CHAPTER X

EXPERIMENTAL
The Theatre of the Absurd - Nonsense rhyme has been a favourite form of entertainment with readers. There are few who have not fallen under the spell of Edward Lear or Lewis Carroll. The following passage by Lear will illustrate the sort of thing meant. It is a limerick of which he has written a great number:

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, "It is just as I feared! -
Two Owls and a Hen,
Four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard!"

The nonsense verses of this kind have been welcome because of their illogical and absurd elements. The new absurd philosophy, on the other hand, looks upon the whole of life as absurd and meaningless. Such an attitude stems from the dismissal of God from the scheme of things by the existentialist thinkers. While men could once import meaning and value into life, relying upon God in spite of frustration, although these may destroy happiness and hope, now they have no such support.

'Dostoievski once wrote "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted;" and that, for existentialism, is the starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if

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God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself.  

The Absurd Theatre has been defined by Ionesco in an essay on Kafka: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose .... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."  

This in short is the absurd attitude and it seems to have influenced several leading thinkers of our time. We cannot perhaps find its ancestry in the element of nonsense which has always given pleasure and does so even now, for example, in Walt Disney's cartoons. The Absurd Philosophy, as it is called, is a new development and is a temporary embodiment of a sense of frustration people have felt. The causes for this are also to be sought in the increasing dominance of the machine in the world. We cannot quite revolt against the machine age as in Samuel Butler's Erewhon where machines were destroyed because of their harmful effect on man yet the remnants were preserved in a museum. But in Erewhon complete sanity did not apparently return and a certain amount of topsy-turvydom continued.

in the relation between man and society. For example, it was a very heinous offence to fall ill and to be in need of medical science. 4

Of the various absurdities introduced in the plays written by Avant-Garde writers, one is the absence of communication between persons. We have the idea stated by Eliot in "The Waste Land" and Beckett in putting his characters into jars in his play seems to emphasize this isolation, separateness and solipsism. Eliot's lines run as follows:

I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus 5

Another passage in "The Hollow Men" by Eliot seems suggestive for our purpose:

Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass

Harold Pinter in "The Collection" shows that an enquiry about a wife's behaviour with a stranger staying at the

5. "Waste Land V"
same hotel gives rise to the utmost confusion. Nothing is known, nothing is ascertained because each has a different tale or a different tale at a different time. In 'The Lover' the husband plays a dual role of husband and lover and the wife that of a wife and a whore. The situations described do not arise from frustration but from a certain intractability which belongs to the human world. In Ionesco the absurdities take many different forms including marrying a motor-car and a girl with several noses. In his "The Chairs" the element of nonsense appears in an old man's hallucinatory experience. In his "Rhinoceros", which is not a one-act play, Ionesco speaks of a disease called Rhinocerites which rages in epidemic proportion. It is possible that the rhinoceros is a symbol of separatism; its prevalence may be an excess which destroys society and turns men into wild animals. It is important to notice that one of the men who drank habitually, was friendly, humble and sociable escaped infection. It is likely that the author is in some way expressing his strong discontent with the world of the twentieth century and its mechanical bias. Occasionally, one may feel that he intends to make the absurd element the basis of a comic view of life. The Absurd Theatre, as far as we can analyse it, gives a
view of life which seems to be made from a distance by the author without a sense of self-involvement. What appears comical even in suffering would have been tragical had the element of self-involvement been present. Hamm and Clov in "Endgame" and the cripple Nagg, the father, are described comically by Beckett. On such a view even the expression of pain may appear ridiculous. In "Cascando" by Beckett a voice describes how a man tumbles and tries to get up. It is again, a completely outside view. The movement thus described may sum up the difficult onward march of man struggling to achieve progress from a primitive beginning. In "Waiting for Godot" Pozzo and his servant Lucky are mysterious figures and certainly do not belong to our world. Lucky is kicked and is made to deliver a long speech in which philosophical concepts are fragmentarily and incoherently included. The idea may be pure nonsense or perhaps a serious comment as regards the nature of knowledge man acquires. It seems to suggest that knowledge of facts is not an accumulating process, increasing and embellishing our possession. In the sphere of knowledge one and two do not make three by the simple process of addition but cancel each other, becoming a zero, or attains to six times its value (twelve) by being transmuted into wisdom. The comparison
with nonsense verse or prose and the absurd position is perhaps permissible up to a point. Practically in every period of literature we can find some verses meant to amuse but are meaningless. We cannot however associate the absurdist philosophy with the Greeks or the Elizabethans. It betrays a pathological state and the drama offers a kind of diagnosis, necessary to recovery. As against the amusement of the nonsense verse there is bewilderment in the Absurd Drama. While in the former escape from reason and routine is a relaxing experience, in the latter, there is instead, an embittered sense of frustration and despondency. In this attitude there is nothing to provide a firm standpoint for the study of human life and its purpose; at most it gives us a view of society governed by mechanical forces of industry and constantly under threat of destruction by nuclear war.

The title of one of Mr. Auden's latest poems "The Age of Anxiety" suggests one of the moods of the post-war world, - a mood often called 'angst', - a word borrowed from the Danish religious thinker of the early nineteenth century, Sören Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is the father of 'Existentialist' philosophy; this is not a philosophy which has had much technical influence on English literature,
but some of its attitudes,—particularly the awareness of a general latent anxiety, not as the product of some particular pressure of events, but as intrinsic to the human state itself,—are shared by many English writers.

1. Samuel Beckett, an Irish dramatist, is the author of several plays characterized by an experimental technique. One of them is a short-play *Endgame* which discards many stage conventions. The expression "Endgame" belongs to the playing of chess and what we see in *Endgame* written in prose is a threatened annihilation of the human species under condition not clearly indicated. There seems to be a suggestion that the world has arrived at the last stage of depopulation through war or some other unnamed large-scale disaster. What Beckett says in the play has on occasions a comic effect like a jest on the lips of a dying man. Indeed, the play is the account of a time apparently remote from our own; the embers of some great conflagration burn and consume the last remains of life. The aims of the author are not clear because allegory, symbolism and realism seem all to enter his technique. One can see, therefore, that Beckett's art is profoundly ambivalent moving as it does between opposite poles, between the tragic and the comic,

the one sometimes prevailing, sometimes the other. Such a complex attitude, involving the presence of contradictory elements, forms the basis of the writer's technique. The view he presents may be logically untenable yet has a psychological truth worth exploring. One does not know whether Beckett speaks from supreme dissatisfaction, or from superior intuition. But his is an analysis, almost a surgical dissection, undertaken with a resolute will to reach the very core of meaning, to discover the ultimate secret. Such a programme is too unpractical to produce material results but that it has been undertaken is an indication of an undaunted exploratory spirit, whose adventures excite imagination and direct it into new channels. We are sure that there is a hard core of meaning and that when the onion is peeled away, something will be left as the innermost centre of his vision, and this vision, as far as we can judge, has elements of beauty in spite of the general unconventionality of presentation. One will also notice a positive religion akin to the Christian ideal which often crops up and seems never far away from the acts and thoughts of the characters. The acceptance of Christianity can be through a mode of denial as exemplified by Baudelaire and it may be interesting to enquire how much the works of
Beckett owe to the influence of that great nineteenth century French poet. Beckett, who wrote in French with more ease than in English is, evidently, close to the French tradition in some of its most living forms. Three critical studies have already been written on Beckett's works. The critics are Mr. Frederick J. Hoffman, Mr. Hugh Kenner and Mrs. Ruby Cohn. A T.L.S. Article (December 21, 1962, "The Core of the Onion") discusses some of the books and the critical works already mentioned and makes an observation which will, to a certain extent, prepare the reader for the problem his plays and novels suggest.

Commenting on Proust in 1931 Beckett indicated the course he wanted to follow as a writer. Like Proust he rejected "the literature that 'describes',... content to transcribe the surface, the facade, behind which the Idea is prisoner." (See T.L.S. December 21, 1962). Among the four characters in Endgame Hamm cannot stand, Clov cannot sit and Nagg and Nell are kept shut up in a bin. The very idea that humanity may arise again even after millions of years seems to be frightful as the following scene will show:

"Clov : (anguished, scratching himself). I have a flea!
Hamm : A flea! Are there still fleas?
Clov : On me there's one. (Scratching.) Unless it's a crab louse.
Hamm : (very perturbed). But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!" 7

What has happened is nowhere definitely stated. Hamm is blind

7. Ibid., p.27
and is constantly in need of a pain killer. He is anxious to know about the view outside. There is something portentous about it, threatening and fearful in its aspect. There is no prophecy in clear terms but enough scope for the imagination to explore the details of horror which make even the prospects of a future life on this planet a source of distress. The four people are not capable of bringing up a new generation. Nell, who is the only woman, lives separately from Nagg; they are parents of Hamm who is already an old man. Nagg demands pap, a liquid infant food, and stays near Nell without being able to be within physical reach. There is no affection anywhere. Nagg is spoken to with contempt by Hamm. There is no friendship, no love and even the capacity for laughter has disappeared. To guffaw, to enjoy a cheery outbreak at another's cost, is also outside of the few things that they can still do. What seems a little peculiar is, that hope of some kind has not left the world. There is a reference to green hills somewhere near. The persistent feeling is that there is no life, so at least Clov makes us imagine; 'I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit.'

Hamm is constantly telling Clov that he is to go and at the

8. Ibid., p. 51.
end he does go, fitted out for a journey. *Endgame* is concluded when Clov leaves behind the few wrecks of humanity, one of whom, Nell, dies before his departure.

This is a symbolical play. Mr. Kenner ("Samuel Beckett", John Calder) discusses how the play must be interpreted. He makes a very ingenious analogical use of the arithmetic of the irrational numbers and also proposes a fairly reasonable view as regards the implications of the names given to characters in *Endgame*. The play's interpretation is aided by stage representation. Even then the writer's idea will seem baffling. To resort to the arithmetic of the irrational numbers, as Mr. Kenner does, is to take most of us out of our depths. The full idea of what these mean will be understood by those with a scientific education. After the symbolical plays of Maeterlinck a great leap forward is taken by Beckett but his drama, valued as they rightly are by critics and theatre-goers, have not yet established a new theatrical tradition. Even an experiment may widen our mental horizon and teach us to look further than the conventional modes permit us to do. From this point of view, if not from any other, we consider the play deserving of attention and careful study. The structure of the play is built upon a certain pattern of behaviour. To know the behaviour, therefore, is to have some insight into what the play is about.
The place where we see Clov, has a bare interior with grey light coming in from outside. He is stiff in his limbs, staggers as he tries to walk and seems restless. He puts a large bloodstained handkerchief over the face of Hamm who is asleep. Climbing a ladder to see the surrounding country through a telescope he has a glimpse of multitudes in transports of joy. They are, in fact, the audience witnessing the play. He reports that the light is sinking and the waves of the sea have a leaden appearance. Mother Nell, about whom not much is known beside her name, is dead and unburied. For, Clov cannot attend to this business on top of his other responsibilities. He has no sense of time,—when he says yesterday he refers to "that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day." He also discovers that Nell's pulse has stopped. In this chaotic world he loves order, "It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust." Hamm is the master of the house and orders Clov about using a whistle to summon him. He is blind and thinks that his misery is loftier than what anybody has ever endured. Clov tells him that Nature has ceased to exist. His parents Nagg and Nell are confined within a bin. The way Hamm behaves towards his father is often perfectly heartless. He even takes him to task for having brought him into the world.

9. Ibid., p.32
10. Ibid., p.39
The last long speech is by Hamm. It seems to convey a sense of mutual interdependence as the basis of society. At the moment Clov leaves, the reference to "endgame" seems to imply that life has no future before it.

Nagg is the father of Hamm and seems to be fond of Nell, his wife, even asking her to kiss him. But they are not near enough physically for the caress. They are without sight but can still hear. Nell's view is that nothing is funnier than unhappiness. There is a moment in Nagg's conversation with Nell which seems to suggest that meaning has disappeared from life. "What does that mean? (Pause.) That means nothing." Nagg, a storyteller with a very well-developed sense of humour loves to tell his wife about the tailor who did not complete a pair of striped trousers for an Englishman who needed them for the New Year festivities. And the man told the tailor: "In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world. Yes Sir, no less Sir, the WORLD! And you are not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months!" Nagg mimicks the tailor's scandalized voice and the words that follow as explanation. He has, evidently, a dramatic gift. Nagg, however, has no legs but a pair of stumps and is fond of guzzling. His first words are "Me paps!"

11. Ibid., p.20
12. Ibid., p.22
He wants the liquid baby food for his second childhood and is greeted by Hamm as his accursed progenitor. He recalls incidents which made him and Nell lose their shanks and remembers the freezing climate during a trip on Lake Como and their engagement on an April day. The account of the two aged people kept in a bin will seem to suggest that the world is completely changed, that it does not accept normal experience as having any meaning and even looks down upon those who have had any share in it. There is a momentary and uncertain glimpse of a boy which Hamm caught. This would be an indication that life has not perhaps completely disappeared. There are suggestions that here and there, there existed some form of life, still undecayed, still promising to spread and fill the void, created by the undescribed calamity. The reference to a sinking fire in the *Endgame* could mean anything from a universal conflagration to a nuclear war. The general character of the scene depicted confirms this impression. Physical debility and a morbid feeling of annihilation and of complete hopelessness may easily be the outcome of some such circumstance. The writer has tried to look at things from within, without providing the external details which alone would have helped us to understand the situation more adequately. To omit details is to gain an effect of concentration and intensity. Physical details may complete
a picture in a rough sort of way. They may also tend to divert the mind from the contemplation of the essential substance. The material completeness may involve a shift of emphasis from the important to the unimportant, from the effect to secondary causes and explanations. One wonders whether the play is a prophecy or a warning. Perhaps it may combine both. Artists are able to see farther than most people. If this is Beckett's version of future, there is justification to concentrate on the fewest details so that what emerges may the more clearly register the effect of desolation and misery. The words of the Bible, the dwindling machinery and the medicine that gives way - are all remnants of what had existed and would soon be lost for ever. In a world so nearly dehumanised, man's handiwork could not survive him.

2. **Play** by Samuel Beckett. The stage with three urns each about one yard high and enclosing the dramatist personae is certainly a novelty which hardly anything in stage history could match. What are the urns, all made according to the author's specification, to do on the stage? Are they symbols of our inevitable apartness, do they suggest that human association is a fiction, that people do not actually know each other - with any truth or certainty? Perhaps,

13. Samuel Beckett's **Play** (Faber and Faber, London, 1964)
as the stage is a place of spectacle, the urns will make an exciting show, each one containing an isolated human being and looking almost as a part of the urn itself. The situation is a triangular love: Wife, husband, mistress. The subject is as old as anything human can be. Yet why should its introduction be made in this fantastic manner? Any reasonable answer is difficult to find except perhaps the fact that the most sensational theme is as old as Adam yet people will rig it up as a novelty by their ingenuity. The proceedings begin in an accusatory style. The wife forbids the husband to have further contact with the mistress. The man pretends ignorance and takes shelter in the usual subterfuges. This does not help matters. Finally, the two women meet and they get a little friendly, each declaring that the man need not come to her unless he has an inclination to do so. The women are numbered one and two and the man also is left without a name. This somewhat abstract approach gives the fable a universal quality. The man is not content with what the women can give. He moves from one to the other because there is no fulfilment for him. The women agree not to put pressure. The man says, "A little dinghy, on the river, I resting on my oars, they lolling on air-cushions in the stern ... sheets. Drifting. Such fantasies." 14

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14. Ibid., p.21
From the man's words it may seem that the two women can give him the stability which one cannot. He has formed in his mind a kind of fantasy by which he is isolated in a dinghy with the two women, this being his vision of a self-contained world. Beckett does not by offering this picture enter a plea for bigamy. He seems, however, to suggest that man's nature is not moulded by law but has its own impulses shaping and directing it.

The play is perhaps a success on the stage but its literary quality is not evidently an attraction. Its movement is circular: it begins with the words which are practically the same as those spoken at the end. The husband's role is defensive: "We were not long together" the wife's is an imperative, "Give her up"; the mistress, on the other hand, can only recall the angry wife bursting into her presence one morning like a fury equipped with the power of the law. Thus the words oscillate back and forth between two given ends and register no progress, indicating no solution. From this eternal tangle there is no escape, once a man is caught in it. Such seems the fable Beckett has designed. John Wain in a valuable article comments upon Samuel Beckett as a poetic dramatist. His views do not seem to be in accord with those of Eliot as stated in "The Theodore Spencer Memorial Lecture" at Harvard University. John Wain writing twelve years later has the benefit of a
body of new facts of which Eliot had no knowledge at the date. We quote Eliot so as to form a clear estimate as regards the two views: "But in order to be poetic in prose, a dramatist has to be so consistently poetic that his scope is very limited.... The poetic prose dramatist who has not this advantage, has to be too poetic."\(^\text{15}\) We shall next quote John Wain whose words convince us that Eliot was not very clear-sighted in treating the poetic drama in prose as more or less unpractical because of the limitations under which it labours: "Beckett's achievement was twofold: first, he wrote a 'poetic' drama that broke away from verse; Waiting for Godot was undeniably poetic in its use of language and its atmosphere, while breaking with the tired and wilting tradition of 'verse drama'. By comparison with the plays of, say, Christopher Fry, Godot was genuinely poetic, and its success made possible a whole new idiom of poetic prose in the theatre, quickly exploited by Harold Pinter and others."\(^\text{16}\)

John Wain points out that drama has moved between the two poles of ritual and realism. In the nineteenth century and the twentieth realism went all the way it could. But cinema and television can do the job better. Drama is

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thus returning to ritual to gain a new strength. It is
re-establishing its connexion with its primal source.
The use of mask in Yeats, of soliloquy in Pinter, and
other modes practised by new dramatists like Arnold Wesker,
Shelagh Delaney, John Arden, Bernard Kops and Doris Lessing,
are among the devices by which the trend to naturalism is
checked in favour of a new anti-realistic element. John
Wain's examination of the position and prospects of the
theatre since the forties strikes a note of optimism:
"No one doubts that the aims and methods of British
playwrights have altered vastly in the last twenty years,
and my own view is that these changes have been entirely
for the better. The younger dramatists who have started
up in such profusion since 1950 may be no better, talent
for talent, than their predecessors; but the theatre they
write for is in a healthier state. It has managed to rid
itself of some venerable and hampering illusions. The chief,
and the most harmful, of these illusions was that the
stage-play could be, or should be, or ever had been, a
naturalistic form. The new theatre has rediscovered its
own essential nature, half-way between discussion and ritual."

Harold Pinter - Harold Pinter is more concerned with
form than with meaning. He confesses, "I start off with

17. Ibid., p.10
people, who come into a particular situation. I certainly don't write from any kind of abstract idea. And I wouldn't know a symbol if I saw one. "Writing for Myself" (an interview), Twentieth Century (February, 1961), p.174. Pinter's interview with Tynan provides an important, though brief introduction to the nature of the dramatic art he practises: "I think it is impossible—and certainly for me—to start writing a play from any kind of abstract idea .... I start writing a play from an image of a situation and a couple of characters involved, and these people always remain for me quite real; if they were not, the play could not be written."18 Another statement, also made at the same interview, draws attention to an element in his work, which is often mentioned as its characteristic: "I feel ... that instead of any inability to communicate there is a deliberate evasion of communication. Communication itself between people is so frightening that rather than do that there is continual cross-talk, a continual talking about other things, rather than what is at the root of their relationship."19 Further we come across quite frequently what Esslin characterizes as "nonsensical cross-examination."20

Pinter is only thirty-four years of age. His first play The Room was written in 1957 in which year he also wrote.

19. Ibid., p.213
20. Ibid., p.210
The Dumb Waiter and The Birthday Party. He has had much success as a writer for the theatre and the television, one of the most outstanding of his works being The Caretaker which received the Evening Standard Drama Award for the best play of 1960. Harold Pinter has been praised by John Russell Taylor in "Anger and After" as a dramatist of great promise. He observes: "... his works are the true poetic drama of our time" etc. But Pinter does not use the verse medium.

The Collection and the Lover are two plays in prose, both produced in 1961 and seem to have as their main themes, menace and lack of communication. Menace may be an offshoot of angst, a word borrowed from the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, founder of the 'Existentialist' Philosophy. Angst seems to be a part of human consciousness owing little or nothing to contemporary pressure of events.

Pinter's "The Collection" was first presented as a television play in 1961 and was produced on the stage a year later. The form in which it is published reveals the intention to televise the scenes. Several views represent simultaneously two different flats where we can see all the four characters involved in the action, - Harry, James, Stella and Bill. The note of menace is struck in the form of a

telephone call late at night, - a voice asking for Bill, then asleep and in bed. Harry wants to know the caller's name, who does not, however, give it. Next day the ring comes again. Bill hurries away from home to avoid meeting the man who spoke at the other end of the line. He promises to come in a minute and does so to find that Bill is away. James, for that is his name, calls at the house a second time. Bill is now at home and tries to be as rude as possible to the visitor: "You can't just barge into someone's house like this, you know. What do you want?" He even threatens to call in the police. Quite indifferent to this rudeness James hunts for olives and asks: "You mean to say you don't keep olives for your guests?" Bill replies sarcastically, "You're not my guest, you're an intruder." James charged Bill of booking a room, No. 142, at Westbury Hotel, Leeds, but sleeping in 165 with his wife. He also said that Bill had a bath and came into her room, towelled like a Roman, accusing him of having treated his wife like a whore. Bill first denies having met her, later admits the meeting and a few inoffensive kisses. The statement was afterwards altered to a chance encounter in the lounge and a discussion of what the pair would do if they went by

24. Ibid., p.16
25. Ibid., p.17
26. Ibid.
themselves into the bedroom. Finally, everything seemed to be a kind of dream and illusion without any basis in fact. The statement that their intimacies did not go beyond a casual meeting in the lounge might be the whole story. The wife was asked to confirm the account. But she looked at her husband neither confirming nor denying. Thus the play comes to an end.

In examining the point of view of Harold Pinter we can recognize the two elements on which attention is focussed. Perhaps the features emphasized are also the features of the larger life of society. The sense of an undefined danger has haunted the western imagination. The philosophical interest over a longer period of time has made the problem of communication all-important from the point of view of poets and the public. Here we discover its sphere change, and communication between characters in a play or story comes to assume the nature of a problem. But as the theme develops the problem as suggested in Pinter's play does not seem so much one of communication as an uncertainty about the grounds on which a certain allegation is made. The characters Stella and Bill in the given circumstances have no particular reason to be frank and open to James. It is not alleged that they are intentionally secretive and are trying to form an unlawful alliance behind
the back of the husband. But there is almost an unconscious desire to withhold the facts, to whittle them down so as to give as little offence as possible. The question of communication cannot be here treated as all-important, for a definite motive operating may even more effectively explain the different versions about the same situation. The dialogue is clear and swift; its power comes from being in accord with each and every occasion. In other words, the idea of economy is carried as far as it can go. The end may appear satisfactory, the momentary disturbance is forgiven and forgotten when James tells Bill: "Look... I really think I ought to apologize for this silly story my wife made up. The fault is really all hers, and mine, for believing her." But the alleged act of adultery is left unproved. Thus a more or less satisfactory finale is reached and we perceive that what happened is actually nobody's fault but a fault of communication. When a play is written to put across such a view, it is not always that we are able to see it, and even if we do, we do so, feeling that there are other equally valid explanations and that there is no particular case for holding only one of them as the single explanation possible in the given situation.

27. Martin Esslin comments on this fact: "Harold Pinter, whose uncanny accuracy in the reproduction of real conversation among English people has earned him the reputation of having a tape-recorder built into his memory, reveals that the bulk of everyday conversation is largely devoid of logic and sense, is in fact nonsensical." (Absurd Drama, Penguin Plays, 1965), p.14

As a television piece the alternation of scenes or their simultaneous presentation gains considerably in liveliness of effect. The word "Collection" may mean some material for an artistic work which is yet to be produced. The play starts with a sense of something unresolved and ends with the same feeling though the cause changes. The first feeling is that of menace, something uncomprehended and basically dangerous, a threat which may materialize any moment. The telephone call at an unearthly hour, visitors calling and leaving in an unexplained manner constitute this element of menace. The second element is lack of communication, the husband, the wife and the alleged lover try to ascertain what exactly did take place. Several versions emerge, the worst is adultery and the least incriminating is merely a preliminary meeting, though possibly with a chance of all sorts of development. The husband is eager to accept his wife's innocence as established yet the wife looks speechlessly on without allaying the troubles which had upset the poor man. There seems to be a misunderstanding, although, apparently, there is no way of clearing it up. Each man and each woman are cut off and are confined to their separate prison cells without being able to communicate, the real and the fictitious make up the total fabric of life. To disentangle the two may be desired but the thing
seems to be out of reach. The three rooms make up the scene. At the end they appear simultaneously in a half faded light. The idea may be to offer a glimpse of all the persons of the drama by way of a farewell sight to remember and ponder over.

4. In *The Lover* included in the same volume there is also a similar shadow cast over the events, and a sense of insecurity following as a result. *The Lover* has two characters Sarah and Richard who play double roles, wife-mistress, husband-lover. Richard's last words to his wife "You lovely whore" spoken in his double role apparently establish the case for lack of communication. The technical modes representing the double role introduce changes in dramatic presentation, not particularly easy to follow, and even if intelligible, they do not seem to give a satisfactory idea why double roles are preferred to single ones and what dramatic advantage is gained thereby. The two plays are, however, full of brisk movement and the dialogues move swiftly, naturally and with a sprightly gift of wit and humour without blazing into pyrotechnics or falling below a certain quality of brilliance. The plays are alive, and yet alive in a way which suggests problems with an aesthetic or philosophical basis. From the above analysis we can see that the atmosphere of the
present age fairly hums with experiments. Although this is an indication of a desire to achieve an original approach to different questions and provide a study of various human impulses there is also the possibility that changes of this kind may indicate only a passing fashion, ephemeral in character, without being an expression of anything deep-seated in human nature or essential to the art by which it is expressed. Pinter is subtle; but the question is whether this subtlety aids the understanding of human nature. Perhaps the technique is adapted to the tastes of sophisticated society, ready to respond to new modes of subtlety for the purpose of its entertainment.

5. **A Slight Ache**\(^{29}\) by Pinter has only three characters, Flora, Edward her husband and a match seller. The time is a day in summer and the place is the home of the couple (Flora and Edward). The match seller constitutes the element of menace. He is continually waiting outside the gate with damp matches to sell. Edward invites him to come inside and Flora offers lunch. But the match seller does not respond even by a single word. Edward tells him many things and Flora speaks with him alone, identifying him as the poacher who had once raped her. Later as a Justice of Peace she had this poacher in front of the bench. "He was there for poaching. That's how I know he was a poacher...."

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I acquitted him, letting him off with a caution." The incident of the rape is associated with a horse ride she undertook before marriage when she went out by herself on a canter. The whole business may well be a figment of the imagination rather than a fact. As she spoke to the stranger in the parlour her mood grew melting; the silent man before her grew young. The husband, however, regarded the man as mysterious and a source of potential danger. His "slight ache" in the eye probably means some kind of distorted vision. What is generally thought to be the lack of communication, the author preferring instead "an evasion of communication", the nonsensical cross-examination is also present in the play. Pinter's dialogue is natural rather than witty, - he avoids the intellectual as an unsuitable single pillar to support his rather curious vision and depends instead on a poetic approach. As a piece of writing his excellence is indisputable. The following comment by Esslin is a kind of defence but one which may not appeal to every taste: "Most real conversation, after all, is incoherent, illogical, ungrammatical, and elliptical. By transcribing reality with ruthless accuracy, the dramatist arrives at the disintegrating language of the Absurd. It is the strictly

30. Ibid., p.20
logical dialogue of the rationally constructed play that is unrealistic and highly stylized. The objection to the statement is that we have all of us the feeling that when we speak we do try to speak more or less rationally.

6. **The Dumb Waiter** ³² - The characters in the play are Ben and Gus and the scene is a basement room in Birmingham and the time is the present. The two men are, evidently, employed as agents to murder people not wanted by their employers. They wait for instruction while a shaft comes down and goes up carrying food. The talk is incoherent but throughout there is a sense of impending danger. The enquiries about time made through the speaking tube indicate that the Zero hour has come and evidently Ben is required to kill Gus. "Gus goes out to the lavatory and while he is gone Ben receives an order over the speaking-tube which turns out to be that he must kill Gus. They confront each other as the curtain slowly falls."³³ The play has the characteristics we associate with Pinter's technique: suspense, a lack of understanding about what people mean, and a type of topsy-turvydom in speech. But out of all that is said and done the lurid light of a somewhat fearful prospect shines menacingly. The power and the literary

³¹ Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p. 205
³² Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* (Samuel French, London, 1960)
gifts of Pinter have earned him just esteem but one wonders whether his diagnosis of the modern situation is really in accord with experience. But if it fails the criterion of realism, which evidently it does, there is for it vindication on the plane of symbolism and allegory.

Eugene Ionesco - Apart from experiments in technique as illustrated by the works of Beckett and Pinter, the subject-matter also registers important changes in the recent writers. There is more psychology of the abnormal kind along with resort to subtle feelings and despondencies. What we now notice in an increasing measure is the exploration of the unconscious. Hence the frequency with which fantasies are found as an element in drama and novel. In Ionesco's plays illusion and actuality are fused together in a kind of fantasy. He writes explaining his point of view:

"Creation ... is life, it is liberty, it can even be counter to the conscious desires (these are seldom fundamental desires) and to the prejudices of the creator." 34 Eugene Ionesco's experiments in drama are based upon his knowledge of two fundamental states of consciousness, "an awareness of evanescence and of solidity, of emptiness and of too much presence, of the unreal transparency of the world and its

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34. "Reality in Depth", Encore V, 1958, 10.
opacity, of light and of thick darkness." According to Donald Watson who writes a retrospect for the second volume of the plays, they represent the following styles: "banality, exaggeration, (to include repetition and inconsequence), illogicality, dislocation and elevation." As regards dislocation of language we notice that he either invents words or telescopes or distorts them, e.g., 'chronometrable', 'eulogue', 'aristocroot', 'abracchante', 'mononster' etc.

7. We can briefly examine one of Ionesco's short plays "The New Tenant" so as to gain some access to his ideas and technique. "The New Tenant" seems to be a characteristic illustration of what Ionesco describes as "an awareness of evanescence and of solidity" by way of a key to the interpretation of the plays. The new tenant arrives to take possession and has the usual exchanges with the caretaker. Although provoked by her, he does not show any acerbity of temper. The furniture comes pouring in, covers the room from floor to ceiling, also the stairs and the road outside, and finally even the walls themselves seem to make passage for its entry. This is almost a surrealistic technique in which the actual merges into fantasy. The new

tenant turns off the lights in order to lie in his chair quietly and enjoy the accumulations by which he is surrounded. The picture of his grand parents looks down upon him from a high place on the wall. What are we to make of the gaze they cast upon him? Perhaps they represent the past, the tradition nearly lost, being a contrast to the entirely meaningless quest for possession to which the modern man may easily succumb. But other interpretations may also be possible. The effect of the scene on the stage may be that of an impasse symbolizing the present state of the world, steadily forcing us into a position from which there is no escape. Ionesco will rank as dramatist of the inner world of the mind. His accounts of actual things are often casual, for he uses these to introduce mental states of two kinds mentioned above. The following comment may offer an insight into the fact: "In the theatre the emergence of the Ionesco cult of the absurd refuses to admit order or meaning anywhere into drama. But the area of human experience with which such art deals has been whittled down and down. Once the main concern of the writer was with Man and God, or man and his universe; then it shrank further to the individual man and his society. Now the main area of concern and conflict is
within the individual man." "After the Tranquillized Fifties", by C. B. Cox and A. R. Jones, The Critical Quarterly, (Summer 1964 Vol.6, No.2 p.119). Ionesco's contemporaneity in art is undeniable. His plays do not provide a coherent picture but the elements which keep on appearing again and again, reveal the troubles and preoccupations of the modern mind. This would be seen very clearly from an examination of a three-act play, "Rhinoceros". The characters become transformed into rhinoceroses. The cause is speculatively analyzed in the play itself as a predisposition in favour of nature and rural life. This view is abandoned when the trouble rages through the whole city. It is now described as a new kind of plague, as rhinocerites. The rhinoceroses did not do any harm beyond trampling down a cat and destroying a rather ramshackle staircase in trying to climb it. Only one man escapes; he is a drunkard but humble and considerate by nature. Are we to suppose that human sensibility is being lost through increasing mechanization of life; that the only resistant to this is inebriation and its consequent tendency to self-forgetfulness, and the cultivation of a spirit of humility? Perhaps such simple answers lead us nowhere in trying to get at the author's purpose. What
is evident is the novelty of the reaction in the plays to the business of living in the modern world. As contemporaries of the playwright we can enter into his spirit without being fully able to analyze it. The absurd position is a recurring element in Ionesco.

8. In one play "Jacques or Obedience" a bride is preferred because she has three noses to another who has only two! Does this mean that human efficiency is judged in terms of a machine; that the more of a thing like a double or triple engine is a recommendation and proof of worth also in a human being?

9. In "The Motor Show" a young man chooses a car as his bride and borrows a nose which he returns.

10. In "Foursome" three young men propose to own the same girl and in the scramble which ensues she loses her hands and legs. These examples well indicate the absurdities in the Ionesco play.

11. The writer himself explains his position in "Improvisation". As a background to his drama one should remember an incident he had once witnessed in a village street. This was a shepherd embracing a chameleon. The latter term might

have been properly glossed so that the picture could grow
definite in our minds. He seems to accept this as a kind
of metaphor to describe his relation to the theatre. He
is the shepherd he says, and the theatre is the chameleon.
In other words, he realizes that the vitality of the
theatre cannot be manifested within the four corners of
an academic theory. It is constantly changing and the
dramatist works in the full knowledge of this continually-
changing aspect of his beloved whom he wishes to serve.
Ionesco mentions Brecht and other dramatists, including
those of ancient Greece. From his own contemporaries he
seems a little different but he does not indicate how he
is related in his own estimation to Shakespeare and the
classics. On the subject of his absurd philosophy his comments
are valuable. Psychoanalytical writers present their material
after treating its rawness out of existence. He insists on
preserving the rawness without any change for the sake of the
art he practises. He thus seems to be close to the surrealists
in his attitude and the absurdities are, therefore, capable
of interpretation in terms of the Freudian subconsciousness.

12. In " Victims of Duty" 42 described as a pseudo drama,
Madeleine Choubert discusses drama from the earliest times
to the present. The husband holds that dramas

42. Ionesco's " Victims of Duty", Plays Vol.II (John Calder,
have always been realistic and that, there has always been a detective about. Unlike the remarks quoted earlier, which suggest the theatre as a medium never the same for more than once, here we have the idea of a kind of a cast-iron frame, rigid and not susceptible of change. But it is possible that in making this comment the idea of a different type of drama seems to have been present in the speaker's mind. For what he calls detective drama he likens to a mode of naturalism. His own practice as a dramatist thus introduces a completely new type of experience.

13. In "The Lesson" an old professor seems to hypnotise a little girl into consenting to the sexual act. The pupils are his victims and in a sense they die and are buried comically because it seems that he will have no further contact with them. The professor is an experienced hand and diabolically induces a feeling of helpless inferiority, preceding an abject surrender for which this seems a preparation.

14. "The Chairs" is a fantasy of a nonagenarian married couple. The old man was a Quartermaster-General with a

43. Ibid., p.269
44. Ibid., p.270
46. Ionesco may perhaps owe to De Sade's Justine some idea about the old professor, in his "The Lesson". Doctor Rodin in Justine (Ch,8) used to have a number of students under his care. One of them Julie, is lashed by him with a leather
nostalgia for childhood and a sense of frustration because he could not rise in life higher than he did. An evening is celebrated as an occasion of a great gathering to which even the Emperor is supposed to come. No one is visible to the audience yet the flow of talk goes on and the old man declares that he has a message which an orator appointed by him will deliver. The orator arrives very late and writes something on the blackboard which nobody understands. The couple have already jumped out of the window in a suicide mania. Here again a suppressed sense of personal failure manifests itself as a demand for fulfilment with all the paraphernalia required for such a purpose. After fulfilment there is nothing else to live for. The old man constantly howling for his 'mummy' seems to illustrate a psychological fact discovered in this century that one takes refuge so to


48. Albert Camus while analysing the absurd sensibility finds the suicide mania a truly philosophical problem. He says: "An act like this is prepared within the silence of the heart, as is a great work of art. The worm is in man's heart....In a sense, and as in melodrama, killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing...
speak in childhood, or the mother's womb in certain circumstances. As the theatre is an absurd theatre we must not look for coherence in the pattern and seek for the identification of the audience, the Emperor and the orator. They seem to be necessary to the fulfilment desired and it may be wrong to see in them any symbolism other than what the occasion imposes.

"Maid to Marry" is a curious play,—the lady's daughter is introduced as a man about thirty years old, robust and virile, with a bushy black moustache, (p. 158 Vol. 3) and her mother introduces her as a woman aged ninety-three explaining: "She owes us' eighty years, so that makes her only thirteen." There is discussion about nationalities, about the French, the English and the Corsican, and also about progress, mechanization, etc. The attitude to these questions will seem frivolous in view of their grave


"... the fact is that being inside a whale is a very comfortable, cosy, homely thought. The historical Jonah, if he can be so called, was glad enough to escape, but in imagination, in day-dream, countless people have envied him. The whale's belly is simply a womb big enough for an adult. There you are, in the dark, cushioned space that exactly fits you, with yards of blubber between yourself and reality, able to keep up an attitude of the completest indifference, no matter what happens."

importance. The attempt to concede some value to them seems a mode of debunking. This attitude is characteristic of Ionesco whom we never see launching upon a Shavian discussion or argument with a view to propaganda.*

What Ionesco offers is not facts but a semblance of facts and out of these he produces feelings and emotions which seem perfectly normal. While the former is difficult to understand, for they are mostly wildly fantastic in character, the latter appear to be quite genuine stuff and although we cannot connect the two yet one seems well related to the other by reason of a disordered psychology, being the expression of neurosis from which humanity in our day seems especially to suffer. The obscurities, the confusions, the excitement, the solitude the sexual urge

* In this reference it may be pointed that some critics are of opinion that a 'strong didactic impulse' is present in the works of Ionesco. The following note which appeared in the T.L.S. for April 1, 1965 seems suggestive on the point we are discussing: "It is the hazard of writers who depend on dreams and private obsessions that their careers may be no longer than a course of analysis: creation becomes a form of therapy, with the inescapable consequence that success in psychological terms also brings artistic death.... The fact that the public are impressed by pundits and clear messages in no way compensates for the imaginative loss involved." T.L.S. April 1, 1965, Player Into Pundit, Eugene Ionesco: Notes and Counter-Notes. Translated by Donald Watson. 279 pp. Calder. 35s.
and its disappointment, the prevailing sense of frustration and the desire to pass on to something for the benefit of futurity, all belong to our world and indicate what we can see as a strong human impulse even in the midst of mechanization encroaching so dangerously upon human relations. If we are so fond of machines why should we not beget machines - marry them and live with them? The preferences are dictated not by aesthetic standards but by a purely numerical one. Choice is bestowed upon one having more of the same thing than another, three noses are preferred to two. Is there an implied satire on modern civilization? Are not our desires and our modes of life relentlessly exposed and laughed at by this fable of our modern life? Or do we see in Ionesco's attitude a reflection of Picasso's policy in art where ethics and moral issues demand more attention than the 'beautiful harmonies'? "My landscapes", he writes, "are exactly like my nudes and my still lifes; but with faces people see the nose is crooked, whereas nothing shocks them about a bridge. But I drew this 'crooked nose' on purpose. I did what was necessary to force people to see a nose. Later on they saw - or they will see - that the nose isn't crooked at all. What I had to do was to stop them from
going on seeing only 'beautiful harmonies' or 'exquisite colour'."  

Bertolt Brecht. The descriptions applied to Brecht's drama sometimes appear to be in conflict. Peter Demetz declares, "Brecht's theatrical concepts were very much in the antirealistic tradition of the European theater." Another writer, I. Fradkin, contributing to the same volume, speaks of "the general recognition of Brecht as a remarkable representative of socialist realism." Fradkin elucidates the point a little farther on. In doing this Brecht is his authority:

"The experience of several of these writers (Dickens, Grimmelshausen, Cervantes, Swift, Tolstoy, Voltaire, Balzac, and Hašek) - Brecht emphasizes - testifies that realism does not exclude the creation of characters and situations which are improbable from the point of view of ordinary plausibility, and that fantasy and invention are completely legitimate methods for a realistic artist."

This would seem to mean that the intrusion of the

53. Ibid., p.102
54. Ibid., p.103
supernatural does not falsify the human scene, that improbabilities do not sacrifice its essential truth.

Hans Mayer observes: 'In our own time we have seen Bertolt Brecht applying all his genius as a playwright and all his sharpness as a thinker to establishing the need for a "non-Aristotelian dramaturgy and drama."' 55 Sergey Tretiakov gives a chart in which we can see in two columns the attributes of the Aristotelian and those of the Epic Theatre, set down for a study of their contrasting trends. Of the latter the following in his estimate are the distinguishing features:

"Narrative

Makes the spectator an observer and arouses his will to action

Calls for decisions and a world outlook

Argument

The spectator is taught

Man is a subject of investigation

Interest in the course of the action

Every scene is independent

Montage

Intellect"

In Little Organon for the Theatre (1948) Brecht, though an anti-Aristotelian writes with reverence for the author of the Poetics: "When stating that the theater


56. Brecht, Edited by Peter Demetz, p.24
has emerged out of ritual, one is only saying that in the process of coming out it became theater; it probably did not retain the ritual intent of the mysteries, but rather the pleasure in it, pure and simple. And that catharsis of Aristotle, the purification through fear and pity, or from fear and pity, is a washing which is not only produced in a pleasant manner, but actually for the purpose of pleasure.\textsuperscript{57} Hans Egon Holthusen observes that if Brecht's art and theory are compared with those of the so-called absurd theatre "then he stands decisively on Aristotle's side."\textsuperscript{58} Raymond Williams in an important article, published in "The Critical Quarterly" under the title "The Achievement of Brecht" quotes a remark made by Brecht on publication of his \textit{Three Penny Opera}: "... Complex seeing must be practised..." 'The idea of "complex seeing"... was his most original dramatic contribution.' (Summer 1961, pp.155-156) One may perhaps say that this 'complex seeing' when brought to bear upon \textit{The Good Woman of Setzuan} will enable one to realize that it is impossible to be good and to live. Mr. Peachum voices the sentiments in \textit{The Threepenny Opera}: Who would not like to be a good and kindly person? ... But circumstance won't have it so!

\textit{(Brecht edited by Peter Demetz, p.128)
16. Walter H. Sokel gives a short critical summary of
The Good Woman of Setzuan which brings out the nature of
the problem so well that we are tempted to quote it:
"Shen Te would like to give all her possessions away to
make everyone happy because her nature thrives on giving.
But her other self Shui Ta is compelled to be calculating,
mean, and profit-minded in order to save Shen Te's property
and thereby to make it possible for her to indulge her
generosity in the future. As Shui Ta she denies her
nature, in order to fulfill it as Shen Te. As Shui Ta
she must exploit and deceive her lover, to whom - as Shen
Te - she gives herself without reservations. As Shui Ta
she adjusts to and manipulates her environment which
victimizes Shen Te. As Shui Ta she assures her survival
which Shen Te recklessly endangers. As Shui Ta she
safeguards her livelihood but cripples her life; as Shen
Te she fulfills her life but forfeits her livelihood.
Making a living swallows living; livelihood devours life.
The means defeat the end they are to serve." Brecht's
purpose seems to be to create modern myths of universal
validity and it makes little difference to him whether
this concerns a Chinese or a European background.

In The Good Woman of Setzuan we have a prologue and
an epilogue and sixteen scenes, serially numbered as, 1, I-A, etc.

59. Brecht edited by Peter Demetz, p.128
The woman who plays the chief role gives shelter to the gods. She was a prostitute, but her divine visitors honour her for her compassionate nature. They give her money but she loses it quickly. At the end she comes to her senses under divine guidance, pulling herself out of her difficulties as well as those around her. For a number of scenes she plays a dual role, as a strict supervisor of property and again, as one giving unstintingly to relieve human distress. Wang, the water carrier, is an intermediary between the gods and Shen Te.

"The Good Woman of Setzuan is a brilliant matching of Brecht's essential moral complexity with a dramatic method which can genuinely embody it. The moral framework is explicit, as it was in Strindberg's Dreamplay, in the traditional device of the gods visiting earth to find a good person. But the action which this initiates is clearer in Brecht than in Strindberg, because the central perception is more precise. In his early plays Brecht had been attracted to morally ambiguous characters, whom he could use to point a cynical paradox about conventional morality. In The Good Woman of Setzuan these feelings have developed and clarified. He can now invite us to look at what happens to a good person in a bad society,
not through argument, but through a dramatic demonstration....
If it is always a sin against life to allow oneself to be
destroyed by cruelty or indifference or greed, then
goodness is trapped in an intolerable dilemma: the real split
in consciousness which a purely individual morality, seriously
lived through, inevitably leads to: Goodness turns into
its opposite, and then back again, and then both co-exist,
for the dilemma is beyond individual solution. And this
is conveyed with simplicity and power in Shen Te's
transformation of herself into her tough male cousin,
Shui Ta, who is first a disguise and then in effect takes
on an independent existence.... This is "complex seeing"
integrated in depth with the dramatic form, and it is
carried right through in that there is no imposed resolution -
the tension is there to the end, and we are formally invited
to consider it."60

The epic convention associated with the Brecht drama
is however, opposed to the ruling convention deriving from
Aristotle. There are several notable dramatists who have
adopted Brecht's technique like Thornton Wilder, Max Frisch,
and Friedrich Dürrenmatt.61 The idea termed "Verfremdung"

60. Raymond Williams's "The Achievement of Brecht"The Critical
translated as "estrangement" and also as "alienation" remained a constant sense throughout Brecht's career. Brecht's view was that once the world was presented as strange, it would arouse the desire in the spectator to alter it. He thought to achieve this end by innovating a theatre in which there should be no possibility of connexion between spectator and stage. He believed that in the Aristotelian form of drama, the spectators were purged by fear and pity, and their feelings were used up in the witnessing of purely theatrical events. According to Brecht the dramatic form of the theatre along with other things emphasizes man to be unalterable, to be fixed and 'feeling' is given the predominant place; correspondingly, the epic form of the theatre regards man as alterable and altering, man as a process, and reason is emphasized with great stress. Production technique helped to achieve estrangement. "He (Brecht) often required very strong illumination of the stage throughout, even in night-time scenes, to avoid giving the spectator any opportunity of sinking into reverie or of feeling himself linked in the darkness with those around him. Similarly, in early days he required the spotlights and
floods to be actually visible on stage.... He denied emotion, as he denied beauty, as an indulgence that could not be afforded while suffering still existed elsewhere. Only rational thought would serve to change the human situation as he saw it."

To achieve complete alienation the style of acting also required a radical change. Brecht maintained that his actors should maintain the same distance from the characters they were portraying as the audience was expected to adopt. "The methods by which this attitude was inculcated were numerous. Actors were encouraged at rehearsals to translate their speeches into the third person, preceding them with the words "He said", or to describe their actions in the past tense as they performed them." This acting technique becomes quite evident in the play The Good Woman of Szechuan when the good woman "Shen Te assumes a mask of harsh oppressiveness and turns into the business man Shui Ta, so that each of her twin personalities recalls the possibility of the other; neither is fixed and unalterable. He who said No repeats almost identically the plot and situations of He who said Yes (much as the second act of Beckett's Waiting for Godot.


63. Ibid., p. 65.
repeats the first act - a surely not fortuitous coincidence); seeing much the same events enacted a second time, the audience can afford to sit back and think, rather than allow itself to be carried away by the action. In The Caucasian Chalk Circle a narrator is introduced to offer the audience necessary facts, and songs used elsewhere to comment on or predict the action.

17. Jean Paul Sartre. Crime Passionnel by Jean Paul Sartre embodies some elements of 'Existentialist' philosophy, seen against a political background. Written in French, this is a play in five scenes with a Prologue and an Epilogue. The central interest belongs to a murder committed by Hugo at the instigation of the party but the true explanation is that it was a crime passionnel, inspired by sexual jealousy. It is a play of doubts, hesitations and delays, in which the hero's self-questioning is skilfully dramatized. After serving a sentence of imprisonment for five years reduced to two because of good conduct, Hugo is released and the party decided to put him to death lest he should do mischief from independence of spirit and the habit of unrestrained speech. Olga, a

64. Ibid., p.66.
member of the party, pleaded for his life and thought that an enquiry into the cause of the murder might vindicate him. Her plea was granted and only a few hours were allowed for conducting the enquiry after which the members would return for the final verdict.

The twenty-three year old Hugo remembered every detail of what had happened two years before and now started on the recital. Son of a rich man he was a journalist by profession. He left his father to forget old associations and to live for the new faith the party represented. Its original doctrine in which he believed was threatened by a compromise formula so as to promote a new coalition. One of the sponsors of this move was the leader whose murder was thought necessary by the party members. Hugo volunteered himself for the job. He went to the leader's residence as his secretary, accompanied by his wife, a pretty girl, who though clever was not interested in politics. Hugo took a revolver with him; his wife Jessica hid it so effectively that the search made, on arriving at the leader's house did not expose them. Ten days passed yet the murder could not be committed. A talk about coalition was held with certain important people. One could see that things would go ahead unless prompt measures
were taken at this stage. Olga threw a hand grenade into the conference room, causing but a slight damage. Hugo had chance to kill the leader but he did nothing. On the night of the outrage the leader sat talking with Hugo far into the night. He explained that the compromise he aimed at would not immediately benefit the party. But it would save life, it would ultimately establish the classless society. Hugo did not agree. Jessica, on the other hand, found the standpoint attractive and was fascinated by the leader's sense of personal solitude. Next day, the leader met Jessica in his office. She was trying to seduce him and finally he responded by taking her in his arms and kissing her. At this point Hugo entered the room and fired three shots at him, killing him. The leader directed his body-guard not to retaliate because he declared this was not a political murder. Hugo himself did not know the exact reason. It could not have been love for Jessica, for he did not love her enough. In the Epilogue Olga tells him that the slain leader's views have now gained acceptance. There is, therefore, no reason to justify the murder or make it necessary. Let him not, therefore, own up this murder. The assassinated leader is having statues erected
in his honour and streets are named after him. Hugo could, therefore, be a member of the party and enjoy confidence. This he chose not to do. Here we have the existentialist choice which he made with full awareness of what he was doing. This was not merely a party murder under orders, which had to be executed. He would not sacrifice his humanity, nor would he whittle down the business to an act of jealousy or to accident. Honour was due to the leader for his conviction and also to himself for serving his ideal. Thus at the last moment he chose death by which the greatness of his own ideal could be vindicated. This is a tragedy and exemplifies the kind of elevated drama that could possibly take place in the century. In our day intellectual conviction sometimes acquires a passionate quality so that a man can lay down his life at this altar and represent not only himself but a widening class.

The concluding words of Hugo suggest the cause of the murder to be political. He desired to give an especial clarity to the political purpose behind the act so that it could not be clouded by issues belonging to personal life.
A comment of Mr. Styan on Crime Passionnel may be found interesting. As a critic of the elements of drama Mr. Styan emphasizes that plays are meant to be judged in performance. But he says: "In his anxiety to demolish the obvious reasons for the assassination, M. Sartre neglects to give his audience a positive lead." Audience participation is a force in the nature of drama; if the audience is not familiar with a philosophy proposed by the author complete participation becomes a problem. Styan comments: "We may have been willing to accept Hoederer's death as a noble one by normal standards, and we may see Hugo's decision to make it a worthy one as giving credit to Hoederer and not to Hugo. Yet the focus of the action to the end is properly on Hugo and his fate. We see him give himself over with an ironical bow to what he knows to be death. The ironical bow could be the gesture of the traditional villain making his surrender to the forces of justice. Does he thereby redeem his existentialist manhood or his Christian soul? After only a light struggle, the audience is likely to choose the latter. There is no harm in M. Sartre's offering unusual circumstances to demonstrate his

principles, but they must be fully realized in terms
neither sensational nor arbitrary if the play is to
avoid being simply melodramatic." 68

18. Max Frisch. Andorra by Max Frisch, is in
twelve scenes and is not, therefore, strictly speaking,
short play. The prose dialogue usually comprised short
speeches, interspersed with rather long ones by Andri
and Senora. The purpose, evidently, is to paint the
atrocities on Jews under Hitler. This is done by means
of a love story between Andri and Barblin. It is a
passionate episode but is clouded by the discovery that
they are both children of the same father. Great misery
follows and is augmented to tragic intensity. The
youngman is convicted as a Jew by a Jew Detector and is
executed. The anti-semitic fever rages giving rise to
torture, shame and execution on a mass scale. Barblin,
having loved a jew is to pay the penalty of having her
head shaved clean. The Priest gives the final account
of what happened after Andri's execution. Her (Barblin's)
father has hanged himself in the schoolroom. "She is
looking for her father, she is looking for her hair, she
is looking for her brother." 69 In itself the play does not

68. Ibid.

69. Max Frisch's Andorra translated by Michael Bullock,
(Methuen & Co.Ltd., 1964), p.89.
present any new point of interest technically or in the presentation of the theme. For the view of Hitler's regime and the genocide of the Jews have drawn hundreds of pictures. This one will belong to the same class and will probably be regarded as one of the most vivid and gruesome among the stories written on the subject.

19. The Fire Raisers 70 by Max Frisch was first produced on 29 March 1958 in Zurich and in Great Britain in 1961. Edna O'Brien in Encore (quoted in the short preface to the play), praises the work for its allegory, its wit and the adult European brain evidenced in it. The fire raisers are better understood as men who destroy and by doing so play an essential role in society. Until the ground is swept clean it cannot be fit for new constructions. The fire raisers are thus revolutionaries and forerunners. And against them we see Biedermann, a capitalist sitting on piles of money, believing as Dr. Johnson did, that few occupations are more innocent than that of making money. The capitalist and his wife die and they find themselves in hell with several others whom they recognize and who are in their opinion deservedly there. The fire raisers arrive in the form of angels. The idea which the word suggests is that transgressions are no longer punished in hell but are

forgiven. The morality idea of good and evil is discarded by the assumption that no one is to be penalized. This view seems to be in harmony with what Jesus had said about the sun shining on the just and the unjust. Evidently, God does not differentiate as man does. The capitalist believes himself worthy of divine grace because in his estimate he has never done any wrong. Yet we learn that Johann Knechtling put his head into the gas oven because the capitalist denied him a hope which he had rightly cherished. No one is absolutely free from sin and a close scrutiny would justify punishment for all. The fire raisers are clothed as angels, and make their appearance in the second part. As they bring about changes and revolutions in human society the pair of wings serve them to carry out their job with the necessary swiftness of movement. The play is allegorical and perhaps also not without some kind of symbolism. The plot includes the modern situation without any harangue on the injustice and violence of our times and the perpetual uncertainty they breed, giving rise to suspense and anxiety. What is even more significant is the force of optimism with which it delivers its final message. The author goes back to Jesus and picks up the idea of hell's being out of date from the Sermon on the Mount.
Absurd Drama (Penguin Plays) to which Martin Esslin contributes an Introduction contains four plays, two of which are in one-act. These are "The Two Executioners" by Fernando Arrabal and "The Zoo Story" by Edward Albee. As regards the former, Martin Esslin's view is that its "theme is the exploration of a complex image of the mother-son relationship"; and "The Zoo Story", according to the same authority, presents "an image of the difficulty of communication between human beings in our world." \(^{71}\)

We shall briefly analyse the plays and try to ascertain whether what is said about their themes is also our view on the subject.

20. Fernando Arrabal. "The Two Executioners" gives the story of a wife who informs against her husband. As a result, he is flogged in a torture-chamber from which his groans reach her and her two children. One of them, Maurice, is apparently the father's pet and the other, Benoit, the mother's. Maurice is violently angry with his mother when she proposes to apply salt and vinegar to the afflicted man's wounds. She, nevertheless, does this, tragically increasing the sufferer's woes. Death, however, relieves the poor man. Maurice, although thrown into misery,

finally kisses his mother at Benoit's invitation. The two children are thus reconciled. The picture of the future is painted by the mother's darling, "we'll all three live together without ill-feeling; Mother, you, and me. What could be more wonderful?"72 No explanation is offered of the mother's behaviour as regards her husband except what she says to the Executioners and her own account of the self-sacrifice she had made in not enjoying her life like other women "going to dances, cafés, cinemas!"73 Her words to the Executioners by which she betrays her husband are far from explicit: "I came to see you because I can't stand it any longer. It's about my husband... The being in whom I placed all my hopes, the man to whom I gave the best years of my life and whom I loved as I would never have thought I could love... Yes, yes, yes, he is guilty."74 The operative motive appears to be jealousy and the wife, taking advantage of what seems the husband's complicity in a political crime, exposes him and is thus able to take revenge. She loved him as no man was loved before but perhaps his heart was pre-engaged, perhaps he

72. Ibid., p.154
73. Ibid., p.142
74. Ibid., p.141
loved another. The children were by no means her first thought though they serve to fill a void. Here we have therefore, more a study in jealousy and revenge than an attempt to paint "the complex image of the mother-son relationship." This latter seems to be an element of secondary importance in the play.

21. Edward Albee. "The Zoo Story" has only two characters, Peter and Jerry. On a Sunday afternoon Peter is reading a book on a bench in Central Park. Jerry starts a talk, telling him "I've been to the Zoo."75 They were complete strangers to each other. Peter, at first reluctant, is drawn into a conversation in the course of which he gives various information about himself - that he earns eighteen thousand a year, that he is married and has a wife and two daughters; that there are two parakeets and a cat as pets in the family. Similarly, Jerry also describes the four-storey house where he lives, particularly the dog which is unfriendly to him and which he had tried to kill. From his attempt to poison it he evolved a philosophy not unlike that of Brecht as illustrated by his conception of Shen Te and Shui Ta in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*: "I have learned that neither

75. Ibid., p.159
kindness nor cruelty by themselves, independent of each
other, creates any effect beyond themselves; and I have
learned that the two combined, together, at the same time,
are the teaching emotion."76 At the end Jerry tosses a
knife at Peter's feet, which he picks up. With a rush
Jerry charges Peter and impales himself on the knife.
He advises Peter to hurry back home to avoid the police
and wipes the knife's handle to remove finger-prints.
His last words are, "Oh...my...God."77 Once only is the
problem of communication suggested. When Jerry asks
Peter if he has a wife, we are told that he bewildered
by the seeming lack of communication, says: "Yes!"78
Although Martin Esslin speaks of "an image of the difficulty
of communication" as the play's theme, this is not the view
we form after reading it. What Blackham suggests as one
of the causes giving rise to Existentialism seems to explain
Jerry's death and behaviour more adequately: "the situation
of the person lost in the masses of a progressive society,
one among many, isolated and organized."79 Jerry's last act
seems to be the outcome of loneliness and frustration. The
visit to the Zoo symbolically suggests a return to childhood

76. Ibid., p.176
77. Ibid., p.185
78. Ibid., p.161
79. H. J. Blackham's Reality, Man and Existence (Bantam
associations. It is there that he made up his mind to put an end to his life. The method is novel but it apparently saves him from the guilt of suicide.

The story is a bitter satire on American civilization where life seems to slip down to the animal level. The occupations and interests of life are devoid of beauty and whether we are braying like a beast or crying like a demented person, the sense of malady spreading through whole of society seems the most outstanding factor in the situation.

22. Edward Albee in a note to "The Sand Box" states that in the speeches of the characters, "there should be no suggestion of regionalism." The characters are the members of a family with a nonagenarian grandmother about to die. A young man in a bathing suit, continually practising callisthenics, is introduced as the Angel of Death. The scene opens on a bare stage, the grandma being placed in a sand-box. There is no particular emotion in those watching her pass away, nor in the grandmother at the moment of her death. She groans a little but at the same time, says how she had lost her husband at thirty and

had brought up her daughter all by herself. The words are forms of gesture, and we are told about some sorrow due to bereavement in what seems an off-hand manner. "We must put away our tears, take off our mourning ... and face the future. It's our duty." Grandma herself addresses the Angel of Death, "You're... you're welcome... dear."

This is shown in a tableau. The originality which is claimed on behalf of the play is seen in a minimum of action; practically nothing happens except the death which is also normal and is hardly mourned by anyone; a deficiency in affection between the mother and daughter may be the explanation and indicates a certain measure of emotional decay, probably meant to characterize the loneliness and isolation in the highly organized life in the West. It is the tableau form of presentation which introduces an element of novelty. The grandmother's throwing about the sand at her daughter and her attempt at burying herself in sand have a comic effect whether intended or not. The dialogue is scrappy and lacks meat: It is without eloquence or brilliance.

23. "The Death of Bessie Smith" is concerned with the Black and White problem in America. Bessie is a negro

81. Ibid., p.18
82. "The Death of Bessie Smith", Two Plays by Edward Albee (1965)
woman and does not make her appearance in the play. She is
involved in a car accident and dies without medical aid.
This is denied in the hospitals for the White. Among other
things, the loss of values is what the dramatist underlines.
The moral and social inhibitions are alike gone. A young
woman, for example, will enter into physical relations
with a man but will marry where there is money. In giving
this picture and that of the collapsing family relationships
Albee's attitude is highly critical.

The Theatre of the Absurd in its present form has
a history of hardly more than twenty years behind it.
The practitioners, grouped under this label, present a
variety of characteristics. These do not constitute a
movement, such as the term generally implies. The only
unifying element among these dramatists has been
described by Martin Esslin as the use of the "poetic
image": "in all of them the poetic image is the focus
of interest." Esslin sums up in a single sentence the
implications of the label: "A term like the Theatre of the
Absurd must therefore be understood as a kind of intellectual
shorthand for a complex pattern of similarities in approach,

method, and convention, of shared philosophical and artistic premises, whether conscious or subconscious, and of influences from a common store of tradition."\(^{84}\)

Martin Esslin has linked up the sense of the loss of meaning which lies at the root of the Absurd Drama with a number of causes, social and spiritual. These are, in the first instance, the decay of religious faith, which started with the Enlightenment; the collapse of liberalism after the First World War; Stalin's totalitarian regime destroying the hope of radical social revolution, predicted by Marx; the Second World War and the genocide and barbarism under Hitler. These were followed by an increasing spiritual emptiness in Western Europe and America. "Suddenly man sees himself faced with a universe that is both frightening and illogical— in a word, absurd."\(^{85}\)

The explanation for the emergence of Existentialist thinking as given by H. J. Blackham seems very similar to this. According to him the causes, however, belong to the nineteenth century: (1) the situation in philosophy, following Kant and Hegel and the advance of the sciences; (2) the situation in Christianity after the Enlightenment; and (3) the situation of the person lost in the masses of a progressive society,

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84. Ibid., p. 9
85. Ibid., p. 13

* The illogical nature of the universe had prompted scientists, too, to make it a subject of their study and they have expressed the view that the ultimate laws of nature were not even causal. We are citing C.G. Jung who cites Jeans as his authority:— 'Sir James Jeans reckons radioactive decay among the causeless events which ... include
one among many, isolated and organized. Esslin has commented upon the fact that there is much common ground between Existentialist Philosophy and the Theatre of the Absurd, stating: "It is merely the philosophers and dramatists respond to the same cultural and spiritual situation and reflect the same preoccupations." Thus for Heidegger "death is the capital fact in the light of which human existence is to be interpreted. Men find themselves cast into the world to die. This is their inescapable destiny, the true meaning of all lives. It is the absolute point of view for human beings, from which everything is to be seen and judged, for the look of things from any other point of view is illusionary. Human life may be absurd from this point of view, but it is absurd to look at it from any other point of view." 88

Paris is the stronghold of the Theatre of the Absurd. Martin Esslin has pointed out that practically all writing synchronicity. He says: "Radioactive break-up appeared to be an effect without a cause, and suggested that the ultimate laws of nature were not even causal" (f.n. Physics and Philosophy (Cambridge 1942), p.127; cf. also p.151). This highly paradoxical formula, coming from the pen of a physicist, is typical of the intellectual dilemma with which radioactive decay confronts us. It, or rather the phenomenon of "half life", appears as an instance of a causal orderliness - a conception which also includes synchronicity..." pp.132-133. C.G. Jung's "Synchronicity An Acausal Connecting Principle", The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955).

86. See H. J. Blackham's Reality, Man and Existence, p.2
87. Martin Esslin's Absurd Drama, p.15
in the convention are real or virtual exiles. The attitude of mind which finds that the world is ceasing to make sense quite easily becomes that of the exile. How far-fung is the Theatre of the Absurd will appear from a reference to the names and nationalities of those whose works have either brought it into existence or contributed to its success and stability. The list is taken from Esslin's Introduction, mentioned above. Beckett (1906), Anglo-Irish; Ionesco (1912) half-French and half-Rumanian; Adamov (1908), a Russo-Armenian; Jean Genet (1910) is a Frenchman; Jean Tardieu (1903) and Boris Vian are also French; Dino Buzzati and Ezio d'Errico are Italians; Gunter Grass and Wolfgang Hildesheimer are Germans; N.F. Simpson, James Saunders, David Campton, and Harold Pinter are British. Slawomir Mrozek and Tadeusz Rozewicz are Poles. Fernando Arrabal (1932) is a Spaniard and Edward Albee an American.

Martin Esslin's concluding remarks regarding the Absurd School are worth quoting: "The realism of these plays is a psychological, and inner realism; they explore the human subconscious in depth rather than trying to describe the outward appearance of human existence." 

89. Martin Esslin's Absurd Drama, p.23