

couple and their quest for reality'. The chorus of weird sisters talking a nonsense language; the vaudeville scenes of fairground barkers and soap-box salesmen; the skits on gangster films, popular ballads, Americans in Europe, and Mussolini's Italy, all fit beautifully into this interpretation. Bentley, however, also quotes Cummings' dialogue between the Author and the Public, in which the author says, '... so far as you are concerned "life" is a verb of two voices, active, to do, and passive, to dream. Others believe doing to be only a kind of dreaming. Still others have discovered (in a mirror surrounded with mirrors) something harder than silence but softer than falling: the third voice of "life" which believes itself and which cannot mean because it is.'¹

This, surely, is a perfect statement of the philosophy of the Theatre of the Absurd, in which the world is seen as a hall of reflecting mirrors, and reality merges imperceptibly into fantasy.

The Theatre of the Absurd is part of a rich and varied tradition. If there is anything really new in it it is the unusual way in which various familiar attitudes of mind and literary idioms are interwoven. Above all, it is the fact that for the first time this approach has met with a wide response from a broadly based public. This is a characteristic not so much of the Theatre of the Absurd as of its epoch. Surrealism admittedly lacked the qualities that would have been needed to create a real Surrealist drama; but this may have been due as much to the lack of a real need for such a theatre on the part of the public as to a lack of interest or application on the part of the writers concerned. They were ahead of their time; now the time has caught up with the avant-garde of the twenties and thirties, and the theatre Jarry and Cummings created has found its public.

1. e. e. cummings, quoted by Bentley, op. cit., p. 487.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ABSURD

WHEN Nietzsche's Zarathustra descended from his mountains to preach to mankind, he met a saintly hermit in the forest. This old man invited him to stay in the wilderness rather than go into the cities of men. When Zarathustra asked the hermit how he passed his time in his solitude, he replied; 'I make up songs and sing them; and when I make up songs I laugh, I weep, and I growl; thus do I praise God.' Zarathustra declined the old man's offer and continued on his journey. But when he was alone, he spoke thus to his heart: 'Can it be possible! This old saint in the forest has not yet heard that God is dead!'¹

Zarathustra was first published in 1883. The number of people for whom God is dead has greatly increased since Nietzsche's day, and mankind has learned the bitter lesson of the falseness and evil nature of some of the cheap and vulgar substitutes that have been set up to take his place. And so, after two terrible wars, there are still many who are trying to come to terms with the implications of Zarathustra's message, searching for a way in which they can, with dignity, confront a universe deprived of what was once its centre and its living purpose, a world deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless – absurd.

The Theatre of the Absurd is one of the expressions of this search. It 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; that is, the possibility of knowing the laws of conduct and ultimate

1. Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, in *Werke*, vol. II (Munich: Hanser, 1955), p. 279.

values, as deducible from a firm foundation of revealed certainty about the purpose of man in the universe.

In expressing the tragic sense of loss at the disappearance of ultimate certainties the Theatre of the Absurd, by a strange paradox, is also a symptom of what probably comes nearest to being a genuine religious quest in our age: an effort, however timid and tentative, to sing, to laugh, to weep – and to growl – if not in praise of God (whose name, in Adamov's phrase, has for so long been degraded by usage that it has lost its meaning), at least in search of a dimension of the Ineffable; an effort to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, to instil in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primeval anguish, to shock him out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical, complacent, and deprived of the dignity that comes of awareness. For God is dead, above all, to the masses who live from day to day and have lost all contact with the basic facts – and mysteries – of the human condition with which, in former times, they were kept in touch through the living ritual of their religion, which made them parts of a real community and not just atoms in an atomized society.

The Theatre of the Absurd forms part of the unceasing endeavour of the true artists of our time to breach this dead wall of complacency and automatism and to re-establish an awareness of man's situation when confronted with the ultimate reality of his condition. As such, the Theatre of the Absurd fulfils a dual purpose and presents its audience with a two-fold absurdity.

In one of its aspects it castigates, satirically, the absurdity of lives lived unaware and unconscious of ultimate reality. This is the feeling of the deadness and mechanical senselessness of half-unconscious lives, the feeling of 'human beings secreting inhumanity', which Camus describes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

In certain hours of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their senseless pantomime, makes stupid everything around them. A man speaking on the telephone behind a glass partition – one cannot hear him but observes his trivial gesturing. One asks oneself, why is

he alive? This malaise in front of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable letdown when faced with the image of what we are, this 'nausea', as a contemporary writer calls it, also is the Absurd.¹

This is the experience that Ionesco expresses in plays like *The Bald Prima Donna* or *The Chairs*, Adamov in *La Parodie*, or N. F. Simpson in *A Resounding Tinkle*. It represents the satirical, parodistic aspect of the Theatre of the Absurd, its social criticism, its pillorying of an inauthentic, petty society. This may be the most easily accessible, and therefore most widely recognized, message of the Theatre of the Absurd, but it is far from being its most essential or most significant feature.

In its second, more positive aspect, behind the satirical exposure of the absurdity of inauthentic ways of life, the Theatre of the Absurd is facing up to a deeper layer of absurdity – the absurdity of the human condition itself in a world where the decline of religious belief has deprived man of certainties. When it is no longer possible to accept complete closed systems of values and revelations of divine purpose, life must be faced in its ultimate, stark reality. That is why, in the analysis of the dramatists of the Absurd in this book, we have always seen man stripped of the accidental circumstances of social position or historical context, confronted with the basic choices, the basic situations of his existence: man faced with time and therefore waiting, in Beckett's plays or Gelber's, waiting between birth and death; man running away from death, climbing higher and higher, in Vian's play, or passively sinking down toward death, in Buzzati's; man rebelling against death, confronting and accepting it, in Ionesco's *Tueur Sans Gages*; man inextricably entangled in a mirage of illusions, mirrors reflecting mirrors, and forever hiding ultimate reality, in the plays of Genet; man trying to establish his position, or to break out into freedom, only to find himself newly imprisoned, in the parables of Manuel de Pedrolo; man trying to stake out a modest place for him-

1. Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), p. 29.

self in the cold and darkness that envelops him, in Pinter's plays; man vainly striving to grasp the moral law forever beyond his comprehension, in Arrabal's; man caught in the inescapable dilemma that strenuous effort leads to the same result as passive indolence – complete futility and ultimate death – in the earlier work of Adamov; man forever lonely, immured in the prison of his subjectivity, unable to reach his fellow-man, in the vast majority of these plays.

Concerned as it is with the ultimate realities of the human condition, the relatively few fundamental problems of life and death, isolation and communication, the Theatre of the Absurd, however grotesque, frivolous, and irreverent it may appear, represents a return to the original, religious function of the theatre – the confrontation of man with the spheres of myth and religious reality. Like ancient Greek tragedy and the medieval mystery plays and baroque allegories, the Theatre of the Absurd is intent on making its audience aware of man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe.

The difference is merely that in ancient Greek tragedy – and comedy – as well as in the medieval mystery play and the baroque *auto sacramental*, the ultimate realities concerned were generally known and universally accepted metaphysical systems, while the Theatre of the Absurd expresses the absence of any such generally accepted cosmic system of values. Hence, much more modestly, the Theatre of the Absurd makes no pretence at explaining the ways of God to man. It can merely present, in anxiety or with derision, an individual human being's intuition of the ultimate realities as he experiences them; the fruits of one man's descent into the depths of his personality, his dreams, fantasies, and nightmares.

While former attempts at confronting man with the ultimate realities of his condition projected a coherent and generally recognized version of the truth, the Theatre of the Absurd merely communicates one poet's most intimate and personal intuition of the human situation, his own *sense of being*, his

individual vision of the world. This is the *subject-matter* of the Theatre of the Absurd, and it determines its *form*, which must, of necessity, represent a convention of the stage basically different from the 'realistic' theatre of our time.

As the Theatre of the Absurd is not concerned with conveying information or presenting the problems or destinies of characters that exist outside the author's inner world, as it does not expound a thesis or debate ideological propositions, it is not concerned with the representation of events, the narration of the fate or the adventures of characters, but instead with the presentation of one individual's basic situation. It is a theatre of situation as against a theatre of events in sequence, and therefore it uses a language based on patterns of concrete images rather than argument and discursive speech. And since it is trying to present a sense of being, it can neither investigate nor solve problems of conduct or morals.

Because the Theatre of the Absurd projects its author's personal world, it lacks objectively valid characters. It cannot show the clash of opposing temperaments or study human passions locked in conflict, and is therefore not dramatic in the accepted sense of the term. Nor is it concerned with telling a story in order to communicate some moral or social lesson, as is the aim of Brecht's narrative, 'epic' theatre. The action in a play of the Theatre of the Absurd is not intended to tell a story but to communicate a pattern of poetic images. To give but one example: things happen in *Waiting for Godot*, but these happenings do not constitute a plot or story; they are an image of Beckett's intuition that *nothing really ever happens* in man's existence. The whole play is a complex poetic image made up of a complicated pattern of subsidiary images and themes, which are interwoven like the themes of a musical composition, not, as in most well-made plays, to present a line of development, but to make in the spectator's mind a total, complex impression of a basic, and static, situation. In this, the Theatre of the Absurd is analogous to a Symbolist or Imagist poem, which

also presents a pattern of images and associations in a mutually interdependent structure.

While the Brechtian epic theatre tries to widen the range of drama by introducing narrative, epic elements, the Theatre of the Absurd aims at concentration and depth in an essentially lyrical, poetic pattern. Of course, dramatic, narrative, and lyrical elements are present in all drama. Brecht's own theatre, like Shakespeare's, contains lyrical inserts in the form of songs; even at their most didactic, Ibsen and Shaw are rich in purely poetic moments. The Theatre of the Absurd, however, in abandoning psychology, subtlety of characterization, and plot in the conventional sense, gives the poetical element an incomparably greater emphasis. While the play with a linear plot describes a development in time, in a dramatic form that presents a concretized poetic image the play's extension in time is purely incidental. Expressing an *intuition in depth*, it should ideally be apprehended *in a single moment*, and only because it is physically impossible to present so complex an image in an instant does it have to be spread over a period of time. The formal structure of such a play is, therefore, merely a device to express a complex total image by unfolding it in a sequence of interacting elements.

The endeavour to communicate a total sense of being is an attempt to present a truer picture of reality itself, reality as apprehended by an individual. The Theatre of the Absurd is the last link in a line of development that started with naturalism. The idealistic, Platonic belief in immutable essences – ideal forms that it was the artist's task to present in a purer state than they could ever be found in nature – founded in the philosophy of Locke and Kant, which based reality on perception and the inner structure of the human mind. Art then became mere imitation of external nature. Yet the imitation of surfaces was bound to prove unsatisfying and this inevitably led to the next step – the exploration of the reality of the mind. Ibsen and Strindberg exemplified that development during the span of

their own lifetimes' exploration of reality. James Joyce began with minutely realistic stories and ended up with the vast multiple structure of *Finnegans Wake*. The work of the dramatists of the Absurd continues the same development. Each of these plays is an answer to the questions 'How does this individual feel when confronted with the human situation? What is the basic mood in which he faces the world? What does it feel like to be he?' And the answer is a single, total, but complex and contradictory poetic image – one play – or a succession of such images, complementing each other – the dramatist's *œuvre*.

In apprehending the world at any one moment, we receive simultaneously a whole complex of different perceptions and feelings. We can only communicate this instantaneous vision by breaking it down into different elements which can then be built up into a sequence in time, in a sentence or series of sentences. To convert our perception into conceptual terms, into logical thought and language, we perform an operation analogous to that of the scanner that analyses the picture in a television camera into rows of single impulses. The poetic image, with its ambiguity and its simultaneous evocation of multiple elements of sense association, is one of the methods by which we can, however imperfectly, communicate the reality of our intuition of the world.

The highly eccentric German philosopher Ludwig Klages – who is almost totally unknown, and quite unjustly so, in the English-speaking world – formulated a psychology of perception based on the recognition that our senses present us with images (*Bilder*) built up of a multitude of simultaneous impressions that are subsequently analysed and disintegrated in the process of translation into conceptual thinking. For Klages, this is part of the insidious action of critical intellect upon the creative element of the mind – his philosophical *magnum opus* is called *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* (*The Intellect as Antagonist of the Soul*) – but however misguided his attempt to

turn this opposition into a cosmic battle between the creative and the analytical may have been, the basic idea that conceptual and discursive thought impoverishes the ineffable fullness of the perceived image remains valid, at least as an illustration of the problem of what it is that is being communicated in poetic imagery.

And it is in this striving to communicate a basic and as yet undissolved totality of perception, an intuition of being, that we can find a key to the devaluation and disintegration of language in the Theatre of the Absurd. For if it is the translation of the total intuition of being into the logical and temporal sequence of conceptual thought that deprives it of its pristine complexity and poetic truth, it is understandable that the artist should try to find ways to circumvent this influence of discursive speech and logic. Here lies the chief difference between poetry and prose: poetry is ambiguous and associative, striving to approximate to the wholly unconceptual language of music. The Theatre of the Absurd, in carrying the same poetic endeavour into the concrete imagery of the stage, can go further than pure poetry in dispensing with logic, discursive thought, and language. The stage is a multidimensional medium; it allows the simultaneous use of visual elements, movement, light, and language. It is, therefore, particularly suited to the communication of complex images consisting of the contrapuntal interaction of all these elements.

In the 'literary' theatre, language remains the predominant component. In the anti-literary theatre of the circus or the music hall, language is reduced to a very subordinate role. The Theatre of the Absurd has regained the freedom of using language as merely one – sometimes dominant, sometimes submerged – component of its multidimensional poetic imagery. By putting the language of a scene in contrast to the action, by reducing it to meaningless patter, or by abandoning discursive logic for the poetic logic of association or assonance, the Theatre of the Absurd has opened up a new dimension of the stage.

In its devaluation of language, the Theatre of the Absurd is in tune with the trend of our time. As George Steiner pointed out in two radio talks entitled *The Retreat from the Word*, the devaluation of language is characteristic not only of the development of contemporary poetry or philosophical thought but, even more, of modern mathematics and the natural sciences. 'It is no paradox to assert', Steiner says, 'that much of reality now begins *outside* language.¹ . . . Large areas of meaningful experience now belong to non-verbal languages such as mathematics, formulae, and logical symbolism. Others belong to "anti-languages", such as the practice of non-objective art or atonal music. The world of the word has shrunk.'² Moreover, the abandonment of language as the best instrument of notation in the spheres of mathematics and symbolic logic goes hand in hand with a marked reduction in the popular belief in its practical usefulness. Language appears more and more as being in contradiction to reality. The trends of thought that have the greatest influence on contemporary popular thinking all show this tendency.

Take the case of Marxism. Here a distinction is made between *apparent* social relations and the social *reality* behind them. Objectively, an employer is seen as an exploiter, and therefore an enemy, of the working class. If an employer therefore says to a worker, 'I have sympathy with your point of view,' he may himself believe what he is saying, but objectively his words are meaningless. However much he asserts his sympathy for the worker, he remains his enemy. Language here belongs to the realm of the purely subjective, and is thus devoid of objective reality.

The same applies to modern depth psychology and psychoanalysis. Every child today knows that there is a vast gap between what is consciously thought and asserted and the

1. George Steiner, 'The retreat from the word: I', *Listener*, London, 14 July 1960.

2. Steiner, 'The retreat from the word: II', *loc. cit.*, 21 July 1960.

psychological reality behind the words spoken. A son who tells his father that he loves and respects him is objectively bound to be, in fact, filled with the deepest Oedipal hatred of his father. He may not know it, but he means the opposite of what he says. And the subconscious has a higher content of reality than the conscious utterance.

The relativization, devaluation, and criticism of language are also the prevailing trends in contemporary philosophy, as exemplified by Wittgenstein's conviction, in the last phase of his thinking, that the philosopher must endeavour to disentangle thought from the conventions and rules of grammar, which have been mistaken for the rules of logic.

A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably. . . . Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting; that is, all that is great and important? (As it were, all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards, and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.¹

By a strict criticism of language, Wittgenstein's followers have declared large categories of statements to be devoid of objective meaning. Wittgenstein's 'word games' have much in common with the Theatre of the Absurd.

But even more significant than these tendencies in Marxist, psychological, and philosophical thinking is the trend of the times in the workaday world of the man in the street. Exposed to the incessant, and inexorably loquacious, onslaught of the mass media, the press, and advertising, the man in the street becomes more and more sceptical toward the language he is exposed to. The citizens of totalitarian countries know full well that most of what they are told is double-talk, devoid of

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: I* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), pp. 48-48e.

real meaning. They become adept at reading between the lines; that is, at guessing at the reality the language conceals rather than reveals. In the West, euphemisms and circumlocutions fill the press or resound from the pulpits. And advertising, by its constant use of superlatives, has succeeded in devaluing language to a point where it is a generally accepted axiom that most of the words one sees displayed on billboards or in the coloured pages of magazine advertising are as meaningless as the jingles of television commercials. A yawning gulf has opened between language and reality.

Apart from the general devaluation of language in the flood of mass communications, the growing specialization of life has made the exchange of ideas on an increasing number of subjects impossible between members of different spheres of life which have each developed their own specialized jargons. As Ionesco says, in summarizing, and enlarging on, the views of Antonin Artaud:

As our knowledge becomes separated from life, our culture no longer contains ourselves (or only an insignificant part of ourselves), for it forms a 'social' context into which we are not integrated. So the problem becomes that of bringing our life back into contact with our culture, making it a living culture once again. To achieve this, we shall first have to kill 'the respect for what is written down in black and white' . . . to break up our language so that it can be put together again in order to re-establish contact with 'the absolute', or, as I should prefer to say, 'with multiple reality'; it is imperative to 'push human beings again towards seeing themselves as they really are'.¹

That is why communication between human beings is so often shown in a state of breakdown in the Theatre of the Absurd. It is merely a satirical magnification of the existing state of affairs. Language has run riot in an age of mass communication. It must be reduced to its proper function - the expression of authentic content, rather than its concealment.

1. Ionesco, 'Ni un dieu, ni un démon', *Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud - Jean-Louis Barrault*, Paris, nos. 22-3, May 1958, p. 131.

But this will be possible only if man's reverence toward the spoken or written word as a means of communication is restored, and the ossified clichés that dominate thought (as they do in the limericks of Edward Lear or the world of Humpty Dumpty) are replaced by a living language that serves it. And this, in turn, can be achieved only if the limitations of logic and discursive language are recognized and respected, and the uses of poetic language acknowledged.

The means by which the dramatists of the Absurd express their critique – largely instinctive and unintended – of our disintegrating society are based on suddenly confronting their audiences with a grotesquely heightened and distorted picture of a world that has gone mad. This is a shock therapy that achieves what Brecht's doctrine of the 'alienation effect' postulated in theory but failed to achieve in practice – the inhibition of the audience's identification with the characters on the stage (which is the age-old and highly effective method of the traditional theatre) and its replacement by a detached, critical attitude.

If we identify ourselves with the main character in a play, we automatically accept his point of view, see the world in which he moves with *his* eyes, feel *his* emotions. From the standpoint of a didactic, Socialist theatre, Brecht argued that this time-honoured psychological link between the actor and the audience must be broken. How could an audience be made to see the actions of the characters in a play *critically* if they were made to adopt their points of view? Hence Brecht, in his Marxist period, tried to introduce a number of devices designed to break this spell. Yet he never completely succeeded in achieving his aim. The audience, in spite of the introduction of songs, slogans, nonrepresentational décor, and other inhibiting devices, continues to identify with Brecht's brilliantly drawn characters and therefore often tends to miss the critical attitude Brecht wanted it to assume toward them. The old magic of the theatre is too strong; the pull toward identification, which

springs from a basic psychological characteristic of human nature, is overwhelming. If we see Mother Courage weep for her son, we cannot resist feeling her sorrow and therefore fail to condemn her for her acceptance of war as a business, which inevitably leads to the loss of her children. The finer the characterization of a human being on the stage, the more inevitable is this process of identification.

In the Theatre of the Absurd, on the other hand, the audience is confronted with characters whose motives and actions remain largely incomprehensible. With such characters it is almost impossible to identify; the more mysterious their action and their nature, the less human the characters become, the more difficult it is to be carried away into seeing the world from their point of view. Characters with whom the audience fails to identify are inevitably comic. If we identified with the figure of farce who loses his trousers, we should feel embarrassment and shame. If, however, our tendency to identify has been inhibited by making such a character grotesque, we laugh at his predicament. We see what happens to him from the outside, rather than from his own point of view. As the incomprehensibility of the motives, and the often unexplained and mysterious nature of the characters' actions in the Theatre of the Absurd effectively prevent identification, such theatre is a comic theatre in spite of the fact that its subject-matter is sombre, violent, and bitter. That is why the Theatre of the Absurd transcends the category of comedy and tragedy and combines laughter with horror.

But, by its very nature, it cannot provoke the thoughtful attitude of detached social criticism that was Brecht's objective. It does not present its audience with sets of social facts and examples of political behaviour. It presents the audience with a picture of a disintegrating world that has lost its unifying principle, its meaning, and its purpose – an absurd universe. What is the audience to make of this bewildering confrontation with a truly alienated world that, having lost its rational

principle, has in the true sense of the word gone mad?

Here we are face to face with the central problem of the effect, the aesthetic efficacy and validity, of the Theatre of the Absurd. It is an empirical fact that, in defiance of most of the accepted rules of drama, the best plays of this kind are effective as theatre – the convention of the Absurd *works*. But *why* does it work? To some extent, the answer has been given in the foregoing account of the nature of comic and farcical effects. The misfortunes of characters we view with a cold, critical, unidentified eye *are* funny. Stupid characters who act in mad ways have always been the butt of derisive laughter in the circus, the music hall, and the theatre. But such comic characters usually appeared in a rational framework, and were set off by positive characters with whom the audience could identify. In the Theatre of the Absurd, the whole of the action is mysterious, unmotivated, and at first sight nonsensical.

The alienation effect in the Brechtian theatre is intended to activate the audience's critical, intellectual attitude. The Theatre of the Absurd speaks to a deeper level of the audience's mind. It activates psychological forces, releases and liberates hidden fears and repressed aggressions, and, above all, by confronting the audience with a picture of disintegration, it sets in motion an active process of integrative forces in the mind of each individual spectator.

As Eva Metman says in her remarkable essay on Beckett:

In times of religious containment, [dramatic art] has shown man as protected, guided, and sometimes punished by [archetypal] powers, but in other epochs it has shown the visible tangible world, in which man fulfils his destiny, as permeated by the demonic essences of his invisible and intangible being. In contemporary drama, a new, third orientation is crystallizing in which man is shown not in a world into which the divine or demonic powers are projected but alone with them. This new form of drama forces the audience out of its familiar orientation. It creates a vacuum between the play and the audience so that the latter is compelled to experience something itself, be it a

reawakening of the awareness of archetypal powers or a reorientation of the ego, or both . . .¹

One need not be a Jungian or use Jungian categories to see the force of this diagnosis. Human beings who in their daily lives confront a world that has split up into a series of disconnected fragments and lost its purpose, but who are no longer aware of this state of affairs and its disintegrating effect on their personalities, are brought face to face with a heightened representation of this schizophrenic universe. 'The vacuum between what is shown on the stage and the onlooker has become so unbearable that the latter has no alternative but either to reject and turn away or to be drawn into the enigma of the plays in which nothing reminds him of any of his purposes in and reactions to the world around him.'² Once drawn into the mystery of the play, the spectator is compelled to come to terms with his experience. The stage supplies him with a number of disjointed clues that he has to fit into a meaningful pattern. In this manner, he is forced to make a creative effort of his own, an effort at interpretation and integration. The time has been made to appear out of joint; the audience of the Theatre of the Absurd is being compelled to set it right, or, rather, by being made to see that the world has become absurd, in acknowledging that fact takes the first step in coming to terms with reality.

The madness of the times lies precisely in the existence, side by side, of a large number of unreconciled beliefs and attitudes – conventional morality, for example, on the one hand, and the values of advertising on the other; the conflicting claims of science and religion; or the loudly proclaimed striving of all sections for the general interest when in fact each is pursuing very narrow and selfish particular ends. On each page of his newspaper, the man in the street is confronted with a different and contradictory pattern of values. No wonder that the art of

1. Eva Metman, 'Reflections on Samuel Beckett's *plays*', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, London, January 1960, p. 43.

2. *ibid.*

such an era shows a marked resemblance to the symptoms of schizophrenia. But it is not, as Jung pointed out in an essay on Joyce's *Ulysses*, the artist who is schizophrenic: 'The medical description of schizophrenia offers only an analogy, in that the schizophrenic has apparently the same tendency to treat reality as if it were strange to him, or, the other way around, to estrange himself from reality. In the modern artist, this tendency is not produced by any disease in the individual but is a manifestation of our time.'¹

The challenge to make sense out of what appears as a senseless and fragmented action, the recognition that the fact that the modern world has lost its unifying principle is the source of its bewildering and soul-destroying quality, is therefore more than a mere intellectual exercise; it has a therapeutic effect. In Greek tragedy, the spectators were made aware of man's forlorn but heroic stand against the inexorable forces of fate and the will of the gods – and this had a cathartic effect upon them and made them better able to face their time. In the Theatre of the Absurd, the spectator is confronted with the madness of the human condition, is enabled to see his situation in all its grimness and despair. Stripped of illusions and vaguely felt fears and anxieties, he can face this situation consciously, rather than feeling it vaguely below the surface of euphemisms and optimistic illusions. By seeing his anxieties formulated he can liberate himself from them. This is the nature of all the gallows humour and *humour noir* of world literature, of which the Theatre of the Absurd is the latest example. It is the unease caused by the presence of illusions that are obviously out of tune with reality that is dissolved and discharged through liberating laughter at the recognition of the fundamental absurdity of the universe. The greater the anxieties and the temptation to indulge in illusions, the more beneficial is this therapeutic effect – hence the success of *Waiting for Godot* at San Quentin. It was a relief for the convicts to be made to recognize

1. Jung, 'Ulysses', quoted by Metman, loc. cit., p. 53.

in the tragicomic situation of the tramps the hopelessness of their own waiting for a miracle. They were enabled to laugh at the tramps – and at themselves.

As the reality with which the Theatre of the Absurd is concerned is a psychological reality expressed in images that are the outward projection of states of mind, fears, dreams, nightmares, and conflicts within the personality of the author, the dramatic tension produced by this kind of play differs fundamentally from the suspense created in a theatre concerned mainly with the revelation of objective characters through the unfolding of a narrative plot. The pattern of exposition, conflict, and final solution mirrors a view of the world in which solutions are possible, a view based on a recognizable and generally accepted pattern of an objective reality that can be apprehended so that the purpose of man's existence and the rules of conduct it entails can be deduced from it.

This is true even of the lightest type of drawing-room comedy, in which the action proceeds on a deliberately restricted view of the world – that the sole purpose of the characters involved is for each boy to get his girl. And even in the darkest pessimistic tragedies of the naturalistic or Expressionist theatres, the final curtain enables the audience to go home with a formulated message or philosophy in their minds: the solution may have been a sad one, but it was a rationally formulated conclusion nevertheless. This, as I pointed out in the introduction, applies even to the theatre of Sartre and Camus, which is based on a philosophy of the absurdity of human existence. Even plays like *Huis Clos*, *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* (*Lucifer and the Lord*), and *Caligula* allow the audience to take home an intellectually formulated philosophical lesson.

The Theatre of the Absurd, however, which proceeds not by intellectual concepts but by poetic images, neither poses an intellectual problem in its exposition nor provides any clear-cut solution that would be reducible to a lesson or an apophthegm. Many of the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd have a circular

structure, ending exactly as they began; others progress merely by a growing intensification of the initial situation. And as the Theatre of the Absurd rejects the idea that it is possible to motivate all human behaviour, or that human character is based on an immutable essence, it is impossible for it to base its effect on the suspense that in other dramatic conventions springs from awaiting the solution of a dramatic equation based on the working out of a problem involving clearly defined quantities introduced in the opening scenes. In most dramatic conventions, the audience is constantly asking itself the question 'What is going to happen next?'

In the Theatre of the Absurd, the audience is confronted with actions that lack apparent motivation, characters that are in constant flux, and often happenings that are clearly outside the realm of rational experience. Here, too, the audience can ask, 'What is going to happen next?' But then *anything* may happen next, so that the answer to this question cannot be worked out according to the rules of ordinary probability based on motives and characterizations that will remain constant throughout the play. The relevant question here is not so much what is going to happen next but what *is* happening? 'What does the action of the play represent?'

This constitutes a different, but by no means less valid, kind of dramatic suspense. Instead of being provided with a *solution*, the spectator is challenged to formulate the *questions* that he will have to ask if he wants to approach the meaning of the play. The total action of the play, instead of proceeding from point A to point B, as in other dramatic conventions, gradually builds up the complex pattern of the *poetic image* that the play expresses. The spectator's suspense consists in waiting for the gradual completion of this pattern which will enable him to see the image as a whole. And only when that image is assembled – after the final curtain – can he *begin* to explore, not so much its meaning as its structure, texture, and impact.

It is certainly arguable that this new kind of suspense repre-

sents a higher level of dramatic tension and evokes a more satisfying, because more challenging, aesthetic experience in the audience. Of course, the poetic qualities of great drama, of Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Chekhov, have always provided the audience with a deeply complex pattern of poetic association and significance; however simple the motivations may appear to be on the surface, the profound intuition with which the characters are drawn, the multiple planes on which the action proceeds, the complex quality of truly poetic language combine in a pattern that transcends any attempt at a simple and rational apprehension of the action or its solution. The suspense in a play like *Hamlet* or *The Three Sisters* does *not* lie in an anxious expectation of how these plays will *end*. Their eternal freshness and power lie in the inexhaustible quality of the poetic and infinitely ambiguous image of the human condition they present. In a play like *Hamlet*, we do indeed ask, 'What is happening?' And the answer clearly is that it is not just a dynastic conflict or a series of murders and sword fights. We are confronted with a projection of a psychological reality and with human archetypes shrouded in perpetual mystery.

This is the element that the Theatre of the Absurd has tried to make the core of its dramatic convention (without making any claim at reaching the heights the greatest dramatists have attained by their intuition and the richness of their creative capacity). If Ionesco, in seeking to trace the tradition to which he belongs, singles out the scenes of Richard II's loneliness and degradation, it is because they are such poetic images of the human condition:

All men die in solitude; all values are degraded in a state of misery: that is what Shakespeare tells me. . . . Perhaps Shakespeare wanted to relate the story of Richard II: if he had narrated merely that, the *story of another human being*, it would not have moved me. But Richard II's prison is not a truth that has been overtaken by the flow of history. Its invisible walls still stand, while so many philosophies, so many ideologies have crumbled forever. All this endures because this

language is the language of living evidence, and not that of discursive and demonstrative thought. It is the theatre which provides this eternal and living presence; it corresponds, without doubt, to the essential structure of the tragic truth, of stage reality. . . . This is a matter of archetypes of the theatre, of the essence of the theatre, of the language of the theatre.¹

It is this language of stage images that embody a truth beyond the power of mere discursive thought which the Theatre of the Absurd places at the centre of its endeavour to build a new dramatic convention, subordinating all other elements of stagecraft to it.

But if the Theatre of the Absurd concentrates on the power of stage imagery, on the projection of visions of the world dredged up from the depth of the subconscious; if it neglects the rationally measurable ingredients of the theatre – the highly polished carpentry of plot and counterplot of the well-made play, the imitation of reality which can be measured against reality itself, the clever motivation of character – how can it be judged by rational analysis, how can it be subjected to criticism by objectively valid standards? If it is a purely subjective expression of its author's vision and emotion, how can the public distinguish the genuine, deeply felt work of art from mere impostures?

These are the old questions that have been asked about each phase in the development of modern art and literature. That they are questions of real relevance is clear to anyone who has seen the bewildered attempts of professional critics to come to terms with works in any of these new conventions – the art critics who miss the quality of 'classical beauty' in Picasso's grimmer pictures, as well as the drama critics who dismiss Ionesco or Beckett because their characters lack verisimilitude or transgress the rules of polite behaviour that are to be expected in drawing-room comedy.

1. Ionesco, 'Expérience du théâtre', *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Paris, 1 February 1958, p. 226.

But all art is subjective, and the standards against which the critics measure success or failure are always worked out *a posteriori* from an analysis of accepted and empirically successful works. In the case of a phenomenon like the Theatre of the Absurd, which is the outcome not of the conscious pursuit of a collectively worked-out programme or theory (as the Romantic movement was, for example) but of an unpremeditated response by a number of independent authors to tendencies inherent in the general movement of thought in a period of transition, we have to analyse the works themselves and find the tendencies and modes of thought they express, in order to gain a picture of their artistic purpose. And once we have gained a clear idea of their general tendency and aim, we can arrive at a perfectly valid judgement of how they measure up to what they have set out to do.

If in the course of this book, therefore, we have established that the Theatre of the Absurd is concerned essentially with the evocation of concrete poetic images designed to communicate to the audience the sense of perplexity that their authors feel when confronted with the human condition, we must judge the success or failure of these works by the degree to which they succeed in communicating this mixture of poetry and grotesque, tragicomic horror. And this in turn will depend on the quality and power of the poetic images evoked.

How can we assess the quality of a poetic image or a complex pattern of such images? Of course, as in the criticism of poetry, there will always be a subjective element of taste or personal responsiveness to certain associations, but on the whole it is possible to apply objective standards. These standards are based on such elements as suggestive power, originality of invention, and the psychological truth of the images concerned; on their depth and universality; and on the degree of skill with which they are translated into stage terms. The superiority of complex images like the tramps waiting for Godot, or the proliferation of chairs in Ionesco's masterpiece, over some of the more

childish pranks of the early Dadaist theatre is as evident as the superiority of Eliot's *Four Quartets* over the doggerel on a Christmas card, and for the same self-evident and purely objective reasons - higher complexity, greater depth, more brilliant and sustained invention, and infinitely greater craftsmanship. Adamov himself rightly puts a play like *Le Professeur Taranne* above a play on a similar subject like *Les Retrouvailles* because the former sprang from a genuine dream image while the latter was artificially contrived. The criterion here is that of psychological truth, and even if we did not have the author's own evidence, we could deduce the greater psychological truth, and hence the greater validity, of *Le Professeur Taranne* from an analysis of its imagery. It is clearly more organic, less symmetrical, and less mechanically constructed, far more intense and coherent, than the imagery of the later play.

Touchstones of judgement such as these - depth, originality of invention, psychological truth - may not perhaps be reducible to quantitative terms, but they are no less objective than the same criteria applied to making the distinction between a Rembrandt and a mannerist painting, or between a poem of Pope's and one of Settle's.

Valid criteria certainly exist to assess the success of works within the category of the Theatre of the Absurd. It is more difficult to place the best works in this convention into a general hierarchy of dramatic art as a whole, but this, in any case, is an impossible task. Is Raphael a greater painter than Brueghel, Miró a greater painter than Murillo? While it is clearly futile to argue, as is so often done in discussing abstract painting or the works of the Theatre of the Absurd, whether such apparently effortless products of the imagination deserve the title of works of art simply because they lack the sheer effort and ingenuity that go into a group portrait or a well-made play, it is worthwhile to refute some of these popular misconceptions.

It is *not* true that it is infinitely more difficult to construct a

rational plot than to summon up the irrational imagery of a play of the Theatre of the Absurd, just as it is quite untrue that any child could draw as well as Klee or Picasso. There is an immense difference between artistically and dramatically valid nonsense and just nonsense. Anyone who has seriously tried to write nonsense verse or to devise a nonsense play will confirm the truth of this assertion. In constructing a realistic plot, as in painting from a model, there is always reality itself and the writer's own experience and observation to fall back on - characters one has known, events one has witnessed. Writing in a medium in which there is complete freedom of invention, on the other hand, requires the ability to *create* images and situations that have no counterpart in nature while, at the same time, establishing a world of its own, with its own inherent logic and consistency, which will be instantly acceptable to the audience. Mere combinations of incongruities produce mere banality. Anyone attempting to work in this medium simply by writing down what comes into his mind will find that the supposed flights of spontaneous invention have never left the ground, that they consist of incoherent fragments of reality that have not been transposed into a valid imaginative whole. Unsuccessful examples of the Theatre of the Absurd, like unsuccessful abstract paintings, are usually characterized by the transparent way in which they still bear the mark of the fragments of reality from which they are made up. They have not undergone that sea change through which the merely *negative* quality of *lack* of logic or verisimilitude is transmuted into the *positive* quality of a new world that makes imaginative sense in its own right.

Here we have one of the real hallmarks of excellence in the Theatre of the Absurd. Only when its invention springs from deep layers of profoundly experienced emotion, only when it mirrors real obsessions, dreams, and valid images in the subconscious mind of its author, will such a work of art have that quality of truth, of instantly recognized general, as distinct

from merely private, validity that distinguishes the vision of a poet from the delusions of the mentally afflicted. This quality of depth and unity of vision is instantly recognizable and beyond trickery. No degree of technical accomplishment and mere cleverness can here, as in the sphere of representational art or drama, cover up the poverty of the inner core of the work in question.

To write a well-made problem play or a witty comedy of manners may therefore be more laborious or require a higher degree of ingenuity or intelligence. On the other hand, to invent a generally valid poetic image of the human condition requires unusual depth of feeling and intensity of emotion, and a far higher degree of genuinely creative vision – in short, inspiration. It is a widespread but vulgar fallacy that bases a hierarchy of artistic achievement on the mere difficulty or laboriousness of the process of composition. If it were not futile from the outset to argue in terms of position on a scale of values, such a scale could be based only on the quality, the universal validity, the depth of vision and insight of the work itself, whether or not it was produced in decades of patient plodding or in a flash of inspiration.

The criteria of achievement in the Theatre of the Absurd are not only the quality of invention, the complexity of the poetic images evoked, and the skill with which they are combined and sustained but also, and even more essentially, the *reality* and *truth* of the vision these images embody. For all its freedom of invention and spontaneity, the Theatre of the Absurd is concerned with communicating an experience of being, and in doing so it is trying to be uncompromisingly honest and fearless in exposing the reality of the human condition.

This is the consideration from which it is possible to resolve the controversy between the ‘realistic’ theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd. Kenneth Tynan rightly argued in his debate with Ionesco that he expected what an artist communicated *to be true*. But Ionesco, in asserting that he was concerned with

communicating *his personal vision*, in no way contradicted Tynan’s postulate. Ionesco also strives to tell the truth – the truth about his intuition of the human condition. The truthful exploration of a psychological, inner reality is in no way less true than the exploration of an outward objective reality. Indeed, the reality of vision is more immediate and nearer to the core of experience than any description of an objective reality. Is a painting of a sunflower by van Gogh less real, less objectively true, than a picture of a sunflower in a textbook of botany? In some senses, perhaps, but certainly not in others. And the van Gogh painting will have a higher level of truth and reality than any scientific illustration, even if van Gogh’s sunflower has the wrong number of petals.

Realities of vision and perception are as real as quantitatively verifiable external realities. There is no real contradiction between what claims to be a theatre of objective reality and a theatre of subjective reality. Both are equally realistic – but concerned with different aspects of reality in its vast complexity.

This also disposes of the apparent conflict between an ideological, politically oriented theatre and the seemingly apolitical, anti-ideological Theatre of the Absurd. A *pièce à thèse* on, say, as important a subject as capital punishment will try to present a set of arguments and circumstances to illustrate its case. If the circumstances presented are *true*, the play will be convincing. If they are obviously biased and manipulated, it will fail. But the test of the truth of the play must lie ultimately in its ability to communicate the truth of the *experience* of the characters involved. And here the test of its truth and realism will ultimately coincide with its *inner reality*. However correct the statistics and descriptive details of the play may be, its dramatic truth will depend on the author’s ability to convey the victim’s fear of death, the human reality of his predicament. And here, too, the test of truth will lie in the creative ability, the poetic imagination of the author. And this is precisely the criterion by which we can judge the truth of the wholly

subjective creations of a theatre not concerned with social realities.

The contradiction does not lie between realistic and unrealistic, objective and subjective, theatre but merely between poetic vision, poetic truth, and imaginative reality on the one hand, and arid, mechanical, lifeless, poetically untrue writing on the other. A *pièce à thèse* written by a great poet like Brecht is as true as an exploration of private nightmares like Ionesco's *The Chairs*. And paradoxically some play by Brecht in which the poet's truth has proved stronger than the thesis may be *politically* less effective than that very play by Ionesco, which does attack the absurdities of polite society and bourgeois conversation.

In trying to deal with the ultimates of the human condition not in terms of intellectual understanding but in terms of communicating a metaphysical truth through a living experience, the Theatre of the Absurd touches the religious sphere. There is a vast difference between *knowing* something to be the case in the conceptual sphere and *experiencing* it as a living reality. It is the mark of all great religions that they not only possess a body of knowledge that can be taught in the form of cosmological information or ethical rules but that they also communicate the essence of this body of doctrine in the living, recurring poetic imagery of ritual. It is the loss of the latter sphere, which responds to a deep inner need in all human beings, that the decline of religion has left as a deeply felt deficiency in our civilization. We possess at least an approximation to a coherent philosophy in the scientific method, but we lack the means to make it a living reality, an experienced focus of men's lives. That is why the theatre, a place where men congregate to experience poetic or artistic insights, has in many ways assumed the function of a substitute church. Hence the immense importance placed upon the theatre by totalitarian creeds, which are fully aware of the need to make their doctrines a living, experienced reality to their followers.

The Theatre of the Absurd, paradoxical though this may appear at first sight, can be seen as an attempt to communicate the metaphysical experience behind the scientific attitude and, at the same time, to supplement it by rounding off the partial view of the world it presents, and integrating it in a wider vision of the world and its mystery.

For if the Theatre of the Absurd presents the world as senseless and lacking a unifying principle, it does so merely in the terms of those philosophies that start from the idea that human thought *can* reduce the totality of the universe to a complete, unified, coherent system. It is only from the point of view of those who cannot bear a world where it is impossible to know why it was created, what part man has been assigned in it, and what constitutes right actions and wrong actions, that a picture of the universe lacking all these clear-cut definitions appears deprived of sense and sanity, and tragically absurd. The modern scientific attitude, however, rejects the postulate of a wholly coherent and simplified explanation that must account for all the phenomena, purposes, and moral rules of the world. In concentrating on the slow, painstaking exploration of limited areas of reality by trial and error – by the construction, testing, and discarding of hypotheses – the scientific attitude cheerfully accepts the view that we must be able to live with the realization that large segments of knowledge and experience will remain for a long time, perhaps forever, outside our ken; that ultimate purposes cannot, and never will be, known; and that we must therefore be able to accept the fact that much that earlier metaphysical systems, mythical, religious, or philosophical, sought to explain must forever remain unexplained. From this point of view, any clinging to systems of thought that provide, or purport to provide, complete explanations of the world and man's place in it must appear childish and immature, a flight from reality into illusion and self-deception.

The Theatre of the Absurd expresses the anxiety and despair that spring from the recognition that man is surrounded by

areas of impenetrable darkness, that he can never know his true nature and purpose, and that no one will provide him with ready-made rules of conduct. As Camus says in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

The certainty of the existence of a God who would give meaning to life has a far greater attraction than the knowledge that without him one could do evil without being punished. The choice between these alternatives would not be difficult. But there is no choice, and that is where the bitterness begins.¹

But by facing up to anxiety and despair and the absence of divinely revealed alternatives, anxiety and despair can be overcome. The sense of loss at the disintegration of facile solutions and the disappearance of cherished illusions retains its sting only while the mind still clings to the illusions concerned. Once they are given up, we have to readjust ourselves to the new situation and face reality itself. And because the illusions we suffered from made it more difficult for us to deal with reality, their loss will ultimately be felt as exhilarating. In the words of Democritus that Beckett is fond of quoting, 'Nothing is more real than Nothing.'

To confront the limits of the human condition is not only equivalent to facing up to the philosophical basis of the scientific attitude, it is also a profound mystical experience. It is precisely this experience of the ineffability, the emptiness, the nothingness at the basis of the universe that forms the content of Eastern as well as Christian mystical experience. For if Lao-tzu says, 'It was from the nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang, the named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind',² St John of the Cross speaks of the soul's intuition 'that it cannot comprehend God at all',³ and Meister Eckhart expresses the same experience in the words,

1. *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p. 94.

2. Lao-tzu, quoted in Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), p. 33.

3. St John of the Cross, quoted in Huxley, op. cit.

'The Godhead is poor, naked, and empty, as though it were not; it has not, wills not, wants not, works not, gets not. . . . The Godhead is as void as though it were not.'¹ In other words, in facing man's inability ever to comprehend the meaning of the universe, in recognizing the Godhead's total transcendence, his total otherness from all we can understand with our senses, the great mystics experienced a sense of exhilaration and liberation. This exhilaration also springs from the recognition that the language and logic of cognitive thought cannot do justice to the ultimate nature of reality. Hence a profoundly mystical philosophy like Zen Buddhism bases itself on the rejection of conceptual thinking itself:

The denying of reality is the asserting of it,
And the asserting of emptiness is the denying of it.²

The recent rise of interest in Zen in Western countries is an expression of the same tendencies that explain the success of the Theatre of the Absurd – a preoccupation with ultimate realities and a recognition that they are not approachable through conceptual thought alone. Ionesco has been quoted as drawing a parallel between the method of the Zen Buddhists and the Theatre of the Absurd,³ and in fact the teaching methods of the Zen masters, their use of kicks and blows in reply to questions about the nature of enlightenment and their setting of nonsense problems, closely resemble some of the procedures of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Seen from this angle the dethronement of language and logic forms part of an essentially mystical attitude toward the basis of reality as being too complex and at the same time too unified, too much of one piece, to be validly expressed by the analytical means of orderly syntax and conceptual thought. As

1. Meister Eckhart, quoted in Huxley, op. cit.

2. Seng-t'san, 'On believing in mind', quoted in Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (London: Rider, 1950), p. 77.

3. Ionesco, quoted in Towarnicki, *Spectacles*, Paris, no. 2, July 1958.

the mystics resort to poetic images, so does the Theatre of the Absurd. But if the Theatre of the Absurd presents analogies with the methods and imagery of mysticism, how can it, at the same time, be regarded as expressing the scepticism, the humble refusal to provide an explanation of absolutes, that characterize the scientific attitude?

The answer is simply that there is no contradiction between recognizing the limitations of man's ability to comprehend all of reality in a single system of values and recognizing the mysterious and ineffable oneness, beyond all rational comprehension, that, once experienced, gives serenity of mind and the strength to face the human condition. These are in fact two sides of the same medal – the mystical experience of the absolute otherness and ineffability of ultimate reality is the religious, poetic counterpart to the rational recognition of the limitation of man's senses and intellect, which reduces him to exploring the world slowly by trial and error. Both these attitudes are in basic contradiction to systems of thought, religious or ideological (e.g. Marxism), that claim to provide complete answers to all questions of ultimate purpose and day-to-day conduct.

The realization that thinking in poetic images has its validity side by side with conceptual thought and the insistence on a clear recognition of the function and possibilities of each mode does not amount to a return to irrationalism; on the contrary, it opens the way to a truly rational attitude.

Ultimately, a phenomenon like the Theatre of the Absurd does not reflect despair or a return to dark irrational forces but expresses modern man's endeavour to come to terms with the world in which he lives. It attempts to make him face up to the human condition as it really is, to free him from illusions that are bound to cause constant maladjustment and disappointment. There are enormous pressures in our world that seek to induce mankind to bear the loss of faith and moral certainties by being drugged into oblivion – by mass entertainments, shallow material satisfactions, pseudo-explanations of reality,

and cheap ideologies. At the end of that road lies Huxley's Brave New World of senseless euphoric automata. Today, when death and old age are increasingly concealed behind euphemisms and comforting baby talk, and life is threatened with being smothered in the mass consumption of hypnotic mechanized vulgarity, the need to confront man with the reality of his situation is greater than ever. For the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions – and to laugh at it.

That is the cause to which, in their various individual, modest, and quixotic ways, the dramatists of the Absurd are dedicated.