

ONTOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT: EMBODIMENT
AND ESSENCE IN THE THEATRE
OF THE ABSURD

by

JEREMY EKBERG

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ABSTRACT

Many of the plays of modern drama offer characters who struggle in uncertain and bizarre worlds to create meaning or some sense of identity for themselves. The uncertainty caused by constantly shifting values and traditions forces characters to metamorphose at each instant into new beings who in turn struggle to create meaning through language, games, and remembering, which are all types of ontological embodiment. Ontological embodiment is that process by which each character shapes the raw material of existence into successive representations of the self via actions which allow for the creation of identity.

Each embodiment can be evaluated in relation to other embodiments for its authenticity. The greater the extent to which an embodiment is concerned with the character himself rather than others, the greater the authenticity of that embodiment. The more authentic a particular character's embodiments are, the greater his ontological self-knowledge, that knowledge of the self which allows for independent thinking. This ontological self-knowledge enables characters to live without the burden of pre-established mores or values. These mores or values are often unquestioned by individual characters who live by their edicts without examining them for their beneficial or detrimental aspects.

Among the characters in the plays of Samuel Beckett, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Eugene Ionesco, only a few embody themselves with any real authenticity. The others, because they focus their ontological embodiments on others by attempting to change those others to suit their own needs or by trying to curry their favor, embody themselves inauthentically and as a result

fail to achieve the requisite ontological self-knowledge to think for themselves. Only Clov, of Beckett's *Endgame*, Kean and Anna of Sartre's *Kean*, and Berenger of Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, embody themselves in an authentic manner with any consistency. Clov is recalcitrant to his master Hamm, while Kean and Anna renounce the social hierarchy of England to start a new life in America and Berenger resists the temptation to become a rhinoceros. These actions prove that each of these characters focuses his embodiments on himself and his own ontological self-knowledge rather than on that of another.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and close friends who stood by me throughout the time taken to complete this often demanding dissertation. Thanks to Wendy, Mom, and Maria. Also, thanks to my astute committee for taking me to task on the elaboration of my ideas and my often tenuous sentence structure: Patti, Emily, Steve, Albert, and Fred.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“All the ancient Gods reappeared as demons at a later date, The dwellers in Olympus became evil spirits.”

– August Strindberg, “Tribulations”

“In vain do I fulfill the functions of a cafe waiter. I can be he only in the neutralized mode, as the actor is Hamlet, by mechanically making the *typical gestures* of my state and by aiming at myself as an imaginary cafe waiter through those gestures taken as an 'analogue.'”

– Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

Transformation, epiphany, renewal. Gods and mortals alike are capable of undergoing modification and indeed are compelled to undergo intermittent metamorphoses not only in physio-psychological terms, but in terms of their very essences, their beings. Strindberg's comments on the conversions of gods attest only to the inescapability of change for humans and for gods, who being immortal must necessarily undergo more transformations than their mortal counterparts while they live for eternity. As for Sartre, it is the gestures of an actor which actualize these transformation not only for thespians but for all subjects. Unlike the gods and mortals of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, however, what is significant about these alterations is not the change itself. The incessant renewal involved in each particular change is what is significant: each state of being is chosen each instant because subjects are never complete or stable. Even an epiphany is not an isolated incident to be experienced and then remembered as something complete and unalterable. With each moment of his life, each subject undergoes the radical reformation of his entire being. For gods and mortals alike the creation of an essence is never completed once and for all, it is created with each thought and action and in each moment of

existence. The gods of Olympus constantly metamorphose into evil spirits. Greek and Roman mythology is rife with their mischief.

The manner in which any being remakes himself in each instant, with each action and for the entirety of his life, will reveal much about how subjects ontologically fashion an essence out of the existence thrust upon them by a force they do not understand, a force that according to existentialist philosophers including Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, is contingent and unjustifiable. In short, this force is one they do not comprehend and did not ask for. Being is already there for each individual. There are no ontological guidelines that explain why it is there or what the subject should do with it. Being is like a vast ocean. It overflows the subject, no one can explain how it formed, and it is larger than any individual subject. In the modern world more so than in the ancient, value systems have fallen away as valid avenues for self-creation. According to theorists including Albert Camus and Martin Esslin, in many ways, religion, politics, and even knowledge itself have lost their credibility because of the horrors of the twentieth century's world wars, holocausts, and genocides. As a result, the pure raw material of existence compels existent subjects to fashion some kind of essence which enables them *to be* in ontological terms and without the benefit of the guidance provided by traditional values. This process of making and remaking is perceptible through the actions of a given subject, which is why drama – and especially modern drama, because of its adept explorations of states of being – is the ideal genre in which to explore how consciousness and action work in tandem to fashion some kind of essence, some class of characteristics for each subject in ontological terms or for each character in dramatic terms.

Each subject's consciousness is divided. Sartre writes that conflict is at the heart of otherness (*Being and Nothingness*, 1943, 477). This conflict is obvious in the inter-subjective

struggles between subjects for sustenance, shelter, and affection. What is less obvious is how this conflict manifests itself in intra-conscious relations, i.e. within a single subject. Because a single consciousness is able to reflect upon itself, to meditate on its own thought patterns and to examine its own habits, it is necessarily divided into what Sartre calls the reflective and pre-reflective consciousness. But because each subject constantly decides what it will be, consciousness is also divided into the constructive and destructive tendencies which exist on a plane apart from the reflective and pre-reflective consciousnesses. These tendencies are more than mere physiological impulses, they are ontological forces which impel the subject to create his essence out of the raw material of existence. Each character remains compelled to simultaneously build up and tear down his entire being at every instant.

The stage space or the printed page is a laboratory in which these series of embodiments are obvious to the viewer or reader. Each action of Clov or Estelle or Berenger indicates the ways in which he or she embodies his or her ontological being through these actions and to what extent each embodiment is authentic and therefore productive rather than detrimental to his ontological self-knowledge. For example, because Clov embodies his being with his own subjecthood in mind rather than focusing his ontological energies on someone else, he has a greater level of authenticity in comparison to others whose embodiments are focused outwardly and comes to find a greater ontological self-knowledge by the end of Beckett's *Endgame* (1957). Although Clov remains in a frozen tableau at the culmination of the play, and though this stasis renders problematic any final assessment of his authenticity, if he does escape, it is his ontological self-knowledge which empowers him to escape the control of his overbearing master, Hamm. If this stasis means he fails to escape, he nevertheless gains some measure of authenticity. This can be seen in his assertiveness against Hamm's numerous clamorings and his

final refusal to heed his master's call¹. After all, each character, because of his intra-conscious split between the constructive and destructive tendencies, is unstable in ontological terms. He is therefore forced at each and every moment to tear down and simultaneously rebuild his ontological make-up, i.e. his essence.

But while Clov attains some measure of authenticity, other characters like Estelle of Sartre's *No Exit* (1944) fail to achieve it. Because of her projection of her ontological energies – not upon herself but upon Garcin and Ines – and because she incessantly courts their approbation, her embodiments are less authentic because so focused outwardly. She examines her own being very little, instead seeking approval from her two cellmates and thereby seeking to have an essence assigned to her. Therefore, her level of ontological self-knowledge is minimal and rather than creating her own essence she unquestioningly accepts one from other subjects. Essentially, she is unable to question her belief systems because her focus is so much not on herself but on others and how those others view her. As a result, she remains in her hellish cell for eternity.

Clearly the preceding examples are ones in which embodiment must be considered through inter-conscious relations. This again is why absurd drama is ideal for the examination of this process: the authenticity level of each character's embodiment is obvious via their actions and speech in an absurd world. The absurdity of these plays is especially crucial because it represents those phenomena of existence beyond the control of the individual. Things in the universe rarely make sense. It is up to the subject to make sense. How each character makes sense and how each character acts toward another character, the words they speak to one another, their characteristics in general, are all indicative of their level of authenticity. If they embody themselves in ways in which they focus on their own beings by concerning themselves primarily

¹ For Evan Horowitz's argument that Clov simultaneously stays and goes, see page 111.

with themselves and their embodiments, they have a greater level of authenticity than if they are focused on outward phenomena. Or, if their embodiments make obvious their lack of interest in interfering with the embodiments of others (by for example courting others' approbation), they can be said to possess a more authentic embodiment and therefore a more thorough ontological self-knowledge. This in turn enables them to form a worldview or system of values uniquely their own, one unencumbered by ready-made mores or values they may not fully accept upon thorough examination, an examination only possible with a thorough ontological self-knowledge. In their introduction to their compendium of writings by critical theorists, Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner assert that the twentieth century's new technologies, new forms of organizing labor, new class configurations and methods of social control ushered in an era which Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer called the "end of the individual," a time in which societies were essentially one dimensional and without internal opposition (*Critical Theory and Society*, 8-9). This era in turn led to an age in which working-class individuals failed to live examined lives in the Socratic sense, an age of what Heidegger calls "they" in which ready-made ideologies were plentiful and readily accepted.

After the defeat of the Nazis ushered in the Cold War, Esslin would make correlations between history and art in his landmark work *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961). Esslin astutely sets the context for the rejection of outmoded value systems in a passage which is worth quoting at length:

The Theatre of the Absurd, however, can be seen as the reflection of what seems to be the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time. The hallmark of this attitude is its sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found wanting,

that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions. The decline of religious faith was masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies. All this was shattered by the war (4-5).

The devastation of World War II was too much for many who endured that period of six years during which some 55 million people, soldiers and civilians, were killed in combat and genocide. As a result, not only religion, but the value systems built around progress, jingoism, and totalitarianism also failed in the eyes of those who once believed. This shattering of faith, according to Esslin, opened the door to acceptance of nontraditional drama which sprang up first in Paris, one of the many European capitals affected by the war. The new lack of viability of old beliefs influenced not just art but philosophy as well, which is why the Theatre of the Absurd can so easily be read with existential philosophy in mind.

As a result of this lack of viability, subjects found themselves forced to create their own subjective meaning in a world without meaning. The method by which each subject and indeed each character must fashion an essence is that of ontological embodiment. It is termed thusly because of Sartre's assertion that "Men do not act: what we call their acts are simple attributes of the substances they embody" (*Saint Genet*, 1963, 75). These substances are the essences of each subject rendered discernible only through embodiment. Heidegger and Sartre theorize ontological being in their treatises on subject formation, otherness, and the raw material of existence, but theorize little on how succeeding embodiments of a single subject result in that subject's ontological essence. The current study will add to this body of knowledge with a system based specifically on how ontological embodiment operates within a single consciousness and in the face of other subjects. This proposed system will show that more authentic embodiments

(those focused by a subject specifically on himself and without any desire to influence the embodiments of others) lead to a greater level of ontological self-knowledge, that knowledge which enables the subject to create an essence unfettered by what Heidegger termed the “they.” “They” is, according to Heidegger, that entity – made up of for example a society, a particular demographic, a family unit – which prescribes one's state-of-mind and determines a subject's belief systems. In his discussion of authentic reality, Herbert Marcuse stipulates that something is authentic when it is self-reliant and able to preserve itself (*Philosophy and Critical Theory*, 61, 1989), while Sartre writes in *Saint Genet* “... we are tempted to regard the information of our consciousness as dubious and obscure. This means that we have given primacy to the object which we are to Others over the subject we are to ourself” (43). What the latter quotation means is that it is difficult for the subject to break free from the “they” in order to be a free-thinking and enlightened individual, though this breaking away inevitably leads to an existence free from the impositions of others.

Furthermore, authentic embodiments lead to an essence through which the subject places himself in a better position to question the value systems he is exposed to throughout his existence, the value systems that according to John Killinger, have lost their efficacy. In his discussion of the Theatre of the Absurd, Killinger writes, “With the displacement of God and the traditional kind of religious hope has come a consequent displacement of the meaning of time and ordinary reality; these are obviously inventions of the mind, contrivances for handling the world more easily, now rendered silly and meaningless” (*World in Collapse*, 1971, 11-12). The displacement Killinger sees as a catalyst for absurd conceptions of the universe also results in the creation of absurd drama and of philosophical theories designed to deal with this displacement. The loss of feasibility of traditional belief systems (including religion) results in the void of

values which necessitate Heidegger's and Sartre's theories on the subjective creation of meaning for each subject and Beckett's and Ionesco's dramas which explore new conceptions of time and space.

As such, the current study will examine embodiment in conjunction with thorough examinations of select plays of the Theatre of the Absurd. This theatre is ideal for an examination of these ideas because of its being largely the product of the devaluation of traditional belief systems and its focus on explorations of states of consciousness, most notable in Beckett's plays. The works of Sartre are important here because of their stress on theatrical action, and Ionesco's because of their emphasis on language as a tool of inter- and intra-conscious communication. The incessant embodiments of characters upon the stage can teach us much about embodiment in general, since plays, because they are self-contained (in that they have beginnings and endings) and viewable or readable works, offer characters who embody their beings with their every thought and action. This idea of embodiment, in tandem with the examinations of selected plays, will through their foci on characterological and ontological exegesis, offer an awareness of new avenues of self-creation through which each subject may better comprehend how he fashions his own essence and how he may do so in ways that better enable him to live unencumbered by new or discredited belief systems not necessarily his own, belief systems that may actually be detrimental to a particular subject.

What has changed since the life of Socrates are the socio-historical events of world wars, genocides, and advances in technology, particularly those advances, like the atomic bomb, which enable devastation on a scale previously unimagined. These events and the concomitant loss of faith in traditional value systems have resulted in what Camus termed absurdity. During World War II, Camus wrote, "That universal reason, practical or ethical, that determinism, those

categories that explain everything are enough to make a decent man laugh” (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 21, 1940). Killinger takes a similar tack as he comments, “Whatever the cause of the absurdity, revolution or passage from innocence to experience, the sensing of man's loss of control is an important dimension of absurd existence. Movements, insurrections, times whirl around him. They are not of his making – though he may indeed have contributed to them – and he cannot stop them” (81). This utter powerlessness is obvious in the plays of Sartre, Beckett and Ionesco as characters appear defeated, lugubrious, and dispirited, tortured like Sartre's victors, beaten like Beckett's tramps, or turned into pachyderms. Other characters, however, realize that their lives are very much as they make them, that they create their own essences via authentic embodiments that focus not on outward phenomena but on their own being creations which enable them to avoid the pitfalls of hegemony and blind faith. The loss of control of which Killinger writes is also why the theories of Heidegger and Sartre are so crucial to readings of absurd drama. The ideas of these existential philosophers can greatly explicate otherwise difficult texts because of their focus on meaning creation in a world in which meaning is difficult to acquire.

In his preface to *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus argues that the worldwide destruction which resulted from the total war of World War II brought to the fore what he calls the feeling of absurdity and the problem of suicide. “[*The Myth of Sisyphus*] attempts to resolve the problem of suicide, as *The Rebel* attempts to resolve that of murder, in both cases without the aid of eternal values which, temporarily perhaps, are absent or distorted in contemporary Europe” (v). Written in 1940, the year in which the Nazis invaded France and the year after they took over Poland, Camus's essay offers an argument in which the debunking of traditional religious and moral values is taken for granted. Despite this loss of hope, Camus argues that suicide is not a valid

method of dealing with the absurdity of existence even for those who do not believe in God. “Although *The Myth of Sisyphus* poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert” (v). The creation Camus mentions is not merely artistic creation, although it is part of his vision. This creation is necessarily the ontological creation of the self so obvious in the plays of the absurdist genre, which sprang up in France in the aftermath of World War II. Camus's desert is nothing less than the arid landscape of twentieth century existence in which advances in technology, the mystification of language through propaganda, and the destruction brought on by two world wars have destroyed the viability of those things people once believed.

Because so influential on the Theatre of the Absurd and so influenced by his existential predecessors and contemporaries, Camus's essay deserves a more thorough treatment here. Camus contends that, “We get into the habit of living before acquiring the habit of thinking” (8). What is this habit other than Heidegger's “they”? What is it other than that mode of habit in which the subject finds herself unaware that she creates her own essence, her own meaning through the embodiments she wills before her own consciousness and those of others? This habit is detrimental, as Camus argues, to thinking, and in turn, to that ontological self-knowledge which is the key to an existence unfettered by interference from others and their ready-made (though outmoded) belief systems. Camus's “habit of living” is explored adeptly by Beckett, who offers up characters, like the tramps Vladimir and Estragon, who in *Waiting for Godot* (1953) are so encumbered by their unthinking habits they can remember nothing, at times not even their own names. What is perhaps more significant in Vladimir and Estragon is that they see no real alternative to the meaningless lives they lead; they remain unaware of their own freedom to

embody themselves as they see fit. Camus would argue that this results in subjects who refuse to confront the absurdity of existence.

Camus's oft-quoted definition of the absurd shows not only the subjective aspect of this absurdity – i.e. that it is experienced and combated on an individual level – but its theme of disillusionment as well.

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity (6).

These “bad reasons” are the outmoded value systems upon which subjects formerly relied for guidance and meaning creation. This “divorce between man and his life” resulted from historical events including the Holocaust which destroyed the old values.

In his chapter entitled “The Significance of the Absurd,” Esslin explains how the Theatre of the Absurd is an attempt to shock the unthinking subject into facing the realities of his condition, to instill in him that lost cosmic wonder at the universe, and to jostle him out of his trite, mechanical, complacent existence (351), an existence similar to the habit-ridden one of which Camus wrote. What is even more significant to the present study is Esslin's comment that this type of theatre satirically castigates the absurdity of lives lived unconscious and unaware of ultimate reality (351). This quality of being unaware is – like Heidegger's “they,” like the lives of Beckett's tramps – that state of unquestioning oblivion in which those subjects who embody themselves inauthentically are mired. Through the absurd, the playwrights of this genre seek to

awaken audience members to the fact that they may be living their lives unaware of this absurdity and of the necessity for authentic embodiments to deal with it.

Esslin, who coined the phrase that is the title of his book, offers an in-depth and thorough exploration of several of the movement's playwrights and their works. He also explains how the historical phenomena Kierkegaard and Camus saw as the catalysts for the devaluation of traditional beliefs have influenced absurd drama. Esslin argues that a sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of existence is the theme of Beckett's and Ionesco's plays (5). Sartre and Camus, on the other hand, although they treat this theme just as much as Beckett and Ionesco, do so through lucid and logically constructed reasoning, while Beckett and Ionesco employ avant garde dramatic techniques (6). The difference between Theatre of the Absurd and what Esslin calls Existentialist theatre which expresses the absurd is best explained by Esslin himself: "While Sartre or Camus express the new content in the old convention, the Theatre of the Absurd goes a step further in trying to achieve a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed" (6). So, although Sartre is not strictly speaking an absurdist, his philosophy and his plays are crucial to an understanding of the Theatre of the Absurd because they sprang from the same tradition of disillusionment and anxiety that inspired the works of Beckett and Ionesco.

As for the technical apparatuses which make a particular play absurd, Esslin contends that those works considered absurd generally showcase the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought. They also lack plot, development, characterization, and suspense, and have no beginning or end in traditional terms. They rely on scenes reflective of dreams and nightmares and feature dialogue like *non sequiturs* and rambling that parody the devaluation of language which resulted largely from the propaganda of two world wars (3-7). Esslin also lists

those theatrical traditions which influenced the Theatre of the Absurd, including pure theatre (scenic effects as they appear in the circus, revue, or acts of jugglers, acrobats, and mimes), clowning, verbal nonsense, and the literature of dream and fantasy (282). All these elements help the playwrights of the absurd craft works in which the exploration of their absurd universe makes sense in its nonsense. Because philosophers like Camus and Sartre were propounding new ways of existing via philosophy, playwrights took some of these ideas into their drama in order to render tangible the belief that each subject creates his own existence. Esslin contends, “[The Theatre of the Absurd] bravely faces up to the fact that for those to whom the world has lost its central explanation and meaning, it is no longer possible to accept art forms still based on the continuation of standards and concepts that have lost their validity ...” (350-351). To Esslin, changing times lead naturally to changing aesthetic temperaments.

A Revolution in the Theatre

Writing in 1938, Antonin Artaud called for a radical restructuring of modern drama in his seminal *The Theatre and its Double*. In that work, Artaud expounds on what he saw as the need for a Theatre of Cruelty, a new form of drama which would dispense with the hackneyed plots and characters of the well-made play made famous by Henrik Ibsen and others, the problem play of which George Bernard Shaw was a prolific author, and the realistic works of Anton Chekhov and others. What all these types of plays have in common, according to Artaud, is their utter lack of efficacy in a world in which realism as an artistic method has become predictable and trite. “If people are out of the habit of going to the theater, if we have all finally come to think of theater as an inferior art, a means of popular distraction, and to use it as an outlet for our worst instincts, it is because we have learned too well what the theater has been, namely, falsehood and illusion”

he writes (*The Theatre and its Double*, 1958, 76). Artaud saw the twentieth century as an age during which theatre had lost its place among the ranks of the arts, a time in which drama became simply another distraction for the theatregoing public. What Artaud calls descriptive and narrative, or psychological theatre had been practiced in theatres throughout the world since the time of Shakespeare and as a result was played out. What Artaud's work effectively accomplished was more than a simple rethinking of drama; it was a treatise that has influenced experimental and avant garde theatre even to the present day.

To combat the psychological drama of practitioners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – a drama Artaud believed rendered plots and characters quotidian and obvious – Artaud famously called for his Theatre of Cruelty. This theatre would not be cruel in terms of violence perpetrated upon one character by another, but would shock spectators out of their complacent viewing and thinking habits. Artaud writes,

I propose then a theater in which violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theater as by a whirlwind of higher forces. A theater which, abandoning psychology, recounts the extraordinary, stages natural conflicts, natural and subtle forces, and presents itself first of all as an exceptional power of redirection (82-83).

With this, Artaud defines his theatre of cruelty as one of shock, a theatre of new techniques, storylines, and characters which would induce its viewers to think in new ways about drama and artistic creation.

Another important dramatic theorist who, though he may not have directly influenced Sartre, Ionesco, or Beckett, made the theatre an avenue for the exploration of metaphysics, is Jerzy Grotowski. Published in 1964 – the year during which Sartre famously declined his Nobel

Prize, and five years before Beckett sent his publisher to accept his – Grotowski's “The Theatre's New Testament” acts as an argument in favor of exploratory theatre with virtually no boundaries. This new type of theatre, limitless and boundless, is one in which states of consciousness can be more adeptly explored because it calls for a theatre in which new ways of perceiving the world may be presented to its audience. Grotowski declares that the traditional conception of what is considered theatre is inherently flawed, that theatre can exist without costumes, sets, music, lighting, and even a text (31). In fact, this latter element is a modern addition to theatre, which in its beginnings as a religious ceremony had none. The definition of theater, according to Grotowski is very simple: it is what happens between a spectator and an actor (31). Grotowski's revolutionary statements effectively pave the way for many types of new theatre including environmental theatre, the happening, and other types of avant-garde drama.

The trends to which Artaud was reacting were the realism of the box set and the well-made play which gave way to the naturalism of Emile Zola and the early works of Strindberg. The turn of the last century saw the rise of the working classes, urbanization, advances in technology and the overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and disease that went with them. To combat these problems, dramatists and others employed the conventions of realism to inculcate a didactic message to their audiences in the hopes of bringing about improvements to social conditions (Wilson and Goldfarb, *Living Theatre*, 1983, 403). Closely related to realism, naturalism presented “slice of life” dramas which focused on the lower classes and the environments which shaped them (Wilson and Goldfarb, 407).

These types of plays competed with the expressionist drama which gained popularity early in the twentieth century, after naturalism entered a state of crisis about the turn of the century, according to Bert O. States (*Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology*

of *Theatre*, 1985, 85). Of naturalism States declares, "... [T]here was nothing *new* it could do, as a mature style, without repeating itself to death" (86). In a book published 10 years after his *Theatre of the Absurd*, Esslin offered an analysis of new forms in the theatre in which he wrote that a lack of new things to do was not the only reason realism lost much of its appeal. "Plays with a rationally constructed plot that start from the exposition of a problem, moral, social, or philosophical, and then proceed toward a solution presuppose a world order that is rational and known to man" he writes (*Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre*, 1971, 6). Like Camus and Killinger, Esslin rejects the idea that things are rational. As a result, drama can no longer be rational. And so realism and naturalism gave way in large part to expressionism and other avant garde art forms, forms which de-emphasized the traditional techniques of drama, including plots with fully articulated *denouements*, developed characters with clear motivations, and settings generally reflective of the middle-class home or work environment. These expressionist dramas, including those Artaud wrote, have much in common with those of the absurdists in their extreme subjectivity and their focus on seemingly unrelated series of incidents presented from the point of view of a single consciousness.

But the dramatic-aesthetic evolution toward the avant garde modern theatre is not simply one of throwing away the traditional structures and techniques of the old ways. It is also a turn inward, much like Rene Descartes's turn inward via his insistence on subjective rational doubt, which inaugurated modern philosophy. Robert Brustein argues that the modern dramatist is one who evinces a certain self-consciousness in his writing: "Whether involved as an idea or a character, the modern dramatist is continually exploring the possibilities of his own personality – not only representing but exhorting, not only dramatizing the others but examining the self" (*The Theatre of Revolt*, 1962, 13). One of the forms this self examination may take and in which it

may be represented on the stage is what Brustein calls existential revolt, which he defines as that drama in which the playwright examines the metaphysical life of humanity and protests against it (26). This type of drama is no doubt the product of the turn inward which began with expressionism as the dramatic form in which thoughts, feelings, and states of being of the individual psyche became fodder for dramatic presentation. This turn toward the individual subject's states of consciousness is also the reason the Theatre of the Absurd is the ideal type of drama through which to explore ontological embodiment.

The Theatre of the Absurd, according to Esslin, has renounced any effort at telling stories, exploring characters, discussing ideas, or solving problems. As a result, "... it has been able to concentrate on the presentation of what is essentially a *sense of being*, an intuition of the tragicomic absurdity and mystery of human existence. As such the Theatre of the Absurd is an existentialist theatre which puts a direct perception of a mode of being above all abstract considerations ..." (*Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre*, 9). Ionesco himself writes that "A play is a construction made up of a series of states of consciousness, or situations, which grow more intense, more concentrated, and then knit together either to be unraveled or to end in inextricable and unbearable confusion" (*Notes and Counter Notes*, 1964, 244). This is why the Theatre of the Absurd is the dramatic genre best suited for an exploration of how subjects embody their beings incessantly in order to establish relations with their selves and others. The absurdists focus not on plot, characterization, or problem solving in the traditional sense; they create an atmosphere and a mood that is indicative of their efforts to explore inner states of consciousness.

Sartre is among the most prolific practitioners of these new techniques in drama and philosophy. In addition to being a philosopher and playwright, Sartre was also a critic. In 1945

he founded *Temps Modernes* with the express purpose of promoting *litterature engagee*, or engaged literature. This type of writing is committed to a purpose beyond literature for its own sake, according to Steven Ungar's introduction to "*What is Literature*" and *Other Essays* (1988, 7). In his voluminous critical work, Sartre argues that one of the chief motives for artistic creation is the need of the artist to feel he is in a relationship to the world. Because the world at large is itself the raw material out of which the artist constructs his art, the creative act aims at a renewal of the writer's world and his totality of being as it finds itself in this world. What is new in this is that artists are now able to realize that their totality is in their hands. This concept of renewal is doubtless a product of Sartre's philosophy, with its focus on the renewal and self-determination of the individual. In "The Humanism of Existentialism" Sartre writes that "Subjectivism means, on the one hand, that an individual chooses and makes himself; and, on the other, that it is impossible for man to transcend human subjectivity" (*Essays in Existentialism*, 37). Because the artist remakes himself while simultaneously creating his works, and because the artist cannot escape his subjectivity, one is inextricably linked to the other; the artist can never be totally removed from his work. As a result and particularly for Sartre, the work of art must always be socially relevant. As a survivor of German captivity, a committed Marxist, and an advocate for human rights in colonial Algeria, Sartre rejected art for art's sake, arguing that each work must have some form of didactic message. Adamantly opposed to this doctrine, Ionesco believed art should remain unbiased in order to guarantee truly unfettered expression, while Beckett remained stubbornly reticent on aesthetics, especially those of his own works, much to the chagrin of critics around the world.

In his essay "What is Literature?" Sartre writes "... although literature is one thing and morality a quite different one, at the heart of the aesthetic imperative we discern the moral

imperative” (“*What is Literature?*” and *Other Essays*, 1988, 67). Sartre believed literature could enact real and meaningful changes not only in the belief systems of its readers but in the realm of socio-political systems as well. The reason class-based inequalities have been allowed to continue for centuries, he argues, is that those in power convince the powerless that there are no such things as classes, that every misfortune is an accident and not the product of the class system (107). With this, Sartre calls for literature which offers a message, which enlightens its readers as to how the social world operates.

This is why Sartre believes the fate of literature is tied to the fate of the working class (205), those who are most often oppressed, who because of this oppression are most in need of expression. This does not mean, however, that Sartre advocates propaganda. On the contrary, because the twentieth century was in many ways the age of propaganda, Sartre sees true literature as that which seeks to disabuse its readers of the erroneous notions brought about through propaganda. Because this propaganda was used so much during both world wars, Sartre concludes that war alienates literature because it demands that writing serve the aims of propaganda (215).

Starkly opposed to Sartre's *litterature engagee* stand Ionesco's theories. An equally successful playwright and one of the earliest practitioners of the Theatre of the Absurd, Ionesco was also a critic. At odds with Sartre and his socially conscious drama, however, Ionesco rejects any and all forms of didactic message in the theatre as a vulgarity: “Drama is not the idiom for ideas. When it tries to become a vehicle for ideologies, all it can do is vulgarize them” (*Notes and Counter Notes*, 24). Although German playwright Bertolt Brecht was more frequently the target of Ionesco's attacks, of Sartre Ionesco writes, “It is the Sartres of this world who are responsible for alienating our minds” (231). This alienation, Ionesco believed, resulted from

Sartre's reliance on socially conscious drama, which the former playwright believed deadened the abilities of the individual to think for himself. Ionesco dismisses Sartre and Brecht as authors of political melodramas and representatives of left-wing conformism (91). He argues that not all social problems are *purely* social problems (135). As a result, social drama tends to obfuscate the truth by making every problem appear social. Art must be created by an individual and not by an ideology, Ionesco argues, and political or social art is not individual because ideologies are always second-hand (34-35). Politics can never be a source for true art because it relies on the type of unquestioned acceptance of second-hand beliefs against which Heidegger, Camus, and others warn.

Another problem with committed or didactic art, according to Ionesco, is that it takes into account the subjectivity of its creator, but not that of its patrons (44-45). "If you wish to speak to everybody, you will really speak to no one: the things which interest everybody in general have very little interest for each man in particular" (45). Anguish and solitude characterize the conditions of man, he argues (78). He sees life as "nightmarish, painful, and unbearable, like a bad dream" (110). As a result, it is natural for individuals to seek refuge from this bitter loneliness in society, the "they," or a crowd of theatergoers. The danger in this, just as Heidegger warns, is the concomitant sacrifice of individuality and as a consequence, of ontological self-knowledge.

Specifically on Brecht, Ionesco says, "I dislike Brecht just because he is didactic and ideological. He is not primitive, he is elementary. He is not simple, he is simplistic. He does not give us matter for thought, he is himself the reflection and illustration of an ideology, he teaches me nothing, he is useless repetition" (134). He dismisses Brecht's characters as flat and his dramas as overly social and insufficiently metaphysical. There is an entire dimension of the

subject which Brecht leaves out, according to Ionesco: his ontological aspects. Ionesco argues that his art is more complete because it addresses the entire human condition, its metaphysical as well as its social aspects. Because Brecht fails to address both these aspects of the human condition, he writes theatre for the unenlightened (221).

Brecht, for his part, counters that art can be both aesthetically pleasing and didactic: “Theatre remains theatre even when it is instructive theatre, and in so far as it is good theatre it will amuse” (*Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, 1964, 73). In the same treatise, he argues that art must feed knowledge, which in turn fosters the appreciation of that art. The more enlightened one is, the more she can better appreciate the art she experiences. Brecht further contends that in his works, the moral arguments are only second in priority to their aesthetic qualities, and that their aim is less to instruct than to observe the human condition (75). Essentially, Brecht believes the theatre is a moral institution much the same way Sartre sees literature as an art with morality as its *sine qua non*.

What Ionesco advocates, rather than political or didactic drama, is uncommitted art. “Dramatic creation satisfies a mental need, this need must be sufficient in itself” he writes (43). In the same passage, Ionesco compares the work of art to a tree in that both are natural because they seek nothing other than to be what they are. A tree does not seek to explain itself and neither should a work of art. Complimenting this belief that a play should have no other reason for its existence than to be a play is Ionesco's desire – similar to that of Grotowski – to be limited by nothing other than the limits of stage technology. “... I should like to be able to strip dramatic action of all that is particular to it: the plot, the accidental characteristics of the characters, their names, their social setting and historical background, the apparent reasons for the dramatic conflict, and all the justifications, explanations and logic of the conflict” (217). Ionesco

compares his ideal theatre to a sporting event, with its live antagonism, dynamic conflicts, and motiveless clash of wills (232). It is obvious to anyone who has seen a production of *The Bald Soprano* (1950), that Ionesco succeeded. Its nonsensical dialogue, lack of plot, distortion of social mores, and complete disregard for traditional dramatic conventions testify to the playwright's success in achieving his vision.

Ionesco writes much more favorably of Beckett's work than he does of Brecht's. This is perfectly natural given the similarities in style and structure of the playwrights' works. Beckett's uncommitted, unexplained, stripped-down drama fits in with what Ionesco considers exemplary theatre. He lauds Beckett for his treatment of the whole of the human condition, rather than that of a particular subject in a particular society (as in Brecht's plays). "Beckett poses the problems of the ultimate ends of man; the picture of history and the human condition this author gives us is more complex, more soundly based" than that of Brecht (135). In another article, Ionesco calls Beckett an exciting new dramatist (52). Beckett returned this praise, writing to director Alan Schneider that he was in good company when *Endgame* played at the same theatre in Vienna as one of Ionesco's dramas (*Disjecta*, 1984, 109).

Much more difficult to pin down are the aesthetic theories of Beckett himself on his own works and those of others. Unfortunately, Beckett never wrote much about his plays, rarely did interviews, and when forced to answer questions about his work, replied cagily. In a 1954 letter to New York publisher Barney Rosset, Beckett wrote of his frustration at being questioned by actor Sir Ralph Richardson. "Too tired to give satisfaction I told him that all I knew about Pozzo was in the text, that if I had known more I would have put it in the text, and that this was true also of the other characters" Beckett writes. "... I also told Richardson that if by Godot I had meant God I would [have] said God, and not Godot. This seemed to disappoint him greatly" (qtd.

in Knowlson, 2004, 372). In another famous missive, Beckett wrote to director Alan Schneider in 1957 “If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated ...” (*Disjecta*, 109). Beckett apparently believed that all that needed saying about his plays was in the plays themselves. Disappointed by Beckett’s lack of forthrightness about his works are generations of critics who still puzzle over the meaning of his dramas. Beckett was simply not interested in answering questions about his enigmatic works. In a 1953 letter to publisher Jerome Lindon, Beckett instructed him to refuse all requests for interviews (*Damned to Fame*, 354). By the 1960s, Lindon would still have to tell reporters and critics that Beckett never did interviews (*Damned to Fame*, 484). The playwright’s most famous dodge of the spotlight was perhaps his refusal to accept his 1969 Nobel Prize in person. Lindon accepted it on his behalf (*Damned to Fame*, 507).

What can be surmised about Beckett’s aesthetic beliefs via his plays, however, is that he, like Ionesco and unlike Sartre and Brecht, rejected the need for didactics in the theatre. The difficulty in interpreting any of Beckett’s plays testifies to this. Critics and scholars have struggled so persistently in deciphering Beckett’s characters, settings and style that the extraction of any type of lesson from them is rendered all but impossible. And although according to Knowlson, Beckett was deeply committed to human rights, liberty in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, and the abolition of apartheid and racism (21), none of this appears directly in his plays. Had Beckett advocated didactic drama, he would have been more forthcoming about his plays. What Beckett does explore in his works, however, are states of being. In his preface to Beckett's authorized biography, Knowlson writes that Beckett's late works explore the nature of being and that consequently they are less concerned with the superficial and transitory (21). Although Knowlson addresses only Beckett's late work specifically, this reading of his works can

be applied to all his drama and to that of other dramatists, absurd and existential alike, as is shown in the comments of Esslin and Ionesco.

Sartre, Ionesco, and Beckett all created dramas – whether didactic or not – which adeptly explore the nature of being and consciousness in the twentieth century. The old belief systems lost plausibility because of the worldwide loss of faith in reason and religion brought about by two world wars and other historical phenomena. These three playwrights, much like Artaud before them, saw a need for plays which would do more than simply tackle social problems. The real problem for humanity was no longer a product of the sociopolitical realm. It was an issue of being, which while not completely divorced from the corporeal world, was nevertheless one worth exploring as new philosophies addressed new crises of belief. Sartre, though not an absurdist, nevertheless contributed an important philosophy which shines through in his comparatively realistic drama. Ionesco as arguably the first practitioner of the Theatre of the Absurd and Beckett as its most famous proponent offer plays which, because of their de-emphasis of plot and characterization, are well-prepared to explore states of consciousness stripped of virtually all corporeal interference.

What theorists like Artaud and Grotowski and playwrights like Sartre, Ionesco, and Beckett did was effect a revolution in the theatre which turned it away from the problem play to the existential and absurd play. This latter is not metaphysical or ontological simply because it is experimental, though the type of experimentation called for by Artaud and Grotowski and practiced by the three playwrights discussed here makes the exploration of particular states of consciousness more easily accomplished because unbounded by traditional structure. When playwrights are less concerned with plot and characterization, they can be more concerned with the exploration of being and how consciousness operates in the material world and, more

particularly to the present study, with how successive and incessant embodiments of ontological energies create the essence of a particular subject in a manner which renders this embodiment either authentic or not.

A Revolution in Philosophy

For the present study, the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Sartre will best reveal how characters attain or forgo ontological self-knowledge via their successive embodiments. Although Camus is an important theorist and playwright, especially for his ideas on absurdity, Beckett, Ionesco and Sartre and their plays will be the focus here, the former two for their absurdity and the latter for his influence thereon as well as for his tremendous influence on theories of essence creation. In order to better understand the plays of the absurd, their relation to the times during which they were written, and how they relate to ontology, developments in the history of philosophy must be read in light of their interrelatedness to each other and to the history of modern drama. The idea of ontological embodiment was not arrived at accidentally; it is the product of the ideas of disparate theorists, each of whom has built a system influenced by his forebears.

Mark C. Taylor, in a sort of history of modern philosophy, argues that modern philosophical thought began with Descartes's inward turn to the subject (*Altarity*, 1987, xxii). With Descartes, the focus of philosophical inquiry turned from the outward ideals of Aristotle to the inner realm of each individual subject. Indeed, Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" (*Discourse on Method*, 1637, 18) can be considered one of the greatest turning points in philosophical inquiry. Taylor comments that "Through a dialectical reversal, the creator God dies and is resurrected in the creative subject" (xxii). With this, Taylor tells us, like Camus and Esslin before him, that the burden of meaning creation in a world in which old values are outmoded

values, rests on the subject, not on any external system or idea. This shifting of the labor of creating individual and subjective meaning was arrived at through Descartes's reliance on doubt and individual empiricism as the avenues to self discovery. Nearly four centuries after his famous maxim, Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" could be just as accurately rephrased as "I create myself, therefore I am."

Descartes recounts how as a youth he became disillusioned with the traditional disciplines of knowledge and so abandoned them in favor of a more individualized and subjective pursuit of truth. He writes that "... so long as I merely considered the customs of other men, I found hardly anything there about which to be confident, and that I noticed there was about as much diversity as I had previously found among the opinions of philosophers" (6). The diversity the young Descartes sees in philosophy and custom leads him to free himself from the chains of other subjects' reason and custom, just as Camus and Esslin would three centuries later. With this method, Descartes inaugurates a tradition of philosophy to be picked up on by Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre, one which stresses the need for personal and introspective, rather than transcendent or objective, philosophy.

With the foregoing, Descartes outlines a system which, through its focus on subjectivity, paves the way for later philosophers, and particularly the existentialists, to construct systems which stress the importance of determining one's own reality. As part of his system, Descartes writes that he will vow to "... conquer myself rather than fortune, and to change my desires rather than the order of the world, and generally to accustom myself to believing that there is nothing that is completely within our power except our thoughts ..." (14-15). This power each individual possesses over his thoughts is what Sartre would later consider the radical and subjective

freedom to which each subject is condemned. And it is only because of this radical freedom that each subject is able to create his own essence, his own reality, through ontological embodiment.

Granted, this empowering belief that one controls one's own thoughts does little to directly affect the outside, material world. What it does do, however, is enable the subject to embody himself in any way he sees fit, for to embody oneself necessarily entails speaking and acting in accordance with a particular embodiment. And these speech acts and physical actions in turn embody the subject in the face of the other which in turn forces a particular reaction from that other. An example of this is how victims react to being tortured. As will be shown during an analysis of Sartre's drama, even while being tortured, the victim can choose how to react to that torture, even if he is unable to stop it.

Although Descartes is not considered an existentialist, his method, with its focus on subjective rationalism, paved the way for that branch of philosophy. Two hundred years after Descartes, Existentialism was born in the writings of Soren Kierkegaard, who expounded on the nature of existents, existence and – a hundred years before Camus – the absurd. And although Camus and Esslin argue that the absurd became most obvious during World War II, Kierkegaard's conception of the absurd came a century earlier and is one based on faith. David Swenson writes that “The various determinants of faith are by Kierkegaard concentrated in the single category of the absurd, since the movement of faith seems paradoxical to the ordinary consciousness from which faith emerges” (qtd. in Lowrie, 1974, 16). While Camus sees the absurd as issuing from a lack of faith, Kierkegaard sees it as the result of a profundity of it. To Kierkegaard, the absurd is that which is a paradox, a thing which is true despite its contradictory nature. Faith, because it demands of a consciousness belief in things which are irrational, is paradoxical. Abraham agreed to slay Isaac because of his faith, though to all rational intellection,

such an agreement is irrational. Kierkegaard's belief that faith issues from a consciousness and is simultaneously paradoxical to that consciousness is Cartesian in its scope because of its focus on subjective consciousness, but also distinctly Kierkegaardian in its reliance on paradox for its veracity.

Kierkegaard begins *Fear and Trembling* (1843) with a defense of Cartesian subjectivity as the key to a fuller understanding of being for each individual. This defense is the segue into his treatise on faith and the absurd. According to Kierkegaard, faith is a personal and extremely subjective matter which is only ever achieved via the absurd because to have faith in the first place is absurd. Kierkegaard uses the story of Abraham and Isaac to explore his ideas on faith as ultimately an absurd but laudable thing, a reading which runs counter to Camus's view of the absurd as something which must be endured. Where Camus sees faith as impossible, Kierkegaard sees it as necessary. According to Kierkegaard, Abraham should not be renowned as God's greatest follower, but should be scorned as a murderer because of his intentions to murder his son; however, Abraham does have faith. Despite its absurdity, faith is the highest form of consciousness for a human being according to Kierkegaard, despite faith's tendency to run counter to reason. *Fear and Trembling*, with its focus on subjectivity as necessary for any understanding of existence and its emphasis on the anxiety Abraham must have felt at the prospect of sacrificing his son, shares many conceptual motifs with the themes of many absurdist plays, most clearly the paradoxical, as the playwrights of the absurd create settings, characters, and pseudo-plots rife with confusion, anxiety and befuddlement.

In his introduction to another of his existential treatises, *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), Kierkegaard addresses the “Christian point of view” which dictates that spiritual death is spiritual wretchedness and that despair is the titular sickness. The main categories of despair he

enumerates are 1) despair at not willing to be oneself, 2) despair at not willing to be a self, and 3) despair at willing to be someone else's self. Kierkegaard explicates theories akin to those Sartre would put forth a century later, most notably what Sartre calls bad faith. For Kierkegaard as well as for Sartre, the subject of necessity establishes a relation not only with himself but with others to achieve even the most basic form of consciousness. Through this establishment and by willing to be oneself, despair is negated, according to Kierkegaard. But willing to be oneself – much like not being willing to be oneself (what Sartre called bad faith) – can bring despair. Despair results when a subject is unaware he is characterized by spirit. It is the task of a self to become itself, and although Kierkegaard sees this as being possible only through belief in the spiritual, later philosophers would open the door to a system which insists that embodiment is spurred on by the constructive and destructive tendencies of the consciousness. Where Kierkegaard's becoming a self hinges on the spiritual, embodiment is necessarily an ontological occurrence, which means it operates on the level of being, of existence, rather than faith. According to Kierkegaard, the opposite of being in despair is believing and because very few characters of the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd believe in anything they are nearly always in despair.

Kierkegaard's "willing to be oneself" is a concept further elaborated by Heidegger, who in the early twentieth century constructed a system which has as its focus the Being of beings, i.e. the nature of existence and how beings fashion their own particular and subjective existence. Heidegger's theories are largely the product of his nihilism, according to Taylor (36). As a result of this nihilism, Heidegger found it necessary to create his own belief system by which the individual becomes empowered. In his chapter on Heidegger, Taylor argues that "The distinguishing characteristic of modern philosophy is its tendency to think being in terms of subjectivity" (37). In other words, being, and for that matter, essence, are not things pre-existing

in the universe, things to be captured through careful analytical reasoning; they are things which are subjective and attainable only through the subject's introspection. Another important contribution from Heidegger is his furthering of Descartes's self-reflective process, as Heidegger theorizes that self-consciousness is empowering for the ego. This is the key to the subject's realization that she is thereby further empowered over all things in her unique universe.

“Through the subjection of the object, the subject exercises its mastery over everything other than itself” Taylor writes. “Nothing can be present to self-consciousness unless it is represented by the subject's *own* representative activity” (39). As a result, each subject filters every perception, every stimulus, through his own unique consciousness.

Heidegger's system, outlined in *Being and Time* (1926), was hugely influential on modern ontology and especially on the theories of Sartre. Written after the atrocities of World War I but before the horrors of World War II (during which Heidegger joined the Nazi party), Heidegger's magnum opus nevertheless evinces a similar type of disillusionment to that evident in post-war writers including Camus, Killinger, and Esslin. Heidegger's focus is not on societies, nations, or ideologies, – those things which led to World War I – but very clearly on individual being, as *Being and Time* is an investigation into the nature of being. Early on in that work, Heidegger coins the term “Dasein,” literally, “being there,” a term he uses to indicate that subject which is conscious through its consciousness. “Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself” (33). This being itself, and its opposite, not being oneself, is similar to Kierkegaard's conception of the sickness unto death which is despair, while Heidegger's “possibility” of the self underlines the importance of subjective creation. And while the Heideggerian ontological system is a complicated one, and while a fuller explanation of it is beyond the scope of this study, two very important concepts of that system

are relevant to embodiment and the characters of the Theatre of the Absurd: what Heidegger terms “thrownness” and the “they.”

“As something thrown, Dasein has been thrown *into existence*,” writes Heidegger (321), though he tells us later that Dasein is thrown not of its own accord (329). This means that a subject's existence is never initiated, even in ontological terms, by that subject. Each subject turns up on the scene without any guidance, without being programmed with a mission, and without intuition or instinct. The subject does not ask for his existence and never wills it. “Yet every Dasein always exists factically. It is not a free-floating self-projection; but its character is determined by thrownness as a Fact of the entity which it is; and, as so determined, it has in each case already been delivered over to existence, and it constantly so remains” (331). To exist factically is to exist in a world in which the subject comes up against things in the material and social world, things to which it must react and interact, things often beyond its direct control, though again, things which can be affected by particular and strategically chosen embodiments. And when Heidegger writes that each subject's character is determined by this thrownness, he means that thrownness, as the starting point of existence, sets in motion a chain reaction of embodiments (though he does not use this word) designed to deal with this thrownness. Vladimir and Estragon are thrown onto the stage to wait for Godot. Much like every subject, they know not how they got there. They only react to the world in which they find themselves. The danger of thrownness, however, lies in how a subject comes to terms with his thrownness. “In the face of its thrownness Dasein flees to the relief which comes with the supposed freedom of the they-self” Heidegger tells us (321). As with Vladimir and Estragon, thrownness can be a daunting and intimidating thing with which to deal. Via their unthinking habits and reliance on another subject, the two tramps hide in the “they” against which Heidegger warns.

This “they” is the second of Heidegger's concepts which is important here. “The 'they' prescribes one's state-of-mind, and determines what and how one 'sees'” Heidegger writes (213). This “they” in practical terms may be said to be society as a whole, an individual's demographic group, or any agent of a particular ideology. Heidegger's most clear example of how the “they” operates is found in his analysis of how subjects are expected to behave following the death of a loved one or acquaintance (298). The “they” demands a particular set of behaviors from one who grieves and even from one who simply acknowledges that a death has occurred, e.g. weeping or undeserved praise of the dead. Those who do not conform to these expected behaviors are often castigated or chastised in some way. Berenger refuses to conform in the face of overwhelming pressure to do so in *Rhinoceros* (1959). As a result, he is vilified and persecuted as an enemy by the other characters in the play.

The real ontological danger of “they,” however, is not the threat of being made a pariah, according to Heidegger. The danger in ontological terms is that the “they's” interpretation of things can preclude authenticity for an individual subject (235). The “they” tends to interpret occurrences and phenomena in ways that are accessible and amenable to the subject (302), sort of a “sugar coating” of a given phenomenon. In other words, “they,” through their ideology, strive to convince the individual subject that phenomena, for example death, can and ought to be understood in terms of the subject herself. So “they” may convince a particular subject that although she will die and can die at any moment, she has no need to concern herself with death because she will most likely not die for several years and if she does die soon she will go to “a better place.” The problem with all this is that when a subject is considering herself in merely corporeal terms and not in ontological terms, she is fleeing into the “they” which leads her into

inauthenticity (368). The only way out of “they” is embodiments which have as their center of focus not other but the subject herself.

Perhaps the most significant problem with Heidegger's theory of “they” is its inventor's pessimism. Heidegger sees little hope for a subject to escape “they” though he sees it as potentially detrimental to a full exploration of selfhood. Although the fact that genetics, environment, and place in history all determine many things for a subject, they cannot account for everything that subject is or will be. The impossibility of breaking completely away from the “they” is undeniable, though with effort and a clear focus of one's embodiments on oneself, a subject can remake himself as he chooses rather than as “they” dictates. This is where the extreme and subjective freedom of Sartre comes into play. He writes in *Saint Genet* that “We are not lumps of clay, and what is important is not what people make of us but what we ourselves make of what they have made of us” (60). Berenger, for example, though he is born into similar circumstances as the other characters in *Rhinoceros*, refuses to become a rhinoceros, instead proclaiming his individuality, an individuality which no doubt results from his embodiments and results in his greater ontological self-knowledge as one who enables himself to live unfettered by beliefs not his own.

While Heidegger's “they” has merit in its argument that the subject is a social animal and therefore must be influenced by others in some way, it is one of Heidegger's concepts with which Sartre most strenuously disagrees. Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) that Heidegger put too much stock in the “they,” that he considered the “they” a perfectly natural consequence which the sentient being must not only encounter but which is formative of each subject in ontological terms. Sartre argues that conflict is at the heart of otherness and therefore the unity implied by “they” is untenable. “We encounter the other; we do not constitute him” Sartre writes

(336). In other words, while others influence us, we are constantly at war within the ontological sphere of existence because consciousnesses are by nature first and foremost *self-conscious*.

Sartre further takes issue with what he sees as Heidegger's neglect of the structure of consciousness. This particular criticism is based on what Sartre sees as Heidegger's devaluation of self-consciousness. According to Sartre, a being not only questions its own being (as Heidegger suggests) it must also posit this questioning in the face of other beings (24). And this questioning must take place in the face of other beings simply because the initial subject is not part of the other (as in "they"), it is a distinct, apart, individual consciousness. The "they" is not the only Heideggerian concept with which Sartre takes issue, though for the present study it is the most important one on which the two existentialists disagree.

Also in his monumental treatise on existential philosophy, Sartre sets forth some of the most important tenets of that system of philosophy, as he argues that existence is unjustifiable and contingent, that there is no reason for it, that humans continually make and remake themselves because of this unjustifiability. Any existent is a phenomenon which designates itself as a totality of qualities and this totality changes with every action or thought. Sartre writes in *Saint Genet* "Just as Jesus does not cease to die, so [Jean] Genet does not cease to be metamorphosed into a foul insect: the same archetypical event is reproduced in the same symbolic and ritual form through the same ceremonies of transfiguration" (13). Subjectivity is consciousness (awareness) of consciousness and a consciousness is a being who posits its essence. Outside of being there is nothing, but this nothingness enables a consciousness to define itself through nihilation of what it is not. And although the universe is without purpose or rational organization, consciousnesses can create their own purpose through freedom. Sartre's

work is one that may not have directly influenced Beckett or Ionesco, but is one that no doubt espouses many ideas and themes the absurdists also treated.

The Sartrean theory most important to the present study is that of a subject making himself what he is, and this theory is most clearly illustrated in the example in *Being and Nothingness* of the waiter who, in order to be a waiter, must play at being one. Through this playing, the waiter strives to convince his customers that he is only a waiter rather than a waiter and a father, student, coin collector, or whatever else he is in his vast possibilities. If he convinces his customers that he is only a waiter, he will be better able to do his job because his customers do not want a father, student, or coin collector: they want a waiter. Sartre calls this playing at being a waiter a representation (102). As a representation, this conducting oneself in the manner of a waiter entails a sort of internal split of the subject because while working and representing oneself as a waiter, the waiter cannot simultaneously represent himself as a coin collector; that representation must wait until after work. By the very nature of his work and its concomitant representation, the waiter is blocked from his other interests and modes of being at least temporarily. On the other hand, a waiter is not completely and totally a waiter even while he is at work. He has other possibilities, though these are suspended while he is working. If he were only ever a waiter, he would be what Sartre calls an in-itself, i.e. a complete, full, and perfect entity. This is why he must represent himself. He must act or represent himself because he is not an in-itself. Instead, all subjects are for-itselfs, imperfect beings which are becoming, changing, and incomplete entities. This is also why the waiter only plays or represents that he is a waiter: he goes through the motions of his occupation. Even if he does so with gusto, he still does so only as a part of his entire being.

Sartre's invaluable illustration of this concept is an important one not only because it explains how subjects because of their freedom make themselves who and what they are. The example of the waiter is a crucial one to modern philosophy because it hinges for its veracity on the extreme and subjective freedom which lies at the crux of Sartrean existentialism. What is missing from Sartre's theories, however, is an explication of how more precisely these embodiments are achieved and what causes the need for them in the first place. These representations – which will hereafter be termed embodiments because the subject embodies his entire being in them in order to achieve inter-conscious and intra-conscious relations – are obvious in every thought and action of the subject. What Sartre also leaves undeveloped are the constructive and destructive tendencies of the consciousness which act as the catalysts for embodiment, and the instantaneous and incessant qualities of these embodiments. The subject not only embodies himself when at work. He embodies his being with every passing moment and does so in a series of renewed embodiments because impelled to do so by the interplay of the constructive and destructive tendencies. The subject constantly tears down his entire being and simultaneously builds it up via his embodiments, which are rendered perceivable through that particular subject's thoughts and actions.

The subject never exists as an in-itself. She is always a for-itself until she dies, at which point she becomes a totality because no longer impelled to re-create herself. In order to function as a sentient being, and indeed in order to be conscious in the first place, the subject must have as the catalyst for embodiment the constructive and destructive tendencies of the consciousness. This phenomenon is evinced through self-consciousness: The subject represents herself to herself in order to analyze her own thoughts and habits, and in doing so ontologically reconstructs her entire being. This reconstruction is only possible via the radical deconstruction of self which

necessarily presupposes its resultant reconstruction. Sartre realizes this, but does little to help us evaluate the quality of each embodiment. Therefore, it is necessary to delineate a system by which each subject's, and indeed each dramatic character's embodiments can be evaluated as to the extent to which each embodiment benefits or acts as a detriment to that subject or character. After all, not every embodiment can be said to be one beneficial to she who does the embodying. An embodiment is only authentic when it focuses on the one who performs the embodiment and when it seeks no interference or influence on another's embodiment. The significance of this authenticity is that it has a greater tendency to lead to that ontological self-knowledge which allows the subject to break free from the "they" which in turn allows for further embodiments unfettered by unquestioned value systems.

The manner in which characters embody themselves and thereby achieve or fail to achieve a particular measure of this ontological self-knowledge is best observed in the plays of Sartre because his philosophical views so heavily influenced the idea of this process. His famous example of the waiter laid the foundation for a process by which his characters' embodiments are rendered analyzable. The works of Beckett and Ionesco can also be usefully explicated for the manner in which this process is brought to light, not because like Sartre, their philosophical-aesthetic theories are directly related, but because their absurd dramas render the process easily identifiable in their focus on particular states of consciousness and their accompanying embodiments.

The Sartre plays which will be treated here are *Kean* (1953), *The Victors* (1946), and *No Exit*. Of all the characters in these plays, only Kean and his *fiancee/ingenue* Anna embody themselves with any real authenticity. Kean embodies himself inauthentically throughout most of the play which bears his name. He plays a social game of keeping up with the Prince of Wales's

womanizing and social influence. As a result, he casts forth an embodiment of himself that evinces a concern that does not have at its center his own subjecthood, but that of others. He acts in a manner which reveals that his concern is with influencing others to be impressed by his acting or his skill in seduction. It is not until the drama's final scene that Kean embodies himself in such a way that his concern for his own being is made manifest, as he makes his true feelings for Anna known.

As for *The Victors*, in the existentially crucial moment in the play in which the Resistance fighters murder one of their own members to keep him from divulging secret information under torture, a clash of embodiments is born out of their cowardice and pride. Each character attempts to prove that he is a hero who sacrifices himself in order to save the lives of other Resistance members, though each one's embodiments reveal that he is prideful and only concerned with influencing others' actions and perceptions. In short, none of them embodies himself authentically.

Like the characters in *The Victors*, the trio of *No Exit* fail to live authentically. Its three main characters are doomed because the amount of ontological self-knowledge they each possess is so miniscule. This lack of self-knowledge is a direct result of their embodiments which focus on the reconstruction of others' beings rather than on their own. They embody themselves in an inauthentic manner because their embodiments have as their aim the radical reconstruction of others' beings rather than their own. They remain throughout the play unconcerned with their own subject formation as they strive to make others reconstruct themselves in ways favorable to them. Garcin pleads for the approval of Inez, who needs Estelle, who wants Garcin in an incessant shifting and clashing of embodiments.

Beckett's plays, like those of Sartre, rarely feature characters who embody themselves with any authenticity. In *Waiting for Godot*, Pozzo is the character who most clearly embodies himself inauthentically. This lack of authenticity is obvious due to his endless abuse of Lucky which interferes with the latter's radical reconstruction of being, while Lucky, though he never seeks to interfere with the being reconstruction of another, is equally inauthentic in his embodiments because he never takes responsibility for those embodiments, instead relying on his master via his passive acceptance of orders from Pozzo. Like Lucky, Vladimir and Estragon remain inauthentic in embodiment not because they seek primarily and for the most part to influence another's being reconstruction, but because their own reconstructions are muddled by their failing memories and their indecisiveness. Their ontological energies, which would be better served if concentrated on their own ontological self-knowledge via authentic embodiments, are instead focused on the idea of Godot and their wait for the flesh-and-blood titular character, who never appears.

In *Endgame*, Clov initially represents himself in a similar fashion to that of Lucky, though ultimately he gains more authenticity. This authenticity is most clearly evinced at the end of the play when Clov prepares to exit the hovel in which he had served the overbearing and self-aggrandizing Hamm presumably for most of his life. The servant's assertiveness is an act of authenticity because it epitomizes an embodiment which has as its primary concern its own ontological self-knowledge. This embodiment seeks to interfere with no other subject's embodiments, seeks no approval from another, and ensures its own ability to embody itself further and with responsibility and freedom. Hamm, by contrast, seeks to interfere with the being reconstructions of all those with whom he surrounds himself. This is most obvious in how he manipulates his parents through control of what little food the foursome has and via the

dialogical dominance he perpetrates upon his unfortunate parents and his servant. Nagg and Nell, on the other hand, exist somewhere between Hamm and Clov in their levels of authenticity.

Though Nell presumably dies during the course of the play and Nagg remains in his ashbin at its end, the couple is too physically incapacitated to ever leave their domicile. They do refrain from attempting to influence others' being reconstructions; however, they do little to assert themselves and also display the type of memory lapses characteristic of Vladimir and Estragon.

The characters of *What Where* (1983) also embody themselves without authenticity. This is clearly demonstrated in their actions toward each other as they torture each other in turn, thereby seeking to influence the radical reconstruction of their fellow characters. This focus of energies on others rather than on themselves obviates any acquisition of ontological self-knowledge because so focused outwardly rather than inwardly towards the self.

Of Ionesco's characters, Berenger is the one who most authentically embodies himself, especially in the crucial moment at the conclusion of *Rhinoceros* in which he, as the last person in his town to resist rhinocerotis, staunchly retains his human form despite the consequences of doing so in a place in which everyone he knows has turned into a rhinoceros. It would be much easier for Berenger to give in to the temptation to conform to the "they" and become a pachyderm like his neighbors and coworkers, but the protagonist stalwartly refuses because his freedom is worth becoming a pariah.

Unlike Berenger, Choubert and Madeleine, in *Victims of Duty* (1953), embody themselves inauthentically because they change personalities several times throughout the play. Choubert's and Madeleine's changes are those of charlatans in that they seek only to adopt the personalities of others. This is a clear act of inauthenticity in that it is akin to Kierkegaard's

attempting to be someone else's self. Ontological energies in this case are clearly turned outward onto another, resulting in no gain of self-knowledge.

The Lesson (1951) offers a trio of characters, all lacking in authenticity. The Professor, as a murderer, seeks like the characters of Sartre's *The Victors*, to kill others and thereby interfere in the most radical way with the being reconstructions of others. The Pupil becomes successively more meek during the course of the play and as a result fails to defend herself against the Professor which makes her, like Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*, one who does not interfere with the radical reconstructions of others, but one who neglects to defend her right to continue to embody herself.

These nine plays will be the focus of the dissertation because they offer characters whose actions and dialogue can be most thoroughly explored with ontological embodiment in mind. Because of the plays' clashes of ontological energies made perceptible via the struggles characters wage against each other and themselves, states of consciousness come to the fore in these plays, rendering the argument that quality of ontological energies determine authenticity for these characters more acceptable. This authenticity in turn renders evaluable the quality of life of each character and the extent to which each character's value systems are beneficial or detrimental to that character.

CHAPTER II

SARTREAN OTHERNESS AND ONTOLOGICAL SELF-KNOWLEDGE

In the last days of World War II, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a treatise on French Jews and the ways in which French society attempted to welcome many of them home after they had been in concentration camps during the height of the war. Despite the sympathy created for victimized Jews following the exposure of the horrors of the Holocaust, French society had difficulty assimilating or re-assimilating its Jewish population due to anti-Semitism. Though most influential as a long essay on the workings of the consciousness of the anti-Semite, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948) is just as important a work as *Being and Nothingness* in its exploration of how the subject forms itself in conjunction with existential authenticity or inauthenticity and how these concepts are related to bad faith and its consequences. More importantly to the study of ontology, however, Sartre explores in both works his theory that the subject constantly remakes himself, though he forgoes an extended analysis of intra-subject otherness in favor of an exegesis of what he calls being-for-others, a concept which has as its focus inter-subject relations. The intra-subjective aspect of subject formation and how it results in inter-subjective relations has yet to be explored in its fullness and especially when considered in conjunction with Sartre's plays. *The Victors*, *No Exit*, and *Kean* are more than simple didactic plays in which Sartrean concepts are manifested through the speech and gestures of actors. These plays offer possibly the most concrete realizations of how subjects form and reform themselves through a radical destruction and reconstruction of their own being.

A fuller understanding of these concepts and their intersections with Sartre's drama as they are manifested in a fictional world and played out on stage will reveal the ways in which characters, like all subjects, remake themselves in their efforts to attain some level of ontological self-knowledge, or that understanding of one's own being which enables a subject to become truly free of Heidegger's "they," what Sartre sees as slavery to the judgments of others. Heidegger distinguishes the "they" from the authentic self in that the former is a form of being which has been dispersed into the mass of otherness found in groups of others, e.g., in a society, town or nation. Writes Heidegger, "If Dasein is familiar with itself as they-self, this means at the same time that the "they" itself prescribes that way of interpreting the world and Being-in-the-world which lies closest" (*Being and Time*, 167). This prescribed interpretation of the world, being close at hand and close in the mass of being of the "they," necessarily renders difficult any acquisition of self-knowledge for the individual subject as it insinuates itself into those spaces in which the individual self is remade.

In *No Exit*, for example, Garcin, Estelle, and Inez are so mired in the "they" that they are unable to exit the room in which they find themselves. This stasis is obvious in that they spend the entire drama attempting to gain each other's approval in the hope that this approbation will somehow free them. However, the subject can only break free from the "they" through his focus on his own ontological embodiment. And each embodiment is only discernible via the subject's actions.

Thus action is paramount in Sartre's plays. Action, as a primary element of drama and ontology, reveals the methods by which characterization occurs, but also, as will be proven, shows the quality of ontological embodiment each character chooses. Before a full explication of this ontology can be achieved, it is necessary that the relation between Sartre's drama and his

philosophy be known, as such an examination will reveal the balance he strikes between the two genres and how he uses the former as an exploration of the latter. Critics including Lucien Goldmann and Jacques Guicharnaud agree that Sartre's theatre is the theatre of his philosophy, and that his dramas are constructed in such ways as to espouse his philosophical ideas; that his philosophy is one of action – not simple theatrical gesture, but more than that – an exploration of the subject's *actions* as an existent being in a world of facticity. More specifically, much of the criticism on Sartre's drama, including that of Richard B. Vowles, states that his characters act in ways that determine whether or not they are more or less authentic subjects, depending on whether or not through their actions they take responsibility for their freedom by acting individually and by avoiding bad faith. And because his plays are plays of action, freedom, and responsibility, they are also vehicles for Sartre's philosophy and more than that, explorations of that philosophy, didactic vehicles which, because of their messages, are presented in a more realistic style than the works of the absurdists. Michael Wreszin comments in his discussion of the confluence of Sartre's drama and his philosophy, “His is thesis drama of the most didactic kind” (55), while Goldmann asserts that “Sartre's theatre is, as a whole, a theatre of propaganda, not political but philosophical ...” (109). While the works of absurdists like Beckett and Ionesco with few exceptions have no tangible didactic messages, Sartre's works are laden with his explorations of personal responsibility and its relation to existence. Sartre writes in *What is Literature and Other Essays* (1947), “We must take up a position *in our literature*, because literature is in essence a taking of position” (224).

The importance of the philosophic messages in Sartre's plays necessitates a realistic style for his characters, settings and plots. “He wanted first to get the spectator on familiar ground and then gradually bring him into existential drama, far from his familiar ground” (69) writes

Guicharnaud. In this way, Sartre draws his audience, through realistic settings, situations, and dialogue into a sort of theatrical dialectic by which he inculcates his philosophy to the masses. This realism is obvious in Sartre's most famous play, *No Exit*, which is set in “a drawing room in Second Empire style” (3). This realism and the theatre as a medium enable Sartre to reach a wider, collective audience than he would with a novel or poetry. Dorothy McCall writes, “Drama became for Sartre his preferred means of expressing *une littérature engagée* committed to change both man's social condition and his conception of himself. A novel communicates with its readers as individuals, each in his solitude; a play in performance communicates directly with a group” (2). Sartre and other dramatists can reach a theatre audience made up of dozens of people while a novel can reach only one at a time. Furthermore, Sartre's tendency to rely on his own philosophy as the basis for his plays dictates that he has a message to share with his spectators and that realism – the dramatic style most accessible to the masses – is crucial to his art.

But if Sartre's theatre is philosophically didacto-exploratory and intended to reach a wide audience through examinations of the actions of its characters, those who have commented on the existential authenticity of its characters have downplayed the importance of the manner in which these actions are performed in direct correlation to particular embodiments. When a character performs a particular action, even the simplest action is a part of a much larger system of being formation. The action for example, Kean agreeing to marry Anna, is a direct result of the embodiment he flings into being in the face of himself and others because the embodiment carries with it goals, whether the subject clearly realizes its embodiment's concomitant projects or not. If Kean embodies himself as one who is ready to marry, he does so with the goals of for example domestic tranquility in mind. This is not to say, however, that each subject consciously

has clear goals in mind. Goals may be much more broad, for example a cafe waiter may embody himself as such simply to obtain a livelihood.

Because Sartre's theatre is one of embodiment, action and authenticity, plays like *No Exit*, *The Victors*, and *Kean* offer Sartrean philosophical explorations of subjects pushed to the limits of existence by condemnation, torture, and oppressive social edicts. It is in extreme situations that a subject most clearly exercises or fails to exercise his freedom and therefore his authenticity, which in turn reflects the quality of his embodiments. “[The existentialist play's] structure is dictated by the 'extreme situation' of moral choice” (216) Vowles argues. Edith Kern contends that existentialism's most important ethical tenet is the authenticity of man's existence (10). In contrast, Thomas C. Anderson asserts that freedom is the principle value in Sartrean ethics (*The Foundation and Structure of Sartrean Ethics*, 1979, 42). By way of explanation, he writes that if one does not value freedom above all other things he values nothing at all (63). Sartre himself argues in “The Humanism of Existentialism” that responsibility is the key to ethics and that each subject is responsible for all other subjects. Unfortunately, he forgoes elaboration on this perplexing maxim, though Anderson explains that if each subject is the author of his world, he is responsible for all others in that world (78-79). He also writes that existential ethics are the ethics of action and involvement and that these actions are made conspicuous by the choices made by individual subjects (50). Although Kern, Anderson, and Sartre himself disagree on the focal point of Sartrean ethics, there are no concepts in their assertions that are mutually exclusive. The key to understanding Sartre and his ethical tenets lies in considering not only freedom, but also action and responsibility as their *sine qua non*. For the present study, each subject exercises her freedom – which is rendered obvious via her actions – which in turn reveals her level of responsibility, particularly her responsibility to herself rather than others.

Because so much of Sartre's theatre is based on action, Vowles's "moral choice" is not synonymous with ethical choice, but should be regarded as a choice that determines an entirety of being for the subject who chooses. In other words, the choices are moral not necessarily because they are made in extreme situations, but because they directly determine through the manner in which they are embodied the level of authenticity of the chooser's embodiment. As will be shown through analyses of plays including *The Victors*, in which subjects torture and murder each other to no avail, it is solely particular embodiments which should be evaluated rather than a subject's entire being.

Sartre takes a philosophical approach to writing in general in his own aesthetic criticism, which seeks to conflate his existential theories with modern aesthetic theory. He argues in *What is Literature and Other Essays* that the creative act, through the various objects it produces and reproduces, aims at a renewal of the writer's world and his totality of being (63). In this way, Sartre establishes a link between individual self-creation and aesthetic creativity while at the same time positing a correlation between the author and reader that allows for message transmittal. In this way, the creation of a work of literature not only acts as proof positive of Sartre's theories on the exercise of freedom as totality creation, but also demonstrates how his dramas act as vehicles for his philosophy. According to Sartre, because reading is a synthesis of perception and creation for the reader, it posits the essentiality of subject and object and forms a bond between them. The writer appeals to a reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of a work which makes the work and its message exist and this collaboration creates an extratextual dyadic structure which mirrors in many ways those textual dyads created in Sartre's drama, for example in Kean's acting of Shakespeare. This acting creates the plays anew each time they are acted. This creation of art in conjunction with the renewal of the artist and the work constitute

another example of how action, in this case, the creation of the work of art, is part of the re-creation of the self.

Sartre's maxim that authors must take up a position because literature is a taking of position is directly related to his concept of otherness, which he sees as characterized by conflict. In other words, while Ionesco rejected outright the need for literature to espouse any didactic message, Sartre's aesthetic theories clearly argue for their necessity based on his belief that conflict is the very essence of otherness and only otherness can create an atmosphere in which artistic creation is possible. Without difference or otherness, there would be no conflict and therefore no need of art. Essentially, conflict is not only the impetus for art but for existence itself because existence is created through the embodiments subjects cast forth based on the internal conflict between the destructive and constructive tendencies of subject formation.

Although Sartre's theories of aesthetic style and didactic import differ widely with those of the absurdists, much like them he recognizes the crisis of language that began with the propaganda of World War I. But whereas dramatists like Ionesco created a language based on the uselessness of language in plays like *The Bald Soprano* (1950) – in which he blatantly exploits the shortcomings of linguistic communicability – Sartre generally uses realistic language in his dramas, because, as he writes in *What is Literature and Other Essays*, “I distrust the incommunicable; it is the source of all violence” (229). Where Ionesco sees linguistic distortion as a sort of satire of language, Sartre views it as a dangerous experiment. He agrees with his critics when he states in *Sartre on Theater* (1976) that his focus in his plays is on action and that a spoken word is an act, which must be uttered responsibly, just as any other act must be performed responsibly (13).

Sartre's views specifically on drama clearly show that the re-creation of the self and plays with a message are of supreme importance to him. For example, the playwright reiterates that a play should have a message to be shared with its audience. He writes in *Sartre on Theater*, "The very severity of [the French plays of the 1940s] is in keeping with the severity of French life; their moral and metaphysical topics reflect the preoccupation of a nation which must at one and the same time reconstruct and re-create and which is searching for new principles" (42-43). With this sociohistorical aesthetic assessment, he not only reiterates the importance of re-creation, but he essentially argues that art and socio-political phenomena should reflect each other in such ways as to address the concerns of the masses.

More importantly, Sartre writes in the same book, "But if it's true that man is free in a given situation and that in and through that situation he chooses what he will be, then what we have to show in the theater are simple and human situations and free individuals in these situations choosing what they will be" (4). His characters choose what they will be as Kean turns from egomania to domestic tranquility and the protagonists of *The Victors* alter their personalities to the point of being unrecognizable to each other. This important tenet of his philosophic-aesthetic dramatic beliefs proves that he values a more accessible art form, one that allows for mass appeal and one very much in line with his philosophy of freedom and responsibility as avenues of authentic self-creation, one that makes obvious to its viewers the manner in which subjects at every moment reconstruct their beings. The lack of this level of accessibility is one charge Sartre makes specifically against Beckett and Ionesco, calling the inaccessibility of their plays "a problem" (*Sartre on Theater*, 52).

According to Sartre's philosophy, elements of which nearly always appear in his plays, the thing that lies at the very heart of otherness is conflict. And while he explores inter-subject

otherness in depth throughout his *oeuvre*, what Sartre neglects to explain is that if conflict is indeed at the heart of this otherness, how this conflict comes into play within a single subject. In other words, if it can be assumed because of Sartre's own theories on the formation of the subject that a subject is never really ontologically stable, the destructive and constructive tendencies of the subject remake that subject every instant via a radical reformation of being. This reconstruction of being is at once always inter-subjective and intra-subjective. It is the former because it becomes a realizable and lived phenomenon in relation to the other, even if this other is the reflective consciousness of a subject looking back at the unreflective consciousness of that same subject. It is the latter because by its very nature reconstruction is a necessary and possible product of these forces (the destructive and constructive) within the subject.

Rather than being split in two by Jacques Lacan's stalwart fortress walls² or divided into a tripartite entity along the lines of Freud's ego, id and superego, Sartre's subject is split metaphysically into its destructive and constructive selves which incessantly obliterate – through a radical explosion of being – and rebuild – through a radical restructuring of being – the self that it is. In “The Humanism of Existentialism” (1946) Sartre writes that “Man makes himself. He isn't ready made at the start. In choosing his ethics, he makes himself, and force of circumstances is such that he can not abstain from choosing one” (56). For Sartre, the subject is incessantly tearing down not Lacan's wall, but every particle of his being in his making and remaking of himself through the embodiments that he casts forth in the face of others and himself. As Leslie Stevenson's reading of Sartre states, “Anything we do, any role we play, even (Sartre wants to say) any emotion we feel or any value we respect, is sustained in being only by our own

² In his landmark work “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” Lacan argues that “... the formation of the *I* is symbolized in dreams by a fortress, or a stadium – its inner arena and enclosure, surrounded by marshes and rubbish-tips, dividing it into two opposed fields of contest where the subject flounders in quest of the lofty, remote inner castle whose form (sometimes juxtaposed in the same scenario) symbolizes the id in a quite startling way” (*Ecrits*, 78).

constantly remade decision” (256). This decision is the decision of how the subject remakes himself and this embodiment in turn enables the subject to create an essence. It is this embodiment, and not the ethics of Classical philosophy, that in the end makes a self. This embodiment follows the radical explosion of being which results from the conflict of destructive and constructive tendencies and is followed in turn by the actions concomitant to the given embodiment. These actions are then followed by the possibility of evaluation of the embodiment as authentic or inauthentic.

The subject performs this making/remaking via this internal conflict when he *embodies* himself as that which he is not. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre asserts that the subject must be what he is not and not be what he is, meaning that, for example, a cafe waiter must *act* like a cafe waiter, which he is not in the sense that a cafe waiter is not all he is or will be. But the waiter, since he is *acting* in his embodiment as a waiter, cannot truly be that which he is i.e., a waiter. “Human reality is a perpetual surpassing toward a coincidence with itself which is never given” Sartre stipulates (139). This act of embodiment and this failure to coincide with the self are direct results of the inescapability of the subject to constantly remake himself. But Sartre's interest in a complete explication of this process wanes before he fully outlines his project of self formation, which leaves the present study to prove such hypotheses as 1) the unattainability of any final or permanent authenticity, since each subject embodies itself alternately in authentic and inauthentic ways and because the embodiments of a single subject are constantly in flux, 2) the primacy of embodiment as the force by which the self is formed and authenticity achieved or avoided (though always fleetingly), and 3) the criteria for the assessment of authenticity levels, especially in consideration of the ephemeral shifting of embodiments of a single subject. The

primary criterion for the assessment of authenticity levels will be the extent to which a subject forgoes exploration of its subject formation in favor of an exploration of that of another.

In those spaces in which the self is remade, the subject usually remakes himself as near the same to his previous embodiment as possible (in which case the structural tendency prevails because it keeps most of the being the same). A more extensive change is possible over time, though in extreme instances (one in which the subject must remake himself destructively in order to survive or save face, etc.), the subject remakes himself differently (in which case the destructive tendency is prevalent). Among these extreme situations are torture, damnation, and penury, challenges with which Sartre's characters must contend. Though these characters often radically alter their beings due to these challenges, traces of the subject always remain and aid in the radical restructuring of the self as a pattern for restructuring. Although these traces act as a sort of template in subject reformation, a subject's authenticity level may vary with each passing restructuring. *It is the quality of the embodiment of a particular subject which determines his level of existential authenticity and it is a greater level of authenticity which enables a subject to achieve a more thorough ontological self-knowledge. Because so formative of self-knowledge, the quality level of any embodiment is determined by the extent to which the embodiment is concerned with the subject and not with the subjecthood of others. A truly authentic embodiment is one that refrains from attempting to influence others.* If a cafe waiter embodies himself as a cafe waiter and does so in such a way that his being is concerned with his subjecthood and not that of others, then his embodiment can be said to be of quality. As a consequence, his level of authenticity will be greater. Conversely, if the cafe waiter embodies himself as a cafe waiter, but does so in a manner in which his concerns are not with his subjecthood but with that of another, e.g. if his embodiments are intended to impress someone or to interfere with their embodiments

in some way, his authenticity level will be lower. The embodiment a subject sets forth is not always necessarily one designed to alter the state of being of another, though it is always necessarily an inter-subjective and simultaneously an intra-subjective one because even if an embodiment is cast when its subject is isolated and incommunicado the subject always embodies himself to himself. When the cafe waiter is not at work, even when he is alone in his room, he still embodies himself, if only to himself, as Fred or Emily or whoever he is when not at work. Each subject always has some sense of identity because it must always remake itself and this remaking brings with it embodiment and action, which in turn aid in the creation of some sort of identity. Matthew C. Eshleman argues that, “The desire ‘to be’ is always a desire ‘to be’ some particular being Since these specific projects, albeit embedded in the original project, must take place in social reality, social reality is necessary to give a concrete . . . explication of our original project of bad faith” (43-44). But Eshleman is only half right. Each embodiment is indeed one with particular goals or a “project” in mind, but each one is not always social in the sense that it involves other subjects or their influence in some way. Even when the subject is alone and not in communication with another subject, he still must embody himself to himself, just as a consciousness reflects upon itself, and this is only achieved through embodiment. As Sartre writes, again in *Being and Nothingness*, “All consciousness is positional in that it transcends itself in order to reach an object . . .” (11). If a consciousness is capable of reaching an external object, it is also able to reach itself via reflection upon itself.

In his discussion of Sartre’s café waiter and his relation to bad faith, Tony Fisher argues that a subject’s sense of identity is never fully defined. “Of course, to say that my personal identity is fictive is not to say that it is merely fictional” he writes. “. . . a fictive identity is non-genuine to the extent that it does not and cannot ultimately answer the question of ‘who’ I am”

(85). Fisher goes on to assert correctly that identity is formed only through “identificatory acts of pragmatic self-assertion” (85). What could these acts of pragmatic self-assertion which establish a subject’s identity be other than that subject’s embodiments? To thoroughly and accurately set forth an embodiment which is authentic and therefore identificatory in the sense that it in some way identifies a particular subject at least temporarily, one must focus on one’s own subjecthood in the making of such an embodiment.

According to Sartre, and in accordance with Heidegger’s conceptions of “thrownness” a human consciousness, or subject, is thrust into a situation in the world. Each one, through its attainment of consciousness, finds itself existing without knowing why. For Heidegger, the subject is something thrown into existence and something which exists as an entity which has to be as it is and as it can be (*Being and Time*, 321). This means a subject is always in flux or transition.

Although Sartre was a voracious reader of Heidegger, his stay in Berlin in 1933-34 was initially to study Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. While in Germany, Sartre attempted to study Husserl and Heidegger simultaneously, but became exhausted with this, according to Annie Cohen-Solal's biography of Sartre (*Sartre: A Life*, 1987, 100). He gave up Heidegger during the rest of his time in Berlin, but came back to that philosopher upon his return to France, at which point he critiqued extensively Heidegger's ontology. While the latter philosopher believes the individual cannot escape the “they” of society and nation and is therefore subordinated to others, Sartre maintains that subjective freedom empowers the individual subject over the group mentality. However, the extent to which the subject is able to make this escape depends upon individual embodiments.

For Sartre, because an extreme and subjective freedom clashes with the facticity of day-to-day living and because a subject's existence is in the first place unjustifiable and contingent, the ways in which a subject through her actions chooses to make herself are the sole determinants of her level of what Sartre calls authenticity. Sartre writes in *Anti-Semite and Jew* that “To be in a situation, as we see it, is *to choose oneself* in a situation, and men differ from one another in their situations and also in the choices they themselves make of themselves” (60). A given situation (its facticity) necessarily limits the subject's freedom in practical, if not ontological terms. In the case of the anti-Semite, the subject chooses himself but does so in an inauthentic manner because he acts in bad faith when he chooses to find his being outside himself, never looking within. Bad faith is defined as “A lie to oneself within the unity of a single consciousness. Through bad faith a person seeks to escape the responsible freedom of Being-for-itself” (*Being and Nothingness*, 800). Through his embodiments, because he seeks his being outside himself, an anti-Semite projects the meaning of his being outwards. He wants the Jew to fear him and be subservient to him, he wants to be part of a collectivity because he fears himself and his consciousness. His embodiment attempts to take refuge among the embodiments of others and this refuge is akin to Heidegger's “they.” This fear is a necessary consequence of the nature of the anti-Semite as one who hates others based on ethnicity. “Now the anti-Semite flees responsibility as he flees his own consciousness ...” Sartre writes (27).

Although *Anti-Semite and Jew* is specifically tailored to address the issues of a minority group in France, its ideas are applicable to all subjects because they deal with the very basic situation in which every subject finds himself, not in a situation of hatred, but in a situation of *choosing the mode of his embodiments*. What's more, the work itself offers arguably the most precise definition of Sartrean authenticity ever attempted. Writes Sartre, “[a]uthenticity, it is

almost needless to say, consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves ..." (90). Of its converse, inauthenticity, Sartre writes that it is – somewhat akin to Heidegger's "they" – "Individuality lost in the impersonal 'one'; social relativism and universal tolerance; polite rationalism; blindness to values ..." (*War Diaries*, 14, 1983). Anthony Manser, adds,

I cannot give a full and clear account of authenticity, the opposite of bad faith, but I am sure that to be authentic is to be totally involved in what one is doing, without any thought of the effect of the fact that it is I who am doing it might have on others' views of me. There is an enormous difference between the lecturer who is following the argument wherever it may lead, is absorbed in it, and one who is thinking of the effect his brilliance will have on the audience (103).

What this means for Sartre is that the subject, in order to have an authentic existence, must take responsibility for her freedom by defining herself not based on her past or any role thrust upon her, but based on her actions and how she embodies herself. If the subject embodies herself without regard to "they" she attains greater authenticity than she would otherwise. But these requirements, according to Manser, are only the prerequisites to authentic embodiment and not the determinants themselves. As Manser adds, there is very much an element of focusing on the task at hand for its own sake rather than for the sake of influencing the other in the determination of authenticity.

If "... having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation" and "... assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves" are the prerequisites of authentic embodiment, they are so because casting an authentic embodiment involves focusing on one's own being and its radical reconstruction. This type of reconstruction can only be possible when a consciousness is

unmuddled by concern for another's situation. In other words, a consciousness that is true and lucid is only discernible through an embodiment that is of high quality because a subject who casts forth this type of embodiment must have as his focus his own state of being and his radical reconstruction, not that of others. Among Sartre's characters discussed here, only Anna and Kean (at the end of the play) display this true and lucid consciousness. A subject having as his primary focus his own state of being will as a consequence possess the requisite lucidity to be authentic. It is when the subject concerns itself with the mode of being of others and the alteration of that other mode of being that it falls into an embodiment too distant from himself and therefore of lesser authenticity. To the second half of Sartre's definition – which dictates that he who is authentic is responsible for himself and his actions – must be added that for a subject to be responsible he must *embody* himself responsibly and therefore authentically. The subject does so by taking as his central concern his own being and the radical reconstruction thereof.

It should be noted, however, that an embodiment cannot be faked through bad faith or deception because embodiment is a thing apart and distinct from bad faith. Bad faith, contends Sartre, is a negation turned inward (*Being and Nothingness*, 87). An embodiment is a mode of being projected outward even if this “outward” is again intra-subjective, from a subject to itself in the manner of Sartre's reflective consciousness which reflects upon its pre-reflective consciousness. Inauthentic embodiments are distinct from bad faith because the former are intra- and inter-subjective while the latter are strictly inward negations. An embodiment is a mode of being and a lie or other act of bad faith cannot be a mode of being because it is a simple inward negation. It is not lived. The tenet which states that the subject must be what he is not and not be what he is in no way stipulates that the subject could possibly cast an embodiment that is untrue.

He may lie to others certainly, but when he does, the lie he tells is not an embodiment because the lie hinges on that which is turned inward.

In addition to lucidity and responsibility as the determinants of authenticity, T. Storm Heter builds on Sartre's theories by adding respect for and recognition of the freedom of others as a necessary condition of true authenticity (22). In his analysis of *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Heter states that those who oppress others, like anti-Semites and many of the characters in Sartre's plays, are not authentic because they deny their own freedom and an authentic individual must embrace the freedom of himself and others (26-27). This may be the case, but an awareness of the freedom of others adds to a subject's authenticity not because the freedom of the subject is somehow linked *causa sui* to the freedom of others, but because any attempt to deny the freedom of others has at its origin a diversion of the energies of a subject from itself to others. When a subject refuses to respect the freedom of his fellows, it is because he concerns himself with them to a greater extent than he would had he respected their freedom.

Kean, for example, embodies himself half-heartedly throughout most of the play of the same name. He is confused as to the true nature of his own being as he plays a sort of social game of keeping up with the Prince of Wales's debauchery and social climbing. As a result, he casts forth an embodiment of himself that shows a concern that does not have at its center his subjecthood, but that of others. He acts in a manner which reveals that his concern is with influencing others to be impressed by his acting abilities or his skill in seduction. It is not until the drama's final scene that Kean embodies himself in such a way that his concern for his own being is made manifest, as he makes his true feelings for Anna known. At long last, he embodies himself as Kean the man rather than Kean the actor. He agrees to marry Anna, but does so not to influence her or because he is concerned with any alteration of her being. He does so because he

realizes that settling down with the woman he loves is the best thing for him. *Kean* offers an interesting look into a subject who metamorphoses through his destructive and structural tendencies to form an embodiment which changes throughout the course of the play.

The problematic aspect of Kean's embodiments, specifically their seeming capriciousness, is problematic not only for Kean, but for every character in Sartre's works and indeed every subject. Because each subject's being is incessantly destroyed and rebuilt and because at every moment his embodiments are ever-changing, each subject can be said to be something of an actor who embodies himself differently at different points in time. As a result, no subject can be said to produce an embodiment that is either authentic or inauthentic in any permanent sense. No embodiment is that of the "anti-Semite" or that of "an actor" in any lasting way. Furthermore, a subject always embodies himself with more than one embodiment at a single moment because of the many roles each plays. Therefore, embodiments can be thought of as banners unfurled and thrown forth by a single subject at every moment, clashing with the banners of others who similarly are casting forth theirs. As will be shown, these clashes result in ontic as well as ontological conflicts between characters and between a single character's reflective and pre-reflective consciousnesses. As a result, each embodiment must be considered in its uniqueness, though as stated, subjects usually reconstruct their beings based on patterns which result in an individual's being – except in extreme situations – being embodied by habitual embodiments.

These patterns of embodiment are played out on Sartre's stage not simply because they are materialized by actors who cast forth real-world embodiments of characters who in turn cast forth fictional embodiments as those characters, though these phenomena may be more easily discernible through the medium of the play than for example, in the novel. These patterns are

made obvious on the stage just as they are in real-world situations: through the actions (including speech, which is a spoken action) of a subject and others, and especially in their interactions. Empirical observation and evaluation of quality of embodiment is only finally possible through consideration of the actions of a subject in relation to or in conflict with others, even if this action is constituted solely by the thoughts of a subject before itself.

Among Sartre's more realistic plays, *The Victors* clearly portrays a group of individuals choosing through their actions and embodiments what they will be. In the existentially crucial moment in *The Victors* in which the Resistance fighters murder one of their own members to keep him from breaking under torture, a clash of embodiments is born out of the fighters' cowardice and pride. Each of the protagonists attempts to prove that he is a hero who sacrifices his body to torture in order to save the lives of other Resistance members who never appear in the play, though each prisoner's embodiment reveals that he is prideful and therefore only concerned with influencing others' actions and perceptions. *The Victors* shows how torture influences shifting embodiments via its examinations of the ways in which victims of torture accept or attempt to escape this torture. These embodiments in turn reveal the authenticity levels of its characters. If a character takes responsibility for how he reacts to this torture, by for example exercising his ontological freedom in such a way that he resists the temptation to divulge the location of his comrades, he attains a greater authenticity than he would had he not taken any responsibility.

The play, in which French Resistance fighters are imprisoned and tortured for information during World War II, illustrates several of Sartre's important theories set forth in *Being and Nothingness* and *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Following his tenets on individual consciousnesses in those works with explications of inter-consciousness relations, the author

argues that conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others and that consequently, in this mode in which the self exists as an object for others, each subject seeks to make an object of the other in an effort to recover its own being by becoming the subject rather than the object (475). As a result of this process, subjects are in a constant state of conflict with each other. “Unity with the Other is therefore in fact unrealizable” he writes (*Being and Nothingness*, 477). Embodiments are constantly changing, shifting, and being rebuilt, and more importantly, they are constantly being flung forward by each subject which inevitably results in the clashing of embodiments as they do in the scene in which the victors kill one of their own.

An extreme form of the clashing of embodiments is torture, though Sartre argues that torture is always a failure because torturers never get hold of more than a body. They can never possess more than the flesh of he who is tortured; they can never truly possess another's consciousness without the permission of that consciousness. A torturer can in fact only act upon a facticity (the body) and can never know what the submission of the tortured subject means to its own freedom (511). In fact, a greater level of authenticity – which allows a character to realize that he is not solely his tortured body – may enable a subject to understand that his consciousness can only be possessed if he allows it to be so. A greater level of authenticity is especially manifested during torture because the tortured subject may choose to cast forth an embodiment that communicates to his torturer that he cannot be defeated by this torture. Through this type of embodiment, the tortured subject in fact wins the battle against his torturer because, as Sartre so adeptly explains, torture's real goal is to affect being through the body. That each subject is limited by her physical body is symbolized at the beginning of the play, as the opening stage direction dictates that the protagonists are all handcuffed (109). This restriction on their bodies is suggestive of the facticity that limits their practical freedom throughout their existence. When the

tortured subject embodies himself in such a way as to communicate to his torturer that he will not be defeated by that torture, then he has won.

Unfortunately for the characters in the play, those who are tortured fail to realize that they are free to interpret their imprisonment and more importantly their physical torture as they please in ontological terms. Instead, they rely on pride and the desire to get the better of their captors, as they concoct ludicrous stories to throw off their torturers. The torturers, for their part, fare no better in terms of authentic embodiments due to their sadistic treatment of their prisoners. According to Sartre, “sadism is passion, barrenness, and tenacity” (*Being and Nothingness*, 517). “Thus sadism is a refusal to be incarnated and a flight from all facticity and at the same time an effort to get hold of the other's facticity” (518). This “hold of the other's facticity” is manipulation, not only control of the other's body but of his being, as sadism and torture seek to influence the embodiments of others. So it is not only the Resistance fighters who fail. When Landrieu and his cohorts beat the protagonists, although they make the prisoners identify themselves with their own tortured flesh, they also act through inauthentic embodiments because of their pride in thinking they can ultimately determine the experience of the other. And because they focus so vehemently on the radical reconstruction of the being of others, they forgo any exploration of their own. It is not through the efforts of the torturers only but also through the failure of those tortured that all the human efforts in the play end in failure. For although human bodies are intermediaries between consciousnesses, the other cannot constitute our experience because of the ultimate impossibility of relations between consciousnesses (*Being and Nothingness*, 308). In thinking they can constitute the experiences of the others by making them talk, the captors act in pride. Wreszin comments on *The Victors*: “It deals with the motives and consequences of the heroic act, drawing the fine distinction between heroism and heroics – the

former based upon 'authenticity' and objective reason arrived at subjectively; the latter based upon pride and fundamental insincerity or self-deception” (46). The characters' actions reveal that both the captors and their captives engage in heroics rather than in heroism; there are no heroes in the play.

To the extent that *The Victors* is a play about authenticity and embodiment, it is also a play about how its characters react to torture and the threat of torture. In his brief history of torture and its role in the French penal process in the opening chapter of *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Michel Foucault asserts that a body in an unempowered position is much more than just a body. He writes, “But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (25). Essentially, the human body is located in a much larger network of power relations; it can serve as a conduit for information, labor, oppression, and intimidation. This locating of bodies into the power-relations field is played out in *The Victors* as its protagonists find themselves tools in a network of power structures. This network is built not upon physical bodies but upon embodiments because torture never has as its goal any real effect on the body of another; its goal is to alter the embodiments of another by forcing a confession or the divulging of information. As Foucault recounts how by the early 19th century public torture in Europe had all but disappeared, he writes “One no longer touched the body, or at least as little as possible, and then only to reach something other than the body itself” (11). The body is merely one part of an embodiment made up of the entire being of a subject, or rather a tool for the carrying out of actions that go along with an embodiment, and the goal of torture is not the body but its embodiment as the closest point to which the other can get, since as Sartre tells us, any real unity with another is impossible.

Morts sans Sepulture, most commonly translated as *The Victors* based on an earlier discarded title – but also translated as *Death without Burial* and *Men Without Shadows* – has as its key moment the murder of Francois, whose panic has risen to hysteria at the thought of being tortured. He is killed by Henri when he admits he will reveal the identity of their group's leader under torture. Jean, their leader, immediately denounces the murder, accusing all the remaining fighters of complicity and charging them with killing out of vanity (143). He then seeks to console his girlfriend Lucie, Francois's sister, only to be told that the two lovers have nothing in common any more. "I've become another person. I don't know myself" she declares (145). This rejection of Jean shows Lucie as one who, because of the radical shift in facticity constituted by being captured and later raped, rejects via her embodiment her previous patterns of embodiment to reconstruct herself as one radically different than what she was. But her new-found embodiment will be short-lived: Lucie and the remaining prisoners are later shot by their tormentors.

But before being executed, the moment of the play in which Francois is killed is crucial to a reading in which embodiment and authenticity are brought to the fore because Francois's murder is clearly a product of the clash of embodiments of its characters. This clash is the result of a multiplicity of embodiments being flung at each other, all of which seek to alter the being of others. The captives argue amongst themselves on how best to hold up under torture, what to tell their torturers, but most importantly what to do about the panic-stricken Francois. The most extreme form of alteration of another's being is murder, in which one not only seeks to alter another's being, but seeks to deprive another of the ability to reconstruct his being ever again. In essence, murder seeks to do much more than influence another's being, it seeks to appropriate it permanently, which is akin to an attempt to own another's being or become that other being in the

sense that ontologically one who does so seeks to take over another's being. Such an attempt at the adoption of another being constitutes the most inauthentic type of embodiment.

Characteristically, Sartre plays down the moral aspects of murder, forgoing any real commentary on the rightness or wrongness of these acts, and he is right to do so, as existential philosophy concerns itself much more with ontology than with ethics. Instead, he explores questions regarding the existential responsibilities of his characters. They are all complicit in the murder of Francois because none of them acted to stop it, and they admit as much to each other and to their captors. They all share the guilt because according to Sartrean notions of authentic existence, subjects must choose responsibly and choose out of their concern with how their choices affect all subjects (Baskin, vii). In choosing to strangle Francois to death, Henri chooses on behalf of everyone involved, captives as well as captors, deciding that the best thing for all of them is that Francois die. When asked which one of them strangled Francois, Canoris replies, "We decided together, and we are all responsible" (153). Indeed, all the Resistance operatives may be responsible for Francois's death, but they are so not because they strangled a man or stood idly by while another did so. They are responsible because they embodied themselves in such ways which had as their purpose not simply the radical alteration of another's being, but the permanent cessation of that being.

The notion of responsibility Baskin refers to is the one, Sartre tells us, that is based upon the subject as the author of a world (*Being and Nothingness*, 707). Because the subject incessantly remakes himself, he creates his entire world along with himself and is thereby the author of a world. As the author of a world, the subject is responsible for it. In other words, responsibility is "consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or of an object" (707). Sartre's theory of responsibility is just one part of his outline of radical subjectivity in

which the subject who is condemned to freedom is also condemned to responsibility for that freedom. It should be noted, however, that this responsibility is an ontological one which dictates that any subject who attempts to avoid responsibility is in bad faith and therefore projects an inauthentic embodiment which in turn results in a disempowered subject. In essence, the subject disempowers himself when he fails to realize this responsibility because in doing so he only attempts to hide his own world from himself which results in an obfuscation of ontological self-knowledge. As authors of their individual worlds, each victor is responsible for those worlds even when these worlds overlap into a single event as in Francois's murder.

The characters in *The Victors* take responsibility for the murder of Francois and thereby acknowledge that they are responsible for their subject creation, their worlds, and their embodiments. This would appear to bring them a deep and thorough ontological self-knowledge because to take responsibility is to avoid bad faith; however, taking responsibility for an embodiment that resulted in murder in no way justifies, excuses, or negates the embodiment which leads to murder. Furthermore, the fleetingness of all embodiments renders them extremely problematic when attempting to assess once and for all the moral character of subjects and this is why any final moral assessment of a subject is in fact impossible. To attempt to attribute to any subject any final moral or ethical evaluation of any kind would be to attempt to make that subject into an in-itself, as something complete and whole rather than a for-itself (which all subjects are at least until their deaths), as something incomplete and in a constant state of becoming.

Only a particular subject's embodiments can be judged, and these only individually. Tempting though it is to say of a subject even after his or her death, "She was compassionate" or "He was immoral" these types of assessments are faulty by their nature because all subjects are compassionate and immoral at one time or another based on the embodiments they fling outward

toward others and to themselves. In *The Victors* Sartre offers up characters who on the one hand murder a member of their own military unit, but who on the other hand take responsibility for that murder. Each of these actions creates new subjects and new worlds for characters who are essentially moral and immoral, compassionate and cruel, heroes and cowards all during a single existence but through numerous embodiments.

Francois's murder comes about after he threatens to denounce Jean, whose identity as the group's leader is unknown to their captors. With this, Francois embodies himself in such a way that he seeks to alter Jean's being in the most radical manner possible, just as his is radically altered later: through the death of the other. Francois essentially threatens to take Jean's life in order to preserve his own, which means that he embodies himself in a manner in which he seeks to influence, and in fact to end, the construction of the other's being and does so in the most radical way possible. With his admission that he will reveal Jean's identity, Francois radically remakes himself as one who embodies himself inauthentically. He attempts to embody himself as a hero when he says to his sister, "I'm going to save you, Lucie. They will let us live" (141). He believes that if he turns Jean over to their captors, they will let him and the rest of the group go free, but his ontological focus is so far from his own being and so intent on the beings of others that this embodiment is clearly an inauthentic one which indirectly leads to his own death.

Although it could be argued that Francois has as his primary concern his own being in that his instinct of self-preservation leads him to attempt to save himself by informing on his comrade, for him to embody himself authentically would entail him embodying himself with courage and a clear fixation on his own being preservation via his withstanding any potential torture.

Furthermore, after Henri reveals his intentions to kill Francois, the latter continues his inauthentic embodiment when he begs for his life and says he will not reveal Jean's identity after

all. He seeks to alter the being of Henri, even if only to save his own life. The only authentic way he could have saved himself would have been to have embodied himself in such a way that he would have undergone torture and kept his mouth shut via an authentic embodiment which realizes it is only his body, not his being, that would be affected. This authentic embodiment would have taken the form of one in which he sought the radical reconstruction of solely his own being and one in which his self-preservation instinct could be satisfied.

Francois's fellow group members choose their embodiments just as inauthentically, however, when they remake themselves as murderers and proceed to embody themselves as such. Henri and Canoris speak in vague terms of their regrets for bringing Francois along on the mission during which they were captured, which hints at their pending remorse for the murder they are soon to commit. Henri says, "Francois, I'm not your judge. You're only a kid still, and all this was too tough for you. I expect at your age, I'd have done the same." Canoris echoes this regretful tone: "It's our fault. We shouldn't have brought you with us. Some risks should only be taken by men. Forgive us" (141). Though the embodiments of Henri and Canoris to this point have some authenticity because they do not seek a radical alteration of the being of another and because they take responsibility for what they are about to do, they also act as preludes to Francois's imminent death, a thing which obviously seeks the most radical alteration of Francois's being.

They make the leap from authentic to inauthentic embodiment, however, when they decide to kill Francois and offer up their embodiments as killers. "We can't allow you to speak, Francois" Henri says. "They'll kill you all the same, you know. And you will die in despair" (141). Hearing this ominous threat, Jean immediately attempts to defend Francois by proclaiming he will not allow Francois's murder. "My hands are free, and I am with you" he tells the boy

(142). But Jean is mistaken because to be “with” another is impossible in any ontological sense. As Sartre tells us, any unity with the other is in fact unrealizable. Semantically, Jean means that he is “with” Francois in the sense that he agrees with and supports him, though in an ontological sense, he means to combine his being with another's for the sake of the preservation of that other's being. But any such combination is quite impossible because as Sartre repeatedly reminds us, and rightfully so, conflict is at the heart of otherness. This otherness, in turn, acts as the catalyst both for the intra-subjective formation of the self and the inter-subjective embodiment formation. So in essence, Jean's embodiment is that of one who attempts to combine his being with that of another, an impossible prospect and also one which seeks to interfere with the subject formation of another. Through his attempts to save the life of another, however, Jean seeks to preserve the being of that other, and though his attempt to alter the being of another takes his ontological focus from his own being, it makes efforts at the continuation of another free and independent being. So in the big picture, though Jean embodies himself inauthentically in the short-term by attempting to alter the subjectivity of Henri and Canoris, he does so in an effort to ensure future noninterference with the being of Francois, an act of an authentic embodiment.

The only member of the group to escape moral judgment is Jean, who refuses to be an accessory to murder but who also seeks to combine with or substitute his being for that of another. These are impossible prospects and ones that also seek to alter the being of another. Morally, this is excusable because Jean seeks to save the life of another, though in strictly ontological terms, Jean's embodiment is clearly inauthentic. This inauthenticity, however, is set forth in order to prevent an even greater act of inauthenticity: the permanent and willful termination of another's being.

But before Jean is able to stop Henri from killing Francois, Lucie steps in not to prevent Francois's death, but to ensure it by reasoning that Francois will die the next day anyway. In so doing, Lucie casts two embodiments in rapid succession of each other: an inauthentic one at Jean which seeks to stop him from interfering in the murder, and another inauthentic one at the rest of the protagonists which seeks to ensure that Francois dies. Jean is stupefied by Lucie's actions and asks her "Is this really you?" (142). The fact that Jean asks this question of his former lover, rhetorical though it may be, is proof positive that she has radically altered her embodiment due to extreme circumstances of being, i.e., imminent death. Because not only Francois's but all their lives are in danger, Lucie has radically altered the reconstruction of her being through her destructive tendencies, making herself a radically different being than that which she once was. It is this radical reconstruction that prompts Jean's ontological question as to her being.

The characters, including Lucie, continue to argue and rationalize over whether or not they should permanently silence Francois by terminating the reconstruction of his being. Francois begs for Lucie's intervention, but she turns her head away. With this simple but damning gesture, Lucie simultaneously casts an authentic embodiment – the one which refrains from interfering with Henri's reconstruction as a murderer – and an inauthentic one – the one which seeks, via its noninterference, to end Francois's life. This does not mean the two embodiments cancel each other out, nor does it indicate any sort of moral relativism in relation to Lucie's actions. Because her embodiment, through the action of her noninterference, seeks to permanently end another's ability to reconstruct his being and because such an attempt is the most extreme form of interference with another's being, such actions must be said to be far more inauthentic than any other. And although ontology and ethics are disparate branches of philosophy, if one insisted upon an ethical assessment of these characters' actions, it must be

concluded that a permanent alteration of another's being is more morally repugnant than a temporary one.

It is at this point, just before Henri strangles the young Francois to death, that Lucie offers her first expression of remorse for that death. "My darling, my poor darling, my only love, forgive me" she says to Francois (142). Ontologically, she asks for forgiveness not for the actual murder of Francois, but for casting an embodiment in which she actually condones her brother's death. The fact that she does so with remorse and supposedly for the sake of the lives of unseen Resistance fighters is small comfort to her 16-year-old brother who dies in captivity at the hands of his compatriots. With her expression of remorse, Lucie casts forth yet another embodiment, one which is remorseful and makes some attempt at responsibility, though one which yet again seeks to influence the being of Francois in such a way as to attain some modicum of forgiveness from him. This remorse counts for nothing in practical terms, though it may lessen the severity of the guilt she feels. Nevertheless, though Lucie takes some responsibility which would indicate an authentic embodiment, she acts in an overall inauthentic manner with her efforts to alter the being of her brother.

The title of the play, when translated as *The Victors*, can only be read as an ironic one. There are no winners in the drama, especially at its culmination when the remaining prisoners decide (somewhat capriciously) that they want to live badly enough to reveal the location of their comrades. They are shot anyway, on the orders of a usurping Vichy lieutenant who goes against orders to ensure the prisoners' deaths. If the culmination of the drama seems undercooked, it has seemed so to many. Sartre himself bemoaned the shortcomings of the play. Despite the work's value as a tool of exploration on many of Sartre's theories, the playwright himself was his own worst critic when assessing *The Victors*. "They play was a failure" he said (*Sartre on Theater*,

203). He based this damning statement on the play's lack of suspense resulting from his characters' destinies being clearly mapped out. Indeed the characters taken as a whole often act as mere mouthpieces for their creator. Despite its shortcomings, the play nevertheless offers readers clear illustrations of some of Sartre's most important theories regarding embodiment, authenticity, freedom and responsibility and it does this through its emphasis on conflict and action.

The Victors is also worth serious study because of the ways in which its characters create numerous embodiments of themselves, and ones that are often contradictory or paradoxical. It is because Sartre's characters, like any other subjects, constantly remake themselves that varying embodiments of a single character often seem at odds with each other. Lucie, for example, embodies herself as alternately murderous, remorseful, pragmatic, maudlin, etc. Although it could be argued that this is the result of poor characterization on the part of the play's author, a more ontological interpretation of Lucie's supposed caprice is that she remakes herself based on her ever-changing goals and her facticity, the environment in which she finds herself. This facticity is constantly and rapidly changing and she and her comrades and their goals must change with it. And although Lucie's embodiments are usually inauthentic, this estimation should not be construed (at least solely) as an ethical or moral shortcoming. Her seeming fickleness, and that of all subjects, is simply the product of the incessant reconstruction of being that is a necessary result of the subject's destructive and constructive tendencies at the heart of each being.

A much more successful play, and one that also has clear parallels to Sartre's philosophy, is *No Exit*. As the most popular and critically successful of Sartre's plays, *No Exit* is also among his most philosophically important creative works. The play acts as a manifestation of many of

Sartre's theories, several of which are also found in *The Victors*, as will be shown. Like the characters in the latter work, the trio of the damned in *No Exit* fail to live authentically, though unlike the Resistance fighters, Garcin, Inez, and Estelle fail both in their lives and their afterlives. The characters are doomed because the amount of ontological self-knowledge they each possess is so miniscule. This lack of self-knowledge is a direct result of their embodiments which focus on the reconstruction of others' beings rather than on their own. In more ontic terms, their desperate quest for approval from others and its concomitant existence in inauthenticity result in their repeating this desperate cycle of unattainable approbation for eternity. Scholars who have commented on the play agree that its focus is on actions and the consequences of those actions and how they relate to authenticity and bad faith, though what has been missing is an explication of how embodiment and the actions that come out of particular embodiments come into play in the drama.

The trio of *No Exit* embody themselves inauthentically not, as Sartre would have it, because through bad faith they are liars, cowards, and murderers (though they are). They embody themselves in an inauthentic manner because their embodiments have as their aim the radical reconstruction of others' beings rather than their own. The actions by which they lie, act as cowards, and murder are the actions that follow their chosen embodiments. They remain throughout the play unconcerned with their own subject formation as they strive to make others reconstruct themselves in ways favorable to them. This is why they have so little ontological knowledge about the nature of their own beings. Sartre would argue that these characters are inauthentic because they so often practice bad faith as they lie and equivocate not only to others but to themselves. However, bad faith as a negation directed inward by a consciousness toward itself is a thing apart from an inauthentic embodiment because the latter is not a negation and not

directed (solely) inward, it is a mode of being directed toward the self and others simultaneously. Because what Sartre terms bad faith is a direct product of embodiment, embodiment and its quality level are the major determining factors of authenticity level. Although Sartre himself never used these terms and never attempted a method to assess the quality levels of embodiments, his ideas are central to any such method because of their focus on ontological existence. These levels can be determined through analysis of the actions of the subject who embodies himself. As a result, the embodiments of the infernal trio of *No Exit* must be said to be inauthentic because they remain obsessed with what their roommates think of them. As a result, they each spend the bulk of the play attempting to alter the radical reconstruction of the beings of others because they believe they can achieve salvation through the approbation of the other, when in reality seeking after the approval of others leads the subject to divert energies from her own being onto that of others.

Garcin pleads for the approval of Inez, who needs Estelle, who wants Garcin in an incessant, cyclical shifting and clashing of embodiments. This eternal triangle of dependence takes shape almost immediately in the play and remains a deadlock throughout, preventing any easy way for any one of its characters to receive the approval of another. The door to the room in which they are kept at one point actually opens as if for them to exit. This is why the title of the play is misleading: There is an exit, but unfortunately for the play's characters, none of them embodies themselves authentically enough to take responsibility for their actions and walk out. They need the approval of the other too much to leave before they get that approval. *No Exit* clearly illustrates its author's contention that conflict is at the heart of otherness and relations with others and does so in such a way that makes clear Garcin's assertion that "Hell is other people" (45), though it is so only when any given subject allows it to be.

Commenting on this most famous line from any of his plays, Sartre writes that, “Into whatever I feel within myself someone else's judgment enters. Which means that if my relations are bad, I am situating myself in a total dependence on someone else. And then I am indeed in hell” (*Sartre on Theater*, 199). Sartre further comments that a failure to break out of one's habits may result in one's more or less complete reliance on the judgments of others. Much as the prisoners in *The Victors* rely through pride on how they are viewed by others in order to determine their own modes of existence, the three protagonists of *No Exit*, in even more obvious ways, remain in unique and subjective hells of their own device. A subject can only remain in hell of its own free will, according to Sartre (200). The way out of hell, if one finds oneself in hell because his relations are bad, is to improve these relations. This is most clearly illustrated not only in each character's hellish dealings with others and in the fact that they never improve their relations with others, but in a more tangible way, when the door to their cell actually opens and they remain unwilling to leave.

Unwilling to escape his own physical and existential imprisonment on his own, Garcin relies on another to help him escape. “If there's someone, just one person, to say quite positively I did not run away, that I'm not the sort who runs away, that I'm brave and decent and the rest of it – well, that one person's faith would save me” (39). But Garcin is mistaken: he is the only one who can save himself by approving of himself. In order to do this, he must cast forth an authentic embodiment of himself by choosing to focus on his own ontological being. Just before Garcin makes this statement, he pleads to Estelle that if she would only will it strenuously enough, she could love Garcin and thereby save him. But these two characters have failed repeatedly to evince the necessary self-empowerment, the requisite level of authenticity, to will anything resolutely. This is why they are damned.

This is also why none of them is able to leave the room when at the climax of dramatic action the door to their room flies open. The door only opens after Garcin, driven to madness by the capricious mind games Estelle perpetrates on him, rushes to the door and drums on it, cursing his unseen captors and begging them to open the door. When Estelle attempts to calm him, he utters a statement as profound as it is simple, but one that becomes the last assertion of what little authenticity Garcin possesses. “I won't let myself get bogged in your eyes” he tells her (41). With this, Garcin asserts through his embodiment that he will not rely on Estelle for approval. This claim, if it were backed up by action, would theoretically allow Garcin to leave the room, assuming he could do the same with Inez. He quickly changes his mind and his embodiment, however, and later divulges that he stays in the room for the sake of Inez who hates him.

Garcin declares he will not leave the room though the door is ajar. This unwillingness indicates to Sartre's audience that facticity (represented by the door) is sometimes easier to overcome than the temptation to give in to an inauthentic embodiment. It is the limits Garcin puts on his ontological, rather than on his practical, freedom which make him stay in the room. He makes his plea only after stating that he will endure any physical torment rather than the “agony of mind” he suffers from his two roommates (41). Not until the most famous line of the play does Garcin finally understand that hell is (in some instances) other people and that the legends of red-hot tongs and molten lead are – at least in Sartre's hell – only legends. But hell is only “other people” with one very important qualification: it is only other people if the subject allows those others to determine his own being. In other words, if Garcin's embodiment is one that seeks to modify the beings of others for the sake of approbation from those others, he relinquishes the power of self-knowledge. This, as a result, necessarily brings with it the feeling that these others are the cause of misery when in reality the cause of any such misery,

dependence, or disillusionment is the subject himself. When Sartre claims that each subject is a slave to the judgment of others if his relations with those others are bad, he means that if relations with others are good, the subject can escape this slavery. For Sartre, the subject is a temporal-spatial object in the world and as a result must offer herself up to appraisal by others. Because of the interconnectedness of things and subjects, to be looked at forces the subject to realize she is the object of the unknown (to her at least) appraisals of others (358). The fact that the subject cannot know these appraisals makes her a slave to the judgment of others in ontological, if not in practical, terms. But dependence on the judgments of others (what Sartre calls slavery) is in the first place the product of an inauthentic embodiment. It is not bad relations with others which is the genesis of this slavery, but an embodiment that for example, seeks approval from another.

As the door to the protagonists' cell flies open, once again the ever-astute Inez realizes the true predicament: "The barrier's down, why are we waiting? ... But what a situation! It's a scream! We're inseparables!" (42). Because of the manner in which they embody themselves, each member of the trio allows the nature of their torment to be each other and as a result they are indeed stuck with each other. When Estelle suggests to Garcin that they push Inez through the open door and into the corridor, he refuses and says "It's because of her I'm staying here" (42). Estelle is dumbfounded. But Garcin goes on to explain that because he and Inez are cowards she is the one he has to convince. He says to her "No, I couldn't leave you here, gloating over my defeat, with all those thoughts about me running in your head" (42). Just as he is unable to forget his former co-worker Gomez and his chattering about Garcin's character, Garcin is unable to bear the thought of Inez's harsh judgment of his character. He therefore remains a slave mired in bad faith because of his inauthentic embodiment and is thereby unable to walk out the door. Instead

he chooses to remain in the room, where he hopes to gain salvation by convincing Inez he is a decent person.

Sartre argues that every subject is a slave to judgment because judgment is the transcendental act of (another) free being. We are defenseless against this transcendental act because it is perpetrated by a free other which we are not (*Being and Nothingness*, 358). But this defenselessness against judgment does not imply that a subject ought to rely on this judgment, nor does it suggest one should be apathetic towards it. That a given subject is defenseless against such a transcendental act implies that it is something to be avoided or at least not depended upon. But despite this defenselessness, Sartre's characters seek to equivocate, deflect, or at least ameliorate the judgment of others with their half-truths and prevarications, essentially relying on the judgment of these others instead of their own destructive and constructive tendencies.

All three characters are damned for their reliance on others for their own ontological self-knowledge and now must live with their shame for eternity in a constant quest for each other's approval because, as Sartre claims, shame is only possible in the eyes of the other (*Being and Nothingness*, 302). "It is shame or pride which reveals to me the Other's look and myself at the end of that look" he writes (*Being and Nothingness*, 350). But Sartre continues in this latter work to assert that shame is only possible if the subject who feels it sacrifices some measure of freedom to become "a given object" (350). This in effect is one way in which a subject becomes a slave to the judgment of the other, as is clearly played out in the interactions of the characters in *No Exit*. When Garcin, Inez, and Estelle rely on each other to attain ontological knowledge of their own selves, they cast inauthentic embodiments and give up their freedom to attain this knowledge for themselves. Though they are unaware of what they do ontologically when they relinquish the responsibility of their own subject formation, they nevertheless attempt to rely on

others for their subject formation. This is what shows their weakness. The result of this is that they each become “a given object,” a slave, and thereby allow themselves to be determined by another. They rely too much on others and as a result know virtually nothing of themselves. This reliance on others is made most clear through the actions of these characters.

The centrality of action as the most important sign of a subject’s quality of embodiment is one carried over to *Kean*, a play based on a drama by Alexandre Dumas, who crafted his work on the life of actor Edmund Kean. *Kean* has much in common thematically with *The Victors* and *No Exit* in its examination of how particular subjects fashion embodiments of varying degrees of authenticity. However, it is a different sort of play in that while the previous two plays have no authentic embodiments (or at least not for long), according to the playwright himself, *Kean* has one authentic personage: Anna, though Sartre relies on his characters’ avoidance or exercise of bad faith as the primary determinant for this assessment. In other words, Sartre sees Anna as authentic not because of her embodiments, but because she avoids bad faith. She is steadfast, determined, and independent and these qualities allow her to win Kean's heart at the end of the drama. According to Sartre, Anna's character traits are evidence of an authentic being because she owns her own freedom and accepts responsibility for her own existence. Sartre's conception of authenticity dictates that any attempt on the part of a subject to deny her freedom or to see herself as a product of facticity and therefore limited by circumstances, results through bad faith, in an *inauthentic* existence which may result in a subject attempting to identify itself with its past choices, a further act of inauthenticity. The other characters in the play (excepting its minor characters), acting in accordance with their slavery to social edicts, define themselves through the facticity of their social stations or careers. McCall comments, “... Kean is not the play's only

actor. The others, too – with the exception of Anna – are all playing parts, imitating the feelings that belong to their role, dancing their little steps in the social ballet” (103).

Although Sartre's reading of his own work attempts to analyze his characters and their authenticity, it is mistaken because no subject, not even a character whose entire existence is played out upon the stage, can be said to be definitively and once-and-for-all authentic or inauthentic. It is only a particular embodiment which can be said to be authentic or not. Because embodiments are ephemeral and ever-shifting, authenticity is not a thing to be acquired for long; it is fleeting. While it is true that Anna's embodiments are more often authentic than any other character in the play, this does not make her authentic. Furthermore, she is not authentic because she is responsible, etc., but because her embodiments are authentic and usually have her own self-knowledge as their goal rather than another's. And though she makes moves to entice Kean into marriage, which upon first consideration may appear as inauthentic embodiments, she does so not to affect Kean's being reconstruction, but for the sake of her own. What this means is that she does not cajole Kean into matrimony for any other reason than because her potential marriage will benefit her subjecthood and her becoming one who knows herself.

Anna's primary concern is with her own self-knowledge. “I always get what I want” she tells Kean (199). What she wants and what she gets by the *denouement* of the play is to become an actress and to marry Kean. This is not to say that Anna is selfish or uncaring, but that she has no desire to interfere with the subject reconstruction of others or to seek their approbation. Anna desires a more intimate knowledge of herself and acquires it through her actions, which necessarily derive from her embodiments. These embodiments are those of a rebellious young girl, an aspiring actress, an ambitious *ingenue*, and one who shows no interest in the pretensions of the upper class. She makes moves at reforming the drunkard spendthrift Kean into a

respectable gentlemen, which at first may appear to be an attempt at interference with his free reconstruction of being; however, though many of her embodiments are inauthentic, a more thorough analysis of her character will reveal that overall and by the end of the play Anna casts authentic embodiments because her overall concern is with her own self-knowledge. She, unlike the protagonists of *No Exit*, uses Kean as a tool not of mere approbation but of a fuller and more complete self-awareness to come to fruition during her life with Kean. If she seeks to interfere with the reconstruction of Kean's being it is only in order to share her being with his (by sharing her life with him) as his wife and pupil.

In contrast to the Kean of the play's beginning, Anna is truly self-reliant, with clear goals in mind; she evinces what Sartre calls a toward-which (or goal) to project her being toward. "She alone in the play is fully a self, outside the maze of reflections where the others try in vain to find their real image" McCall writes (104). This quest for real images is in vain when it is considered that it is akin to seeking meaning from another rather than from oneself. Of Kean, on the other hand, McCall asserts that, "For himself he is only make-believe. Since the subjective sense of his reality eludes him, he must depend on the image he finds in the eyes of others" (102). Like the trio in *No Exit*, Kean spends most of his embodiments desperately trying to curry favor with those he mistakenly believes can reconstruct his being in a meaningful manner though by the end of the play Kean realizes he must embody himself with his own being in mind. Throughout most of the action of the play, Kean is an "imposter" unable to locate his true self (Savage Brosman, 91), one who has forgotten himself as a man and who only knows himself as an actor (Bukala, 291).

Beset by societal pressures, financial headaches, and his existential quest for selfhood, Kean the character offers much opportunity for hermeneutic discussion regarding what

constitutes authenticity of embodiment and whether or not it is achievable for an actor whose career depends on pretending to be someone else. As McCall writes, “Through a mirrored labyrinth *Kean* explores the actor's question: What is my mask, what is my face?” (99). Although Kean makes efforts at authentic embodiments, he never truly achieves any until the end of the play, when he agrees to marry Anna and move to America. This action and its embodiment are authentic because they truly do not attempt to influence the being reconstruction of another, not even of Anna and because through it Kean finally makes an effort at self-knowledge. He gives up his life as a panderer to favor, and finally begins his journey of knowing himself and what he is really like. By agreeing to marry his young pupil, Kean no doubt changes his life and that of Anna, but he does not attempt to influence, cajole, or incommode her, nor does he seek her approbation in the manner of Garcin, Inez, or Estelle.

But before Kean grows tired of his life of charade and finally embodies himself authentically, his character development as an inauthentically embodying seeker of esteem is most notable as Sartre lets evolve Kean's indebtedness to his creditors. When the prince confronts Kean about his affair with the Countess Elena, he urges the great actor to give up his mistress in order to save his career and avoid disfavor with the king. According to the prince, the king in return agrees to settle Kean's massive debts if he breaks off his relationship with the count's wife. But Kean sees this as an injunction against him having what he considers a real life. His reaction essentially ushers in a pattern of gradually increasingly authentic embodiments which reveals Kean's quest for a greater ontological knowledge of himself. “Do you understand that I want to weigh with my real weight in the world?” he says to the prince. “That I have had enough of being a shadow in a magic lantern. For twenty years I have been acting a part to amuse you all. Can't you understand that I want to live my own life” (189). With this, Kean

makes one of his strongest efforts at escaping his life as an “illusion,” “a magic lantern” shining for the entertainment of others. Kean finally begins to embody himself authentically via this assertion that he wants to become a fuller, more complete being with knowledge of his own subjecthood. His statements prove his desire to focus on his own being reconstruction rather than that of anyone else. Furthermore, his magic lantern represents how Kean or any actor embodies himself one way on the stage (as the lantern's flame) while simultaneously embodying himself another way within that role (the flame's shadow).

Kean's status as a conflicted character who embodies himself inauthentically is developed well before his relationship with Anna is. Early in the play the prince asserts that Kean is not a man but an actor and that an actor is a mirage (165). As a mirage, Kean is ephemeral, superficial, and lacking in substance, in short, inauthentic. Kean himself hardly refutes this, but attributes his mirage-like attributes to his being an actor. While this attribution may be accurate, in terms of Sartrean bad faith, it is also an acceptance of a role not freely chosen. Kean chooses to be an actor but does not choose to be an actor ephemeral and lacking in substance. Nevertheless, he attributes his essence to his training as an actor. Having arrived unexpectedly at Count de Koefeld's residence in order to clandestinely set a rendezvous with Elena, Kean says “Our playwrights plunge me into a false situation every night – but every night they extricate me. I shall know how to get us out of this one as easily as all the others” (167). Kean has studied presumably for years on how to deceive others and more importantly how to live in a “false situation” which has become his existence. Of acting, Kean tells Anna, “You act to lie, to deceive, to deceive yourself; to be what you cannot be, and because you have had enough of being what you are” (199).

In accordance with Sartre's "existence before essence" edict, Kean is a *tabula rasa* though he accepts the roles thrust upon him rather than creating his own. He bows to the pressure of his admirers to continue playing Shakespeare's heroes. "You are born an actor as you are born a prince. And determination and hard work have nothing to do with that fact" he says (199). With this, Kean denies his own freedom by stipulating that actors are subject to a sort of divine right of kings for actors which reveals a sort of faith in human nature, something Sartre rejects outright. Kean is no more born an actor than he is born an acrobat or a prince.

Kean begins to take an active interest in remaking himself in a responsible and authentic manner when he confronts Lord Neville, ostensibly for the sake of Anna's honor but in reality to salvage his own authenticity. In this scene, though Kean casts an inauthentic embodiment as he seeks to gain respect from the nobleman, he at least makes efforts at knowledge of his own being. As Anna's betrothed, Lord Neville challenges Kean upon hearing of his exploits with Anna. And although in the process of defending himself he defends Anna's right to choose a husband, it is primarily with his own self he is concerned. With a verbal challenge that results only in a comical altercation, Kean muses, "A lord in the dust – I am a new man" (215). This becoming a new man is significant not for itself, but more because he challenges a member of a higher social rank in order to achieve the remaking and thereby throws social propriety to the wind, essentially making progress toward rejecting the approbation of others through the assertion of his own being. The man, rather than the actor, is empowered because he relies more upon his nebulous authenticity of embodiment than his pandering to social edicts.

Kean's quest for self-knowledge has its culmination, however, at the end of the play, in the scene in which he agrees to marry Anna and go into exile in America. Upon being told by the prince that he can go wherever he likes provided he leaves England, Kean replies that he will go

to New York, to which Anna has ostensibly booked passage. When Anna hears this, she becomes delighted, reveals that she lied about having arranged the trip, and when asked by Kean why she lied, replies “To make you marry me.” The prince wishes them well on their voyage, to which Kean answers, “I expect to marry there, sir. Miss Anna Danby looks unimportant, but she always gets what she wants” (276). With this, Kean gives up a lifetime of slavery to the judgment of the noble classes and Anna arrives at the epitome of her efforts to get what she wants: to know her own being in a profound sense. Though Anna casts authentic and inauthentic embodiments throughout the play, Kean's authenticity of embodiment is a new one because he finally reaches a point where he does not seek to influence the reconstruction of another for his own gain. Though marrying Anna will indubitably change her life, it will be a change not for the sake of Kean's ego, but for more than that, for his being because it will enable him to truly know himself through the life they will share together.

Kean's quest for ontological self-knowledge is rendered somewhat problematic not only because of his vocation as an actor, which demands that he must translate his actor persona into his personal, real self and vice versa. The great actor's personal life also poses special challenges that influence him to choose inauthentic rather than authentic embodiments of himself: throughout most of the play he is a profligate Lothario and a social climber. Whether or not the real Kean is the great actor or the amorous rascalion, and how he discovers at the end of the play who he really is makes for a drama in which paramount are ontological explorations of selfhood and consciousness and how these concepts react to and interact with facticity in the form of societal pressures and transcendence in the form of embodiment.

Of all the characters in the three plays treated here, only Kean and Anna cast authentic embodiments, though several other characters make efforts at authentic embodiments or cast an

inauthentic embodiment that is the lesser evil of two, specifically several of the characters in *The Victors* who act inauthentically in order to attempt to save a life. Kean, for his part, is only able to embody himself authentically after becoming exhausted and dispirited after years of inauthentic embodiments. He finally realizes that the way in which he has lived his life allows for no personal fulfillment. In ontological terms, this is because he has no ontological self-knowledge, something Anna clearly possesses. This is obvious from her clear goals and her knowledge of her own goals. In contrast, those characters in Sartre's plays who mold inauthentic embodiments have less ontological self-knowledge because they expend their embodiments and their resultant actions attempting to interfere with the being reconstructions of others rather than focusing on their own reconstructions.

CHAPTER III

THE BECKETTIAN QUEST FOR SYMBIOTIC EMBODIMENT

While sharing a London taxi with Samuel Beckett in 1955, biochemistry major turned actor Peter Woodthorpe asked the enigmatic playwright what *Waiting for Godot* was all about. His curiosity was no doubt the product of his own involvement with the London production of the play and a result of much discussion in the British newspapers of the work and its often divergent interpretations. Woodthorpe had played Estragon with his natural Yorkshire accent (which Beckett found “superb”) and had no doubt contributed to the raging success of the play in England. And although Woodthorpe had had first-hand experience in acting in the play, like many others, he struggled with its meaning. Beckett replied to the young actor's question about his play with characteristic enigmatic nonchalance: “It's all symbiosis, Peter; it's symbiosis” (Knowlson, 373-376, 2004).

In stark contrast to Sartre's contention that “Hell is other people,” Beckett's simplistic explanation of his most famous play reveals a view of interconscious relations that is centered on the other as necessary to the survival of a subject. And although much of the enormous amount of critical work written on Beckett's *oeuvre* insists on its bleakness, hopelessness and despair³, more and more of the criticism of the last decade has insisted that Beckett is nowhere near as desolate as initially believed. This recent body of critical work – most notably exemplified by that of Alain Badiou – in addition to Beckett's own brusque remark, suggests that his views on his own plays may have been somewhat misunderstood or glossed over. Knowlson's biography

³ For Example, see Ruby Cohn, ed. *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Criticism*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975 and John Killinger. *World in Collapse: The Vision of an Absurdist Drama*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1971.

does not attempt to further explicate Beckett's enigmatic answer to Woodthorpe's question or the playwright's notorious reticence about his own work throughout his life. However, close readings of some of his major plays and the predominant trends in Beckett criticism in conjunction with existential interpretations of his dramas will reveal that while authentically embodied characters are rare in his works, some characters embody themselves more authentically than others.

Symbiosis reappears in Beckett's second major stage success, *Endgame* – a play whose main characters are, according to Theodore Adorno, unable to live without each other (144) – and in his last stage play, *What Where* (1983), in which four characters take turns torturing each other in a vain attempt to extract information. Whether Beckett's comment on symbiosis in *Godot* was uttered with Vladimir and Estragon, Lucky and Pozzo, or a combination of these in mind, it attests to the importance of interconscious relations in his work, despite the insistence of early assessments of his drama which focused on *individual* consciousnesses and their search for meaning.

Furthermore, Beckett's own writings regarding the re-creation of the self, though he never referred to this process as embodiment, are illuminating when considered in conjunction with inter-consciousness relations. Beckett himself writes in *Proust* (1937), "Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals; the world being a projection of the individual's consciousness ... the pact must be continually renewed, the letter of safe-conduct brought up to date" (8). His characters remake themselves anew, though their attentions for the most part are so focused on external manifestations of being via Beckett's symbiosis that they lack ontological self-knowledge to the point of being rendered immobile physically and incapable of growth ontologically. Gilles Deleuze writes that Beckett's characters exhaust the possibilities of reality through repetition of action and speech in a process akin to

Beckett's "succession of individuals." "Beckett's protagonists play with the possible without realizing it; they are too involved with a possibility that is more and more restricted in kind to care about what is still happening" ("The Exhausted," 4, 1995). Vladimir and Estragon remain where they are despite their declarations that they will leave. Were they sufficiently focused on their own being reconstructions and on who and what they are, they would be better able to assert themselves and their beings to the point where they could assign some meaning to themselves and their environment. This would in turn enable them to go somewhere, to possibly create some meaning out of the stories they tell each other, to better remember past events or to find something to do besides wait for Godot. According to Beckett, "The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations ... represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being" (*Proust*, 8). These "perilous zones," fraught with peril and pain though they may be, are the only opportunities for Beckett's characters – or for any being – to choose authentic embodiments. This is so because these zones offer the only ontological space in which choice of embodiment is possible. If Beckett sees his own work as involving symbiosis and if this symbiosis can be read as a type of ontological symbiosis which operates in conjunction with the re-creation of the individual, then this re-creation in the face of the other must be evaluable in terms of authenticity based upon the degree to which each subject reconstructs his being with his own being in mind rather than that of another.

Furthermore, Beckett's works have long been discussed, by Milton Rickels and others, in terms of their emphasis on habit and the damage it can do to a consciousness's power to examine itself and its world. In a notable passage from *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir declares habit "a great deadener" (105). His and Estragon's wait for Godot is obviously the product of habit: The

cyclical nature of the two-act play and the repetition of key dialogue symbolically attest to this. Rickels writes, “Beckett noted that the human creature existing in time tries to escape the fact that he creates his world, his values, every day. His common mode of escape is habit” (140). As defined by Rickels, Beckett's tramps are experts at this type of escape. As Vladimir waxes philosophical, it becomes apparent that habit – as the enemy of authentic embodiment because of its tendency toward a continuously unthinking, unquestioning state – prevents Vladimir and Estragon from breaking free of their reliance on Godot. Habit is also what sustains Clov as a malcontented servant for the majority of the action of *Endgame*, though he makes moves toward independence throughout that play. The grains of sand Clov muses on represent each day of his life and the mound of sand which builds up indicate an accumulation of days in which he seeks meaning. This mound builds up by the end of the drama to a point at which Clov must assert himself against Hamm. But the characters of *What Where* are not as authentic in embodiment: habit is what keeps them from breaking the cycle of torture in that play.

Richard Duran writes of *Waiting for Godot*, “Rather than assume responsibility for their own lives, Vladimir and Estragon place their fate in the hands of a Godot” (987). This lack of responsibility hinges on habit for its continuation, as habit allows the perpetuation of avoidance of the responsibility which is so key to authentic embodiment. Says Vladimir, “Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens.) But habit is a great deadener” (104-105). The cries he speaks of represent the urges (never acted upon by Vladimir or Estragon) to create meaning in a meaningless world and the deadening tendency of habit is clearly proven by the pair's insistence on waiting for Godot as the only certainty in this world.

Scholars' commentaries on Beckett's works have been so prolific in their discussion of habit, consciousness, subjecthood, and numerous other topics, that a brief history of the criticism of Beckett's work is warranted. This short history will show a contentious and astute debate, and a prolific collection of books, articles, and dissertations that is often querulous, sometimes confusing, but which nearly always has at its core the profound questions of the nature of being, meaning, and language. Ronan McDonald, in *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (2006), attributes the abundance of Beckett criticism to the fact that his work is perceived as profoundly concerned with fundamental questions about the nature of human existence. This fundamental aspect of Beckett's work in conjunction with its hermeneutic difficulty entices critics and scholars because, according to McDonald, there is a greater need for interpretation than there is for other authors. Also, Beckett's formal inventiveness and questioning of the structure of drama and fiction, along with his reticence about his own work, attract scholars (116). And because his work fits into so many philosophico-theoretical contexts, theorists of the past 60 years have debated how Beckett's work fits into divergent schools of thought. According to McDonald,

Existentialists found a concern with human isolation and the absurdity of the universe, while narrative theorists pointed at the metatextual interest in the construction and unraveling of stories. Post-structuralists celebrated in Beckett the self-reflexive consciousness of textuality and a concern with shape, repetition, the forming and deforming aspects of language, while hermeneuticists pored over the abiding concern with interpretation and how meaning is generated from language and the world (117).

But before any of these schools of thought laid claim to Beckett, the earliest criticism of his novels and plays was existentialist in orientation with only smatterings of new criticism and formalism. In his landmark 1965 *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Esslin asserts that Beckett's writing is the culmination of existential thought in fiction because his characters are free of abstract concepts or general ideas and are therefore condemned to a lifetime of meaning creation. The existential experience, according to Esslin, is one of a consciousness constantly attempting to give shape to the void, just as Beckett's characters do, though in varying degrees of success. They are not guided by any moral or metaphysical principles; they simply exist in a struggle to create meaning through games, the biding of time, and talking. Esslin takes it for granted that artists as well as philosophers operate in a world devoid of widely accepted aesthetic and epistemological norms. This situation has resulted, at least in Beckett's case, in a creative impulse which dictates that the artist present not didactics but the experience of consciousness itself. Esslin further argues that Beckett's works are superior to those of Sartre because the latter's works are guided by his philosophy, while Beckett's remain pure representations of consciousness. The urge to express in an unintelligible world and the difficulty in expressing anything are constant themes in Beckett's work, as are the flight from self-perception and the split between perceiver and perceived within the self. In short, existentialist readings of Beckett's work were popular early in his career because being is always at the forefront of his fiction and drama. And although this type of reading has fallen away in popularity – having given way to readings involving repetition theory and poststructuralism – many unanswered questions remain regarding the relationship between Beckett's work and existential authenticity, for example the specific role embodiment plays in his drama.

The intra-conscious split between perceiver and perceived discussed by Esslin is carried over into the 1970s by Ruby Cohn, who in her 1975 *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Criticism* argues that this split within the subject is the product of the innate need of all existents, and especially Beckett's characters, not only to see but to be seen in order to exist. Each character is in need of a witness to confirm his identity, much in the same vein of Beckett's own comments regarding symbiosis. Each pair may be the witnessed and witnessing part of a single self, and this split in two of a single whole is mirrored by the dramatic techniques of Beckett's plays: the series of symmetries in props, sets, and characters (the pairing of Vladimir and Estragon and Hamm and Clov, set layouts in which a perpendicular tree intersects with a parallel road, and Lucky's rope around his neck and Estragon's around his waist) (11).

By the 1980s, existentialist readings of Beckett works were still *en vogue* though they would soon give way to other philosophical interpretations. According to McDonald, poststructuralism and deconstructionism became popular branches of criticism for Beckett scholars during the 1980s and '90s. Also during the 1980s, Beckett scholars engaged in the modernism/postmodernism debate which eventually gave way to readings of postmodern repetition theory, where much of the body of current criticism rests today. Published in 1984, Lance St. John Butler's *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being* suggests a parallel between Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Beckett's work and calls for an analysis of Beckett's *oeuvre* under the lens of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. More importantly, St. John Butler's chapter entitled "Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Beckett" offers a Sartrean reading of some of Beckett's most famous novels and plays in which he proclaims that what Sartre and Beckett have most in common is their enduring concern with the nature of consciousness. One of Beckett's most interesting preoccupations with consciousness

centers on a consciousness confronting itself, a concept akin not only to Sartre's theories on the dyadic nature of consciousness but also to Esslin's split between perceiver and perceived and Cohn's split in two of a single whole. These latter theorists see a pattern in Beckett's work in which he offers characters who have consciousnesses which reflect upon themselves rather than turning outwards in a sort of internal symbiosis. This reflecting corresponds to the creation of the self and its resultant responsibility. Writes St. John Butler: "All through the trilogy [*Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951), *The Unnamable* (1953)] and the later works the narrators are engaged on making themselves. Sartre proposes ... that *because of* this self-construction man is also responsible for his situation" (94-95). St. John Butler offers one of the last Sartrean readings of Beckett before the critical trend shifted to phenomenology and repetition theory.

In *Beckett and Phenomenology* (2009), Ulrika Maude and Matthew Feldman declare that existentialism has run its course, that it has been replaced by phenomenology as the philosophy through which Beckett's work must be interpreted. Maude and Feldman write in their introduction that, "Although existentialism offered the most prominent early theoretical approach to Beckett's work, one could argue that its excessive emphasis on the will and its ultimately affirmative conviction in man's freedom and choice were ill suited to accommodate Beckettian negativity" (4). Phenomenology, according to Maude and Feldman, is more relevant to Beckett's work because of its focus on consciousness, memory, and sense perception⁴. But while Beckett's work does have as its primary foci consciousness, being, meaning, (usually failing) memories, etc., the authors' conception of "Beckettian negativity" is far from a universally accepted one, as will be shown via an analysis of Badiou's reading of Beckett. And although phenomenology does

⁴ See for example *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), and *Footfalls* (1976), plays in which characters explore their own consciousnesses and escape the present through reliving their memories.

much work in explicating the playwright's difficult texts, much work remains to be done in the field of existentialism and embodiment theory.

Badiou reads Beckett positively rather than under the guise of bleakness for which the author was initially famous. And indeed a serious reading of his plays will reveal that some of his characters embody themselves so as to have positive attitudes though at other times they often cast embodiments which make it obvious that they give in to despair. In their introduction to *On Beckett* (2003), Nina Power and Alberto Toscano argue that "In stark contrast to prevalent readings of Beckett's work by either Anglo-American or (the majority of) other European commentators, Badiou conceives of Beckett's *oeuvre* as, in toto, more hopeful than hopeless, more optimistic than nihilistic" (xii). Badiou's theoretical preoccupation with event, subject, truth, being, and appearance ultimately dictates that it is through Beckett's fixation on couples that a negation of solipsism in his works is possible. Badiou sees Beckett's works as focused on the existence of the other and the question of subject as a question of identity and how subjects identify themselves (4). What Badiou reads as a negation both of the subject and the other leaves open a space of unfettered being in which at least a temporary abrogation of solipsism is possible, what Badiou calls "the existence of the Two" or the virtuality of the other (5). This concept of unity is obvious in Beckett's pairs: Hamm and Clov, Vladimir and Estragon, and Nagg and Nell. Similar to Beckett's own symbiosis, "It is thus that Beckett surmounts the painful antinomies of the *cogito*: one's identity does not depend upon the verbal confrontation with oneself, but upon the discovery of one's other"⁵ (61).

According to Andrew Gibson, *Waiting for Godot* exemplifies this concept with its depiction of characters unable to remember the simple details of existence. It is otherness which

⁵ Peter Poiana asserts in his discussion of Badiou's ontology and Beckett's *Nohow On* that the ontological question has always conformed to the belief that the horizon of being to which the anguished subject aspires is one of lost unity ("The On-tology of Beckett's *Nohow On*," 137-138).

creates a succession of worlds, and it is this succession which creates the confusion, the lack of groundedness found so often in Beckett's characters. "Once the other intervenes, there is no longer one world. The world proliferates *ad infinitum*" Gibson writes (195). And although the entrance of the other upon the scene creates additional worlds, it simultaneously demolishes solipsism. Deleuze echoes this notion when he argues that "... the Others are *possible worlds*, to which voices confer a reality that is always variable, following the force that the voices have, and revocable, following the silences that they make" ("The Exhausted," 7). Contrary to many of the early readings of Beckett which insist that his fiction and drama must be read as solipsistic, lonely, and desolate, Badiou offers a theory that has much in common with the symbiosis Beckett himself used to describe *Waiting for Godot*. And although Badiou does not focus on existential authenticity as the key to embodiment, he outlines a theory which places otherness at the forefront of his readings of Beckett's work. This otherness is conspicuous in *Catastrophe* (1982), as a director and his assistant examine an old man as if he were an object. Beckett's optimism is also obvious in that short play when the examined man, P, raises his head after remaining with head bowed for most of the play (*Collected Shorter Plays*, 1984, 301).

Beckett's "symbiosis," his views on self-creation espoused in *Proust* and Badiou's "existence of the two" reach an easy confluence with ideas concerning embodiment when it is considered that the latter relies upon the dyadic nature of both consciousness and inter-subject otherness for its salience as an ontological system. Beckett's conceptions of his own work and Badiou's theories on Beckett's plays are direct results of the dyadic nature of those plays and the concepts explored therein, and this dyadic nature offers credence to a reading of Beckett in which his characters' embodiments are paramount. In *Waiting for Godot*, this dyadism is seen in the pairing of characters: Vladimir with Estragon and Pozzo with Lucky, but also in its two-act

structure. In Beckett's work, the subject is often undecided, incomplete, or incapacitated. This fragmentation of subject is directly in line with the notion of embodiment as the product of the fragmentation of the self into its structural and destructive tendencies, its dyadic impetuses. Characters and subjects alike must embody themselves because they are in the first place split and therefore never whole or unified.

The embodiments of the two main pairs of characters in *Waiting for Godot* must be considered separately, as each pair evinces very different types of embodiments and each character displays unique embodiments throughout the play though each character's embodiments are directly related to his interactions with another. Pozzo is the character who most clearly represents himself inauthentically due to his incessant abuse of Lucky which interferes with the latter's radical reconstruction of being, while Lucky, though he never seeks to interfere with the being reconstruction of another, is equally inauthentic in his embodiments because he never takes responsibility for those embodiments, instead relying on his master for his every embodiment via his passive acceptance of orders from Pozzo. Like Lucky, Vladimir and Estragon remain inauthentic in embodiment not because they seek primarily and for the most part to influence another's being reconstruction, but because their own reconstructions are muddled by their failing memories and their indecisiveness. Their ontological energies, which would be better served if concentrated on their own ontological self-knowledge via authentic embodiments, are instead focused on the idea of Godot and their wait for the flesh-and-blood Godot, who never appears. As Ethel F. Cornwell argues, "The Beckett hero does not seek his identity, he flees from it; his quest is for anonymity, for *self-annihilation*" (41, emphasis Cornwell's). Vladimir's and Estragon's embodiments clearly evince this flight from identity: their failing memories are directly related to their physical and ontological stasis because they are the

direct result of a lack of authenticity of embodiment which comprises their flight from identity. Were they to act in such ways as to show authenticity they could break out of their habits of disempowerment and focus on their freedom to the point of being able to move as they wish and remember the events of their own lives.

While Cornwell reads Beckett's characters as beings who flee their own identities and seek self-annihilation, Lois Gordon sees these same characters as somehow authentic. "Beckett's two couples in *Waiting for Godot* are among literature's most authentic characters, and they function as exemplary figures of good faith" she writes (170). But Gordon's assessment of the characters in *Godot* assumes Vladimir and Estragon are well-versed in the tenets of Sartrean existentialism. She argues that, "Fully aware of the truths Sartre propounds, Beckett's figures have created the best way of surviving from day to day in a universe they will never comprehend" (171). That the characters of Beckett's play will never comprehend their universe is indisputable, though the rest of Gordon's assertions are difficult to accept when it is considered that the two tramps can never be considered as embodying themselves authentically as long as they wait for Godot, as long as they wait for some external, mysterious force to offer their lives meaning. What Vladimir and Estragon fail to realize is that for them to achieve any semblance of authenticity, they have to create the essence which comes only after their existence. Gordon herself admits this lack of responsibility on the part of the protagonists, as she writes that, "To the extent they may have admitted their crimes, they still fail to take responsibility for them" (175). How can these tramps be authentic if they refuse to take responsibility? This assertion is directly at odds with Sartre's notion that one of the most crucial determinants of authenticity is responsibility.

The most telling moments of the play in regard to its characters' lack of responsibility and authenticity center upon Vladimir and Estragon, when at the end of each act, the former, at the end of Act I and the latter at the end of Act II, express their desire to move and the succeeding stage direction indicates that they remain motionless. The simplicity of Vladimir's "Yes, let's go" (59) and of Estragon's exactly identical "Yes, let's go" (109), when considered in conjunction with the stage direction "They do not move" immediately following each of these lines is not only suggestive of a repetitive cycle in which the two main characters everlastingly repeat the play they have just acted. This repetition of action in the form of dialogue in conjunction with the inaction dictated in the stage direction, suggest much more about Vladimir's and Estragon's failure to embody themselves in any authentic manner, not because they expend their energies attempting to influence others' reconstructions, but because far from being able to do so, they are unable to embody themselves without the idea of the mysterious Godot and the supposed salvation he will bring. Their entire beings seem to hinge on their wait for Godot. Much like the characters of Sartre's *No Exit*, who wish to leave their hellish cell but are unable to do so, the protagonists of *Godot* verbally assert their desire to leave while their actions betray their unwillingness to do so. What the two sets of characters have in common ontologically is not simple indecision but their inauthenticity of embodiment based upon their ontological foci being on others (for example on Godot and his ostensible arrival) rather than on themselves.

The two protagonists of Beckett's most famous play are unique in their embodiments because these embodiments rely primarily and for the most part not on any interactions with others but on the *idea* of another because this other never appears in the play. Although it could be argued that the pair of tramps attempts to influence Godot's radical reconstruction of being via the Boy who acts as Godot's messenger, the Boy has only 38 lines in Act I and 17 lines in Act II.

His lines are short and consist of simple answers to questions from Vladimir or Estragon (usually “yes,” “no” or “I don't know”). Furthermore, the pair, in their interrogations of the Boy, seems more interested in acquiring simple information about the enigmatic Godot rather than in influencing him in any way. For example, in Act I, Vladimir asks the boy, “You have a message from Godot?” and the Boy replies, “Yes, sir” (53). The boy is the most minor character of the five characters who actually appear onstage in the play because of the sparsity of his involvement in its action and because he acts essentially as an embodiment of an embodiment (that of Godot). It is possible, though more difficult, to influence the radical reconstruction of another's being via a messenger, as embodiment involves not only the words one speaks but one's entire being, including actions, body language, tone of voice, etc. So Vladimir's and Estragon's embodiments are not inauthentic primarily and for the most part because they attempt to influence the reconstructions of others but because their embodiments center on an idea external to themselves, the idea of Godot.

This inauthenticity is most clearly symbolized at the end of each act of the play when the pair's indecisiveness and lack of ontological self-knowledge are embodied in their verbally expressed desire to move and their simultaneous failure to do so. This seemingly simple act of caprice reveals two characters whose embodiments, like those of any other, are capricious and ever-changing, but which are also influenced by those characters' refusal to assign meaning to any action. Their embodiments, in short, are characterized by many things, including their obsession with the idea of Godot, their extreme indecisiveness, and their failure to give meaning to themselves, their actions, and their environment. What these embodiments indicate in any holistic assessment of their ontological self-knowledge is a clear failure on the part of Vladimir and Estragon to focus on their own being reconstructions in such a way that will ensure any

modicum of authentic embodiment. Although they do not seek to interfere with the being reconstruction of any other in any meaningful way, they focus not on themselves but on each other, upon the idea of Godot, and upon Pozzo and Lucky.

In her discussion of Beckett's novels, Cornwell asserts that "... self-creation involves the increase, not the diminution, of self-awareness ..." (45). However, given that existents constantly remake themselves because of their destructive and constructive tendencies and given that "self-awareness," which could be called ontological self-knowledge, is only ultimately possible through authentic embodiments, self-creation does not *always* involve an increase of self-awareness, as Cornwell argues. As is proven by careful analysis of Beckett's characters, self-creation, when performed via inauthentic embodiments, results in a loss of self-awareness rather than its increase.

Pozzo is indubitably the character in the play whose embodiments are most clearly inauthentic. This inauthenticity is manifested in his mistreatment of Lucky, who fares little better in his own level of authenticity, though with the latter, inauthenticity is more the product of a lack of ontological assertion rather than the result of an outward projection of being manifested through mastery. Pozzo asserts his being too much, Lucky too little. Pozzo's embodiments are inauthentic because they seek to interfere with those of Lucky through their imposition: Pozzo wants to control Lucky. He wants to make him "Think!" (44). The imposition of thought is especially telling in terms of ontological self-knowledge because of thought's relation to consciousness and because of consciousness's crucial role in determining how the structural and destructive tendencies determine each embodiment. If Pozzo controls Lucky's thoughts, he can control, at least on the face of things, his being. That is, he can control his practical, if not his ontological, freedom.

In his reading of Sartre's philosophy, David Detmer identifies two types of freedom at work therein, types of freedom which can easily be applied to Beckett's works: ontological freedom and practical freedom. The first type of freedom involves a consciousness separating "... itself from all that is external to it, and from whatever might attempt to ensnare or enslave it, and in so doing, disentangle itself from the chain of causal determinacy" (64). What this means is that when a subject employs his ontological freedom, he chooses which mental attitude he will adopt in dealing with external stimuli, even torture. Practical freedom, on the other hand, is the subject's freedom to attain his chosen ends (67), in other words, to attain basic human needs. This freedom may be diminished by external forces though ontological freedom is completely within the control of the subject.

The control Pozzo exercises over Lucky and Lucky's passive reaction to it shows that the latter is reluctant to exercise his practical or his ontological freedom. This is why Lucky's embodiments are as inauthentic as those of his master Pozzo. Much like Vladimir and Estragon, Lucky's ontological focus is not on himself, not because he seeks to interfere in the being reconstructions of others, but because he asserts no portion of his ontological energies upon anyone, including himself. He remains a *tabula rasa* never filled in through his own efforts.

The disparity between these characters' inauthenticities and their potential for authenticity is established at the very beginning of *Waiting for Godot*. The opening stage direction – "A country road. A tree. Evening" (1) – acts as the stage embodiment of the philosophical idea of the *tabula rasa*, or the existence before essence so crucial to Sartre's theories. The nearly barren stage upon which Vladimir and Estragon act out their tragicomedy is a sort of blank slate upon which they can assign whatever meaning they wish by way of their embodiments and their resultant actions, though they fail to assign it any meaning. Writes Peyton Glass III, "Beckett's

description of the scene in *Waiting for Godot*, 'A country road. A tree,' establishes, even before the entrance of the characters, the primary axes on which the play is to be charted. Since they lead both into and away from the stage area, the horizontal and vertical axes might be characterized as concrete expressions of explorational possibilities, avenues of potential discovery" (366-367). The tree on the stage, which could be seen as a symbol of life and therefore of hope, is all but ignored by the pair of tramps who see it only as a convenient tool to aid them in their suicides, suicides which are discussed but never enacted. In short, Vladimir and Estragon are unable to assign any meaning to their environment, being so caught up in their wait for Godot.

In fact, when brainstorming for something to do while they wait, Estragon suggests they hang themselves from the lone tree upon the stage. The absurdity of this suggestion and of Vladimir's reply that "It'd give us an erection" (12) is obvious when it is considered that their suicides, if carried to fruition, would render impossible the very activity Vladimir and Estragon consider their *raison d'être*, the activity that they misguidedly use as ontological fodder for their beings, i.e. waiting for Godot. The further absurdity of Estragon's suggestion that they hang themselves and of Vladimir's apparently serious consideration of that suggestion is that their suicides, much like the murder of Francois by his compatriots in *The Victors*, would be the most permanent and total abrogation of their ontological abilities because it would render impossible any further acts of embodiment and therefore destroy any possibility of ontological self-knowledge of any kind. The fact that this extreme act of inauthenticity is never carried out does not grant the pair any level of authenticity simply because the reason they decide to continue living is that they want to hear suggestions from Godot on whether or not they should end their lives. Says Vladimir, "Let's wait and see what he says" (13). Estragon immediately agrees to this

suggestion and the two tramps go back to debating the substance of their past conversations with Godot.

The pair's inability to move, considered in tandem with the expression of their desire to move, acts as a motif which shows their embodiments as lacking in ontological self-knowledge because so void of self-assertion. That the characters constantly remake themselves from moment to moment cannot be doubted. As David M. Higgins writes, "Appropriately, [Estragon] has no recollection of being there the day before, because he wasn't" (19). Estragon, like Vladimir, wasn't at the country road because he has remade himself via his embodiments and is therefore a new subject. Though he has remade himself he has not done so in a meaningful manner and this is why he remains in stasis. This physical and ontological stasis is first illustrated early in the first act, when upon being told by Vladimir the story of the crucifixion of Christ, Estragon threatens, "I'm going" although the stage direction immediately after reads, "He does not move" (6). This lack of ambulatory ability is further explained when Estragon once again expresses his desire to leave, though this time he includes Vladimir via the first-person plural pronoun: "Let's go" (8). In reply, Vladimir says, "We can't" and upon being asked by Estragon why they can't, replies, "We're waiting for Godot" (8). The desire to leave, the expression of their unwillingness to do so, and the explanation that they are waiting for Godot occurs eight more times in a play of 109 pages, not including similar expressions of self-imposed immobility. The dialogue shows that the pair's ontological energies are expended not upon interference with others' reconstructions, other than the minor interference of wanting to be accompanied away from where they are. On the contrary, these energies are expended almost entirely on the idea of Godot, which remains an idea not only because Godot never appears in the play, but because of Vladimir's and Estragon's uncertainty regarding any concrete details of the

enigmatic Godot's existence. The expenditure of energies on this idea is evinced not least because of their insistence upon waiting for someone they know nothing about, but because of their inability to do anything else of substance.

The pair's inability to move is an important recurring theme in the play not simply because it proves their overwhelming reliance on Godot and the wait for Godot nor because it gives them a convenient excuse to wait, but because the reason they continue to wait is that the wait itself is the only thing they consider certain. Vladimir's and Estragon's terribly inept memories and their insistence on habit result from this lack of certainty which in turn results from embodiments centered on external phenomena. This lack of certainty is not the product of a world in which nothing is certain, it is on the contrary the product of embodiments that seek not true certainty but the quick and easy route of reliance on another for any semblance of certainty or the reliance on habit as an escape. Vladimir, in an attempt to explain why they wait for Godot, exclaims "Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come –" (91). He assigns a similar importance to this wait later, when he says, "To-morrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of to-day? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot?" (104). That the wait is the only certainty and the only thing worth recounting of the events of an entire day reveal the pair's lack of authenticity because so void of ontological self-assertion. They seem to consider themselves not as beings whose essence, in Sartre's terms, comes after their existence. Rather, they regard themselves as creatures waiting to have their essences assigned to them by Godot.

This lack of self-assertion and its concomitant physical and ontological stasis is further aggrandized by the pair's habits, most notably their habit of waiting. Habit is such a driving force in the lives of Vladimir and Estragon not simply due to the repetitive nature of the play and its

characters' antics nor because habit is an incessant theme in Beckett's work, but more so because of their reliance on habit as a means of escape from having to embody themselves authentically. This reliance is clearly shown through the pair's stasis but also through their absurdly inept memories. Higgins astutely argues, "Memory perpetuates habit, and habit perpetuates the role" (24). He also stipulates that, "Roles are inauthentic ..." (18). On no fewer than a dozen instances, Vladimir and Estragon find themselves unable to recall the simplest details of their existences, including their own names (38, 53, 105), their relationship with Godot (20), their own emotional states (54), how long they have known each other (58), details of their environment (66), events of the past (67-68, 72-74, 94), and other minutiae. The events of Vladimir's and Estragon's lives blend together for them in a seemingly endless confluence of random activity which renders impossible any clear memories of whatever stimuli they perceive. This inability to remember, the tramps' perceptions of the world as a series of unmemorable and random events are the products of their reliance on habit for these very perceptions. This reliance on habit in turn is directly the product of their inauthentic embodiments, for in order to embody themselves authentically they would need to question the order of things, including their own memories, rather than simply accepting them in befuddlement. Duran comments, "Beckett's two tramps would, in fact, prefer to think of themselves as predetermined and already defined, thereby relieved of having to choose their own essence" (988).

The pair's tendency to rely on habit and the unquestioning existence of inauthentic embodiments is obvious from the first line of the play, uttered by Estragon: "Nothing to be done" (2). Vladimir repeats Estragon's exact sentence twice in quick succession, characterizing the tramps as unassertive and docile existents who blindly accept whatever stimuli come their way (4-5). Their refusal to take matters into their own hands via any authentic embodiment is further

made clear throughout the play in dialogue such as Vladimir's "One is what one is" (17), Estragon's "Nothing we can do about it" (20), and most notably in the repeated exchange between the two: "ESTRAGON: Let's go. VLADIMIR: We can't. ESTRAGON: Why not? VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot." (51), (76), (79), (88), (96), (100), (107), (109). These statements and the fact that they are repeated constantly throughout the play underscore the tramps' lack of focus on their own ontological self-knowledge. If they were to embody themselves more authentically, they would be able to set goals that were beneficial to themselves and to achieve those goals. Vladimir and Estragon do not represent themselves in ways which show they have any interest in the development of their own beings. Rather, they rely on the idea of Godot.

The duo's refusal to move, the repetition of this refusal and the reason for this refusal – that they are waiting for Godot – clearly show the play's two main characters as lost in a world of random stimuli, though they are lost due to their own lack of authenticity. Although the pair's interactions with the overbearing Pozzo and the absurdly servile Lucky – especially their initial attempts at defending the latter – can be read as moves toward some iota of authenticity, ultimately their failure to meaningfully assert themselves to these others betrays their profound lack of any such authenticity, as they actually take on characteristics of both Pozzo and Lucky and play at being Pozzo and Lucky.

Having witnessed Pozzo's maltreatment of Lucky, Vladimir exclaims, "It's a scandal!" (25), though he stutters nervously after being asked by Pozzo to clarify this statement, at which point Vladimir continues, "To treat a man ... (gesture towards Lucky) ... like that ... I think that ... no ... a human being ... no ... it's a scandal!" (25). Estragon joins in this chiding with, "A disgrace!" (26), while Pozzo simply ignores the tramps' criticisms as he replies with a *non*

sequitur about their ages. Again later, Vladimir upbraids Pozzo for his treatment of his servant when he says, “After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like a ... like a banana skin. Really ...” (33). But Vladimir and Estragon quickly become distracted, commenting on the weather as if the preceding scoldings never took place. This dialogue in which the tramps attempt to intervene in Pozzo's treatment of Lucky is the closest they come to authentic embodiments because though they seek to interfere with the radical being reconstructions of another, i.e., Pozzo, they do so in an attempt to ensure another, i.e. Lucky, is able to reconstruct his being freely and unfettered by Pozzo's abuse. Although these embodiments are close to being authentic, they are not so because Vladimir and Estragon become so easily distracted from following through on their nascent authentic embodiments, which in turn betrays their outward foci.

In fact, Vladimir and Estragon represent themselves so inauthentically that later in the play they take on the characteristics of Pozzo and Lucky, as if they are completely devoid of essences of their own and in a manner which proves Higgins's assertion that “Roles are inauthentic ...” (18). This is most obvious on the two occasions when the pair plays at actually being Pozzo and Lucky:

VLADIMIR: We could play at Pozzo and Lucky.

ESTRAGON: Never heard of it.

VLADIMIR: I'll do Lucky, you do Pozzo. (He imitates Lucky sagging under the weight of his baggage. Estragon looks at him with stupefaction.) Go on.

ESTRAGON: What am I to do?

VLADIMIR: Curse me! (82).

Later, the pair participates in the mistreatment of Lucky, (whom they once defended) – most notably when Estragon kicks Lucky (101). They also treat the Boy in a similarly abusive manner when Estragon shakes the Boy while insisting he has lied to them (54). Furthermore, Vladimir and Estragon seem to turn on each other temporarily when Vladimir uses the exact dialogue of Pozzo when speaking to Estragon, who shows Vladimir his wounded leg. “The other, pig!” Vladimir shouts (74) and “The other, hog!” (77). The ease with which Vladimir and Estragon are influenced not only to take on the traits of their acquaintances but to actually play at being those others testifies to their characterizations as thin and vacuous wisps of ontological mass with little ontological self-knowledge.

Pozzo and Lucky fare little better in their embodiments, as the former clearly seeks to interfere with the being reconstruction of Lucky while the latter remains more akin to Vladimir and Estragon in his level of inauthenticity. Clearly Pozzo's ill treatment of Lucky extends beyond just the physical rope with which he yokes his unfortunate slave. Pozzo's abuse of Lucky and the inauthentic embodiments it entails are also manifested via language, especially in the master's dehumanization of his slave as a “pig” (20, 25, 29, 30, 44, 51), which influences Lucky to remain disempowered and servile. Pozzo seeks to reform Lucky's ontological make-up into one inferior to his own so that he can prop himself up as a superior being, a further act of inauthenticity. While ordering Lucky to fetch random objects including a stool and a whip, Pozzo remarks to Vladimir and Estragon, “Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes (he puts on his glasses and looks at the two likes) even when the likeness is an imperfect one” (21). With this statement, Pozzo not only belittles Lucky as one who is beneath his “society,” but denigrates the two tramps as “imperfect” imitations of himself. Essentially, his insults and

maltreatment of others seek to influence the being reconstructions of others into ones that are inferior to his own.

Lucky, by comparison, makes no attempt to influence the being reconstructions of others but also forgoes any attempt to assert himself and thereby remake himself with his best interests in mind. As an ontologically empty vessel waiting to be filled by Pozzo's orders and insults, Lucky has more in common with the inept Vladimir and Estragon than with his master. Aside from fetching random objects for the boisterous Pozzo, Lucky's actions in the play are restricted to his dance and his thinking, both performed under orders from his master. This thinking of Lucky's, his most famous and most oft-discussed act in the play, epitomizes his inauthenticity, due to its presentation as mere regurgitation of inane facts and convoluted logic. A single, long sentence, Lucky's monologue begins "Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaquaqu with white beard quaquaquaquaqu outside time without extension ..." (45) and continues for a total of three pages. Lucky's thinking involves no real assertion or exploration of his ontological self-knowledge because it makes no real point, evinces no critical thinking, and is made up essentially of random words.

Also playing the role of the slave is Clov, who in *Endgame* initially embodies himself in a similar fashion to that of Lucky, though ultimately with more authenticity. This authenticity is most clearly evinced at the end of the play when Clov prepares to exit the hovel in which he had served the overbearing and self-aggrandizing Hamm presumably for most of his life. Although Clov never actually leaves the room, he also neglects to answer Hamm's summoning "Clov!" at the play's culmination (84). With this seemingly simple act of recalcitrance, Clov escapes his servitude and the verbal onslaught he suffered in being forced to listen to Hamm's convoluted chronicles and verbal abuse. The servant's assertiveness is an act of authenticity because it

epitomizes an embodiment which has as its primary concern his own ontological self-knowledge, much like in *Catastrophe* when P raises his head to face his others. Clov seeks to interfere with no other subject's embodiments, seeks no approval from another, and ensures his own ability to embody himself further and with responsibility and freedom.

Hamm, by contrast, seeks to interfere with the being reconstructions of all those with whom he surrounds himself. This is most obvious in how he manipulates his parents through control of what little food the foursome has and via the dialogical dominance he perpetrates upon his unfortunate parents and his servant. Elin Diamond observes that, “Unlike the suffering Hamm of the present, his created 'I' of the past is a self-styled Jehovah, regulating the weather (the earth then had a weather) with his instruments” (113). With his incessant verbal deluge, Hamm, while creating his essence with his stories, courts the approbation of the others who appear in the play and seeks to control these others through manipulation of material reality in the form of control over the ashbins in which his parents are held and through the suppression of the narratives of others via his brusque admonitions and obnoxious verbiage.

Nagg and Nell, on the other hand, exist somewhere between Hamm and Clov in their levels of authenticity. Though Nell presumably dies during the course of the play and Nagg remains in his ashbin at its end, the couple is too physically incapacitated to ever leave their domicile. They refrain from attempting to influence others' being reconstructions, though they do little to assert themselves and display the type of memory lapses characteristic of Vladimir and Estragon. This latter trait suggests that like the two tramps of *Godot* they have trouble remembering things because so ensconced in habit and its debilitating tendencies to authenticity and ontological self-knowledge.

While Hamm and Nagg remain at the end of the play exactly where they began it, Clov, though still in the room at its end, is dressed for the road and ostensibly prepared to finally leave it. As Evan Horowitz has astutely pointed out, Clov both leaves and does not leave the room at the end of the play. This is so, according to Horowitz, because of the two divergent translations of the play. In *Fin de Partie*, the opening stage direction reads that Clov is, “*immobile à côté du fauteuil*” – “motionless beside an armchair” (Horowitz's translation, 121), while the beginning of *Endgame* has Clov “motionless by the door” (1). Though this discrepancy focuses on the start of the play, it has caused one of the greatest conundrums of translation in Beckett's *oeuvre* as it also affects how we read the end of *Endgame* because, as Horowitz argues, it is so telling about the trajectory of the play, in other words, how it will end. Essentially, if the play can be read as cyclical or repetitive, like so much of Beckett's work, it is more likely that Clov actually leaves at the end of the play if he begins it near the door (as in the English translation) than if he does so by the armchair (as in the French version). Horowitz writes, “One could plausibly argue, given that the English was written after the French, that this latter text is the authoritative one. If so, then the end merely repeats its beginning, and there can be no possibility of escape” (126). This disparity in translation is ultimately crucial to how Clov's embodiments can be read because if the reader can assume that he leaves at the end of the play, then his embodiments are ultimately more authentic. If he leaves the hovel, he breaks free from Hamm's yoke and finally takes responsibility for his being reconstructions.

However, we never see Clov leave. We never read that he leaves. A responsible reading of the end of *Endgame* must take the literal word of its author as that which actually transpires in the work. But despite this lack of actual escape, Clov nevertheless refuses to answer his master's summoning, which is a significant act of authentic embodiment in itself. Ultimately, a close

reading of *Endgame* reveals that though Clov is dressed "... for the road" (82) at its end, he never actually leaves the room. According to Horowitz, "Even if we can't finally decide whether Clov leaves or doesn't leave, what might we learn about the play by thinking of Clov's departure as both imminent and impossible, not an either/or but a both/and?" (123). But this is a slippery hermeneutic slope. What we might learn is that Clov's level of authenticity is, in the final analysis, indeterminable if we consider that Clov both leaves and remains. Others, like William S. Haney II, flatly declare that Clov never leaves the shelter. "No departure, no resolution, no closure" he writes. "*Endgame* famously ends where it begins" (48). The fact that Clov never actually leaves the room is undeniable, though he nevertheless breaks free from Hamm's mastery simply by refusing to answer his call. Jane Alison Hale comments that, "We will never know for certain if he succeeds in leaving, since he is still standing at the door when the curtain falls" (54). That Hale uses the phrase "at the door" rather than "beside an armchair" would suggest that, according to Horowitz's reading at least, Clov will leave the room. With characteristic ambiguity, Beckett renders the end of the play difficult, though a close reading reveals that Clov makes himself a free man who may reconstruct his being as he sees fit rather than having it influenced by Hamm's overbearing loquacity. Despite the lack of closure on the question of Clov's departure, clearly there is much allusion to ending, one of the major themes of the play and particularly of Clov's embodiments. Hale writes that "From the very first line of the play, when Clov announces, 'Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished' (1), we hear allusion after allusion to the end of time, of people, of stories, of food, of objects, of nature, of color, of sight, of fleas and rats, of light, of the day, of love, of the meaning of words ..." (48). So although Hamm is more concerned with continuation in the form of his chronicle, Clov strives for ending the life he has in the shelter. Hamm insists on telling his story as a way of temporarily

and futilely avoiding ending. “Beckett's man, while hoping for death, dreads it as a meaningless conclusion to his meaningless life” argues Patricia O. White (41). So Hamm stubbornly continues to tell his tales in hopes of staving off the end of his existence and simultaneously retaining his power over the other characters.

Adorno argues in “Trying to Understand *Endgame*” that freedom of choice has no place in *Endgame* because the mysterious historical forces that brought its characters to the brink of destruction are so strong and so compelling that the foursome's existences are all but mapped out for them before the curtain rises on the scene of the hovel. “Even to the concentration camp victims, existentialism had attributed the freedom either inwardly to accept or reject the inflicted martyrdom” he argues. “*Endgame* destroys such illusions” (126). But these characters always have ontological, if not practical, freedom. While pitting Beckett's portrayal of existence – which, according to him, refuses to allow for true freedom – against Sartrean conceptions of freedom, Adorno dismisses any possibility for the play's characters to remake themselves in any meaningful way. However, there is evidence of such freedoms within the play, most of which is found upon careful consideration of Clov's actions. Furthermore, Adorno's reading of existentialism seems to ignore Sartre's conceptions of embodiment. Adorno writes that, “For the norm of existential philosophy – people should be themselves because they can no longer become anything else –, *Endgame* posits the antithesis, that precisely this self is not a self but rather the aping imitation of something non-existent” (143). This statement is puzzling for two reasons: it misinterprets Sartre's theories on subjective freedom and it ignores the fact that the “aping imitation” is not merely an imitation: through its imitation, it becomes that which it imitates in the sense that a subject becomes that as which it represents itself, as in Sartre's example of the waiter.

G. Farrell Lee concurs with Adorno that choice is an impossibility in *Endgame*. He argues, “Even choice, that important existential barometer of significance, is impossible in *Endgame*; choice necessitates the determination of value, for to choose is to place value on what is chosen above what is not chosen, and there are no values in *Endgame*” (64). But this assertion ignores Clov's many expressions of dissatisfaction with his current situation. Surely, these alone are indicators that he values that which he cannot have under Hamm's roof. Lee continues with, “While Sartre insists that we should constantly define ourselves in the world by exercising choice, in *Endgame* nothing is ever defined and choices are never made” (65). Again, although explicit values and their accompanying choices are not obvious in the play, they are definitely there, as not only Clov's grumbling but his preparations for departure show.

As I have argued elsewhere⁶, the primary method Hamm uses to keep Clov under his thumb is the suppression of the latter's narrative, which is never fully articulated during the course of the play, just as Pozzo allows Lucky to speak only when he allows it. Clov struggles to tell his story, as he is incessantly silenced by the overbearing Hamm and conditioned into acceptance of a bleak worldview not entirely his own (35). The master tells his servant, “One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me” (36). With this, Hamm assigns a fatalistic outcome to Clov, who has spent most of his existence in the service of his overbearing master. Though the once impressionable Clov is a grown man, he has been indoctrinated into Hamm's negative outlook from a very young age. “Do you remember when you came here?” Hamm asks his servant. Clov replies, “No. Too small, you told me” (38). The final phrase of Clov's answer, his “you told me” is telling as it reveals a pattern of being told what to do, what to think, and what to say. This latter, his linguistic indoctrination, is

⁶ In “The Chronicles of *Endgame*: Metafiction and Power Relations in Conscious Spaces.” *Ethical Encounters: Boundaries of Theatre, Performance and Philosophy*. Ed. Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrafe and Daniel Watt. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.

most obvious in Clov's answer to Hamm's questioning of the servant's use of the word "yesterday," an act of indirect linguistic appropriation: "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent" (44). Clov's indignant reply also signals his burgeoning authenticity with its questioning of Hamm's teachings. As Nagg offers Nell a bit of food, Hamm rudely interrupts them: "Quiet, quiet, you're keeping me awake" (18). Immediately following this outburst, Hamm launches onto his tortuous monologue, thereby asserting his control over the spoken word and through it, ideas. The master of the hovel is loathe to allow others to express themselves and is thereby able to remain in power over these others. At one point, Hamm shouts for silence as Nell reminisces about Lake Como. "What's she blathering about?" he asks (23), suggesting that when anyone else speaks, it is blather, and when he speaks it is narrative. As Clov prepares to leave the room (arguably for the last time), Hamm asks him to say something from his heart. When Clov struggles to communicate his thoughts on love and friendship, Hamm shouts, "Articulate!" and as Clov continues to speak, "Enough! (80).

This linguistic appropriation creates an environment in which Hamm can easily indoctrinate Clov, Nagg, and Nell into an ideology that demands acquiescence to the belief that whatever Hamm has to say is more valuable than what anyone else can say. Nels Pearson argues that, "Like Caliban, Clov stresses that the words he has learned are basically meaningless to him because they are inseparable from the identity of his master/teacher" (218). This inseparability of words from identity, and more specifically, of the words Clov uses from Hamm's identity, underline the extent to which Clov has been indoctrinated by his master through language and ideology. "Hamm dominates and bullies Clov, who hates him and wants to leave. But to do so would be to commit both suicide and murder, for Hamm's larder contains the only remaining food that he would have to go without, and Hamm is completely dependent on him" Hale writes

(48). Although this reading is very much in line with Beckett's comments on symbiosis in *Godot*, it denies Clov's characterization as one willing to risk the bleakness of the outside world rather than remain a slave to Hamm's bullying.

Hamm's control over the hovel and its denizens is maintained not only through linguistic/ideological control, but also through material control, as he orders his parents bottled in their ashbins and lords over them what little food the foursome has in their depleted coffers. "I'll give you nothing more to eat" he tells Clov when the servant fails to immediately acquiesce to one of his many requests (5). Later, Hamm bribes Nagg with pap so he will have someone to listen to his story (49), ensuring that his control remains absolute through monopolization of narrative and control over food. In addition, Hamm controls what few objects are to be found in the room: he shouts at Clov to move his chair around and to hand him a stuffed dog and a gaff. Clov holds the telescope with which he peers out onto the bleak landscape but only points it in the direction ordered by the irascible Hamm. Furthermore, Hamm controls whether the window is open or not and shouts at Clov to close it as his whimsy dictates. The only thing not directly controlled by Hamm is the box of painkillers, which turns out to be empty (71). Near the end of the play Clov accuses Hamm of withholding oil from Mother Pegg who allegedly died of darkness (74). This latter recounting clearly reveals a pattern of behavior in which Hamm lords material goods over those around him.

The significance of Hamm's conduct as a linguistic/ideological and material appropriator is that he embodies himself in a clearly inauthentic manner. His goals are to control others and the objects and material goods in the foursome's pathetic hovel. As such, he interferes with the radical being constructions of those others while constantly remaking himself as one only somewhat concerned with his own ontological self-knowledge. Although the construction and

relation of his chronicle act as moves toward the creation of an essence, a nebulous definition of self in which Hamm relates past events but also admits to embellishing parts, ultimately Hamm fails to achieve any real authentic embodiment and concomitant self-knowledge because his energies are so focused on his power games which funnel his ontological energies into control of others. Diamond asserts that Hamm creates fictions in an attempt to remove himself from the reality of the present and that his impulse to fictionalize is the impulse “to recreate the self or 'I,' ...” (111). While the creation of his chronicle is an attempt to reconstruct his being through language, the fact that this creation removes him from the present is another indicator that his embodiments are inauthentic. At the end of the play, Hamm remains where he began it, sitting in his chair like the king of a deserted kingdom. His final act is to place his handkerchief over his face (84), essentially pulling a wool over his eyes, as he remains blind to the new authenticity possessed by Clov.

Clov, by contrast, achieves some measure of authenticity of embodiment because although he never actually leaves the room, he does assert himself in the expression of his desire to leave. Clov is, after all, a reluctant servant at best. On no fewer than 15 occasions throughout the play, Clov either declares that he will leave or questions why he stays. Additionally, Clov routinely loses his temper at Hamm's orders and expresses himself with derision, all signs of his nascent authenticity. Clov's brooking of Hamm's authority is noticeable when Hamm orders his servant to once again peer out into the desolate landscape, causing Clov to become annoyed. “And the horizon? Nothing on the horizon?” Hamm asks. “What in God's name could there be on the horizon?” Clov replies with exasperation. His anger at his master's orders becomes even more clear as their dialogue continues:

HAMM: Is it night already then?

CLOV (looking): No.

HAMM: Then what is it?

CLOV (looking): Gray. (Lowering the telescope, turning towards Hamm, louder.) Gray!

(Pause. Still louder.) GRRAY! (Pause. He gets down, approaches Hamm from behind, whispers in his ear.) (31).

Throughout the play, Clov expresses himself not through any articulated narrative, but via these expressions of annoyance, derision, and dissatisfaction. At one point, after being forced to move Hamm around the room while he sits in his chair, Clov says, “If I could kill him I'd die happy” (27). Near the end of the play, he declares that he will look out the window, but only because it is the “last time” (78). This, in addition to Clov's expressed dissatisfaction with linguistic inculcation – his “If [words] don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent” (44) – are all significant because they act as expressions of *ennui* and anger which prove that Clov has developed some measure of interest in his own existence and therefore his ontological self-knowledge. He embodies himself authentically because he does not wish to interfere with the being reconstruction of others, not even that of Hamm. He only wants his freedom to remake himself as he sees fit, and the only way for him to do this is to break away from Hamm's yoke.

One of Clov's most significant lines of dialogue is “Something is taking its course” (13, 32), an enigmatic expression, but one which at the very least suggests that something is changing. The something is the next grain of sand in Clov's pile. Each grain is so small it goes unnoticed, though it is there building up just like Clov's assertiveness. Unlike the characters and setting of *Godot*, which change very little, the inhabitants of the hovel in *Endgame* face some measure of quantifiable change, as one character presumably dies and another prepares to leave

for good. The remaining characters, Hamm and Nagg, however, make no real moves toward change. What Clov's cryptic statement signifies is the verbalization of his dissatisfaction with his life and therefore his embodiments. The "something" that is "taking its course" is the evolution of Clov's authenticity which is evinced in his underarticulated expressions of annoyance and the reiterations of his desire to leave Hamm's employ. Clov is quite simply tired of embodying himself as a servant with little or no real freedom. By the end of the play, Clov is ready to leave the hovel and explore his practical and ontological freedom in such a way as to acquire some measure of authenticity.

Horowitz interprets Clov's final speech as an act of defiance itself. Because Clov's submission is based on being told what words to use, what to see out the window, and in short, what to perceive as reality, any self-removal or distancing from these pre-established notions can be read as a kind of rebellion. When Clov becomes so bowed and so disillusioned as to the use of words – because Hamm taught him the words and because he holds a dialogic monopoly on them – it is clear that Hamm must have necessarily failed to sufficiently indoctrinate his servant. Horowitz argues that the uncertainty experienced by Clov, his "I don't understand" is proof positive of his resistance. "Not knowing becomes a form of liberation, an escape from the desiccated language and overdetermined decay of Hamm's endgame" (126).

Eva Metman sees similar character development in Clov, though she bases her interpretation not on Clov's use of linguistic tools but on the appearance of the small boy outside the window late in the action of the play. "What remained latent in *Godot*" she writes, "is developed in *Endgame*: the experience of transition" because the boy "... corresponds to the solemn change towards merciless reality in Hamm and ruthless acceptance of freedom in Clov" (135). Metman asserts that the appearance of the boy ushers in a new era for Hamm and Clov,

one in which the former must realize his need to end his stories and the latter must become aware that he really can leave the shelter if he embraces this new freedom.

Although Clov is the only character in the play who shows some measure of authenticity, he is not the only character who leads an existence smothered by Hamm's constant muzzling. The mere fact that Nagg and Nell live in garbage bins instantly clues the audience to the fact that the couple leads lives of physical as well as mental and verbal immobility. Paraplegics, Nagg and Nell comprise the shocking spectacle of elderly people "bottled" in trash cans who are ignored like so much garbage in one of the most famous images in modern drama. It is also an image of stark symbolism that represents not only their devaluation as conscious beings, but their devaluation as contributors to the collective historical narrative of all the play's characters. As the most senior members of Beckett's sad little group, Nagg and Nell should be its chief historians, as they have experienced the longest lives. And although their enemy is just as much their own failing memories as it is their son, Hamm's bribery and impatience effectively end the couple's ability to express themselves.

The elderly couple's failing memories and their physical stasis have affinities to those of Vladimir and Estragon, two characters whose porous memories and reliance on habit result from embodiments centered on external phenomena rather than internal being reconstruction. For Nagg and Nell, their inept memories are no doubt partly the product of their old age but also of foci not on their being reconstructions but upon living in the past, essentially relying on past embodiments rather than present ones. The couple refuses to live in the present other than to obtain some meek sustenance or compare ashbin linings. Rather than living in the present and focusing on present embodiments, Nagg and Nell insist upon shoddy reminiscences of Lake Como (21) and a tandem bicycle (16). They pronounce the word "yesterday" with an "elegiac"

zest (15), betraying their proclivities toward aversion to authentic embodiment in favor of flawed and abortive attempts to live in past embodiments.

The dysfunctional family's strained relationship is evident from the beginning of Nagg's dialogue with Hamm. The son calls his father "accursed progenitor" (9) and "accursed fornicator" (10) before ordering Clov to shut him up in his can. When Nell emerges from hers she is all but ignored by her son. Struggling with not only failing memories but failing sight and hearing, the couple is at the mercy of Hamm, bribed into listening to his chronicle or shut up in their garbage bins in a show of power that proves Hamm has the upper hand. They discuss how they are not being adequately cared for – the sand in their cans has not been changed regularly until Hamm barks, "quiet, quiet, you're keeping me awake," (18) thus preventing them from discussing the conditions in which they are kept and thereby quashing any possible resistance to his edicts.

Nagg's joke further annoys Hamm and acts as a catalyst for the expression of his attitude toward his parents, especially his father. Once Nagg has delivered the punchline to his joke – "... look at the world – and look – at my TROUSERS" – he is immediately told to shut up by his irascible son, who then asks "Have you not finished? Will you never finish?" (23). With this, Hamm spews forth his disgust with the continuation of narrative, though he is hesitant to end his own because he knows he will have no purpose should his chronicle end. According to Nagg, Hamm has a long history of needing an audience. He bribes his father into listening to his stories and when the promised treats never materialize, Nagg admits his lackadaisical parenting skills by reminding Hamm of a past encounter: "I was asleep, as happy as a king, and you woke me up to have me listen to you. It wasn't indispensable, you didn't really need to have me listen to you" (56). With this, it is clear that Hamm has filled his life with storytelling because of a compulsion

to have listeners in a materialization of Beckettian symbiosis. This compulsion dictates that he must define his role in the endgame through his storytelling and that if he cannot tell his stories, he has no function and therefore might as well die. His need to relate his chronicle is also what drives Hamm to control others as he remains compelled to force others to listen to him. This in turn is what makes Hamm the character in the play who most embodies himself with inauthenticity.

Though Hamm detests his existence, he is reluctant to end it by ending his chronicles because he feels he must have some kind of purpose. And so he remains at the end of the play, sitting where he began it and speaking still, though at the end he speaks to his handkerchief because there is no one left to listen to him. "Old stancher!" he says. "You remain ..." (84). While Hamm remains in stasis like Vladimir and Estragon, Clov shows his newly formed authenticity by preparing to leave the room. The first dialogue of the play is Clov's, whose "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (1), signals that the play will have beginning and ending as one of its themes and also shows his desire for the change ultimately brought on by his growing dissatisfaction with his life as Hamm's servant, a dissatisfaction that grows into authentic embodiment at the play's culmination.

Clov leads a tortured existence, like many of Beckett's characters, including those of *What Where*, who are not merely tortured through linguistic/ideological manipulation, but through actual physical torture as they take turns giving each other "the works." Through this torture the play offers opportunities for discussion on the relation between torture and embodiment. Torture is key to understanding embodiment due to its tendency constantly to remind the subject that he is an ontological being with his very *state* of being in his own hands. Sartre tells us that a torturer can only ever act upon a facticity (the body) and can never know

what the submission of the tortured subject means to its own freedom (511). Detmer's distinction between ontological freedom and practical freedom comes into play again in *What Where* because of the play's focus on torture. In terms of practical (physical) freedom, the results of torture are fairly obvious, though in terms of ontological freedom, the excruciating pain and humiliation inflicted upon those tortured is more complex. Torture seeks to strip down its victims of their "theyness," any shield, like Kean's mask, which seeks to deflect the humiliation onto others through its fall-back on societal structures, comradeship, etc. Heidegger explains "theyness" as he writes,

With Dasein's lostness in the "they", that factual potentiality-for-Being which is closest to it (the tasks, rules, and standards, the urgency and extent, of concerned and solicitous Being-in-the-world) has already been decided upon. 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 ... So Dasein makes no choices, gets carried along by the nobody, and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity (312).

The tortured subject is alone and therefore removed from his "theyness" or its symbiosis because no other subject can feel his agony for him. Through torture, the tortured one loses the luxury of his "they" but only attains some measure of authentic embodiment if he seizes the opportunity by employing his ontological freedom to remain resilient in the face of this loss. He is forced to confront his being reconstruction because every moment of torture reminds him that he must remake himself via his ontological freedom in a way he cannot do with his practical freedom: he is powerless in practical terms but not in ontological terms. Societal structures, which Foucault sees as operating historically through torture and execution and later via the panopticon, are

broken down through torture, though the victim can use his ontological freedom to choose how he will deal with this breach. As Foucault writes, “The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property” (11). But the type of intervention with the body Foucault describes affects the practical freedom of a subject (just as torture does), not necessarily his ontological freedom, unless he allows it to as Gracin does with his “Hell is other people.” Because torture brings the tortured to a state of truth in which he is stripped of his mask and forced to reveal himself, he is brought to a state in which how he handles himself ontologically will be obvious to those who perpetrate the torture. If the victim chooses through his ontological freedom to remain courageous and to set his body apart from his being, then he has employed his ontological freedom in a way which evinces an authentic embodiment. If, on the other hand, he embodies himself without authenticity while under torture, he will give in to it in the form of a confession or the divulging of information.

The embodiments of those tortured and how torture affects their being reconstructions was treated in Chapter II during an examination of these concepts in conjunction with the characters of *The Victors*. It is worth treating again in Beckett's *What Where* because quality of embodiment is most easily determined when a subject is given a test of mettle, when he is pushed to the extremes of being by torture, the threat of death, saving face, etc., when the mask of propriety is removed and the subject is left alone in a space in which he is confronted with his need to remake himself with every passing moment. These are times when a subject embodies himself with his own being most as his primary concern and therefore most authentically, if he chooses responsibly how he will embody himself. Just like Prometheus and Sisyphus who are tortured for eternity, one must imagine them being content in their torment. “One must imagine

Sisyphus happy” Camus writes of his titular character (123). This contentment or this happiness is only possible through ontological embodiment.

John Deamer examines the action of the play in relation to embodiment, though the embodiment he addresses is that of discursive knowledge rather than the ontological embodiment spurred by the constructive and destructive tendencies within the subject. Deamer notes that when the victim of torture is taken offstage and “given the works” he is deprived of any voice, while when the same subject returns and takes the role of torturer, he has a voice, which sets up a critique of authority and insurgency and how the relation between them is one of linguistic expression (186). But linguistic expression is only one type of embodiment, one action by which quality of embodiment can be determined. Ontological embodiment involves the entire being reconstruction of a subject, not merely his linguistic embodiments.

When *What Where* premiered in 1983, it was recognized as one of Beckett's few openly political plays⁷. What is more remarkable about the short play is how Beckett stages the interactions of a loudspeaker with four identical-looking men who torture each other in turn for mysterious information. The fact that the actors on the stage are “alike as possible” (309) in appearance means that in literal terms they look alike, and embody themselves as similarly as possible. Not only are the four men identical in appearance, they act alike and have similar-sounding names (Bam, Bem, Bim, Bom). They take orders from a loudspeaker, or someone who represents himself through one, and themselves act alternately as victim of and perpetrator of torture, except for Bam who is never tortured.

That the four human characters of the play are a single subject has been suggested by Elizabeth Klaver, who writes that within the play, “... the mind is fragmented into four distinct

⁷ Mel Gussow calls the play an “assault on totalitarianism” (160) and a “provocative political statement.” (161). John Calder suggests the origins of the play lie in Beckett's wartime experience as member of the French Resistance.

images – Bam, Bem, Bim, and Bom – which are made to appear by the controlling voice of Bam” (376). Graley Herren agrees. He writes that “... the striking similarities in names and appearances suggest that *all* of the players are fragments or 'shades' of the same character. 'Self,' then, is depicted less as an essence than as a performance on the 'field of memory' ” (327).

If the foursome are read as successive embodiments of a single subject, this mimics the theory that embodiments are constant and ever-changing within a single individual who never represents himself exactly the same way twice but must continually choose embodiments as part of Sartre's condemnation to freedom. Beckett himself said of the characters of *What Where* “The four [Bam, Bom, Bim, Bem] are trapped. One by one, they have an opportunity to ask the victim what where, and they receive no answer” (qtd. In Gussow, 42-43). That the play's characters embody themselves upon the stage along with other characters who act out embodiments of that same character may be problematic until it is realized that what the theatre audience sees is simply a dramatization of successive embodiments of a single subject. The theatergoer witnesses the enactment of an impossibility: the clashing of disparate and hypothetical embodiments from a single subject.

Because time is linear and like an arrow moves from past to present, an individual subject's embodiments are manifested by that subject for an infinitesimal instant and then fall away into the past like grains of sand in an hourglass. As Beckett asserts in *Proust*, there is a space between each embodiment, what he calls the “perilous zones” (8). In the spaces between each of these embodiments, the subject is left in a space in which he must remake himself via succeeding embodiments, whether he knows this or not. In the case of *What Where*, Beckett stages an interaction which is impossible outside the theatre, a confrontation within a single subject of an embodiment with another of its own embodiments. Bam, Bem, Bim, and Bom look,

sound, and act alike, and although the loudspeaker is a piece of equipment with no other human qualities than its voice, this voice is that of Bam (309). These embodiments of the same subject torture each other because they all struggle to occupy the same place in linear time, the space in which the subject “is.” Thus, they attempt to become in-itself, that which is complete. Each embodiment wants to be “the” subject, the main or primary one, but because they magically co-exist thanks to Beckett's conjuring trick, each of them is and is not a unified subject. In short, because several embodiments of a single subject co-exist in the play, none of them is the true subject and all of them are. This does not suggest, however, that there is any primary or initial embodiment of the subject of *What Where*. There is no first subject because, as Heidegger points out, each subject began its being at an indeterminate point in “thrownness,” which stipulates that each subject turns up on the scene of being and therefore has no easily identifiable starting point. The beginning of existence is just as mysterious as its end. According to Heidegger, “In the face of its thrownness Dasein flees to the relief which comes with the supposed freedom of the they-self” (321). This “supposed freedom” leads in fact to a deadening of ontological self-knowledge due to its tendency to rely not on a focus of the subject on itself but upon others.

The fact that the foursome look, dress, and sound alike automatically suggests “theyness” and a reliance on the inauthentic embodiments involved in social edicts, or in this case, military order and torture. Ultimately, none of the play's characters can be said to embody himself authentically, not because each is an impossible co-embodiment of a single subject which in reality could not co-exist with the other embodiments, but because the characters torture each other in their jockeying for supremacy as an in-itself, which means they seek to alter each others' radical being reconstructions through this torture.

The men take their orders from the mysterious V, manifested only by a megaphone and the voice which comes through it. That V is only a megaphone and voice suggests not only an enigmatic source of information and particularly of orders, but a dehumanized consciousness, or alternatively, a consciousness who insists upon anonymity. That V has the voice of Bam suggests that he is yet another embodiment of Bam. Either way, V embodies himself inauthentically, not because he is a disembodied voice or a dehumanized consciousness, but because he orders the torture of each of the foursome in turn. This cyclical structure in which Bem, Bim, and Bom take turns torturing and being tortured, suggests each is the same subject but manifested in different embodiments because their cycle goes on and on much like a subject's embodiments. Bam, however, is the only one not tortured and is also the voice of V. Bam is the one who orders, at V's suggestion, the torture of his fellows, which suggests he is the least authentic character in the play. If so, Bem, Bim, and Bom fare little better in their authenticity, as they take turns torturing each other, which clearly involves an interference in the being reconstruction of another.

The play begins in a shadowy room in the spring of an unknown year as V proclaims, “We are the last five” (310), presumably referring to himself and the foursome of Bam, Bem, Bim, and Bom. Just 15 lines later, however, he says “I am alone” (311), suggesting that he (who has the voice of Bam) is merely another embodiment which comprises along with the others a single subject. V then narrates the action which unfolds upon the stage as Bom enters with his head bowed, presumably as a sign of submission to the past or pending torture ordered by V. “In the end Bom appears. Reappears” he says (311). That Bom reappears suggests that the events about to unfold on the stage have already happened, perhaps several times in an endless cycle of torture and embodiments. That V announces each season of the year in turn also suggests the repetitive aspect of the characters' actions. Bim then enters, head haught because he knows he

will be the torturer and Bom will be the tortured. Bim then exits followed by Bom, returns with head bowed after failing to extract from Bom the information V wants, while Bem enters with head held high. Bem then exits followed by Bim. Bem then re-enters, head bowed and Bam exits followed by Bem. Bam soon returns head bowed and V pronounces this entire dance “Good” (311). This cyclical and apparently endless succession of victimization mirrors the endless embodiments cast forth by a single subject while the characters' enthusiasm for torture reveals them as inauthentic embodiments of a single subject.

V then declares, “I start again” (311) and the entire scene replays itself with the difference that the characters speak to each other rather than remaining silent. Bam interrogates Bom to ascertain what information the latter extracted from his victim. Bom reports that he tortured his victim but was unable to acquire any information from him. V, meanwhile, comments on the scene on the stage, remarking, “Not good” and then “Good” (312). V's comments suggest that he represents the destructive and constructive tendencies of the subject, as he guides the characters (his embodiments) in their speech and actions. Dissatisfied with Bom's report, Bam calls him a liar and declares that he will be tortured, which V pronounces “Good” (313). Bim then appears and is ordered by Bam to torture Bom until the latter confesses that he lied about his inability to extract information from his victim. The actions upon the stage mimic those performed in silence at the play's beginning while they reinforce the overwhelming motif of repetition.

The cycle continues, as V declares once again that he is alone, though following this statement he announces “It is summer. Time passes” (314), suggesting that although the action of the play is repetitive and cyclical, time has not stopped, it continues. The *deja vu* quality of the play continues as Bim returns, head bowed, to report that he was unable to extract information

from his unfortunate victim, Bom. Just as he accused Bom of being a liar, Bam accuses Bim of the same, at which point Bem enters and is ordered to torture Bim. Soon after, V announces that it is autumn (315) and Bem reappears only to report his failure at obtaining information from his victim. Bam subsequently accuses him of lying and leads him offstage to be tortured. At this point, V announces, “It is winter. Time passes. In the end I appear. Reappear” (316). Bam then enters with head bowed, suggesting that V will torture him. The play then ends with the final dialogue, that of V, who says, “Make sense who may. I switch off” (316).

In his analysis of the relation between Beckett's works and Heidegger's theories, Lance St. John Butler argues that there is everywhere in Beckett's work a painful, inescapable bond between self and other (33). What is ultimately Heideggerian about this bond (which Beckett would call symbiosis), he says, is that it is necessarily ontological rather than psychological or social. Clearly this is so, as ontological embodiment hinges not only on the constructive and destructive tendencies of the self, but on having an other – even if this other is the reflected-upon consciousness of a single subject – for its very existence. The characters of *What Where* are especially subject to this otherness because they are multiple embodiments of a single subject.

The bond St. John Butler finds in Beckett's work is similar to the symbiosis the author himself saw in *Godot*. Although each subject must focus on his own ontological self-knowledge in order to represent himself authentically, it is always in the face of the other that a subject represents himself. In fact, it is ontologically impossible for a subject ever to be without an other – again, even if this other is a consciousness reflecting upon itself, the internal other – because the nature of consciousness stipulates that it can reflect upon itself. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *What Where*, characters embody themselves inauthentically because of their lust for power and their reliance on habit and its concomitant power as a “great deadener”

of ontological self-knowledge. Clov is the notable exception to this tendency because although he is a servant who takes orders from an overbearing master, he seeks no approbation from others and asserts himself to the point of the threshold of leaving an abusive environment. This reading – especially when it is considered with Clov's incessant temerity at Hamm's orders in mind – counters the tradition of Beckett criticism which insists upon the powerlessness of the subject, left to fend for himself in a gloomy and hopeless world, as it insists upon a reading of Clov in which a new beginning is a distinct possibility. A new and optimistic reading of Beckett's *oeuvre* is important to the existing body of criticism on those works because it will allow for more critical approaches and avenues of exploration to the works of this important playwright, readings which will allow for further exploration of otherwise difficult texts.

CHAPTER IV

IONESCO AND ESCAPE FROM THE HERD MENTALITY

In “An Address Delivered to a Gathering of French and German Writers” in February 1960, Ionesco outlined his theories on the form of the play with an architectural metaphor:

An architect builds a temple, a palace or a small house. A musician composes a symphony. The architect tells us this is for the faithful to have a place made for prayer; for the king to have a dwelling spacious enough to house distinguished guests, various dignitaries and countless soldiers; and for the peasant to have somewhere to shelter his family and his pig ... But the architect is properly caught out: the faithful have died and religion is in ruins, but the temple is not, it is still standing; and generation after generation come to admire the abandoned temple, the empty palace and the picturesque old house, which now shelters only furniture or memories (*Notes and Counter Notes*, 146).

Although his comments were meant to address specifically the formal structures of a play and how new ideas lead to new forms of theatre, they may easily be applied (not least because of their reference to a temple) to outmoded belief systems. The loss of faith expounded upon by Camus, Esslin, and Killinger lends credence to Ionesco's assertion that “religion is in ruins.” Because art and belief systems are so inextricably intertwined, new forms of art and new belief systems must necessarily be built from the ruins of which Ionesco spoke during his address.

New beliefs which debunk old ones inevitably lead to new art, as art is one form of expression of these beliefs or of their lack. The falling away of outmoded belief systems leaves

each subject in a state of Heideggerian “thrownness” in which each subject finds herself as existing without ready-made belief systems like religion or faith in progress. This “thrownness” works in conjunction with the constructive and destructive tendencies of each consciousness to force each subject to renew herself at each instant through ontological embodiment. Each subject's level of authenticity of embodiment depends on the extent to which each embodiment has as its focus its own succession of embodiments rather than that of others. Although each subject encounters the beliefs of others and as a result finds herself in the Heideggerian “they,” this quagmire of external mores is not inescapable. In Ionesco's plays, embodiment is played out via the manipulation of language and how his characters react to it, how agents of authority abuse their power, and how one character resists the temptation to submit to a mob mentality.

Ionesco, as the earliest proponent of the Theatre of the Absurd, was a visionary who saw that language as a ready-made and unquestionable system of communication had lost its efficacy as a means of communication and that structural forms in the theatre had become outdated in the atomic age. These theatrical structural forms came to parallel and simultaneously mock the signs so crucial to structuralism. The association of signifiers to their signifieds, especially when these signifieds were intangible ideas, were seen by the absurdists as arbitrary and outmoded. Because his plays were so revolutionary, experimental and often incomprehensible, critics often reacted unfavorably not only to the plays themselves but to their author. The most famous of these resulted in a controversial *tete-a-tete* in the press between Ionesco and Kenneth Tynan. The significance of the imbroglio, according to Esslin, is that it established Ionesco not as the author of nonsensical plays but as a serious artist dedicated to the exploration of the realities of the human situation (*The Theatre of the Absurd*, 105).

The literary debate began when the *London Observer* published on June 22, 1958 Tynan's

“Ionesco: Man of Destiny.” In the inflammatory article, Tynan lamented what he saw as a trend in the theatre which called for anti-realism for the sake of itself. He claimed that Ionesco was hailed as a messiah by the theatregoing public. “Here was a writer ready to declare that words were meaningless and that all communication between human beings was impossible” (*Notes and Counter Notes*, 88). While Tynan concedes that Ionesco's plays are part of a valid personal vision presented with great imaginative aplomb and verbal audacity, he cautions that the danger in Ionesco's works comes when they are held up for general emulation as the gateway to the theatre of the future (89).

Ionesco rejoined with “The Playwright's Role” (*The Observer*, June 29, 1958) in which he argued that he was not a messiah because he didn't like messiahs and because he considered them to lie well beyond the realm of plays and playwriting (90). To Tynan's claim about the ways in which Ionesco used language, the playwright contended that “I simply hold that it is difficult to make oneself understood, not absolutely impossible ... (90). He elaborates his defense by writing “The problem is to get to the source of our malady, to find the non-conventional language of this anguish, perhaps by breaking down this 'social' language which is nothing but cliches, empty formulas and slogans” (92).

Tynan replied to this defense in the July 6, 1958 *Observer* with “Ionesco and the Phantom.” In it, he accuses Ionesco of being one who regards art as completely independent and distinct from the world around it rather than as something inextricably connected to it (94). Ionesco was in danger of becoming a solipsist, according to Tynan. “Whether M. Ionesco admits it or not, every play worth serious consideration is a statement” he writes (96). With this, Tynan implicitly endorses the type of engaged literature propounded by Sartre but dismissed by

Ionesco. This and similar tracts by theatre professionals as well known as Orson Welles⁸ prompted Ionesco to write his famous defense of his work, “Hearts Are Not Worn on the Sleeve,” which appeared in the Winter 1959 *Cahiers des Saisons*.

In that essay, Ionesco once again defends his experimental plays by arguing that the history of art is first and foremost the history of its expression and that expression is simultaneously form and content (101). With this, he places the greatest value not on ideas but on how they are expressed in the theatre. He defends his use of language via his claim that to renew one's language is to renew one's conception of the world (102). Above all, what the playwright attempts to safeguard is subjectivity in art and the right of the artist to forgo didactics in favor of a focus on form. He writes: “When Mr. Tynan defends realist writers, because they express themselves in an idiom everyone can immediately recognize, he is nevertheless defending a narrow realism – even if he denies it – the kind of realism that no longer captures reality and therefore must be exploded” (104). Much like Ionesco's temple, the form of the thing no longer serves its content. A new form of theater is therefore necessary, one which better accommodates the new ideas which have sprung from the ashes of two world wars. Furthermore, the playwright's comment on renewing language is once more akin to renewing one's belief systems and oneself via ontological embodiment.

Two years after this controversy, the playwright apparently still felt a lingering need to defend his work. He published in 1960 an essay entitled “The Tragedy of Language: How an English Primer Became My First Play.” In that essay, the playwright explains how in 1948 his project to learn English developed into one of the most intriguing playwrighting careers in modern drama. His primer's insistence on banal phrases and trite expressions inspired Ionesco to write

⁸ Welles wrote in *The Observer* on July 13, 1958 that “an artist must confirm the values of his society; or he must challenge them (qtd. in *Notes and Counter Notes*, 99).

one of the earliest successes of absurd drama, *The Bald Soprano*, a play notorious not only for its lack of plot and character development, but for its dialogue which calls attention to the loss of meaning in language. In that play, the Smiths and Martins repeatedly spout *non sequiturs*, nonsense, and quotidian expressions in a play in which characters borrow their personalities from each other in a baffling cycle of anti-realism. Ionesco's use of language in *The Bald Soprano* has been discussed at length; however, his characters' ephemeral and shifting personalities have been less often written about. These shifting personalities which mimic the cycle of embodiments each subject undergoes at every moment are elaborated upon in *The Lesson*, *Victims of Duty*, *Rhinoceros*, and other of Ionesco's works.

Ionesco writes of his English-lesson book (from which he borrowed the names of *Soprano's* characters), "To my great astonishment, Mrs. Smith informed her husband that they had several children, that they lived in the vicinity of London, that their name was Smith, that Mr. Smith was a clerk, that they had a servant, Mary, English like themselves, that for the past twenty years they have had friends by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Martin ..." (10). Ionesco transferred the book's dialogue, characterized by the repetitions of simple facts and senseless elocutions, to the mouths of his characters in order to create a work which would highlight the loss of linguistic meaning which followed the propaganda of two world wars and also explore how characters acquire and relinquish personality traits for a brief time.

The loss of meaning, upon which Killinger and Camus expound on a metaphysical level, inspired Ionesco to create dramas far removed from objective reality. Of *Soprano*, Ionesco comments, "Alas! the wise and fundamental truths [*Soprano's* characters] exchanged, each carefully linked to the next, had gone wild, their language had become disjointed; the characters disintegrated: their words became meaningless absurdities; the entire cast ended up quarreling"

(12). The characters' words have no meaning because the universe holds no meaning other than that which the characters create for themselves. The absurdity of their dialogue parallels the absurdity of the association of words with particular meanings. In short, these characters reject the arbitrary nature of words and meanings through their exposure of the randomness of signifiers and signifieds. As a result, their words are as nonsensical as the universe in which they live.

The loss of linguistic meaning Ionesco found so unpalatable made him aware of the automatic quality not only of language but of human behavior, which he calls “the absence of inner life” and the “mechanical aspect of daily existence” (13). Reminiscent of Heidegger's “they,” when viewed in tandem with the loss of linguistic meaning, this crisis – a crisis of being – led Ionesco to an art form which, like the works of Beckett and Sartre, would explore not only social or psychological problems, but problems of existence and of how subjects rely on themselves for any iota of authentic life. *Rhinoceros*, among Ionesco's most famous plays, has been labeled by the playwright himself as a work which warns against giving in to the temptations of the group mentality. Of Ionesco's body of work, Nancy Lane comments, “Ionesco values the individual and his freedom above all else and views society, especially bureaucratic mass societies, as an enemy. He deplors the dehumanization of modern society, in which the individual is identified with his function ...” (*Understanding Eugene Ionesco*, 1994, 22.). When asked in a 1975 interview whether or not *Rhinoceros* deals with a political subject, Ionesco admitted that it does (“Ionesco and the Critics,” 1975, 647). When pressed by interviewer Gabriel Jacobs to divulge his political views, the playwright replied enigmatically that he had been attacked by both the Right and the Left because of his plays. “Remember that many of my plays, *The Killer*, *A Stroll in the Air*, and especially *Rhinoceros*, are indictments of

totalitarianism. It is quite impossible for a true artist to support a totalitarian doctrine whatever its form, because, for the artist, independence is everything” (649). This independence is everything not only for artists but for their characters, Ionesco seems to say, because if they are not independent they are part of “they” or of a totalitarian society and its ready-made thoughts and emotions. In ontological terms, this quality of being mired in the belief systems constructed by others results in a lesser level of ontological self-knowledge. Sheldon S. Wolin argues that totalitarian regimes are kept in place through their reliance on myth and the language that goes along with it, language which “... does not make the world intelligible, only dramatic” (*Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*, 2008, 10). This type of language is that which Ionesco so vehemently opposed.

In a 1973 interview, critic Emmanuel Jacquart asked Ionesco why such diverse writers as he and Beckett began in the 1950s to reject realism and Aristotelian psychology. Ionesco replied with his characteristic pessimism by saying that the shift in artistic creation from realism and naturalism to absurdism was a historical inevitability: “As far as I am concerned – and it’s in this respect that I come closest to Beckett – the existential condition is unbearable” (“Interview/Eugene Ionesco,” 1973, 45). Historical events, the external world, Sartre’s “facticity,” all work to set limits against the freedom of the individual. These limits, in turn, strike Ionesco as unbearable. It is this very quality of the unbearable, however, which makes theatre possible, according to Ionesco. In one of his voluminous writings on his own drama, Ionesco proclaims, “To tear ourselves away from the everyday, from habit, from mental laziness which hides from us the strangeness of reality, we must receive something like a real bludgeon blow. Without a new virginity of spirit, without a purified outlook on existential reality, there is no theatre ...” (“Discovering the Theatre,” 1959, 11). As described by Ionesco, this “bludgeon

blow” is simultaneously akin to the methods of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, a way out of Heidegger's “they,” and a wake-up call out of the unquestioning acceptance of traditional value systems declared outmoded by Killinger and Camus. In addition, Richard N. Coe comments, “... Ionesco, no less than Camus, is a man obsessed with truth, for whom the ‘comfortable lie’ is anathema. To continue – still, at this late date – to propound the illusion of rationality would be an act of flagrant immorality” (*Ionesco: A Study of His Plays*, 1961, 48). Humanity must refute the “comfortable lie” and create itself anew. According to Ionesco, the theatre can provide this wake-up call by exposing the ridiculous quality of life within outmoded value systems.

In the same interview, Jacobs asks Ionesco about the similarity of his work to that of Beckett. In reply, Ionesco says that Beckett was a metaphysical and theological writer primarily interested in the problem of existence and the metaphysical and existential condition of humanity rather than its economic or political conditions (“Ionesco and the Critics,” 1975, 642). Jacobs then prods Ionesco: “The same is probably true of you,” to which Ionesco replies in the affirmative. The playwright then elaborates by saying, “The most fascinating problem of all, the *real* problem is that of our existential malaise, or why we are in the state we are in” (642). Although Ionesco harbored a distaste for Sartre and his engaged literature, he too must be included among those playwrights who are metaphysical, theological, and interested in the problem of existence. Part of Ionesco's metaphysics includes his explorations of personal identity and this is most obvious in his characters’ tendencies to transform ostensibly into other characters at a whim.

Coe argues in his discussion of Ionesco’s works that, “A ‘personality’, in the classical concept of the term, implies at least a minimum of continuity from one moment to the next, and not merely an unrelated sequence of ‘states of existence’ accidentally confined within the same

material body” (55). Coe is partially correct: each subject usually constructs his embodiments so that they are similar to those of his past based on patterns of succession. As stated earlier, however, in extreme situations – for example, when Berenger finds himself the last known human being on earth – a subject may go against his usual patterns of embodiment for the sake of survival. Where Coe’s reading of this process breaks down is when he stipulates that “Each ‘state of existence’ owes nothing but an arbitrary debt of coincidence to the one before it” (55). On the contrary, each state of existence is freely chosen and willfully crafted based on the decisions made by each subject in each succeeding moment. This does not mean that each embodiment is necessarily determined by its previous one, but that patterns of embodiment guide the subject in essence formation, the exception to this being when the subject finds himself in extreme or potentially fatal situations. Ionesco himself seems to agree with Coe as he again attacks Sartre’s contention that existence comes before essence. “As for me, I believe that essence precedes existence; that man simply finds himself in a variety of different situations ...” (qtd. in Coe, 120). With this, Ionesco asserts that subjects turn up already more or less formed and then construct an existence out of what they have within themselves. But this theory fails to explain how essence is created just as much as Sartre fails to explain how existence begins. Furthermore, a close examination of Ionesco's characters and how they embody themselves will show that, given their readiness to metamorphose their own personalities, their existence comes before their essence. Neither playwright attempts to explain the origin of things; they are more interested in how subjects determine their existences through their actions. And despite Ionesco's statement, his plays are clearly peopled with characters who make themselves what they are. The most notable of these is Berenger, who in *Rhinoceros*, decides to hold out against rhinocerotis though he changes his mind several times before doing so in an exploration of his own being.

Berenger is the only one of Ionesco's characters who embodies himself authentically because although the rest of the world has become rhinoceroses who have given in to the herd mentality, he embodies his resilience against it. He does not give in to rhinocerotism in the hopes of gaining favor from others. His embodiments – at least at the end of the play – have as their focus only his own ontological self-knowledge. Through this knowledge, Berenger learns much about himself and what he values. He gains his independence though he sacrifices his membership in a community. Others among Ionesco's characters embody themselves with less authenticity. They either seek to end the embodiments of others, force others to embody themselves as they see fit, or relinquish their abilities to embody themselves altogether. The characters of the surreal *Victims of Duty* and *The Lesson* embody themselves without authenticity as they seek to dominate or please others rather than focusing their energies on themselves.

First produced in 1951, when absurd drama was still in its infancy, *The Lesson* is a play which exhibits many of the nontraditional characteristics so common in Ionesco's works: dialogue rife with logical fallacies, a dearth of character motivation, and a ridiculous and scant plot. Another trait from Ionesco's *modus operandi* is his use of characters who lack any real authenticity of embodiment. Of the three characters in the play, none of them embodies himself authentically. The Professor seeks to end the life of the Pupil and therefore, like Sartre's victors, strives to terminate the possibility of another's succession of embodiments. The Pupil, for her part, though she seeks only for knowledge from the Professor, embodies herself in a manner similar to Beckett's Lucky, who chooses to remain subservient. This subservience renders her passive rather than assertive to the point that she may embody herself in a manner which is best for her ontological self-knowledge.

Although Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller claim that the Pupil puts up strong resistance to the Professor's overbearing verbosity (*Ionesco and Genet: Playwrights of Silence*, 22, 1968), this resistance is fleeting and in the end too weak to save her. During the course of the one-act play, she becomes gradually more timid as the Professor becomes more aggressive. The maid, on the other hand, seeks not to end the life of another and remains somewhat subservient to the Professor, though she is ultimately an enabler for the Professor's murderous habits, which makes her just as inauthentic in embodiment as he.

While both the Pupil and the Maid at times protest against the Professor's overbearing attitude, in the end they remain, like Lucky, servile and inauthentic. The murder at the climax of the play – during which the Professor slashes the Pupil's throat with an imaginary knife and the Maid assists him in disposing of the body – is significant in its meaninglessness. No motive for the murder is even hinted at. This motiveless deed parallels the lack of motive for existence itself. The killing is just as purposeless as life and rather than fashioning an existence with his own being as his focus, the Professor chooses to spend his ontological energies on the slaying of others: It turns out the Pupil is his fortieth victim of the day (*The Bald Soprano and Other Plays*, 1958, 77). These murders effectively end their victims' possibilities for further embodiment, and the Maid, who acts as an accessory to murder, is just as guilty. According to Richard Schechner, “Everyone is 'guilty' – the servant who makes all the arrangements before and after and who does not back her warnings with effective sanctions; the all too willing victim; the murderer who will not believe what he has experienced innumerable times before ...” (*Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 1973, 36). Contrary to Jacobsen's and Mueller's contention that the Pupil is a fighter, Schechner sees her as a “willing victim.” She is a “willing victim” not in the sense that

she desires to be killed, but because she fails several times to contradict the Professor despite his elocutions of misinformation. Essentially, she fails to fight for her life.

The existential character of the play is suggested at its very beginning: the *dramatis personae* indicates that the characters have no names; they are known only by their professions. Their lack of monikers suggests not only their flatness of character, but that in metaphysical terms they are blank slates. They must choose their essences via their choice of embodiment. The Pupil enters, young and impressionable. The stage direction tells us she is “lively,” “well brought up,” “dynamic” and “polite” (45), characteristics which evince choices made before her arrival at the Professor's home, choices which have resulted in laudable personality characteristics. Although at this point in the play the Pupil may very well be one who embodies herself authentically, further stage directions are unusually revealing as they indicate otherwise: “During the course of the play she successively loses the lively rhythm of her movement and her carriage, she becomes withdrawn” (45). And later: “From gay and smiling she becomes progressively sad and morose; from very lively at the beginning, she becomes more and more fatigued and somnolent” (45-46). The stage direction continues, stipulating that the Pupil actually becomes more passive as the play progresses, that at its end she becomes seemingly inanimate in the Professor's hands. This description is reminiscent of Lucky in the hands of Pozzo. Like Pozzo, the Professor uses language before physical force as a tool of domination. According to Jeanette Patterson, his instruction serves to suppress independent thought in favor of the mindless reproduction of the discourse that is harmful to the student (197). Rosette C. Lamont observes that “No one is more aware than an academic that words may constitute a formidable arsenal” (*Ionesco's Imperatives*, 1993, 56). So in *The Lesson* language is not manipulated for the sake of satire as in *The Bald Soprano*, though it is used strategically as a tool of domination by one

character over others. Lane comments that the play is a ritualized language game in which possession of language equals power (42).

The Professor, the one who most notably abuses language, is described at the beginning of the play as a little old man with a little white beard (46), suggesting frailty and age, but also wisdom. He is polite and timid but has a “lewd gleam” in his eyes (46). Once again, Ionesco's stage directions are especially revealing: “During the course of the play his timidity will disappear progressively, imperceptibly; and the lewd gleams in his eyes will become a steady devouring flame in the end” (46). In a sense, the Pupil and the Professor trade personalities, suggesting their flatness of character but also their inauthenticity of embodiment, for were their embodiments authentic, they would possess a level of ontological self-knowledge that would preclude any chance of such unthinking capitulation of personality. A shift in patterns of embodiment in order to save one’s life is an act of authenticity because it guarantees the continuation of successive embodiments. However, the unthinking and rapid manner in which the Professor and his student alter their patterns of embodiment proves these embodiments are not made for the sake of self-preservation, but simply to dominate or appease the other respectively. What is considered personality in practical terms can be said to be essence in ontological terms. Because these essences are fashioned via successive actions which reveal embodiments, those who embody themselves more authentically will generally be more likely to hold on to those patterns of embodiment because the ontological self-knowledge attained will inform their actions in order that they may benefit themselves best.

Little is known about the Maid until the end of the play when, after the Professor murders the Pupil, she enters the room to assist the Professor in disposing of the body. The Maid is assertive in her dialogue with the Professor, calling him a “Liar!” when he protests the murder

was not his fault (76). This may suggest authentic embodiment because her actions display none of the meekness of the Pupil's behavior. However, because she assists the Professor in his motiveless murders, she enables him to continue ending others' embodiments which makes her just as guilty and just as inauthentic as he. She is an accessory to the Professor's termination of others' embodiments.

The Professor overpowers the Pupil gradually, and does so by befuddling her into submission. He begins the lesson by asking questions with ridiculously obvious answers in an effort to gain her trust: His first query asks what country Paris is the capital of (47). The Professor praises the Pupil for her ability to name the seasons of the year and the order in which they succeed each other (48). During this, the beginning of the lesson, the teacher is meek and polite. He asks permission to sit opposite his student (49) and thanks her when she agrees to his request (50). Soon after this, however, a gleam enters the Professor's eye and is quickly extinguished. Given the violent manner in which the play concludes, it can be safely surmised that this gleam is one of a violent desire on the part of the Professor to unleash his murderous frenzy on his student. For the moment, however, the teacher must suppress his impulses while he gains the trust of the Pupil who eventually lets her guard down. "I am only your humble servant" he tells her (50). His demeanor changes when the topic of instruction goes from simple geography to simple mathematics. The Pupil is unable to correctly subtract three from four, and the Professor politely corrects her mistake (52). His elocution becomes gradually more complex and convoluted, however, and in the end becomes his tool of domination. Ionesco himself says in an interview, "For the Professor words are just means of taking possession of a human being and through all his verbiage and word play, underneath this superficial culture, there is instinctual reality which this language masks or unmasks" (*Eugene Ionesco*, 1976, 11). He essentially

confounds the Pupil into submission with his often nonsensical and contradictory lesson. He draws an imaginary distinction between numbers, proclaiming that “In the larger numbers there are more units than in the small ... unless the small ones have smaller units” (53). The Professor declines to explain the nature of these units or how they figure into mathematical calculations, instead declaring that the distinction is unimportant. It is clear that the play is, as Leonard Pronko suggests, about the dangers of indoctrination (13). This is obvious from the Professor's verbal trickery. Coe contends, “That language can destroy is seen most vividly in *La Leçon*, where the unhappy Girl-Student disintegrates stage by stage before our eyes beneath the sheer weight and impact of meaningless syllables ...” (61-62).

This initially innocuous lesson sets in motion a pattern of rhetoric by which the Pupil begins to doubt herself and consequently to place her being into the hands of the homicidal Professor. The young student effectively consigns her fate and the fate of her ontological self-knowledge into the Professor's hands when instead of asserting herself against her teacher and his misinformation she acquiesces to it. When she answers that there are no units between three and four, the Professor's reply is a contrived one intended to make her doubt herself. “I haven't made myself very well understood” he says. “No doubt, it is my fault. I've not been sufficiently clear” (54). Although the Professor appears polite, his graciousness is a ruse and the Pupil, for her part, insists her lack of understanding is her own fault. The Professor continues the lesson rather than arguing with her.

The Pupil's demure attitude is short-lived, however, as she argues with the Professor soon thereafter about a simple mathematical calculation. With this assertion, the Pupil embodies herself authentically because she strives not to alter another's embodiment nor to curry favor but to enhance her own self-knowledge through the acquisition of learning. She vacillates, however,

between embodiments of authenticity and inauthenticity. As Schechner argues, “There is just so much power, and the game/ritual of *Lesson* is the flow of this power from one to another. The power is in the language” (29). At times, she contradicts the Professor, saying “You're getting mixed up” (67) and “You're bothering me Professor” (68). But given that each embodiment is fleeting and that each successive one must be chosen each moment, it is no surprise that this authenticity is soon abandoned. The young Pupil quickly capitulates to the Professor's claim that “That's the way it is, miss. It can't be explained” (58). With this, the Professor appropriates knowledge through his control and manipulation of it, which gives him the upper hand in their power struggle. Not willing to question her teacher, the Pupil becomes more meek and malleable to his pernicious will. “This is only comprehensible through internal mathematical reasoning” the Professor continues. “Either you have it or you don't” (58). His statement, and more importantly her eventual acceptance of it, empowers the Professor because it incorrectly implies that beings are in Sartrean terms in-itselfs, complete and unmitigating, rather than for-itselfs, beings who constantly change via their decisions on how they embody themselves.

The Professor becomes gradually more short-tempered. He forgoes his previous polite demeanor as he shouts at the Pupil, “Quiet!” (60), “Keep quiet” (62), “Son of a cocker spaniel! Listen to me!” (68), and “Don't interrupt!” (69). In response, the Pupil apologizes or agrees with him on each occasion, essentially becoming more submissive. In tandem with this growing hostility, the Professor uses befuddling anti-logic to cow his Pupil into further submission: “As for the Neo-Spanish languages, they are closely related, so closely to each other, that they can be considered as true second cousins. Moreover, they have the same mother: Spanishe, with a mute *e*” (64). The Professor plies his student with nonsense and appropriates knowledge in order to

control her and ultimately to end her life in the most inauthentic act possible: that of terminating another's succession of embodiments.

Soon after this befuddlement, the lesson becomes violent, when the Professor threatens to bash the Pupil's skull in after her numerous complaints of a toothache (70). The Pupil replies, "Just try to! Skulldugger!" which sends the Professor into a rage during which he seizes her wrist and twists it. She immediately whimpers and becomes passive. The Professor seizes the opportunity of her passivity to introduce a knife into the scene. He tells her he is going to teach her all the translations of the word "knife" (72) and produces a knife (unseen by the audience) to show her (73). The knife's invisibility means the Professor murders his student with the word "knife" rather than with an actual weapon or that the knife is there but is invisible. This latter interpretation indicates that the Pupil is so indoctrinated by the Professor that she believes the knife is there despite its invisibility. She believes so much in its existence that she dies from its cuts. If, on the other hand, she is killed by the word "knife," by forcing her to repeat the word "knife" over and over again, the Professor transforms a language lesson into a tool of attrition. By shouting at her and repeating "knife" and by forcing her to repeat the word, the Professor terrorizes his student into submission. If the knife is an invisible one, the weapon itself represents the illusion of ideology in that although each ideology is real, it is an illusion because it is insinuated into the lives of subjects through intangible means. If, on the other hand, the knife does not exist at all, if it is simply the word "knife" which is the weapon, then the word is not meaningless as in propaganda but is nevertheless manipulated as in propaganda into a weapon rather than being left as a simple tool of communication. Whether the knife is invisible or simply a word, the end result is the same: The Professor ends the Pupil's series of embodiments because she is too inauthentic to stop him from doing so. During this frenzy, the Professor slashes her,

killing her in what Ronald Hayman calls a symbolic rape (27). Though the rape is symbolic, it is yet another instance of the Professor's attempts to dominate the Pupil.

Although the Professor immediately expresses to the Maid remorse for the murder, the revelation that it is the fortieth such slaying perpetrated by the Professor that day indicates that his contrition is just as fleeting as each successive embodiment and that, like the Pupil's assertiveness, it is short-lived. Within one page of the written text, the Professor changes his attitude, declaring, "It wasn't my fault! She didn't want to learn! She was disobedient! She was a bad pupil! She didn't want to learn!" (76). The Maid calls him a liar and when he retaliates with a swipe of his imaginary/invisible knife, she overpowers him, knocking the weapon out of his hand and slapping him. This assertiveness on the part of the Maid seems like authentic embodiment because it has as its goal self-preservation, though her capricious change from condemning the Professor to pitying him and helping dispose of the body prove that she is just as guilty as he. This caprice of embodiment is evident in an embodiment which is enacted without the benefit of independent thinking on the part of she who embodies herself. In other words, a capricious embodiment is an unthinking embodiment, one embodied without thought of one's subjective beliefs. The capricious embodiment – which is an inauthentic embodiment – is evident not from the motivations of the subject who embodies, but from the degree to which the embodiment is a carefully and independently thought out one.

The Maid is the most minor of the three characters in the play though she is significant as the Professor's partner in crime. Although she initially attempts to stifle the Professor's murderous impulses, the Professor becomes irritated by her and chases her out of the room each time she cautions him. She repeatedly re-enters the room with warnings, the most significant of which is her caution against philology (60), the subject through which the Professor's convoluted

logic finally subdues the Pupil. After the murder, the Maid takes charge of the situation. Her physical altercation with the Professor is followed by pity: "I can't help feeling sorry for you! Ah! You're a good boy in spite of everything! I'll try to fix this" (77). She offers to help bury the body and inexplicably gives the Professor a swastika armband as a political talisman against persecution. (This armband is suggestive of Ionesco's warnings against totalitarianism, explored more thoroughly in *Rhinoceros*). Her actions, because they enable her employer to continue his murderous quest, qualify her as one who embodies herself inauthentically: She is just as culpable as the Professor because she enables him to continue his rampage of ending others' embodiments. After the Maid takes control of the situation, the Professor once again becomes docile, reduced, according to Lamont, to a repentant child whining and begging for assistance (*Ionesco's Imperatives*, 57).

The Lesson is a play in which its characters embody themselves inauthentically because they either seek to end the embodiments of others, aid another who attempts to do so, or capitulate to the domination of another. That the Professor and the Pupil vary their levels of authenticity as their personalities become more or less assertive indicates that embodiments are indeed successive and willful. The changes in the actions of the characters are not as extreme as those in *Victims of Duty* though they allow the reader to see embodiment in action, as the latter play does.

The Lesson ends with a ring of the doorbell and the entrance of a new Pupil, suggesting a cycle just as endless as embodiment itself. This cyclical motif is repeated in a similar, though much more metaphysical play, *Victims of Duty*. Like in *The Lesson*, a character is murdered with a knife for no apparent reason, and like in *The Lesson* the ending of *Victims of Duty* suggests a cyclical continuation of the action which begins the play. Unlike *The Lesson*, however, *Victims* is

much more metaphysical in its themes of identity interchange, the exploration of memory, and its rapid shifts in storyline and character motivation. And while this latter play begins in a simple *bourgeois* home as in many of Ionesco's plays, it gradually becomes one of the playwright's most confounding works in that its characters and their actions parallel the ever-changing personalities of subjects whose belief systems alter so rapidly due to the extreme stresses of war, nationalism, propaganda, and vacillations in belief systems. With *Victims*, as with *Rhinoceros*, Ionesco warns against the unquestioning acceptance of ideology which does not have as its *raison d'être* the growth of one's own ontological self-knowledge.

In their *petite bourgeois* apartment, husband and wife Choubert and Madeleine begin the drama by discussing an ad in the paper which seeks to encourage people to cultivate detachment. A mysterious detective then enters, seeking the previous tenant of their apartment. Neither Choubert nor Madeleine remember the man being sought, "Mallot with a t," and are therefore compelled to endure the bullying of The Detective, who eventually force feeds Choubert ostensibly in order to plug the gaps in his memory. The Detective's investigation begins with an exploration of the consciousness of Choubert which ends in fruitlessness. Because during the psychic exploration of Choubert's consciousness each character so often changes identities (becoming alternately infantile, aggressive, or amorous), they parody Sartre's waiter, who comports himself in diverse ways depending on the circumstances in which he finds himself. However, the difference between Ionesco's characters and Sartre's waiter lies in their motives for each disparate embodiment. Because the waiter represents himself according to his necessary occupation, he embodies himself with authenticity. The characters of *Victims of Duty*, on the other hand, are extremely problematic because they shift personalities so often and their motivations for doing so are more often than not unknown. Ultimately, however, every character

embodies himself inauthentically because each one has in mind not his own ontological self-knowledge but that of another. Choubert and Madeleine seek to appease the Detective, who represents overbearing totalitarianism with his bullying. According to Ilan Berman, political police services go hand-in-hand with totalitarianism (*Dismantling Tyranny*, 2006, 153). The Detective clearly represents just such a political police service. While Lane attributes the vacillations of characters' personalities to its being a dream play (67), this qualification as a dream allegory does not speak to its greater significance. It is hardly plausible that Ionesco created a dream play simply in order to explore nontraditional dramatic structures. A careful consideration of his corpus of work reveals his profound concerns with the questions of being and consciousness. The purpose of *Victims of Duty* and its characters' shifts in identity is to explore not dramatic structure, but ontological questions of essence creation.

That the play has as its primary theme the nature of existence and ontology is made clear at its outset. Its treatment of these issues is initially couched in terms of detachment. Choubert and Madeleine sit at their table, she darning socks and he reading the newspaper as they discuss how the government is urging its citizens to cultivate detachment. No details emerge from their conversation on the nature of this detachment, though it could be interpreted as political detachment or a sort of existential detachment. This latter type runs counter to the very nature of existentialism, which calls for an active and vigorous involvement in one's own existence and the determination of the quality of this existence. Existents must be actively engaged in their existence rather than simply being passive and waiting for meaning to arrive from some mysterious outward force. Choubert's skeptical reply to the item in the newspaper shows his authenticity as it reveals his distaste for detachment and authority, though this authenticity is eventually proven ephemeral: "... we know how a recommendation has a way of turning into an

order” he says (118). With this, he declares his individuality and his desire for engagement with the existential questions of being. As will be shown, however, this authentic embodiment is fleeting as Choubert easily allows others to assign various identities to him.

Madeleine for her part fares no better as she naively declares in reference to the government's call for detachment that “... the law *is* necessary, and what's necessary and indispensable is *good*, and everything that's good is *nice*. And it really is very nice indeed to be a good, law-abiding citizen and do one's duty and have a clear conscience! ...” (118). These vague laws which call for detachment represent Heidegger's “they,” the mass belief systems which became outmoded during the twentieth century. Madeleine's comments not only show her to be amenable to ideology rather than engagement with her own embodiments, they foreshadow her characterization as one who, like Choubert, is willing to dilute her ontological self-knowledge with identities easily thrust upon her by others. Acting the part of another renders the acquisition of this self-knowledge virtually impossible as it entails focusing not on oneself but on another. She will eventually embody herself as Choubert's mother, an ally of the Detective against Choubert, and an alternately aggressive and passive pawn in the games the Detective plays with the couple in his search for Mallot with a “t”. Her ontological precariousness is made clear via her love of established order which is made obvious early in the play when she states, “We're so badly looked after!” as she realizes their apartment's concierge is out (121). Madeleine believes in being taken care of rather than in the determination of her own existence and this quality makes her especially susceptible to passive acceptance of identities not her own.

The Detective embodies himself as one obsessed with finding the target of his investigation, the mysterious Mallot with a “t” who never appears in the play. He divulges little about himself, instead focusing on his quest and using Choubert and Madeleine as tools in his

search. He never reveals the motive for his hunt for Mallot with a “t,” but presumably the Detective is an agent of the mysterious governmental forces who seek to cultivate detachment, making him a servant of “they” and in the end a victim of duty. Because he is a personification of a government which encourages detachment, he remains ensconced in ideology and therefore embodies himself inauthentically. Duty is directly linked to inauthenticity in the sense that duty calls for unquestioning adherence to a pre-established order as in the military or government service. Like the Professor in *The Lesson*, The Detective begins the play timid and polite and becomes gradually more aggressive and domineering. The stage directions dictate that at the play's beginning he is “soft-spoken and excessively shy” (121). He becomes successively and slyly more aggressive, however, when he makes it known that he knows things about the couple: that Choubert enjoys the theatre and supports the detachment system (123), facts which he and Madeleine inexplicably confirm. Choubert's indecision on the issue of detachment is only one in a series of alterations in his ontological makeup.

The Detective's fresh assertiveness leads him to question Choubert more and more vigorously as to the whereabouts of Mallot with a “t,” but Choubert protests that he has no memory of his erstwhile neighbor. Madeleine, for her part, embodies herself in the first of numerous embodiments in which she changes personality. From the loving wife darning socks, she suddenly transforms into a sort of junior detective as she sides with the investigator during his questioning of Choubert. “Come along now, old chap, you're not a child anymore” the Detective says to Choubert (125). His comments are immediately echoed by Madeleine: “Come along, you're not a child. Did you hear what he said?” Madeleine effectively sides with the Detective, who calls her by her first name, a sign of informality in a bourgeois home which indicates they are in league together. In fact, Hugh Dickinson writes, “Madeleine's turning

against her husband is unconsciously done because it is habitual” (*Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 109, 1973). This habit is little more than the habit of a comfortable, though unquestioning, existence. The Detective becomes yet more aggressive as he corrects Choubert that he is a *chief* inspector rather than an inspector (126). He becomes impatient with Choubert, and bangs his fist on the table when Choubert becomes distracted from the questioning (127). In a later scene, the Detective slaps Madeleine after she offers an unsolicited opinion about his methods of interrogation (149).

While the Detective grows more aggressive, the changes in Madeleine's character manifest themselves differently, as she becomes more amorous. She wears a low-cut dress, her walk and voice change, and her voice becomes gentle and musical (127), hinting at her attraction to the Detective and her sympathy for the work he does. Choubert takes no notice of the changes in his wife's demeanor, instead showing himself eager to assist the Detective in his quest. In fact, it is Choubert himself who suggests they turn the investigation inward to a deeper layer of Choubert's mind because his memory proves to be void of Mallot with a “t.” The couple's willingness to assist the agent of detachment who is their guest suggests not only their own support for detachment but their fervor for the adoption of quick-fix identities in which they alter characteristics capriciously and unthinkingly, not in order to explore their own identities but simply to please the overbearing detective.

The journey Choubert takes into his own consciousness and which is acted out on the stage is described as a descent into darkness (128) and mud (129), though the Detective pledges that he will guide Choubert through it. He does, but only along with insults (“lazy beggar” [131]) and echoes from Madeleine who is eager to please her guest. The darkness which pervades Choubert's consciousness suggests a void which can be filled only via embodiment. The mud

parallels immersion. At one point, Choubert is up to his chin in it (132). This mud is a metaphor for his impulses, the constructive and destructive tendencies which necessitate each momentary embodiment of the individual. What Choubert finds in the muddy void are memories, conscious images of embodiments, which according to Hayman represent a descent into the past (65). These images of past embodiments can act as blueprints for future embodiments though for Choubert they are an attempt to recall not his past identity but the identity of another, the man sought by the Detective. He fails to use his memories to inform his own future embodiments, using them instead to aid the Detective whose motives are suspect and enigmatic.

That identities are interchangeable, malleable, and fleeting is thoroughly explored in the play. Choubert suddenly disappears from the stage (133). He passes across the stage as the other two characters are nowhere to be seen, and leaves the stage only to reappear again (134). He disappears and reappears yet again (140). No motivation is given for this sudden and unexplained movement. In fact, soon after Choubert randomly disappears the first time, the stage directions dictate that the actors who play the scene to follow are completely different characters. Madeleine suddenly declares she will kill herself. No motivation or indication of her desire to do this is offered up to this point. The Detective at first prevents her from swallowing a bottle of pills, but within three lines of stage direction, attempts to force her to do so (134). Choubert reappears and distracts her from her suicide while she seemingly transforms into his mother (135). As Lamont observes, "... domination may assume various aspects. It starts with the power exercised by parents over a child" (*Ionesco's Imperatives*, 92). This domination is enacted as Madeleine assists the Detective in his bullying of Choubert just as a pair of abusive parents would. Madeleine later becomes a beggar pleading for pity from the Detective (149). This zany and absurd scene in which characters offer no motivations for their actions and rapidly change

personalities parallels the ways in which subjects embody themselves differently based on motivation and an unceasing cycle of embodiments. For Pronko, Choubert's rapid shifts in identity are caused by his reduction, at the insistence of the Detective, to a prelogical state in which he has no identity (19). This works in a reading of Choubert, but fails to explain why Madeleine's personality also changes so easily.

Later, Choubert enigmatically addresses the Detective as his father while the Detective's voice is heard from offstage (136). As a further exploration of the protagonist's consciousness, the disembodied detective's voice recounts random events from Choubert's childhood (137). The Detective and Madeleine become theatregoers in yet another of the play's series of personality shifts (140). The Detective wrangles Choubert through his own consciousness, declaring that he is on the "wrong road" in his search for memories of Mallot with a "t"(144). "The fate of all mankind depends on you" he shouts at Choubert, pressuring him to find his memories of the mysterious fugitive (144). The Detective and Madeleine shout orders at Choubert, though the investigator never explains why the search for Mallot is so crucial, a motif which parallels the random contingency of the universe much like the Professor's murders are motiveless in *The Lesson*. The protagonist becomes more babyish after the overbearing Detective castigates him for his lack of memory: "You're so light-headed you're practically disembodied, you've no memory, you forget everything, forget yourself, forget your duty" (152).

In reply, Choubert protests his innocence in a childlike manner, proclaiming that his failure to find Mallot is not his fault (153). The Detective insists Choubert has gaps in his memory which must be plugged via force feeding. At this point, poet Nicolas D'eu casually arrives and begins questioning the Detective on his support of renunciation or detachment, to which the Detective replies, "My duty, you know, my dear Sir, is simply to apply the system"

(156). In response, Nicolas encourages the investigator to cultivate political detachment by reminding him that he is a thinking person. The Detective only replies, “I am just a soldier, Monsieur ...” (156).

With this, Nicolas (an otherwise minor character in the play) establishes himself as one who prefers existential engagement rather than the political detachment promoted by the citizens' mysterious government. “It is, however, essential not to lose sight of the new logic, the contributions made by a new kind of psychology ...” he says to the Detective. “We'll get rid of the principle of identity and unity of character and let movement and dynamic psychology take its place ... We are not ourselves ... Personality does not exist” (158). The Detective's rejoinder is that he is faithful to his duty and full of respect for his bosses as he declares that everything can be comprehended in time (159). His statement implicates him as one who embodies himself without authenticity because he remains mired in unthinking attitudes and a wasted faith in progress.

The comments of Nicolas on identity, unity of character, and personality are significant to a play in which characters seem to trade personalities or craft entirely new ones out of thin air. They also attest to the play's ontological focus and its author's contentions that a character's actions are freely chosen and rarely consistent. Up to this point in the play, Nicolas is more or less an authentic character. This changes by the *denouement* of the play, however, when he murders the Detective suddenly and seemingly without motive.

Nicolas and the Detective agree to disagree about personality and identity and the Detective begins force feeding Choubert pieces of bread supposedly to plug the gaps in his memory so he can recall Mollot. “Swallow! Chew! Swallow! Chew! Swallow! Chew!” the Detective shouts at his host as the latter sobs like a child being punished (160). Nicolas

disapproves of this tactic and, like the Professor in *The Lesson*, produces a large knife with which he stabs and kills the Detective who before dying declares himself a victim of duty (165). The play ends as Nicolas, who once despised the Detective for his unquestioning loyalty to the government and his oppressive tactics, adopts his personality and in his voice shouts at Choubert to “Swallow! Chew! Swallow! Chew!” as the infantile protagonist declares himself a victim of duty and the curtain falls (160).

Victims of Duty is a much more complicated play than *The Lesson*, as it explores the concepts of detachment versus engagement, the construction of personality and identity, and unity of character. *Victims* is also a commentary, like *Rhinoceros*, on the dangers of unthinking acceptance of government and societal dictates. The bizarre play showcases characters who, far from being round characters with clear motives, are instead erratic and incomplete. This incompleteness is a result of their constant shifts of personality which result from their inauthentic embodiments. Choubert is not strong enough to resist or even to assist the Detective, while Madeleine strives too much to aid the couple's guest and the Detective himself is a slave to his duty rather than a savior to himself. Nicolas, for his part like the Professor, ends the succession of embodiments of another in the most inauthentic act of all: murder. Murder is after all the most inauthentic act because it not only seeks to interfere with the radical reconstruction of being of another, it in fact ends any possibility of reconstruction once and for all.

Like *Victims of Duty*, *Rhinoceros* has as its central concern the conflict between the individual's responsibility to himself and his responsibility to others. The thing which distinguishes *Rhinoceros* from *Victims* and *The Lesson* is that its protagonist is a character who genuinely embodies himself authentically. This authenticity is noticeable in Berenger's fierce independence in the face of overwhelming pressure to conform. Traces of Berenger's authenticity

are conspicuous throughout the play, and although he vacillates at times between authentic and inauthentic embodiments, his final declaration of individuality at the play's *denouement* proves him to be the most authentic of Ionesco's characters. At the drama's culmination, Berenger is the only human being left in his town, and for all he knows, in the world. Everyone else among his acquaintances has succumbed to rhinoceritis, a mysterious ailment which transforms people into pachyderms. There is evidence throughout the text that unlike most illnesses, rhinoceritis is freely chosen by its sufferers. Berenger embodies himself authentically because he willfully avoids being immersed in the mob mentality to which his friends and co-workers succumb. As Pronko argues, he is a rebel and a nonconformist who refuses to capitulate (27). As Coe suggests, Berenger is one who discovers his own significant individuality, as opposed to his friend Jean, the apostle of duty (81).

Berenger declares at the play's end,

I should have gone with them while there was still time. Now it's too late! Now I'm a monster, just a monster. Now I'll never become a rhinoceros, never, never!

I've gone past changing. I want to, I really do, but I can't, I just can't. I can't stand the sight of me. I'm too ashamed! [*He turns his back on the mirror.*] I'm so ugly! People who try to hang on to their individuality always come to a bad end! [*He suddenly snaps out of it.*] Oh well, too bad! I'll take on the whole of them! I'll put up a fight against the lot of them, the whole lot of them! I'm the last man left, and I'm staying that way until the end. I'm not capitulating! (107)

That Berenger capriciously waffles between regret at not becoming a rhinoceros and an excited declaration of his steadfastness at becoming one is a perfectly natural product of embodiment which is ever-fluctuating. If Berenger's soliloquy contains a measure of capricious indecision,

Jacobsen and Mueller astutely argue that the stage directions surrounding it indicate that Berenger's fleeting desire to capitulate is only a momentary phase (68). What is more significant in the passage is his resolve to remain an individual despite the losses incurred in doing so. What Berenger will lose are his relationships with the other characters in the play, especially that of his girlfriend, Daisy. He risks an uncertain future in which he will be the only human on earth, living in a society ruled by humans-turned-rhinoceroses. While Esslin reads in Berenger's decision to resist the lure of the masses a measure of "the fox's contempt for the grapes he could not have" (*The Theatre of the Absurd*, 151), this feeling of sour grapes is only an indication of the risk Berenger takes in abdicating his former way of life. What he gains, however, is his ontological self-knowledge which will enable him to thrive. He will be able to think for himself which will enable him to survive without having to live under the reign of an ideology he considers untenable and dishonest. According to Pronko, "[Ionesco] treats the theme of ideas becoming ideologies and growing thence into epidemics until every trace of human feeling, individuality, or thinking is transformed into mass hysteria" (32). Berenger is able to resist the temptation of easy conformism because, as Lamont writes, "Patience, passive resistance, the silent rebellion of the spirit are his virtues" (*Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 1973, 7).

The juxtaposition between the independent Berenger and his civic-minded friend Jean is obvious from the start of the drama. The play begins in a provincial town square suggestive of normalcy, *bourgeois* morality, and *ennui*. Although at the play's exposition Berenger is a discontented alcoholic who complains that he can't get used to life (7), he quickly begins embodying himself – because of the extreme conditions in which he finds himself – as the most authentic subject in town. This burgeoning authenticity first appears in his conversation with Jean, who tells him in a statement reminiscent of those made by the Detective in *Victims of*

Duty's, “The superior man is the man who fulfills his duty” (7). The statement betrays Jean's (and co-worker Dudard's) love of propriety and duty over independence and self-reliance and indeed, Jean is among the first of the townspeople to change into a pachyderm. As Anne Quinney comments,

A low-level functionary whose job robs him of any individualism he might assert, Jean is the perfect target for ideologies that stifle individual thinking. Like functionaries of the state in many European countries who fell under the spell of fascist ideologies ... Jean and Dudard in the end embrace what appears to be a salutary opportunity to join the masses in a collective wave of fascist sympathy (45).

When the rhinoceroses first appear charging through the town, Berenger is the only one not amazed at what he sees. The entire mob of people assembled, except for Berenger, exclaim in unison, “Well of all things!” (10). They reply with the same words at the second sighting of the rhinoceroses (26). The protagonist sleepily averts his head to the dust kicked up by the beasts and yawns in an insouciant attitude which makes him a misfit, as the other characters appear incredulous at the appearance of the rhinoceroses. “But you must see it's fantastic!” Jean says to him. “A rhinoceros loose in the town, and you don't bat an eyelid! It shouldn't be allowed!” (13). Jean's prescriptive attitude toward Berenger's reaction reveals him as part of Heidegger's “they” and again portrays him as one who embodies himself inauthentically because he is so mired in the ideology of the masses, an ideology which dictates that the only appropriate reaction to the sight of a rhinoceros, (while not a common occurrence in France) is one of stupefied awe. Jean's love of duty and his slavery to social edicts lead him to capitulate to the herd mentality which eventually engulfs the town. Pronko contends, “Jean, it is clear, is a perfect target for ideologies

that stifle individual thinking. Berenger, on the other hand, is a nonbelonger” (31). Jean “... has buttressed himself with a form of religion, the religion of duty” (31). Quinney agrees: “The character who most closely parrots the discourse of fascism is Berenger's close friend, Jean” (44-45).

Because Berenger is the only resident of the town who embodies himself authentically, he complains of feeling like a misfit. “I feel out of place in life, among people, and so I take to drink” he laments to Jean, who replies, “You try to escape from yourself!” (17). If proven accurate, Jean's accusation that Berenger escapes from himself via his drunkenness would suggest that he embodies himself without authenticity, and indeed he does, but in an extremely temporary manner like any subject. Jacobsen and Mueller argue that Berenger undergoes the greatest change of all the characters in the play, even those who transform into pachyderms (66). What constitutes this great change is not any physical transformation but the fact that Berenger is the only one to embody himself with sufficient authenticity to resist the plague of rhinocerotis.

The antithesis between the two friends is carried further, as Jean while waxing philosophic encourages Berenger to find some weapons for himself to use in the struggle that is existence. “Where can I find the weapons?” Berenger asks him (20). “Within yourself. Through your own will” Jean replies (21). But the characters of *Rhinoceros* are especially capricious, and Jean soon gives in to the enigmatic lure of mob mentality while Berenger declares, “Instead of drinking I'll develop my mind. I feel better already. My head already feels clearer” (24). Later he declares, “I've got no horns and I never will have” (30). According to Haney, this dispute foreshadows and confirms that Jean will become a rhino while Berenger will retain his humanity (96). Indeed, Berenger uses his newly found clear-headedness to resist rhinocerotis. In contrast, Jean counsels keeping his word (24) and moderation in all things (25), two traits which prove his

loyalty to unthinking and unquestioning mores, his trepidation at extremes, and his resignation to dominant ideology.

While most critics read the transformations of the play's characters into rhinos as symbolic of their decisions to follow dominant ideologies, Haney sees them as merely the outward signs of a pre-existing inner condition: "The rhinos thus symbolize a prior inner transformation of humans who believe that brute force can render them super-men and place them above the laws of nature, when in fact the only power they have is their strength in numbers" ("Eugene Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*: Defiance vs. Conformism," 88). Jacobsen and Mueller concur, asserting that "Jean's outer change is, in fact, the direct reflection of his inner disposition, and his disease is correctly defined by Berenger as a 'moral crisis'" (43).

Esslin offers yet another reason for these transformations: "Some of the characters in the play opt for a pachydermatous existence because they admire brute force and the simplicity that springs from the suppression of over-tender humanistic feelings; others do so because one can try to win the rhinos back to humanity only by learning to understand their way of thinking ..." (*The Theatre of the Absurd*, 151). However, the contention that Jean, Daisy and the others give in to rhinoceritis in order to sway the rhinoceroses to return to their human form is never developed in the play.

The final split between the two friends, brought on by the sightings of the pachyderms and their divergent interpretations of them, occurs after they quarrel about the number of horns on an African rhino as opposed to that of the Asian rhino. "If that's how you feel, it's the last time you'll see me" Jean declares to Berenger (31). Distraught at the apparent loss of his friend, Berenger sinks into self-pity and drinks a glass of brandy, despite his pledge to develop his mind without alcohol (37). This final action of the opening act leaves his authenticity in doubt,

especially since he vacillates between stalwart declarations of individualism and an alcoholic self-loathing which negates any prospect of ontological self-knowledge. By the end of the play, however, Berenger proves himself authentic through embodiments which have as their focus his own ontological self-knowledge rather than that of others.

Act II opens in a government office, a setting suggestive of adherence to duty and the power of those supposedly beyond reproach. Early in the act, Botard, one of Berenger's co-workers, declares his incredulity at the sightings of the rampaging pachyderms, a phenomenon he did not witness himself but which has been reported in the newspapers. He proclaims, "I never believe journalists. They're all liars. I don't need them to tell me what to think; I believe what I see with my own eyes" (40). Botard, whom Coe refers to as a "committed propagandist" (104), says that he campaigns against ignorance wherever he finds it (42), and that the rhino sightings are an example of collective psychosis just like religion (45). Even as Mrs. Boeuf, the wife of another co-worker, enters the office short of breath after having been chased by a rhinoceros (47), Botard remains an unbeliever. He persists in his incredulity even after he actually sees a rhinoceros, calling it an infamous plot (49). Soon thereafter, he becomes one of them despite his initial unbelieving attitude towards their existence. Botard's slavish adherence to first-hand experience leads him to embody himself inauthentically. Although employing one's senses and reason to determine subjective truths for oneself in the Cartesian manner is clearly an example of authenticity, to rely *only* on this type of objectivity to the point of disbelief in the reason of other credible subjects is actually harmful to the ontological self-knowledge of the individual. Discovering truths, even subjective truths, can be severely limited if Descartes's example is followed too closely to allow for knowledge from others. A more authentic embodiment would involve questioning one's own senses and reason in tandem with those of

another, but would do so while accepting that which is credible. Jacobsen and Mueller write of Botard that he harbors a strong sense of duty to adhere to whatever or whomever is in power (44).

The only character who strikes the balance between complete disbelief in the events around him and utter subservience to the “they” is Berenger. As he enters Jean's apartment in the hopes of salvaging their friendship, he discovers Jean is ill with the symptoms of rhinoceritis: a change in voice which deteriorates into near-muteness, a cough, green skin, a bump on his forehead which eventually grows into a horn, and a predilection for charging at those in his line of sight. Jean actually pushes Berenger and immediately apologizes as if his aggressiveness is beyond his control (63). He displays a vague and burgeoning misanthropy: “It's not that I hate people. I'm just indifferent to them – or rather, they disgust me; and they'd better keep out of my way, or I'll run them down” (64). He sides with the rhinoceroses, declaring that they have as much right to life as people do (66). His troubling transformation continues as he declares that he favors nature over morality and that the two are diametrically opposed (67). Because morality is necessarily a human invention, his preference for nature, along with his disgust of humans, signals his allegiance to the pachyderms and their mob mentality which is taking over the town. Soon after, Jean's metamorphosis into a rhinoceros is complete and Berenger flees the apartment after sighting a multitude of the pachyderms outside (69-70). His flight is yet another sign of his independence.

Berenger's final isolation becomes apparent in the final scene as he breaks with Daisy and co-worker Dudard, who after pledging their resistance to conformism suddenly capitulate to it. Berenger declares to Dudard that he fears becoming someone other than himself (73), though he also proclaims that unlike Jean he is content to be what he already is despite what people think of

him (75). His statement goes against ontological embodiment as the determining factor of the essence of each subject as it reveals a resigned and therefore inauthentic attitude toward his own essence, though his actions later testify to its value in essence creation as a continuous process. In their discussion of the rhinoceritis taking over their town, Berenger asserts that succumbing to the disease is purely voluntary: “But if one really doesn't want to, really doesn't want to catch this thing, which after all is a nervous disease – then you don't catch it, you simply don't catch it!” (76). Dudard, however, remains unconvinced. He replies in a fatalistic response that infection is inevitable (79) and that there is nothing more natural than a rhinoceros (84). Daisy then enters with the news that the once-incredulous Botard is now a rhino, to which Dudard replies that everyone has a right to change his mind (88). His resolve weakens further as like the Detective in *Victims of Duty* he extols the virtues of adherence to duty. “I feel certain scruples!” he says to Berenger and Daisy. “I feel it's my duty to stick by my employers and my friends, through thick and thin” (93). With this, he runs out of the apartment and joins the herd.

According to Lamont, Ionesco said in a private conversation that “Dudard is Sartre” (*Ionesco's Imperatives*, 145, 1993). She expounds on Ionesco's comment by writing that Sartre's failure to denounce Joseph Stalin and his gulags smacked of rhinoceritis of the Left (145). Given Ionesco's unfavorable comments on Sartre as an intellectual who extols the virtues of engaged or didactic literature, his qualification of Dudard as Sartre furthers the former's characterization as a pawn to ideology.

Dudard's departure signals the fall of the reign of humanity as it leaves Berenger and Daisy the only remaining human beings in their town and presumably on Earth. But Daisy soon resigns herself to the same fatalistic attitude which led Dudard into the “they.” After her initial pledge to hold out against rhinoceritis, she gives in to fatalism much like Dudard: “Let things

just take their course. What can we do about it?" (101). Her conversion continues as Berenger attempts to convince her that the world is worth saving:

BERENGER: How can we save the world, if you don't?

DAISY: Why bother to save it?

BERENGER: What a thing to say! Do it for me, Daisy. Let's save the world.

DAISY: After all, perhaps it's we who need saving. Perhaps we're the abnormal ones (101).

Despite this, she pledges to help Berenger resist rhinocerotis until the very end, but she capriciously changes her mind within a single page of dialogue: She sneaks out of the apartment while Berenger examines himself in the mirror, to join the throng of pachyderms rampaging through the town. Her departure makes Berenger's isolation complete and final. At first he panics and regrets his human form, though he soon recovers himself and launches into his final soliloquy in which he declares his authenticity.

Lane argues that, "Rather than criticizing any *particular* ideology or system, *Rhinoceros* attacks all systems or ideologies because they obscure what is truly important (the human condition, metaphysical anguish) and reduce individuals to functions or ciphers" (115). What the play attacks is essentially "they" and unthinking capitulation to it. Giving in to any dominant ideology forces the subject to surrender his ontological self-knowledge and to adopt the knowledge of that ideology. It requires unquestioning acceptance of streamlined mores and values which Ionesco despised. *Rhinoceros*, like *The Lesson* and *Victims of Duty* offers characters who, though they vary in their levels of authenticity from moment to moment, ultimately resign themselves to the ready-made and mass-produced ideas of others. The notable exception to this is Berenger, who sacrifices the life he knew for a new and uncertain future

though he gains a much greater ontological self-knowledge, as he is able to think for himself and thereby learn about himself and what he values.

Ionesco chose Berenger as his single authentic character perhaps because he saw a pattern in his own writing which called attention to the lamentable aspects of human behavior rather than the laudable ones. Berenger offers an example of a character who embodies himself authentically and does so at the cost of his friends and his way of life. Ionesco implicitly argues that a life, though lived in secure and easy contentment, often carries with it slavish acceptance of unquestioning mores and values. What is more valuable than this sort of life is the one in which the subject risks convenience for the ontological authenticity which brings with it a level of self-knowledge which allows one to determine the quality of his own being.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Backstage at a performance of *The Seagull* in 1898, Anton Chekhov had words with a young actor regarding the degree of realism in Constantin Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre production of that play. According to Laurence Senelick's account, the conversation stemmed from the actor's contention that the play was so realistic that “frogs were to croak, dragonflies were to buzz, dogs to bark.” Chekhov replied “What for?” The actor answered “Realism.” “'Realism,' repeats A[nnton] P[avlovich], with a grin, and, after a brief pause, says: 'The stage is art. There's a genre painting by Kramskoy, with the faces magnificently painted. What if the nose were to be cut out of one of the faces and a real one stuck in? The nose is 'realistic,' but the painting is spoiled'” (qtd. in Senelick, xxxii).

Chekhov's comments, while suggestive of the adage of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face, reveal a concern with the unity of works of art and a trepidation at realism for its own sake. They also show his approbation of a holistic assessment of the impact of creative works. In addition, Chekhov's contentions suggest that at the turn of the century – in many respects the height of realism – playwrights and other artists began rejecting realism for the sake of realism. Well before the two world wars of the twentieth century, before their propaganda and disillusionment, artists like Chekhov realized that realism was not an end unto itself, that it was merely an approach to the much more significant impetuses of artists to create works which explore reality rather than simply imitating it. Though Chekhov was a realist, he recognized that stylistically, realistic characters, plots, and sets were but a tool of artistic creation, much in the

same way the absurdists realized a half century later that anti-realistic devices like *non sequiturs* and motiveless characterization could be used with just as much legitimacy.

Chekhov's remarks also affirm the need for artists to holistically assess their works as to how much realism (or anti-realism) serves their chosen goals, for no work is completely realistic or anti-realistic. Even the most befuddling plays of the Theatre of the Absurd are not completely without a modicum of realism. They all have characters (except for Beckett's *Breath* [1969], a play which consists entirely of a pile of garbage strewn across a stage and the sound of breathing). They have dialogue and sets, elements they have in common with the most realistic works of George Bernard Shaw, though absurd plays generally push the boundaries of Grotowski's theory that drama is anything that happens between an actor and an audience. In any event, every play is both realistic and anti-realistic because of the extreme subjectivity each subject possesses, a subjectivity made conspicuous by Descartes and his insistence on subjective rationalism. What may be a diurnal matter of course for one theatregoer may be an absurdity to the next. What sets the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd apart, however, is their deliberate departure from the tenets of realism: well-developed characters with motivations, sets which mimic the interiors of middle-class homes, and plots driven by character motivations.

As a result of this extreme subjectivity, the theatrical experience is an extremely individualized one. This is also why the theatre is a laboratory, an enclosed space rife with opportunities for observation. The audience members observe the actions upon the stage and in ontological terms, they witness how each character embodies his essence with each successive action and the degree to which each embodiment is either authentic or not. While this is happening, the audience member embodies himself. One theatregoer might see Chekhov's

hypothetical painting as a statement on the inextricability of human consciousness from art while another may view it as a grotesque abomination.

Audience members bring their extreme subjectivities with them to the theatre. While watching a performance of *Waiting for Godot*, they continually remake themselves via ontological embodiment. As they do so during the performance, they witness the embodiments of the actors on the stage and the characters they play. And they judge them. Because their entire beings shift during the performance, their assessments of each character shift by the end of each play even if those assessments end up being similar to those they started with. In other words, even if at the termination of *Endgame* a subject's opinion of Hamm does not change, his embodiments do and his assessments of that character shift along with these shifting embodiments. In return, this shifting is no doubt influenced by the ever-changing embodiments of the characters upon the stage. The embodiments of the observer, the actor and the character are in fact inexplicably intertwined with each other as these embodiments clash and interact with each other, influencing each other. The observer is impacted because he observes external embodiments, the actor because he knows he is being watched and the character because brought to life by the actor who embodies him while being observed. This clash of embodiments is only the observing of another's embodiment while that other embodies himself in that same instant of time and in the same space. This clash of embodiments takes the form of a judgment of one subject by the other or of a subject being judged by another.

The present study has sought to explicate the process by which each subject continually remakes herself, and furthermore to show that the theatre and dramatic literature in general are the ideal media in which to observe this process and to analyze the ways in which authenticity and therefore ontological self-knowledge become acquirable. This ontological self-knowledge is

crucial to the subject in an era in which propaganda and ready-made value systems often render each subject inculcated before he has a chance to explore his own reality through his extreme and subjective rationality. By transferring what we see on the stage to the real-world ontological realm of self-creation, each subject may be better informed on the ways in which he embodies himself and the methods of that process which are most beneficial to him. Like Sartre's waiter, each subject may cast forth various embodiments but still be able to harness these into a single though ever-transforming identity.

The inspiration for these views on embodiment, authenticity and self-knowledge derive from Sartre's analogy of the waiter. Expounded upon in *Being and Nothingness*, this important theory has its *raison d'etre* in Sartre's contention that we are what we make of ourselves (101) and that representing ourselves in particular modes (like that of a waiter) is a method of exploring our world in an effort to make something out of it, to create meaning and identity (102). Through our actions and demeanor we embody what we are in a cycle which ends only with death. Sartre reiterates this ephemeral quality of being when he writes that "... the waiter in the cafe can not be immediately a cafe waiter in the sense that this inkwell *is* an inkwell, or the glass is a glass" (102). On the very next page of the book, Sartre repeats this important particularity when he argues that "I am never any one of my attitudes, any one of my actions" (103). Each subject's being is made up of a multitude of embodiments which shift with each thought and action. Even the embodiments which stay with us via memory are new embodiments. They are re-enactments of embodiments rather than a single embodiment which stays in the subject's memory frozen in time and unmitigating. Because a memory is remembered in the context of the the present and the present's embodiment, a childhood memory is yet a new one when experienced in the present. But Sartre moves on before explaining the greater

significance of this process or how more particularly it works in ontological terms. He only introduces the reader to the concept that subjects are not in-itselfs, i.e. complete entities, but are for-itselfs, ever-changing and developing beings.

As stated, the level of authenticity of a particular embodiment is determined by the extent to which that embodiment has as its primary concern the one who performs the embodiment. In other words, to attain a greater level of authenticity in embodiment an embodiment must be performed not for the purpose of currying the favor of another subject, not for seeking to influence another's embodiment, and not in order to end another's embodiment as in murder. The ontological energies of the constructive and destructive forces of each consciousness, when focused on the self, improve a subject's abilities to think freely because these energies – which allow the subject to create and re-create himself – are focused on the self rather than on outward distractions. Because these energies are focused inwardly, they are not mired in the sludge of external belief systems. As a result, they allow for more authentic embodiments than those focused externally. They aid the subject in determining his being without interference, which is why they allow for a greater degree of ontological self-knowledge.

This process and how it operates is easily discernible through analyses of dramatic literature and especially absurdist drama. Plays in general are artistic forms presented without the benefit of written exposition, at least from the point of view of the theatregoer. As a result, they rely on action and dialogue, in other words, embodiments. Stripped of the narrative of the novel and the imagery of poetry, drama when read must rely largely on words and the movements implied by this speech or explicitly demanded by the stage directions. When staged, drama becomes a laboratory in which the speech and actions of characters can be dissected and analyzed for the ways in which they fit together again into a unified whole. This whole is the

character's identity, though it shifts. For example, when Berenger uses language to make it known that he will embody himself with authenticity by remaining independent, he enacts the culmination of a sequence of embodiments which the observer can see are authentic. This allows a careful observer to see the unity in the character of Berenger, that all things were leading up to this final decision of his to remain independent. This does not mean, however, that Berenger was destined to remain independent. In fact, because he constantly remakes himself, any possibility that destiny dictates anything about him must be ruled out. That his characterization as one who remains independent comes full circle at the end of the play means only that his actions relate back to his earlier embodiments which suggest that he will do so.

That the theatre and dramatic literature in general can be treated as laboratories which can be used to test out philosophical theories advances the study of not only literature or philosophy but of knowledge in general. The theatre can also be a lab to test out many theories of, for example, biography, as in Edward Albee's *The Death of Bessie Smith* (1959) or of history as in Georg Buchner's *Danton's Death* (1835). These plays can act as vehicles to explore questions of how subjects conceptualize biography or historical events, of what ought to be considered factual as opposed to what ought to be considered embellished, and of the relationship between drama and the real world (as in Luigi Pirandello's experiments with transgressing the fourth wall). They can help subjects answer questions of how we agree upon the validity of historical occurrences, what is considered history and how subjects construct meaning from biography and history. Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of particular plays can reveal much not only about the plays or their interdisciplinary dimensions but of the real-world applications of how subjects strive to create meaning through their interactions with the material world, with others and with themselves via reflection upon their own consciousness.

The Theatre of the Absurd in particular comprises a body of work especially fit for this laboratory, at least when used to test those philosophical theories which aid subjects in the ways in which they live their lives. Because of their foci on consciousness and being rather than on the solutions to psychological or sociological issues, these plays can better expose how meaning is created by individual subjects. Especially when considering ontology, the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd are ideal for testing those theories. Of Beckett's work in particular, Esslin writes "It has been suggested that Beckett's preoccupation with the problems of being and the identity of the self might have sprung from the Anglo-Irishman's inevitable and perpetual concern with finding his own answer to the question 'Who am I?' ..." (*The Theatre of the Absurd*, 11-12). In the same book, Esslin offers a chapter on Ionesco in which he writes "Formal experiment in art thus becomes an exploration of reality more valid and more useful (because it serves to enlarge man's understanding of the real world) than shallow works that are immediately comprehensible to the masses" (104). The plays discussed here allow for the exploration of these questions of identity and reality not simply because they are anti-realistic but because this anti-realism enables playwrights to focus on particular states of consciousness more completely than strictly realistic plays. These presentations of states of consciousness are most notable in Choubert's investigation of his own memories in *Victims of Duty*, but also in Sartre's *The Victors* as its characters' decision-making processes are presented on the stage as they struggle with their decisions of life and death, and in Beckett's tramps who are unable to remember and identify people and places.

Furthermore, considering the often demanding plays of the Theatre of the Absurd with the present study in mind may ameliorate some of the difficulty in understanding these plays. If they are read or viewed in conjunction with careful consideration of how their characters embody

themselves, these plays will become more easily understandable because an analysis of this embodiment reveals otherwise inexplicable motives. For example, why does Pozzo drag Lucky through the muck of a seemingly meaningless and bleak world? Because he seeks to influence and restrict the embodiments of another in the hopes of dominating that other. Because he fails to realize what Berenger – and to a lesser extent Kean and Clov – realizes: that to restrict the embodiments of another results in the failure of the self to create meaning for himself. The present study may help unlock some of the mysteries of characterology these plays bring to the fore. Cohn and Esslin initially saw existentialism as the key to explaining these plays because that branch of philosophy had much in common thematically with the plays of Beckett and others, e.g. meaninglessness and the search for identity. However, though existentialism is a valuable philosophy for the explication of these plays, it falls short because it does little to help us understand the motives of their characters. It focuses instead on the universe, on existence, and on how identities are created but without the focus on characters and their embodiments.

The present dissertation can aid in the explication of difficult plays, but can also help dispel the troubling and trite argument that playwrights like Beckett are depressing and bleak⁹. For nearly 60 years critics and scholars have declared that many of the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd present a bleak world in which characters are somehow doomed to misery and meaninglessness. What the present study offers, however, is an alternative reading of these plays which stipulates that each character's happiness is within his own control. Kean is unhappy with his life of pretension so he changes the ways in which he embodies himself and in the end finds fulfillment. Clov and Berenger enact similar life-changing embodiments in their quests for happiness and independence. If characters like Vladimir and Estragon fail to do the same, it is

⁹ See Cohn's *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Criticism*, in which she discusses the encroachment of nothingness upon being in Beckett's work. Also, Esslin in *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* contends that Beckett's characters struggle to create meaning without the benefit of any moral or metaphysical principles.

their own fault. Although Esslin, Camus, and others argue that belief systems had lost their viability by mid-century, Sartre, Beckett and Ionesco do not seek to argue that life is bleak, depressing and oppressive. They do, however, create settings and plots (or pseudoplots) in which characters are free – just like real-world subjects – to choose their own embodiments and therefore their own existences.

The significance of the present study to philosophy lies in its elaboration of one of Sartre's most important though most underdeveloped theories: that of the waiter and how he represents himself. The waiter represents or embodies himself in such a way that in a sense he plays various roles depending upon his goals or expectations at each given moment. However, Sartre abandons this analogy before fully treating it. The present study has sought wherever possible to expound upon Sartre's theory, add to it, and to explicate a complicated ontological process and how that process comes to life on the stage. Each consciousness creates its own meaning and is compelled to do so by the constructive and destructive impulses which dictate that it incessantly create and destroy its entire being via actions and speech. As discussed, these actions comprise embodiments which are of greater or lesser authenticity depending upon the extent to which they have as their focus the self rather than another.

In addition to Sartre's propositions, the present study has sought to explore those Heideggerian concepts which are relevant to ontological embodiment, namely the “they” and thrownness. Careful consideration of “they” in conjunction with embodiment and the plays discussed here will show the need for each individual to create his own meaning at each instant rather than blindly accepting external meaning, and furthermore will help explicate the ways in which this can be accomplished. Additionally, the use of Heidegger's theories here will add

additional avenues of exploration for those philosophical theses in heretofore unknown ways. For example, they may be applied to performance theory or characterology.

According to Heidegger, “they” comprise a powerful and seductive entity which entices the subject to accept those ready-made traditions and values found so unpalatable by Camus and Killinger. However, “they” do not have complete power over each subject though they influence her. This phenomenon is most obvious in *The Victors*, *What Where*, and *Rhinoceros*, the implicitly or overtly political plays discussed here, because these plays rely on the embodiments of not only individuals but of groups of subjects whose collective embodiments clash with those of individuals. These collective embodiments comprise a value or set of mores which each individual subject is expected to abide by or suffer consequences that may include ostracism or execution. The characters of these three plays succumb to the pressure of torture and the mob mentality without necessarily knowing why. When they succumb to this pressure without questioning it, they surrender to “they” because they do not possess the requisite ontological self-knowledge to resist it. The path to greater ontological self-knowledge is a way out of this quagmire.

The concept of thrownness on the other hand, bolsters Sartre's contention that because each subject turns up on the scene of life, appears without knowing why, without any real instinct, human nature or any guidance, each one must create her own meaning. Exploration of these concepts reinforces the contentions by Heidegger and Sartre that meaning, fulfillment, and free thinking are not entities which appear out of the ether or from divine intervention but are in fact created by each individual. The most notable example of this thrownness in the Theatre of the Absurd is found in *Waiting for Godot*, in which the two tramps stumble through a barren landscape without knowing why they do so. Just like newborns who find themselves existing

without knowing why, they struggle to remember how they got there. Their appearance on the stage is just as mysterious to the characters themselves as to the audience members who watch them.

Just as these characters struggle to create meaning, those who read plays attempt to piece together an essence out of what they read in the established canon of dramatic literature. The expansion of the canon of absurdist playwrights also may raise new avenues of inquiry among the body of plays discussed here. Of the 22 playwrights featured in *The Theatre of the Absurd*, all are white men. A new assessment of the Theatre of the Absurd which includes women playwrights and playwrights of color including Caryl Churchill and Maria Irene Fornes could forge a new canon of absurd playwrights for the 21st century. The addition of women playwrights and playwrights of color may attract more readers and theatregoers to these works and will also strive to address the concerns of these subjects heretofore left out of the canon. Playwrights' inclusion in the canon would be based on those characteristics Esslin has astutely outlined. Such inclusion will allow for further interdisciplinary approaches to the study of these plays, for example incorporation of elements from postcolonial studies and race theory.

Also, modern drama has long been ignored in favor of Renaissance drama in the literature classroom. Although Shakespeare remains no doubt invaluable to the study of language and literature, absurd drama has much to add to that playwright's contribution, especially if parallels to Shakespeare's works can be drawn from modern plays, for example in Ionesco's *Macbett* (1972). These new interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches to the study of absurd plays can provide new avenues of exploration for fields other than literature and philosophy. Careful analysis of new or previously ignored plays will allow for new theories on

problems including the motivations for murder and torture as well as issues of isolation and the impossibility of remaining truly isolated.

Additionally, widespread acceptance of a new canon of absurd playwrights will allow new plays to address contemporary issues including globalization and poverty, terrorism, and the antisociality and vapidness brought about by over-reliance on technology including social networks and personal communication devices. Absurd plays, because of their tendency to expose the absurdity of events and patterns of thought, can act as satires to call attention to social and philosophical problems not envisioned by the first wave of absurdist.

The present study also seeks the promotion of Ionesco studies, an avenue of exploration which has historically been underdeveloped and underrepresented in the larger body of literary and dramatic criticism currently in print. Although book-length studies of Ionesco's works have been published by critics including Coe, Hayman and Lamont, the amount of work done on Ionesco is very small and outdated compared to that of Beckett and Sartre. While Ionesco has been lauded as the first practitioner of the Theatre of the Absurd, he has also been largely passed over in favor of other playwrights. Ionesco's works have much more to offer than just discussions of his parodies of linguistic meaning or his explorations of the pitfalls of propaganda. His characters' actions and speech patterns are rife with opportunities for analysis of character motivation and ontology in the atomic age.

Additionally, Ionesco's short plays and librettos deserve in-depth treatment not only because they have been largely neglected by critics but also because when considered as a body of work they have much to offer to the larger body of Ionesco criticism. Ionesco's libretto for *Maximilien Kolbe* (1988) as well as his *Sept Petite Sketches* (1954) remain all but ignored by the critical community. This is a shame, as plays including *The Gap*, *Bedlam Galore* and *Scene* have

much in common thematically and stylistically with *The Bald Soprano*, *Rhinoceros* and other plays which have been critically treated much more often. Critical analyses of these plays, which may or may not center on ontological embodiment, will allow for a better understanding of how they fit in to the larger body of Ionesco criticism as well as reveal the plays for what they offer themselves in relation to modern drama and philosophy.

While the corpus of commentary on Ionesco's works is relatively small, the current body of Beckett criticism betrays a troubling insistence on pessimistic readings of that author's works. Critics often specifically mention the bleak sets, threadbare costumes, and lugubrious characters of *Waiting for Godot* in their discussions of the supposedly depressing works of Beckett. However, one of the things the present study seeks to do is to dispel the belief that Beckett's works are depressing. Like any author, Beckett gives his characters choices in the ways in which they embody themselves. Despite the dictates of authorial control which some may believe prescribes each character's thoughts, actions and speech, most authors create not specific actions but characters who retain at least a modicum of free will within the fictional universe. Beckett gives his characters choices in how they embody themselves. Although most of his characters (with the exception of Clov) choose to embody themselves without authenticity, these characters still have choices from which to choose. Characters including Vladimir, Estragon and the denizens of the mysterious room of *What Where* have opportunities to exercise their ontological freedom if not their practical freedom though in most cases they fail to realize that they have this power or refuse to act upon it. Vladimir and Estragon are in no way destined to wait for Godot. They do so because they choose to.

The present dissertation's possible impact for Sartre studies lies in its elaboration on that philosopher's analogy of the waiter who is also and simultaneously a father, lover, stamp

collector and whatever else he is. Like any subject, he embodies (what Sartre calls represents) himself according to the situation in which he finds himself at each successive moment. This dissertation has sought to elaborate on how and why this process is executed and what the impact to the subject and others is during and after each embodiment. The significance of each subject's embodiments is crucial not only to a greater understanding of Sartre's theories but to philosophy as a whole. Possible future development of this elaboration may include a monograph dedicated specifically to the waiter and embodiment and how Sartre's ideas contend with the theories of other modern philosophers on this subject.

The present study also has potential for advancement not only for its author, but for scholars and critics working in such diverse fields as literary studies, ontology, epistemology, sociology, and others. The process of ontological embodiment explored here may be applied to genres outside the realm of dramatic literature, including the novel, the short story, poetry, film, historical narratives and in some cases, the plastic arts. Any work which presents an active human consciousness existing in the universe is rife with potential for exploration in conjunction with the present dissertation.

The ideas expressed here have further applications outside the realm of art. If subjects begin to realize that they renew themselves at each instant, this realization can have profound impact on the ways in which subjects conceive of themselves and conduct themselves in relation to others and to the material world. In addition to the ontological significance, the theses explicated here have ethical import, most notably in the instance of murder. As discussed, murder is the utmost example of an inauthentic embodiment because it necessarily involves the most complete form of influence upon another subject's embodiment, that of its cessation. Clearly murder has been an ethical issue since the biblical account of Cain's murder of Abel. In

less extreme instances of embodiment, adoption of the system outlined here will contribute to the larger body of ethical philosophy in its insistence on living (embodying) not selfishly but authentically via embodiments which enable each subject to realize that the power to live ethically lives deep within himself rather than in supposedly universal or objective precepts. Ethical conduct is authentic conduct because the antipodes of these are moral relativism and amorality which lead to a lesser degree of ontological self-knowledge than that of ethical embodiments.

Though the present study's primary goal is not one concerning ethics, that branch of philosophy is related to ontology as both deal with the free choices made by consciousnesses in the midst of the material, physical world. Ethical or unethical options are chosen by a consciousness just as authentic or inauthentic embodiments are chosen by a consciousness. An example of the interrelatedness of the two branches of philosophy lies in the instance of murder. Because of murder's ethical import and because the act of murder is the most conspicuous example of an inauthentic embodiment, unethical conduct can only be the result of inauthentic embodiments because of its reliance on rationalization. Unethical conduct, for example Pozzo's abuse of Lucky, must necessarily have as its catalyst some measure of rationalization, at least an iota of excuse-making on the part of the unethical one. This rationalization – as when Pozzo refers to Lucky as a “pig,” (20 et al) thereby dehumanizing him, and to Pozzo's mind at least, justifying his mistreatment of Lucky – clouds the consciousness of the rationalizer and can only be the result of an inauthentic embodiment and its concomitant lesser degree of ontological self-knowledge. This instance is one of rationalization because Pozzo realizes on the level of reason that Lucky is not a pig, but employs rationalization to make Lucky as much like a pig as his practical freedom will allow. If he had his druthers and his practical freedom were not limited by

the physical world, he would probably make Lucky into an actual pig. Because he is necessarily limited by the physical world, he uses his skills as a rationalizer to dehumanize his unfortunate slave, thereby claiming a spurious and inauthentic mastery. Berenger, on the other hand, uses his reason without rationalizing during his decision-making process which results in his independence. In his final monologue, he examines cause and effect relationships to ascertain the possible consequences of his actions in order to make his decision. "I should have gone with them while there was still time" he declares (107). "Now it's too late! Now I'm a monster, just a monster. Now I'll never become a rhinoceros, never, never!" But this statement falls short of rationalization because he really is the monster now, the last human in a world of rhinoceroses.

This type of reason is the result of embodiments which have as their focus the subject rather than others. Conversely, the rationalization used by Pozzo clouds the mind because its focus, along with its accompanying embodiment, is clearly on another, i.e. Lucky. Although Pozzo rationalizes in part to make himself a master and though this may suggest he does so with himself as the focus of these embodiments, his primary focus is first on Lucky and the influence on that character's embodiments.

As Chekhov suggests with his witty repartee about the nose in the painting, the various components of a single work of art come together in diverse ways and to different ends. His hypothetical painting of a portrait on canvas with an actual human nose stuck onto it is absurd because of its contrast between artistic depiction and real-world anatomy, but is realistic because it contains a real nose. In the end, the artist must weigh the impact his work will have on those who view it while simultaneously weighing how his embodiments will impact others as well as his place in the world. And just as the various embodiments of a single subject come together to form some kind of identity, some kind of meaning for that individual to project into the physical

world via embodiments, a work of art is made up of multiple elements, for example, a canvas and a nose.

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