It is note-

worthy that in the end the quest for the Irreducible or Being leads Beckett beyond the existential, to a quasi-religious and Idealist sphere.

Part two of the thesis tackles Ionesco in the following terms:

chapter 7: analysis of the fundamental characteristic of Ionesco's work, the concern with wonder, the desire to reveal normality as strange. Wonder has two modalities, the poles of the euphoric and the claustrophobic.

chapters 8 and 9 discuss the Ionesco dynamism in terms of Heideggerian angst and the concept of the Uncanny. Euphoria and claustrophobia correspond to the categories of Heideggerian freedom and the stifling, inauthentic "they." The pattern of Ionesco's plays is interpreted as the struggle of the authentic individual against the collective. Inspired by the vision of angst, the Ionesco hero faces the Heideggerian "they" and the problem of death and goes in search of the euphoric experience, which is that of Being.

chapter 10: Romantic and Idealist echoes in Ionesco.

In the third section, on the work of Genet, the emphasis is on a comparison with Sartre. Genet's concern with the metaphysical ideal of solitude is examined as a reaction to the objectifying Sartrean Look (chapter 11). Chapters 12 to 15 outline five Genet attempts to depict this ideal, attempts based on the Sartrean notions of sadism and masochism. Genet offers us five types: the murderer, the "saint," the "image," the revolutionary and the "indifferent." Only the last of these appears successful, and in focussing on this type Genet moves away from Sartre and in the direction of Heidegger. As in Beckett and

Ionesco, there is a final tendency towards Idealism.

Chapters 16 to 20, which constitute the fourth section of this thesis, concentrate on Beckett's, Genet's and Ionesco's approaches to the theory and practice of art. Here the comparison is with the Heideggerian notions of erschlossenheit or disclosedness and "letting-be." In each case the form of the work of art is discussed in terms of the existential concept of "situation." Chapter 20 moves beyond this, however, to argue that Ionesco's plays in particular may be regarded as phenomenological in form in that their viewpoint combines subjective and objective perspectives on reality.

This discussion leads directly to the final section of the thesis in which Pinter's work is considered primarily in terms of subjectivity and objectivity. The analysis of Pinter proceeds in three stages, as follows:

chapters 21 and 22: outline of Pinter's central interests, the verification of truth, the definition of identity, and the examination of patterns of insecurity and human relationships. In his earlier plays Pinter adopts an existential approach to these issues and one which is mirrored in the form of the plays.

chapter 23: where Beckett, Ionesco and Genet seek to escape the existential in the direction of Idealism, Pinter gradually moves towards the empiricist position. The first phase of this shift is defined as "psychological realism."

chapter 24: the movement to objective perspectives leads to an extreme empiricism, reflected in the form of the plays as chosisme. While Pinter's concern with verification and human identity remains, his approach has greatly altered.

In spite of the considerable complexity of its detail, the argument of this thesis is easily summarized. Beckett's, Ionesco's, Genet's and Pinter's fundamental interests owe little or nothing to Camus and the Absurd. While the comparison with Sartre is at times revealing, the real parallel is with the existential as we find it in the philosophy of Heidegger. Beckett's obsessive movement towards the Irreducible, Ionesco's endless search for the experience of euphoria, Genet's search for solitude, are all comparable to the Heideggerian quest for Being. In each case and also in that of Pinter, existential perspectives are mirrored in the approach to art and particularly to literary form. It is interesting to note that all the writers considered in this thesis are dissatisfied with the limits of the existential universe. Thus Beckett, Ionesco and Genet attempt a return to the Idealist, and Pinter a transition to empiricism. The *via media* of the existential represents an uncomfortable point of rest for a human spirit which craves the greater comforts of more extreme ideologies.

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and no material which is not the product of my own original study and research, except when acknowledgement is made in the text, notes or bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

> It might seem strange that opinions of weight are found in the works of poets rather than philosophers. The reason is that poets wrote through enthusiasm and imagination; 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.[1]
>
> Descartes.

> 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 ... The thinker utters Being. The poet names what is holy.[2]
>
> Heidegger.

Each time one uses the phrase "literature of the Absurd" or "theatre of the Absurd" one is acknowledging, whether explicitly or implicitly, a particular connection between modern art and existential philosophy. The aim of the present thesis is to examine this connection in a way which has not been done before and with specific reference to the work of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter on the one hand and that of Heidegger, Sartre and, to a lesser extent, Camus on the other. This will involve only a slight concern with the Absurd as defined by Camus and none at all with the term as it is used, for the most part in a general and vague sense, by critics writing under the influence of Martin Esslin's book. What I wish to do is to conduct the analysis of these playwrights and playwright-novelists in relation to modern existential philosophy with a detailed precision generally lacking in writing on the subject. For this reason I have not tackled Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter as a group (a procedure which has usually led to an unfortunate blurring of necessary distinctions) but as individual artists, each at least to some extent with a unique vision and manner, and have approached the philosophic side of the thesis with a rigour which is not usual in literary criticism. In other words I have systematically based my parallels between writer and philosopher on a very particular, and literary, study of the writer and, at the same time, on a detailed and comprehensive study of the philosopher from a philosophical point of view. The result is an enquiry into what Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter have in common which attempts to get underneath the generalizations about absurdity or the void and to compare essential rather than general qualities of these writers with equally fundamental qualities of the thought of Heidegger, Sartre and Camus. I wish to stress, however, that in spite of the many pages devoted to the discussion of philosophy, particularly in its early chapters, this thesis is primarily a literary one: its aim is to approach literature by way of philosophy with the sole intention of setting in relief otherwise unnoticed aspects of the work of art.

The relation of such seemingly distinct disciplines as literature and philosophy is, of course, problematical. But it becomes less so in the present context. Whereas traditional philosophizing tends to begin with the thinking subject and so to develop along epistemological lines, existential philosophy - and this fact will be gone into more thoroughly in the chapters following - begins with the subject as existing, that is, as involved in a particular situation which is la condition humaine, and so develops along ontological lines. Consequently existential thinkers have emphasized that if philosophy is to speak for the man of feeling and action as well as for the thinker it must take the form of a literary philosophy or even of philosophic art. Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and, in another context, Gabriel Marcel, have sought to embody their concepts in novels or plays or both. Of course Kierkegaard, whose work anticipates so many of the central features of twentieth century existential movements, wrote treatises whose form is nearer to literature than to philosophy. Heidegger has gone to some trouble to underline his spiritual kinship with the poet. His method, patient and painstaking, is that of the artist, so that in reading him one suspends one's disbelief first because of an aesthetic sense of rightness and only then, possibly, because the subject matter is true. In the case of a loosely-termed existentialist such as Camus art and philosophy go hand in hand although in this case philosophy certainly takes second place. All this means that in comparing the work of Heidegger, Sartre and others with that of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter one is in a real sense simply comparing different kinds of art. Of course it is not necessary to speak of philosophic "influences" on the art of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter. The question is to reveal the fundamental unity of vision in the two cases, the shared weltanschauung.

Two other points must be made in this introduction. The present thesis deals almost as much with French as with English literature. Genet and Ionesco are given in the original and quotations from Sartre and Camus are also in French although in this case I have preferred to paraphrase wherever I can. Beckett presents something of a problem. His early work was written in English but the later novels and many of the plays are in French. On the other hand Beckett himself has translated all of this (occasionally in collaboration with another) in a way that amounts to rewriting so that one is justified in treating it as English literature in its own right. While I have acquainted myself with the original versions, therefore, I have consistently quoted Beckett in English. Quotations from Heidegger and Husserl are also given in English.

The use of philosophical language in a literary thesis raises some difficulties. I have decided to avoid the term Existentialism, since it appears to restrict the discussion to French thinkers of the post-war period, and to speak rather of existential philosophy. In addition, I have decided to capitalize the noun Existence whenever it is used in a technical sense in order to reduce the possibility of confusion and a capital letter also seems necessary in the case of the Absurd or Heideggerian Being - though not in that of Sartrean being. In each case my criterion has been clarity rather than consistency.

PART I

THE BECKETT IRREDUCIBLE

CHAPTER 1

BECKETT : THE REDUCTION

> 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, then and then only may it be a source of enchantment.[1]
>
> Beckett.

The key word in any study of Beckett should be "obsessive." In a multiplicity of output in the spheres of criticism, poetry, drama, the short story and the novel, Beckett has remained extraordinarily faithful to a single conception. It is this central aspect of his work which is of interest in this chapter.

Beckett is loth to reveal himself to the public. Only once has he submitted to a comprehensive interview and consequently this interview, published in 1949 as Three Dialogues, is of some importance to the scholar. The discussion - with Georges Duthuit - possibly represents the most expanded version of the Beckett aesthetic in existence (it is very brief). Actually it does not deal directly with Beckett's own work but with that of the modern painters Tal Coat, Masson and Bram van Velde. Beckett quickly dismisses the first of these. Artists like Tal Coat "never stirred from the field of the possible, however much they may have enlarged it" (pp. 102-103). Tal Coat's is art "on the plane of the feasible" (p. 103). Of course Duthuit protests: what other plane is there?

> B. - Logically none. Yet I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary

> of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road.
>
> D. - And preferring what?
>
> B. - The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.
>
> p.103.

Missing the import of this, Duthuit proposes Masson as a painter who ought to fulfil Beckett's requirements: Masson, after all, "speaks ... of painting the void" (p.109). But Beckett's reaction remains unfavourable. "In search of a difficulty," he comments, "rather than in its clutch. The disquiet of him who lacks an adversary" (p.109). It is still the plane of the feasible, the possible, "the malady of wanting to know what to do and the malady of wanting to be able to do it" (p.110).

Duthuit, on his guard, finally suggests Bram van Velde. Beckett now approves. Here, at last, is

> The situation ... 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.

The plane of the possible is now transcended. We are no longer in "the domain of the feasible" where "the much to express, the little to express, the ability to express much, the ability to express little, merge in the common anxiety to express as much as possible, or as truly as possible" (p.120). Duthuit suddenly grasps the odd implications of the argument:

> D. - One moment. Are you suggesting that the painting of van Velde is inexpressive?
>
> B. - (A fortnight later) Yes.
>
> D. - You realize the absurdity of what you advance?
>
> B. - I hope I do.
>
> pp.120-121.

An obvious objection to Beckett's position is promptly supplied by the logic of convention: if one paints one must be expressing something, even if only the impossibility of expression. Beckett rejects this way out of the difficulty as an a priorism with no force of proof. Art need not express anything.

Duthuit politely treats the matter as an avant garde joke. "Try and bear in mind," he tells Beckett, "that the subject under discussion is not yourself, nor the Sufist Al-Haqq, but a particular Dutchman by name van Velde, hitherto erroneously referred to as an artiste peintre" (p.123). Of course Beckett's argument is outrageous. If van Velde's art is inexpressive, it is not "painting." And indeed Beckett is not prepared to say what it is in what appears as an obliteration of the category of Universals:

> For what is this coloured plane, that was not there before. I don't know what it is, having never seen anything like it before. It seems to have nothing to do with art, in any case, if my memories are correct.
>
> p.126.

In spite of the clowning we are being asked to consider seriously an art which is strictly non-relational and so not art at all, an artist who does not express himself, who does not express anything, and so is not really an artist. According to Beckett the history of art may be represented as a prolonged attempt to avoid the disquieting conclusion that there is no intelligible connection between the artist and his world, between the act of painting and its result. We are left then with a frankly dualist view, with an unrelated particular which, for reasons unknown, manages to subsist. Velde does not paint, yet the result is there for all to see, an act "of him who, helpless, unable to act, acts, in the event paints" (p.119). Duthuit can only regard such a stand as illogical. A world in which terms of relation are either not there at all or at least unavailable cannot subsist, it is inconceivable. The world exists as world only by virtue of connections, Universals. A door is meant to be opened and shut. If it cannot be related in this way to the being who is able to manipulate it, it is not a door as van Velde's picture is not a picture. It is doubtful that we may even say of this door as of this picture that it exists. For after all that which is, without being anything, can only be nothing. The door not a door made of wood not wood from a tree not a tree, the door, which is not anything else apart from the door which it is not, cannot subsist. The idea of the inexpressive, the non-relational implies not only something unusual: it implies the impossible. And this is exactly what Beckett means: van Velde's art is not on the plane of the feasible, it is an Impossible, a saying-nothing in the strictest sense, a something whose existence is inexplicable, since it is nothing at all.

Despite the difficulties of this point of view Beckett has no qualms about referring the whole discussion to his own work:

> There are many ways in which the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said. I have experimented, as you know, both in public and in private, under duress, through faintness of heart, through weakness of mind, with two or three hundred.
>
> p.123.

Clearly, and from the start there could be no doubt of this, van Velde's predicament and Beckett's are identical. Granted this, one may still hesitate to take the approach at face value and pose the question: how seriously is one to take Beckett's stand? Such a question, in the context of Beckett's commitment to the most difficult task ever resignedly undertaken in the history of literature, can only be answered affirmatively. Beckett has been obliged to say nothing many times over. We cannot dismiss this simply as avant garde contempt for "message" or as a Beckett version of l'art pour l'art. The serious critic, whatever his own views, must take Beckett at his word. But if he does so, what critical approach is he to employ in order to cope with an aesthetic of impossibility? Must he fall back on Hamm's despairing

> We're not beginning to ... to ... mean something?[2]

The present thesis attempts, insofar as is possible, to discuss Beckett while remaining on his own ground, that is, it attempts a criticism that in its own way will reproduce Beckett's obsession with the particular, the non-relational, analysing the Beckett void without naming it in other than negative terms, circling repeatedly around the hole in order to map its outlines much as Dionysius the Areopagite delineated his unknown by the method of negative theology. In this way it avoids the uncomfortable choice of viewing Beckett either as a nihilist or as a humanist in disguise.

This chapter will be concerned solely with the subject matter of Beckett's art. In the light of what has already been said, though, it is evident that the only subject available to an art of saying nothing is nothing itself. Moreover, this "nothing" will not mean silence, quite the opposite. In spite of Wittgenstein's famous dictum, Beckett will not give up writing. He will treat nothing not as nonexistent but as impossibly there. In other words it is not a question of not speaking but of speaking in such a way that nothing is expressed and that what is expressed is nothing. But the full significance of this obscure task cannot be made obvious at once. To begin with it is necessary to note that Beckett does not and could not begin at this extreme point. Rather, his work represents a gradual movement towards it. I have termed this movement towards a negative point, a particular object, the Beckett Reduction. From his early work in the thirties to his latest in the present, for over forty years of writing, Beckett has made his way to this end product, to an Irreducible which is left as a sine qua non, a barely-something-almost-nothing, an impossible being-nothing. This Irreducible is his single subject. Surprisingly, it has not been tackled directly in any systematic way by the multitude of literary critics who have devoted themselves to Beckett. Esslin, always perceptive in spite of his limitations, has noted that Beckett proceeds by "eliminating and discarding layer after layer of accidental qualities, by peeling off skin after skin of the onion to reach the innermost core."[3] More significantly, Hugh Kenner, one of Beckett's finest critics, has made much of "his Houdini-like virtuosity (by preference chained hand and foot, deprived of story, dialogue, locale)."[4] For Kenner, Beckett's

> one certain principle is that every work is wrested from the domain of the impossible. Let him by his previous operations have thoroughly salted some trampled patch of ground, and it is there that in time of frost he will plant his next seed.[5]

But it is not Kenner's concern to chart the progress of the Reduction or to examine its end product at close range.

An early hint of this Reduction is already apparent in 1931, in Beckett's essay on Proust. Beckett is not discussing his own work and Proust is primarily an excellent piece of literary criticism. At the same time, its relevance to Beckett's output over the forty years following it means that Proust is rightly treated by many as an oblique Beckett manifesto. In it we read:

> The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn into the core of the eddy.
>
> pp. 65-66.

No better description of Beckett's method could be found. Beckett analyses Proust's portrayal of the Ego disintegrating under the action of time and the fragmentation of life into disconnected parts characteristic of the Proustian phenomenon of voluntary memory. But Proust's narrator finds himself in his own past in the experience of involuntary memory, the most notable example of this being the famous incident of the madeleine in Du Côté de Chez Swann. Whereas the miracle of the madeleine or the cluster of experiences concentrated in the section of Le Temps Retrouvé following the narrator's stumbling on the cobbles of the Guermantes Hotel returns the narrator to his Self, reconnects the fragments of a life and so of an Ego, there is no such miracle present in Beckett's work. Beckett's characters will disintegrate as the Reduction proceeds and without reprieve. Like Proust's they will be essentially alone and their relations will involve them in torments of frustration and futility.

In More Pricks than Kicks, Beckett's earliest collection of short stories, published in 1934, the Beckett character appears for the first time. Belacqua, whose name relates him to the indolent Florentine encountered by Dante in canto four of the Purgatorio, is something of a solipsist, weary of life and of society. It is a commonplace of Beckett scholarship that the protagonist of these very funny if a little too self-conscious stories stands as the archetype of all later Beckett heroes. In the present context he may be regarded as a starting point for the Reduction, as an initial formulation of the Beckett subject. Dante's Belacqua is punished for his sloth by being kept waiting in the second terrace of mount Purgatory. Beckett's pursues his ideal of indolence without divine interference. "Temporarily sane"[6] he dreams of suicide but opts instead for a death of love in the enticing arms of Ruby Tough. After a series of strange amours he dies once and for all because of a surgical mistake. His one aim in life has been what is termed in Proust "the wisdom of all the sages, from Brahma to Leopardi" (p.18), to desire nothing, to suffer patiently the inexplicable burden of an individual life. Doing nothing, wanting nothing: the Reduction has begun and while it has not been taken very far - while Belacqua remains a relatively conventional creature in a social world - its direction has been clearly indicated.

In Murphy (1938) the Reduction is more properly in focus. The hero of this tragi-comedy is a reincarnation of Belacqua, an exile in London who traverses the greater part of the novel in flight from other people. Murphy is a modern mystic who likes nothing better than to remove his clothes, tie himself to a rocking chair with seven scarves and rock himself into oblivion of the "mercantile gehenna"[7] about him. Solitude and the luxury of doing nothing are essential to his success. Unfortunately he attracts the interest of the extravagant Miss Counihan and of a number of other characters who pursue him until he manages to find refuge as a male nurse in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. Here the "seedy solipsist" (p.59) is among his own. Murphy's is a movement inwards that necessitates an ascent towards the goal of emotional indifference, of ascetic detachment from all everyday concerns: "in the beautiful Belgo-Latin of Arnold Geulincx: Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis" (p.124).

Beckett's interest in the seventeenth century Cartesian Geulincx takes us to the centre of the Reduction which so far has been only vaguely glimpsed. The key is chapter six of the novel where, as Beckett explains, "it is most unfortunate, but the point of this story has been reached where a justification of the expression 'Murphy's mind' has to be attempted" (p.76). In justifying it the author has recourse to any philosophy that will serve so that chapter six becomes a hilarious confusion of Descartes, Spinoza, Geulincx, Leibniz, Berkeley and Samuel Beckett. Beckett's interest in the great seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers is well known. It has been noted by Hugh Kenner, by John Fletcher (notably in a chapter of his book Samuel Beckett's Art) and, in passing, by many others. Moreover, it is not of primary relevance to the present thesis. Nevertheless some consideration will be given to it, particularly in this chapter, partly because it can scarcely be ignored in any criticism of Beckett and partly because it provides an excellent introduction to the subject of this thesis. Murphy's mind, we are told, "pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without" (p.76). Like the hero's suit which "admitted no air from the outer world" and "allowed none of Murphy's own vapours to escape" (p.53) it is a closed system, a Leibnizian "windowless" monad. We are not to conclude that Murphy is an Idealist of the Berkeleian or any other kind, however. On the contrary: "There was the mental fact and there was the physical fact, equally real if not equally pleasant" (p.76). Murphy's mind exists beside Murphy's body and independently of it:

> ... Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently ... But he

> felt his mind to be bodytight and he did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected ... He was satisfied that neither followed from the other. He neither thought a kick because he felt one nor felt a kick because he thought one.
>
> p.77.

The relevance of the Geulincx dictum is clear. If there is no intelligible relation between mind and body, only a mysterious intercourse over which Murphy has no control, there can be no question of Murphy effectively intervening in extra-mental affairs. The only solution is an attitude of indifference to all that is not mind: ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis. We are in Beckett's version of the Occasionalist world.

Descartes, whose presence is felt from beginning to end in Beckett's work, based his entire philosophy on the body-mind distinction. While he believed in the interaction of spirit and matter, spiritual and extended substance, and thought he had found the inconceivable point of interaction in the pineal gland, he acknowledged its problematical nature. Later Cartesians gave up the problem as insoluble. Since mind and body are distinct there can be no intercourse between them. If I desire to walk it is not this desire which moves my legs but the continued intervention of God. Of course my wanting to walk and my walking coincide, but only because God wills to synchronize them. Thus my desire to walk becomes the "occasion" of God's fiat to render the human carcass operative, to breathe life into a dying animal. This is the view of Geulincx and also of another seventeenth century philosopher, Nicolas Malebranche. In the Leibnizian world what happens is not unlike Occasionalism. Since the monads, those units to which all things are ultimately reduced, are indeed "windowless," all intercourse between them is ruled out. In order to explain what appears to be an interconnection Leibniz postulates a harmony pre-established by God. The monads are like so many clocks wound to run parallel to each other, synchronized in every detail yet always separate. Thus the world appears as a complex machine, each part geared to cooperate in the general motion. Murphy's Occasionalism is more radical than the Leibizian harmony, though, and Murphy's world, like that of Geulincx, is an immense correspondence of activities, a series of miraculous meetings in which the participants can never touch. Whereas Geulincx is able to have recourse to a deity to keep things from disintegration, moreover, Murphy is helpless. For him no such principle of cohesion is available. What remains is pure Occasionalism, a creation unique to Beckett, infinitely subdivided into incompatible parts. Murphy walks by series of coincidences. When he wants to walk he hopes that, following its own obscure mechanisms, his body will move, which it may well do, if he is lucky. In view of this Murphy wisely expects nothing from it, grateful for any incidental cooperation. As Neary suggests to him early in the novel: "I should say your conarium has shrunk to nothing" (p. 8). The conarium is Descartes' pineal, the legendary point at which thought and matter, soul and body unite. But it is not only the body-mind connection which is threatened. Every act of Murphy is an unknown and takes place in an Occasionalist vacuum. No sustained human relationships are possible, nor is Murphy equipped to cope with social structures. Beckett has reduced the human being to solitude and, since action cannot take place without a degree of coordination, to impotence.

It is evident that a world whose units are not held together but merely juxtaposed is not only unintelligible but also impossible. That which is without relation to anything else can only be nothing at all. We recall the painter who is not a painter and the work of art which is not art. The Duthuit interview took place eleven years after the publication of Murphy, yet it is revealing to see how far the Beckett Impossible is already explicit in the first novel. Murphy, even more than Belacqua before him, is himself like van Velde's picture, a living anomaly. The full force of this emerges when we consider the nature of Murphy's mind. Murphy, in his dissatisfaction with what is external to him, deliberately seeks greater solitude and peace within himself in a withdrawal to the sphere of the cogito. It is an ascesis which combines the Cartesian movement with the Spinozan three-stage ascent to the Intellectual Love of God or, in this case, to the "amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat" (p. 76), since Beckett's system does not allow for the presence of God. Strapped to his mystical armchair, Murphy moves inwards, passing through the three zones of the mind, first, the one in which he is able to think the external world ("here the whole physical fiasco became a howling success," p. 79), second, the one in which images recede ("here was the Belacqua bliss," p.79), and, finally, the one in which there is no individual thought at all. Here Murphy does not act but joins the ceaseless activity of life, participates in an endless motion without himself making any move. We have reached the core of Murphy's mind and, not surprisingly, a new universe, this time a mental one, in the process of falling apart. Murphy's deepest being is that of "a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line" (p. 79). Of course the relation between point and line is analogous to that between mind and body, between Murphy and society: it is a non-relation, a philosophical Impossible. Murphy's innermost mind, like Murphy as a whole, is an inconceivable particular, connected to Murphy's more superficial mental processes by pure coincidence. The inner world disintegrates in the same way as the outer world. We are reminded of a form of Occasionalism which goes beyond even that of Geulincx: that of Nicolas Malebranche. For Malebranche not only is the connection of body and mind dependent on God, but the activities of the mind itself require a deity. The mind receives its ideas not from what is outside it but from God so that all its knowledge is a knowledge of things in God, and all its intellectual operations take place in the context of a continuing divine activity. Murphy's mental processes, of course, do not stem from any such principle of harmony. They take place only by an extraordinary coincidence, by a miracle all the greater for its having no divine source. And at the very core of Murphy's mind is the point where the great mystery has its source, the true Murphy, "matrix of surds" (p.79).

This final reference requires amplification since it provides an added perspective on all that has been said so far. Beckett's monadism, as already observed, leads to an impossibility. To make the point Beckett appeals to the image of the Pythagorean "surd." This question has been treated by Kenner, but since we are here concerned with it from an ultimately very different point of view some repetition is justified. The Pythagoreans found that the square roots of certain numbers could be expressed only as approximations. In the particular case of the triangle formed by the diagonal of a square, for example, the relation of diagonal to side could not be given in terms of a simple number. Any figure which, like pi, could be extended to infinity was termed an "irrational" and regarded as a mystery not to be offered to the uninitiated. Neary, one of Murphy's pursuers and a Pythagorean, speaks of one Hippasos "drowned in a puddle ... for having divulged the incommensurability of side and diagonal" (p. 36). The "irrational" number or surd was also termed an alogon, that is, an "unnamable" by the Greeks. Without commenting at this point on the obvious reference to Beckett's later novel we may note that Murphy himself is the alogon, the irrational that will properly fit no scheme, in Beckett's first novel. In short, Beckett's Occasionalism and his appeal to the Pythagorean concept are simply two aspects of a single concern. Murphy has an "irrational" heart (p. 6); at his birth his voice alone among "millions of little larynges cursing in unison at that particular moment ... was off the note" (p. 52). Murphy is the great misfit, the number which has no definite mathematical identity, the impossible particular, like van Velde's painting. If his world is falling apart in an Occasionalism without God, then the individual object in it remains suspended in non-relation, an unintelligible fact, cut off from every outside cause - in Murphy's case from society, from the body and, ultimately, from his own mental activities - by an impenetrable mystery. At the limit of its reduction such an entity can only be a zero, but a zero that subsists, and so in the deepest sense an irrational *alogon*: an unnamable. In *Murphy* the Reduction is not taken to its limit, except at rare moments of insight when the protagonist is absorbed in meditation. We know that Murphy is a continuing miracle. For all that, Murphy maintains contact with the outside world to the very end. He finds what he imagines to be the perfect image of his ascetic ideal in the "higher schizoids" (p.125) inhabiting the Mercyseat asylum. For a brief moment he gazes at his own impossible being after his chess game (an endgame, naturally) with the lunatic Mr. Endon. Murphy sees his own reflection in the other's eyes, themselves oblivious of Murphy, and recognizes his existence as an irrational mirrored in the unseeing eyes of a madman - as if a nothing could exist only as a reflection off the face of the void.

It is clear that an important reduction of reality to essentials has been initiated in this early novel. Social relationships, friendship, love, concern for life, for activity are cut down to a minimum. As if that were not enough, Murphy himself is further reduced, first by a questioning of the body-mind connection, then by a questioning of all connections within the mind. Murphy has increasingly abandoned the ways of the body for those of the mind only to discover that the objective solitude of social existence is matched by the absolute particularity of the mind within the mind. The Mr. Endon episode, among others, focusses attention on the central concern of the novel: what remains when all that is incidental is questioned, when human reality is reduced in every respect? What remains is the object, never attained, of Murphy's search and also the subject of Beckett's novel: the Irreducible which subsists when an inexorable Occasionalism has removed its links with all that is not it, the Beckett _alogon_, the impossible fact, the being-nothing that is Murphy.

The Irreducible is announced in _Murphy_. In the novels which follow it is more closely examined. _Watt_, written during the war although unpublished till 1953, takes the Beckett Reduction much further than _Murphy_. Again it deals with a search. Whereas Murphy sought the darkness, however, Watt seeks the light. Not unexpectedly he fails completely and moves, though unwillingly, in the same direction as his predecessor. The theme of the book is purpose, value, meaning; Beckett is tackling the same issues as before but in this case from a predominantly epistemological point of view. The Reduction here is to unintelligibility. Watt makes a mysterious journey to join the household of a Mr. Knott. After a stay he is ready to leave. He learns nothing about Knott, going as ignorant as he came, ejected from the Kafkaesque situation of the place and for an unknown reason, alone, broken in spirit. Watt is pathetically cut off from others, a state of affairs which he does not accept with eagerness as does Murphy. His one relationship, with the one-breasted fishwoman Mrs. Gorman, is severely limited ("The irony of life ... That he who has the time should lack the force, that she who has the force should lack the time!"[8]) and he ends his time at the house in the total desolation of his solitude and impotence beside the inhuman Knott:

> Dis yb dis, nem owt. Yad la, tin fo trap ... Od su did ned taw? On. Taw ot klat tonk? On. Tonk

> ot klat taw? On. Tonk ta kool taw? On. Taw
> ta kool tonk? Nilb, mun, mud.
>
> (To be read backwards.)
>
> p. 166.

Two men stand side by side, unable to communicate, dumb, numb, blind. The Watt (what) question receives only a negative answer: Knott. Like the Shandean and the Joycean worlds it recalls, this one contains a strong element of feeling. Watt is a tragedy - with continuous upsurges of comedy. Its hero awaits the sunrise of his hopes at the new household:

> But that would come, Watt knew that would come, with patience it would come, little by little ... over the yard wall, and through the window, first the grey, then the brighter colours one by one, until getting on to 9 a.m. all the gold and white and blue would fill the kitchen, all the unsoiled life of the new day, of the new day at last, the day without precedent at last.
>
> p. 63.

From this moving passage of expectation, however, there is only decline.

More alone than ever, Watt begins to lose contact with the outside world, not, like Murphy, by a deliberate process of ascesis but in confused despair. The incident of the Galls begins with piano tuners visiting Mr. Knott's and ends with Watt's failure to extract any significance from the event which "developed a purely plastic content, and gradually lost, in the nice processes of its light, its sound, its impacts and its rhythm, all meaning, even the most literal" (p. 69). So it is with the problem of the unnamable pot: "For Watt now found himself in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance" (p. 78). Jacqueline Hoefer, whose mistake regarding the influence of Wittgenstein on Watt has unduly obscured the partial validity of her thesis, has seen this as a satire of British empiricism.[9] Certainly it provides an image of the collapse of a Newtonian system of relations, of a scientific approach to reality in general, but with an Occasionalist bias. There are no universal laws governing reality in Watt. Man is stripped of all his achievements in the sphere of perception, of reason, of language and the result is a Reduction to epistemological chaos. In effect we witness the disintegration of Watt's mind, a fulfilment of the prophecy of Murphy. It is as if the mind, as in the system of Malebranche, required supernatural assistance in order to function and as if this assistance were no longer forthcoming. Watt fails to explain the Galls until his very memory of a sense-perception is cast into doubt:

> ... were there neither Galls nor piano then, but only an unintelligible succession of changes, from which Watt finally extracted the Galls and the piano, in self-defence?
>
> p. 76.

In this extraordinary tangle of Beckett and David Hume what emerges is that distant reflection of continental Occasionalism present in the British philosopher. Of course Hume does not deny the validity of the concept of causality; he merely argues that we cannot demonstrate necessary connections between matters of fact. If A is frequently followed by B we may say that A "causes" B although we cannot prove it. Watt's is a world where items are juxtaposed without apparent interaction, where reality, composed of a mass of sense-perceptions, is undeniable insofar as it is there, insofar as something is there, but remains in the final analysis an immense heap of little things. Nothing exists to hold together the fragments of a world. The unified power of the mind has failed and so perception itself becomes a game of hit and miss. Watt struggles earnestly to cope. The concern with series as an explanation for a given event, the concern with possibilities, with logical alternatives and patterns, shows how desperately and ridiculously he attempts to salvage the scraps of experience. Only a few examples can be cited here. There is the attempt to discover a pattern in the croaking of the three frogs, or to explain the rhythm of life at Knott's or to obtain the key to Erskine's room or to unravel the mystery of Knott's left-over food which requires a series of dogs to eat it stretching to infinity and a series of members of the (mythical) Lynch family to keep those dogs also stretching to infinity. The result of Watt's conjectures is, of course, inevitably negative. The principle of causality has been reduced to absurdity: once we postulate Z as caused by Y we must postulate Y as caused by X and so on _ad infinitum_. Likewise the principles of logic (themselves based on an idea of necessary connections) are demolished. As in _Murphy_ a wedge has been driven between mind as knowing subject and world as object of knowledge, as well as between one mental operation and another. Watt, therefore, is certain neither of his interpretations of facts nor of his processes of interpretation.

But this does not mean absolute chaos, at least not in one sense. I may doubt all, said Descartes, except my doubt. Watt is certain of one thing: that one thing is certain. He does not know exactly what that thing is. Nevertheless, it is there, the one thing which remains when all else is questioned. Perhaps there were no Galls, no piano. Perhaps there is no Knott household and no Knott (the name suggests it), no food left over, no dog, no Lynch family, no Watt even. But, if we may paraphrase from _Endgame_, _something_ is taking its course, otherwise there would be no perplexity. Thus the question - what? - reappears from the ashes and, phoenix-like, the protagonist is reborn. Things, as in Murphy, are impossibly fragmented and yet they exist. Events after all "happen," albeit magically, since without interconnections, without some degree of order, nothing can happen. But because there is no order, only chaos, what does happen can only be nothing, a non-event, an alogon like Murphy and Watt or the negative Mr. Knott. In short, an Irreducible remains when all else is destroyed and that Irreducible is a kind of nothing. Arsene's magnificent expression of this truth, recalling Lucky's speech in its inspired confusion, comes early in the novel, as he describes an obscure fall of sand, from one pile to another:

> Where was I? The change. In what did it consist? It is hard to say. Something slipped. There I was, warm and bright, smoking my tobacco pipe, watching the warm bright wall, when suddenly somewhere some little thing slipped, some little tiny thing. Gliss-iss-iss-STOP! I trust I make myself clear.
>
> p. 41.

Arsene's slip of sand is that impossible non-event which is a fact, like the brute fact of Watt and of his coming to and going from Mr. Knott's or like the fact of Murphy's nothingness in the eyes of the lunatic Mr. Endon. From different points of view Beckett returns obsessively to the same Irreducible.

After Watt the Reduction takes yet another new turn. The novel Mercier et Camier (not yet translated into English and published only in 1970) looks forward as well as back in portraying a pair of misfits, whose dialogue resembles that of Vladimir and Estragon, wandering aimlessly in a setting of disintegration imaged in the bicycle which goes to pieces. But the real line of development is in the Stories, Beckett's first significant French work. Three of these were published in 1955 along with Texts for Nothing and subsequently translated into English; a fourth, "Premier Amour," remained in French and was not published till 1970. The Stories were written around 1945 and in each case the subject is the now clearly recognizable Beckett tramp, carrying on the solipsist tradition of Belacqua, Murphy and Watt, but more especially reminiscent of Watt. The narrator of "The Expelled" is a reject from society who retains the resources of a Murphy and hides, like Murphy in his room, in the womb-security of a cab. He has Watt's inefficient gait ("Stiffness of the lower limbs, as if nature had denied me knees, extraordinary splaying of the feet to right and left of the line of march."[10]), hates people, particularly children (prophetic of Mr. Rooney in All that Fall), is troubled by police and finally escapes the charity of the cabbie. The narrator of "The Calmative" claims that he is already dead and tells us an autobiographical tale of a broken tramp haunting the recurring Beckett city. He cannot speak and can barely walk. In "The End" the tramp is ejected from what may be an asylum or a hospital. He drags himself through a town, gradually weaker until, refusing all human kindness and the company of men, in complete indifference - he has read the Ethics of Geulincx - he remains immobile in an old boat which he uses as a bed. Here, if he can, he will die. Beckett has reduced his character not only to solitude and inactivity, as in Murphy, or to perceptual and intellectual confusion, as in Watt, but also to a gradual independence from the body now in process of dissolution, its normal functions reduced to almost nothing. The tramp is further from the external world than any of his predecessors, including Watt. Now that the Occasionalist Reduction has reached the virtual elimination of the body we also witness the reduction of the mind to something approaching bare consciousness.

This is clearly a prelude to the trilogy, possibly Beckett's finest work, written in French between 1947 and 1949 and subsequently rendered into English. Here the Reduction is taken to its conclusion and Beckett offers for the first time a direct portrait of the Irreducible. The process of reduction moves forward in each novel as it did in each of the short stories. Molloy, Malone and others, alogons in an already long line, are brought closer and closer to a negative point. Molloy begins his ascent to the source of things on a bicycle. But he loses that, like Mercier and Camier, and has to go on foot. Then a leg gives way and he limps. Then the other leg gives way also. Finally Molloy crawls along the ground towards an obscure goal which may be his mother or, again, may be Murphy's "matrix of surds." He is utterly alone, separated from everyday normality by a bad memory and an inability to conform to the rules of decency:

> ... if I have always behaved like a pig, the fault lies not with me but with my superiors, who corrected me on points of detail instead of showing me the essence of the system, after the manner of the great English schools, and the guiding principles of good manners ....[11]

His communication with his mother is limited to tapping messages on her skull:

> One knock meant yes, two no, three I don't know, four money, five goodbye. I was hard put to ram this code into her ruined and frantic understanding, but I did it, in the end.
>
> p.18.

Actually Molloy is recalling all of this. From the start of the novel he is confined to a bed in a small room, waiting to die, and his tale recapitulates the events which have led him to this. In a sense he has reached the source of things, the small womb-like room, image of the sphere of mind, but this fact is not evident as yet. "It is in the tranquillity of decomposition that I remember the long confused emotion which was my life" (p.25): Molloy's poetic recollection reveals a life of decay, of failure of mind and body, body alienated from mind, mind alienated from body, of escape from society. It is the prophecy of Lucky come to pass: "I listen and the voice is of a world collapsing endlessly ..." (p.40).

The second part of the novel deals with Moran's search for Molloy. The reason for this search is obscure and on the face of it the search ends in failure - as does Molloy's search for his mother. But in each case the search, which coincides with the Reduction, is not without fruit. Moran, who, unlike the tramp Molloy, begins his journey in a state of mental and physical health, that is, as a normal, socially-adjusted sadist, ends where Molloy began, a crippled and demoralized solipsist. He is pruned of his relations with others, his possessions, his sense of purpose in life and his religious orthodoxy. Like Watt's involved schemes, his meticulous plans come to nothing. But, in approximating his own existence to Molloy's, he has in a sense found the man he seeks. Criticism has commented on this and suggested plausibly that Molloy may be regarded as Moran's subconscious, that is, as the Freudian Id. Thus much of what Molloy does in the first part of the novel is paralleled in the Moran section. We are told that Molloy, "no stranger" (p.112) to Moran, "rises up within" (p.113) him as a dark, bearlike presence, "massive and hulking, to the point of misshapenness" (p.114), and then, Moran explains, "I was nothing but uproar, bulk, rage, suffocation, effort unceasing, frenzied and vain" (p.114). At the end of the book Moran, who never sets eyes on his double, is overcome by him and metamorphosed into a tramp, another Molloy. Thus the Reduction and the search lead from Moran to Molloy and in the direction of ever greater austerity and inwardness.

Malone Dies, the second novel of the trilogy, consolidates gains made so far. Malone, another Molloy at the end of his wanderings, is bedridden, telling vaguely autobiographical stories as death approaches. The Reduction is recapitulated. Malone's story is of Saposcat (requiescat in pace), later called Macmann, son of man, a tramp much like Molloy but bereft of even the latter's rudimentary purpose, who crawls, or rather rolls, in the rain across an interminable plain. But Malone's plight is more austere than that of his hero's. If Sapo-Macmann is a stranger in society, Malone in his little room is utterly alone; if Macmann cannot walk properly, the other cannot walk at all. Whereas Molloy's possessions dwindle, after the loss of his bicycle, to the famous sixteen sucking stones in his pockets, Malone, who wishes to make an inventory of his few goods, can only manipulate them to the extent he can draw them to his bed with a stick. The stick is a last relic of civilization and its manipulation of nature by means of machines, the other pole of Kenner's triumphant Cartesian centaur. But one day the stick is lost, and Malone's dry comment "sine qua non, Archimedes was right" (p.255) sums up the situation. The end of the stick, the running down of the Cartesian machine, is also the end of the body. Murphy's dream of a mind which is bodytight is in the process of realization:

> I am naked in the bed, in the blankets, whose number I increase and diminish as the seasons come and go. I am never hot, never cold. I don't wash but I don't get dirty ... What matters is to eat and excrete. Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles.
>
> p.185.

Malone waits indifferently for the end. His senses are failing; he sometimes wonders if he is not already dead or if the area to which he is restricted is not in fact his own skull. Towards the end of the novel even the dish-pot activity slows down to a stop when his dish is no longer filled with food. He tries to scream:

> I shall try ... I have tried. I heard nothing out of the ordinary. No, I exaggerate, I heard a kind of burning croak deep down in the windpipe ... With practice I might produce a groan, before I die.
>
> p.254.

The Macmann story, running parallel to Malone's - it is clearly the story of a younger Malone - now reaches its inevitable resting place, a lunatic asylum. Here a brief and grotesque idyll is permitted with the ageing Moll, Macmann's nurse. But Moll dies and the tale is interrupted, unfinished, by Malone's disintegration:

> never anything
> there
> any more
>
> p.289.

It would seem that the Reduction could go no further, since Molloy and Malone Dies realize fully the Occasionalism of Murphy and Watt. But the true Beckett alogon, the Irreducible at the heart of Belacqua, Murphy, Watt, the tramps of the Stories, Molloy, Moran, Malone and Macmann is reached only in the final novel of the trilogy, aptly named The Unnamable. Like its predecessors, the Unnamable tells a story which seems to recapitulate its own disintegration and this time the story carries even the austerity of Malone's situation a little further. Its subject is a tramp called Mahood, no longer walking but orbiting, a crippled puppet "coming to the end of a world tour" (p.319), back to his family whose rotunda is as the centre of a circle to his own circumferential travels. Mahood orbiting illustrates perfectly the obsessive inward movement of the Reduction:

> I must have got embroiled in a kind of inverted spiral, I mean one of the coils of which, instead of widening more and more, grew narrower and narrower and finally ... would come to an end for lack of room ... unless of course I elected to set off again at once in the opposite direction, to unscrew myself as it were, after having screwed myself to a standstill ....
>
> pp. 318-319.

But the return journey never eventuates in Beckett and the next time we see Mahood he is stuck in a jar, like Winnie of Happy Days in her pile of sand or Nagg and Nell of Endgame in their bins, totally immobile and speechless.

The final phase of the Reduction takes us to the teller of the story, the Unnamable. To begin with, its situation appears to be analogous to that of a foetus in the womb or of a corpse in the grave. The body is almost gone. The Unnamable lies in the Belacqua posture favoured by all of Beckett's characters, or again, perhaps, in "the shape ... of an egg, with two holes no matter where to prevent it from bursting," or as "round, solid and round" (p. 307). This raises the possibility of atomistic motion: "But do I roll, in the manner of a true ball? Or am I in equilibrium...?" (p.308). The possibility is rejected: "No, once and for all, I do not move"(p. 294).

It looks as if the Unnamable is motionless within a restricted space, at its very centre, knowing nothing of its situation, seeing and hearing very little, utterly indifferent: "They say I suffer like true thinking flesh, but I'm sorry, I feel nothing" (p. 356). It is alone or almost so, surrounded by orbiting tramps with whom it does not communicate: "To tell the truth I believe they are all here, at least from Murphy on, I believe we are all here, but so far I have only seen Malone" (p. 295). Inaction, solitude, indifference: the situation is similar to that presented in the originally French Texts for Nothing, written shortly after. In both cases there is "no talk of a creator and nothing very definite in the way of a creation" (Texts, p. 79). With the body's dissolution, the material world has disappeared and only mind remains.

Indeed the space inhabited by the Unnamable represents Malone's room shrunk to the dimensions of a skull - "the inside of my distant skull where once I wandered, now am fixed, lost for tininess, or straining against the walls ..." (pp. 304-305). It has all been an adventure of the mind, from Murphy onwards, and in The Unnamable and the Texts for Nothing this adventure has been traced to its source, the voice of consciousness: "...I have no one left to speak to, and I speak, a voice speaks that can be none but mine, since there is none but me" (Texts, p. 126). This voice, cut off from all else, suspended in an unknown, endlessly continues its stories of Mahood, its statements about itself. There is no doubt that it is also responsible for the earlier Beckett protagonists. In a sense it is Beckett's own voice but that is beside the point here, since it makes little difference what name is assigned to it: essentially, it remains unnamable. The voice takes the Reduction as far as it can. In the course of the novel it demolishes methodically its own constructions. It spoke of a space, of a round body, of tramps in orbit. Now it denies all of these statements: "Nothing has ever changed since I have been here" (p.296). Tramps, material objects, space, sound, light, all are figments of the imagination, attempts to attenuate the harshness of the Reduction:

> There, now there is no one here but me, no one wheels about me, no one comes towards me ... these creatures have never been, only I and this black void have ever been. And the sounds? No, all is silent. And the lights ... must they too go out? Yes, out with them, there is no light here ... Nothing then but me, of which I know nothing, except that I have never uttered, and this black, of which I know nothing either ....
>
> p. 306.

Systematically, the voice rejects the protagonists of the earlier novels: "All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time ... speak of them when ... I should have spoken of me and of me alone" (p.305). The same renunciation is made in the Texts. In each case the voice disclaims any relationship with the tramps, its "delegates" (p.299), creatures who stood in its place but who bore no essential relation to it. Where Murphy sought to leave the sphere of matter behind, to withdraw into that of mind, the movement is now reversed, or rather viewed from the other side: the mind disclaims its connection with the material-spiritual entity known as Murphy, or Molloy or Malone or Watt.

Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that we are at the end of the line. "Nothing then but me, of which I know nothing," explains the voice in a passage just quoted, "except that I have never uttered." (My italics.) The voice is not its own master. It too, is a kind of "delegate" for someone else. The Unnamable, which stands behind the voice, denies its identity with the voice through the voice itself: "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me" (p. 293). Beckett's subject is the silence one stage removed from the voice, "voice that speaks, knowing that it lies ... It is not mine, I have none, I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know ..." (p. 309). This is the situation of van Velde who, unable to paint, paints. The Unnamable exists as a mind-within-the-mind, like Murphy's third level of inwardness, a point within consciousness which is so particular, so irreducible, that it can have no links with the outside, even with the very voice of consciousness which expresses it. The Unnamable cannot be any of the things said of it: as the ultimate alogon, the very essence of all incompatibles, it must be conceived as a negative, an impossible negative which cannot be dismissed because, like the Beckett characters, it exists, it is a non-event which happens, a being-nothing that is there. Its presence is felt behind every Beckett novel but it is at this stage openly the subject of concern. In a sense, of course, it was always that, as the mysterious source of things sought by Murphy meditating in his room or observing the cells of the Mercyseat lunatics, avoided unsuccessfully by Watt in his rearguard struggle to remain in the world of normality, sought once more by Moran on Molloy's trail, by Molloy looking for his mother, by Malone waiting for the end, by Macmann in his asylum, by Mahood orbiting towards his family. The Unnamable was written at the time of the Duthuit interview and in its light the latter falls easily into place. Beckett has gone from the Occasionalist disintegration of the material and the spiritual to the realm of mind. After that he has reduced the mind itself to bare consciousness, to the voice within a skull, a counterpart of the earlier image of a man within a room. Finally, he has reduced the voice of consciousness to the silent, negative presence which is the very soul of consciousness. It is the end of the Reduction and the Irreducible has been explicitly revealed in an extraordinary seesaw of assertion and negation.

Insofar as the direction of Beckett's movement has been at all observed by the critics it has been viewed as a search for Self, for the mystery of human identity. So far this approach does not seem to have proved very enlightening. For the purposes of this thesis Kenner's insistence on Beckett's obsessive interest in the Cartesian _cogito_ is more relevant. It is clear that, if we refer Beckett's work to the seventeenth century philosophers, what I have termed the Reduction may be viewed as an illustration of methodical Cartesian doubt applied to the entire sphere of human reality and coloured at the same time by a Stoic ethic of resignation derived from Spinoza or Geulincx. Likewise the end product of the Reduction may be viewed as the _cogito_, the one thing beyond doubt, or, again, as the true Leibnizian monad, the ultimate, indivisible unit of existence. But there are obvious limitations to this interpretation of Beckett and they follow from what has already been said about the nature of the Unnamable. Beckett's Irreducible, after all, denies identity with the _voice_ which in speaking unfolds the sequences of the novel. The Irreducible is that which is _beneath_ consciousness , not consciousness itself. Descartes' _cogito_, for all its unlikeness to matter, is conceived as a thinking substance, a _res_, a thing. The Leibnizian monad, though immaterial, is also a substance. But Beckett's subject is nothing at all, a being utterly negative, impossible to define. Thus Beckett's Cartesian Reduction, his Occasionalism and his monadology point in a direction which is uniquely Samuel Beckett, towards something that is not a thinking Self nor even pure Thought but, if we may distort Kierkegaard's phrase, passionate absence.

After _The Unnamable_ the Reduction of necessity comes to a halt. Beckett's last novel, How it is, published in the English version in 1964, is really a prose poem like Finnegans Wake, so that the Reduction focusses on the use of language. There is a protagonist, sometimes known as Pim, who has the remains of a body and is capable of motion, crawling in the mud of a Dantean landscape, dragging a sack of provisions, edging towards another of his kind:

> take the cord from the sack there's another object tie
> the neck of the sack hang it from my neck knowing I'll
> need both hands or else instinct it's one or the other
> and away right leg right arm push pull ten yards fifteen
> yards halt[12]

When two creatures meet the relationship is hardly more fruitful than others depicted in earlier novels. Moreover, this relation and indeed all that the voice narrates is at the end emphatically rejected as false. We are back to The Unnamable; there is no relation, no Pim, no sack, no movement, only a naked presence:

> if all that all that yes if all that is not how shall
> I say no answer if all that is not false yes
>
> all these calculations yes explanations yes the whole
> story from beginning to end yes completely false yes
>
> . . .
>
> there was something yes but nothing of all that
> no all balls from start to finish yes this voice
> quaqua yes all balls yes only one voice here yes
> mine yes when the panting stops yes
>
> pp.157-158.

As in The Unnamable the voice itself is denounced as "scraps of an ancient voice in me not mine" (p.7). The novel's core, once again, is the Reduction of reality ("how it is") to a mysterious substratum, the ghost in Beckett's machine.

Beckett's later prose adds little to this. From an Abandoned Work (prior to How it is) returns us to the aimless wanderer. Imagination Dead Imagine (1965) and Ping (1967), both originally in French, return to the world of The Unnamable. Imagination Dead Imagine, a bare seven pages of beautiful prose offered to the gullible at an outrageous price, describes a closed space, like the inside of an egg, containing two immobile and silent bodies not in contact with each other and barely conscious. It is the archetypal Beckett situation. Ping describes the similar state of a single creature: "Head haught eyes light blue almost white fixed front ping murmur ping silence" (p.166). Of course "ping" indicates the impossible event, the fact of something taking its course, a murmur breaking the silence, in the final analysis, the Irreducible. Enough (found with the above-mentioned texts in the 1967 No's Knife collection of Beckett's shorter prose) resembles Watt in its subject matter and may be omitted from the present discussion. Lessness, a prose poem originally titled Sans and one of Beckett's most recent works, keeps to the world of Ping. Here amid signs of advanced decay waits a "little body grey face features crack and little holes two pale blue."[13] The eyes are those of many Beckett characters, the little holes, one for speech and the other for what in Beckett, as in Joyce, amounts to the same thing, recall the tiny apertures at either end of the Unnamable reduced to the proportions of an egg. The vacant stare, of course, mirrors the indifference of the Geulincx Stoic: "Blank plains sheer white eye calm long last all gone from mind" (12). No movement is possible, no change and yet "in the sand no hold one step more in the endlessness he will make it" (25). It is the impossible step, the movement which is not movement, in a sand which gives no hold and which, in its very structure, recalls the harmonious union of incompatibles of a universe of monads. As long as a single step is conceivable the Reduction to "lessness" continues and the Irreducible - "true refuge long last towards which so many false time out of mind" (1) - remains just out of reach.

From the perspectives provided by the novels it is not difficult to trace a similar process towards the negative in Beckett's drama. Waiting for Godot belongs to the stage reached in the trilogy though it does not take the Reduction as far as does The Unnamable. It is unnecessary to recall in any detail the subject matter of the best known play of our time. Yet one can see, particularly if one relates the play to the trilogy, that the process of simplification in Waiting for Godot is oriented towards an Irreducible. Vladimir and Estragon, though reliant on each other, experience the reality of solitude. Like earlier tramps they have minimal possessions - carrots, boots, hats recall Malone's inventory - are social rejects, physically decrepit, with only the vaguest sense of purpose in life. Estragon's failures of memory especially reiterate the argument of Proust, that without memory is no enduring human presence, no identity. As the play proceeds, the pattern of disintegration becomes more pronounced. Pozzo, once something of a healthy Moran type, goes blind, Lucky, that inspired Beckettian orator, becomes dumb. In act two all four characters collapse to the floor and remain so for some time. But the real sine qua non of the play is the situation of waiting. To wait is to do something so minimal that one may as well say that it is to do nothing. Waiting is action reduced to its absolute zero. The first words of Waiting for Godot are "Nothing to be done,"[14] the last "Yes, let's go," with the stage direction,"they do not move"(p.94). Man, reduced to waiting, is reduced to negative action: he cannot act and yet he can continue not to act, he can even act less and less as he waits more and more. Thus the true alogon of Waiting for Godot is primarily not that being-nothing, the tramp, but the irreducible of motion, the non-event which takes place. This is the impossible embodied in the situation of Vladimir and Estragon, that when action is shorn of all incidentals, something remains, the negative existence of a vigil: I wait therefore I am. We may, perhaps, discern a likeness between the absent Godot and Mr. Knott. In that case Godot too is a kind of *sine qua non*, an absent presence recalling Knott's present absence. But fundamentally, the unnamable of *Waiting for Godot* is the nothing-happening, the fall of sand:

> ESTRAGON : Let's go.
> VLADIMIR : We can't.
> ESTRAGON : Why not?
> VLADIMIR : We're waiting for Godot.
>
> p. 71.

Caught in the tension of a spring which has been wound to a standstill the tramp murmurs: *e pur si muove*.

Endgame (in English, 1958) depicts a more despairing though still essentially comic version of the same thing. The theme, as suggested by the title, is the impossible seesaw of a world which endures after it is reduced to nothing. Clov gazes through his telescope:

> CLOV : ... Let's see. (*He looks, moving the telescope.*) Zero... (*he looks*) ... zero ... (*he looks*) ... and zero.
>
> p.25.

The play is contracted to the room-skull milieu of the novels, Hamm, Nell and Nagg have lost control over their bodies and sit or crouch with little movement. Hamm is blind. It is a game of chess with an unseeing Mr. Endon and though it is continually being lost it continues to be played. Hamm opens: "Me - (*he yawns*) - to play" (p.12). Later he amplifies: "Me to play. (Pause. Wearily.) Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing" (p.51). His only action is to recall or invent a little and Clov, the only one still on his feet, is ready to leave in the final scene. The game is one of elimination and attrition, moving always closer to the goal of the negative. Once again, however, something remains, the factual presence of the characters, the mind of Hamm that hovers on the brink of inexistence but, like the voice of the Unnamable or the murmur in the mud of How it is, continues to be. Clov does not quite leave and a child is discovered outside which signifies, quite simply, that the game is not over since new life has appeared to upset the consistency of the void. Thus Clov's hope - "finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (p.12) - is not realized and the silence of the Unnamable is out of reach. At the same time the mystery of the Unnamable is everywhere present. The impossible happens, not as the awaited end of things but as the fact of a happening which preserves the precarious balance of the status quo: "Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap" (p.12).

Beckett's other stage plays observe the one phenomenon from different angles. Krapp's Last Tape (1958) shows the personality in disintegration by focussing on the failure of memory to effectively link the man of the present with his own past. It is Beckett's most complete comment on the Proustian solution. But while connections are lost the voice of the cogito drones on. More significant, from the viewpoint of this thesis, is Happy Days (1961). Winnie is alone insofar as her relations with her husband Willie are minimal. She is embedded in sand - Clov's "impossible heap" - up to her waist in act one and, in act two, her neck and so reduced to absolute fixity. Like Vladimir and Estragon or Malone she has few possessions - her bag, her umbrella - and in the end loses the use of all of them. At one point Winnie is recognizably akin to the Unnamable:

> I speak of when I was not yet caught - in this way - and had my legs ... and could seek out a shady place ... when I was tired of the sun, or a sunny place when I was tired of the shade ... and they are all empty words ... It is no hotter today than yesterday, it will be no hotter tomorrow than today, how could it, and so on back into the far past, forward into the far future ....[15]

Here and elsewhere in the play the hint recalls the rejection of all change in the earlier work, the negation of all but the irreducible fact of things. Winnie hears the fall of sand: "Sounds. (Pause.) Like little ... sunderings, little falls ... apart. (Pause. Low.) It's things, Willie" (p.40). It is a sound which affirms both the disintegration prophesied by Lucky, the Occasionalist fragmentation of life, and the positivity of an event, a being-nothing: "Yes, something seems to have occurred, something has seemed to occur, and nothing has occurred, nothing at all ..." (p.30). If the Reduction has not gone so far in Happy Days as to really expose the void that exists, it does so in Play (1964). Here the characters are fixed in jars and without any contact with each other. Each is a tormented voice affirming endlessly the reality of being-nothing. The alogon has lost his engaging intelligence and degenerated to a horrifying puppet.

Beckett's radio plays in some respects approximate to the novels. The Reduction begins with All that Fall (1957), a study of loneliness and "lingering dissolution"[16] which focusses largely on the decay of the body. Embers (1959) dramatizes the horror of solitude. Its protagonist, like the Unnamable, talks compulsively. Of course Beckett's embers will not go out any more than his endgame will end; they image both the Reduction and the indestructible residue. *Words and Music* (1962) is less obviously relevant to the present argument. In *Cascando* (1963) we return to a voice obsessively seeking - in this case a tramp called Woburn, himself involved in an obscure search which, in the light of Beckett's work as a whole, is recognized as the old search for the negative source.

Some mention should be made of *Film* (1965) and the television play *Eh Joe* (1966). As the stage plays reduce man to a presence and the radio plays, like the novels, to a voice, so Beckett's screen work reduces him to an image. *Eh Joe* shows us a man in a room and gradually brings him closer until his face appears in an unbearable closeup. At the same time the protagonist's guilt-ridden mind comments unendingly on a past event. The voice is, of course, that of the *cogito*, and, in the Beckett context, a sign of yet another presence beneath it. In *Film* - played by Buster Keaton - there is no speech and the *cogito* exists as self-consciousness. There is a movement away from the social, towards the awareness of oneself as irreducible presence.

A brief survey of Beckett's output is enough to testify to the writer's extraordinary fidelity to a central theme which I have called the Irreducible or the Impossible and to a fundamental movement which is the reduction of reality to a zero point. The extreme argument put forward in the interview with Georges Duthuit is actually put into practice again and again in Beckett's work. In this chapter attention has been focussed not on the ideal of an inexpressive art but rather on the impossible subject matter of such an art, a nothingness which subsists. Beckett's recurring image for this subject, first portrayed in the guise of a "delegate" tramp and finally revealed in its negativity, is the *alogon* or Unnamable, a being-nothing in a universe of non-relations where every happening is an Occasionalist miracle and a non-event.

So far the only interpretation offered of the Irreducible has been shown to be inadequate. Beckett's last stop is not the Cartesian _cogito_ which represents only the penultimate stage of the Reduction; nor is it the Leibnizian monad. The Irreducible, as an absolute particular, cannot be conceived except as a negative with the paradoxical proviso that it must be said to _be_, at least in some sense. It cannot, at any rate, be identified with the voice of consciousness, that is, with consciousness, but only with that obscure origin of things which is also the operative presence beneath the _cogito_. The next few chapters of this thesis will examine the nature of the one Beckett subject with the wider perspectives supplied by the philosophies of some of Beckett's contemporaries.

CHAPTER 2

BECKETT : THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

> Its Being-what-it-is (*essentia*) must, so far as we can speak of it at all, be conceived in terms of its Being (*existentia*).[1]
>
> Heidegger.

Beckett demands to be seriously treated as a philosophical writer and this fact is already generally recognized. There is no question of turning the writer into a philosopher pure and simple, of course, or into an imitator of the philosophers. Whatever Beckett shares with the philosophers, he has made it his own and he has made it art. With this proviso, however, the parallel is worth pursuing because it helps the critic to delineate more adequately the framework of Beckett's vision, that is, it helps us to see Beckett *as he is*. As long as the comparison is always subordinate to this aim we remain in the sphere proper to literary criticism.

So far the discussion of the Beckett subject has appealed only to seventeenth and eighteenth century systems of ideas. Of necessity the relevance of these systems to works of art produced in the twentieth century is limited. Beckett's Occasionalism, as I have emphasized, is not exactly the Occasionalism of Geulincx or Malebranche; nor is his insistence on the *cogito* exactly Cartesian, or his concern with the monad exactly Leibnizian. Beckett uses the philosophers as he uses Dante, without necessarily sharing their outlook. It is enough to point out that for Descartes, Geulincx, Malebranche and Leibniz a deity seemed a fundamental requirement of any philosophical system. Beckett borrows the structure but leaves out its soul, or rather replaces it with something of his own - the Unnamable. In so doing he is already, in a general sense, moving from the Cartesian scene to that of the modern world. This does not mean that the validity of the comparison made in the previous chapter is to be questioned, only that a comparison with modern philosophy may begin where the other leaves off. To some extent the value of this procedure is assumed by most Beckett critics. But the appeal to Heidegger, Sartre or even Camus is inevitably made only in passing. We are told about the void or about the Absurd or, occasionally, dread and always more or less in a context of vagueness and generality. As a result little of a concrete sort is settled either with respect to philosophy or to Beckett who takes on the anaemic appearance of a topical journalist, neither philosopher nor artist. But Beckett's work is far more than a statement of fashionable clichés, and consequently it is vital that a thesis which wishes to refer it to the existential tradition should be concerned not with superficial similarities but with fundamentals, properly analysed and brought to light. For this reason some trouble has been taken in the previous chapter to isolate the core of Beckett's obsession and further trouble will be taken in this and other chapters to do full justice to the philosophers also.

If one can say that Beckett's novels often illustrate in miniature the novel's historical development from the Picaresque to the psychological one can with even more justification argue that Beckett's work as a whole represents nothing less than a literary recapitulation of an entire tradition in philosophy from Descartes and his contemporaries to the present day or, more specifically, from the rationalist stream of the seventeenth century to the Idealists and, finally, to the existential movement. What happens is that Beckett develops an essentially Cartesian Reduction along existential lines and, from time to time, with a backward glance at the Idealist solution. The truth of this statement needs to be demonstrated, of course, and it is the aim of the first section of this thesis to do it. Beckett's relation to the Occasionalists, to Descartes, to Leibniz and to Spinoza has already been discussed. It remains to show that Beckett's approach is also existential and, to a very much lesser extent, Idealist. This twofold comparison is important since it has some application to Ionesco and, in another context, to Genet. All of the writers studied in this thesis adopt an existential vision while at the same time tending away from it, generally in the direction of Idealism, and this is not altogether surprising in view of the connection that exists between the two philosophies. However, only in Beckett's work do we find a perspective sufficiently broad to include the seventeenth century origins of both the Idealist and the existential approaches. This chapter will introduce the analysis of Beckett in terms of Existence philosophy with a brief survey of the existential tradition, particularly insofar as it relates to the other philosophies mentioned above.

Descartes' philosophical distinction between body and mind images the choice facing European thought after the Renaissance: on the one hand a stress on mind, on the other, on matter. The alternative may be expressed in various ways, as a choice between the mathematical and the experimental, or between the theory of innate ideas, upheld by Descartes and Leibniz, and that of the tabula rasa, upheld with variations by the British empiricists from Locke to Hume, or between a rationalist approach in general and one characterized by a distrust of reason and a respect for the inductive method. Of course it would be rash to suppose that such a neat division of philosophical trends after Descartes represents anything other than a simplification of the truth. Nevertheless, there is some value for this thesis in emphasizing a significant divergence between the rationalist and the empiricist lines since this helps to put the existential in perspective.

Excessive stress on the primacy of mind has led historically to Idealism, to the assertion that Absolute Thought is prior to matter. Alternatively, an extreme emphasis on the priority of sense-impressions has defined the empiricist tradition from Locke to the present. On the one hand matter, enveloped by mind, begins to assume a nebulous quality, on the other, material processes invade the sphere of mind and reduce its activities to those of a mere mechanism. Existential philosophy has developed largely out of the systems of the German Idealists. To that extent it has retained the distinctive characteristics of a philosophy of mind: a vital awareness of the reality of the cogito, a sense of the creative power of thought. Yet at the same time it has emerged as a revolt against Idealism. Kierkegaard, one of the first and most seminal philosophers of Existence, attended Schelling's lectures in Berlin and understood the Hegelian synthesis as perhaps few have done. On the basis of this knowledge he delivered a most effective attack on Hegel although one whose validity was not widely recognized at the time. Modern existential philosophy has preserved the ambivalence of these and similar origins. It has retained the Idealist bias insofar as it views the mind as creative, as active in perception rather than as simply subject to outside impressions, but has modified it insofar as it refuses to allow the cogito or the Idealist's pure Thought a reality philosophically prior to the material world of human existence. It is possible to maintain, therefore, that the existential is a bridge between Idealism or, more generally, a rational approach, and the empirical tradition, that philosophers of Existence have in a real sense attempted to bring together again the two halves of human reality separated by Descartes.

Although the work of the most important contemporary existential thinkers, Heidegger and Sartre, may be traced back simultaneously to Hegel and to Kierkegaard's celebrated critique, it is more usual to refer it to the immediate influence of Edmund Husserl. Husserl held the chair at Freiburg before Heidegger and gave the existential movement in the twentieth century an impetus as vital as that given by Kierkegaard, although it is necessary to add that Husserl's technical bias is as far removed as one can imagine from the spontaneous philosophizing of Kierkegaard and, moreover, owes nothing to it. It should be stated too that Husserl himself is not an existential philosopher and that his approach could only be adopted by Heidegger and Sartre in a modified form. In the Ideas, which appeared in 1913, Husserl, like Descartes before him, announces his discovery of a new basis for philosophy, comparable in its importance to the cogito. Writing with excited conviction, he calls it "the secret longing of the whole philosophy of modern times."[2] The parallel with Descartes is drawn deliberately, not only to point out the similarity of the two endeavours but also the difference between them. For Husserl:

> Philosophy can take root only in radical reflexion upon the meaning and possibility of its own scheme. Through such reflexion it must in the very first place and through its own activity take possession of the absolute ground of pure pre-conceptual experience, which is its own proper preserve; then, self-active again, it must create original concepts, adequately adjusted to this ground, and so generally utilize for its advance an absolutely transparent method. There can then be no unclear, problematical concepts, and no paradoxes.[3]

This reads like a Cartesian programme. There is the same concern for a systematic doubt, a movement back to a reliable ground, and, once that is found, for a process of rebuilding on a basis of what, for Descartes, were innate, clear and distinct ideas. Thus Husserl argues:

> ... we would stress the point firmly, we have not been arguing academically from a philosophical standpoint fixed in advance, we have not made use of traditional ... philosophical theories, but on lines which are in the strictest sense fundamental have shown up certain features, i.e., given true expression to distinctions which are directly given to us in intuition.[4]

In his Cartesian Meditations, an expansion of lectures given at the Sorbonne in 1929, Husserl makes the link with the French philosopher explicit. His approach, he states, "might almost" be termed "a neo-Cartesianism,"[5] not in the sense that it borrows the content of the Cartesian philosophy but in the sense that it reaffirms the validity of its method. Husserl believes that what he has found avoids the weaknesses of the Cartesian, above all, that it is not a theory among others but a "concrete science"[6] - which he terms Phenomenology - a new and radical beginning:

> ... we start out from that which antedates all standpoints: from the totality of the intuitively self-given which is prior to any theorizing reflexion, from all that one can immediately see and lay hold of ....[7]

The new position which antedates all others is not exactly Cartesian. If it were it would lead to yet another philosophical rift between spirit and matter. Nor is it exactly Idealist, since Husserl does not begin with the privileged position of the Hegelian theorizer, the "thought without a thinker"[8] ridiculed by Kierkegaard in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript. In fact Husserl modifies nineteenth century Idealism as Descartes modified the jaded Scholasticism of his day, although he does not move as far from Idealism as the other did from the philosophy of the schools. He begins with a doubt more systematic than Descartes'. Everything must go, even the cogito ergo sum. But one thing remains - not, as Descartes thought, the existing thinker - but a phenomenon. We cannot say whether this phenomenon, a thinker and the object of his thought, exists or not:

> But, no matter what the status of this phenomenon's claim to actuality and no matter whether, at some future time, I decide critically that the world exists or that it is an illusion, still this phenomenon itself, as mine, is not nothing ....[9]

The whole sphere of what exists, then, "is not accepted as actuality, but only as an actuality-phenomenon."[10] And this because, even if in practice I must accept the ontological reality of things, a theoretical doubt is possible. It might be suggested that, in spite of appearances, a Cartesian demon is intent on fooling me, that everything which appears to be is in fact merely a dream or a hallucination. Husserl's conclusion is simple: he will accept reality as appearance, as a phenomenon and no more. This does not mean that one doubts in fact, simply that for the sake of a possible doubt, one puts the existence of things as it were in a "bracket." Husserl asks us to suspend judgement on the existence of the phenomenon and to consider the phenomenon as phenomenon. It may be that there is no table but I do perceive a table and it is perfectly possible for me to discuss the phenomenon of the table even if I cannot be sure of the table's existence. In this way I sidestep the closed road of Idealism. To examine the phenomenon as such implies no outrageous metaphysics, only a descriptive, that is, a scientific approach to reality, an examination not of the Existence but of the Essence of things. Of course the phenomenon as Husserl tackles it is an idea. Thus Phenomenology becomes a science of Essences, an Eidetic science, and the celebrated "bracket" the Phenomenological or Eidetic Reduction, the Epochē, "a certain refraining from judgement which is compatible with the unshaken and unshakable because self-evidencing conviction of Truth."[11]

But it is difficult not to feel that the phenomenological tightrope is ready at every moment to tumble us back into the Idealist net. If the truth of the table's existence is "unshaken and unshakable" the Epochē would seem to be redundant. If the Epochē is necessary then there is real doubt and the phenomenological odyssey has been less successful than the Cartesian because, while it escapes the mind-matter antithesis which follows from the cogito, it leaves us in a world of ideas. It is interesting to note that already in the Cartesian Meditations Husserl is placing less and less emphasis on existence and correspondingly more on the Epochē. As long as the question of the ontological status of the phenomenon is left open, of course, Husserl avoids the Idealist tendency to give thought priority over concrete reality. At the same time his stress brings him close to the Idealist position. At times the phenomenon suggests a world of Platonic Ideas or, again, the phenomenological observer who, by means of the Epochē, withdraws himself from the sphere of the existential suggests the Hegelian thinker. Husserl does not help matters by terming the observer whose phenomenal experiance is in question the transcendental Ego. This Ego, Husserl's equivalent of the subject of the cogito, "is antecedent to the natural being of the world,"[12] since the world appears as its idea. One at least gains the impression that, as likely as not, the entire sphere of the material has its origins in the mind of the Ego who performs the Phenomenological Reduction, that it exists simply as an object of the Existence but of the Essence of things. Of course the phenomenon as Husserl tackles it is an idea. Thus Phenomenology becomes a science of Essences, an Eidetic science, and the celebrated "bracket" the Phenomenological or Eidetic Reduction, the *Epochē*, "*a certain refraining from judgement which is compatible with the unshaken and unshakable because self-evidencing conviction of Truth*."[11]

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The curious thing about Husserl's philosophy, however, is that it requires only one major alteration in order to serve as the basis for an existential approach. If we discard the Epochē and call the phenomenon (or the transcendental Ego who contains ideally the entire world) Existence, then we leave Idealism behind and transform Phenomenology into a philosophical method for coming to terms not with ideas alone but with the whole of existing reality. This is precisely the shift which brings us to the position of Heidegger and Sartre. There is no point in "bracketing" the existence of a given phenomenon. In examining the phenomenon as if it existed one is in effect saying that it does exist. Consequently one may as well base one's philosophizing not on the phenomenon regarded as an idea but on the phenomenon regarded as existing, that is, on the phenomenon of Existence. "That which antedates all standpoints," the "intuitively self-given which is prior to any theorizing reflexion" now takes on a new meaning and one which is of central importance to this thesis.

Viewed retrospectively from the existential development of his position, Husserl appears to take his stand behind the cogito and the Idealist pure Thought because of his insistence that consciousness is "intentional," that it presupposes an object, that to be conscious is always to be conscious of something. The idea, as Husserl acknowledges, is Franz Brentano's,[13] but it is Husserl who makes good use of it: "In this manner ... every conscious process is ... consciousness of such and such, regardless of what the ... actuality-status of this objective such and such may be ...."[14] Of course the spectre of Idealism is present. The table of which I am conscious may simply be an idea, no more. But in the hands of later thinkers, that is to say once the "bracket" is ignored, Husserl's dictum is of major significance and its implications are many. Granted that we are speaking of existing reality and not simply of ideas, the statement that all consciousness is consciousness of something avoids the horns of the Idealist and the Realist dilemma by rejecting the independence in the act of perception of subject and object, that is, of mind and its world as object of knowledge. We do not, like the Idealists, reduce the world to mind or, like the Realists, speak as if knowing subject and known object were separate entities (or, like the empiricists, reduce the mind to matter). Rather we begin with a phenomenon that is single, the phenomenon of "consciousness-of," that is, with a phenomenological unity of mind and matter, subject and object, man and world. This is Husserl's ground of "transcendental subjectivity"[15] without its Idealist bias, not the subjectivity of the cogito or that of the Idealist Absolute, nor the objectivity of the empiricist, but a subjectivity which links itself to the outside world and so transcends itself and turns into objectivity. From this standpoint the philosopher forfeits the privileged position of the Hegelian. There is no question of gazing detachedly at the world from the heights of an Absolute. On the contrary, the existential phenomenologist can only survey the world from the inside as it were, that is, as involved in the world about him, as mind intimately associated from beginning to end with what is other than mind. It follows that extreme epistemological scepticism is untenable. A consciousness which, unlike the cogito or the Absolute, is bound to exist as a consciousness of something outside itself cannot question the reality of the world any more than it can question its own reality. The primordial intuition of consciousness will be indistinguishable from the empirical consciousness of the world. Thus all philosophizing will follow, rather than precede, the spontaneous acknowledgement of the philosopher's connection with his environment. In this way a basis is discovered for a philosophy which can lay claim both to subjective and objective criteria, a philosophy which begins with mind but does not stop there, a concrete rather than abstract line of approach.

Husserl's difficulty is that he will not commit himself as regards the existential status of the phenomenon "consciousness-of." From the point of view of Heidegger and Sartre his approach suggests a way out of nineteenth century metaphysics because it situates the thinking subject firmly in a world, Husserl's "my world-about-me."[16] At the same time, as long as we continue to question the existence of the phenomenon, that is, as long as we continue to apply the "bracket" we threaten the entire structure: what value is there in the idea of "intentional" consciousness if both consciousness and its intentional object remain in the shadowy realm of the idea? In order, as they see it, to safeguard the positive achievements of the phenomenological approach, Heidegger and Sartre therefore ignore Husserl's Epochē and identify the unitary phenomenon, "consciousness-of," with Existence rather than with Essence.

This simultaneous reliance upon and rejection of Husserl's approach emerges clearly in Sartre's description of the existential position in L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme. Sartre is speaking for Heidegger as well as for himself, although in Sartrean language, and he sets out to illustrate the nature of the existential approach by contrasting it with the Cartesian. The existential thinker, Sartre argues, does not begin with the cogito. Rather, the familiar dictum is reversed and "I am" precedes "I think." Existence is logically prior to the cogito and to the res cogitans, the subject of the cogito. This means that one is before one thinks, one exists before one is something in particular or, as Sartre puts it, Existence precedes Essence. In other terms again we can say that there is no such thing as an inbuilt Essence, that _what_ a man is is precisely his manner of existing, or that a man _is_ what he _does_. Thus Sartre does not talk about man as if he were the Cartesian thinking being. On the contrary, man is a being that exists and the implication of this is precisely the phenomenological approach as Sartre sees it. To begin with mind or thought is to separate subject from object, mind from matter, man from his world. To begin with man as _existing_ is to base oneself on the phenomenological unity of consciousness and its object, to return to Husserl's dictum that consciousness is always consciousness _of_ something. _Thinking_ man has to make an effort to escape the Idealist conclusion - that mind is the fundamental principle of things - or the Occasionalist disjunction of mind and matter which is Descartes' legacy to Geulincx and Malebranche. _Existing_ man needs to make no effort at all: one does not exist in a vacuum, one exists _somewhere_ and so in relation to other existing things. If one is to _be_ as a result of _doing_ one needs a world as an area of operations. Thus Sartre does not speak of man as a substance, as something self-enclosed, separated from his world - even, as does Husserl, of man as an Ego - but of "human reality." Likewise Heidegger speaks of _dasein_, of man as a being-_there_ (_da_) or a being-in-the-world. As in Sartre this involves the proposition that man's

> "essence"... lies in its "to be." Its Being-what-it-is (_essentia_) must, so far as we can speak of it at all, be conceived in terms of its Being (_existentia_).[17]

The shift away from Husserl is as significant as the evidence of a continuity of inspiration. Husserl, in order to escape the Cartesian dichotomy, stresses the organic unity of consciousness and its world but at the Idealist price of reducing all to mind or at least of focussing exclusively upon the sphere of Essence.

The later philosophers retain Husserl's emphasis on the organic, while, at the same time, grounding their arguments not in the idea of Essence but Existence. Consciousness and its object remains a unitary phenomenon, a "consciousness-of" entity, but receives a new name: Existence. Phenomenology now ceases to be an Eidetic science, a science of ideas and becomes an existential approach, an ontology or study of the phenomenon as existing. In the early chapters of Being and Time - which he dedicates to Husserl - Heidegger proposes the Husserlian method and then adds: "With regard to its subject matter, phenomenology is the science of the Being of entities - ontology."[18] Sartre, writing sixteen years later in 1943, echoes this in the title of his major work: L'Etre et le Néant, essai d'ontologie phénoménologique.

A number of important conclusions are possible at this stage. Whereas for Husserl, a philosopher in whom the Cartesian, Idealist and existential traditions meet in a unique and seminal way, Phenomenology tends towards the idea , in the hands of Heidegger and Sartre it becomes identified with the sphere of concrete being so that the emphasis shifts to man as existing in a real world. The existential philosopher has been rescued from the legacy of the cogito. Of course the Idealist origins of his stand are still visible. He is not an empiricist and continues to take his stand on mind. But because he insists on situating mind in a material environment, because he refuses to separate mind from its material context, he is able to construct a bridge which spans the extremes of Idealism and empiricism. A creature whose essence is to exist is necessarily, not simply accidentally, related to his world. In Heideggerian or Sartrean terms he is ontologically related to it, involved, in his very being, in a material and mental field of operations: the world. It could be said too, that in spite of its fundamental disagreement with Descartes, the existential or phenomenological approach preserves a Cartesian flavour and so clearly reveals its ultimate source. The cogito ergo sum, after all, may be taken in two ways. For all his stress on thought, for all his incipient Occasionalism, Descartes did not think of his dictum as an argument, he did not intend to give his ergo the force of a conclusion. Rather, he thought of the cogito and the sum as two closely related aspects of a basic phenomenon. In this case sum ergo cogito might be thought an equally valid formulation of the idea - whose existential flavour is now apparent. To the extent that the Cartesian phrase may be reversed, according to the emphasis desired, it would not be misleading to say that in spite of the existential quarrel with Descartes and his legacy, the existential experiment is already implicit in the cogito ergo sum.

Enough has been said for the whole philosophical context of the existential to be apparent. Existentialism of the French variety or Existence philosophy in general must be traced back through Idealism to Descartes. At the same time it represents a reaction against Descartes and the Idealists in the direction of the other great philosophical line, empiricism. Thus it is best viewed as a philosophy midway between two extremes, deliberately balanced between the mental and the material, between the ghost and the machine.

It now remains for the Beckett Reduction which, as we have seen, is not quite Cartesian, to be examined in terms of the existential-phenomenological movement. Existential philosophy finds its ground not in the act of thought but in the act of being. It must be shown, therefore, that the Beckett subject, the tramp or, finally, the Unnamable, is more easily explicable in terms of the sum than in terms of the cogito, that Beckett's exclusive standpoint is comparable to Heidegger's or Sartre's, in short, that it is the standpoint of Existence. As well, it must be shown that Beckett looks back from this position to Idealism just as does, in its way, modern existential philosophy. When all of this is demonstrated Beckett will appear as spanning nothing less than an entire tradition in philosophy from the seventeenth century to the twentieth. It should be clear, though, from the analysis of the previous chapter, that this process cannot turn Beckett into a philosopher. What I am concerned to say is that, in his own artistic sphere, Beckett makes assumptions which, expressed philosophically, are those of Heidegger and Sartre.

CHAPTER 3

BECKETT AND SARTRE : THE UNNAMABLE AND THE POUR SOI

> Le néant ... c'est au sein même de l'être, en son coeur, comme un ver.[1]
>
> Sartre.

Before tackling the more general issue of Beckett and the existential we must pose a specific question: how relevant is the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre to a discussion of Beckett's fundamental concerns? This question is to some extent necessitated by the fact that some Beckett critics take an affirmative answer to it for granted without giving any reasons for their stand but above all it is necessitated by the tendency of the present analysis of Beckett's work. If the Irreducible is a kind of nothing it may prove similar to the Sartrean néant.

Sartre retains Husserl's idea that consciousness is always consciousness of and on this basis constructs a unique philosophy. If it is not possible to be conscious without an object of consciousness, it follows that objects of consciousness are prior to the mind, that the perceiver presupposes the perceived. Using different but related terms, we are repeating the dictum that Existence is prior to Essence, that consciousness requires a concrete world. In L'Etre et le Néant, Sartre's most important work, published in 1943 and responsible for the subsequent popularity of Existentialism, this argument is central:

> La conscience est conscience de quelque chose: cela signifie que la transcendence est structure constitutive de la conscience; c'est-à-dire que la conscience naît portée sur un être qui n'est pas elle.[2]

Consciousness requires for its being something other than itself, it is by its very nature a self-transcendence, a moving outwards from the sphere of the ideal to that of Existence. Sartre in stating this is not merely turning Idealism upside down and reiterating Husserl. He is introducing his own strange version of the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter. What is that something of which the mind is conscious? It is being, which is simply defined as anything of which one can say that it _is_. Being is positive, self-sufficient, requiring nothing beyond itself: it is therefore termed the in-itself, the _en soi_. Strictly speaking, being is self-identical, it is itself and only itself, "_l'inhérence à soi sans la moindre distance_,"[3] inherent in itself without distance. We can go on to say of it, though, that it is uncreated, has always been, is beyond affirmation and negation or the opposition of activity and passivity. In short, we can say of it many of the things said by the theologians of God whom Aquinas defined in the terms of Moses' vision of the burning bush: I am I am. The _en soi_ is "_massif_,"[4] it enters into no relations with what is other than itself. Transition, becoming, anything which permits us to envisage being as related to non-being - whatever changes from A to B must in some sense be conceived first as A-not-B and then as B-not-A, that is, as a not-yet or a no-longer - all that is forbidden on principle:

> Les passages, les devenirs, tout ce qui permet de dire que l'être n'est pas encore ce qu' il sera et qu' il est déjà ce qu' il n'est pas, tout cela lui est refusé par principe. Car l'être ... est ce qu' il est ... Il est pleine positivité ... Il est lui-même indéfiniment et il s'épuise à l'être.[5]

The mind in being conscious must of force be conscious of being, that is, of the _en soi_. But if it is conscious _of_ being it cannot itself _be_ being. Consciousness _of_ implies a dualism, an ontological differentiation. But there is only one alternative to being and that is nothingness. Thus consciousness emerges as the contradiction of being - as nothing at all, a void. Sartre therefore bases his system on a radical variation of the Cartesian severance of mind and body. Instead of these two alternatives he proposes a more existential division that cuts across that of mind and matter: one between nothingness and being, between human consciousness, the void which Sartre terms _pour soi_, and anything which in opposition to it may be said to _be_ - the _en soi_, object of consciousness. The mind, _pour soi_, is a "hole in being," "_ce trou d'être_."[6] To the question "how does a hole exist?" the answer is simple; it exists by virtue of the edge around it, that is to say, the _pour soi_ exists not "in itself" but insofar as it leans on the _en soi_ which is self-sufficient. Sartre is simply repeating his original premise that consciousness is consciousness _of_. The mind, its own hole, exists by filling itself with what is other than itself, with _being_, that is, it exists by virtue of its _objects_ of consciousness. If there were no being, no _en soi_ for the _pour soi_ to be conscious of, there would be no _pour soi_; on the other hand, without the _pour soi_ being would continue as before. Of course the hole which is consciousness can never be filled except at the moment of death. No matter how conscious _of_ being, the mind, by its very act of consciousness, maintains itself in its negativity. When the person dies, on the other hand, he is able to be objectified, he becomes _en soi_, object of those minds left alive behind him, he becomes being and ceases to be _pour soi_. Up to a point this is possible in the mind's lifetime. Anyone, insofar as he is constantly an object of a consciousness - either his own or another - participates in being, _en soi_. But, till the moment of death, there is always a part of himself which escapes objectification and so remains negative, _pour soi_.

Since being does not act - it simply is - the onus of a relation between being and nothingness falls on nothingness. It is consciousness, which, by its action, relates itself to being and so maintains itself in precarious existence. As nothingness it can have only negative relations with being. A table is being, en soi, so the mind cannot say "I am the table." On the contrary, as conscious of the table it dissociates itself from it. It must of force say "I am not the table," thus constituting the table as positive and itself as negative in the one act. The table is en soi, the mind is pour soi and the ontological gulf cannot be bridged except by the motion of separation: my relation to being lies in my negation of a relation. It is in this way that consciousness constitutes its world. There is no question of an Idealist creation. The world, that is, being, is prior to the mind. Nevertheless, being on its own is undifferentiated, it does not know itself. Only with the advent of mind or nothingness is being differentiated into a world of becoming, of transition, of variety. The mind separates being from being as Yahweh separated the waters of the firmament - and of course it separates being from being by a film of nothingness, that is, by introducing itself into the very heart of the en soi: "Le néant ... c'est au sein même de l'être, en son coeur, comme un ver." The pour soi gazes at being and in so doing proclaims: the table is not the chair is not the window is not the wall and so forth. It is like an acid which creates holes wherever it appears or a lubricant which insinuates itself everywhere in order to open crevices and fissures in the en soi, retreating to allow these spaces to be filled, then returning once again to open them. In this rhythm of separation and reunion the world - the world as it is for man - comes into being.

It must be added that the pour soi which exists as non-being, as negation of its objects of consciousness, exists equally as negation of itself. Nothingness is not itself; if it were self-identical it would be en soi. Rather, nothingness is separated from itself by itself, a hole torn apart by its own emptiness. The mind is, of course, self-conscious. But in being conscious of itself the mind is not viewing itself. It is focussing on itself as objectified, on itself as being. This objectified Self or Ego is not consciousness as such, it is one's personality, one's image of oneself, oneself as viewed from the outside only. In fact self-consciousness represents a failure on the part of the pour soi to coincide with itself, to be itself. The more consciousness tries to be itself by being conscious of itself, by as it were filling itself with itself, the more it proclaims its own non-coincidence, just as the more it tries to fill itself with being in general the more it constitutes itself as non-being, the more it separates itself from being.

Even at this early stage it is tempting to equate the Beckett Irreducible with the pour soi. Martin Esslin, a little too prone to rush in, has stated that Beckett's real concern is with identity - and so it is, although in terms more sophisticated than Esslin imagines - and that in the Unnamable the artist reaches "that very centre of nothingness, that state of pure potentiality by which Sartre defines Being-for-Itself."[7] The Unnamable thus becomes the core of human personality and comparable to the pour soi. However, leaving aside the question of Esslin's inadequate analysis either of the Unnamable or of Sartre, the matter cannot be settled so easily. It is true that Beckett's concern is with a negative or rather with what has here been termed being-nothing. It is also true that, like Sartre, Beckett conceives of nothingness as something actual, something that demands serious attention. In the words attributed to Democritus of Abdera in Malone Dies: "Nothing is more real than nothing" (p.193). But any comparison between Beckett's vision and Sartre's must proceed with caution if it is to achieve anything. This chapter will begin by discussing first the Irreducible, then the Reduction, in Sartrean terms. After that it will move to wider considerations involving the Sartrean notions of nausea, freedom and human relations.

If the nothingness of the tramp and, ultimately, of the Unnamable, is revealed by a systematic negation of all that is positive, there is some evidence, especially in the trilogy, to support the thesis that the Beckett Irreducible secretes the same néant as the pour soi. Like Sartrean consciousness Molloy wants "to fill in the holes of words," those words which represent the voice of consciousness, "till all is blank and flat" (p. 13). Molloy, searching for his own origins, does not know himself: "even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate" (p. 31). Malone continually interrupts his tale in disgust to initiate the long flow of negations which culminate in The Unnamable:

> But what matter whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying, I shall go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is I do, nor who I am, nor where I am, nor if I am.
> p.226.

The Unnamable denies all positives steadily and for over a hundred pages, as we have seen, under the obligation "to begin again, to start again from nowhere, fron no one and from nothing and to win to me again, to me here again ... unrecognizable at each fresh faring" (p.304), refusing to recognize itself in the "delegates," the tramps who represent it in the novels, those "mannikins" (p.308), "vice-exister[s]"(p. 317), "avatars" (p. 318), from Murphy to Malone, refusing to identify itself with its own situation ("sometimes it seems to me I am in a head ... But thence to conclude the head is mine, no, never," p. 222), refusing to acknowledge the voice as its own ("It issues from me, it fills me, it clamours against my walls, it is not mine," p. 309). "Shall I come upon my true countenance at last, bathing in a smile?" the Unnamable speculates, only to conclude in the negative: "I could employ fifty wretches for this sinister operation and still be short of a fifty-first, to close the circuit ..." (p. 341). No number of "delegates," no amount of positivity, no image will ever suffice to reveal a void: "I knew it, there might be a hundred of us and still we'd lack the hundred and first, we'll always be short of me" (p. 342).

Certainly in some respects the Unnamable appears as a *pour soi*, agonizingly conscious of its own absence, able to *be* only insofar as, like the *pour soi*, it is able to lean on a positive, on an image of itself, a "delegate" tramp. Just as the *pour soi*, even as it relies on the *en soi*, can only deny any connection with it, so the Beckett Irreducible, even as it seeks itself in the endless stories of tramps, is forced at last to collapse back on itself in the knowledge that it is *not* the tramp, that any connection with the tramp is purely negative. In exactly this way the Sartrean consciousness reflects itself in a positive image, an Ego or Self created in *mauvaise foi*. The *pour soi* cannot "be" anything, it can only *pretend* to be. So Sartre's waiter plays at being a waiter, is a waiter in the mode of *not* being a waiter. If he *were* a waiter he would not be conscious *of* being a waiter. Likewise if I *were* my own personality, my Ego, I would not be conscious *of* it. Consciousness implies a role, an act of "bad faith," because the Ego which I perceive myself to be in the gaze of reflection is not myself, it is a *something*, an attempt on my part to *be* - to be *en soi*. Significantly, the Unnamable rejects any connection with an Ego, an identity, in rejecting the tramps. Tormentors attempt to force it to accept an identity without success: "Do they believe I believe it is I who am speaking? That's theirs too. To make me believe I have an ego all my own, and can speak of it, as they of theirs" (p. 348). And the tormentors:

> But my dear man, come, be reasonable, look, this is you, look at this photograph, and here's your file ... come now, make an effort, at your age, to have no identity, it's a scandal ... look at this photograph, what, you see nothing ... no matter, here, look at this death's-head, you'll see, you'll be all right ... here, look, here's the record ....
>
> p.380.

But it is all denied. The Unnamable remains "something quite different, a wordless thing in an empty place" (p.390) and our concern continues to be "with someone, or ... with something, now we're getting it, someone or something that is not there, or that is not anywhere, or that is there, here, why not ..." (p.408). "There is no name for me, no pronoun for me" (p.408), pants the Unnamable, repeating over and over "But it's not I, it's not I" (p.403). It is playing a game in speaking of its "delegates," like Hamm - "Me - (he yawns) - to play" (p.12) - who also likes to identify himself with his stories, or like the narrator of How it is who repudiates in his final dramatic outburst all that he has previously stated:

> and this business of a procession no answer this business of a procession yes never any procession no nor any journey no never any Pim no nor any Bom no never anyone no only me no answer only me yes so that was true yes it was true about me yes and what's my name no answer WHAT'S MY NAME...
>
> p.159.

Is the whole world of the tramps, then, an act of self-deception, mauvaise foi, subsequently admitted by the Irreducible in "good faith"? If that is so, Beckett's sine qua non appears more than ever like the pour soi, a void which pretends to be, but which, in the very act of relying on being for its existence can only differentiate itself from it and proclaim its own ultimate and irrevocable nothingness. Thus the Unnamable which uses its fictions as "rags to cover my shame" (p.15) is inconceivable without them, without the voice to lie its name, and yet must reject these: "Where I am there is no one but me, who am not" (p.358).

At this point and, indeed, throughout this chapter, there are important distinctions to be made, however. We need only recall the Unnamable's attitude to the voice: "Ah if only this voice could stop, this meaningless voice which prevents you from being nothing ..." (p.374). The pour soi, though void, is nevertheless consciousness. But Beckett's Irreducible - and this has been already stressed - rejects the voice and in so doing places itself in a region situated beneath the level of consciousness. To this extent it may be regarded as more negative than the pour soi in spite of Sartre's depiction of consciousness as pure nullity. Indeed, to this extent, it is evident that the Irreducible can no more be likened to the pour soi than to the Cartesian cogito. Moreover, there is a further complication. Sartre, in his mock-sacrilegious way, speaks of the en soi, that is, of being, in the terms the Scholastics spoke of the deity. Thus the en soi, the in-itself, is self-sufficient, self-identical, above change, above differentiation - it differentiates, it turns to becoming, only from the human point of view - above affirmation and negation and so on. It is difficult not to be reminded here of Beckett's negative Irreducible. The Irreducible, more negative than even the pour soi, bears at the same time a confusing similarity to that most positive of all things, the en soi which, as plenitude of being, must, in Sartre's system, be regarded as the contradiction of the pour soi. This difficulty may be left for the present, though.

Sartre's philosophy is not one of static oppositions. The pour soi, as a void, is not thereby passive. On the contrary it is pure dynamism, it cannot be pinned down and this is to be expected: if the pour soi were ontologically still for a moment it would turn into being. Something which is not itself and not anything else can only exist in a constant flurry of ontological motion, it must constantly alter its course so that it may be said, in the strictest sense, never to be anywhere or anything. The pour soi escapes endlessly from itself and from the world and indeed from all positives; it is itself this very escape. While an analysis of time in Sartre and Beckett is best postponed to a later chapter, some brief mention needs to be made here. Sartrean consciousness escapes by temporalizing itself, by being-temporal. It as it were spreads itself over the three dimensions of time in such a way as to manage to be nowhere at all. More precisely, it escapes itself by temporalizing itself forward into the future where it is able to exist negatively. In its future the pour soi becomes a void, that is, it exists in its many possibilities, in its freedom to choose itself. This represents an escape from the past since the pour soi's past is no longer free, no longer an area of possibles, no longer an area of nothingness: its past represents consciousness as fixed, as objectified, in short as a something, an en soi. Thus time is the act of the pour soi refusing itself as negative, it is the pour soi as an escape from itself, a threefold wedge driven into the heart of consciousness and never to be removed because consciousness itself and this temporal wedge are one and the same. Consciousness exists as a hole constantly being filled as it becomes past and as constantly emptied again as the pour soi leaps away, dissociates itself from its past, and joins once more the void of the future: "Tout se passe comme si le Présent était un perpétuel trou d'être, aussitôt comblé et perpétuellement renaissant ...."[8]

There is a further complication. Not only does the pour soi escape being, that is, itself as positive in its past; it also seeks itself as being, as positivity - in its future. But futurity means negativity. The waiter who ėscapes the waiter he is in the past to become the waiter he means to be in the future may be represented as a hole trying to fill itself by emptying itself. The enterprise is hopeless. En soi and pour soi can never join. Human beings, Sartre argues, live a life which is at the same time an escape and a search, projecting themselves towards a never-to-be-realized goal: the union of being and nothingness. The pour soi wants to be (that is, en soi, the past) and to be conscious (that is, pour soi, futurity) at the same time; it desires to combine the immanence of being with the transcendence of nothingness, in short, as Sartre puts it, to be God. Only God is and knows that he is in the one act, only God has plenitude of being and the vacancy of consciousness combined. But, of course, God is a logical impossibility in a system where l'être and le néant are mutually incompatible. No such union can be effected and the gap in the universe is unbridgeable: God is a futile ideal, "une absence et un irréalisable."[9] No wonder, then, in view of man's ceaseless effort to find God, to become divinity by fleeing from and searching for himself, that Sartre insistently ends his work with the words: "l'homme est une passion inutile."[10]

At first glance much of this appears relevant to Beckett. If Sartre's world is in motion so is that of the Beckett Reduction. The Reduction may be represented either as a flight from or as a search for - an unknown. Murphy, escaping from society, seeks the comforts of the darkness; Watt flees the terrors of the dark in search of a solution to the mystery; the narrators of the Stories drift aimlessly, preparing themselves for an obscure advent; Molloy looks for his mother, for the origin of things; Moran looks for Molloy, his own darker self; Macmann and Malone simply find their way to stasis, to the small space of a room, image of the womb or of the mind; the voice of the Unnamable seeks its own end in the embrace of the Unnamable. Clearly, from Murphy on, the movement is away from the light, ultimately away even from the cogito, the voice of thought, and towards the silence of the Irreducible. Beckett's Film chronicles this movement in miniature in depicting the protagonist O's escape from life to the haven of a room. Within the room O faces the last obstacle of all, the gaze of self-consciousness, and struggles to evade even that. Joe of the television play Eh Joe is in a comparable situation, as are the characters of Endgame and, in another way, those of Waiting for Godot. The protagonist of How it is is conducting a search also, on the face of it a search for another human being. But the meeting of two minds is another irreducible and so it is true to say that the search is the same old search, never completed, always continuing. It is a search for the end of consciousness and so also an escape from consciousness and all that it entails. But this end never comes, although it draws constantly nearer. O cannot escape being the Object of his own gaze; neither does Murphy ever quite lose himself in the darkness; nor do the later tramps, nor even the voice of consciousness, ever lose themselves in the Unnamable, for if they did there would be no novel, just as if Hamm's endgame came to an end or if Vladimir's and Estragon's wait were to be rewarded there would be no play. It is tempting to say that we are in the Sartrean world of futility. Beckett's characters wish to flee themselves, as does the pour soi. Perhaps, like the pour soi, they seek an impossible union of being and nothingness, a union of their own being with the nothingness of the Unnamable which, like the attempt to realize God, is doomed to failure. It is true that the Irreducible is an Impossible in one sense. Is Beckett, then, attempting the Sartrean synthesis of *en soi* and *pour soi*? From the point of view of the Unnamable rather than of the tramps this might appear as the attempted synthesis of the negative Irreducible with the positive tramp. Even as the former identifies with the latter, it could be said, it reaffirms its essential incompatibility with a positive and so rejects the tramp and swings back to itself. Thus the movement from Unnamable to "delegate" and back again would resemble the abortive attempt of the *pour soi* to *be* - *en soi* - an attempt which continues even as it continues to fail, since insofar as Sartrean consciousness becomes being it ceases to be conscious and as soon as it is conscious it ceases to be being.

In spite of certain similarities between Sartre and Beckett these conjectures cannot be validated. Neither the Beckett tramp nor the Unnamable can be satisfactorily compared to the *pour soi*. The *pour soi* is a void of consciousness fleeing itself towards the impossible goal of being or rather towards the unrealizable union that Sartre terms God. The Beckett tramp is, of course, a human consciousness, ultimately reducible to the *voice* of consciousness, the *cogito*, but, unlike the *pour soi*, he is not a negative. On the other hand the Irreducible, which *is* a negative, cannot be termed consciousness. Thus the Beckett Reduction, while it may at times recall the frenzied dynamism of the *pour soi*, is in essence a very different movement. Viewed from the side of the tramp, the Reduction appears as a flight from being to nothingness, from consciousness to silence. In Sartre, of course, nothingness and consciousness are identical. In Beckett they clearly are not. From the viewpoint of the Unnamable the Reduction is a movement from nothingness to being (that is, to the *cogito*) and back again. Where the *pour soi* escapes itself to find *being*, Beckett's Reduction illustrates a search for a *negative* beneath the level of mind. The Irreducible, then, is not like the *pour soi*, and this has been more tentatively suggested earlier in this chapter. It represents a void clearly distinct from human consciousness while at the same time recalling - and this is worth emphasizing once again - the positivity of the Sartrean en soi. Perhaps it is not too misleading to suggest a parallel between the Irreducible and the en soi-pour soi synthesis which for Sartre defines God. The Irreducible's negativity does not exclude a certain positivity since, after all, the Irreducible is and so has been defined as a being-nothing. In that case we may say that "God" is realizable in Beckett; he may be impossible but he is nonetheless there. While no tramp can reach him, he exists, for without his presence the whole Beckett system of things would collapse. We return necessarily to the same point: being and nothingness contradict one another in Sartre: in Beckett they exist in one and the same extraordinary Irreducible, they are not mutually incompatible. All comparisons between the pour soi and its activities and the Beckett subject and the Reduction inevitably come up against this obstacle.

This is not to say that the general comparison of Beckett and Sartre should be abandoned. If the Beckett escape from consciousness is not like the flight of the pour soi from itself it is nonetheless a movement that is frustrated in a rather Sartrean way. The presence of consciousness is inescapable, not for the Unnamable perhaps, but in any case for the tramps and for the voice of the Unnamable, that last link with the tramps. O of Film awakes to see his own face staring at him. Joe of the television play cannot silence the inner voice. And indeed all the Beckett characters are in a similar position. Consciousness and existence go together as in the Cartesian formula, and speech is a Beckettian substitute for consciousness, something interchangeable with it: I speak, therefore I am. Existence and the activity of mind - these are a fact and there is "nothing to be done" about it. To be is to be conscious is to be in torment, a torment often borne with Stoic resignation in the novels, even with indifference, but at times impossible to bear at all. We recall the suffering Watt, the narrator of From an Abandoned Work - "tossing my head from side to side and up and down, staring agonizedly at this and that, increasing my murmur to a scream" (p.144), Molloy's attempted suicide and Hamm's observation: "Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (p.37). Of course the fact of consciousness, of existence, is equally the fact of our not reaching the Irreducible. For the Irreducible, as the voice assures us in denying all its positive pronouncements, is beyond the suffering of its "delegates." But the whole question of the torment of being, of the fact of being and of its relation to the Unnamable is one better left to a later chapter. Here it suffices to allude briefly to it in order to relate two aspects of it - Beckett's concern with birth and the disgust of the body - to what Sartre (following Heidegger) has called facticity.

The pour soi is nothing but this does not mean that it does not exist. Insofar as it leans on the en soi, that is, insofar as it is something, it avoids utter non-existence. Such acquired being properly speaking cannot be said to belong to it; it is borrowed from the en soi. The pour soi exists as a negation of the en soi, as a parasite feeding avidly on being. Sartre calls this minimal being of the pour soi facticity. The pour soi, though void, is a fact. Thus facticity is nothing other than that tenuous negative link between the pour soi and the en soi, the fact that nothingness cannot be save as rooted in being which it contradicts. Facticity is the fact that consciousness has to exist, that it cannot avoid having a particular birthplace, a particular past, a particular body: its birthplace, its circumstances at the moment of birth, its bodily makeup, its past insofar as it is over and done with, all these are more or less fixed, they are en soi, they lend the pour soi what little positivity it has. I cannot say what I am in the present, since I am a void, or, as we shall see, a freedom. But I can say that I am something in my past. For example, I am a waiter: that is my past. If it were not, I, who am a waiter, could as easily say I am a diplomat. My being a waiter is my facticity. Facticity, for Sartre, provides an explanation for the experience of the Absurd. Insofar as consciousness is linked to its past, to fixities and certainties, that is, to the en soi, it has a sense of being. There is something very contingent in this. Being does not have to be, it just is. There is no point in being, it has no meaning, since meaning belongs to the life of consciousness, that is, of nothingness. Being, en soi, is de trop, gratuitous, and absurd. To the extent that consciousness leans on being it too feels de trop, unnecessary, without meaning. Of course it is able to give meaning to life through its actions but, at certain moments, the weight of its facticity bears down on it and the sense of its own absurdity is overwhelming, the fact of consciousness becomes inexplicable. The pour soi may become aware of its own superfluity in the experience which is forcefully depicted in La Nausée. Roquentin feels a sense of being, of the Absurd, which is also described as nausea in L'Etre et le Néant: "Une nausée discrète et insurmontable révèle perpétuellement mon corps à ma conscience ...."[11] It is closely identified with the presence of the flesh but has wider significance and relates to the very contingency and facticity of the mind, the fact that the mind is, inexplicably.

From what has already been said it is obvious that the inescapability of consciousness in Beckett cannot correspond too closely to Sartre's facticité, given the fundamental philosophical divergence between the Beckett and Sartre worlds. The fact of being in Beckett's work is indeed a link with the positive, existence felt as torment, but it is above all a cry of despair at the unattainability of the Unnamable. Still, if we ignore fundamental differences, it is true to say that Beckett's characters experience something akin to nausea. So many examples suggest themselves that one must be selective. Murphy's "my God, how I hate the charVenus and her sausage and mash sex" (p.29) is the motto of most of the tramps. Reproduction is the one unforgivable sin and resentment against one's parent replaces filial piety: "Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?" (Endgame, p.35). The parent is immediately responsible for the inescapable fact: "My mother. I don't think too harshly of her. I know she did all she could not to have me, except of course the one thing" (Molloy, p.19). Again and again the tramp broods on the moment of genesis. Neary of Murphy "cursed, first the day in which he was born, then - in a bold flash-back - the night in which he was conceived" (p.35). The narrator of From an Abandoned Work has similar feelings:

> Ah my father and mother, to think they are probably in paradise, they were so good. Let me go to hell, that's all I ask, and go on cursing them there, and them look down and hear me, that might take some of the shine off their bliss.
>
> pp. 143-144.

Molloy treats his old mother with contempt ("her who brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct. First taste of the shit," p.16). Mahood in The Unnamable tramples his family underfoot and the voice of the Unnamable sighs: "ah you can't deny it, some people are lucky, born of a wet dream and dead before morning" (p.383). Moreover a Swiftian disgust of the flesh runs through much of Beckett's work, closely associated with the question of reproduction. Moran of Molloy tells us that he "inclined his [son's] young mind towards that most fruitful of dispositions, horror of the body and its functions" (p.118). In each of the novels the flesh appears as more or less nauseating. There is the opulent Miss Counihan in Murphy who after all stands for that world of matter, that facticity of existence, which the hero is so anxious to escape. There is the one-breasted Mrs. Gorman, the fishwoman who comes to see Watt. There are the ludicrous copulations in rubbish dumps in the trilogy. The flesh decays in All that Fall and indeed in many of the novels as well, as we have seen. Perhaps the description of the Mac and Moll idyll in Malone Dies, with its mixture of sad compassion and disgust, sums up Beckett's feelings about the physical:

> And though both were completely impotent they finally succeeded, summoning to their aid all the resources of the skin, the mucus and the imagination, in striking from their dry and feeble clips a kind of sombre gratification.
>
> p.261.

So far little has been said about Sartrean facticity or nausea from the point of view of absurdity. But Sartre is not greatly concerned with the Absurd although he goes to the trouble of defining it. In L'Etre et le Néant the Absurd plays little part and appears simply as an aspect of the experience of nausea. Clearly the sense of being gratuitous, the sense of the inexplicable, is important in Beckett and relates to much that has been said in this chapter about the Beckett tramp and his obsessions. But it is better to consider the issue in a later chapter and using the terminology of Heidegger rather than Sartre. Still, we can say at this point that there are some resemblances between the Sartrean Absurd, understood as nausea or facticity, and the situation of the Beckett character. In each case there is a burden, and this is the weight of being itself in the form of the past, that is, of the fact of birth and of the presence of the body.

There is, of course, another and more popular definition of the

Absurd, that of Albert Camus, and a brief consideration of Beckett's work in relation to this definition, although in some respects a digression, is relevant here insofar as this thesis is to some extent necessarily concerned with Camus. Camus is not significant as a philosopher but he has had a considerable impact on the post-war world and is often mentioned in Beckett criticism. For good or ill the label "theatre of the Absurd" is here to stay and it points more or less exclusively to Camus. While one need not quarrel unduly with Esslin's use of the phrase within the very general limits proposed by his book the fact remains that when we attempt to relate in any detail the work of Beckett and Camus only a negative answer is possible to the question: is Beckett's world absurd in the Camus sense? The Absurd is defined in _Le Mythe de Sisyphe_ as a confrontation of man and his world, as a divorce, "_ce divorce entre l'homme et sa vie_."[12] As a feeling it occurs when one's normal habits are suddenly or unexpectedly interrupted: without one's routine one feels uncomfortable, useless, absurd. Or it occurs when one suddenly realizes that one is ageing or perhaps about to die; man wants to be young, he wants to live, yet he must die: this is absurd. Or again when one realizes one is alone in spite of one's need for human support. Even inanimate nature may be a source of the Absurd. This pen with which I write, this paper on which I write, the desk at which I sit, all these are totally _indifferent_ to me: matter, the environment in which I live, does not _care_ about me, it feels _nothing_, only I, a human being, alone of all things in a vast universe, am capable of feeling. This too is absurd. Above all, it is absurd that man is brought into the world with an immense desire to understand, a desire which must be frustrated to a greater or lesser degree. The mind seeks lucidity and order, categories into which much that exists cannot be introduced: "_Mais ce qui est absurde, c'est la confrontation de cet irrationnel et_ de ce désir éperdu de clarté dont l'appel résonne au plus profond de l'homme."[13] All of this is simply summed up: man and his world do not fit, they are not made for one another, creation is a mistake and man must make the best of it. There are echoes of Sartre here although in terms of philosophy the Camus Absurd rests on a vague and unspecified foundation. Sartre's nausea is the malady of being, the malady of consciousness - of one's flesh, of one's life, of one's milieu, of all of these as utterly contingent, utterly unnecessary and yet massively there. Camus' Absurd is likewise an awareness of the inexplicable nature of the human condition, of the world as an obstacle to man's understanding, and, like nausea, it focusses attention on the realities of physical existence, although, unlike nausea, it also represents a sigh of regret. Sartre does not linger on the pleasures of the flesh, on the excitement of youth. For Camus, on the other hand, these are the most difficult things to give up.

If at first glance the Camus Absurd seems relevant to Beckett, there are important differences, as there are between Camus and Sartre. Beckett's tramps are pathetically alone, alienated from their world, unable to make sense of their situation, plagued by the shortcomings of their condition. But Camus is a humanist and makes his position clear throughout Le Mythe de Sisyphe. Camus loves the life of sensation and seeks after order and proportion. One does not imagine Murphy or Malone playing football or sunbaking on an Algerian beach. Camus will not acquiesce in the sufferings of life because he regards pleasure as a supreme value; in like manner he cannot be reconciled to the irrationality of things because reason too is a value. Hence the wager of the Absurd, "le pari ... de l'absurde,"[14] the resisting of any acceptance of suffering and the irrational such as Camus imagines is the case in Christianity. This resistance is also at the core of L'Homme Révolté and indeed defines Camus' notion of revolt. The absurd man gives up all otherworldly attempts to explain away the disparity between man's aspirations and life as it is. Rather he rebels against the state of things, faces their absurdity and gets down to the business of enjoying life within the given limitations. Thus *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* rejects suicide as a solution and *L'Homme Révolté*, murder. Life is sacred and moreover may be better enjoyed by *l'homme absurde* than by others since the former is aware of life's limits and so also aware of the value of every transient moment: "*Sentir sa vie, sa révolte, sa liberté, et le plus possible, c'est vivre et le plus possible.*"[15] It is necessarily an ethic of *carpe diem*, even an ethic of quantity rather than of quality, and the types of absurd man are Don Juan, the actor and the adventurer, men whose aim it is to live entirely for this world by cramming as much sensation, as much experience, into the moment as possible. We have gone from Beckett's universe of despairing hope and hopeful despair to a hedonism reminiscent of the *fin de siècle* aesthetes. It is the triumph of the flesh, with renunciation as the one sin. Sisyphus, rolling his boulder to the top of the hill only to see it roll down again, is happy: "*Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.*"[16] Man labours all his life to live, only to die at the end of it; yet this life is worth the anguish of the Absurd. In *L'Homme Révolté* Camus concludes with a plea for moderation, a defence of the Mediterranean love of life and of nature against what he terms German ideology and against the enthronement of history in opposition to nature. It is an argument for a Latin *via media* against northern excess, for a life in the sun. From beginning to end, then, the ideal is a humanist and hedonist one and is coupled with a hatred for the otherworldly and for all that lessens the pleasures, whether physical or emotional or intellectual, of human existence.

But Beckett is in love only with a negative, mercilessly satirizing the rest with the zeal of a Desert Father. If Camus is a moralist and philosophe Beckett is as far removed from him as is St. Jerome in his cave from Voltaire. Beckett makes mention of physical fulfilment only to evoke a sad smile of sarcasm and intellectual desire for clarity only to guffaw as he does in Watt. A life of rich experiences, a respect for moderation - this is precisely what Beckett has reduced to zero. In the Reduction, he seeks to further, not to lessen, any divorce between man and existence, driving inwards, seeking not human values but the abyss, like the most otherworldly ascetic. This is not to deny Beckett's own peculiar humanism: values are implicit in Beckett's work, but they are nothing like Camus'. Beckett's revolt is absolute in a sense the other's is not. The Camus Absurd reflects the humanist's regret at the transcience of the flesh and the Stoic's acceptance of it. By and large Beckett regrets, and accepts with Stoicism, the fact that the Irreducible is not negative enough, that the Reduction does not sufficiently remove one from the human farce: "who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The conclusion is obvious. If the Beckett tramp is ever in an absurd situation it must be in a framework which is not Camus' any more than it is Sartre's. The fact is that both nausea and the Camus Absurd derive from yet another concept, the concept of angst, and that Beckett's Absurd, if we may call it that at all, is best examined in the context of the philosophy of Heidegger. But we may leave this point for the moment. At this stage I wish merely to sketch a few limited connections between Beckett and Camus and between the Sartrean and Camus Absurd.

The question of Sartrean freedom has not yet been discussed and it is time to rectify the omission. Sartre's views on this subject are perhaps better known than any other part of his philosophy but very rarely taken in their proper context of that philosophy. Quite simply, Sartre begins with the assertion that man is in every conceivable respect free. And he could hardly say otherwise on the basis of L'Etre et le Néant. Consciousness is nothing and nothing cannot be determined, therefore consciousness is free. The nothingness which interposes itself between the pour soi and itself means that the pour soi cannot determine itself, it must by its nature act spontaneously (though not necessarily capriciously); the nothingness which slips between the pour soi and the world means that external being cannot determine consciousness: it has, after all, only negative relations with it; above all, the same film interposed between consciousness and its past means that the past cannot determine the present. In my past I am en soi, my past is not myself. At every moment a new myself is born, a new void of freedom is opened and an old, now fixed, myself is discarded. For Sartre what I am is moulded by the future, not the past - as the determinists would have it - and the future cannot force the present. I am at present what I wish to be in the future, my present self is shaped by those future-oriented acts which I perform. But it must be stressed that freedom is not something extrinsic to the pour soi. Freedom, futurity and nothingness are one and the same. Thus freedom is not a quality of human consciousness: it is human consciousness, as Orestes sees in Les Mouches. To be consciousness is to be a void, to be a void is to be a futural being and to be a futural being is to be a freedom. The pour soi is a dynamism, a temporal creature, or rather it is temporality, it is itself as not itself, it exists elsewhere as it were, in its projects and schemes, that is, in its possibilities, its future. Consciousness is what it wishes to be, it shapes itself in action, it constitutes itself, freely, at every moment of its life, it exists as a perpetual choice. But, as Sartre puts it, "ma liberté ronge ma liberté,"[17] my freedom gnaws away my freedom, it undermines it. To be free is to suffer and this suffering is twofold. To begin with, freedom is a responsibility. If I am free I cannot attribute my situation to the manipulations of divine providence or to other men's activities or to the vicissitudes of my past or to the determinisms of the environment or to hereditary factors. I myself am responsible for myself, on nothing else can I lay the blame for my mistakes. It will be objected that I am not free to be born where I please or in what circumstances I please or to be born at all or to choose not to be free or to choose to be fat rather than thin and so on. Sartre admits all this but will not class the above limitations as determinisms. One cannot be free, exercise freedom, in a vacuum. Freedom is existential in nature, it requires a situation within which to operate and it requires barriers, otherwise it cannot be freedom. Sartre calls this the facticity of freedom. Thus my facticité is my freedom to be free as a waiter, for example, and not as a diplomat. Facticity is the pour soi's link with being. So also it is freedom's link - and freedom is the pour soi - with a real world, a barrier to freedom. As consciousness could not be without being, so freedom could not be without its situation. In different words, as being is the fact of nothingness, as the pour soi by virtue of being is a fact, so freedom too is a fact, it cannot be chosen. I am not free to choose to be, to be conscious, to be free, to be nothing. I am forced to exist and I am forced to be free. This is the second torment of freedom, that freedom escapes my control, that I myself escape myself, slipping through my own fingers: "ma liberté ronge ma liberté." No wonder man prefers to live within a determinist system, whether that of the scientists or that of theological predestination.

It seems that Beckett's characters experience freedom as does the pour soi, at least in some respects. Although a fuller treatment of this issue must await a later chapter, it may be noted here that the tramp of the novels and plays, wandering from city to plain, from seashore to forest and finally into the confined space of the room, appears to have the boundless vacancy of freedom before him. Belacqua strolls through Dublin, Murphy forges into the unknown, Watt comes to and goes from the mysterious Knott establishment, and all in an emptiness filled with infinite possibilities, each as possible as the next. Molloy, Macmann and Mahood undertake their obscure journeys and Malone and the voice of the Unnamable meander in the regions of the mind. The very aimlessness of the Beckett journey suggests a parallel with the freedom of the pour soi: the tramps have nowhere to go or, conversely, they can go anywhere, do anything. So it is with Clov in Endgame or Vladimir and Estragon. But what is freedom worth if it is limited to a choice to stay or go or to a choice to be here rather than there or somewhere else again? The very freedom of freedom, the nullity of being free, becomes a burden.

Beckett stresses this fact in what may appear as a rather complicated manoeuvre. To begin with, he offers us a recurring image of compulsion. Human beings torment each other as Pozzo torments Lucky, for example. In Endgame Hamm dominates his household as the brutal male nurses of Murphy and Malone Dies dominate the inmates of lunatic asylums. As we shall see, the Other is usually present in all of Beckett's work, watching the tramp, manipulating him perhaps, in a parody of the Berkeleian ever-present divinity. There is, after all, a deity in this Occasionalist world, a supreme Other who holds the pieces together, who handles the strings of so many puppet tramps. In relation to this power - brutal, sadistic or perhaps insane, or perhaps only supremely indifferent to creation - the tramps are not free. There is the goad in Act Without Words II which forces the two subjects to go through their little routine, the obscure sense of determinism, perhaps of supernatural origin, which seems to lend some unknown significance to Watt's movements. Sometimes the image of divine manipulation is expressed in the form of a tyrant, such as the mysterious Youdi, reminiscent of Yahweh as Mr. Knott recalls the *deus absconditus*. Youdi is the leader of the organization which employs Moran to search for Molloy. In *Malone Dies* the dying tramp receives a strange visitor, like the messengers of *Waiting for Godot*. If it comes to that Godot himself may be thought of as an absent Prospero. The Unnamable is obsessed by the possibility of being at the mercy of a college of tyrants whose aim it is to force him to speak. A tyrant is held responsible for the landscape of *How it is*, a parody of the Leibnizian harmony, an endless line of men, crawling face down in the mud. There is also the bell in *Happy Days* which controls Winnie's sleeping and waking, Croak, the tyrant of *Words and Music*, the Opener who controls the world of *Cascando* and the inquisitorial light of *Play* at whose prompting the three characters speak.

But we cannot stop here. In the first place Beckett is obviously less than half serious when he speaks of Youdi or Mr. Knott or most of the other tyrants. In the second, we must recall that at the most basic level of all, that of the Unnamable, these tyrants are all rejected as fictions. Both the Unnamable and the narrator of *How it is* claim that these figures of power have been invented, as men invent God, to explain an inexplicable plight. The narrator of *How it is* explicitly denies that he exists as a thought in the divine mind; there is noone in control, noone listening, no scribes of the Almighty - Krim and Kram - to note down all that takes place on earth; above all, there is no Almighty responsible for the whole situation, for the sacks of food on which the narrator depends:

> but all this business of voices yes quaqua yes of
> other worlds yes of someone in another world yes
> whose kind of dream I am yes said to be yes that
> he dreams all the time yes tells all the time yes
> his only dream yes his only story yes

> all this business of sacks deposited yes at the
> end of a cord no doubt yes of an ear listening
> to me yes a care for me yes an ability to note
> yes all that all balls yes Krim and Kram yes all
> balls yes
>
> pp. 158-159.

This is Beckett's answer to Molly Bloom's affirmative. The Yes is a lie, only the No exists. The Occasionalist deity here and in The Unnamable is once and for all announced a fraud. Thus the whole argument for determinism and compulsion falls to the ground. If Watt, Moran, Malone, Vladimir and Estragon and the protagonists of The Unnamable and How it is are manipulated it is not by something external to themselves. The true goad is consciousness itself, the ever fretting cogito which worries itself to distraction. We are back to the burden of freedom and to the Sartrean facticity of freedom. Beckett's tramps, like the pour soi, are a fact. They are not free not to be, nor are they free not to be free. Freedom, like consciousness, is not something they have chosen but something they suffer. To that extent all is determinism. For where is the freedom of freedom since one is not free to choose the only thing that matters, namely freedom itself? Given the fact of existence, what else is left, since that fact eludes our control and that fact alone is of supreme importance? Once Vladimir and Estragon have to be, what difference does it make whether they go or stay?

However, Beckett's attitude to freedom is not quite as simple as this suggests, nor is it so simply Sartrean. It should first of all be referred back to seventeenth and eighteenth century thought in which the freedom and determinism debate looms very large. Descartes identifies consciousness with freedom in a way at least prophetic of Sartre but his legacy is more confused, coloured as it is by the Stoic ethic of improving oneself rather than one's world. Thus Geulincx, for whom the body-mind chasm is unbridgeable, argues that while man is required to subdue the passions he has no real power outside the realm of mind. The only solution left, therefore, is the ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis: where one has no power to effect, there one should cease to desire. This is the difficulty of Occasionalism, that one cannot envisage a world where all is kept in motion by God except as a world bereft of free will. To be free is to act directly upon. But the Occasionalist cannot do that, he can only act through the mediation of God. Malebranche extricates himself from this dilemma with some anxiety. Leibniz, whose philosophy in some respects raises the spectre of Occasionalism, is faced with an equally difficult problem. God has wound the gigantic clock that is the universe; what is left for man but to await its running down? If God has made Adam as he is can Adam do anything but sin, granted that he is Adam or, as Sartre puts it, that Adam's Essence precedes his Existence? To be something, to have a God-given essential Self is, for Sartre, to be determined from the moment of birth to that of death: only if Existence precedes Essence can one speak of freedom. For many seventeenth and eighteenth century thinkers this problem did not arise, at least not in this form. Hobbes opted for a mechanistic view, Spinoza for a form of Pantheism: in both cases strict determinism follows. For Spinoza, only God is free. For the British empiricists the emphasis on sense impressions could only lead to a form of determinism, and, indeed, even freedom as understood by the Occasionalists is abolished by Hume. The Scholastic dictum to the effect that nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses is taken to its logical conclusion and the result is a world in which matter initiates and mind responds.

Beckett's depiction of freedom recapitulates a great deal of the above and is best summed up in the experience of Murphy.

Murphy exists as an inexplicable conjunction - or disjunction - of mind and body. Insofar as he is bodily he is subject to various determinisms, insofar as he is mind he is free. It is exactly the situation of the subject, described in the Ethics of Geulincx and referred to on several occasions in Beckett, who is a passenger free to walk east on the deck of a ship sailing west. The passenger is, of course, mind and the ship, body. Thus we read in Molloy, for example: "I who had loved the image of old Geulincx, dead young, who left me free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck" (p.51). But Murphy is unsatisfied with this situation and seeks a higher freedom in a Spinozan ascent. He enters deeper into the area of mind, "a closed system, subject to no principle of change but its own, self-sufficient and impermeable to the vicissitudes of the body" (p.77). As the bodily with all its determinisms recedes, Murphy finds himself in the first and second zones of the mind and "in both these zones of his private world Murphy felt sovereign and free" (p.79). But there is a third zone where, as seen in chapter one of this thesis, the subject loses himself in the depths of the mind within the mind till he reaches the shadowy outlines of the Irreducible. At this impossible point where being shades off into nothingness, Murphy transcends freedom: "Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom" (p.79). It is the point where the human individual rejoins the Spinozan Absolute, where Murphy enjoys the freedom of the gods. This freedom, moreover, like the freedom of divinity, is indistinguishable from necessity. Sartre is right in maintaining that freedom requires obstacles to freedom. Absolute freedom, freedom which meets no obstacles, cannot be distinguished from absolute determinism. God wills and his very act of will is, as the theologians maintained, creation. If Murphy's fiat could have this power there would be no point in terming it either free or necessary, since it would be both.

Murphy's threefold movement is, of course, a miniature of the Beckett Reduction. Thus we can say that Beckett's early characters enjoy the freedom of the passenger on the Geulincx vessel. As the vessel sails further and further west, as the body moves to its inevitable dissolution, the tramp exists more and more as mind. By the same token he becomes more and more free. Murphy is to a limited extent affected by the world about him, as is Belacqua. By the time we reach Watt this connection has been broken and causality of all kinds disappears in a tangle of Hume and Occasionalism; Beckett is describing the succession of servants in the Mr. Knott household:

> ... and Dick's ten years on the first-floor are not because of Harry's ten years on the ground-floor ... and Harry's ten years on the ground-floor are not because of Dick's ten years on the first-floor ... and the other's coming then is not because of (tired of underlining this cursed preposition) Dick's ten years ....
>
> p.132.

By the time we reach Molloy, Malone, Vladimir and Estragon and others the tramp is free. He pays little attention to the body and none at all to the world about him. It is at this point that we may legitimately speak of a Sartrean element in Beckett. The tramp has left the necessity of the material behind and exists in the void of freedom. Of course, as in Sartre, this void is not felt as freedom but as an inexplicable burden. The consciousness of the tramp has become its own exquisite torment. The tramp is free but he is forced to be that, he is forced to be. Thus the whole of existence appears as a new determinism, that of facticity, and one more horrifying than any material determinism could ever be.

Nevertheless it is clear that Beckett does not stop at this point. As Murphy's ascesis suggests, the final goal is not at all one of Sartrean freedom. Sartre refuses to confound being and nothingness and, by the same token, freedom and necessity or determinism. Only God can be both en soi and pour soi, both free and necessary, and God cannot exist for Sartre. As we have seen, though, the Beckett Unnamable or Irreducible is precisely being-nothing. Likewise it transcends the freedom-necessity dichotomy. The tramp may be free and he may suffer the fact of freedom; the voice of consciousness, that is, the voice of the Unnamable may be in the same situation. But the Unnamable itself is something more mysterious than consciousness - Sartrean or Cartesian. The Unnamable represents that point in Beckett's Reduction, as in Murphy's meditation, where not only the body is left behind but also the freedom of the mind. In it freedom and determinism coalesce with the same facility as they do in the bosom of the Idealist Absolute or the theologian's God. As usual Beckett's treatment of the subject of freedom may be regarded as a philosophical encyclopaedia, spanning in its development a threefold philosophical development from the Cartesian and post-Cartesian to the existential and, finally, to the Idealist.

Thus the parallel with Sartre and, at this point, with all existential approaches to the question of freedom, breaks down. Existential freedom is the freedom to act, both in Sartre and in Heidegger. For Sartre especially freedom implies commitment to social and political issues. All of this is alien to Beckett, for whom there is only, on the one hand, the worthless existential freedom of the conscious human being - "free, yes, I don't know what that means, but it's the word I mean to use, free to do what, to do nothing" (Molloy, p.13) - that freedom which is haunted by its own incapacity in relation to the one thing that counts, namely existence and, on the other hand, that god-like freedom of the Unnamable which is identical with necessity and which so transcends human freedom that it is misleadingly termed freedom at all.

One further comparison must be attempted between Sartre's philosophy and Beckett's work. Sartre, in the Husserlian tradition of "intersubjectivity," claims that his system avoids the reef of solipsism, "l'écueil du solipsisme,"[18] on which so many philosophies have run aground. The pour soi exists as an individual subject in relation to many other subjects. As it exists outside itself, in its environment, in its future, so also it exists outside itself as regards the other person. The Other is ontologically constitutive of the pour soi, that is, the pour soi is Other; after all, it cannot be itself, since it is nothing at all. This does not, of course, imply a blurring of human individuals. It means that when the Other objectifies me, makes me an object of his perception, I acquire positivity, being, I become someone. To myself, on the other hand, I will always remain pure consciousness, subjectivity, nothingness. Thus I can only be, that is, attain objective status as a definite, stable personality, as Peter or John or William, by virtue of there being other consciousnesses in the world besides myself. I am a void until the Other constitutes me as object of his attention and so as positive - as other than myself - in a movement which Sartre calls le regard, the Look. I do not wish to anticipate a discussion of this aspect of Sartre since such discussion belongs more properly to the study of Jean Genet, but a bare statement of Sartre's philosophy of the Look is necessary at this point. Nothingness can only relate by negation, it cannot relate positively. Its essential stance towards any object of its consciousness is: that is not me. Thus when two pour soi meet each must try to dissociate itself from the other. The basis of human intercourse in Sartre, then, is ontological conflict, not agreement. Human relations are reducible to a struggle for supremacy - a conclusion that is immediately useful in Sartre's Marxist analyses of society but that in the long term necessarily runs counter to the optimistic, Messianic element in Marx. When Peter and John meet each seeks to make the other the object of the Look. By objectifying the other the victor has the satisfaction of remaining void, subject, in short, free, just as in objectifying a table I assert myself as not-table, as consciousness. The difficulty is that Peter and John cannot both succeed: there cannot be two subjects (from one point of view) and two objects (from another) since that would mean that Peter and John are each subject and object at the same time. Subjectivity, which is pour soi, cannot coexist with objectivity, which is en soi. Being and nothingness at the moment of the Look are mutually exclusive. Thus we may postulate that Peter succeeds and John fails. Peter objectifies John and by that move constitutes himself as subject. The very basis of all human relations is that act by which one man asserts himself as master and makes another his slave. Hegel's master-slave pair has become the human norm.

Beckett's world of human relations will not fit neatly into the Sartrean scheme, as will, for example, Genet's, and this question can be settled in a later chapter. We may note at once, however, that whatever the underlying philosophical differences (if Beckett is willing to blur being and nothingness he may be equally expected to blur the subject-object distinction in human relationships and so to allow for a degree of positive communication between his characters) the tormentor-tormented appears as a fundamental unit of Beckett's world. An extended example of this fact is the magnificent second part of How it is. The narrator, crawling in the mud to establish contact with another of his kind, is finally rewarded:

> ... instead of the familiar slime an arse two cries one mute end of part one before Pim that's how it was before Pim
>
> p. 54.

Pim, like the narrator, is an old man lying face down in the mud. The narrator must communicate, by signs, he must teach the other the art of human intercourse:

> first lesson theme song I dig my nails into his armpit right hand right pit he cries I withdraw them thump with fist on skull his face sinks in the mud his cries cease end of first lesson
>
> p.69.

It takes time measured out in agony for Pim to learn to sing when his armpit is clawed, to be silent when struck on the head. Eventually, he is perfect:

> table of basic stimuli one sing nails in armpit two speak blade in arse three stop thump on skull four louder pestle on kidney
>
> five softer index in anus six bravo clap athwart arse seven lousy same as three eight encore same as one or two as may be
>
> p.76.

The miracle of communication continues to be realized until one morning Pim has crawled off and the narrator is left alone, waiting for someone to overtake him and treat him as he treated Pim. There is an endless line of creatures edging forward in the slime, each alternately tormentor and tormented, first master, then slave, an infinite series "and always two strangers uniting in the interests of torment" (p.131). The meeting of two human beings is, of course, an inconceivable, another Irreducible - "two strangers uniting" is something of a paradox - and the result of this non-event can only be suffering - "in the interests of torment." Of course the narrator and Pim are foreseen in the Pozzo-Lucky or Hamm-Clov pairs in Waiting for Godot and Endgame. Even in Murphy, the first novel, there are sadistic male nurses who tyrannize the inmates of the Mental Mercyseat. Perhaps a kick in the seat is, after all, a small mercy; intercourse may be difficult and painful but it is better than nothing. Thus Molloy taps, or rather beats, his ageing mother on the skull to reach her, much as the narrator of How it is behaves with Pim. Considerably more grim is the sadism of Moran's treatment of his son in Molloy and Moran's murder in the forest. After this there can only be the agony of jealousy and hate in Play where, certainly, hell, as Sartre puts it in Huis Clos, is other people, l'enfer c'est les autres. But it would be premature to conclude that there is no more to human relations in Beckett's work than this. It may be that true intercourse is, like the Unnamable, a goal never to be reached - as it is in Proust: "No object ... tolerates possession, meaning by possession total possession, only to be achieved by the complete identification of object and subject" (p. 57). It does not follow, however, that human relations, in Beckett's work, must base themselves on the Hegelian antithesis or on the Sartrean conflict of objectivity and subjectivity, being and nothingness. There is, in fact, another reason for the austerity of relationships in Beckett and it will emerge later in this thesis.

How far does the comparison with Sartre help to elucidate the nature of the Beckett odyssey and in particular of the Beckett Irreducible? Clearly, so far and no further. Sartre's system rests on the en soi-pour soi distinction and on the postulate that consciousness or the pour soi is nothingness. As such consciousness exists as a search which is equally an escape, a movement outward and forward in an effort - for ever frustrated -

to unite the poles of being and nothingness, to constitute "God." In addition the *pour soi* exists as a burden to itself, tormented by its being, which is not its own, by the nausea of facticity and, at the same time, by its void, by its being abandoned to freedom. Finally, it exists as a failure to make contact with other human beings: that too would involve the unrealizable union of being and nothingness. Existence, then, may be defined as a rift, always on the verge of being obliterated and always renewing itself. No wonder man is a futile passion when life itself is a short-circuit: "*Il y a ici un passage qui ne se fait pas, un court-circuit.*"[19] Without any doubt Esslin and those who, following Esslin, have wished to see a Sartrean presence at the core of Beckett's work are mistaken. But the parallel between Sartre and Beckett is a fascinating one just the same. The Irreducible is certainly a negative, like the *pour soi*; the Reduction, like the Sartrean movement, may be represented as a flight from consciousness, the implacable *cogito*; the tramp, like the *pour soi*, is tormented by the *fact* of being, by the nausea of the flesh, by the irretrievable *faux pas* of birth; like the *pour soi* he bows under the double load of freedom and the fact of *having* to be free; last of all, he attempts, with no more success than the *pour soi*, to reach across to another of his kind and establishes the Sartrean pattern of master and slave.

On the other hand the differences between Sartre and Beckett are more fundamental still. The Irreducible may be like the *pour soi* but it is equally like the *en soi*: it is a being-nothing, something out of the question in Sartre's system. Moreover it is not to be related to consciousness, as is the *pour soi*. The Beckett tramp, who *is* conscious, however, is *not* a negative. Nor is the tramp's flight from consciousness to the Unnamable strictly comparable to the flight of the *pour soi*, for the union of being and nothingness, which cannot eventuate in the one case, is an undeniable, if embarrassing, reality in the other. The chief thing to stress is that whereas the pour soi seeks to be, the tramp seeks not to be. In other words, the Reduction is essentially a progress to a negative, not an escape from one. Granted the above points, it follows that all the other similarities between Sartre and Beckett must be to a degree superficial, since L'Etre et le Néant stands or falls on the en soi-pour soi distinction. Thus the tramps' inability to avoid the eye of consciousness and their hatred of the fact of being, their disgust of the body, must be distinguished from nausea and the Sartrean Absurd in spite of interesting parallels. In parenthesis it may be added that the situation of the tramps must also be distinguished from the Camus Absurd, for reasons which have been given. The fact is, as already argued, that both la nausée and l'absurde have a common origin in a third concept, such that any parallel between Beckett and Sartre or Camus on this score must be explained in the context of Heidegger. Similar things may be said as regards the question of freedom, which is, however, a little more complex, since here Beckett reflects not only Sartre and the existential but also the Cartesian and, in his treatment of the Unnamable, the Idealist. (It is well to recall that whatever one says about the fact of being and the freedom of the tramp is not applicable to the Unnamable itself which is beyond consciousness and so beyond the antitheses of being and nothingness, necessity and free will.) Insofar as the tramp's having-to-be-free and his relations with others recall Sartre, the last word must be left to chapters to come.

In the end it is vital to emphasize that Beckett's is not a world of Sartrean futility, of never-to-be-realized hopes. The Irreducible is an Impossible, but it is there, the Reduction is a movement which cannot conceivably reach its goal and yet it represents a positive achievement, the uncovering of the fundamental principle of things. That this principle of necessity remains a mystery is not a drawback, moreover. Where Sartre's is a closed system, a system allowing only a very limited fulfilment to the pour soi, Beckett's opens out to the infinite. "All is possible, or almost" (p.297), says the Unnamable: being-nothing exists, it is that most unlikely thing of all, a living paradox, and if we cannot quite put our fingers in the wound we may at least squirm closer and closer. It is this fascination for the darkness, this ascetic drive, which keeps the Reduction going and differentiates Beckett sharply from Sartre and Camus. The Irreducible calls to Beckett. Sartre, after all, is a lover of the light, like Camus, and mystery does not appeal to his essentially secular mentality.

It seems that, in spite of the many parallels with French Existentialism, Beckett demands a slightly altered philosophical focus.

CHAPTER 4

BECKETT AND HEIDEGGER : BEING-IN-THE-WORLD

> ESTRAGON: ... Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!
>
> Waiting for Godot, p.61.

> The "who" is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people, and not the sum of them all. The "who" is the neuter, the "they" ... We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge ....[1]
>
> Heidegger.

Heidegger's work is more useful for providing a philosophical perspective on Beckett than Sartre's, especially in those areas where the Sartre-Beckett comparison breaks down. In any case much of Sartre's writing, for all its originality, owes something to Heidegger, which means that much of what appears to be Sartrean in Beckett is referrable in the long run to the German philosopher. In the chapters to come two things must be settled: the true identity of the Irreducible expressed in modern philosophical terms and the exact relation of Beckett's world to the existential or phenomenological. Although a ground for discussion has been cleared, neither of these questions have been dealt with satisfactorily as yet. I propose to begin with the second, in chapters four and five of this thesis, and to settle the first in chapter six.

Heidegger's philosophy does not begin with man but with Existence, that is, with a unity of man and his world, with man involved in his world and not suspended in the speculative heights of the cogito or the Idealist Absolute. It is not so much a question of saying that man exists but rather that he is an Existence, that his being is not enclosed but, in its very nature and not by a mere coincidence, a relationship. To some extent this discussion has been anticipated in chapter two of this thesis, but it requires further elaboration. Heidegger's position follows from Husserl's description of consciousness as consciousness of. In Being and Time he introduces it by means of the central concept of dasein. Dasein is man, but man so viewed as to necessitate a new name for him and one which will not set him apart from his milieu but place him in it; thus it may be translated as being-there or da-sein. "There," of course, is the world. Dasein is not distinct from its surroundings. It is not such as to first be and then be somewhere. Its being is a placing: it is "there," in the world, and it cannot be separated from its "there" except in the theoretic minds of philosophers. A philosophy whose aim it is to tackle the man of flesh and blood and not an abstraction must begin with man and world as indissoluble unity, let us say even organic unity, since the echo of Coleridge is not out of place and the existential is in some respects the inheritor of the Romantic tradition. Dasein, then, as the name indicates better than do the terms "man," or "self" or even "consciousness," is never by itself. It is always accompanied - in its being, not simply in fact - by a world and without this world it would perhaps subsist but it would not exist, it would not be what it is. Dasein is nothing other than a relation, it is not something in its own right as it were. That is to say the "there" of dasein's being-there cannot be regarded as something added on. Dasein is not an essence, a substance, a thing - which also happens to exist, like the Scholastic soul which resides in the mind of God until he sees fit to give it the higher value of existence. It is nothing but its Existence or, as Sartre would put it, its Existence is prior to its Essence.

Heidegger sums all of this by saying that dasein is a being-in-the-world.

Being-in-the-world cannot, of course, be broken down into its constituent parts of "being" and "world"; it must be taken as a whole. Moreover Heidegger's use of the term "in" must be clearly understood in an existential sense. It follows from the above that dasein is not "in" the world as, for example, a match is in a matchbox, that is, spatially. Since dasein and the world imply each other, the world penetrates to dasein's very being, the relation is not external, it is not measurable. Rather it is an internal relation of the kind we refer to when we speak of organic form in literature. In saying that a poem is an organic whole we mean that to change a part is to change the whole, that is, that a part of the poem in a real sense contains the whole, is as large as the whole. In like manner there is no world without dasein and no dasein without world. Heidegger is not putting forward the idea that without the human mind to observe the material earth would no longer be. Without man something would be, but it would not be a "world." It would be an inconceivable, undifferentiated material presence, much like the Sartrean en soi before the advent of the pour soi. But this is not what we refer to as the "world"; the world comes into being with man. Dasein, then, is not in the world as a stranger. It exists in it in the sense of "dwelling" there, as Heidegger has it,[2] being "familiar" with it as one is in one's home as distinct from another's house. All this is not to deny that dasein is also a spatial being. But its spatial relations follow from and do not precede its ontological being-in-the-world. The Heideggerian notion, which goes beyond Husserl's stand, is at the heart of the comparable Sartrean concept of situation. To be in a situation, for Sartre, is to be inwardly penetrated by it, to be "there" in a sense of involvement rather than in a purely spatial sense. Sartre defines the pour soi as a being outside itself, in its situation. In situation I am my situation, I "exist" it, since Existence implies an area of operations, I and my situation are one single phenomenon. Thus while Heidegger's dasein is by no means a void of consciousness, like the pour soi, the two have something in common which is shared by all existential philosophies. Existence, dasein, situation, being-in-the-world all imply the same fundamental approach to experience and that approach is synthetic and phenomenological.

Temporality is an essential aspect of being-in-the-world and here also Heidegger's philosophy is seminal for Sartre. We recall that the pour soi is a temporal creature, living ahead of itself in its own future. Dasein temporalizes itself, that is to say, does not merely live "in" time as spatially encapsuled by it but is itself temporality. Dasein spreads itself out, it is "ecstatic" (in the term used both by Heidegger and Sartre), a being outside itself, primarily existing in its future. This point is important in Heidegger as in Sartre. On the basis of its futural orientation dasein may be defined as free, as a being created for action, not merely for the passive reception of sense impressions. To exist in the future is to be a being of schemes and plans, to interpret the present in terms of what one wants to do or, more accurately, to mould the present - that is, oneself as present - in terms of what Sartre calls a "project" into the future. Heidegger's dasein too projects itself forward and so colours its present and, of course, its past. Thus I open a door in the present because I wish to be in another room in the near future, because opening the door is a necessary part of my futural project to be in another room. At the same time my past actions are all focussed on my anticipated future and coloured by it: if I succeed in something my past efforts take on a different aspect than, say, if I fail. Clearly the future influences the present but not in such a way as to determine it. My wishing to be in the next room does not determine my opening the door because I am at every point free to alter my project, that is, my future. If I decide not to enter the room I am no longer obliged to open the door. What the future does is to determine the meaning of present actions. The significance of opening the door comes from the future, from my intention, which anticipates an as yet unrealized state of affairs. We are now in a position to understand more clearly perhaps what Heidegger means by being-in-the-world. The "world" is not the brute presence of matter which could as easily be without the presence of man. The "world" is dasein's sphere, it is that pattern or framework of significance or meaning with which dasein surrounds itself. The world is that which comes into being in that instant of human consciousness directed towards action and which is made possible by the dynamic cooperation of future and present. The world may be defined as the significance which the future confers upon the present. One other point needs to be made here. Dasein's present relationship with the objects around it is likewise influenced by its future schemes. Dasein is involved with things, that is, its being-there is revealed in the use it makes of things as means to future ends. To use something and to confer meaning on it are, of course, one and the same thing. Heidegger here differs from the stand taken by most philosophers for whom, as for Descartes, the world is first revealed as an object of knowledge and only subsequently as utilizable. Dasein, however, does not first perceive and then utilize. It lives in the future and it is not the present object it sees but the anticipated scheme. Thus its first contact with present objects is a spontaneous making use of them. Only as means to an end are these objects perceived: dasein is spontaneously "there," one with its world even as it first begins to act, it is only subsequently able to detach itself from the world by means of scientific or philosophic reflection, it is only subsequently able to assume the stance of an observer. We may conclude by saying that for dasein every object is zuhanden, ready-to-hand, a tool, every aspect of dasein's world is charged with the weight of the future, with the weight of meaning. To be a being-there or a being-in-the-world is to inject into the heart of things present oneself as futural. The relevance of this to a discussion of Beckett will become apparent as we proceed.

A concern with future schemes and projects is conspicuously absent in Beckett's world. By the same token the degree of significance attached to the present is minimal. Belacqua has few aims and ambitions and his perambulations appear aimless. Murphy has one goal in life and that is to transcend all goals. Consequently the significance of things in his world is limited to their constituting a help or an obstacle to his single-minded search. People are a hindrance, as is the body; the mystical rocking chair is very much zuhanden, as is the little room. Watt would like to have an aim in life, but he cannot find one. It follows that for him the issue of the meaning of things is a vital one. Objects, bereft of utility, sink into an abyss of undifferentiated chaos. These experiences will be analysed in the next chapter, but they require to be mentioned here. By the time we get to the Stories and the trilogy the situation is austere indeed. What is it that drives the tramps on? As the obscurity of their goals increases so the significance of their actions decreases. Molloy seeks his mother, Moran seeks Molloy, Malone waits for his end, the voice of the Unnamable pants on towards its own vanishing point. In each case what the existential philosopher terms "world" shrinks to a minimum. Since there is only one end in view all things are invested with a single purpose, all reduced to a single function, and, since the one end is the end of all positives, the attainment of a state of pure negativity, everything is reduced to the status of an obstacle. Before the Unnamable can be reached all else must be left behind. We go from the bicycle, a source of joy to Molloy, to the austere standard equipment of the tramps: coat, image of impermeability, hat, sign of existence and echo of the caul, boots which never fit, symbol of the human situation. Molloy's relations with objects are limited to such incidents as that of the sucking-stones, Malone rummages in his pile of assorted rubbish with a stick, the narrator of How it is is reduced to an endless, perhaps meaningless, journey, dragging with him the sack full of food. Vladimir's and Estragon's problems are similar to those of the tramps in the trilogy. There is no plan for the future, unless it is Godot, that substitute for a plan. Because there is no future there is no significance in the present, nor is there any link with the material beyond the limited use one makes of hats and boots and carrots. Comparable things may be said of Endgame and Happy Days and indeed all the plays. Winnie plays with her handbag, Krapp with his tapes and so on. The seventeenth century dream of the great machine, a dream more ambitious than dasein's projects, has degenerated to a manipulation of sucking-stones in the pockets of an overcoat or the struggle to remove a boot. We may look at this as the staple of the clown routine or as Beckett's satire of the bourgeois novel in which man is chiefly defined by his possessions, but it is something else as well. Beckett's world is in a state of disintegration. This fact was briefly analysed in chapter one as an Occasionalist phenomenon yet it requires still further analysis. If the tramp is a being-there or a being-in-the-world he is that in a strange way. His world, its projects and meanings collapse around him. Its objects lose all their usefulness: Estragon's belt breaks, his trousers fall, Malone loses his stick, Winnie loses the use of her hands, even the body, from one point of view man's basic zuhanden, is finished. In the end the Reduction takes us to a point where the world disappears in the darkness of the Unnamable. Can we, with the philosophical perspectives offered by Heidegger, go a little further in explaining this phenomenon of collapse?

Of course the phenomenon occurs especially in the area of human relations. For Heidegger to be a being-there is to be intimately connected with others since dasein's world touches at every point that of other men. Accordingly dasein is said to be mitsein, a being-with. In the light of what has so far been said of Heidegger mitsein presents no difficulty: human relations are not merely a matter of spatial proximity, the "with" of being-with indicates involvement. Dasein is "with" in its very being, it is ontologically legion. This is as much as to say that it would not be dasein if it were alone, that the Other is built into its own makeup. Thus when Heidegger poses the question of the identity of dasein the answer is given as das man, meaning "they," as one says on in French. Heidegger's subject is not "I" but "they," it is an indefinite plural:

> The "who" is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people, and not the sum of them all. The "who" is the neuter, the "they" ... We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge ....

This may seem very different from the Sartrean struggle for supremacy yet in an important respect it is not. Sartre explicitly rejects mitsein in L'Etre et le Néant because, as he sees it, consciousness cannot have positive relations, it can only be set against the Other. But since the pour soi's negative relation is part of the pour soi's very being, as is dasein's positive relation with others, the difference between Sartre and Heidegger here is not insurmountable. It all depends on whether one defines withness positively or negatively. In each case otherness is constitutive of oneself, man is not and can never be alone; that he suffers from loneliness is another matter and indeed proof of his fundamental being-with.

Human relations in Beckett's work have, at first sight, little of *mitsein* about them. Certainly the Other is almost always present to the Beckett tramps. In accordance with the Berkeleian dictum that to be is to be perceived the tramps expect to be watched by another at every moment of their existence. Of course the true observer whose gaze maintains us all in existence is, for Berkeley, God. But it is not difficult to identify anyone who is Other to me with God, the ultimate Other, in this context. Sartre manages a shift of this kind with his doctrine of the Look; the Look of anyone makes me what I am, it petrifies me into an *en soi*. In Beckett the distinction between other minds observing me and the mind of divinity is unimportant. What counts is that someone is always watching me. This issue has been indirectly touched upon in the discussion of freedom and compulsion in chapter three. Sometimes the observer is simply another tramp, sometimes he may be that obscure tyrant who at least appears to rule over the tramps' destinies. Murphy, who escapes other human beings, cannot in one sense deny that *esse est percipi* as he gazes at his own reflection in the eyes of the lunatic Mr. Endon. But then Mr. Endon does *not* perceive, strictly speaking, a fact which leaves Murphy's *esse* on precarious ground. Watt, that sad, questioning creature will be "calm and glad he witnesses and is witnessed" (p.40), and his anguish will be that others do not need him as he needs them. Yet even the elusive Mr. Knott is dependent on the gaze of another:

> And Mr. Knott, needing nothing if not, one, not to need, and, two, a witness to his not needing, of himself knew nothing. And so he needed to be witnessed. Not that he might know, no, but that he might not cease.
>
> p. 202.

This theme recurs in Beckett. Malone is watched by a mysterious visitor, the Unnamable is obsessed by the thought that he is under observation as is the narrator of How it is who imagines "someone listening another noting" (p. 28). In the plays the characters have similar preoccupations. "Tell him you saw us ... You did see us, didn't you?" (p. 52) cries Vladimir to Godot's messenger and Estragon to Vladimir: "Do you think God sees me?" (p. 76). At the end Vladimir muses as he watches his sleeping companion: "At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on" (p. 91). Winnie is glad to have a witness, however imperfect, to her prattle in the form of Willie. She also registers a "strange feeling that someone is looking at me" (p. 31). In Play one of the victims is preoccupied with the same issue.

Of course there are many observers. There is the audience, there is the author, Samuel Beckett, there is the reader. But we are not concerned with these here. The true observer of present relevance is revealed in Film. This brief work is explicitly concerned to dramatize the esse est percipi and shows a man escaping what Beckett calls the "agony of perceivedness."[3] He avoids the look of other men, retires to a room, suppresses in turn the gaze of a mirror, then that of a dog and a cat, then that of God the Father staring from a print on the wall, then that of a parrot and a fish only to be at last confronted by an image of himself gazing at him. Beckett sums this concisely: "Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception" (p. 31). Clearly the Unnamable's outburst - "when you think what it would be, a world without spectator, and vice versa, brrr!" (p. 378) - is an ironic one. Actually there is no spectator, human or divine, in the last analysis, just as there is, as we have seen, no external force of compulsion. What the tramp and the voice of the Unnamable experience as compulsion is consciousness itself. What they experience as an external witness is really always the presence of self-consciousness. This is evident when the Unnamable and the narrator of How it is dismiss any notion of a presence other than their own, whether this be a presence of external compulsion or some kind of spectator. If esse est percipi this is only because consciousness constitutes itself as existing by gazing reflectively at itself, by being conscious of its own consciousness. At this point being-with has been banished as effectively from Beckett's world as was being-in-the-world and the Irreducible stands alone.

This is not to deny that human relations are often depicted in positive terms in Beckett's work. It is true that the master-slave relation receives some emphasis. On the other hand, whereas the pour soi is obliged to have only negative relations with its fellows, Beckett's characters are under no such philosophic restraint since, as already shown, Beckett's world is not founded on the Sartrean void. Indeed Beckett's compassion makes it clear that, in spite of limitations imposed upon the coming together of two human beings, relationships of friendship or of love have something to offer. Murphy has genuine feeling for the lunatics of the Mercyseat and this is rewarded. Nor is his affair with the devoted prostitute Celia viewed entirely with scepticism. Watt's experience with the one-breasted Mrs. Gorman has its moments of soothing rest. The grotesque infatuation of Mac and Moll in Malone Dies cannot be dismissed as sarcasm on Beckett's part. Vladimir and Estragon make something of their relationship: "We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us?" (p.69). This point will be readily allowed, since many have stressed the humanism of Waiting for Godot or at least the way in which, in this play, companionship keeps despair at arm's length. Even the two tramps who meet in the slime of How it is do not regard their communication as a failure. And Happy Days, if we are to believe Madeleine Renaud, who took the part of Winnie in the original Paris production, is a play in which human love is exalted.[4] At its climax Willie, hitherto largely out of sight, emerges to crawl to Winnie's face above the sand. Winnie reacts with joy and a tragi-comic rendition of the song from The Merry Widow: love, that inconceivable touch of fingers, is, after all, possible, as the lyrics of the waltz assure us.

But it would be futile to ignore the limitations imposed upon those who wish to love and be loved in the novels and plays. Beckett's world is not Sartre's, being-with is not out of the question in it and yet it is severely restricted in fact. At the beginning of his writing career Beckett comments on the treatment of human relationships in Proust: "... the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic ..." (p.63). Some of this is humourously presented in Murphy:

> Of such was Neary's love for Miss Dwyer, who loved a Flight-Lieutenant Elliman, who loved a Miss Farren of Ringsakiddy, who loved a Father Fitt of Ballinclashet, who in all sincerity was bound to acknowledge a certain vocation for a Mrs. West of Passage, who loved Neary.
>
> p.7.

The results when love is requited may be little better. Thus Molloy tells us: "... I toiled and moiled until I discharged or gave up trying or was begged by her to stop. A mug's game in my opinion and tiring on top of that..." (p.56). And, in a comparable mood of disillusionment, Malone watches a couple in the window who "cleave so fast together that they seem a single body"; but it is all in vain for "when they totter it is clear they are twain, and in vain they clasp with the energy of despair, it is clear we have here two distinct and separate bodies, each enclosed within its own frontiers" (p.238). Winnie, even on her happy day, is aware of this: "Willie. (Mildly.) Help. (Pause.) No? (Pause.)" (p.28). She does not ask for much: " ... indeed at times it would seem hardly possible ... to ask less - of a fellow creature ... whereas actually - when you think about it ... then perhaps the moon - all this time - asking for the moon" (p.23). Even Vladimir and Estragon who by Beckett standards are very close cannot step in each other's shoes:

> ESTRAGON: (feebly). Help me!
> VLADIMIR: It hurts?
> ESTRAGON: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!
> VLADIMIR: (angrily) No one ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have.
> ESTRAGON: It hurts?
> VLADIMIR: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!
> p.10.

After this Nell and Nagg attempt - unsuccessfully - to kiss across the space which separates their rubbish bins, Krapp recalls with disgust the idylls of the past, and the characters of Play continue to torture each other for all eternity. The story of Bolton and Holloway in Embers goes far towards a summary of human relationships in Beckett: as the two men face each other, one in need, the other closed off, Bolton's "please!" sounds the unheard plea for communion in a world of solitude and pain. Of similar significance is Mrs. Rooney's cry in All that Fall: "Your arm! Any arm! A helping hand! For five seconds! Christ what a planet!" (p.21).

The end result of the Reduction is, as already stated, to leave the Beckett subject in his own company, sole witness to his own predicament, and, beyond that, to suggest the presence of an Unnamable whose solitude transcends consciousness itself. Clearly if human relations are at least theoretically possible in Beckett they are in fact always disappointing. As in the case of the tramps' relations with the world about them in general we must ask why love and friendship are doomed to collapse or, if they continue, they must do so in more and more difficult circumstances. The tramp may be involved in his world but this world is falling apart; if the tramp relates at all to the future, to present objects and to people, it is in the context of a general disintegration. To give the Sartrean answer at this point - that all relationships are bound to short-circuit - is not enough and we must look again to Heidegger for a philosophy that will do justice to Beckett's art.

More particularly, we must turn to the concept of _angst_. This key term may be traced to Kierkegaard but is made extensive use of by both Sartre and Heidegger. Since Sartre borrows it in part from Heidegger, though, it is best considered here in the context of the latter's thought. In order for this to be done, a preliminary study of what could be termed "normality" is required. Heidegger's _dasein_ usually exists in a state of "everydayness:" "Proximally and for the most part Dasein is ... absorbed in the world."[5] It is absorbed in its schemes and projects and in the utilization of its environment and, in the course of this, encounters other beings - not as persons, but as a vague presence which must be taken into account if _dasein_'s schemes are to be carried out. We _first_ meet the Other in ourselves, in other words, in the very texture of our own activities insofar as they exist in the world, that world which is the product not of one man's strivings but of the strivings of all men. Logically prior to my actual encounter with the Other, this encounter with the Other in my world, that is, in _myself_, is impersonal and implicit rather than explicit. The Other appears as a "they," and in this context absorbed _dasein_ is itself a "they," it has little individuality, it does what anyone, what "other people" do, it *is* anyone: "We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see and judge ... as *they* see and judge ...." In this ontology of normality or "everydayness" Heidegger is not attempting a moral comment. To say that *dasein*'s being-with takes the usual form of being everyone and noone is offered as a descriptive statement. For the most part *dasein* has no real personal identity: it *is* "they" in the sense that it participates in a general ethos which proceeds from noone in particular but is "in the air" as it were. Some things "are done," others are "not done," one does things as they "should be" done. At no stage is it clear whence these imperatives originate; they are there and their power increases in proportion as their origins are obscured. As a "they" *dasein* lives in the public eye; what it does is always on show and is characterized by superficiality or, more specifically, by what Heidegger calls Idle Talk, Curiosity and Ambiguity. All this makes up the way of being termed "falling." *Dasein* is said to fall from an "authentic" mode of existence into "everydayness," into "inauthenticity" or the role of the "they." The mistaken "supposition of the 'they' that one is leading ... a full and genuine 'life,' brings Dasein a *tranquillity*, for which everything is 'in the best of order,'"[6] and in this comforting illusion it busies itself distractedly with its schemes, alienated[7] from its authentic possibilities, "*entangled*"[8] in a mass of short-sighted objectives. But *dasein* is not merely confused. It *is* this confusion, its being *is* a falling, an incoherency. "Thrown" into the world it continues to plunge into its unreal future, like a stricken Mahood in orbit, itself its own trajectory, its own plunge.

Normality is of secondary interest in Beckett, but it is nonetheless of some significance. *Molloy* provides a starting point here with its description of Moran. Moran is not a tramp. He owns a house, keeps animals, goes to church, has a job, is, in short, as solid a citizen as one may hope to find in the trilogy. Moran lives entirely in an atmosphere of vague and impersonal obligation not unlike that of the Heideggerian "they," working for a presumably vast organization and with the absurd task of tracking down Molloy. The "they" in Beckett's work belongs to the sphere of lies, humbug and cruelty. We meet its representatives in the sadistic male nurses of Murphy's asylum with their "textbook attitude ... the complacent scientific conceptualism that made contact with outer reality the index of mental well-being" (p. 122). Beckett adds:

> On this basis the patients were described as "cut off" from reality ... The function of treatment was to bridge the gulf, translate the sufferer from his own pernicious little private dungheap to the glorious world of discrete particles, where it would be his inestimable prerogative once again to wonder, love, hate, desire, rejoice and howl in a reasonable balanced manner, and comfort himself with the society of others in the same predicament.
>
> p. 123.

Watt is full of normal folk like the nurses of Murphy: the academics of the Louit story, Lady McCann, "catholic and military" (p. 30), who casts the first of many stones at the Beckett tramp, the group at the station who treat Watt with contempt. Such people occur in the Stories to swindle the tramp and in Molloy there are the inevitable police to whom Molloy is an affront, there is the social worker ("against the charitable gesture there is no defence," p.24) and Lousse, the Circe of the novel. In Malone Dies there are Sapo's parents and Lady Pedal, this last assaulted by the not-so-irrational lunatics whom she treats to a charity excursion. Normality is often associated with figures of some authority, always more or less vicious, such as Pozzo or Hamm. It is from "these righteous ones, these guardians of the peace" (Molloy, p.35), absorbed in the inanities of the "they," keenly aware of the value of time, that the tramp must escape. But Moran in Molloy and Pozzo in Waiting for Godot collapse and revert to something resembling the tramps. Beckett hates their world with more than the conventional hatred of the avant garde for the bourgeoisie and disintegrates it with relish. Exactly how are we to understand this in the context of modern existential philosophy and how are we to relate it to the issues of being-there and being-with discussed in this chapter?

CHAPTER 5

BECKETT AND HEIDEGGER: THE CONCEPT OF *ANGST*

> Everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein has been individualized, but individualized *as* Being-in-the-world. Being-in enters into the existential "mode" of the "*not-at-home*."[1]
>
> Heidegger.

> For Watt now found himself in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance.
>
> *Watt*, p.78.

"Falling" *dasein* escapes itself and burrows in the security of normal, everyday things, the life of the "they." But what Heidegger calls an authentic way of being is possible and is, in fact, constantly being thrust before *dasein*. Thus the analysis of normality in *Being and Time* leads directly to the discussion of *angst*. Heidegger borrows the idea of *angst* - or dread, or anguish, as it has been called - from Kierkegaard and adapts it to suit his own approach.

Angst may be initially defined as a mood of terror accompanying or colouring one's experience of reality. In the experience *dasein* is said to face itself, its own situation, in a way it does not normally do when it is absorbed in everyday affairs. Under the influence of *angst* normality collapses. Inauthentic schemes and plans lose their credibility. Objects assume an alien form and the safety of the "they" disappears. Everything previously familiar to *dasein*, its very world, is now steeped in strangeness, in a feeling of otherness. Heidegger terms this the Uncanny and describes *dasein*'s situation as that of one who sees for the first time the world as a naked, indifferent presence. In this crisis _dasein_ does not know what to do and feels that no action could relieve the sense of oppression. It is not as if _dasein_ were afraid. Fear, says Heidegger, is directed outwards, towards a particular object. But _angst_ bears no relation to anything in particular. It is vague and all-pervasive and seems to emanate from _dasein_ itself. Of necessity it sets _dasein_ apart from others who are still involved in the everyday, for in this unique experience the platitudes of normality are of no avail: the "they" cannot reach the solitude of _angst_. It could be said that in _angst_ _dasein_ has acquired a new identity. No longer legion it is now individualized, what Heidegger refers to as being-one's-self. But _dasein_ is a being-there, a being-in-the-world, and _angst_, if it is to reveal the truth, must in some way underline this fact. In other words it must highlight the basic elements of the human condition even as it sets _dasein_ apart from others and distances it from its activities and projects. The one basic element of _dasein_'s structure is that it is not an Ego, that its essence is to _exist_, to be _there_. Hence what is most vivid in the experience of _angst_ is the awareness of being thrust into an unbearable disclosure, as if Existence were precisely a being-out-in-the-open, a standing out or _ex-sistere_. Normally _dasein_ is at pains to forget this and much of its activity is aimed at lessening the sense of its one reality: that it is inescapably in existence, thrown, through no will of its own, into the possession of its own being - in freedom and, by the same token, in uncertainty and fear. _Angst_, however, makes comforting illusions appear totally irrelevant:

> Everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein has been individualized, but individualized _as_ Being-in-the-world. Being-in enters into the existential "mode" of the "_not-at-home_."

Heidegger elaborates by arguing that _dasein_'s structure as revealed in the experience of angst is threefold: Facticity, Existence and Falling. These concepts have been discussed already and may be dealt with briefly here. Dasein is, first of all, a fact, "thrown" into being; secondly, it is a being-there, an Existence, a project into the future, into freedom, a being which, like the pour-soi, lives outside itself; thirdly, it is an inauthentic being-with, entangled in the confusion of the "they." The role of angst is to neutralize normality and to allow the truth to speak for itself. No more ingenious torture could be devised for man whose greatest impulse is to avoid responsibility and the facts of his position. Thus angst afflicts with every possible calamity. It forces man to admit that he is inescapably a fact, that he exists, that he is free, that he has to face his situation, not blindfold as it were or cushioned by the activities of normal living but in the glare of a horrifyingly simple insight. Angst tampers with dasein's world with the aim of baring its essentials. It modifies the awareness of time by focussing dasein on the fact of its limits or finitude. Dasein sees that the future is enclosed by death as the past by birth. Instead of looking forward, as "one" does, to an interminable sphere of action, dasein finds itself against a wall. The wall of the future projects it back against the wall of the past - the fact of things beyond human control - and both of these turn its attention to the present, a moment of intense insight and discomfort which Heidegger terms the Moment of Vision. Of course the Moment of Vision is the moment of angst.

One other point should be stressed. Angst is an experience of being and nothingness, as Heidegger explains in his 1929 lecture, "What is Metaphysics?" As everyday reality recedes into meaninglessness, dasein feels that its world has suddenly lost its solidity, that it hovers over a vast emptiness. It becomes aware that it itself is a void, a mere phantom, not the substantial Self it supposed itself to be, that Self which everyone in general knew as Peter or John, but a freedom, a project, a possibility. To be free, as *dasein* normally is, to build a house or buy a car is one thing, to be faced with the fact of freedom in its entirety is another. *Dasein* becomes dizzy on the edge of the void which it knows is inescapable since it is itself that void. At the same time its every action seems permeated by nullity, it becomes a kind of nothing, since, after all, it is free, it may be carried through or not depending only on *dasein*'s choice. "Why do this?" *dasein* finds itself asking of everything it does. Why not? Actions have no meaning other than that which *dasein* assigns to them and it is difficult to accept that as sufficient. As already explained, however, even as it reveals the immaterial transparency of things, *angst* underlines their substantiality. As nothingness pours into the world *dasein*'s being-there also obtrudes in all its monolithic facticity. *Dasein* is simultaneously exposed to the void and stifled by the presence of its own being, everything recedes only to crowd, the world withdraws as uncanny only to return as the inexorable "there" which *is dasein*.

At this point it is not difficult to relate Sartrean nausea and the Camus Absurd to *angst* as described by Heidegger. Sartre's *pour soi* differs radically from *dasein* but like it is plagued by the burden of Existence, by its freedom and its facticity. And indeed there is no doubt that *L'Etre et le Néant* owes a great deal to Heidegger's work. Clearly, insofar as the situation of the Beckett tramps resembles that of the *pour soi*'s facticity and freedom it will also resemble that of *dasein*. Likewise the similarity between Beckett and Camus will be explicable in terms of *angst* insofar as the Absurd appears as a variant of the Heideggerian theme. The Absurd involves a break with habit as *angst* a break with the everyday; it involves a sense of alienation from people, from objects, from oneself, as does *angst*; it involves an awareness of human limits, of age and of death - like the other. Heidegger does not use the term absurd but then the Uncanny is somewhat similar. As Sartre borrows from Heidegger in order to construct his own unique philosophy of being and nothingness so Camus borrows the concept of angst from Kierkegaard - where its context is more obviously religious - and from Heidegger, adds a little humanism and Mediterranean love of life, and calls it the Absurd. It should be evident, from the description so far given of nausea, the Absurd and angst, that Camus' treatment of the theme is less philosophical than Sartre's and Heidegger's and indeed that it is, by comparison, imprecise and journalistic. Doubtless this contributed to its popular success.

A little more needs to be said about Heidegger's angst which is to be the basis of the present analysis of Beckett. Associated with dasein's feeling of anxiety is also a pervasive sense of guilt and this guilt, like angst, relates to nothing in particular. Rather it is tied up with the fact of Existence which escapes human control. Dasein is, as it were, guilty because it exists, that is, because it is dasein. At this point we may introduce the Heideggerian distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity. Everyday dasein refuses the responsibility of facing its Existence:

> The "they" has always kept Dasein from taking hold of these possibilities of Being. The "they" even hides the manner in which it has tacitly relieved Dasein of the burden of explicitly choosing these possibilities. It remains indefinite who has "really" done the choosing. So Dasein makes no choices, gets carried along by the nobody, and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity.[2]

This is dasein's ontological guilt, that it exists as "falling," as inauthentic, that it exists as "they," and it is revealed by what is referred to in Being and Time as the Voice of Conscience. Conscience here is dasein itself asserting itself as there in the face of its own tendency to cover over the fact. In a world of Idle Talk, Curiosity and Ambiguity the call of Conscience is silent, single-minded and categorical. Its summons is heard in the experience of angst. Like angst it tells "nothing" at all, it simply nullifies all else, repeating itself with the insistence of fact, undermining the everyday, bringing before dasein its own image, alone, free, "forsaken,""abandoned,"[3] without alibi. If dasein hears the call and acknowledges its own being-there, it is said to bear its guilt, to be "resolute," answerable for itself. Resolute dasein and authenticity are one and the same. Heidegger sums his entire argument by saying that the voice one hears in angst calls one to oneself as existing and by terming this the voice of Care. Care is the true being of dasein and this term implies all that has already been said of Heideggerian man. To exist is to be movement, to be constant stir and fret, a project outwards, it is to be a creature of worry and anxiety, constantly faced with the emptiness of a free future. Angst simply reveals man to himself, as a being shot through and through with Care. It also offers him an opportunity to face his own nature authentically and to live without disguise.

As early as Proust Beckett shows an interest in the breakup of habit and the moment of discomfort and insight which results. Habit, he argues - and he could be speaking for his own later characters as much as for those of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu - is "the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his [man's] existence. Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit" (p. 19). Of real interest, though, is the transition period when one habit has been shed and a new adjustment is not yet made to another. These are "perilous zones ... dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being ... that is, the free play of every faculty" (pp.19-20). It is not difficult to see in this a partial description of _angst_, that intense consciousness of being unrelieved by the opiates of doing. Once we turn to Beckett's own work it is at once clear that the tramps, alienated from the everyday world of the sane, exist in a no-man's-land which is precisely this perilous zone of contact with reality and which is for them a natural and enduring state.

However, any analysis of Beckett in terms of Heideggerian _angst_ must begin with _Watt_ and particularly with the fascinating incident of the piano-tuners. The Galls, father and son, arrive at Mr. Knott's to tune the piano and Watt observes them as they go about their job. When they have finished the two leave and, for Watt, the torment begins:

> ... the scene in the music-room, with the two Galls, ceased very soon to signify for Watt a piano tuned, an obscure family and professional relation, an exchange of judgements more or less intelligible, and so on, if indeed it had ever signified such things, and became a mere example of light commenting bodies, and stillness motion, and silence sound, and comment comment.
>
> pp.69-70.

The more Watt tries to plumb the significance of this obscure visit the more it evades him until he finds himself confused about his very acts of perception. The event seems to dissolve into nothingness and yet it cannot be overlooked. In a sense it is a nothing that continues to happen in Watt's mind as he broods over it in its

> ... complex connexions of ... lights and shadows,

> the passing from silence to sound and from sound to silence, the stillness before the movement and the stillness after, the quickenings and retardings, the approaches and the separations, all the shifting detail of its march and ordinance, according to the irrevocable caprice of its taking place.
>
> p.69.

To settle the question by insisting that there is nothing out of the ordinary here, simply a pair of workmen, a piano, an arrival, a few words and a departure would suit Watt very well. If the event could be explained in some simple way it could be forgotten. But it acquires an impenetrable density to Watt's mind. How to comprehend, to rationalize a brute event, if the visit was that? How to satisfy the desire for clarity by joining together a name and a reality such as would be the case if one could say "the Galls," or better still, "the Galls, father and son, piano tuners," or, if possible, even "the Galls, father and son, piano tuners, come to do their job and leaving when it is done"?

> What distressed Watt in this incident ... was not so much that he did not know what had happened ... as that nothing had happened, that a thing that was nothing had happened, with the utmost formal distinctness, and that is continued to happen, in his mind, he supposed ... though it seemed to be outside him, before him, about him ... inexorably to unroll its phases, beginning with the first (the knock that was not a knock) and ending with the last (the door closing that was not a door closing) ....
>
> p.73.

The Galls' visit is, of course, an irreducible, a non-event which takes place. What is of interest at this point, however, is its relation to Watt. Watt needs a hypothesis to "disperse" (p.74) or "exorcize" (p.75) the problem unless he is to admit utter bankruptcy in his attempt to give human meaning to reality. As it happens he fails and the disintegration of experience involved in the incident of the Galls gradually extends to all of Watt's life: "For Watt now found himself in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance" (p.78).

Watt is faced with a unique experience, the falling away of normality and everyday significance characteristic of Heideggerian _angst_. In spite of all his efforts his world-about-him takes on an alien colouring, a strangeness akin to the Uncanny. No longer is it enough to assign a casual label to things: piano tuners participate in a mystery of being before which Watt's interpretative resources are helpless. As he gazes at a pot in Mr. Knott's kitchen

> ... it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot ... For it was not a pot, the more he looked, the more he reflected, the more he felt sure of that, that it was not a pot at all. It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted. It was in vain that it answered, with unexceptionable adequacy, all the purposes, and performed all the offices, of a pot, it was not a pot. And it was just this hairbreadth departure from the nature of a true pot that so excruciated Watt.
>
> p.78.

No finer tragi-comic parallel to the Heideggerian experience could be found in modern literature. As Watt's sense of the everyday reality, that is, the familiarity of things, breaks down his being-in-the-world, as Heidegger would put it, takes on the aspect of the not-at-home. Of course Watt is distanced from objects about him such as the pot and other things zuhanden. A pot is a pot only to one who is able to utilize it. But Watt has no sense of direction, he does not know what it is he should be doing, he has no plans, no project into the future. And it is precisely his loss of normal goals that disintegrates his little world. Bereft of purpose, objects lose any human meaning, they lose their very nature. Everything sinks into the night of the Uncanny and Watt makes "the distressing discovery that of himself too he could no longer affirm anything that did not seem as false as if he had affirmed it of a stone" (p.79). Panic-striken he attempts to assign names arbitrarily. But the "pseudo-pot" (p.80) is no more responsive when labelled a shield or a raven. As for himself:

> ... he continued to think of himself as a man, as his mother had taught him, when she said, There's a good little man, or, There's a bonny little man, or, There's a clever little man. But for all the relief that this afforded him, he might just as well have thought of himself as a box, or an urn.
>
> p.80.

The "pillow of old words, for his head" (p.115) is gone. Watt is alone. Between him and other human beings, as between him and his world in general, is a film of strangeness, of nothingness. In Heideggerian terms being-there and being-with have been challenged by the void. Yet, as in the experience of angst, nothingness crowds. Even as Watt is separated from normal reality the impenetrable fact of things, of himself amid a multiplicity of things - or rather nothings - is thrust upon him. The simple event which may be termed the Galls baffles but it is there, a fact without any content, a happening without meaning and so a non-event, a being-nothing. Everything recedes and sinks into an abyss only to torment Watt with its inexplicable presence. As he founders, Watt is forced to question even sense perception. Perhaps there are only brute sensations, an unknown sine qua non, and all the rest is fantasy, human construction, subjectivity: "were there neither Galls nor piano then, but only an unintelligible succession of changes from which Watt finally extracted the Galls and the piano, in self-defence?" (p.76). Heideggerian angst and the sceptical empiricism of Hume combine. Watt has plumbed a certain depth of being, away from the facile explanations of the "they," in that solitude which Heidegger terms being-one's-self, and has gazed at a void emanating from himself and engulfing the whole of life about him.

We may say the same of Vladimir and Estragon who experience a breakdown similar to Watt's although Beckett's emphasis in Waiting for Godot differs from that in the novel. As we have seen, without a point of reference, without a project into futurity, there is no existential "world" and it is Knott's failure to function as a point of reference that initiates the disintegration of Watt's world. Godot is a little more useful to Vladimir and Estragon. It is possible that he does not exist but insofar as there is hope the tramps retain a hold on their world. They have something in the future to work towards; thus the present becomes meaningful, there is something to do. But of course Godot cannot be reached except negatively, through waiting, so that the tramps are reduced to a minimum of existence: they have more to look forward to than has Watt but that is little enough, their present plight is more meaningful than Watt's but hardly enough to satisfy them. As Vladimir puts it, "this is becoming really insignificant" (p.68). Most important of all, their power to act is, as it happens, simply a licence to wait, to madden themselves with what is, in effect, negative action. Thus, after all, there is "nothing to be done" (p.9) and the vision of angst is inescapable. Vladimir and Estragon exist in a world that is strange to them, alienated from all sense of purpose except for the imperative of waiting. Time for them is no longer the time of the

Heideggerian "they" but an obsessive awareness of what the German philosopher calls finitude. Untrammelled by everyday concerns the two tramps are able to grasp the phenomenon of existence as a whole. They await an end of waiting. To that extent they are _already_ at the end, "anticipating," in Heidegger's term, the whole of their future, stretched out on the rack of time as a tension of futurity and the present, urged by their present plight onto the boundaries of the future and forced back by the emptiness of the future onto a present which may be defined as a Moment of Vision, a present of unbearable consciousness of being, that is, of _angst_. Under these conditions normal being-in-the-world is reduced to very little, to minimal human relations, to minimal utilization of material objects. The emptiness of the future, which is the emptiness of freedom, invades the present. This freedom, however, is not exactly Sartrean, as seen in a previous chapter. It is not the freedom of the _pour soi_ but something related to it, the freedom of _dasein_. Vladimir and Estragon are not Sartrean holes in being but beings whose choice of existence is, in one sense, illimitable:

> VLADIMIR: ... What do we do now?
> ESTRAGON: Wait.
> VLADIMIR: Yes, but while waiting.
>
> p.17.

It is the very magnitude of their possibilities that cripples the tramps. The world is theirs to fill with significance, but where are they to begin? The vision of freedom with its naked austerity can only be expressed as _angst_; one gazes, fascinated and appalled, and one continues to gaze, indefinitely.

At the same time it would be quite inadequate to consider _Waiting for Godot_ simply as a play illustrative of the existential breakdown of being-in-the-world, of meaning, of relations. Over and above all of this the play requires to be considered in terms of Heideggerian facticity. Even as they are assailed from all sides by nothingness, by freedom, by absence of significance, the tramps are obsessed with the _fact_ of being, with the inescapability of existence, in a way Watt is not. Of course they feel their being-_there_, as they feel their finitude - existence, finitude, thereness, it all amounts to the same thing - because they are waiting. But even if there were no Godot, if this were merely a waiting for the end of existence, it would make no difference. Godot, after all, is that one necessary reference point, that one brute fact which explains all other brute facts, and is not that existence itself? Waiting is not incidental to Vladimir's and Estragon's lives, it is their very being, an image of their facticity, and so the two are necessarily, perpetually, abnormally aware of being _there_, without reprieve. This is not simply the facticity of the _pour-soi_, although it resembles it, as has already been shown, but something revealed in a mood of Heideggerian _angst_, the nature of man as Heidegger defines it - _da-sein_. The tramps know that they _are_, whatever else they do or think, they cannot avoid facing that. They may be free but then their freedom is a fact also, it is there whether they like it or not, they _have_ to be free. To their eyes this is no freedom at all. Likewise they may choose to go or stay, but what difference does it make, since whether here or there or elsewhere they are forced to exist? With this monstrous proviso anything they choose to do is the same as anything else, any place they choose to occupy is the same as any other, it is all a being-in-the-world:

> ESTRAGON: ... Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!
>
> p. 61.

It is interesting to compare this dilemma with another kind of fundamental presence, that of characters in a Robbe-Grillet novel. Alain Robbe-Grillet, writing about Waiting for Godot in 1963, has no scruples about referring to the Heideggerian dasein in order to praise Beckett for his insistence on the brute fact of human presence. But the argument is utterly misleading. Robbe-Grillet, as in his novels, interprets human presence as the presence of an inanimate object, a stone or a tree, seeking to obliterate the role of consciousness and its attendant, rational speech. Dasein, however, is not an object, nor are Beckett's tramps objects. Where Robbe-Grillet leads to the visual effects of chosisme, Beckett, like Heidegger, carries on a tradition directly opposed, that of the cogito. The facticity of Vladimir and Estragon is nothing so simple as a merely material presence; Beckett and Heidegger are totally absorbed in the human predicament.

It is this which makes possible the drama of angst in Waiting for Godot. Vladimir and Estragon are intensely conscious, it is consciousness which defines their being-there, which makes the task of passing the time, that is, of existing, so difficult. Like Watt the tramps would like to escape the austerity of the situation by fashioning a pillow of words: "Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a way?" (p. 12). Ironically, it is their being together which, far from diminishing their acute sense of exposure increases it, since each sees himself reflected in the other. Nevertheless they try to forget:

> ESTRAGON: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
>
> VLADIMIR: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
>
> ESTRAGON: It's so we won't think.
>
> p. 62.

The discussion lags:

> VLADIMIR: Say something!
> ESTRAGON: I'm trying.
> Long silence.
> VLADIMIR: (in anguish). Say anything at all!
> p.63.

It picks up:

> ESTRAGON: That wasn't such a bad little canter.
> VLADIMIR: Yes, but now we'll have to find something else.
> p.65.

At times the tramps panic: "What'll we do, what'll we do!" (p.71) Estragon moans. They concentrate on objects, imitate the tree, play at being Pozzo and Lucky, carry out an exercise in abuse, do their physical training, and, when suicide fails, continue as before, waiting for the impossible end of being. Existence crowds and stifles them as it does Heidegger's dasein. To be "there" is to be enclosed, by time, by oneself, by one's world, in spite of all one's efforts. Thus Lucky expresses in his dancing the claustrophobia of existential angst in a rhythm variously described as "The Scapegoat's Agony," "The Hard Stool," and "The Net" (p.40).

But it would be inaccurate to suppose that Vladimir and Estragon are inauthentic, that their wish to avoid the consciousness of angst represents a desire to return to the world of the "they." The tramps' squirming is understandable and is in no way incompatible with what Heidegger calls Resolve. Vladimir and Estragon are fully aware of their existential "guilt" and they are willing to shoulder it:

> VLADIMIR: Suppose we repented.
>
> . . .
>
> ESTRAGON: Our being born?
>
> p.11.

Among Beckett's women the most striking example of authenticity is Winnie of Happy Days who, on the face of it, tries to escape the realities of her situation in a way reminiscent of Vladimir and Estragon but who is in some respects more clear-sighted than the tramps. Of course she exhibits what Beckett has termed "our pernicious and incurable optimism" (Proust, p.15), but her presentation is not antipathetic. In any case, she is no naïve optimist. Her little games, her song, her memories, all this exists on the brink of the void and Winnie is not unaware of it. Like Vladimir and Estragon she tries to fill her empty day with trivia, unable to escape the awareness of angst, of her precarious hold on things. In fact she faces her despair and makes the best of it, living in the Heideggerian Uncanny: "Strange? (Pause.) No, here all is strange" (p.33). Winnie is distanced from her surroundings. She is alone, knowing how little she may rely on Willie. There are little comforts of course - the bag and its contents, sad relic of dasein's triumphant projects into the world of doing, her prayers and her thoughts of the past - but there is no question of shutting out the terror of being: "sorrow keeps breaking in" (p.27). Winnie opens with an act of calculated self-control: "Begin your day, Winnie" (p.10). It is the motto of the voice of the Unnamable: "On, Winnie" (p.12). If Winnie is a little person, a conventional lady with conventional illusions, there is nothing conventional about her courage: "Brush and comb the hair ... these things tide one over" (p.20). It should be stressed that Winnie's situation is most similar to that of Vladimir and Estragon in that in each case the full force of angst is concentrated on the awareness of one's Existence as a being there, as a naked fact. The tramps cannot move: being-here is no different from being-there if one has no option about being-in-the-world. In Winnie's case this is underlined by the image of immobility. To exist is to be enclosed by finitude, by the world. Winnie's sandpile which gradually swallows her up is therefore a mirror of her existential predicament, an image of the facticity of Existence which prevents her from embracing the only alternative, non-being. In act two Winnie's fears are realized. The use of the bag gone, there is nothing but the consciousness of immobility, that is, of being-there. Winnie's despair emerges in disguised form in the story of Mildred. Although at the end she is rewarded with Willie's presence, the real problem remains unresolved.

It is possible to argue along similar lines for most of Beckett's characters. For example, the protagonist of _Film_ who escapes the gaze of his own _cogito_ may equally be said to be in flight from _angst_, that is, from the awareness of Existence. And here the link between the entire Cartesian tradition with its stress on mind and the concept of _angst_ is evident. To suffer _angst_ is to suffer one's own consciousness, its acute sense of its own being and, above all, of its being _placed_, enclosed within the boundaries of Existence. It is this anguish which overcomes the inauthentic. Moran, a normal, self-forgetful human being, crumbles under the experience of _angst_, progressing, as he moves closer and closer to the tramp Molloy, from the world of the "they" to the state Heidegger calls being-one's-self. It is a process of individualization, in Moran's words: "a frenzied collapsing of all that had always protected me from all I was condemned to be" (p.149). Of course the Beckett character is condemned to Existence and to the knowledge of it without evasion. Pozzo's development in this respect exactly parallels Moran's. Pozzo begins as a paradigm of normality and ends with the loss of his sense of everyday projects and time. As in the vision of Vladimir and Estragon his sense of temporality has shrunk to an instant of acute awareness of Existence as a whole: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (p.89). Inevitably, though, it is the outcast who is weighed down by the truth in Beckett's work. In this context Lucky's celebrated speech expressing the horror of a universe resting on emptiness emerges not only as a piece of inspired poetic confusion but as the prophetic utterance of the tramp possessed by angst and the voice of Care.

On the whole it is the privilege and curse of the characters of the trilogy and the later work to see the truth most clearly. But these characters differ from Winnie or Vladimir and Estragon in that they make few attempts to escape angst. There is no longer any question of escape, only one issue held before their eyes without respite. "I have spoken of a voice telling me things," says Moran when he has taken on the personality of the tramp, "it did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little ... But in the end I understood ..." (p.176). The Voice of Conscience or of Care in Heidegger is a call in angst to authenticity. Likewise the voice of consciousness in Beckett is a call to the razor-edge of being self-aware, a condition in which old certainties are robbed of their security and everything appears strange and relative. Molloy hears it - "it is not a sound like other sounds, that you listen to, when you choose, and can sometimes silence" (p.40) - and it keeps him constantly "so terror-stricken that I was virtually bereft of feeling" (p.54), as he tells us. It is true that Molloy, like other tramps, lives in a state of torpor, but this is in respect to everyday human concerns. When it comes to the one thing necessary the tramp's mind is horrifyingly active: "A fine rain was falling and I took off my hat to give my skull the benefit of it, my skull all cracked and furrowed and on fire, on fire" (p.61). Molloy, like Watt, has lost all contact with the hated world of normality: "And even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate ... there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names." (p.31). Malone is in the same situation, living "in strangeness" (p.183), absorbed in the wisdom of angst which puts all else in the perspective of Existence: "Dish and pot ... these are the poles" (p.185). The tramp has left behind inauthentic projects (he is reduced to minimal activities and minimal utilization of objects) and inauthentic being-with (he is alone). He exists in a void of freedom - Heideggerian as well as Sartrean freedom - able to do what he likes or go where he wishes. But it is a worthless choice since Existence itself, the fact of the tramp's being-there, is inescapable. Hence the tramp suffers a growing claustrophobia as nothingness overruns everything about him, reducing all to sameness, and then thrusts his thereness, his being-in-a-world, at him. Once again the intensification of angst and the pressure of consciousness are one and the same thing. Molloy is hemmed in by earth and sky, Malone by a little room. As in the plays, immobility images the plight of being-there: Malone is helpless in bed, like Winnie in the sand. Guilt too - the guilt of existing - is an issue, as it is in Waiting for Godot. Macmann is preoccupied with it and, as in Heidegger, it is impossible to free oneself of such guilt - the only way is to accept it and live with it, responsible for oneself like "resolute" dasein: "So long as it is what is called a living being you can't go wrong, you have the guilty one" (p.260).

All of this is taken to its ultimate point in The Unnamable. Of course in strict terms we cannot speak of the Unnamable itself as suffering the awareness of being. This plight is reserved for the voice which, as we have seen, speaks for the Irreducible but is distinct from it. Here, more than ever, to be conscious is to groan in angst, to live out one's time in a Heideggerian Moment of Vision. The Voice has cut all links with normality, it is supremely individualized in its utter solitude, it is supremely free, without interest in any particular project, unconcerned with everyday significance, above all, painfully existing as there, in situation. Thus its immobility goes beyond anything envisaged by the tramps and its sense of being hemmed in by Existence is extreme. Its space is that of the cogito, of course, the dimensions of a skull, but it is equally that of Heideggerian finitude, the space of a moment of agonizing lucidity. Like the tramps, the Voice has no choice: it gazes at itself in authenticity, drawn by the power of the terrible vision. Such torment coupled with clear-sightedness is the mark of most other Beckett characters from Mrs. Rooney of All that Fall to Joe of the television play and from Murphy and Watt to the narrator of How it is. In the voice of the Unnamable, however, it finds its fullest expression.

In chapter four I analysed Beckett's depiction of human relations and of relations between the individual and that assortment of personal projects Heidegger calls the "world" in terms of the concepts of being-in-the-world or being-there and being with, dasein and mitsein. The world of Beckett's characters was seen to be in the process of disintegration so that for the tramps there could be very little being-in-the-world in the sense of doing, of manipulating one's environment with a view to future schemes, and, in spite of attempts, very little being-with. Finally, I outlined Heidegger's notion of inauthentic Existence, the life of das man or the "they," and pointed out that it is precisely this kind of everyday normality that is in the process of collapse in Beckett's work. The explanation in terms of modern existential philosophy is now evident: Beckett's world of normal being-in-situation is disintegrating because it is viewed through the eyes of tramps for whom something very like Heideggerian angst is a natural condition. Angst, as Heidegger defines it, involves the concepts of the Uncanny and of being-one's-self, detached from inauthentic projects; it also involves an obliteration of one's world, an invasion of nothingness or freedom whose effect is to emphasize the fact of being - one's thereness - even as it reveals its contingency, its existence on the backdrop of the void. Without unduly blurring the distinction between art and philosophy it is possible to apply a great deal of this to the situation of the Beckett character. Watt's problem thus appears as an onrush of existential insight, unwelcome but inevitable: Watt's world sinks into the

Uncanny, into Existential nothingness. In the cases of Vladimir, Estragon and Winnie the effect of angst is similar but the emphasis seems to be rather more on the revelation of being-there as facticity. The same may be said of the trilogy where images of fixity and claustrophobia are taken to their farthest point. Most of Beckett's characters, then, are cursed with the feeling of angst, even those who, like Pozzo or Moran, are initially presented as respectable bourgeois. And this - fundamental - aspect of Beckett's vision relates not only to the tradition of Heidegger, where angst is of central importance, but, as already pointed out, to the Cartesian tradition also. In the hands of Samuel Beckett the cogito is transformed into the awareness of existential being, into angst, that is to say, the Cartesian line is linked, as indeed it should be, to modern existential approaches. It is no exaggeration to say that a student of the history of philosophy from the seventeenth century to the present might learn more from Waiting for Godot or Watt or The Unnamable than from a great many conventional histories. We may add that in Beckett's hands Occasionalism likewise dovetails into the modern predicament. The Reduction, studied in an earlier chapter in terms of seventeenth century thought, is, in addition, a movement perfectly expressive of the levelling gaze of angst, beginning tentatively in Murphy and taken to its farthest point in the later work. Indeed, from this point of view the Reduction is nothing other than a progressively intensified sense of angst and it reveals, as does angst in Heidegger's work, the simple fundamentals of life: Existence - understood as freedom, as a being-there.

On the above basis we may state categorically that Beckett's work is in a genuine sense existential, that it shares the weltanschauung of Martin Heidegger. More precisely, Beckett's basic assumption is existential or phenomenological in that his characters are viewed as beings-in-situation or beings-in-the-world. If at first sight this does not seem to be the case, if at first sight the Beckett tramp appears totally cut off from an existential sphere of action, this is simply due to Beckett's concern with the awareness of being or angst. In other words, the tramp is comparable to dasein, but to authentic dasein scarred by the knowledge of truth; he is a being-there, but as alienated from his normal "there" and obsessed by the overpowering consciousness of "thereness" in all its starkness and inevitability. Descartes' cogito is denied this sense, it exists beside a body as it were, within a world in a purely spatial sense. The Beckett cogito, Cartesian mind in anguish, knows itself as placed in an ontological sense, its awareness of itself is a consciousness of position: in fact it is exactly a being-in-position, a being enclosed, defined by its being-enclosed. The womb and the grave, themselves restricted spaces, are the poles of this enclosure which is Existence and the small space of the skull images the situation between these poles. Not surprisingly, Beckett blurs all distinctions between womb, skull and grave: regardless of how it is viewed, Existence is definable as a limited area.

It should be clear at this point that the parallel with Heidegger is more helpful than that with Sartre or Camus. Beckett's starting point is not Sartrean and if there are resemblances this is, at least in some important respects, due to Sartre's link with the wider existential movement and with Heidegger in particular. Sartrean facticity and freedom, for example, owe a lot to the German philosopher, so that the similarity between Sartre and Beckett may be misleading where these concepts are concerned. Beckett's world is not one of en soi and pour soi, being and the void, not in a Sartrean sense. Nor is it a world of the Absurd as Camus understands this, although the idea of absurdity is certainly applicable at times. Once again, the root principle is neither Sartre's nor Camus' but Heidegger's and it is the concept of angst. In order to make the comparison with

Heidegger more convincing still, however, we must go further. First of all we must note a divergence from Heidegger.

Authentic dasein has, as already explained, a sense of finitude. In the moment of angst it knows itself as mortal, it "anticipates" its end, as Heidegger puts it, straining forward with its gaze fixed on finality. This forward motion is inseparable from an arching back to the beginning and between these two ends of the rack dasein stretches out to span the present, a Moment of Vision. Beckett's tramps also straddle the three dimensions of time in this way to forge them into an organic unity. But whereas the awareness of limits acts as a spur to dasein, it has no such effect on the tramp. Dasein's angst makes it sensible of the necessity to act, in freedom, to work to realize its authentic being in the shadow of death. On the other hand the tramp is totally unconcerned with the freedom to act. Nor is he really concerned with death in a Heideggerian way. Finality troubles him and indeed he "anticipates" it, but as something which is inconceivable, and, most important, something which is to be desired. Murphy is fond of "pondering Christ's parthian shaft: It is finished" (p.52) and he manages to make his exit at the close of the novel. But the later characters are not so lucky. The end becomes an infinitely distant point constantly being anticipated and so realized in the present such that the tramp exists in an extraordinary tension, that of an imminent end constantly postponed. Nothing could be more frustrating. "A ton of worms in an acre," broods the narrator of From an Abandoned Work, "that is a wonderful thought" (p.145). Even more obvious are the examples of Waiting for Godot, Endgame and the trilogy. "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (p.12): these are the opening lines of Endgame. The game does not end, of course, as in the other play Godot never comes. Vladimir and Estragon will continue to wait, Hamm and Clov will continue to end. So also in Molloy and Malone Dies:

> ... and that's what counts, to be done, to have done.
>
> Molloy, p.41.

> This is the kind of story he has been telling himself all his life, saying, This cannot possibly last much longer.
>
> Malone Dies, pp.239-240.

The final say goes to the Unnamable: "you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (p.418). Unlike dasein, for whom authenticity means action, the tramp (and the same may be said of the Voice in The Unnamable) wants only to have done with things, to leave consciousness behind, as argued in an earlier chapter of this thesis. Moreover this is not simply the expression of a desire to escape the torture of angst; it is something more positive, a desire to transcend angst. The Reduction, which has been identified with the effects of angst, leads after all to a vital mystery, the Irreducible. Angst, on the other hand, leads, as we have seen, to a sense of being-there, it reaffirms the existential. Must we say then that the parallel between angst and the Beckett Reduction is misleading? It happens that this is not the case. Beckett, it is true, is not basically concerned with the existential situation. He takes trouble to depict this situation which is that of the tramps or, more generally, of consciousness, but only as a part of something other. Consciousness, being-there, angst, whatever belongs to the sphere of Existence - all this is defined by Beckett as that which we must discard or leave behind in the search for the true Unnamable. It is hardly surprising, then, that the tramps show no more willingness to build a more authentic Heideggerian world than they do to exercise themselves in the activity which springs from Sartrean freedom. Their eyes are set on the Irreducible and on that alone and the Irreducible is represented as that impossible point, infinitely distant and infinitely close, just beyond the area of Existence. This is not to say that the validity of the parallel between Beckett and Heidegger stops short of a discussion of the Irreducible. If that were so, much of the point of these chapters would be lost. Heidegger, in fact, sees angst as pointing to something more than to Existence. Thus the comparison between angst and the Beckett Reduction retains its force: if Beckett's Reduction goes beyond the existential so does Heideggerian angst.

Chapter six of this thesis will examine this point and so add to what has been said of angst so far. In so doing it will turn to the Irreducible again and to the still unsettled issue of its relation to the concept of nothingness. This issue was, of course, raised in the discussion of the pour soi. Since Beckett's ultimate sine qua non is not comparable to Sartrean nothingness it may prove to resemble more closely the Heideggerian void.

CHAPTER 6

BECKETT AND HEIDEGGER : EXISTENCE, NOTHINGNESS AND BEING

> The being that exists is man. Man alone exists. Rocks are, but they do not exist. Trees are, but they do not exist ... God is, but he does not exist.[1]
>
> Heidegger.

> It would be premature to ... adopt the facile explanation that Nothing is merely the nugatory, equating it with the non-existent ... we should rather equip ourselves ... to experience in Nothing the vastness of that which gives every being the warrant to be. That is Being itself.[2]
>
> Heidegger.

> ... a being so light and free that it is as the being of nothing.
>
> *Watt*, p.38.

Angst reveals the existential situation of man; so does in its way the Beckett Reduction. But this last seems to go beyond Existence in its quest for the Irreducible. The question is: has Heideggerian *angst* a comparable function? Does it also lead to a sphere transcending consciousness and *dasein*? In fact it does.

To illustrate this point we must point out that in spite of its prominence in Heidegger's first work, *Being and Time*, *dasein* is not the central protagonist of Heidegger's philosophy. Indeed the later work, and some have interpreted this as a surprising about-face, leaves *dasein* out altogether. There is no change of direction, however. As early as *Being and Time*, which was published in 1927, Heidegger states that the analysis of *dasein*, that is, of the existential, is of secondary importance and that the real search is for Sein, that is, for Being as distinct from being-there:

> Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word "being"? Not at all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of Being. But are we nowadays even perplexed at our inability to understand the expression "Being"?[3]

The trouble is that we are not. Being, says Heidegger, has been "forgotten"[4] and this term has technical connotations in Being and Time which links it to inauthenticity. Lost in the confusion of the "they," dasein is so alienated from Being that it has no idea of it and even no idea that there is something there to be understood. The "forgetfulness" of Being is traced in An Introduction to Metaphysics (1935) as a historical decline since the time of the first Greek philosophers. In Being and Time the argument is that to rediscover the meaning of Being we must look to dasein, that is, to man. And to the reader's surprised "is not man, being-there, a particular example of Being?" Heidegger's disconcerting answer is "no." Dasein is that through which Sein is revealed, but being-there is not the same as Being; likewise Existence - another name for being-there - is not identical with Being. As Heidegger puts it in one of his essays:

> The being that exists is man. Man alone exists. Rocks are, but they do not exist. Trees are, but they do not exist ... God is, but he does not exist.

Thus Being and Time will begin with dasein or Existence and, by an analysis of this, attempt to approach Being itself. At this point many philosophers will throw up their hands in exasperation and accuse Heidegger of sophistry. Since the present thesis does not set out to comment on the philosophical as such, though, it is enough for us to accept the Heideggerian on its own terms.

Heidegger insists on a distinction between Being and Existence or, if we wish to put this in non-Heideggerian terms, between Being and man or consciousness. Of course Sartre preserves this distinction also. The _en soi_, after all, is defined as being and the _pour soi_ as Existence. Existence, in other words, is a term applicable only to humans. But in Heidegger the consequences of this approach are quite different. The German thinker does not see Being as Sartre sees the _en soi_. Nor does he see it as a Universal. On the whole when we think of being we are likely to say "it is that which all existing things have in common"; in other words, we are likely to think of all existing things as _particular_ cases of being. In this way of looking at things (let us skirt the Nominalist - Realist controversy of the Middle Ages) being is not something in its own right. It is a class within which all that exists must fall, the most universal or general of all concepts. Heidegger flatly rejects this way of thinking: Being is not a _genus_, it is not a category, an idea. If it were one could dismiss it as an abstraction - as indeed it is dismissed by most philosophers. But this, for Heidegger, is precisely that oblivion of Being which he so deplores. On the contrary, he maintains, Being is something more real than an idea, it is not the lowest common denominator of all things, arrived at by a process of abstraction from the Particular: it is those things themselves insofar as they are revealed, disclosed, thrust into the open. I do not, says Heidegger, arrive at Being by a process of reasoning that argues "chairs have being-chairs in common, men have being-men in common, all objects have Being in common." Rather, Being is what is _originally_ manifested. It cannot be identified with all particular cases of existing beings because all of these _presuppose_ Being. Being is prior to ideas - it is not possible to think Being unless one _already_ is. It is presupposed in one's awareness of oneself and all particular objects, it is the condition of things.

At the same time Being enters the world through man or dasein. Without conscious being-there, there would be no consciousness of Being. Presumably Being would "be" but it would be concealed, it would not be "there," it would not "ex-sist" or stand out in the light. Thus man, who is Existence, may be said to exist Being or again, as being-there, may be said to reveal Being by situating it, that is, by the disclosure of a "world." Of course man does not create Being, he is merely the agent of the revelation. If we persist in thinking in terms of Particulars and Universals Heidegger's stand will remain incomprehensible. But perhaps the student of literature will more readily accept the imaginative leap that is necessary for the reader of Heidegger than will the professional philosopher. Heidegger's case is argued again and again, in Being and Time (1927), in the lecture "What is Metaphysics?" (1929), in "On the Essence of Truth" (1930), An Introduction to Metaphysics (1935), The Question of Being (1955) and elsewhere. Being is prior to speculation, it is the ground of things and it reveals itself in dasein's instinctive recognition of it. Moreover it is not something obvious but a forgotten mystery requiring constant rediscovery. We may say concisely that Being differs from "beings." The distinguishing feature of man is that his relation as a being-there to Being is unique.

In order to see the relevance of the above to the concept of angst we must elaborate another aspect of Heidegger's philosophy. In his An Introduction to Metaphysics Heidegger discusses what he sees as a fundamental question: "why beings (instead of nothing)?" It is a question which obsesses man and has always done so. Sartre would reply that being is gratuitous, de trop, and so dismiss it: things are, what more can one say? However, it is the question itself and not the answer which interests Heidegger. The asking of such a question is a "privileged happening,"[5] a Kierkegaardian "leap"[6] beyond security, beyond the everyday and the inauthentic and this because the question recoils threateningly on itself and turns into "why the why?"[7] One cannot ask this question without questioning oneself and taking the ground as it were from under one's feet. Thus the question "why are there beings?" or, more colloquially, "why do things exist?" requires courage and a rising above the mass of the "they." Heidegger puts this somewhat more philosophically. Dasein is able to ask such a fundamental question because it is an expression of its own being; one asks the question because one is that question, because one is a questioning being. More precisely, man is something for whom "Being is an issue."[8] Man is free. He chooses to be this or that, to express his being in this or that way. Consequently being is not a neutral fact as maintained, for example, by the empiricist. Being is a moral matter and the asking of the fundamental question represents a particular moral stance, an authentic way of being. It represents not simply a conceptual reality, in other words, but an existential one. To ask about being is to be - authentically. The most important thing is not this, however, but the goal towards which the question is directed.

Heidegger thinks of the Question (we may capitalize for convenience) as the origin of metaphysics, arguing that the Greeks interpreted "why beings?" as a meta-physis, a going beyond not only matter but all things, a going beyond "beings" in general. To question is to transcend. Man, who, alone of all things, can question all that exists, rises above all. Or again, altering our metaphor, we may say that he goes beneath all things, to the ground of all things. Now what is beneath, what supports all "beings," is Being. Thus the effect of the Metaphysical Question, that question which is at the heart of philosophy and at the heart of man, is to rediscover forgotten Being. We are back to earlier statements made in this chapter: the true or authentic being of dasein is to reveal Sein. We may state the issue concisely by saying that the Question takes us to the Being of beings. Only in freedom can this discovery be made. That is to say, no amount of intellectual effort will suffice. Man chooses to see Being, it is a case of crede ut intelligas. Once Being is revealed, man stands "resolute," in the light of Being, properly existing as a being-there, facing all that it is the aim of the "they" to avoid. The link between the Metaphysical Question and angst should now be clear: they are two sides of the same coin. One cannot ask "why beings?" except in angst. More important, one cannot discover Being except in angst. This point needs a little more explanation since so far angst has been linked exclusively to the idea of Existence, that is, being-there. Angst is itself a questioning of all things. Like the Question it disintegrates everyday, inauthentic, normal reality. One cannot ask "why?" with respect to everything without placing oneself and all things over the void of angst. Of course in so doing one affirms one's Existence, one highlights one's own thereness and the concrete reality of one's world even as one holds all of this at arm's length. The point has been made in a previous chapter. What needs to be added here is that, as Heidegger sees it, the effect of angst and the Question is to reveal not only one's being-there but also, in the same breath, Being itself, the substratum on which Existence rests. Angst shows me that I exist but it also questions my Existence and so points to something beneath it. Thus Existence is not obliterated but emphasized even as it is seen as originating in something which is not Existence. Angst, then, may be said to reveal Existence, but as contingent, as dependent upon Being.

Much of this has obvious relevance to Beckett. If we are to translate his vision into philosophical terms we can say that the present of Beckett's temporality, that of acute awareness of Existence in angst, is equally a constant questioning of all things, including the questioner:

> Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on ... What am I to do ... in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple?
>
> The Unnamable, p.293.

Of course we have returned to Descartes' aporia, the method of systematic doubt. The whole of Beckett's work is a voice which questions and so undermines all of reality. And such a questioning is clearly identical with the Reduction by which Beckett negates all that he can and moves steadily to what is left, the Irreducible. But to that extent, as I have already argued, the Reduction goes beyond the Cartesian, beyond consciousness and, at the same time, beyond the existential also. Thus the Irreducible appears as the ground of all else, much as Heidegger's Being appears as the ground of Existence. There are good reasons for arguing this parallel. The voice of the Unnamable puts everything in doubt, annihilates all it can and itself continues in a state of tension. In its questioning it reveals itself as something that is painfully, undeniably there, in situation, like dasein, in short, it reveals itself as Existence. The same is true for the tramp, that questioner possessed by angst who may be said to exist, like authentic dasein, as a question (we recall, for example, that tramp who exists as a prolonged "Watt?"). But the questioning Reduction does not stop here. It passes by the tramp until it reaches consciousness itself, the nakedness of angst, then leaves this behind as well in order to reach the mystery of the Unnamable hidden behind the voice. Thus the Irreducible or Unnamable cannot be termed a being-in-the-world, an existential being-there. It represents the ground phenomenon of things, like Heidegger's Being, and it is revealed by the voice of consciousness just as Being is revealed by the consciousness of angst. Quite simply, Heidegger's

Existence-Being distinction appears in Beckett as the distinction between the tramp and the voice of consciousness on the one hand and the Irreducible present beneath these on the other. Just as Heidegger's _angst_ begins by revealing Existence and ends by revealing Being so the Reduction moves from the sphere of human consciousness to that of an unknown substratum, the Irreducible.

What happens is this. The Voice opens in _angst_, instantly dispelling the world of normality, focussing steadily on the one fundamental thing which is normally overlooked. In doing so it reveals itself and its world, it proclaims tormentedly its _thereness_ in a stifling universe. But it proclaims this world of claustrophobic Existence even as it questions and negates it so that the end result is both denial and affirmation, a denial which turns into an affirmation and so requires to be followed by another denial which itself stands as a new affirmation. The pattern then becomes one of deny-affirm-deny, of question-establish-question, the "eternal tautology" of "yes or no" (_Murphy_, p.32), the "screaming silence of no's knife in yes's wound" (_Texts_, p.135), the "old road ... up yes and down no" (_Texts_, p.123), the struggle of "choke, go down, come up, choke, suppose, deny, affirm, drown" (_Molloy_, p.210). The best examples of this pattern are found in _How it is_ and _The Unnamable_. Bom in the former crawls "towards Pim he does not exist" (p. 30) and the whole final section of this poetic novel is a magnificent movement of contradiction, ending with a No to match Molly Bloom's triumphant Yes. This is also true of _The Unnamable_:

> But let me complete my views, before I shit on them. For if I am Mahood, I am Worm too, plop. Or if I am not yet Worm, I shall be when I cease to be Mahood, plop.
>
> p.340.

This is Beckett's creative rhythm - the expansion and contraction of excretion, the spasm of birth and death, the logical pattern of *pro* and *contra*. But it is not a rhythm of frustration, any more than is that of Heideggerian *angst*. On the contrary it is Beckett's way of pointing to the Irreducible. The Voice whose task it is to name the Unnamable begins by denying its own reality. As it denies it, it unfortunately affirms it too - as Descartes saw, my doubting proves that I exist. But to affirm itself is to deny the Unnamable beneath it, so the Voice is forced again to deny itself. The pattern continues indefinitely and of course the mystery of the Irreducible is never reached. But this does not matter. Indirectly, the Unnamable is revealed as that reality *beneath* the wrestling of Yes and No, as the ultimate subject of all affirmation or denial. In like manner the awareness of Heideggerian *angst*, able to speak *directly* only of Existence, that is, of itself, manages to speak *indirectly* of Being, that mystery at the heart of Existence.

But the Irreducible is also a negative, like the *pour soi*, though not in the same sense, as we have seen: the *pour soi* excludes being or positivity whereas the Irreducible appears as a negative that is intimately involved in being, a paradoxical being-nothing, "a being so light and free that it is as the being of nothing." In fact the comparison with Heidegger's Being may be sustained here and in detail, particularly by reference to "What is Metaphysics?" In this lecture, delivered to the university of Freiburg when Heidegger took up the chair of philosophy vacated by Husserl, Heidegger proposes to discuss the problem of nothing. Nothingness, he argues, is not simply a concept, something derived from the linguistic practice of negation. Rather, the negatives we use in speech presuppose a real criterion, a nothingness which is a reality prior to thought and language. Of course this idea is abhorrent to most philosophers. If we talk of nothing as a reality in its own right we jettison a great deal of conventional logic: it seems illogical to say that nothing _is_, at best an abuse of language, at worst a philosophic confusion. Notwithstanding, Heidegger drops what he sees as a narrow rationalist objection to the reality of nothing and argues that it "is" in a distinctive way and is consequently worth serious consideration. He refers his audience to the phenomenon of _angst_. Nothingness is actually _experienced_ in the uncanniness of _angst_ and so _angst_ is the starting point for the analysis of nothingness:

> All things, and we with them, sink into a sort of indifference. But not in the sense that everything simply disappears; rather, in the very act of drawing away from us everything turns towards us. This withdrawal of what-is-in-totality, which then crowds round us in dread [_angst_], this is what oppresses us. There is nothing to hold on to. The only thing that remains and overwhelms us whilst what-is slips away, is this "nothing."[9]

In _angst_ man experiences a sense of the whole of Existence ("what-is-in-totality"[10]) and of nothingness simultaneously, the whole of things being _questioned_, that is, undermined by the void, and accentuated by this same void at the same time, at once invalidated and reaffirmed. This point has been stressed but it needs to be repeated here: _angst_ and the Question are essentially linked to the idea of nothingness. But what is this nothing that is revealed in _angst_?

Heidegger replies that it is something which enters the world through man. Nothingness is active, it does not obliterate things but reveals them in their strangeness, as if hanging in mid air. In questioning the reality of things nothingness affirms them, it reveals them as positive in contrast to itself, it serves as it were a _creative_ function. This is a surprising conclusion but it follows from the entire philosophy of angst. All things, the whole realm of Existence, emerges ex nihilo. Nothingness is the origin of things since it is in the experience of the void that man is aware of things in all their solidity, that is, as supremely there while resting on the abyss of nothing. It follows that nothingness is responsible for man also and indeed this idea is implicit in Heidegger's earlier work. Dasein is free: this means that it is "permeated with nullity through and through."[11] To be free is to be shot through with nothingness, as is the pour soi. To be free and to exist (in the technical sense) are identical. Thus angst shows man that he is a void, in short, it shows him his Existence. At the same time it shows man that he exists in a "world" whose own differentiation is possible only through man. Man projects his freedom into his world, he fills the world with his own nothingness and so, as in Sartre's philosophy, he constitutes the world, he reveals it. Without nothingness as it appears in man, then, there would be no Existence, there would be no man and no "world," only an unknown undifferentiated something. It is clear that nothing, as Heidegger conceives it, is not simply opposed to being, as in Sartre. Rather it is a prerequisite for the revelation of all things positive, it stands behind or supports them. We arrive at the centre of Heidegger's argument: nothingness is identical with Being. It is not identical with Existence, of course. Nothingness props Existence up, it makes it possible; it enters the world through man to become the very soul of man and the world; it is revealed by angst as it itself reveals all things. All of this has already been said of Being also. Thus the ground of Existence has been pinpointed by an analysis of the phenomenon of angst: it is Being which is nothingness. Dasein is now seen as a hole through which Being or nothingness pour into the world and angst as the questioning which epitomizes this dynamism and allows reality to be viewed in the light of its essential Being and its essential nothingness. The void is not something to be glossed over but the central concern of all philosophy:

> It would be premature to stop thinking at this point and adopt the facile explanation that Nothing is merely the nugatory, equating it with the non-existent ... Instead of giving way to such precipitate and empty ingenuity and abandoning Nothing in all its mysterious multiplicity of meanings, we should rather equip ourselves and make ready for one thing only: to experience in Nothing the vastness of that which gives every being the warrant to be. That is Being itself.

Beckett's Irreducible is now in philosophical focus. It behaves like Heideggerian Being to the very end. It is a negative but one which, unlike the pour soi, may be related to a positive, a being-nothing in the Heideggerian sense in which Being and nothing ultimately coalesce. On the one hand we have the world of the tramps and of consciousness, the world of the voice of the Unnamable, and, on the other and supporting it as its ontological ground, we have the Unnamable itself, a creature in whom positive and negative are confounded. The Unnamable, itself a void, is the origin of the entire Beckett creation, a source of all things. Just as Heideggerian angst finally takes us to the Being of things which is also nothingness, a kind of pure freedom expressing itself through man, so the Beckett Reduction takes us to the irreducible being of things, an unnamable emptiness expressing itself vicariously through the voice of consciousness, through the "delegate" tramps from Murphy to Malone. Just as dasein is a platzhalter[12] or stand-in for Being, so Beckettian consciousness is a representative of the great Other, the Irreducible.

Beckett's entire literary output may be regarded as an extraordinary search for the origin of things, for the ontological basis of the cogito. This search, continued obsessively for some forty years of writing and always with the one seemingly hopeless goal, is entirely comparable to Heidegger's lifelong philosophic quest for Being. In each case there is a gradual movement away from everyday reality which is not nihilistic but profoundly constructive. It is true that the Reduction may be seen as an escape from consciousness - it has been seen in these terms in preceding chapters. But the whole effort of this thesis has been to present the movement as a positive one. Murphy ascends to the darkness which is the "matrix of surds" (p.79), Moran seeks the darkness of Molloy, Molloy his own origins in the figure of his mother. Malone has reached the source. Static in his room he initiates the movement inwards that culminates in the Unnamable. Of course this movement can be described as a search for identity or selfhood and it has been seen in these terms by Martin Esslin and John Fletcher.[13] But Self is an inadequate term. It belongs to the sphere of the psychological whereas Beckett's efforts must be placed at the level of ontology, like Heidegger's. Heidegger strains in all his work to do justice to that elusive _urgrund_ or ground of all philosophizing and all Existence. Beckett likewise longs for the impossible. He would like to _touch_ the void, to put his finger on that point of intersection where being and nothingness are one. If only he could do so he would solve all problems, he would understand the impenetrable mystery of transitions, of beginnings and of ends, of life and death, of mind and body, of motion and rest, of individuality and communion, that is, of love, in short, of being itself. Beckett is a modern Faust who must fail in one sense but who clings to this triumphant failure more tenaciously than any hermit ever clung to the desert: "I can't go on, I'll go on" (_The Unnamable_, p.418).

So far we have not examined in any detail the philosophic implications of the shift in interest from Existence to Being, from tramp to Unnamable. The rest of this chapter will be concerned with this, first from a religious and theological point of view, then from a more strictly philosophical one.

Heidegger is not unwilling to evoke theological echoes. Of course Sartre does the same but he does it facetiously, in order to dispel the ghost of theism, whereas Heidegger's attitude is quite different. Heidegger's search for Being, as already explained, cannot be thought of as morally neutral, since Being itself is not that. To ask the Metaphysical Question that initiates the search is to question oneself as well and so it requires authenticity. More simply, to turn towards Being is to alter one's own mode of Existence. Angst, therefore, may be thought of as an experience analogous to a religious conversion:

> Readiness for dread [angst] is to say "Yes!" to the inwardness of things, to fulfil the highest demand which alone touches man to the quick. Man alone of all beings, when addressed by the voice of Being, experiences the marvel of all marvels: that what-is is.[14]

Such a response must be free and it must involve the whole man. Thus dasein "expends itself in Being for the truth of Being."[15] It is a "freedom of sacrifice"[16] which prompts dasein to "preserve the truth of Being no matter what may happen to man" in answer to the "grace wherewith Being," deity-like, "has endowed the nature of man, in order that he may take over in his relationship to Being the guardianship of Being."[17] Authentic dasein has become a saint of the existential, a means through which Being may enter the world. It is difficult not to see the Heideggerian search as a patient movement towards a First Cause, although without the Scholastic overtones. On the whole, perhaps, the overtones are those of traditional mysticism and the search recalls the via negativa of Dionysius the Areopagite. Being has all the characteristics of the totally Other, the Immanent-Transcendent of Christian theology, the nada of John of the Cross, above all, the "I am" which Aquinas found in the story of the burning bush and made the basis of his system.

In Beckett's case also there is the oblique appeal to mysticism. If Beckett is a blasphemer he is a surprisingly religious one. Of course there is no question of anything approaching conventional theism. But it would be even more misleading to speak of atheism or, for that matter, agnosticism. Like Heidegger, Beckett is essentially concerned with the sphere of the numinous. There are differences between the two. Beckett could in no sense be described as pious whereas the term describes much of Heidegger's work remarkably aptly. Nor does the Heideggerian notion of sacrifice and service to Being have any counterpart in Beckett. But these differences of tone are insignificant when set against the similarities.

Beckett begins half-seriously with that mystic of our times, Murphy, sitting naked in his rocking-chair, awaiting the revelation of the darkness and the silence, "silence not of vacuum but of plenum" (p.103). Murphy has something like a success:

> His ... senses also found themselves at peace ... the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way ... to the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real. Time did not cease, that would be asking too much, but the wheel of rounds and pauses did, as Murphy ... continued to suck in, through all the posterns of his withered soul, the accidentless One-and-Only, conveniently called Nothing.
>
> p.168.

Murphy's trance combines mysticism of a neo-platonic sort with the quest for the Irreducible: the One-and-Only called Nothing is, of course, the impossible "point in the ... generation and passing away of line" (Murphy, p.79), that is, the point of intersection of being and the void which defines the Beckett Unnamable. In the later novels and in the plays Beckett refuses to be so specific. Watt too is a kind of mystic, escaping rather than seeking the hound of heaven. Or perhaps Watt is seeking in his own fashion. Whatever the case, he discovers in Mr. Knott that same nothing than which naught is more real. Again, theological _motifs_ are woven into the story. Watt, after the "being so light and free that is is as the being of nothing," struggles up his ascent of Mount Carmel, an unwilling ascetic:

> _Of nought. To the source. To the teacher. To the temple. To him I brought. This emptied heart. These emptied hands. This mind ignoring. This body homeless. To love him my little reviled. My little rejected to have him. My little to learn him forgot. Abandoned my little to find him._
>
> p.164.

However different the context, one cannot help being reminded of the John of the Cross lines echoed in "East Coker":

> In order to arrive at being everything,
> Desire to be nothing.
> In order to arrive at knowing everything,
> Desire to know nothing.[18]

The Johannine ascent is expressed concisely in the diagram of the mount of perfection: "_nada, nada, nada, nada, nada, Y en el Monte nada_."[19] Watt too, goes by the way of fivefold nothing and at the top discovers that same nothing:

> What had he learnt? Nothing.
> What did he know of Mr. Knott? Nothing.
> Of his anxiety to improve, of his anxiety to
> understand ... what remained? Nothing.

> But was not that something?
>
> He saw himself then, so little, so poor. And now, littler, poorer. Was not that something?
>
> p.147.

And Knott, the goal of the search, whom it is "anthropomorphic insolence" (p.202) to attempt to explain, is the deity figure, the deus absconditus, the great cloud of unknowing which Watt desires above all to see "face to face," or, if that proves impossible, at least "from behind" (p.145), as Moses saw Yahweh. But the difficulties are enormous and Watt must be content with the Pauline formula, with glimpses "not clearly caught, but as it were in a glass" (p.146). As the wise Arsene tells him: "... what we know partakes in no small measure of the nature of what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail ..." (p.61). We are on the ground of negative theology as Beckett well knows:

> For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man ... and as the only way one can speak of man, even our anthropologists have realized that, is to speak of him as though he were a termite.
>
> p.74.

A concern with what can neither be uttered nor effed takes us quickly to the search in the trilogy which ends with the Unnamable. The theological and religious overtones remain in the Bunyan atmosphere of the first few pages of Molloy ("What shall I do? What shall I do?" [p.10] is the cry) and later in the novel: "What I liked in anthropology was its inexhaustible faculty of negation, its relentless definition of man, as though he were no better than God, in terms of what he is not" (p. 39). We need not distinguish here between finite and infinite. At the heart of man is a mystery of being which is the mystery of God. All of the tramps are moving closer and closer to this point as the trilogy proceeds. It is in the context of the negative way that we must understand their self-abnegation. "No, I want nothing" (p. 199), Molloy groans and Macmann carries on in

> ... the desolation of having nobody and nothing, the wilds of the hunted, the scant bread and the scant shelter and the black joy of the solitary way, in helplessness and will-lessness, through all the beauty, the knowing and the loving.
>
> Malone Dies, p. 279.

Malone, who knows that "Nothing is more real than nothing" (p. 193) speaks of the "relapse to darkness, to nothingness, to earnestness, to home, to him waiting for me always, who needed me and whom I needed, who took me in his arms and told me to stay with him always ... whom I have often made suffer and seldom contented, whom I have never seen" (p. 195). In The Unnamable this mysterious being is finally brought forward, and it is indistinguishable, in some respects, from divinity.

The Irreducible does not exist, in Heideggerian terms, it is, outside space and time, outside relations and mutability. "One enormous second," the speaker of the Texts for Nothing speculates, "as in Paradise, and the mind slow, slow, nearly stopped" (p. 78). But if we are to speak of the Unnamable we must invent time. After all, the Voice says, "Hell itself, although eternal, dates from the revolt of Lucifer. It is therefore permissible ... to think of myself as being here forever, but not as having been here forever" (The Unnamable, p. 298). We must speak of God in human terms. Thus the Voice continues its search. But a moment later it must contradict itself in order to speak for the Unnamable: "it's a lie, I seek nothing, nothing any more..." (p.391). In order to speak of divinity we must deny all that we affirm because God transcends all human affirmation. The Voice is in an impossible position: whatever it utters comes from the Unnamable but loses its connection with the Unnamable even as it is expressed. The only answer is a continuing Reduction: "... mutilate, mutilate, and perhaps some day, fifteen generations hence, you'll succeed in beginning to look like yourself ..." (p.317). Thus the Voice edges its way around the borders of the void: "... our concern is with someone ... with something, now we're getting it, someone or something that is not there, or that is not anywhere, or that is there, here, why not ..." (p.408). The oscillation between first and third person is remarkable:

> ... there I am the absentee again ... he who neither speaks nor listens, who has neither body nor soul, it's something else he has, he must have something, he must be somewhere, he is made of silence ... he's the one to be sought ... the one to be spoken of, the one to speak ... then I could stop, I'd be he, I'd be the silence ... we'd be reunited, his story the story to be told, but he has no story ... he's in his own story, unimaginable, unspeakable, that doesn't matter, the attempt must be made, in the old stories incomprehensibly mine, to find his ... the story of the silence that he never left ....
>
> p.417.

This is perhaps the place to recall some of the statements made about the Irreducible in chapter three of this thesis. Sartre is right: a creature that combines in its own person the opposites of freedom and necessity, nothingness and being, is God. More specifically, the Irreducible behaves like the divinity of the mystics; affirmative theology makes no inroads into it, only that faith so extolled by John of the Cross enables one to reach it and then in emptiness and darkness.

It may be objected that the via negativa is the butt of a Beckett joke. No question of it, Beckett smiles as he invites us up the slopes of the holy mountain. Mr. Knott does not cut a fine figure as divinity; Youdi of Molloy is even less seriously presented; Godot, the tyrants who are initially supposed to control the Beckett universe, all absent answers to the riddle of existence, are rejected once and for all in The Unnamable and How it is as mere inventions. But the mystery remains even as Beckett works the last relics of the anthropomorphic illusion out of his system. If the search for the Unnamable is at times depicted in terms of comedy it is also something very serious. Murphy and Watt, Molloy, Malone, Vladimir and Estragon, whatever they may say on occasion, are forced to regard the great negative with fear and trembling. Beckett may satirize more conventional religious attitudes but he does not do so from the standpoint of the true sceptic. Watt does discover something in his discovery of nothing; the later tramps reach the maternal source; the Unnamable is a reality. In each case we are faced not with a facile satire of Freud or of the naïve believer but with an all-too-earnest quest for the truth. Beckett certainly rejects the deus ex machina of the Cartesians but only to replace it with a deity more appropriate to the times, a dead God, a God who is not there and yet who, in the final analysis, belongs to a long tradition of religious thought. The image of Beckett which emerged from the comparison with Albert Camus and Sartre is reinforced by this perspective. Beckett is otherworldly not only in a negative, but in a positive sense also.

In the end he offers us what may really be termed a theology. We have only to see the Reduction and its revelation of being-nothing from the divine point of view, that is, from that of the Irreducible.

So the narrator of How it is imagines everything as taking place in the divine cranium:

> there he is then at last that not one of us there
> we are then at last who listens to himself and who
> when he lends his ear to our murmur does no more
> than lend it to a story of his own devising ...
>
> p.151.

Creation, with its tramps, is an invention of the Unnamable which projects itself out from its unknown into a world and then returns to itself, witness to its own motion but through the eyes of its creatures. It is as if the whole creation were an attempt on the part of the Irreducible to name itself. It cannot do so, since it is a negative, and its attempt to do so can only result in the naming of something else, that is, its creation. Once creation is a fact, the Unnamable must deny any connection with it. But in the very act of denying its creatures the Unnamable asserts itself - as negative. Encouraged, it sets out once again to name itself and promptly names its creation instead. The oscillation continues for ever and in the process God brings into being a world, by mistake of course, and preserves it, also by mistake. But the process, a version of the intercourse of God with himself familiar in Christian theology, is not simply an error. The Irreducible seeks to know itself in the consciousness of its creatures, the tramps (or the Voice) and indirectly it succeeds, since, through its creatures, it asserts its own negative presence. Creation, a self-alienation of divinity, after all implies a creator, however absent he may be. Thus from a theocentric perspective the pattern of affirmation and denial represents the very rhythm of universal life. It is a spectacle of a divinity which, in uttering its Word, utters a creation, peopling the universe of tramps - against its own will perhaps, but inevitably all the same - and then, through the tramps' own search for their source, returns to itself in a miraculous revelation.

One of Beckett's radio pieces, Cascando, may be taken as a final statement of the entire process. The play has two protagonists, the Opener and the Voice. The Opener gives the order and Voice, with the help of Music, begins to narrate its unceasing search for the tramp Woburn, following him on his journey as he stumbles to a boat and heads out to sea. Opener acts as a First Cause, in short, as the Irreducible, prompting the Voice to undertake the search. In Heideggerian terms Opener may be thought of as Being, responsible for Voice, that is, for Existence. Just as the Voice seeks Woburn (himself searching) so Opener, we can say, seeks himself vicariously through his puppets; behind the tramp is consciousness, behind that, the Unnamable: Woburn, Voice and Opener. Woburn will never reach his goal, Voice will never quite reach Woburn, that is to say, Opener will never reach himself through his creatures. Beckett has here reproduced in miniature the movement out of the Irreducible and the constant dynamism of the impossible return. Everything happens in the mind of the Opener. "It is the month of May,"[20] he tells us, "the reawakening" (p. 45), genesis.

Heidegger's and Beckett's movements to a metaphysics which at times merits the name of theology raises the issue of Idealism. Chapter two of this thesis has already pointed to a general kinship between this philosophic stand and the existential approach. At this point, however, a more detailed statement is called for. Existential angst, which comes to Heidegger via Kierkegaard, has close affinities with the Romantic weltschmerz, its historical antecedent. In Romantic literature weltschmerz expresses itself as a search for an Absolute. It is as if the Romantic were filled with a sense of endless possibilities, of metaphysical freedom, as if the world offered no final obstacles to limitless development. Euphoric optimism has a short life span and the sense of the Absolute scarcely survives beyond 1830, but while it lasts it produces that heady excitement which characterizes the work of so many Romantics. In Idealist philosophy - and Idealism is closely connected with Romanticism here - the desire for Absolutes is translated into the standpoint of the Absolute. That is to say, where the Romantic poet conceives of personal fulfilment in terms of the epic and heroic (one calls to mind the sense of unbounded existence crammed in the Coleridgean term "joy") the Idealist thinker sees the act of philosophizing as the adoption of a superhuman perspective, a God-like view of things. Of course Hegel is the most obvious example here, but something similar could also be said of Fichte, Schelling and others. The Idealist takes his stand on a privileged position, he begins with an Absolute, whether he calls it Idea or Thought or Ego or Spirit or Will. In general terms we may think of the Absolute as outside space and time, that is, as outside the world of finite relations, and as responsible for the finite world. The Eternal thinks the world into being or, if we prefer, thinks itself as it thinks the world, seeking to know itself, perhaps, in the world's, or the philosopher's, knowledge of it. Thus the Idealist who seeks to know the Absolute affirms his identity with it and in a way breaks out of the narrow sphere of created things. To this dynamism in the area of the conceptual corresponds the Romantic's wild longing for union with an Absolute, whether Nature or Spirit or God, and for a way out of the narrow confines of the existential prison. Post-Romantic writers and thinkers on the whole abandon this ambitious programme. Perhaps Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel, particularly in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, sums up much of the shift in metaphysics. Kierkegaard ridicules the Hegelian who thinks himself out of the world and into the shoes of the Absolute. Man is a being in situation - in later terms, a being-in-the-world or being-there - and there is no getting out. The Absolute, however infinite, however removed from the petty restrictions of human existence, has its origins in the mind of a man: as such it is a fiction. Man can only really philosophize from one standpoint and that is not a transcendental but an existential one. Thus the sense of unbounded freedom, of privileged position, is replaced by that of freedom within limits - the limits of one's "there" - man's world, his Existence, closes in around him, the Romantic craving for the unattainable turns into the existential ethic of patient effort in the shadow of the grave. This shift defines the differences between weltschmerz and angst. Whereas the one represents an awareness of oneself in a world which opens out towards infinity, the other represents a realization that oneself and one's world are limiting factors. Of course the sense of limits need not be thought of as simply oppressive. Without it, no free action is possible. Where the Romantic's sense of absolute freedom - and absolute freedom is indistinguishable from absolute necessity as all absolutes are indistinguishable from their absolute opposites - actually makes action impossible and leads to an ethic of passive self-oblation, the existential sense of restrictions leads to a more constructive stance. But the point I want to stress here is that, in spite of differences, Idealism and the existential are closely related. The latter is a historic product of the former and a development of it.

We are not surprised, then, to discover elements of Idealism in Heidegger, perhaps even an unwillingness to remain indefinitely on the level of the existential. Certainly the Metaphysical Question may be given as evidence for this. To ask the Question is to transcend Existence, to reach the Being of beings. Heideggerian Being, which recalls the God of Thomas Aquinas, also recalls the Idealist Absolute. Fichte, for example, spoke of the Absolute as Being and Heidegger's is surely removed from the restrictions of the existential situation. Actually the matter is not quite so straightforward. Heidegger may reply that his Being is not arrived at by a process of Idealist abstraction but is revealed as the substratum of Existence itself. Moreover he suggests a relation between Being and time - hence the title of his work - although the nature of this relation is left obscure and it seems obvious that Being cannot be regarded as a temporal thing in the sense in which dasein is that. Many would say that Heidegger's gradual concentration on Being to the exclusion of dasein marks a clear tendency away from the existential, however. Whatever the truth of this, there can be little doubt that Heidegger's philosophy shows traces of its Idealist origins.

In Beckett's case there is less ambiguity. The Irreducible is undeniably a kind of Absolute. It is, as we have seen, God-like, removed from the limits of space and time, free of all relations with any finite, "namable," thing whatsoever, alone, bodiless, transcending every existential quality. Its freedom, as argued in an earlier chapter, is without bounds and so identical with necessity; it does not suffer from the pressure of Sartrean or Heideggerian facticity or from angst; it is neither a being-there nor a being-with. Thereness, withness, a painful awareness of one's inescapable situation, all these belong to the tramp and to the voice of consciousness which speaks for the Unnamable. But the Unnamable itself is totally removed from them. It is nothing at all and yet the source of all things, a creature in whom opposites merge for the simple reason given above, that at the level of ultimates all is one. The Absolute, like God, is its every quality utterly and completely in such a way that does not exclude its being every other quality as well. I do not wish to overemphasize the presence of a nineteenth century Idealism in Beckett, however. It seems more likely that the model for the Irreducible is to be sought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the Spinozan deity or in the Idealism of Berkeley. But then it is not too difficult to link certain aspects of these philosophers with the German Idealists of the later period. The fact is that Beckett's Reduction, with its movement away from consciousness, is comparable to the Romantic quest for an Absolute and that it does indicate a very definite tendency away from the existential and towards Idealism. Indeed Beckett, in his own work, recapitulates the entire philosophic development from Descartes to Idealism to the existential or, more precisely, develops the Cartesian in the direction of the existential but with a backward glance at Idealism. Thus we begin with the cogito of the tramp or the Voice and move to angst (the interim phase of weltschmerz is taken for granted), that is, we begin with Cartesian consciousness and develop it in the direction of a more Romantic and, finally, existential awareness of reality. Likewise we begin with the Cartesian and Occasionalist deity and work towards Heideggerian Being with a backward glance at the Idealist Absolute and, of course, the God of negative theology as well. The question proposed in chapter two of this thesis has been amply demonstrated: Beckett's work illustrates the threefold development of a major philosophical tradition better than any history of philosophy.

Although there is an important aspect of Beckett still to be studied in a later section of this thesis - so far only the subject of Beckett's art has been examined and not Beckett's art as such - the basic aim of the last six chapters has been fulfilled and can be quickly summarized. Beckett's work spans, above all, the Cartesian and the existential. We have seen the former metamorphosed into the latter first in a comparison with Sartre, then with Heidegger. The parallel with Sartre, and with Camus, has been shown to be limited. Beckett's Irreducible is not a pour soi and if terms such as nausea and the Absurd are applicable to Beckett's world they are less applicable than angst. Likewise the discussion of Sartrean facticity and freedom leads directly to Heideggerian angst. Beckett's tramps suffer the situation of dasein, their "thereness," in a world that reveals itself as fundamentally existential or phenomenological. But the comparison with Heidegger takes us beyond this, to the sphere of Being or nothingness which is that of Beckett's Irreducible. Thus the Reduction functions as does Heideggerian angst, it points to the hidden ground of things, the mystery which so obsesses Beckett and Heidegger. Moreover both in Beckett and Heidegger a concern with this mystery expresses itself partly as a more or less tentative return to Idealism and partly as a religious phenomenon.

We are therefore led to a Beckett who is essentially a positive writer and one with even more considerable philosophic and metaphysical perspectives than criticism has so far realized. The comparison with Heidegger is remarkably useful. It does not distort the essential Beckett vision but, on the contrary, allows us to grasp it in all its richness of allusion.

PART II

IONESCO AND THE EXPERIENCE OF WONDER

CHAPTER 7

IONESCO : CLAUSTROPHOBIA AND EUPHORIA

> Deux états de conscience fondamentaux sont à l'origine de toutes mes pièces ... Ces deux prises de conscience originelles sont celles de l'évanescence ou de la lourdeur; du vide et du trop de présence ....[1]
>
> Ionesco.

> L'étonnement est mon sentiment fondamental du monde.
>
> *Notes et Contre-Notes*, p.193.

Because he is possibly the most important of modern writers and certainly more important than those others discussed in this thesis Beckett has been studied here in considerable detail. Moreover, neither in Ionesco, nor Genet, nor Pinter do we find that breadth of reference which allows us to consider Beckett in relation to an entire philosophical tradition. Thus in discussing these other three I shall be concerned in each case only with limited aspects of existential thought. This will present no problems since the essentials of this philosophic approach have already been outlined and may from now on be taken for granted.

As well as being without the philosophic breadth of Beckett, Ionesco is not philosophic in the same sense. Strictly speaking, he is a visionary moralist, more absorbed in the Good than in the True. At the same time, and here the difference with Beckett is minimal, his field is the metaphysical and he is concerned with man, as are Heidegger and Sartre, at a level which is neither socio-political nor psychological but ontological. There can, once again, be no question of arguing for the "influence" of modern existential thought except in the most general sense. Ionesco does not pretend ignorance of the philosophers, as Beckett is wont to do, but he dissociates himself firmly from any school. If Heidegger has made any impact on him, he tells the critic Claude Bonnefoy, it is because he has thrown fresh light on Ionesco's own experience: "*Les philosophes que j'ai pu lire ... ont peut-être ... éclairé ce qui chez moi était encore une intuition élémentaire*."[2] This must be the line of approach of the present thesis. Rather than in terms of influences we must speak of a shared *weltanschauung* and on the basis of this argue that the parallel with the philosophers is subordinate to the aim of a better understanding of the artist. With respect to Sartre and Camus Ionesco explains:

> Nous avons certainement subi ... l'influence de certaines lectures ... Nous sommes toujours influencés par ce que nous vivons, par ce que nous voyons, par ce que nous lisons ....

What of it? Those whom we read have in their turn absorbed ideas and attitudes from their reading: "... *et les auteurs que nous lisons eux aussi ont subi l'influence de leur époque, de ce qu'ils ont lu, vu et vécu*" (*Entretiens*, p. 142). This stand is hardly surprising and does not preclude the kind of study proposed by this thesis. Ionesco is no more an imitator of others than is Beckett.

Apart from its intrinsic value there is another reason for examining in depth Ionesco's relation to the existential. Unthinking use of the absurdist tag has done greater harm to the truth in the case of Ionesco, perhaps, than in Beckett's. Ionesco has been largely misunderstood by the critics, and this in spite of his own considerable commentary on his theatre, so that continuing misunderstanding appears arbitrary and wilful. This thesis will place as much emphasis on *Notes et Contre-Notes* or the interview with Claude Bonnefoy or Ionesco's journal as it has placed on one of Beckett's rare utterances, the dialogue with Georges Duthuit. But it must be added that Ionesco's theoretical writing offers no perspectives which are not found in the plays. Rather it confirms what should have been evident in the plays from the start. As criticism becomes more sensitive to Ionesco's art the absurdist interpretation is, in any case, being modified.

As with Samuel Beckett, my method will be to concentrate initially on a fundamental aspect of Ionesco's vision, something which is unique to Ionesco and is as far removed as possible from a vague and all-encompassing label, and then to relate this to equally fundamental issues in modern existential philosophy. In this way neither art nor philosophy will suffer - rather each will, in its way, shed light on the other.

A glance at Ionesco's first full-length play, Amédée ou comment s'en débarrasser: comédie en trois actes (Amédée or how to get rid of it, written in 1953), is enough to reveal the basic pattern of all of Ionesco's work, a pattern which is only gradually being recognized. Act one depicts an enclosed, claustrophobic situation, with the protagonists in their small flat, cut off from outside contact. The very image of the situation is the growing corpse, but there are other elements, Amédée's dejection, his sense of heaviness, weariness: "Je me sens fatigué, fatigué. Je suis rompu, lourd, je digère mal ... j'ai sommeil tout le temps."[3] Amédée is a failure as a writer. All about him dampness is suggested by the plague of mushrooms and in this close atmosphere relations are strained, conjugal incompatibilities heightened. Above all, the corpse in the next room grows disturbingly in size until it seems to squeeze the couple out of the flat. Act three is in direct contrast to all this. The night is lit by a great moon, stars, comets mingle with the display of fireworks as Amédée becomes lighter and lighter, rising in the sky out of reach of the excited crowd below: "Pardon, Messieurs-dames, je suis confus ... Oh, oh! je me sens cependant tout guilleret, tout guilleret" (I, p. 308). Every possible stage resource is needed to give the effect of brilliant clarity, noise and excitement, a dazzling apotheosis comically and futilely disavowed by Amédée himself. Whatever the precise significance of all this, it is clear that the success of the play depends on the successful orchestration of its contrasts. It is worth noting too, that these are presented simultaneously in act two, in the interval between the early action and the coming of night. As the protagonists wait, images of the past arise, embodying in the feelings of Madeleine and Amédée the basic contrast of the play. Amédée's is a world of light and joy, of curtains parted on the dawn of spring: "Madeleine, réveille-toi, ouvrons les rideaux, c'est l'aurore du printemps ... le soleil inonde la chambre ... Lumière de gloire ... Chaleur douce!" (I, p. 277). Madeleine sees the opposite, darkness, rain and mud: "... nuit, pluie, boue! ... le froid! je grelotte ... noir ... noir ... noir!" (I, p. 277). To the man's vision of green valleys covered with flowers, his awakened perception ("La joie éclate ... Lumière folle ... L'amour fou ... Le Bonheur fou," I, p. 278), the sense of weightlessness ("les épaules des ailes ... abolie, la pesanteur ... plus jamais la fatigue," I, p. 279) and the glory of a universe of air and freedom ("Univers aérien ... Liberté ... Équilibre ... Légère plénitude," I, p. 279), Madeleine juxtaposes mushrooms, the sense of stifling in darkness and dampness: "Des champignons! ... Sombre vallée, humide, marécages, on s'enlise ... au secours, j'étouffe ... Cauchemar! ... Épaisses ténèbres!" (I, pp. 277-279). As the woman's vision begins to dominate hopelessness grows, density invades the scene. An important, and much commented upon, aspect of Ionesco is made apparent. It is a proliferation of matter, of words, whose weight deadens the spirit and which recalls the proliferation of mushrooms in the flat and the growing tissue of the corpse, multiplying itself in all directions.

The basic antinomies evidenced in Amédée, and which I wish to term the poles of the claustrophobic and the euphoric, are found in all of the plays to a greater or lesser extent. Critics have noticed them but, on the whole, have not analysed them as they deserve. Richard Coe,[4] for example, hastily annexes them to the Absurd and moves on. From the present point of view, however, they are of central importance.

We may note the way in which they dominate Ionesco's second full-length play, Tueur sans Gages (The Killer). Tueur sans Gages (1957) presents us with an image which epitomizes the feeling of joy and release, the "cité radieuse" (II, p.65). As the play begins, an effect of autumnal or wintry grey, produced entirely by lighting, is suddenly metamorphosed into brightness:

> ... c'est une lumière très forte, très blanche ... Ainsi, après la grisaille, l'éclairage doit jouer sur ce blanc et ce bleu ... Le bleu, le blanc, le silence, la scène vide doivent créer une impression de calme étrange.
>
> II, p.63.

Light, whiteness and blueness, emptiness, strangeness are powerful motifs in what follows. Bérenger, the protagonist, congratulates the architect on the radiant city, on its sunny avenues, streaming with light - "rues ensoleillées, des avenues ruisselantes de lumière," II, p.65 - in contrast to Bérenger's own city of dust, mud, rain and cold where everything, even fire, is damp and cheerless: "... tout est humide: le charbon, le pain, le vent, le vin, les murs, l'air, et même le feu" (II, p.67). But suddenly it is spring for Bérenger, he has found the city of light which, it seems, recalls an experience of his earlier life. Once Bérenger possessed within himself a source of light which appeared inexhaustible:

> ... il y avait, autrefois, en moi, ce foyer puissant

> de chaleur intérieure, contre laquelle le froid ne pouvait rien ... un printemps que les automnes ne pouvaient entamer; une lumière rayonnante, des sources lumineuses de joie que je croyais inépuisables.
>
> II, p. 74.

Some half a dozen times in his life he has been filled with an unknown joy, an "état lumineux" (II, p. 76), in silence, at midday, in spring or in summer. His description of the experience must be quoted at length since it represents Ionesco's most fundamental concerns:

> ... je me promenais dans une rue étroite ... bordée de maisons basses, toutes blanches ... J'étais tout seul dans la rue ... il faisait bon, pas trop chaud, le soleil au-dessus de ma tête, très haut dans le bleu du ciel ... Je sentis profondément le bonheur unique de vivre. J'avais tout oublié, je ne pensais plus à rien sauf à ces maisons-là, ce ciel profond, ce soleil qui semblait s'être rapproché ... Brusquement la joie se fit plus grande encore, rompant toutes les frontières! Oh, l'indicible euphorie m'envahit, la lumière se fit encore plus éclatante, sans rien perdre de sa douceur, elle était tellement dense qu'elle en était respirable, elle était devenue l'air lui-même ou buvable, comme une eau transparente ... C'était comme s'il y avait quatre soleils dans le ciel ... Les maisons ... semblaient être des taches immatérielles prêtes à fondre dans la lumière plus grande qui dominait tout ... Pas un homme dans la rue ... pas un bruit ... Pourtant, je ne souffrais pas de cette solitude ... je comblais l'univers d'une sorte d'énergie aérienne. Pas une parcelle vide, tout était un mélange de plénitude et de légèreté, un parfait

> équilibre ... Oh, j'aurais certainement pu m'envoler, tellement j'étais devenu léger ....
>
> II, pp. 76-78.

In this description we find in more elaborate form the elements of Amédée's joy and of his unwilling Ascension. The world is filled with light as Bérenger walks down a little street of white houses; Bérenger is overcome by an unexpected euphoria, everything material sinks into evanescent luminousness; drunk with the sense of lightness and plenitude, the protagonist is ready to float into the sky, to fly away.

But, as he tells the architect, this experience is a thing of the past. His normal setting is that degraded city of dampness and cold whose presence in this play undermines that of the radiant city. If the radiant city, like the euphoric experience it recalls, represents a world transfigured by wonder, "un autre univers, un monde transfiguré" (II, p. 71), a world seen as if for the first time in all its newness and innocence, the other city represents the world of everyday banality, always the same, its snow dirty, its wind biting, its people neither happy nor unhappy but, what is worse, ugly because neither the one thing nor the other:

> Depuis des années et des années, de la neige sale, un vent aigre ... des maisons, des quartiers entiers, de gens pas vraiment malheureux, c'est pire, des gens ni heureux ni malheureux, laids ... des êtres tristement neutres ... souffrant inconsciemment d'exister.
>
> II, p.74.

At the end of act one the stress moves from the radiant city to the other and throughout act two the image of greyness is elaborated in all its ugliness of noise, aggressiveness and litigation.

Clearly the nightmarish quality of Bérenger's home and its inhabitants points to the claustrophobia and disharmony in Amédée's flat. Act three of *Tueur* focusses gradually on this final situation. Anxiety mounts as Bérenger seeks to thwart the mysterious killer whose existence turns the city of light into a trap, traffic banks up, recalling the sense of proliferation of matter and enclosure in the other play, and, at last, Bérenger is left alone, darkness closes in and with it the killer. The narrow road in which the protagonist is cornered functions as an ironic counterpoint to the sunny road of white houses, the setting for the vision of the euphoric.

It should be emphasized, though, that Bérenger's two experiences have something in common. In each case the world is observed with a sense of surprise. "*Tout etait vierge, purifié, retrouvé, je ressentais à la fois un étonnement sans nom, mêlé à un sentiment d'extrême familiarité*" (II, p.78), says the protagonist of the experience of euphoria. In this case the world is observed with both wonder and recognition: it is the world of ordinary living transfigured by joy. In the experience of claustrophobia the familiar is also seen with new eyes but with different results: Bérenger observes the inhabitants of the rainy city in all their hopelessness and drabness, something which they themselves are unable to do. The same point could be made of Amédée's dual experience of reality: on the one hand an amazing vision of normal conjugal living as stifling and depressing, on the other an extravagant sense of liberation in a world transformed into light. But this common ground of wonder in the two experiences will become more evident as we proceed.

Much of what has so far been discussed in *Amédée* and *Tueur sans Gages* emerges in what Ionesco has said about himself and his work:

> Deux états de conscience fondamentaux sont à l'origine de toutes mes pièces: tantôt l'un, tantôt l'autre prédomine, tantôt ils s'entremêlent. Ces deux prises de conscience originelles sont celles de l'évanescence ou de la lourdeur; du vide et du trop de présence; de la transparence irréelle du monde et de son opacité; de la lumière et des ténèbres épaisses.
>
> Notes et Contre-Notes, p. 140.

Sometimes the two feelings mingle, says Ionesco, sometimes one or the other is dominant. Their polarity may be expressed as the contrast of evanescence and weight or of emptiness and excess of things or of transparency and opacity or, finally, of light and darkness. Ionesco himself describes his own life in terms of such antitheses. There is, for example, the vision of euphoria, associated in the Journal en Miettes (Fragments of a Journal, 1967-1968) and elsewhere with the writer's childhood at La Chapelle Anthenaise. The description of this experience in Ionesco's life, as given in the interview with Bonnefoy, differs remarkably little from Bérenger's in Tueur. Ionesco explains that he was seventeen or eighteen at the time of its occurrence, walking down a road in June, at midday:

> Tout d'un coup j'ai eu l'impression que le monde à la fois s'éloignait et se rapprochait ... que j'étais dans un autre monde, plus mien que l'ancien, infiniment plus lumineux ... il me semblait ... que la lumière était presque palpable, que les maisons avaient un éclat jamais vu, un éclat inhabituel, vraiment libéré de l'habitude ... j'ai senti une joie énorme ....
>
> p. 36.

As in the play, light invades the scene, the world is transfigured and made luminous, the habitual assumes an air of wonder and joy. In the Journal the narration of this same event is still more personally revealing. Again, it is midday and June and this time, as in the play, little white houses along the road figure prominently; again, Ionesco emphasizes the interplay of familiarity and surprise:

> Une transformation subite de la ville. Tout devenait à la fois profondément réel et profondément irréel ... Quelque chose de tout à fait neuf dans la lumière ... un monde inconnu et qu'il me semblait connaître éternellement ... Une joie débordante ....

The dazzling light is portrayed as the agent of the transformation, as the force of dissolution and renewal. Thus the new world is "un monde que la lumière dissolvait et qu'elle reconstituait."[5] This point is stressed also in the second volume of the Journal where the experience is yet again recounted. Here the walls of the houses shine with such brightness

> qu'ils avaient l'air de vouloir disparaître, se confondre dans l'intensité d'une lumière ardente, envahissante, totale qui s'évadait de ses formes ....

"Devant elle," the passage continues, "le monde semblait sur le point de s'effacer, de s'évanouir dans la lumière." Finally,

> ... je sentis comme un coup que je recevais en plein coeur, au centre de mon être. La stupéfaction surgit, éclata, déborda, faisant

> dissoudre les frontières des choses ....
>
> II, p.223.

At the height of this heart-piercing Ionesco approximates, like Bernini's Teresa and like his own Amédée, to the sensation of flight. It is a moment of supreme naïvete in the wonder of a universe which has been annihilated and renewed.

It is understandable that Ionesco's stress should be on the euphoric. On the other hand the vision of the mundane, of claustrophobic proliferation of things, also recurs. Ionesco frequently describes nightmares of claustrophobia in the Journal. In the Bonnefoy interview he associates these with Paris, a city hideous to him as a child after the serenity of the village of La Chapelle Anthenaise. Thus the duality of evanescence and enclosure is initially translated as that of country and city, childhood and adulthood.

In the critical writings, collected in Notes et Contre-Notes, Ionesco indicates a little more clearly the relationship between the two feelings. First of all there is the euphoric in which ordinary existence collapses into light and air and in which one senses "... que le monde a une substance de rêve, que les murs n'ont plus d'épaisseur ... dans un univers ... uniquement fait de clartés et de couleurs" (p.140). Euphoria is not without ambivalence, however. For example it may turn into a kind of vertigo, an unpleasant feeling of emptiness: "... la sensation de l'évanescence vous donne une angoisse, une sorte de vertige" (p.140). From this state it requires very little to plunge us into the claustrophobic where lightness becomes weight and the universe bears down on us, filling all with the dead presence of matter:

> ... la légèreté se mue en lourdeur; la transparence
> en épaisseur; le monde pèse; l'univers m'écrase ...

> la matière remplit tout, prend toute la place,
> anéantit toute liberté sous son poids ... le
> monde devient un cachot étouffant.
>
> p. 141.

The possibility of a rapid transition from one state to the other is explicable in terms of what euphoria and claustrophobia have in common. "L'étonnement est mon sentiment fondamental du monde" (p. 193), Ionesco argues in the Notes and he may be taken at his word. Wonder is the key to the Ionesco universe and the link between its opposites. A brief look at La Cantatrice Chauve, the first of the plays, and at what the author has said about it illustrates this fact very well.

The interesting thing about La Cantatrice Chauve: anti-pièce (The Bald Prima Donna, 1950) is that it offers us a vision of disintegrating reality analogous to that involved in the euphoric experience. In this case, however, the sense of wonder has turned into a brooding awareness of strangeness, a depressing amazement at the banality of life. "Tiens, il est neuf heures," exclaims Mrs. Smith in her famous opening as the clock strikes three,

> Nous avons mangé de la soupe, du poisson,
> des pommes de terre au lard, de la salade
> anglaise. Les enfants ont bu de l'eau
> anglaise. Nous avons bien mangé, ce soir.
> C'est parce que nous habitons dans les environs
> de Londres et que notre nom est Smith.
>
> I, p. 17.

As this play, in which the most ordinary things take on a monstrous shape, proceeds, the proliferation of things - of Bobby Watsons, for example - signals the growing sense of panic and enclosure. Frenzied dialogue proclaims not only the wonder of everyday language but also its nightmare disintegration:

> M. SMITH.- Le pape dérape! Le pape n'a pas
> de soupape. La soupape a un pape.
> Mme. MARTIN.- Bazar, Balzac, Bazaine!
> M. MARTIN.- Bizarre, beaux-arts, baisers!
> M. SMITH.- A,e,i,o,u,a,e,i,o,u,a,e,i,o,u,i!
> I, pp.52-53.

La Cantatrice Chauve, in short, provides an example of the sense of wonder in the service not of euphoria but of claustrophobia. The effect is the same - to translate the commonplace into the unusual - but the mood is radically opposed. As Ionesco complains, the critics saw everything in the play, its parody of theatre, its satire of the bourgeois, of the modern puppet, unable to communicate with himself or others, everything, in fact, but the essential. "Qu'est-ce que c'était pour moi cette pièce?" he asks in the Bonnefoy interview and replies to his own question:

> C'était l'expression de l'insolite, de l'existence vue comme une chose absolument insolite. Il y a un degré de communication entre les gens. Ils se parlent. Ils se comprennent. C'est cela qui est stupéfiant ... L'insolite est partout: dans le langage, dans le fait de prendre un verre, de le boire ... bref dans le fait d'exister, d'être.
> pp. 69-70.

The aim of the play is less to parody normality than to expose it to the gaze of wonder in the light of which the most normal things - the fact that people do communicate, for example, that one uses words, that one lifts up glasses in order to drink - become amazing, unbelievable, strange. In the very act of burying himself in the banality of the Smiths' existence Ionesco reveals its immense *otherness*: "*rien ne me paraît plus surprenant que le banal; le surréel est là, à la portée de nos mains* ..." (*Notes*, p.142). This sense of wonder, we are told, was in this case the particular result of Ionesco's reading an English manual for beginners. As he began to learn his English phrases, Ionesco made a startling discovery. He learned, as he puts it, not English but other surprising truths: for example, that there are seven days in the week and that the floor is below, the ceiling above. All this was not new, but it was something never before apprehended in all its unbelievable truth (*Notes*, pp.155-156). It was to convey to others his surprise at this discovery that Ionesco claims he wrote his play. The essential comedy of the explanation should not mislead. Clearly, in its way, the vision of *La Cantatrice* is comparable to Bérenger's in *Tueur sans Gages*, with the difference that in the former wonder allies itself with horror rather than joy. Ionesco himself was put out by the audience's reaction to the first play: it was a tragedy and everyone laughed (*Notes*, p.65). Of course comedy and the tragic are always linked in Ionesco - like the poles of euphoria and claustrophobia - but it is undeniable that *La Cantatrice* is overwhelmingly nightmarish. "*Envahi par la prolifération de cadavres de mots, abruti par les automatismes de la conversation, je faillis succomber au dégoût, à une tristesse innommable, à la dépression nerveuse, à une véritable asphyxie*" (*Notes*, p. 65), is Ionesco's comment on the writing of the play. If there is a little of the tongue-in-cheek in this melodramatic avowal, the statement remains a valid description of the feelings engendered by *La Cantatrice Chauve*.

It is clear from the examples so far given that the two feelings which dominate Ionesco's writing should not be thought of as totally opposed. For one thing transition is possible from the one to the other, as Ionesco argues and as *Amédée* and *Tueur sans Gages* illustrate.

In the former play we move from the sense of enclosure to that of euphoria, in the latter the motion is reversed. In addition, and this is a related fact, the euphoric may be experienced as ambivalent and as tending towards its opposite. Examples of this in the plays will come later in this chapter. Most important of all, both the euphoric and the claustrophobic are the product of something more fundamental in the Ionesco vision and may be regarded as modalities of the experience of wonder. Wonder destroys in order to recreate, sometimes, as in La Cantatrice, in a mood of stifling horror, sometimes, as in the first act of Tueur, in one of delight. Without exception, all of Ionesco's plays may be described in the above terms.

A number of plays are dominated by the sense of amazement in conjunction with a proliferation of matter which hems in and stifles. La Leçon:drame comique, Jacques ou La Soumission:comédie naturaliste, L'Avenir est dans les Oeufs ou il faut de tout pour faire un monde (The Lesson, Jacques or Submission and The Future is in Eggs) closely resemble La Cantatrice in this respect. The teacher of La Leçon (1950) overwhelms his pupil with a mass of words before he murders her. Murder itself proliferates: there are forty victims a day. The tangle of the arithmetic lesson - numbers are always ominous in Ionesco - and of the lesson in philology recalls the verbal avalanche of the final scene of La Cantatrice. Jacques (1950), facetiously subtitled "comédie naturaliste," heightens the banal and lends it an air of surreal horror. Ionesco's lighting comments unambiguously on the mood: "Décor sombre, en grisaille" (I, p.93). Later the light is brighter, a watery green in the crucial love scene, and, finally, the stage is darkened. We are obviously in an early version of Amédée's flat or Bérenger's rainy city. As large numbers of relatives, all Bobby Watsons with more or less identical names, close in around him, Jacques capitulates to normality in a marshy wasteland prefiguring Madeleine's in Amédée. The dream of the guinea pig in the bath, the story of the miller who drowns his child, all emphasize Jacques' predicament and at the climax of the scene watery immanence images his claustrophobia. The social institutions of marriage and the family are dissolved in an unreal vision of strangeness. Roberte II, Jacques' bride, forced on him by the parents is herself the marsh in which the protagonist is trapped:

> ROBERTE II.- Viens ... Je suis humide ... J'ai un collier de boue, mes seins fondent, mon bassin est mou, j'ai de l'eau dans mes crevasses. Je m'enlise .
>
> I, p.120.

In scenes reminiscent of Picasso everything has only one name - "cat" - and from Roberte's three noses we go to her hand with nine fingers and to a reptilian greyness. L'Avenir (1951) carries this action to its conclusion and, as the two lovers begin to reproduce, the scene is overwhelmed with impossible quantities of eggs. At the same time, proliferation of objects has its correlative in a frenzied speeding up of action. As more and more eggs are produced the pace increases in the same way as it does in the climax of La Cantatrice.

This world made strange, disjointed and reassembled in an atmosphere of claustrophobia, is the theme of Le Nouveau Locataire (The New Tenant, 1953), where the stage is filled to overflowing with furniture. As the protagonist turns off the lights not only the house but the entire city, the underground, the Seine, indeed, the whole country, are filled with his objects. The situation in Rhinocéros (1958) is comparable to this. Bérenger (Ionesco's Everyman who appears in Tueur) suffers from the same ailment as Amédée, a nagging weariness: "Je suis fatigué, depuis des années fatigué. J'ai du mal à porter le poids de mon propre corps ..." (III, p.23). At the sáme time his friend Jean ludicrously waves his arms as if to fly: " ... je me sens léger, léger, léger!" (III,p.23).

But the play is dominated by the negative state of leaden weight and hopelessness. The world, falling apart before Bérenger's amazed eyes, reveals itself in a proliferation of monsters. And yet to some the plague is nothing unusual. Dudard, in accepting the normality of rhinoceritis, is simply facing facts, according to his own defence of himself: "Je veux être réaliste" (III, p. 93). Bérenger, surrounded by human beings who have been metamorphosed into rhinoceroses, is confused and hemmed in. Normality and the abnormal are impossibly entangled, everything is strange and threatening: "le surréel est là, à la portée de nos mains."

Although many of the plays depict only the negative pole of the Ionesco experience there are some which, like Amédée and Tueur, give both sides of the picture. Victimes du Devoir: pseudo-drame (Victims of Duty, 1952) is Ionesco's first ambitious attempt here. In it the protagonist Choubert undergoes an immersion comparable to Jacques' into mysterious inner depths of darkness and mud, encouraged by his wife (another Madeleine) and by a detective:

> CHOUBERT.- La boue m'arrive au menton.
> LE POLICIER.- Pas assez ....
> MADELEINE.- Enfonce-toi, chéri, dans l'épaisseur.
> LE POLICIER.- Enfonce ton menton, c'est ça ... la bouche ....
> I, p. 192.

In the mud up to his chin, then his mouth, Choubert finally vanishes in the dark bottom of the ocean, miming his journey for the audience. Later, the situation is reversed. He emerges from the depths and begins to climb imaginary mountains, in the sunshine, until, at the top, he is ready to fly, like Amédée. His feelings also anticipate Bérenger's in Tueur:

> C'est un matin de juin. Je respire un air plus léger que l'air...Le soleil se dissout dans une

> lumière plus grande que le soleil. Je passe à
> travérs tout ....
>
> I, p.211.

Able to pass through all material barriers, Choubert experiences the wonder of things: "Je baigne dans la lumière ... Je suis étonné d'être, étonné d'être ..." (I, p. 212). However, the sense of claustrophobia returns, this time in the proliferation of cups of coffee which Madeleine brings into the room and, above all, in Choubert's being stuffed with bread - a grotesque anticipation of the furniture blockage in Le Nouveau Locataire. Choubert's choking continues at the end to a chorus reminiscent of the climax of acceleration and proliferation of matter in earlier plays.

It is not difficult to go from the contrasts of Victimes du Devoir to those of later plays. In Le Roi se Meurt (Exit the King, 1962) Bérenger, now of royal blood, watches his kingdom sink into the earth as he struggles to recapture the moment of euphoria. Again Ionesco focusses on a sense of wonder in the light of which things disintegrate and fall away from the little king. The opposition of release and claustrophobia is even more fully expressed in Le Piéton de l'Air (A Stroll in the Air, 1962) and La Soif et la Faim: trois épisodes (Hunger and Thirst, 1964). Possibly the most extravagant of Ionesco's plays, Le Piéton involves light effects and a prolonged flight above the stage. We are in the England of La Cantatrice, this time transfigured by April sunlight. The sky is pure and blue and visible in the background are the sunny white houses of Ionesco's euphoric experience. Yet another Bérenger basks in the wonder of things. The sense of evanescence is underlined by the periodic appearance and disappearance of the mysterious traveller from the "anti-world" who moves through invisible barriers. The scenery, with its little red train in the distance, recalls the Mediterranean colours of the Fauves, perhaps the fantasies of Dufy, although

Ionesco specifies an atmosphere of Rousseau, Utrillo and Chagall. There is a turreted palace, a picture of the Eiffel tower, a red balloon, a blue lake, even a rocket. Bérenger feels lighter and lighter, more and more happy and, above all, amazed: "Je regarde, c'est comme si c'était la première fois que je voyais. Je viens de naître" (III, p. 155). Divine intoxication (III, p. 156), it takes possession of him and is given visible form in the silver bridge far away and luminous in the sun. At last, excusing himself like Amédée, the protagonist rises in the air, performs on a flying bicycle and is eventually lost from view. However, the claustrophobic is also present. It appears with the background characters, reminiscent of the grotesque creatures of La Cantatrice, who speak of walls hemming them in, of weight, of the dirty London snow; it reappears in Bérenger's wife's nightmare. Most important of all, the euphoric flight itself turns sour and becomes a vertigo of the kind described in Notes et Contre-Notes, in short, transforms itself into its opposite. Excess of space becomes a kind of claustrophobia. Bérenger, high above the world, sees blood and mud, confusion and fear. Looking back from here we can interpret the slight alarm felt by Amédée as he rises in the air and the sense of artificiality and foreboding present in the very heart of the radiant city in Tueur sans Gages as a foretaste of the ambivalent vision of Le Piéton.

In La Soif et la Faim a similar transition occurs between the two Ionesco feelings. Jean, the protagonist, suffers from the sense of enclosure in the first act. The house is sinking into the mud and darkness and he dreams of release in images of houses without walls and roofs, houses open to the light: "Je n'aime que les maisons avec des murs et des toits transparents, ou même sans murs et sans toit, où le soleil entre par vagues de soleil ..." (IV, pp.79-80). In fact, we are in the damp, closed space of Jacques or Amédée. But in act two the scene is very different. Jean has left his wife and daughter and the doomed house and finds himself on a high, empty plateau. On the face of it the image is one of release. However, the ambivalence of the flight in Le Piéton mars the experience. Space oppresses, it becomes a torment, it shades off into claustrophobia. "Un peu vide ... cette clarté" (IV, p.105), someone comments. In the third act matter once again weighs heavily and we are left with the contrast between the vision of a luminous garden with its silver ladder to the sky - much like the bridge of Le Piéton - and the nightmare enclosure of the monastery-prison where Jean is trapped. Jean serves the brothers more and more quickly but their hunger and thirst is infinite and the service, it seems, must continue indefinitely, endlessly postponing the protagonist's reunion with his family in the garden of light. Disintegration and the sense of oppression go together. Dishes multiply and as matter swamps the stage, Jean's inner emptiness grows. As in other plays, evanescence and excess of matter, the euphoric and the claustrophobic, are confused. The more Jean eats in the monastery the more he is hungry, the more he attempts to fill himself the emptier he becomes, just as in act two the more he tries to liberate himself, to seek the openness of the high plateau, the more stifled he becomes. Thus, while the sense of release turns into a new kind of prison, the old prison of the family appears as a place of sunshine and joy.

In one other play Ionesco concentrates entirely on an effect of paradox of this sort. Les Chaises: farce tragique (The Chairs, 1951) does not depict the euphoric but it does present a picture of emptiness and evanescence. An old couple receive large numbers of visitors and seat them in dozens of chairs ranged about the stage. But the visitors are invisible and so the more they arrive, the greater the multiplication of chairs, the greater the emptiness. Absence presses densely from all sides, crushing the hosts, the only actors whom we are able to see. Ionesco has gone to some trouble to express his views on this play which has been interpreted as variously as La Cantatrice Chauve. The point is not, he explains in Notes et Contre-Notes, to focus on the illusions of an old couple but to depict the void, to create a sense of positive absence (pp. 168-169). This means that the visible characters are not to be regarded as being any more real than those we cannot see. Les Chaises is an image of euphoric evanescence turned sour, as in La Soif et la Faim, of space viewed as stifling and expressed partly in terms of its opposite in an accumulation of objects. Ionesco puts it simply:

> Par les moyens du langage, des gestes, du jeu, des accessoires, exprimer le vide. Exprimer l'absence ... Irréalité du réel ... Les voix à la fin, bruit du monde ... débris de monde, le monde s'en va en fumée, en sons et couleurs qui s'éteignent, les derniers fondements s'écroulent ou plutôt se disloquent. Ou fondent dans une sorte de nuit. Ou dans une éclatante, aveuglante lumière.
>
> Notes, p.170.

All the elements of the Ionesco vision are mingled, perhaps even confusingly, in this picture. By every means possible Ionesco will convey to the audience the identity of opposites, in this case in a mood of claustrophobic terror, of amazed despair. He will show normal reality as unreal, the world itself as falling apart in a chaos of vague noises, as disintegrating into darkness. Or perhaps, he adds in a revealing afterthought, into a blinding light. Emptiness and density, evanescence and enclosure are closely allied, as indeed are the fundamental experiences of joy and claustrophobia. Each of the two experiences involves a sense of wonder and in each case, whether in darkness or in light or in a mixture of both, the world is broken down and reconstituted, shaped anew, witnessed as if for the first time. The element of wonder is essential. Ionesco cannot accept the normality of things and neither can his characters.

Again and again, from La Cantatrice Chauve to La Soif et la Faim, they gaze in stupefaction, sometimes enraptured, at other times uneasy or, finally, horrified. What they see is a world either collapsing under its own weight or dissolving into air, but never a world at rest.

CHAPTER 8

IONESCO AND HEIDEGGER : AUTHENTICITY AND THE COLLECTIVE

> J'ai l'impression de me trouver devant des gens d'une politesse extrême ... Tout d'un coup quelque chose se défait, se déchire et le caractère monstrueux des hommes apparaît ....
>
> Entretiens avec Eugène Ionesco, p.167.

The phenomenon of Heideggerian angst has been discussed at length earlier in this thesis and on the basis of this discussion it is already clear that if a comparison of Ionesco's vision with modern thought is to be attempted the notion of angst must be the starting point. Like Beckett's world, Ionesco's falls apart, it tumbles into the existential void. "Pour moi," Ionesco explains,

> c'est comme si l'actualité du monde était à tout moment parfaitement inactuelle. Comme s'il n'y avait rien; comme si le fond des choses n'était rien ... Une seule actualité, pourtant: le déchirement continuel du voile de l'apparence ... Rien ne tient, tout s'en va. Mais je ne fais que répéter ce que disait le roi Salomon: tout est vanité....
>
> Notes, p.115.

The reality of things is doubtful, the everyday turns out to be nothing at all, founded on nothing. Only one truth remains, that of the disintegration, as all things give way. The entire world stands revealed as monstrous vanity. Ionesco appeals to Ecclesiastes but the language is that of Martin Heidegger.

> Je n'ai jamais réussi à m'habituer, tout à

> fait, à l'existence, ni à celle du monde, celle des autres, ni surtout, à la mienne. Il m'arrive de sentir que les formes se vident, tout à coup, de leur contenu, la réalité est irréelle, les mots ne sont que des bruits dépouillés de sens, ces maisons, ce ciel ne sont plus que les façades du rien, les gens me semblent se mouvoir automatiquement, sans raison; tout semble se volatiliser, tout est menacé - y compris moi-même - d'un effondrement imminent, silencieux, dans je ne sais quel abîme, au-delà du jour et de la nuit.
>
> _Notes_, p. 135.

Everything that one normally takes for granted is uncertain, the world, other people, oneself. Everyday forms are emptied of content, words, as in _La Cantatrice_, become mere noises, the houses and the sky of the euphoric vision perch on the edge of the void, human beings and their normal activities seem incomprehensible, robot-like. Above all, everything, including oneself, seems menaced by a collapse into the abyss. At this point, though, Ionesco differs greatly in emphasis from Samuel Beckett. Where the latter finds in the experience of _angst_ grim and irrefutable evidence of one's being-there, the former concentrates rather more on what Heidegger terms the Uncanny. _Angst_ reveals the everyday as strange by situating it over an abyss of nothingness. In the work of Ionesco the picture is unchanged: for the Uncanny we substitute the sense of wonder which the author himself refers to as his fundamental response to the world. One of the most revealing descriptions of the Ionesco vision from this point of view occurs in the _Journal_:

> Les murs s'effondraient, les définitions se disloquaient. Il n'y avait plus aucune

> direction. Les noms des choses se séparaient des choses ... notre réalité se brisait en des milliers de morceaux ... Tout ce que j'avais cru être des constructions solides n'était plus que des châteaux de cartes qui s'étaient effondrés.
>
> II, p.246.

The passage continues:

> J'étais étranger et seul, infiniment étranger à moi-même. Je me réveillais ou je naissais dans un univers nouveau ... La stupéfaction était si grande qu'elle annihilait toute peur et ... n'était qu'un écho de la plénitude, et l'étrange se transformait, immédiatement, en familier.
>
> II, p.247.

Disintegration of what appeared to be solid, dislocation of everyday meanings, loss of direction or purpose, all recall the Beckett experience of angst. There is even an echo in the above passage of Watt's difficulty with names and their relations to objects. But the stress is on the strangeness of it all. Ionesco is strange to himself, reborn in a new world which is, however, also familiar because it is simply a transfiguration of the old as the substance of things dissolves into the essential. Elsewhere this is concisely summarized. Just as Heideggerian angst reveals the true status of things so Ionesco's experience has the effect of suddenly opening one's eyes to the alien quality of normal life:

> J'ai l'impression de me trouver devant des gens d'une politesse extrême... Tout d'un coup quelque chose se défait, se déchire et le caractère monstrueux des hommes apparaît ou bien lé décor

> devient d'une étrangeté inconnue et les hommes
> et le décor révèlent peut-être ainsi leur véritable
> nature.
>
> Entretiens, p.167.

This could be a description of La Cantatrice Chauve or, indeed, of any Ionesco play. Of course there are two sides to the experience of wonder and the passage relates particularly to the claustrophobic whereas the one quoted before it relates to the euphoric. This fact must be translated into the terminology of Heidegger's philosophy if the parallel with the idea of angst is to be sustained.

Angst, as Heidegger sees it, simply reveals the makeup of man, that is, Existence, dasein. More precisely, it reveals a threefold structure which is termed Facticity, Existence and Falling. Man is there, whether he likes it or not; he exists, or projects himself into the future; he is inauthentic, enmeshed in the illusions of the "they." If we wish to relate the Heideggerian pattern to Ionesco we must think in terms of a twofold revelation, however. On the one hand angst must be thought of as recalling man to his being-there, to his situation, as a free project into futurity, on the other, as recalling man to his being-there as "falling" or inauthentic. These two aspects of the experience of angst are immediately recognizable in the Ionesco polarity of euphoria and claustrophobia. If the sense of wonder in the plays parallels the disintegrating vision of the Uncanny, then the two modalities of wonder parallel the major revelations of the Heideggerian experience: that man exists as free and at the same time as immersed in the inauthentic. Thus the whole effort of Ionesco's work would be to break down the illusions of normal living, to show the usual as strange or as slipping away from one. When the collapse of normality is felt as oppressive one may speak of the pressures of the "they," when it is felt as euphoric the parallel is with Heideggerian freedom. But we must examine the matter in greater detail.

There is no doubt that the euphoric must be related to the sense of being there or existing. Wonder and the awareness in joy of Existence are specifically linked by Ionesco:

> ... lorsque ... je me réveille, à moi-même et au monde et que je prends ... conscience, soudainement, que je suis, que j'existe, qu'il y a quelque chose qui m'entoure, des sortes de choses, une sorte de monde et que tout m'apparaît insolite, incompréhensible, et que m'envahit l'étonnement d'être ... L'univers me paraît alors infiniment étrange, étrange et étranger.
>
> Notes, pp. 114-115.

It is worth noting as well that in this passage to exist and to be aware of oneself as existing is to be a being surrounded by one's world or, in philosophic terms, a being-in-the-world. Ionesco's euphoria represents a realization that all is strange and alien but it is this very realization that confronts one with the fact of Existence. Of course Ionesco insists on the strangeness of the experience rather than on its facticity but to some extent the two concepts merge in the euphoric. The important thing to stress here is the statement of what Ionesco calls "l'unique et essentielle réalité" when he is overcome by the sense of the wonder of Existence, "lorsque m'envahissait, accompagnée d'une joie immense et sereine ... la stupéfaction d'être, la certitude d'être ..." (Journal, II, p.218). In the mood of euphoric wonder Existence is acknowledged just as it is Heideggerian angst. Moreover this Ionesco experience equally asserts the reality of freedom. In Heidegger the emptiness which invades the everyday and threatens it is the void of freedom. Indeed, freedom and Existence are synonymous terms. This appears to be the case in Ionesco's work. Amédée, flying above the stage, experiences a release which corresponds to a sense of freedom. As he puts it earlier in the play, euphoria means a world of lightness and liberty, "univers aérien ... Liberté" (I, p. 279). Choubert, also "étonné d'être, étonné d'être" (I, p. 212) as he climbs high mountains of the imagination and prepares to ascend into the air, experiences Existence as a sense of liberation. Freedom, emptiness, a sense of the void in a mood of joy, light and air, the power to fly, all these are obviously related. Bérenger of Tueur sans Gages or Le Piéton de l'Air is aware above all of his possibilities. To feel joy in the radiant city, in the experience of the luminous houses and in the toy landscape of Le Piéton is to feel that one can achieve anything or, in more existential terms, it is to confront an open future, the nothingness, filled with possibilities for action and fulfilment, of freedom itself. Once we recognize the very close parallel between the Ionesco euphoria and Heidegger's vision of Existence as freedom we are also in a position to explain along philosophic lines the ambivalence of the euphoric. Angst itself is ambivalent. Insofar as it is an experience of one's freedom it may be felt as exhilarating. But existential freedom also presents itself as a responsibility, as something one cannot escape, and so as a threat, a torment even, as we have seen with reference to Beckett's work. Likewise in Ionesco a character may comment wrily "un peu vide ... cette clarté" (IV, p. 105). Jean of La Soif et la Faim leaves his home and finds freedom on the high plateau, in the emptiness and the light. But then freedom is felt as a frightening void which thrusts itself on one. Bérenger of Le Piéton has a similar transition from joy to anxiety in his flight above the world and in Les Chaises emptiness is very definitely felt as frightening and claustrophobic, that is, as crowding one.

Thus the experience of Existence as freedom throws one back on that of Existence as an inescapable fact. I am free but I have to be free, I cannot escape responsibility. The sense of possibilities and the void comes at every turn upon that of one's concrete, particular thereness. The Ionesco flight is suddenly transformed into an imprisonment because freedom is inconceivable without the world, without a restricted, limited space as its area of operations. Euphoria now turns into its opposite but the common ground remains: it is Ionesco's wonder which, like Heideggerian angst, focusses in turn (if not all at once) on every aspect of the human situation. Once we are in the power of the claustrophobic we are aware only of the monolithic thereness or facticity of life. Amédée is tired, weighed down by the body, hemmed in on all sides by the existential situation, unable to escape until the final act. Matter, the brute weight of Existence, swamps the whole scene in plays like La Cantatrice, La Leçon, Jacques, L'Avenir est dans les Oeufs and Rhinocéros. In each case the overwhelming sense is comparable to that found in Beckett: to exist is to suffocate, to be enclosed in a room or stifled by objects or words or people. At the same time, as in the euphoric, all is strange and Ionesco writes La Cantatrice, as he writes plays depicting freedom, in order to underline the astounding fact, "le fait d'exister, d'être" (Entretiens, p. 70).

The argument so far presented in this chapter does not quite explain the Ionesco feelings, however. It is true that Ionesco's wonder is analogous to angst and that whenever Ionesco depicts the euphoric he may be translated into the Heideggerian terms of Existence and freedom. On the other hand we cannot simply see the claustrophobic as an assertion of Heideggerian being-there because it suggests something more: the idea of inauthentic man as "falling" or as entangled in the world of the "they." This point still needs to be demonstrated and will occupy much of the rest of this chapter. Whereas claustrophobia in the work of Beckett indicates one's being-in-the-world, its function in Ionesco's is to reveal one's being-in-the-world as inauthentic or as coloured by a sense of the inauthentic. Thus clastrophobia relates to the pressure of the collective, of everyday social norms, and euphoria to the experience of authenticity. Of course in each case we are concerned with the same phenomenon of Existence, viewed from a different angle and always in angst. In what follows I shall elaborate this argument and in so doing return to the plays in order to examine them methodically in terms of angst. Angst is an awareness of things and it requires a subject as well as an object. If the subject of Beckett's work is human consciousness in the form of the tramp or the Voice we may expect to find an authentic hero in Ionesco's plays also, one who is in some special sense identified with the euphoric and set against the stifling world of "falling," inauthentic beings.

A strikingly Heideggerian image of the "they" is offered in a slight, but interesting, play entitled Le Maître (The Leader, 1953). A public figure, perhaps a political leader, executes a series of magnificent gestures before an enthusiastic crowd but out of sight of the audience: he has his trousers ironed, smiles, walks about, tastes flowers, fruits and roots, suffers children to come to him, shows confidence in all, institutes a police force, salutes justice, honours the great conquerors and conquered of the past, recites a few lines. Everyone cheers wildly. At the end, the great man appears on stage. But he is headless. Suddenly each character is breathlessly enquiring of his neighbour: "comment vous appelez-vous?" (II, p.243). The play reads like a Heidegger parable. The great man is nobody at all, he has no head and his followers are no better: everyone is, as it were, someone else, everyone is "they," an indefinite plural, a projection into another who has himself no personality.

This is the world of Ionesco's first play, La Cantatrice Chauve. Early criticism of La Cantatrice was quick to see it as a satire of the bourgeoisie (Ionesco made it evident that it was not to be regarded as a satire of English manners). But for the author the bourgeois is not limited to a particular social class: "Le petit bourgeois, c'est pour moi l'homme ... que l'on retrouve dans toutes les sociétés ... le conformiste ... " (Notes, p. 110). The early Ionesco character is one who is interchangeable with another. Thus at the end of La Cantatrice the action recommences with the Martins in place of the Smiths. The horror of the play is the claustrophobia of a world of stereotypes:

> En ce qui concerne les personnages de mes premières pièces ... Ils sont vidés de toute psychologie. Ils sont tout simplement des mécaniques ... Ils sont séparés d'eux-mêmes. Ils sont dans le monde de l'impersonnel ... de la collectivité.
>
> Entretiens, pp. 132-133.

Ionesco's early characters are dehumanized, without individuality, belonging to the mass. In Heideggerian terms they are not themselves but "they," das man. Puppets whose reactions are stilted and impersonal, whose language consists entirely of common platitudes, the Smiths and Martins are "nobody," like le maître. For Heidegger inauthentic dasein exhibits three qualities, namely Ambiguity, Idle Talk and Curiosity. Ionesco's equivalent for Idle Talk is obviously enough the proliferation of words which chokes the action as the play proceeds. Again, the characters are "curious," in Heidegger's technical sense, in that they lack a centre of personality. Their attention moves constantly outwards to new irrelevancies. Above all, their language is not used to express truths, to establish relationships, but to disguise reality, to render everything ambiguous. Clearly, in the Heideggerian system, the primary aim of inauthentic behaviour, that is, of Idle Talk, Curiosity and Ambiguity, is to keep the condemning vision of angst at arm's length.

Two facets of inauthentic, collective behaviour stand out in

Ionesco's portrayal: aggressiveness and irrationality. Emotion is always present as a repressed undercurrent in La Cantatrice, constantly liable to break out and transform seemingly innocuous words into deadly threats. Logic is simply the servant of such emotion, which builds up in a series of tense situations, moving to a climax near the end. The "they" hides its hate behind a mask of reason. In Punch and Judy fashion, by starts and jerks and yet with frightening consistency, the characters advance to a confrontation. Of course we laugh. Nevertheless the dialogue moves us gradually from comedy to threat. In the maid's poem everything catches fire and from then on Smiths and Martins are more and more at each others' throats. They begin to shout commonplaces and absurdities as the mass of sounds more and more images the emptiness within. There is no point of reference here, since everyone is equally inauthentic. If the play communicates a sense of wonder or angst, if the climax is experienced as a disintegration of normality, it is because Ionesco has the audience supply its own point of authentic reference. The characters erupt and then subside, normality has been revealed for a while as situated over the void. But it is the spectator, not the protagonist, who is stifled by a nothingness which crowds, who, in a mood of Ionesco wonder, feels the evanescence of everyday reality and its density, sees the Smiths and Martins hanging in a void and yet enclosed by the pressure of their being-there. Ionesco himself has described the writing of the play in terms reminiscent of the experience of Heidegger's Uncanny:

> Un phénomène bizarre se passa, je ne sais comment: le texte se transforma sous mes yeux ... Les propositions toutes simples et lumineuses que j'avais inscrites ... bougèrent toutes seules, se corrompirent, se dénaturèrent.
>
> Notes, p. 158.

Under Ionesco's gaze as he writes, simple, lucid statements from the English manual for beginners begin to alter, to deteriorate. The affirmation, as Ionesco puts it, that there are seven days in the week is monstrously distorted to argue that there are three, Tuesday, Thursday and Tuesday. Comically and tragically

> ... il s'était agi d'une sorte d'effondrement du réel. Les mots étaient devenus des écorces sonores, dénués de sens; les personnages ... s'étaient vidés de leur psychologie et le monde m'apparaissait dans une lumière insolite, peut-être dans sa véritable lumière ....
>
> Notes, p. 159.

Even as he writes, the author is overcome by angst, by the vision of a language reduced to its outer shell, of characters emptied of all everyday motivation or meaning. There seems little doubt that this vision represents a genuine, that is, authentic insight into the nature of the "they." In different words it must be stressed that Ionesco's angst, unlike the claustrophobic experience in Samuel Beckett, does not simply reveal man's Existence, his thereness, as a being situated or enclosed in the world. It reveals Existence as a being-with. The characters of La Cantatrice or, if we prefer, the spectators of the play, are stifled by the revelation of the human situation as a participation in the life of the inauthentic "they." More technically, we can say that La Cantatrice depicts man as immersed in the world in the form of the collective, that is, as an inauthentic or "falling" being-with, a creature whose identity is legion, one of innumerable Bobby Watsons.

There is one play where claustrophobia appears unrelated to the inauthentic collective, and that is Le Nouveau Locataire (The New Tenant). As the stage begins to burst with excess furniture the effect on the audience is comparable to the effect of Ionesco's first play. But in this case the notion of being-with which is relevant elsewhere does not seem applicable. The tenant is stifled by matter, by the enclosure of Heideggerian being-there in a way reminiscent of Beckett. If we wish to draw the parallel even closer we can say that Ionesco's character is crushed by the weight of what Heidegger terms _zuhanden_, the tools which we employ for the furtherance of our schemes and futural projects. Of course it is precisely these tools which constitute our "world" in the existential sense since they are an extension of ourselves into the world, in short, our _situation_. The tenant therefore may be said to _be_ his furniture and to suffocate as a result of his own pressure upon himself. There is no need for us to force such an interpretation of the play, however, since we are bound to return to it in another context later in this thesis.

Despite _Le Nouveau Locataire_, claustrophobia in Ionesco generally relates to something very like the Heideggerian "they," revealed in all its banality by the gaze of _angst_. In _La Cantatrice_ no character emerges from the mass. We are in the world of _guignol_, following the antics of _père_ Ubu. But in other plays the _guignol_ element is slowly modified and, as some critics have seen,[1] a movement towards the human is discernible. In the present context this may be seen as a movement towards authenticity, as the emergence of Ionesco's authentic hero. The process is gradual and will be traced in what follows. Briefly, the crowd of _La Cantatrice_ differentiates, in later plays, into victim and aggressors and the stage is set for one of Ionesco's central concerns, the struggle of the authentic individual against the collective, against the violence and unreason of the "they." Writers like Richard Coe have done a great deal to set Ionesco's attack on logic - that limited set of rules used to shield society from its essential irrationality - in perspective. Noone, on the other hand, has analysed the relation of the Ionesco individual to society in the philosophic terms here proposed.

Already in La Leçon one of the characters is victim and the other aggressor. We are still in the sphere of Punch and Judy but a slight humanizing touch has been added. Thus the pupil appears as one of Ionesco's earliest depictions of one who stands apart from the crowd - in this case clearly imaged in the teacher. She is a victim of the "they," swallowed up by a fury of irrational platitudes. More obviously than in La Cantatrice, normality turns into a nightmare; the teacher, a respectable figure of authority, imposes his will on the young girl; education is revealed as disguised sexual sadism. Gradually the pupil ceases to resist and at the end, before the murder, has been rendered totally passive - one of the "they." In Jacques and L'Avenir est dans les Oeufs the victim is a youth and the family is the aggressor. As in La Cantatrice normality is supported by reason and reason serves to disguise underlying violence. Jacques is asked to submit to tradition and the family: he must marry and reproduce. As well he must utter a ludicrous formula of submission: "j'adore les pommes de terre au lard" (I, p. 99). When he submits he will, of course, be in the same position as the pupil of La Leçon, and this in fact happens. The horde of more or less identical Jacques and Roberts has its way. In this case the situation of claustrophobia indicates not only the pressure of the family but, more specifically, the force towards conformity inherent in the sexual relationship. Roberte, young Jacques' chosen mate, is the prime agent in his surrender to society. Ionesco has called the scene "l'enlisement de l'homme dans l'érotisme" (Entretiens, p. 157). Roberte is all moisture, representing fully the experience of sinking into darkness and mud so familiar in the plays. When everything becomes "cat" "c'est ... une absence de langage, c'est ... l'abdication de la lucidité, de la liberté devant l'organique"(Entretiens, p. 159). This victory of the "they" receives confirmation in L'Avenir, where the reference is to a wider social world. Submission to conformity leads to frenzied reproduction. Grandfather has died and the family must replace him, must, in its mechanical way, produce another replica. At the end the proliferation of eggs in which the entire set is swallowed up is, in fact, the proliferation of the Ionesco puppet, the "they." The parallel is with industrial mass production and the overtones are those of right-wing politics. The situation is only a little altered in *Les Chaises*. Here the protagonist has lived a lifetime of experience and yet has only a garbled, incoherent message to deliver. Like the old couple, the crowd which arrives is simply an *emptiness* which clutters the stage, an accumulation of chairs. And yet there are hints that the old man has been victimized and is comparable to young Jacques.

All the above plays depict the power of the "they," either dissipating itself in vague gestures or concentrating on a single victim who is inevitably crushed. Authentic behaviour is limited to Jacques' sulky rebellion, to the ineffectual resistance of the schoolgirl, to the touch of humanity in the makeup of the old couple of *Les Chaises* with their hopes and dreams. It seems that inauthenticity works through figures of authority, through the teacher and the family, through sexual relations, perhaps specifically through the woman. The vision of *angst* belongs properly not to any one character but to the audience, as in *La Cantatrice*. In each case we are faced with confusion and banality, with disintegration coloured by the sense of the strange. We see the futility and irrationality, the danger of inauthentic action. Marriage and reproduction, education, personal relations appear grotesque, as if set on the backdrop of the void. As all everyday meaning falls away we are left only with a massive presence, the "thereness" of the everyday, a stifling pressure of inauthentic being. If the "they" crowds, though, it does so only to proclaim its nothingness, as in *Les Chaises*.

The word "duty," significantly mentioned in L'Avenir, becomes the theme of Victimes du Devoir where the individual once again suffers at the hands of others. Of course duty means conformity to the claustrophobic will of the collective and of the past. Choubert, the protagonist of Victimes, is no rebel but a little man who readily bends before prevailing norms. At the same time his dream journey to the heights of the Alps illustrates what he himself is unable to express, his desire for authenticity, that is, for the euphoric experience of freedom, his wish to escape the negative experience of the "they." At first Choubert is simply the little bourgeois who is eager to believe in authority, if also slightly apprehensive. His wife Madeleine resembles Jacques' Roberte in that she is an important influence and a force for conservatism and repression. Madeleine's view of society involves a confused mixture of secular and religious values: "Il est ... très agréable d'obéir aux lois, d'être un bon citoyen, de faire son devoir, de posséder une conscience pure!" (I, p. 178). Choubert admits the value of individual sacrifice and is promptly turned into a scapegoat. The threat to freedom comes from a number of sources. The detective who forces Choubert on his dream journey and who tyrannizes him represents authority and is in addition a father figure. Madeleine, who helps the detective, is a threat as wife and, later, as mother. As the play proceeds the detective takes on the appearance of an inquisitor and of a psychoanalist. Choubert descends into his own depths, only to discover there the claustrophobia of the "they" - since he is at this stage a kind of nobody. But the quest for an identity goes on with the detective and Madeleine anxious lest Choubert should stumble on the experience of freedom. Time is reversed. The detective and Madeleine become Choubert's parents for a while. Clearly we are back in the setting of Jacques. Thus Choubert's humiliating journey into the depths involves an immersion in sensuality, a descent to the infantile and, above all, a submission to "duty," society's sanction for the guilt with which it burdens the hapless individual.

It is impossible to miss autobiographical echoes at this point. Ionesco's parents are clearly reflected in the detective and Madeleine, particularly in the quarrel scene. Ionesco's father, closely associated in the mind of the playwright with Roumanian Nazism, is easily linked with the figure of authority. As Choubert turns into a child he witnesses what Ionesco witnessed and describes in his *Journal* (II, pp.28-29), his mother's attempted suicide. In the play, though not in the *Journal*, the father forces poison on the wife. Although Choubert wants to forgive the father figure no rapport is established and his sense of guilt grows. For a little while he escapes the stifling family milieu when his dream journey takes him, as we have seen, to the euphoric, to an awareness of joy and liberation. "*Je suis seul*" (I, p. 210), he laughs on the heights of the Alps. To bring him back the others recall him to his "duty," to the advantages of normal social existence: "*La patrie ... a besoin de toi ... Tu as la vie, une carrière devant toi! Tu seras riche, heureux et bête ...* (I, p. 211). Above all, their argument is for the collective: "*La solitude n'est pas bonne ... Entends la voix de la solidarité humaine* ..." (I, p. 210). But solitude *is* good, Choubert sees. Dimly aware of a transfigured world, the first of Ionesco's characters to tentatively approach the apprehension of *angst*, he is in the process of discovering his true identity, his being distinct from the crowd or, in Heidegger's terms, his being-one's-self. *Angst* reveals not only the banality of the "they"; it equally singles out the individual and offers him the choice of authenticity. Certainly Choubert is defeated: his tendency to airiness is counterbalanced by his being stuffed with bread. Moreover, noone is responsible for this outrage. Everyone is a "victim of duty," the aggressor is everyone and noone, it is the all-embracing and elusive "they." But if Choubert is overwhelmed he nonetheless achieves much more than his predecessors. The vision of wonder or the Uncanny is his own, that is, for the first time in Ionesco there is a character in a play to act as mediator to the audience. Where in the case of La Cantatrice an authentic point of reference does not exist in the play, Choubert is a standard of sorts. However inauthentic and fearful, he emerges from the ocean of the collective, he is more human, more individualized, than, for example, Jacques. Nevertheless, Choubert's insight is strictly limited.

Amédée represents a development beyond this position. Again we begin with the repressive situation, in this case the pressure of normality in the impossibly crowded flat and, of course, the pressure of the growing corpse. This last may be variously interpreted. Here it suffices to suggest that it images Amédée's own past which lives on to stifle him. As in Victimes and Jacques woman is associated with the repressive. There seems little doubt that Madeleine (also the name of Choubert's wife) weighs heavily on Amédée and indeed that, in some sense, it is she who represents the power of the inauthentic in the deadening pull of female immanence, the claustrophobia of the conjugal situation. It is therefore not fanciful to identify the corpse with Amédée's wife, though this is clearly not the whole story, and to suppose that the subtitle of the play - How to get rid of it - refers to Madeleine. Amédée is Jacques fifteen years later: "Depuis quinze ans, nous vivons enfermés" (I, p. 238). In addition he is a playwright, so that his conflict with his wife may be taken as a picture of the artist's relation to society. While Madeleine works at the telephone, in contact with the busy sphere of the "they," Amédée attempts to write, hopelessly and without inspiration, crushed by the presence of the corpse whose silent multiplication can only remind us of the proliferation of matter and the pressure of inauthenticity in earlier plays. Ineffectually, Amédée protests, adding that one must have joy in order to create (I, p. 235). It is Coleridge's problem and the situation is unchanged. Amédée is unheroic. If he differs from Choubert it is only that he is more fully realized as a human being with a capacity for suffering and hope. Indeed, the development beyond Choubert recalls Choubert's development beyond Jacques. An element of guignol remains but because Amédée is something more than a sad puppet he emerges more clearly than his predecessors from the undifferentiated mass of Bobby Watsons, Smiths, Martins, Jacques and Roberts. His sense of vaguely apprehended angst, an all-pervasive unease, coupled with a confused and timid longing for release, introduces a new element into the Ionesco play but one implicit even in La Cantatrice.

In the dream sequence of act two Madeleine's vision evokes the full horror of claustrophobia while Amédée vainly stresses its opposite. The disintegrating vision of angst is shared by the couple:

> MADELEINE ... La pierre, c'est le vide. Les murs,
> le vide. Il n'y a rien ...
> (AMÉDÉE ... C'est lourd. Et pourtant, c'est si mal
> collé...Il n'y a que des trous ... les murs
> chancellent ....)
>
> I, pp. 279-280.

Reality is dense and heavy and yet it is falling apart, full of holes, a void which presses in upon one as in the Heideggerian experience. On the whole, however, it is the woman who is most tormented by the claustrophobic facticity of things, by the weight of the past and, if we view the matter from the perspective offered by other plays, by the inauthentic, the collective. The man, on the other hand, longs for the euphoric. Inevitably, it is he who breaks out. Husband and wife slowly pull the giant corpse out of the window in the second act and in Ionesco's directions this must suggest that the very entrails of the house and of the characters are being hauled out (I, p.292). It is, of course, a birth. Where Choubert mimes his sense of release in a dream state, Amédée actually experiences the joy of flight in act three. Symbolically, he rises above the mass of onlookers. Like Choubert's Madeleine, his wife attempts to stop him, but unsuccessfully. It is true that he is an unwilling individualist, excusing himself profusely as he rises in the air:

> AMÉDÉE.-... je m'excuse, Messieurs, Mesdames ... Je voudrais bien rester ... Rester les pieds sur terre ... C'est contre ma volonté ... Je suis pour le progrès, je désire être utile à mes semblables ... Je suis pour le réalisme social ....
>
> I, p.307.

But neither Social Realism nor the desire to serve the collective can prevent the assertion of Amédée's deepest instinct for freedom. He continues comically, assuring us that he is opposed to transcendence, until he disappears in the brilliant night sky. Unlike Victimes and indeed any other Ionesco play, this one ends on a positive note. Amédée is still the little man victimized by the "they" but Ionesco's gradual progress towards an authentic type is unmistakable. The protagonist is becoming more and more conscious of the vision of angst, of the crushing weight and, at the same time, the evanescence of the everyday world. He is more and more individualized, set apart from the inauthentic mass by his insight - if somewhat reluctantly.

This character is fully developed in Rhinocéros which recapitulates all the earlier Ionesco themes but moves out of the conjugal sphere and into that of the socio-political. Bérenger (another of that name) is at once contrasted with the other characters in the play. Whereas his friend Jean is well-dressed and tidy in his opinions and ideas, Bérenger is a doubtful case, like Choubert and Amédée. Again le devoir is a key issue. Unlike Jean, Bérenger has no willpower and consequently little sense of duty. "L'homme supérieur est celui qui remplit son devoir" (III, p. 13), the former argues. It is the argument for control, for power, the Nietzschean position as interpreted by the Nazis and it highlights the first characteristic of the inauthentic collective: aggressiveness. As we have seen, irrationality disguised as logic is the other characteristic of the "they." And indeed, as Bérenger argues with his friend, a logician at the next table is putting forward views paralleling Jean's. Bérenger is caught in the middle and stifled by the rigidity of those about him. From the start he feels ill at ease, weighed down, like Amédée, feeling "des angoisses difficiles à définir ... mal à l'aise dans l'existence, parmi les gens." The angst of earlier characters is now out in the open: "Je ne me suis pas habitué à moi-même. Je ne sais pas si je suis moi" (III, p. 23). Bérenger is a stranger to himself, a misfit in society, even out of step with existence. The world of the logician and of Jean is precisely that world of certitudes that is slipping from him. As it does so Bérenger is possessed by a feeling of something wrong, not quite the feeling of wonder but a distant apprehension of the Uncanny. This is the usual plight of the Ionesco rebel but it is conscious in Bérenger, whereas Choubert and Amédée are misfits in spite of themselves. It does not follow that the protagonist of Rhinocéros emerges as a powerful figure, quite the contrary: he too is an unwilling hero, full of doubts and contradictions, but his approach is fundamentally authentic since he questions the platitudes of the "they." For this reason Bérenger is more than a passive victim. He is ready to argue his case:

> BÉRENGER ... C'est une chose anormale de vivre.

> JEAN: Au contraire. Rien de plus naturel. La preuve:
> tout le monde vit.
>
> III, pp. 24-25.

This logic of the collective is echoed in the startling conclusions of the logician who proves to us that logically a dog is a cat, although the contrary also holds good. Of course logic is the instrument of the collective and can be used to support any point of view. "Le rationalisme mène à la déraison" (Entretiens, p.131), Ionesco told Claude Bonnefoy and Rhinocéros dramatizes this fact. Logic allies itself with the forces of duty and the exponents of power; eventually, it provides a rationale for every prejudice in its justification of the status quo. When the rhinoceros kills a cat, for example, the logician has a ready answer: "Que voulez-vous, Madame, tous les chats sont mortels!" (III, p.33). With similar arguments, Ionesco suggests, logic urges us to accept the totalitarian state.

As the characters continue their conversations, more and more people are turned into rhinoceroses. In act two Jean is transformed and by the third Bérenger, who cannot resign himself to rhinoceritis, is left almost alone. The disease is a madness but one which is contagious and dangerously attractive. As Jean gives way to his bestial nature, his ideas appear progressively simpler and more lucid. "Je suis maître de mes pensées ... Je vais tout droit" (III, p.69), he claims. At the same time his sense of purpose is undergoing a similar simplification, a concentration of the will: "J'ai un but, moi" (III, p.73). This is the meaning of the rhinoceros image. Jean and the others will charge straight ahead, enslaved by a mass of prejudices which take on the appearance of a terrible, warped lucidity. As more metamorphoses occur, normality and rhinoceritis coincide. Of course tolerance towards the bestial is the first step to submission. Dudard, who wishes to be realistic and objective, even scientific about the plague is promptly changed into a rhinoceros. Bérenger has no arguments to match his, because there is nothing logical about humanism. The other has only to ask for definitions for the protagonist to be driven back to defensive assertion: "Vous ne savez plus ce qui est normal, ce qui ne l'est pas ... Moi ... je le sens ... intuitivement" (III, pp. 94-95). Eventually even Daisy leaves him and Bérenger is alone, assailed by doubt. But he does not give in, nor is the ending of the play ambiguous in the sense suggested by Esslin.[2] Certainly there is an element of the ridiculous in Bérenger's resistance but this does not make it "absurd" and so comparable to the behaviour of the others. On the contrary, Ionesco affirms the value of solitude and the dignity of Bérenger. Criticism has insisted on misunderstanding the playwright on this score from La Cantatrice on, but he has made his stand clear: "Pour moi il ne s'agissait ni d'incommunicabilité, ni de solitude. Au contraire. Je suis pour la solitude"(Entretiens, p. 69). Bérenger at the end of Rhinocéros has reached a point of truth sought after confusedly by Jacques, by the old man of Les Chaises, by Choubert and Amédée and there can be no real doubt of this. The "they" has won and this is imaged in the proliferation of animals and the sense of claustrophobia, but the protagonist triumphs also and that despite the open possibility of his capitulation.

Bérenger is hardly qualified to play the hero yet he grows in stature as the play proceeds. His strength is his naïvete, in short, his embryonic sense of wonder, the sense of angst. Precisely because of it he sees what noone else does, the strangeness of the metamorphosis from man to beast. From the start and more clearly than Amédée, he sees the world of the "they" as falling apart, as insane and dangerous. Indeed it is the void of this world, its nothingness which hems him in at the end. He has little chance to experience the freedom of angst, overwhelmed as he is by the vision of man's inescapable relation with the inauthentic - in Heideggerian terms his being-with. Yet it is precisely freedom which he affirms. Bérenger, for all his simplicity, is not a puppet. His solitude at the climax of the play illustrates a conscious flight above the collective. Looking at the question from several points of view we can say that he is individualized or set apart by the experience of angst, that he is more human than earlier characters, that he is a rebel rather than a mere scapegoat, in short, that he possesses a real identity as an authentic hero. Bérenger is committed to the truth - "Je prends part, je ne peux pas rester indifférent" (III, p.87) - and "resolute" in the Heidegger sense. Moreover his commitment is indistinguishable from his sense of wonder: "Moi, je suis surpris, je suis surpris, je suis surpris! Je n'en reviens pas" (III, p.88). Because of this the sense of angst is not thrust directly upon the audience, as it is in La Cantatrice. Rather, disintegration and claustrophobia are experienced from Bérenger's point of view. Ionesco has found a spokesman for the underdog, the man of good will.

Like all else in Ionesco's work the parable of Rhinocéros is surprisingly autobiographical. Rhinoceritis recalls the rise of Nazism, minutely described in Ionesco's Journal as personally experienced by the playwright in pre-war Roumania. When Ionesco tells Bonnefoy about his homeland the latter exclaims "Mais c'est l'histoire de Bérenger ... que vous me racontez." The answer is "Exactement. Je me suis toujours méfié des vérités collectives" (Entretiens, p. 26). Ionesco's sense of hopelessness in Bucharest is exactly Bérenger's situation and it mirrors, as Ionesco points out, the difficulty of standing firm even in one's own mind against the collective and its dominant ideologies. The enemy in Rhinocéros, however, is not simply Fascism. Botard, for example, tends to the left and is notwithstanding metamorphosed. The true enemy is the conformist, a fact which explains Ionesco's intense dislike of Sartre's politics, as he understands them, and his disagreement with Kenneth Tynan, as well as his fear of Nazism. Whether in a revolutionary or in a reactionary society

> ... le petit bourgeois n'est pour moi que l'homme des slogans ... répétant les vérités toutes faites, et par cela mortes, que d'autres lui ont imposées. Bref ... c'est l'homme dirigé.
>
> Notes, p. 49.

The political emphasis of Rhinocéros should not obscure the other dimension of repression, the sphere of marriage and the family, though. I have already pointed out the identity of Nazism and the father figure in Ionesco's mind, a fact immediately explicable in autobiographical terms. Like D.H. Lawrence, however, who initially sided with the mother in the family situation only to take the man's part in later life and in his writings, Ionesco clearly moves from a fear of the paternal to a revulsion against the maternal. Ionesco's parents quarrelled violently and the boy grew up in his mother's care. We cannot fail to see that in Ionesco's work the woman - mother or wife, it is all one - inevitably stifles the man. This is the case in Les Chaises, though not to a marked degree, and evident in Jacques, Victimes and Amédée. Bérenger of Rhinocéros is abandoned by Daisy and the pattern is repeated in later plays yet to be discussed. Thus while it is tempting to identify the claustrophobic with the father figure, the fear of authority and the totalitarian and the euphoric with Ionesco's pleasant childhood with his mother, it is equally important to relate the claustrophobic to the feminine. Ionesco has offered a Jungian interpretation of the two feelings, but, in view of his prolonged confessions, particularly in the Journal, it is not easy to avoid a Freudian conclusion as well. One might tentatively suggest the following picture: a claustrophobic feminine, not unlike the Freudian Id, struggling against the Superego, the euphoric, evanescent, masculine transcendence identified with an absent father. Nevertheless the bias of the present thesis is philosophical, not psychological, and it suffices to note here a number of links between the claustrophobic and the euphoric at the conjugal and at the political level. In Heideggerian terms we must say that as he grows in authenticity the Ionesco protagonist must free himself of all stifling social and personal ties. The world of the "they" exerts its influence first in the home, then over the entire globe. If the point is not sufficiently clear in some of the earlier plays it becomes evident later. In Délire à Deux ... A tant qu'on veut (Frenzy for Two, 1962), conjugal discórd takes place in the midst of revolution. In the film sequence La Colère: scénario de film (Anger, 1961) there is a steady progression from minor conjugal conflicts to a world conflagration and the explosion of a nuclear bomb. With respect to the sphere of education it is worth noting that the teacher of La Leçon wears a swastika armband after he has murdered his pupil: again, the leap from microcosm to macrocosm is easily accomplished.

CHAPTER 9

IONESCO AND HEIDEGGER : AUTHENTICITY, DEATH AND THE SEARCH FOR BEING

> Nous allons tous mourir? Dis-moi la vérité!
>
> Entretiens, p. 12.

> Combien j'avais été aveugle ... J'étais sauvé, maintenant ... puisque je savais maintenant ... je suis, moi je suis, tout est. Le miracle d'être, le miracle d'être, le miracle d'être.
>
> Journal en Miettes, II, p. 225.

So far I have argued for a parallel between Ionesco and Heidegger on the basis of the concepts of angst and authenticity. Ionesco's sense of wonder fulfils a function analogous to that of angst in that it reveals Existence as strange. More specifically, it reveals Existence as disintegrating, falling into the abyss, and as crowding, that is, as evanescent and as claustrophobic. The sense of evanescence or the euphoric has been linked with Heideggerian freedom in the experience of angst and that of suffocation or enclosure with the idea of being-there or being-in-the-world, the other aspect of the experience. At the same time I have stressed that for Ionesco one's "thereness" is defined primarily in terms of the individual and the collective: to be-there, to exist, is to be hemmed in by the inauthentic mass of the "they," das man. In spite of this, however, the plays progressively offer us a picture of authenticity, an authentic hero who emerges from the collective, first as its victim, then as a fully-fledged rebel, inspired by the vision of angst, the awareness, denied to the earlier puppets, of Existence as alternately euphoric and claustrophobic. But the struggle against female immanence, against the inertia of matter and the past, against the family and the state is only the beginning. A more formidable adversary presents itself also and in discussing this further aspect of the plays the parallel with Heidegger will be drawn more strictly than has so far been done.

Tueur sans Gages, a work written a little before Rhinocéros, provides an important perspective in this regard. The protagonist is another Bérenger, a fully-developed Ionesco hero about whom the whole play revolves. Like his namesake in Rhinocéros, Bérenger is possessed by the sense of wonder which is Ionesco's counterpart of the philosophers' angst. He sees clearly enough the dreariness of the everyday, the futility of life in the rainy city and he rebels against the political hysteria of the collective. Whereas the inhabitants of the rainy city are ugly because neither ugly nor beautiful, "des êtres tristement neutres," suffering existence unconsciously, he can say, "mais moi j'avais conscience du malaise de l'existence," and this not because of his intelligence but his simplicity. Bérenger is "moins sage, moins résigné, moins patient" (II, p. 74), he cannot accept the everyday precisely because in his naïvete it appears to him as strange. In act one he experiences everything in terms of freedom and the euphoric as he tours the radiant city. Here wonder conjures up the lightness, brilliance and evanescence of Ionesco's personal encounter. It is angst, a vision of nothingness, but with a positive emphasis, a sense of an open future, of boundless possibility in a world suddenly made fragile and intoxicating. Not unexpectedly, there is an undercurrent of uneasiness. While Bérenger pours out his heart, the architect who is listening conducts his own business. Later the protagonist's enthusiasm is questioned by the behaviour of the girl Dany and above all by the pool full of corpses set in the heart of the city of light. While Bérenger does not live in a fool's paradise it must be admitted that euphoric freedom is not the whole story. Existence has another facet, a fact which explains the element of ambiguity in Choubert's temporary elation and in Amédée's flight. Freedom is not possible without limits, that is, without facticity; to be free is equally to be _there_, to be situated; it means that one _has_ to be free, that one _has_ to _be_. Freedom, in short, is a responsibility, a burden as well as a joy, which even as it projects us into an open future recalls us to the past, to our being "thrown" into a world of finitude. Even more important, the experience of freedom in _angst_ makes us aware of that other limit coexistent with our birth, our futural limit, death. _Angst_ reveals man to himself, it shows him that he exists, in other words, it faces him with his ontological bounds, it disconcertingly outlines the limits of the box in which man has been thrust. _Dasein_ or being-there means being hemmed in on the one hand by birth, on the other, by death. Of course these are not phenomena _external_ to man, incidentals as it were. They _define_ man, because man is precisely _da-sein_.

The question of death does not properly arise in the context of Beckett's work but in Ionesco it is of crucial importance. Moreover the parallel with Heidegger is close. For Heidegger _angst_ and authenticity are organically linked with the fact of death. Death, as I have suggested above, is not an event in one's life or, as Sartre thinks, simply cessation of life, transformation of _pour soi_ into _en soi_, but one of the limits of Existence. Thus death is a part of life, it is _the_ possibility or project towards which _dasein_ travels as it plunges into the void of its freedom, that is, its future. It is a project which modifies all lesser projects, a possibility that belongs to _dasein_ as individual since it cannot be shared or, in Heidegger's language, it is "that _possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped_."[1] Of course we are speaking in a context of _angst_ and it is _angst_ which reveals death since _angst_ is said to individualize man or set him apart from the crowd of the "they." To know one's existential limits, in other words, is to stand alone, anguished, free. For Heidegger authenticity requires, therefore, that man be aware of death as a part of his life. Death must be "anticipated," it must permeate one's present, just as, in existential philosophy, the future in general is taken as the proper sphere of consciousness. Man is a being-towards-death, as Heidegger has it, finite not in the sense that he "will die" some day but in the sense that he is made for dying, whether he likes it or not. Inauthentic man escapes the recognition of death as he escapes angst. Authenticity means, among other things, an inward acknowledgement that one is being "thrown" into Existence and consequently "falling" into the arms of death.

In Tueur sans Gages the collective avoids this difficult conclusion, partly by burying itself in everyday trivia, partly by concentrating on what Ionesco regards as less important spheres such as the political. Act three for a while takes us to a rally headed by mother Pipe and her geese. In a tangle of leftist propaganda and echoes of Fascism reason is shown as subservient to prejudice and hate. It is the world of earlier plays and also of Rhinocéros, the sphere of the "they." Amid this violence and hubbub someone exclaims: "Nous allons tous mourir. C'est la seule aliénation sérieuse!" (II, p.145). Political alienation pales into insignificance beside the fact of death. This is one of the themes of Tueur and Ionesco stresses it elsewhere as well: "... aucun système politique ne peut nous libérer de la douleur de vivre, de la peur de mourir ..." (Notes, p. 73). Inevitably, and in contradiction to the Marxists, Ionesco reaffirms the primacy of metaphysics. If this is bourgeois, he argues, then he will be a bourgeois - like Solomon, Buddha, Shakespeare and John of the Cross (Notes, p. 132). Significantly, Bérenger refuses to follow mother Pipe and the geese.

As a true Ionesco rebel, however, he must go beyond a mere rejection of the "they," he must come face to face with the human condition itself.

Early in the play, the theme is already emerging. Bérenger does not like to admit his own age, even to himself. His experience of joy is related to a feeling of youthfulness, "une jeunesse, un printemps" (II, p. 74), and at its height the sense of Existence merges into a certainty of immortality: "j'étais, j'avais conscience que j'étais depuis toujours, que je n'allais plus mourir" (II, p.78). I shall return to this unexistential assertion in due course. Here it must be stressed that Bérenger is deceiving himself in wishing to gloss over the fact of mortality. The radiant city is not eternal, far from it; indeed it is inhabited by a tueur sans gages, a merciless killer, death itself. When the architect tells Bérenger the truth the latter is amazed. The important thing is that he refuses to ignore the reality of death, however. In his innocence he has the same reaction as has another Bérenger to the rhinoceros plague. Once acknowledged, the truth alters his life. Like Heidegger's authentic dasein, Bérenger henceforth lives in "anticipation" of his meeting with the killer. Naïvely, but full of good intentions, he imagines that the killer may be eliminated and his surprise when he discovers that everyone else knew about the murderer all along is not expressive of a desire for escapism. On the contrary, it is the most authentic response possible for Bérenger until he grows in understanding. His "anticipation" is a kind of Heideggerian Resolve. On the other hand the architect's resigned attitude is quite inauthentic and represents the everyday desire to forget the truth, the unwillingness of the "they" to see death as a part of life. "Si on pensait à tous les malheurs de l'humanité," argues the architect - a figure of authority and so a representative of the collective - "on ne vivrait pas." The argument is familiar. Every day there are catastrophes, "des maisons qui s'effondrent sur *les gens qui les habitent ... des montagnes qui s'écroulent ...*" (II, p. 91). The vision of disintegration, image of the true human condition, is here robbed of its wonder and becomes simply normal. But Bérenger's world is altered by the truth and he cannot go on as if nothing were happening:

> BÉRENGER ... On ne peut pas, on ne doit pas laisser cela comme ça! Ça ne peut plus aller! Ça ne peut plus aller!
>
> L'ARCHITECTE.- Calmez-vous. Nous sommes tous mortels.
>
> II, p. 97.

This is the logician's argument in *Rhinocéros*. But what should be noted here is that Bérenger's refusal to resign himself is a refusal to submit to normality and the views of the collective. Normality represents for Ionesco the world of the Fall, a weakening of insight, a loss of the faculty of wonder, forgetfulness, habit: "... *c'est la chute ... le faiblissement ... d'une force du regard ... la perte de la faculté de s'émerveiller; l'oubli; la sclérose de l'habitude* ..." (*Entretiens*, p. 35). It is also a grey covering which hides the strangeness of death. Bérenger's spontaneous inability to accept the killer sets him apart and deepens his sense of *angst*. There are terrible things in the world, he gasps. The horror is very close, "*tout près d'ici*," indeed "*moralement c'est ici-même, là*!" (II, p. 119).

At this point the *angst* of euphoria gives more and more way to the claustrophobic, a sense of enclosure which is partly a sense of the pressure of the "they," as in other plays, but above all agonizing awareness of human limits and the reality of death. From the enclosed space of his room Bérenger goes to the stifling press of the political rally and to the traffic jam. As action accelerates, anxiety grows, obstacles proliferate. At the end the protagonist is alone in gathering darkness, walking down a long, narrow street. He muses as he goes ("Je suis habitué à la solitude ... J'ai toujours été seul," II, p. 159). Bérenger is scarcely authentic as yet, but there is truth in his belief that, in his solitude, he is a lover of humanity. Suddenly time stops and the killer appears. In a long and dramatic monologue Bérenger defends himself with every conceivable platitude. Naturally it is all to no avail. He is "guilty" in the Heideggerian sense in which Vladimir and Estragon are guilty, "thrown" face to face with death and the more he argues the more he pleads against himself. There is a pathetic surrender, but this should not confuse us. Bérenger is something more than the little bourgeois of earlier plays and in effect what we witness is not his defeat but that of the "they." Platitudes fail and precisely for this reason death is honestly faced as inescapable, as a fact of life, strange and terrifying. At the end Bérenger is as authentic as his counterpart in Rhinocéros. He is hardly a hero. His strength lies in his sense of the real, of the immediacy of things, which, for all his fears and weaknesses, makes it impossible for him to overlook the truth. Existence is seen anew in the vision of angst, as euphoric and, finally, as claustrophobic. In each case, and particularly at the end, the protagonist discovers himself as authentic, as alone, as separated from the mass.

Actually, Bérenger's feelings are remarkably accurate as a portrait of Ionesco's. As a child, the playwright tells Claude Bonnefoy, he lived in a timeless world. One day, however, he asked his mother: "Nous allons tous mourir? Dis-moi la vérité!" He was four or five and became frightened at her reply. Childhood experiences of this sort are also stressed in the Journal, where the fear of death reappears. In Notes et Contre-Notes Ionesco writes that he has always been obsessed by the horror of dying: "J'ai toujours été obsédé par la mort. Depuis l'âge de quatre ans ... l'angoisse ne m'a plus quitté" (p. 204). As in Heidegger death is seen as a power which sets the individual apart and, significantly, a parallel is drawn with another experience in solitude, the euphoric. Of course the common factor is wonder or angst. Other passages echo these. We are made to be immortal, or to wish to be, and yet we die. I see Camus, says Ionesco, and then he is gone: "Quel crédit puis-je accorder à ce monde qui n'a aucune solidité...?" (Notes, p. 92).

At this point a reassessment of plays already discussed is rendered necessary. Claustrophobia and release are not simply identifiable with the poles of the collective and the authentic individual but also relate to the awareness of death. Ionesco's vision of wonder reveals the natural as well as the social or human limits of man's lot. The complexity of Ionesco's images arises from the fact that death, which stifles the individual and so relates to the claustrophobic, also enables the authentic hero to stand alone, most secure in the moment of greatest anguish, and so relates to the experience of freedom and evanescence - if it does not quite spill over into the ultimate experience of liberation, the euphoric. The pattern emerges in the earliest plays, even in plays concerned directly not with mortality but with the "they." In a Heideggerian context, of course, it could not be otherwise, since angst of necessity reveals Existence as finite and so focusses on human mortality. Already in the proliferation of words at the climax of La Cantatrice we are offered an image of burial. It is as if Ionesco's horror of the collective were already shading off into a horror of actual burial, as if the play were animated by a dim realization that once beyond the "they," one is still faced with the obstacle of death. In Jacques fear of burial underlies the imagery of water and mud; love, after all, has frequently been depicted in literature as a dying but in this case there is a complex fusing of associations: feminine immanence, the sexual act, the maternal bosom, the weight of society, tradition and the past, the cold embrace of the wet earth. The tenant of Le Nouveau Locataire is buried alive by furniture, grasping a bunch of flowers: criticism, commenting on this last scene of the play, has rightly interpreted the whole as a subtle evocation of a funeral. And Choubert's odyssey too is nothing less than a journey to the underworld as the victim suffers metaphoric burial.

Amédée, according to Ionesco's interpretation, is to be understood as a parable about death. The growing corpse, Bonnefoy is told, is time (Entretiens, p. 97). It has "la maladie incurable des morts," that is, "la progression géométrique" (I, p. 256). Such a disease of the dead may be referred to the theme of the proliferating "they," but it seems that a more literal approach is possible. As the corpse grows, for example, the hands of the clock advance (I, p. 272). The nightmare of Madeleine's claustrophobic vision may be seen in terms of death also:

> (AMÉDÉE ... Le temps est lourd ... Les années brèves.
> Les secondes lentes.)
> MADELEINE ... Il n'y a rien ....
>
> I, p. 279.

In the magnificently suggestive sequence of act two the uprooting and evicting of the corpse appears to image a victory over death and this is perhaps to some extent the meaning of Amédée's euphoric flight at the end. For the most part, however, it is death which conquers in Ionesco. A short story called "La Vase" ("The Slough," published in 1955) provides a good example of this. We are with a prosperous traveller, bursting with energy, in a setting partly Kafkaesque and partly Beckettian. To begin with he tells us of his euphoric days: "Je respirais avec ravissement, contemplais, ivre de bonheur, la mer immaculée ou la ville victorieuse, ou les champs étincelants dans la gloire du premier jour."[2] Later, the picture changes, the traveller grows tired, more and more weighed down the more he rests. He is forced to stop at an inn, unable to rise from his bed until one day he drags himself outside and collapses in the rain. Dreaming of sunshine and mountain heights, he is swallowed by the mud. The story enacts a death and burial and presents the opposition of euphoria and claustrophobia as the contrast between youth and age. Perhaps the same can be said of most of Ionesco's plays. But one other play, in addition to Amédée and Tueur, has death as its most specific theme.

Le Roi se Meurt (Exit the King, 1962) was written at a time of illness and reflects Ionesco's terror of dying. "Je venais d'être malade," the playwright explains,

> et j'avais eu très peur. Puis, après ... dix jours, j'ai rechuté et j'ai été à nouveau malade quinze jours. Après ces quinze jours, j'ai recommencé à écrire.
>
> Entretiens, p. 90.

Thus the play was written in two phases, once between two bouts of illness and once after the second bout was over. According to Ionesco, it images this fact in a pause or break in the middle. Le Roi se Meurt is a story of yet another Bérenger, another Everyman who has to learn to face the end. Bérenger is now a king whose kingdom is in ruins, a sign of the destruction wrought by time and also, as elsewhere, of a world collapsing into the void of angst. Here angst relates specifically to the awareness of mortality, of course. Bérenger has two queens, Marguerite and Marie, whose task it is to plead for death and life respectively and who obviously polarize two aspects of the Ionesco woman previously contained in a single figure: the conjugal and the maternal. Marguerite, a figure of authority, prepares the king to face death as his kingdom crumbles about him: "Son palais est en ruines. Ses terres en friche. Ses montagnes s'affaissent. La mer a défoncé les digues, inondé le pays"

(IV, p. 15). In spite of such imagery, the play is as much comedy as tragedy, highlighting the impossible arrogance of the little king who refuses to die and his outrageous cowardice. Bérenger grows weaker and weaker yet still imagines the end to be far away. Marguerite puts the matter bluntly: he will die at the end of the play, within an hour and a half, an hour and twenty-five minutes, and so on. Once finitude is admitted, of course, the longest life is reduced to an instant and Bérenger, "anticipating" the future, curses his birth. Why be born if not to live for ever? "_Pourquoi suis-je né si ce n'était pas pour toujours? ... Je suis venu au monde il y a cinq minutes ..._" (IV, p. 37). But it has been two hundred and eighty-three years. For the king

> Si ... tous les univers éclatent, ils éclateront, que ce soit demain ou dans des siècles et des siècles, c'est la même chose. Ce qui doit finir est déjà fini.
>
> IV, p. 41.

This is an existential conclusion. Man projects himself into futurity, into the ultimate wall of his finitude. Once revealed by the consciousness of _angst_, the end is already reached and death becomes one's lifelong companion.

Marie, the younger queen, puts forward her case. If Marguerite appears as spokesman for Heideggerian "anticipation," the other emerges as champion for the present. Once again it is the old opposition of the euphoric and claustrophobic. Marie wishes to forget past and future, to live in a euphoric present characterized by the sense of boundlessness, infinity. She urges Bérenger to immerse himself in wonder, to break out of his prison into joy and light:

> Plonge dans l'étonnement ... sans limites, ainsi tu peux être sans limites, ainsi tu peux être

> infiniment. Sois étonné ... tout est étrange ...
> Écarte les barreaux de la prison ... Laisse-toi
> inonder par la joie, par la lumière ....
>
> IV, pp.41-42.

But Bérenger is stifling and the anguish of imminent death separates him from others: "*Ils sont tous des étrangers ... J'ai peur, je m'enfonce, je m'engloutis ...*" (IV, p. 43). It is the death agony of all mankind: "*Des milliards de morts ... Ma mort est innombrable. Tant d'univers s'éteignent en moi*" (IV, p. 45). The king is not simply an escapist. As he prepares to die he sees for the first time the wonder of life. For the most part however, he wishes to avoid the issue. He makes a Sartrean choice to live and manages to postpone the end. Marguerite is inexorable: "*L'abîme grandit. Au-dessous il y a le trou, au-dessus il y a le trou*" (IV, p. 61). Bérenger himself is this structure of holes: "*Je suis plein*," he says, "*mais de trous ... Les trous s'élargissent, ils n'ont pas de fond*" (IV, p. 54). The language recalls Sartre but the void is Heideggerian, revealed in *angst* as one's trajectory to the limits of the future. For Sartre, as I have said, death is the cessation of life and freedom. For Ionesco, as for Heidegger, it is a part of authentic living. Authentic *dasein* sees itself as a being-towards-an-end, a finite creature, and, in spite of himself, Bérenger cannot avoid this vision. Insofar as he succeeds in facing the truth, with Marguerite's help, he grows in stature, progressing from the position of the frightened child to that of the "resolute" monarch. Like the second act of *Amédée*, the end of *Le Roi* depicts a birth with Marguerite acting as midwife. There is a difference, though, between the king and, for example, the earlier Bérenger of *Tueur*. Where the latter, like other Ionesco characters, is ultimately swallowed up by death, the former undergoes a positive ascesis, although without any supernatural point of reference or a specific belief in immortality. *Le Roi* is dominated by the image not of burial but of disintegration.

In other words it combines the theme of death less with the claustrophobic, as we might expect, than with evanescence. All of this suggests, therefore, not only the horror of dying but a search for a positive ethic, an authentic acceptance of angst and a preparation for death. Like earlier Bérengers the king is a little man yet ready at the end to stand before the truth, if somewhat shakily. The authentic man in Ionesco, always a weak individual but endowed with the strength of naïvete, has emerged from the undifferentiated ranks of the "they," has survived the repressive situation of the family and the pressures of political conformity to face the ultimate claustrophobia, death, the ultimate proliferation of matter, burial. In his latest work, Jeux de Massacre (Here Comes a Chopper, 1970) a loosely-knit assemblage in seventeen scenes, Ionesco returns to the theme of death but with a difference: it is the world of the earlier puppets once again. One by one the puppets die mysteriously as they go about their business as scene follows scene to the same purpose. Clearly, for the collective, death is utterly negative in its effects. There is no reference point, no ascesis to authenticity, only endless disintegration. For the authentic hero it is another matter; anguish is keener but so is the capacity for truth.

Two important plays remain to be examined in terms of authenticity and angst but before focussing on these I wish to return to Heidegger. Angst - and this emerged in the discussion of Beckett - is said to reveal the nothingness of Existence so that it both suspends reality over the void and highlights its concreteness. Nothingness, in other words, undermines Existence and by the same token sets it off. Clearly, Ionesco's experience of wonder has this effect: it disintegrates reality only to reaffirm it either as inauthentic and claustrophobic or as euphoric freedom. But for Heidegger the real function of angst is to point beyond Existence, to the ultimate ground of the existential, Being. We recall, moreover, that this

Being is identified with nothingness. In order to see whether the parallel here between Ionesco and Heidegger is as close as that between Heidegger and Beckett we must concentrate on the experience of euphoria.

Ionesco's description of the euphoric usually stresses the discovery of oneself as existing, as we have seen. Is it legitimate to suppose that the writer is concerned with something more? "Lorsque ... je prends ... conscience, soudainement, que je suis, que j'existe ... et que m'envahit l'étonnement d'être ..." (Notes, pp. 114-115), he begins in a passage quoted earlier in this thesis. Examples of this kind of statement abound. Full of joy, Ionesco finds himself "au centre de l'existence pure, ineffable," aware of "l'unique et essentielle réalité, lorsque m'envahissait ...la stupéfaction d'être, la certitude d'être" (Journal, II, p. 218). Awakening from a sleep peopled by the phantoms of everyday existence, he knows he is "saved" in the unshakeable certitude "que je suis":

> J'étais sauvé, maintenant ... puisque je savais maintenant ... je suis, moi je suis, tout est. Le miracle d'être, le miracle d'être, le miracle d'être.
>
> Journal, II, p. 225.

At this point it is inadequate to suppose that l'être simply signifies the je suis, Ionesco's personal awareness of consciousness, although the two are obviously linked. The euphoric experience involves a sense of "pure" existence, as Ionesco has it, an awareness of the "ineffable," of "essential reality." It is analogous to a religious conversion and in its suggestiveness transcends the je suis, moving outwards to the whole universe, the tout est. Le miracle d'être is not just the miracle of consciousness, then, it is the miracle of that mysterious presence which holds all things in existence, Heideggerian Being. I do not wish to insist on a too precise identification between the philosophy of Heidegger and Ionesco's art on this issue. Such identification is difficult enough when we deal with Beckett and Heidegger and it is even more problematical here. It is enough to say that Ionesco's experience bears a striking resemblance to the Heideggerian discovery of Being, that in both cases what is involved is first a sense of the strangeness of things coupled with a heightened awareness of them, then a luminous insight into the very heart of the existential even as it vanishes into nothingness. In each case the numinous quality of the insight inevitably suggests a god-like object, in Heidegger's words the Being of beings.

Ionesco is astonished by the miraculous presence of Being itself, then. The reality of this mysterious substratum in the euphoric experience clearly differentiates Ionesco's vision of freedom from Sartre's and links it with Heidegger's and Beckett's. If, as in Sartre, it were simply a question of discovering _oneself_ as free, the Ionesco hero would be little concerned with the experience of freedom and joy, he would set out to work upon the raw material of the world, to _act_ upon his environment. But he does not do this to any extent. Rather he gazes in wonder and fascination at the revelation itself. Ionesco's world, in short, approximates to Heidegger's and Beckett's in that it is not secular but religious, that it preserves an essential dimension which we do not find in Sartre. Thus the Ionesco void, the evanescence of the euphoric experience, is also a plenitude, like Beckett's being-nothing, like Heideggerian _Sein_ and, of course, like the divinity of the theologians. Amédée calls it "_légère plénitude_" (I, p. 279). In Bérenger's vision as described in _Tueur sans Gages_ the universe is filled with a kind of "_énergie aérienne_," nothing is left empty even as the world vanishes into light and air: "_tout_ était un mélange de plénitude et de légèreté" (II, p.77). Of course the discovery of freedom remains central. Freedom is a negative, an emptiness filled with possibilities. The important thing is that, for Ionesco as for Heidegger, human freedom ultimately rests in the darkness of something which stands behind or beneath the human, a positive, god-like power. For this reason the negative experience of the void turns into an experience of fulfilment and joy.

It is significant that Ionesco's primary symbol for the experience of reality is a question mark:

> Je ne puis m'étonner assez, je n'ai pas une assez grande capacité d'étonnement ... je ne puis assez interroger: "Comment est-ce possible, mais comment cela est-il possible?"
>
> Journal, II, p. 234.

More concisely: "pourquoi cet Être?" (Journal, I, p. 112). We are on the same ground as that of the Heideggerian Question, though the formulation is not identical in each case. In the Bonnefoy interview Ionesco speaks of the "fundamental intuition" "que nous sommes là, que quelque chose existe et que ce quelque chose suscite la question" (Entretiens, p. 144). Bonnefoy asks if this is a reference to Heidegger and Ionesco's reply is rightly ambiguous. The point, Ionesco argues, is that theatre, like philosophy, must ask the fundamental question about the nature of things. Wonder then, like angst, may be regarded as a questioning of the everyday and the euphoric flight as a remarkably apt image of the Heideggerian leap beyond the existential, to the Being of beings, the flight of metaphysis. Being, as in Heidegger, has been "forgotten," or, in the language of Ionesco, the original radiance of things has been lost. Wonder, like the Metaphysical Question, places everything over an abyss, discovers it as strange and new and raises the issue of its ontological origins. Again and again Ionesco returns to "cette *présence monolithique, inexplicable du monde et de l'existence"* (*Entretiens*, p. 144), his one obsessive concern and comparable in its intensity to Beckett's fascination for the Irreducible. It is hardly surprising in this context that the awareness of the euphoric should be visualized as a flight not simply above the inauthentic collective but, in the final analysis, above the multiplicity of beings, to the simplicity of their source.

For Heidegger authenticity resolves itself into a quest for the ground of things, in his own case, a philosophic search. Beckett too, as we have seen, is engaged in a comparable search. For Ionesco authenticity requires that the individual pursue the full realization of the promise inherent in the euphoric experience. In each case the search is for essential reality. Where Beckett prunes his world of all that is contingent, Ionesco, through the stress on wonder, attempts to distil the quintessence of things, to refine his world until, for a moment, it is pure light, pure Being. The Ionesco hero has to struggle to achieve even the possibility of this vision. Like the Beckett tramp, he must rebel against the mass of mankind. Specifically, he must emerge from the ocean of the collective and he must face death. Beyond that, his life is spent in a frequently hopeless quest analogous to the endless wandering of Beckett's characters. At the same time it is important to see that the authentic individual's struggle against the claustrophobic itself represents a moment in the search for Being, for the vision of joy or liberation. Inevitably, the search has overtones of the numinous. Ionesco explains that he is little interested in the worldly - "*le mondain ne m'intéresse pas*" - only in the Unknown: "*ce qui est derrière, c'est Lui ou Cela, l'Inconnu qui est seul digne de notre intérêt* (*Journal*, I, p. 54).

Once the search is recognized as Ionesco's fundamental concern new perspectives are possible on the early plays and qualities obscured by critics intoxicated with notions of the Absurd stand out distinctly. In fact the search begins even before the emergence of the authentic hero. The old couple of Les Chaises dream of a lost city of light (I, p. 130) and the aim of their soirée is to share this long-vanished reality with others. As the guests arrive and excitement grows, the release of pent-up feelings in the hosts is movingly suggested. The two are possessed by an unnamed and hardly acknowledged yet profound longing for fulfilment. In retrospect, we are not surprised that the evening is a failure: the vision of Being, as it is elaborated in later plays, requires solitude and the collective is a hindrance rather than a help. That the old man has no message to give through the Orator other than garbled noises does not mean that we must rush to the Absurd for an explanation, far from it. Ionesco's characters certainly do have something to say, although at this early stage they are insufficiently emancipated from the inauthentic to be able to say it. Of course the old couple (particularly the old man since, as we might expect, the woman is something of a spiritual hindrance) want to tell the world of their yearning for freedom, light and joy. Doubtless at this stage Ionesco is uncertain about his direction, so that the search remains partly disguised. The beginning, however, is there.

In Victimes the nature of the quest is still obscure but the fact of the quest is out in the open. On the face of it Choubert is looking for a mysterious person known as Mallot, for the mystery of his own identity, perhaps. He finds only depths and heights, emptiness and fullness and to some this suggests Sartre. Esslin, for example, sees the play as a statement of man's nothingness, as a search for a Self which does not exist.[3] The real parallel, however, is with Heidegger. Ionesco's void, as we have seen, is not like the pour soi, but resembles the paradoxical being-nothing of Samuel Beckett. Choubert's taste of freedom is an experience of plenitude, of a presence recalling Heidegger's Being. It is true that the little hero does not find fulfilment, but this does not mean that his search is for a Sartrean negative and so a search in bad faith. Choubert, on the contrary, gropes towards authenticity. It is also true that in one sense the goal of the search, from the detective's point of view and perhaps Madeleine's, is for a neat definition which cannot exist. At the same time Choubert's search and Ionesco's must be distinguished from the detective's, except insofar as Choubert himself partly confuses the quest for Being with the sterile search for definitions, the solving of the puzzle, as if Being could be reduced to a mere detective's riddle. The play proves that when the question is posed in inauthentic terms, no answer is possible. It also illustrates in embryo the true quest for Ionesco's Unknown.

In Amédée the obscure search continues and, at the end, the protagonist is not unsuccessful when, like Saul on the Damascus road, he is lifted up by an alien force. It may be argued too that Amédée has been actively, if somewhat vaguely, preparing himself for his apotheosis. Like the old man of Les Chaises and like Choubert, he has powerful desires from the start and the search for Being in Ionesco inevitably begins with these. Amédée longs for freedom and so for Being. His goal, the "maison de verre, de lumière" (I, p. 281), becomes Bérenger's city of light. In Bérenger's case, of course, and for the first time in the plays, search and goal are explicit. "Pendant longtemps ... j'avais essayé," the seeker explains "consciemment ou inconsciemment, de trouver la direction" (II, p. 70). He could well be speaking for earlier and less articulate Ionesco heroes. At this point the euphoric is clearly linked to the experience of Being: " ... je criais: je suis, je suis, tout est, tout est!" (II, p. 78). And, as always, Being is mysterious: "C'est bien cela, me disais-je ... Je ne puis vous expliquer ce que 'cela' voulait dire, mais ... je me comprenais très bien" (II, p. 78).

By the time we reach Ionesco's later work, Le Piéton de l'Air and La Soif et la Faim, the fact that the movement towards authenticity and the search for Being are one and the same is evident. In an atmosphere of happiness and in brilliant sunshine Bérenger of Le Piéton flies off into the sky. Opposition is present in the English promenaders, inauthentic beings who do not, however, constitute a threat. In this work Ionesco has allowed his imagination free play and has depicted the flight of liberation without timidity. Bérenger is an artist who, like Amédée, cannot write and who, like Bérenger of Rhinocéros, refuses to conform. The question, as he puts it, is "can I renew myself?" - "vais-je pouvoir me renouveler?" (III, p. 126). Paralyzed by the knowledge of death and at the same time seeking a way out of his situation with his less resolute wife and on the background of the English characters - mechanical puppets recalling those of La Cantatrice - Bérenger awakens to the revelation of freedom and the experience of light. While the others evoke images of claustrophobia and hopelessness and fail to respond to the beauty of the sunny landscape, he rises in the air. Only his daughter is able to share his qualities which are those of earlier authentic heroes: naïvete, spontaneity, faith, the capacity for wonder. Bérenger's apotheosis recalls Amédée's but with a difference. Bérenger is not loth to fly but, on the contrary, wishes to do so, fully conscious, as Amédée and the earlier heroes are not, of the truth of things, that is, aware of the claustrophobic predicament of man, of social pressures to conformity and of death, and eager to experience release. In short, Bérenger's angst is quite out in the open, as if the lessons taught all previous Bérengers were known to him. Thus he attempts to convince his listeners of man's longing for fulfilment, that longing which initiates the search for Being. "J'ai retrouvé le moyen ... oublié (III, p. 165), he tells them, "voler est un besoin indispensable à l'homme" (III, p. 166). To which the collective replies that the need tó eat is greater. But Bérenger is undeterred: man has forgotten how to fly and is for this reason unhappy without knowing why. The parallel with Heidegger's "forgetfulness" of Being is close here, all the more so since the Ionesco flight is intimately connected with the euphoric revelation of Being. As in Heidegger the "they" have not only forgotten Being, the wonder of things: they have forgotten their forgetting. Consequently the protagonist's flight appears inexplicable to them. Nevertheless Bérenger will not be restrained and he finally vanishes from sight. Not unexpectedly, the claustrophobic dominates in his absence. Joséphine, Bérenger's wife, suffers like other Ionesco women from her own fears of the past, of death, of the collective. In fact she experiences that half of the experience of angst which complements Bérenger's. As the protagonist flies in search of Being, moving deeper into the euphoric, she is possessed by the sense of enclosure and burial. Normality, which to Bérenger appears as transfigured in beauty, is distorted for Joséphine and evokes a sense of horror. But, as it happens, Bérenger's vision turns into a nightmare also. Freedom turns into vertigo as the flight ends by revealing the hopelessness of the human lot. The point need not be laboured here since it has been made in an earlier chapter. In Heideggerian terms Bérenger progresses from a sense of freedom to an awareness of limits, of being-in-the-world, and this expresses itself as a renewed consciousness of the menace of the collective, of wars, of death. Thus on his return he can only tell of horror, of geese (recalling the followers of mother Pipe in Tueur), of depravity, slaughter, mud. It is the vision of the apocalypse, of the atom bomb, the world of the "they" falling apart in violence and confusion. The important thing to note, however, is that this vision is seen through the eyes of an authentic character, the solitary Ionesco hero. Bérenger, even more than his predecessors, questions the everyday in the Heideggerian sense and so recognizes the truth. In the end he faces not only the limits of Existence but also what is beyond, the void: "Rien. Après, il n'y a plus rien, plus rien que les abîmes illimités ... que les abîmes" (III, p. 198). In Le Piéton the nothingness beyond the human offers no consolation. It may be the void of freedom and so of Being, the unchartered area where Bérenger cannot advance; it may be the void of hopelessness, the emptiness of the "they," the nothingness of matter. Nevertheless the longing of the Ionesco hero and the search for plenitude are not stifled.

In *La Soif et la Faim* the search begins all over again only to be again frustrated. Jean is like earlier Ionesco protagonists but his yearning for the unknown, for wonder and the experience of Being, is even more acute. From the start he is possessed by *angst*, crushed by the sense of the Uncanny. Once again the woman represents the forces of immanence. Jean hates the house which is sinking in the mud, the conjugal situation, the dead weight of the past: it is as if he were being buried alive. For him the entire world is a stifling enclosure. For Marie-Madeleine normality is acceptable: "*La plupart des gens vivent ainsi*" (IV, p. 79), most people live like this, she argues. Jean, however, is tormented by a hunger and thirst for fulfilment, for space and light. The husband and wife pair are curiously unlike Amédée and his Madeleine. Whereas in the earlier play the woman is on the whole a negative force, Marie-Madeleine of *La Soif* possesses a certain wisdom, an ability to see beauty in the limited conjugal situation where Jean sees only ugliness. The suggestion is that for once the transcendent male is making a mistake and will seek fulfilment precisely where it is not to be found. This does not mean that Jean is inauthentic. On the contrary, his longing is genuine and expresses most fully and unambiguously the more or less secret aspirations of every Ionesco hero from *Les Chaises* onwards. As Jean puts it: "*Ce n'est pas la paix que je veux ... il me faut une joie débordante, l'extase*" (IV, p. 82). His search is for ecstasy and joy overflowing all bounds. Seeing only disintegration about him he will abandon his wife, not to fly like Amédée or Bérenger of *Le Piéton*, but simply to express his individuality and to seek the plenitude of freedom which he lacks: "je ne dois être que moi-même" (IV, p. 98).

As in other plays, however, freedom is not easily attained. Jean is seeking in the wrong place and in act two the woman he hopes to meet - an idealized version of the Marie-Madeleine he has left behind - does not arrive. He remains on a high plateau, alone and bathed in a cold light: the claustrophobia of normality has given way to the void of desire unrequited. Later, Jean can only continue to search for euphoria and the wonder of Being. He explains his predicament: "... j'ai voulu fuir la vieillesse; j'ai voulu fuir l'enlisement, je cherche la vie, je cherche la joie. J'ai cherché l'accomplissement et je trouve la torture" (IV, p. 114). The passage is revealing. Jean has tried to escape age and death, he has sought after life and joy and found only suffering. To this extent his experience completes the pessimism of Le Piéton. At the same time his poetic outburst in act three summarizes the anguish of every authentic character in Ionesco and expresses it with the insistence of despair. Once he was happy, he tells us like Bérenger of Tueur, filled with ecstasy and astonishment, unaware of hunger and thirst. Why, suddenly, was there a change, a sense of absence and loss, an emptiness constantly enlarging itself? Was he right or not to set off in search of joy?

> Il me semble que je n'ai pas toujours été habité par ce feu dévorant. Autrefois ... je m'arrêtais au milieu d'une campagne ... pris d'un étonnement indicible et d'un ravissement indicible ... Tout suffisait, tout était plein. Je n'avais pas faim, je n'avais pas soif ... Pourquoi, tout à coup, y a-t-il eu ce changement? Pourquoi ... cette absence? ... Cette insatisfaction et l'angoisse ... ce creux qui n'a plus fini de s'élargir en moi

> ... Pourquoi n'y a-t-il plus eu de journées lumineuses ... Devais-je ou non courir sur les routes de crépuscule et d'automme à la recherche de cette lumière ... ou de ces mirages?
>
> IV, p. 166.

No answer is given by the play. Jean finds his way to a monastery whose walls recall a prison or a barracks. In search of freedom he has returned to the collective, since the monastery represents the "they" at its most menacing and claustrophobic. The inmates of the monastery are also hungry, though not for freedom, and imprison Jean to satisfy their infinite needs. At the end, as in Les Chaises, emptiness increases as matter proliferates. Eating the food of the place, Jean grows ever more hungry. He witnesses an indoctrination during which two prisoners are taught that truth is defined by the authority of the collective. We are in the world of Jacques, of mother Pipe and her geese and of Rhinocéros. Jean sees his vision of light, an image of his wife and daughter (reminiscent of the family in Le Piéton), of a spring garden and a ladder to the sky. But he cannot leave the monastery. Marie-Madeleine will wait for ever but at the same time Jean's duties at the monastery multiply alarmingly as did the corpse in Amédée or the horde of animals in Rhinocéros. The last Ionesco hero to ask Heidegger's Metaphysical Question, to abandon the everyday, and, driven by angst, to set off in search of Being and the experience of euphoric wonder finds a prison much worse than the one he left behind. It seems that the movement towards authenticity is for ever hindered and the final, liberating experience of plenitude always beyond reach.

CHAPTER 10

IONESCO : THIRST FOR THE ABSOLUTE

> ... j'étais, j'avais conscience que j'étais depuis toujours, que je n'allais plus mourir.
>
> Tueur sans Gages, II, p. 78.

A parallel with Heidegger's philosophy, beginning with the concept of angst, the notions of authenticity and the "they" and moving on to the problem of death and the search for Being, brings us to some of Ionesco's central concerns. Moreover, the link with Heidegger is also a link with Samuel Beckett. Ionesco is in many important respects utterly unlike Beckett and it is for this reason that an approach based on generalizations about the Absurd proves inadequate. But a thorough analysis of Ionesco in terms appropriate to his work - and those terms are wonder, claustrophobia and euphoria, individuality and collectivity, death, fulfilment and plenitude - reveals fundamental similarities, perhaps even surprising ones. In each case the writer is obviously concerned with a search, in Beckett's case, for an Irreducible, in Ionesco's, for an experience of joy. Nor is it misleading to relate this search to Heidegger's philosophic explorations, to the quest for Being, the ground phenomenon of all things. Two issues remain to be discussed and this chapter will deal with them in turn: the possibility of interpreting Ionesco in terms of Sartre or Camus and the relevance of a comparison with Idealist thought, a comparison which has been useful in the analysis of Beckett's work.

Some critics, notably Esslin and Richard Coe,[1] have argued that the Ionesco character is, in the final analysis, a pour soi or hole in being. Certainly, in the terms of the present thesis, one might at first sight be tempted to fit the two feelings into Sartrean categories. Thus the claustrophobic might be regarded as a variation of Roquentin's experience of nausea which, after all, involves a sense of one's inescapable link with the material world. But nausea is a feeling of disgust, an awareness of facticity, whereas the Ionesco hero, overwhelmed by the material, feels not disgust but horror and astonishment. Even in _Amédée_, where the presence of the growing corpse might recall the Sartrean nausea of the body, Ionesco's treatment is not Sartrean. As we have seen, claustrophobia relates most of all to the menace of the collective and the obvious comparison here is with the Heideggerian "they." By the same token, Ionesco's euphoria is less Sartrean in inspiration than one might suppose. Of course it is an experience of freedom as void but, again, the mood is Heideggerian. The _pour soi_ contradicts being which is _en soi_. Ionesco's flight of freedom involves an awareness of nothingness but at the same time this nothingness is, as in Heidegger and Beckett, a positive force, plenitude, a numinous region. The truth is that Ionesco evokes an occasional Sartrean echo only because at certain points the philosophies of Heidegger and Sartre meet. When we enter the souls of Ionesco's creatures, we find not the void of the _pour soi_ but the mystery of Being. At times the claustrophobic prevails: the characters of _La Cantatrice_, for example, are inauthentic puppets, weighed down by matter which disintegrates and vanishes into emptiness even as it stifles. Where the euphoric prevails or where the vision of claustrophobia is seen through the eyes of the authentic hero the mystery of Being is more clearly in focus. But in each case it is evident that the whole orientation of Ionesco's experience is beyond the boundaries of the Sartrean universe. Ionesco is not primarily concerned with human freedom in the Sartrean sense. His goal is visionary and ecstatic. Although it is not a negative, like Beckett's Irreducible, it nevertheless recalls Samuel

Beckett's goal which also belongs to the sphere of the metaphysical and the religious. Ionesco has spoken of his interest in mysticism, in the Journal (II, p. 222) and in the Bonnefoy interview where the experience of light is related, if somewhat vaguely, to Dionysius the Areopagite and John of the Cross (Entretiens, pp.47-48). Whatever one thinks of this, the fact remains that for him the search for truth involves the experience of or the desire for an Other, "Lui ou Cela, l'Inconnu" (Journal, I, p. 54), a mysterious positive presence in the void of light. This presence is felt as obscurely holy and is sought in a way that recalls the movement towards the source in Hölderlin's poems as interpreted by Heidegger. Clearly we are not in a Sartrean world: Ionesco's goal may or may not be reached but the door remains open, there is no question of Sartrean futility. The mood of a Ionesco play is awed reverence before the wonder of man's depths and heights. It is a mixture of naïvete and piety quite alien to the spirit of Sartre.

A parallel with Camus is not much more profitable. Critics have been over-zealous in their support of the absurdist thesis whether, like Coe or Wellwarth or even Esslin, they have taken some care not to distort the facts or, like Grossvogel, have used the term "absurd" quite uncritically.[2] It is true that Ionesco is closer to Camus than is Beckett, for example. Ionesco is a humanist, as is Camus. Both are lovers of this world, both stand for tolerance, moderation, an end to violence, both are essentially moralists. But, at the same time, we cannot overlook the fact that Ionesco finds his inspiration in something obscure, mysterious and wonderful, that his is a tormented and passionate search for a quasi-religious goal. None of this could be said about Camus. Ionesco occasionally speaks of the Absurd in a way which may be taken to refer to his own work. For example, he tells Claude Bonnefoy that Sartre and Camus did not take the Absurd to its logical conclusion, did not turn it into a principle of style as well as content, as did Adamov and Beckett (Entretiens, p. 143). Presumably he means that his work is comparable to Adamov's and Beckett's here. Moreover, if we do not examine our terms too closely, we may perceive a similarity between Camus' description of the experience of the Absurd and Ionesco's experience of wonder. The Absurd alienates man from his normal life, it highlights the limits of social ties, it conjures up the spectre of death, it frustrates the mind's desire for clarity. Some of these categories are applicable to Ionesco. And yet the Ionesco hero is in search of solitude and hungers not so much for order and clarity as for the experience of the mystery of things. Again, the parallel breaks down at the point where Ionesco's humanism shades off into the metaphysical and the religious. For Camus the difficulty is the divorce between man and his world. For Ionesco the difficulty cannot be expressed so simply; it is something closed to human reason and open only to the imagination, to a spiritual faculty of vision. Camus lives by daylight, Ionesco by his dreams. If there is a similarity, it is misleading and explicable partly in terms of Camus' dependence on the idea of angst for his theory of the Absurd. As with Beckett the real similarity is with Heidegger. If we take the analogy with the Absurd too seriously we simply distort the nature of Ionesco's vision, whereas the analogy with angst leads us to the essentials of that vision in a way which appears much more satisfactory. Perhaps the last word should be left to the playwright himself. If he has admired Camus, as he admits in Notes et Contre-Notes (p. 213), Ionesco is careful to dissociate himself from fashionable movements:

> On a dit que j'étais un écrivain de l'absurde; il y a des mots comme ça qui courent les rues, c'est un mot à la mode ... assez vague pour ne plus rien vouloir dire et pour tout définir ... En réalité l'existence du monde me semble non pas absurde mais incroyable ....
>
> Notes, p. 194.

It is not life as we experience it that is mysterious, Ionesco continues, but life taken as a whole, life viewed from the point of view of its source. In Heideggerian terms, in other words, the problem is that of Being and Camus shows no interest in this. Speaking to Bonnefoy, Ionesco repeats his arguments against the absurdist interpretation of his plays: "Je préfère à l'expression 'absurde' celle d'insolite ou de sentiment de l'insolite" (Entretiens, p. 144). Wonder is not the same as the Absurd. There seems no need to press the matter further.

This thesis has observed a tendency away from the existential and towards the Idealist in Beckett's work and this movement has been interpreted as a not unexpected tension within existential philosophy itself. An analogous tendency is even more evident in Ionesco and it must be taken into consideration if we are not to gloss over the essential and characteristic tone of the plays and indeed of everything Ionesco writes. But Ionesco is, as I have argued, less philosophic than Beckett, so that, at least initially, it seems more profitable to examine the drift away from the existential in terms not of Idealism but of a manner which in some important respects relates to it: the Romantic.

Ionesco is a modern Romantic and to some extent his Romanticism will not mix with the more existential aspects of his work. This statement will gain weight as we proceed. First of all it is noteworthy that in Ionesco, even more clearly than in Beckett, the vision of angst recalls its Romantic antecedent, weltschmerz. The existential hero suffers life as does the Romantic but in a way that is more austere and inward because more resigned. Romantic angst therefore appears as more passionate and frenzied than its modern counterpart. The difference here between Ionesco and most of his contemporaries is striking. The Ionesco hero, in this case the protagonist of "La Vase," speaks of a profound nostalgia, a crushing sadness, unknown desire, unbounded regrets and remorse:

> ... je fus envahi par cette nostalgie profonde, intolérable, une tristesse écrasante, un désir sans nom, des regrets, des remords sans bornes, une pitié innommée....
>
> p. 159.

Of course the man is about to die. But why "sans nom," why the mystery, why the stress on the illimitable, "sans bornes"? This is not simply an existential complaint before the inevitability of death. It is also a metaphysical protest and characteristically Romantic in its intensity of feeling, above all, in its lofty vagueness. There is a felt presence of infinity here, a sense of longing and suffering which is not explicable in existential terms alone. Ionesco writes in a similar vein in Notes et Contre-Notes. "Je ... me vois assailli," he explains,

> par une souffrance incompréhensible, des regrets sans nom, des remords sans objet, par une sorte d'amour, par une sorte de haine, par un semblant de joie, par une étrange pitié (de quoi? de qui?)....
>
> p. 135.

Whatever the exact meaning of this, the Romantic colour is inescapable. Ionesco's passion rarely has that specifically concrete quality which is the mark of the existential. Rather it is a passion directed beyond the narrow confines of Existence, towards the infinite, an object that is not an object, the soul of man conceived as absolute.

Moreover, Ionesco's unbounded feeling focusses on the past in a way that recalls not the existential awareness of man's situation but a Romantic nostalgia, a longing for paradise lost, for a plenitude man has never possessed and yet forever recognizes as his own, "choses que j'ai perdues à jamais, que je n'ai jamais eues, jamais vues, dont je n'ai jamais su qu'elles sont" (La Photo du Colonel, pp.176-177). Of course Ionesco is a timid Romantic and the nineteenth century vigour is restrained, but it is there nonetheless. The existential hero suffers the present, the concrete burden of the past, the void of futurity. He does not suffer the exquisite pains of the unknown. Nor is he concerned with the myth of Eden. Ionesco's heroes suffer undefined regrets about the past, yearnings for something lost, for the innocence of childhood - innocence, one may add, in the sense in which Blake uses the term. There is the couple of Les Chaises with their memories of joy, Choubert with his despairing "le jardin enchanté a sombré dans la nuit" (I, p. 191), his vision of loss: "Où est la beauté? Où est le bien?" (I, p. 203). There is Bérenger of Tueur recalling the vision of the past and seeking to heal a tragic and intolerable separation. Of course only the vision of the child is able to pierce through this world of Platonic shadows and regain, if only momentarily, man's true home. Thus every authentic character in the plays is marked by naïvete and the capacity for amazement.

The fascination for the past is coupled with a desire for a glorious future that will restore freedom and undo the effects of the Fall. No truly existential character would dare hope for liberation of this kind. Like many Romantics Ionesco seeks the apotheosis of man in the spirit of Blake's "damn braces, bless relaxes." But while waiting for this, the experience of transfigured nature, a revelation, in solitude, of the mystery of life, is his reward and a fresh spur to his desires. If, in the end, he is crushed, it is because society has betrayed him. For the most part, however, he continues his search, impelled by the eternal "je veux ... je veux" (Victimes, I, p. 191). The Romantic tone of this quest is especially evident in Ionesco's later plays where, significantly, the echo of Strindberg is most pronounced.

The influence of Strindberg's expressionist work on Ionesco has been noted by some,[3] although it has not been sufficiently stressed, and Ionesco has replied both in Notes et Contre-Notes and in his interview with Claude Bonnefoy:

> On me prouva que j'étais très influencé par Strindberg. Cela m'obligea à lire le dramaturge scandinave: je me rendis compte, en effet, que cela était vrai.
>
> Notes, p. 67.

This comical admission should not mislead us. It does not matter that Ionesco read Strindberg after he wrote his plays. The point is that Ionesco's manner is very close to the late Romanticism of the other. In every respect the similarities are astonishing. Both dramatists are deeply concerned with the male-female struggle. More important with respect to the Romantic, both project themselves into their work and so reveal their lives and their dreams. When Ionesco says in L'Impromptu de l'Alma, "voyez-vous, je vais cette fois me mettre en scène moi-même!" the critic rightly counters "vous ne faites que cela" (II, p. 14). Anyone who is acquainted with Ionesco's journal or even simply Notes et Contre-Notes cannot fail to realize to what extent the plays are autobiographical. Both Ionesco and Strindberg are concerned with a metaphysical Fall, with guilt and remorse. Both depict a quest for salvation. The protagonist of The Road to Damascus with his endless wanderings, his search for the ideal feminine and for a religious truth, closely resembles Jean of La Soif et la Faim. Like Jean, Strindberg's Stranger ends in a monastery, though not one that is a prison. Similar are the Daughter of A Dream Play or the Student of The Ghost Sonata, all impelled by obscure yearnings for fulfilment and peace. But the greatest resemblance between Ionesco and Strindberg lies in their common dramatic use of the dream for confessional purposes. The dream is not congenial to the strictly existential writer but it flourishes in that area which we may term expressionist and which marks the transition from the Romantic to the existential. Ionesco's plays, like many of Strindberg's, appear as dream projections, sometimes as nightmarish, and indeed Ionesco has made no secret of this and has related most of the plays to specific dreams, some of which - the flying dream, the dream of a wall, dreams of alienation and of euphoria - are narrated in detail in the Journal and in the Bonnefoy interview. But this aspect of Ionesco may be left for the present. The point to be emphasized here is the parallel with the Romantic.

A great deal of criticism altogether misses this quality of Ionesco's work, even as it obscures Ionesco's real affinities with the existential, in its emphasis on guignol and on the Absurd. In fact, his 'Pataphysics notwithstanding, Ionesco differs from Jarry and the Absurd of Punch and Judy in the direction of feeling: his Romantic spirit is ampler. How greatly he has been misunderstood because of thoughtless interpretations may be seen in this quotation from Esslin, himself the least guilty critic of his kind:

> While effective as theatre, La Soif et la Faim has little coherence and sometimes falls into a Romanticism reminiscent of a far earlier period of drama. It is ironical that Ionesco should have reached official acceptance in France in a play which seems not ... particularly characteristic of Ionesco's own peculiar world.[4]

In fact La Soif represents the natural term of Ionesco's constant bias. Far from being an aberration it reveals the essential Ionesco. I am not suggesting that one should ignore the element of guignol which is present from La Cantatrice to Jeux de Massacre, only that one should recognize that Ionesco has always been a man of feeling and has publicized the fact, a little timidly in his early work but with increasing conviction after Victimes, Amédée and Tueur. Yet there are still those who, like Grossvogel,[5] cannot see this and who continue to regard Ionesco as inhuman and to apply the term "absurd" mechanically and irrelevantly. Anyone who is unconvinced about Ionesco's Romanticism has only to begin by examining the later plays and to work back to La Cantatrice. Read in order of composition the plays reveal a development of the Ionesco character from puppet to human being - as some of Ionesco's more sensitive critics, such as Wellwarth and Guicharnaud, have seen.[6] Read the other way they reveal something of the human element, the element of Romantic feeling, present from the start. Thus Jean and Bérenger of Le Piéton help to bring into the open earlier Romantic characters, the Bérengers of Le Roi se Meurt, Rhinocéros and Tueur, and these in turn express more fully the Romanticism present in the still earlier Amédée and Choubert. Once the line of development is recognized it is possible to see the germ of the Romantic in Jacques, in the old couple of Les Chaises, even in the situations of La Leçon and La Cantatrice. What must be stressed, then, is that even the early puppets are not really absurd. On the contrary, they are unhappy people, bursting with repressed violence and ultimately longing for the experience of the euphoric. This longing is first brought into focus in Les Chaises and after that more and more openly revealed in subsequent plays in a way reminiscent of a personal psychoanalysis. Victimes and Amédée represent the process of this birth, Tueur and Rhinocéros confirm the trend. In Le Piéton and La Soif the movement from puppet to human being, from a disguised to an exuberant Romanticism, reaches its climax.

If we accept the importance of the Romantic element in Ionesco's work we also raise the possibility of an interpretation of the search for plenitude along Idealist lines. And it is true that the euphoric experience with its mood of joy appears to take us beyond the existential. As we have seen, the euphoric is not only a revelation of man's concrete Existence but also a religious experience of what Heidegger terms Being, and Heidegger's Being - and this has been brought out in the analysis of Beckett - itself perhaps escapes existential categories. What is true of Beckett's work and Heidegger's philosophy is even more true of Ionesco's plays. A phrase descriptive of the obsessive search for joy undertaken by all of Ionesco's protagonists is significant here: our thirst for the Absolute, "*notre soif de l'absolu*" (*Notes*, p. 73). If Ionesco can speak in this way the question of Romantic Idealism becomes pressing: is the Ionesco search to be viewed as a flight from the limits of the existential, as a movement towards a privileged metaphysical position reminiscent of the Hegelian's, in short, towards the infinite, the eternal, the Absolute?

Certainly there is a vaguely Platonic otherworldly tone in Ionesco. Man is not made for this world but for another: " ... *n'avons-nous pas l'impression que le réel est faux, qu'il ne nous convient pas? que ce monde n'est pas notre vrai monde*?" (*Notes*, p. 92). More important, this ideal world appears to be at least glimpsed in the euphoric experience. Thus euphoria would seem to take one to a realm of freedom that is not strictly existential and the movement or attempted movement in the plays from the claustrophobic to the euphoric would seem to represent not only an escape from the inauthentic collective but, at the same time, something much more radical, an escape from the existential situation, man's being-there, and towards an Idealist Absolute. Again, this could be termed a movement from Existence to Essence, from the direct experience of one's human finitude in *angst* to a more extravagant revelation of Being understood as an ideal state outside the limits of space and time. It is here that we must recall that the Ionesco hero regards euphoria as a possible safeguard against the onslaught of time and death. Of course the existential hero accepts his finitude as inescapable. In Ionesco, however, if claustrophobia relates to the fear of burial, euphoria acts as an antidote to this fear: "Je me suis encore dit que si cet événement avait surgi ... plus jamais je ne serais malheureux car j'apprenais que l'on ne mourrait pas" (Journal, I, p. 113). Choubert, like Ionesco, thinks of joy as a source of life eternal: "des sources de vie, des sources immortelles" (I, p. 191). If Amédée's corpse represents, as the writer argues, the burden of time, the ending of the play surely suggests a victory over death, a resurrection. Bérenger of Tueur is convinced that the experience of light means a transcending of death:"... j'étais, j'avais conscience que j'étais depuis toujours, que je n'allais plus mourir" (II, p. 78). In Le Roi se Meurt the younger queen pleads for life against the other whose role it is to prepare the king for the end. She asks Bérenger to rise above his fears and to immerse himself in joy and wonder. "Ainsi tu peux être sans limites, ainsi tu peux être infiniment" (IV, p. 41), she tells him. It is significant in this context to recall that Ionesco has, especially in his discussions with Bonnefoy, clearly linked the euphoric to his own childhood at La Chapelle Anthenaise, to the period of his life when he did not know about death and had not yet discovered time. The continued suggestion is that euphoria, in its revelation of a Being transcending the categories of Existence, is a pledge of youth and immortality. Of course, with the possible exception of Amédée, no Ionesco hero ever succeeds in his endeavours. Choubert, Bérenger of Tueur and Le Piéton, all return to earth after their euphoria, Jean scarcely glimpses the ideal, the little king dies in spite of his wish to live. Still, the momentary experience is a reality and the search continues.

We must conclude that, even more than Beckett, Ionesco is a Romantic in an existential world. The Romantic world and the world of the Idealist is an open world in which anything is possible. By the time we reach Strindberg the position has altered and man is losing the sense of the Absolute, the belief in a privileged position. In Ionesco, as in Strindberg, something of the Romantic remains, but it is affected by a new sense of limitations. The existential hero knows that he is a being-there, a creature involved in a finite world, ontologically immersed in the concreteness of the situation, able to be only within the bounds of the situation. The major tension in Ionesco, the constant struggle between claustrophobia and euphoria may, in the final analysis, be seen as a conflict between the triumphant existential and a surviving but disillusioned Romantic Idealism. At this point in this thesis such a conclusion is not surprising. Ionesco, like Beckett, takes the existential viewpoint as a given and again like Beckett but with greater abandon, looks back to the Idealist sources of the existential and to the Romantic sources of modern art. Romanticism contains the germ of the existential as its notion of the organic unity of things contains an implicit grasp of the notion of situation. The Romantic hero becomes existential when the situation closes in on him, when he begins to measure freedom and fulfilment in terms not of absolutes but relatives. And this development is to be expected: if man and his world represent an organic Coleridgean whole, it follows that man exists not as a privileged Ego but in a situation, that the Absolute is no longer conceivable. Ionesco's work offers a unique perspective on this transition from one weltanschauung to another.