FORM IN MODERN DRAMA:
A THEORY OF STRUCTURE

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Whatever else may be argued about, or debated, or disagreed upon by critics of the arts, it may at least be said that when we talk about art, we are talking about questions of "reality" and "illusion", "content" and "form". After this has been said, however, the problem of definitions of terms and concepts immediately arises. Of necessity, the lack of a precise vocabulary requires that the critic establish his own terminology and explain the hypotheses from which he intends to begin his inquiry. That is the purpose of the Introductory chapter of this paper. In that chapter, I have attempted to propose a particular philosophical/aesthetical set of definitions, in order to create one possible framework of reference within which to discuss the nature of reality and illusion in the theatre. And that chapter itself is the real preface to this thesis.

The basis of the argument which follows in the subsequent chapters rests upon the hypothesis that in theatre, perhaps more than in any other art form, the problem of the nature and location of reality and illusion is unavoidably complex, because the reality and the illusion are so unavoidably in open conflict. This is largely due to the fact that the element of imitation, an aspect of all art, is more blatantly and confusingly obvious in the theatre than in the other arts. The result has been that through the long history of dramatic representation, widely differing concepts have arisen about the relation between the "reality" behind the artistic vision being presented, the "story" being portrayed, the characters who tell
that story, the actors acting those characters, and the audience, who directly watch those actors acting those characters portraying that drama through the mechanisms and techniques of the theatre. And numerous theories have arisen to explain these differing ideas.

However, what does initially emerge from studying the development of theatre is that, at its source, it was based on a quite clear-cut and consistent relation between these various elements; and this particular balance, along with the important social and/or religious function of theatre, was contained and expressed through the total structure of a play. In general, the "content" of the play was myth, and its "form" became one of ritual re-enactment of that myth. The relation between audience, actor, and myth was not dissimilar to that of a church congregation to a minister or priest who performs a ritual based on a religious body of belief. And it is within this particular juxtaposition that the relative position of reality and illusion may be defined. These ideas I have examined in Chapter II, in terms of the similarities evident in the rise of three different theatres: that of Greek tragedy; the No theatre of Japan; and the theatre of Medieval England.

With the beginnings of the modern theatre at the end of the last century, a concept altogether different became the basis of the dramatic illusion. This began in the realism and naturalism of Ibsen and Strindberg (the latter of whom followed the theories of Zola), who undertook the difficult task of rejecting the "well-made" play which had long been in vogue, and forging new forms. But realism and naturalism in the theatre soon developed into two other distinct phases: that of impressionism and expressionism. These latter forms
in drama coincided, to some extent, with the concurrent developments in music and painting; but they are also a reflection of the limitations of realistic drama itself, and may be seen as a more or less predictable outgrowth from realism, as a rejection of those limitations. Dramatic realism and naturalism attempted to undercut the essential, and historical, discrepancy between reality and illusion as they had originally existed in the theatre; and with the movement into impressionism and expressionism, which finally led to Absurdist theatre and the wildly innovative structures of playwrights such as Ionesco and Genet, theatre steadily moved away from realism, back to the origins of its growth.

It was in the plays of Pirandello that all of the theoretical, philosophical and technical problems inherent in theatrical representation were openly explored. Out of his theatre, which radically influenced other dramatists then and since, there grew a theatre which became very aware of itself as theatre. Impressionistic, expressionistic, and realistic techniques were still used and developed, but more and more, they were contained within structures which could express a modern temperament and at the same time re-establish drama along the lines of the classical relation between theatrical reality and illusion. There was a major problem, however, which centered around the absence of a body of community belief—either mythical, religious, political or moral—which might serve as the "content" upon which to construct the new ritual.

Recent dramatists have created numerous dramatic structures to compensate for this absence, while at the same time expressing a prevailing existentialism. This endeavor is all the more remarkable
in that these same dramatists, while working with non-socially-orientated, even iconoclastic, ideas, also work toward creating a theatre which will hold the same social function it held in the days when going to the theatre was an activity performed by the community, paying witness to its beliefs. These various new dramatic structures embrace a wide range of techniques: from basically realistic frameworks to the constructs of pure fantasy, dream and nightmare. But they have a common denominator: they attempt to create a new theatre of ritual and ceremony by expressing contemporary ideas through a combination of contemporary technique—from Ibsen on down the line—with classical techniques.

One feels that the dramatists who began this work—Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Maeterlinck, and others—were in some way aware of the problems involved; and in various ways, some more successful than others, they expressed this awareness in their plays. But it was after Pirandello had cleared the ground by stating the problems, that modern drama began to take rapid, innovative leaps in unanticipated directions. Pirandello expressed the conflict between reality and illusion; some dramatists following him then saw their way clear to move out of reality altogether, by moving completely into art. And often they did this by recreating what they understood to be the classical concept of the dramatic illusion.

It is this development which I have traced in the remaining chapters of this paper. Chapters III, IV, and V deal respectively with Realism, Impressionism and Expressionism; Chapter VI with Pirandello, and Chapter VII with the return to a theatre of ceremony and ritual. My primary concern throughout is to attempt to
suggest what seem to me to be the artistic, philosophic and aesthetic ideas contained within these various approaches, rather than to make long and detailed analyses of individual plays. It is for this reason that I have spent a considerable number of pages in Chapter I explaining the premises from which I begin. I have tried to work from the direction of the dramatists themselves, to explore, in so far as possible, the perspectives of their approach: how they may have conceived their role as dramatist, and the problems with which they saw themselves confronted. Some, given the terms within which they were working, seem to me to have solved their problems; others, from the perspective of what I try to explain as my idea of the essential concept of dramatic representation, appear to me to be less successful. But whether the plays of any of these dramatists ultimately work for an audience, will still remain a decision for the individual reader and spectator.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In his essay "Concepts of Form and Structure in Twentieth-Century Criticism", René Wellek concludes by way of describing two movements: "Russian Formalism", and the "structuralism" of a now-defunct group, the Prague Linguistic Circle. Of the first, Wellek explains that

The Russian Formalists argued in a context of revolt against the ideological criticism around them, against the idea of "form" as a mere container into which ready-made "content" is poured. They argued, like many critics before and after, for the inextricable unity of form and content . . . Content implies some element of form. The events told in a novel, for instance, are parts of the content while the way they are arranged into a plot is presumably part of the form. Dissociated from this way of arrangement, they have, however, no artistic effect whatsoever.¹

Of the Prague Linguistic Circle, which developed a modified version of Russian Formalism, Wellek says that this group named their doctrine "structuralism" rather than "formalism" because they felt that the term 'structure' (which must not be misinterpreted as referring to anything purely architectural) does more justice to the totality of the work of art and is less weighed down by suggestions of externality than 'form'. They saw that 'form' cannot be studied merely as a sum of devices and that it is not purely alesucous, or even purely linguistic inasmuch as it projects a 'world' of motifs, themes, characters, and plots."²

2. Wellek, Ibid., p. 67.
Both of these approaches obviously follow from the long-established tradition of arguing that form and content are more or less one and the same thing, and that to try to discuss them separately is, at worst, a violation both of art and of the function of criticism, and at best, a waste of time. Yet, as Wellek points out, both of the above concepts move beyond the narrow confines of a strictly "formalistic" viewpoint—beyond, for example, Croce’s idea of form as "expression-intuition", or Valéry’s idea that in perfect art (i.e., poetry alone), content should disappear and only form remain. Russian Formalism and structuralism begin to move beyond this, by implying an attempt to see form not as inseparable from content, nor divorced from it, but as the "sum of relations between elements".

The danger of concentrating on a "formal" approach to art is that the critic may sacrifice reference to anything at all outside of the individual work itself. Hence, there will be no relation to tradition, society or culture; the critic will risk seeing the work as a very private, dissociated expression, and the result may be a very private interpretation. Various critical movements have developed to counteract this tendency—primarily, the particular "schools" which, at the furthest end, analyze the work of art as being the product of literary tradition, history, sociology or psychology. Wellek, in another essay, "The Main Trends of Twentieth-Century Criticism", singles out six of these approaches: Marxist; psychoanalytic; linguistic and stylistic; organ- istic formalism; existential; and myth criticism. He points to the last one, myth criticism, as being the most prominent today. Of it he says that it "developed from cultural anthropology and the Jungian

3. Wellek, Ibid., pp. 56, 57.
4. Ibid., p.67.
version of the subconscious as collective reservoir for the 'archetypal patterns', and primordial images of mankind. This too, however, has its limitations: "The dangers of the method are obvious: the boundary lines between art and myth and even art and religion are obliterated. An irrationalistic mysticism reduces all poetry to a conveyor of a few myths: rebirth and purification. After decoding each work of art in these terms, one is left with a feeling of futility and monotony."6

What I am going to attempt to do in this paper is to balance a loosely "formalistic" approach against a mythical approach. Or, more accurately, to include the former within the larger context of the latter. I intend, however, to use a formalistic concept in a particular way: to adopt the term "structure" to apply to a specific work of art, and reserve the word "form" for speaking about a broader philosophical idea, in the sense of the "forms" or "archetypes" of reality. These are static, unchanging, and ultimately unknowable essences of things which transcend man's finite, temporal understanding. But, it is into the finite work of art that a man puts his vision of this ultimate and eternal truth. "A work of art", Ionesco said, "is the expression of an incommunicable reality that one tries to communicate—and which sometimes can be communicated. That is its paradox, and its truth."7 It would seem, then, that if art is generally understood to be a particular manner of representing this vision, then we are justified in asking: What manner? Into what

5. Wells, Ibid., p. 360.
6. Ibid., p. 361.
artistic structures are the intuitions of the forms of reality cast, and why?

My use of a basically "mythical" approach is not the result of an arbitrary alliance with a particular school of criticism, nor an emphasis on one critical method at the expense of others. Rather, it emerged as one way of trying to elucidate the apparent obscurities in much modern drama—obscurities which are far more often "structural" than they are evidences of highly idiosyncratic views of reality. I use "myth" in a specific sense, and a much broader one than that which Wellek defines. By the term "myth" I mean all the basic age-old truths, or concepts of experience and the meanings underlying them, which we recognize as undeniable and unchanging aspects of man's nature, the irreducible elements of his relation to the universe.

Thus, my idea of myth includes the ultimate psychological relationships within the individual and between the individual and the universe.

Jung describes the inevitable psychological basis of mythology in this way:

The mind of the primitive is little concerned with an objective explanation of obvious things, but has an imperative need or, rather, its unconscious psyche has an irresistible urge to assimilate all experience through the outer senses into inner, psychic happening. The primitive is not content to see the sun rise and set; this external observation must at the same time be a psychic event—that is, the sun in its course must represent the fate of a god or hero who dwells, in the last analysis, nowhere else than in the psyche of man.

All the mythologized occurrence of nature, such as summer and winter, the phases of the moon, the rainy seasons, and so forth, are... symbolic expressions for the inner and unconscious psychic drama that becomes accessible to human consciousness by way of projection—that is, mirrored in the events of nature.

Throughout history, I would argue, man's questions, and the answers he has tried to find for them, have been basically the same. His manner of asking those questions—the perspectives of his approach and the tools of his trade, so to speak—have been very different. But ultimately, the impetus in each case stems from the same basic needs. Aldous Huxley, in his book Literature and Science (1963), indicates the way in which these two areas of human activity differ in their basic aims; but from the following passage, which I quote at length, it is clear how closely linked are their final concerns with "reality":

The physical sciences started to make progress when investigators shifted their attention from qualities to quantities, from the appearances of things perceived as wholes to their fine structures; from the phenomena presented to consciousness by the senses to their invisible and intangible components, whose existence could only be inferred by analytical reason. The physical sciences are 'nomothetic'; they seek to establish explanatory laws, and these laws are most useful and enlightening when they deal with relationships between invisibles and intangibles underlying appearances. These invisibles and intangibles cannot be described, for they are not objects of immediate experience; they are known only by inferences drawn from immediate experiences on the level of ordinary appearance. Literature is not 'nomothetic', but 'idiographic'; its concern is not with regularities and explanatory laws, but with descriptions of appearances and the discerned qualities of objects perceived as wholes, with judgments, comparisons and discriminations, with 'inscapes' and essences, and finally with the 'tactic' of things, the Not-thought in thoughts, the timeless Suchness in an infinity of perpetual perishings and perpetual renewals.

The world with which literature deals is the world into which human beings are born and live and finally die; the world . . . of innate differences and the rules, the roles, the solemn or absurd rituals imposed by the prevailing culture . . . The man of letters, when he is being most distinctively literary, accepts the uniqueness of events, accepts the diversity and manifoldness of the world, accepts the radical incomprehensibility, on its own level, of raw, unconceptualized
existence and finally accepts the challenge which uniqueness, multifariousness and mystery flings in his face and, having accepted it, addresses himself to the paradoxical task of rendering the randomness and shapelessness of individual existence in highly organized and meaningful works of art.

Thus, although the scientist and the literary artist start from different points, they are both concerned with the "invisibles and intangibles underlying appearances." And, following from Jung's suggestions, one may see the maker of mythologies—be he primitive or highly civilized—as involved in the same process of finding and/or creating explanations and representations (images) for the "timeless Suchness" of infinite reality. It is the structures through which man communicates his vision of reality in the shared illusion of art which have changed. The truths to be known do not change, but the means of apprehending them do. It is this kind of distinction which I would make between "form" and "content": Content as the experience, the myth, the shared body of belief, the tradition, the truths; form as the illusion, the ritual, the method of representing the belief, the particular expression within the tradition, within time, of an artist's vision of truth and reality. This may be seen as what might be called an historical division between form and content, rather than a division which concentrates on the individual work of art. It is more or less concerned with the artistic process, the way in which the internal is made external, the static, active.

In the following diagram, I will try to suggest and explain an hypothesis for representing two simultaneous processes: 1) the manner in which the internal and static (everything related to what I loosely call the "forms of reality" or Huxley's "Istigkeit of things"

or "timeless Suchness") is made external and active; and 2) the way in which the artist casts his vision of the internal static reality into an external work of art. It is simply one way of relating philosophical concepts about the nature of appearances and reality in the world to aesthetical concepts about the nature of illusion and reality in art. And this, as we shall see, is particularly relevant to dramatic representation, which is unavoidably preoccupied with the essence of reality and illusion on all levels.

I. **INTERNAL/STATIC** becomes, or is **EXTERNAL/ACTIVE**

manifested through

- reality \(\rightarrow\) appearance
- content \(\rightarrow\) form
- unconscious \(\rightarrow\) conscious
- archetype \(\rightarrow\) myth
- myth \(\rightarrow\) ritual
- structure of feeling \(\rightarrow\) rhythm of action

II. structures of the universe \(\rightarrow\) reflect \(\rightarrow\) structures of the mind

- structures of the mind (imagination) \(\rightarrow\) which reveals \(\rightarrow\) structures (forms) of reality

create art

hence

art (illusion) \(\rightarrow\) reveals \(\rightarrow\) reality

This is not as schematic as it might appear in diagrammatic form; the fact that reality and illusion end by changing places indicates the close connection between the two sides. The division is justified in this sense: "If art is a perfect illusion of reality, then it is
not reality; indeed, the more perfect the illusion, the more removed from reality it is. At the same time, if art is perfect reality, it identifies itself with the living actual reality, and it is no longer art."¹⁰ Let us accept as the basis of our argument this traditional separation of reality and illusion. The diagram, then, would be explained in this way: all of the elements on the left-hand side might be understood to be the Platonic forms, the quintessence of reality, music of the spheres, the collective unconscious—in other words, all of the philosophical/psychological/mythical concepts which have arisen to designate infinite reality, knowledge of which lies beyond man’s finite mind. On the right-hand side are all the temporal representations or expressions of "reality". Each pair follows from the one before, by being a further particularization. Let us take the top pair first: reality/appearance. This is the basic, timeless reality which is revealed to man only through appearance—sense perceptions—since things in the world are only particularized active embodiments of ideal static forms. To use Huxley’s language, the "timeless Suchness" or reality is made known to us in a world which is "an infinity of perpetual perishings and perpetual renewals". The Platonist would describe this relationship in terms of this particular tree being only an imperfect concrete appearance (or manifestation) of the Idea of Tree; and the way in which I see it will differ from the way in which my neighbour sees it. The religious believer might explain it by saying that perfection, eternal static reality, exists only in the mind of God, the Unmoved Mover, who sets into action the world, His creation, which is built upon the principle of continual change. The psychoanalytic critic

might say that all the appearances of the world are the raw material with which man must work, but he lives among them by ordering them into some kind of system which will transcend the daily chaos of change. This ordering process will take place, in Jung's terminology, on three levels: the conscious, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious. The "projections" of the primitive are not essentially different from the sophisticated creations of modern art; and both are part of the same, and continuing need for symbolic expression. Finally, this ultimate reality, however one may define it, will be depicted in the illusion of the work of art.

The second pair in the diagram—content/form—is simply a more specific way of describing the reality/appearance relationship. I would make a distinction between "content" and "Content", the first being all the things in the world—cabbages and kings—and the second being the sum total of all of them. We may say, for example, that there is an idea of "table" which transcends any particular example of it; when the word is used, it is this idea which comes to mind, rather than the mental picture of a certain table. Similarly, with abstract ideas, such as love, duty, peace, etc.; these are concepts which are meaningless without concrete forms, but their meanings transcend any particular manifestations.

By analogy, then, in the same way that our ideas of things transcend the things themselves, so does the "Content of the world transcend the sum of all its contents. This is just a way of saying, for example, that a Platonic Idea is made manifest by having a form in the world. Similarly, the Christian would say that the Spirit of God entered the world in the form of a man, Christ; and also, that all men are imperfect
fleshly expressions of the Love of God. But God, or the Idea, lie beyond our understanding, transcending everything that may be said about them. Reality or Content, we may say, is the sum (or greater than the sum) of all the parts of content; and because man can know only an infinitesimal part of the content of the Universe, he cannot know reality. The Content of the world is revealed to man in forms—the physical forms of all nature and all that man has made from her, and the spiritual forms of his own imagination and that of other men. Man takes aspects of the content of which he is aware and synthesizes them into new forms. The artist takes his concepts or vision of the reality underlying the world's appearances, and casts them into the shared illusion of art. This is the process of drawing from one's insights into the internal essence of reality and revealing them through an active process of creation, in an external, particularised form.

In the third pair—unconscious and conscious—we are dealing with a less easily-definable relationship, yet one which can hardly be ignored. For the sake of this argument, I would like to follow from some of Jung's suggestions about the nature of the unconscious, in order to give us a language with which to work, while hoping to avoid any suggestion that Jungian psychology is the only approach acceptable. In the same way that we create a distinction between the "content" of the world, and the transcending "Content" or reality underlying it, so we may see a separation between the unconscious mind of the individual man, and the unconscious mind which we hypothesize to be similar in most men. The latter would include our ideas about fundamental emotional needs and reactions—love, hate, jealousy, etc. It would
also be the source of the age-old impulses in men toward making myths, creating objects for religious worship, and expressing beliefs and feelings in rituals, all of which transcend precise definition and which take on, or are given, a life and significance of their own, independent of the men or cultures which originally created them. Jung points out a definitive separation between these two levels of the unconscious:

A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the personal unconscious. Yet this personal unconscious appears to rest upon a deeper layer that does not derive from personal experience and achievement but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the collective unconscious. I have chosen the term "collective" because this part of the unconscious is not individual, but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. The collective unconscious, so far as we know, is self-identical in all Western men and thus constitutes a psychic foundation, superpersonal in its nature, that is present in every one of us.11

It is in this sense that I link the unconscious, with its "contents and modes of behaviour" which are "universal" to the Content of reality. If we accept these ideas (which, as Wellek pointed out, are the basis for a "mythical" approach to literature), we may say that, in terms of art, the relationships which exist in the unconscious mind are made manifest through the conscious process of artistic creation. Out of the collective unconscious, then, are forged conscious relationships by which man expresses the unconscious relationships. Within the unconscious mind exist the archetypes of man's perceptions of reality. These have become, or given rise to,

the myths and symbols, which have become the forms of man's perceptions of the content of reality. Another quote from Jung, following directly from the above quotation, explains his use of the word "archetype", the way in which we apprehend the unconscious through the conscious, and this process between the unconscious becoming "conscious formulas" to express archetypal structures:

Any kind of psychic existence can be recognized only by the presence of contents that can be made sufficiently conscious for recognition. We can, therefore, speak of an unconscious only in so far as we are able to point out its contents. The contents of the personal unconscious constitute the personal and private side of psychic life. They are chiefly the so-called feeling-toned complexes. The contents of the collective unconscious, on the other hand, are the so-called archetypes.

The term "archetype" derives from St. Augustine. The term is an explanatory paraphrase of the Platonic Eidos. For our purpose this designation is appropriate and helpful, for it tells us that with the collective unconscious contents we are dealing with ancient or, better yet, with primordial types—that is to say, with images impressed upon the mind since of old. The phrase représentations collectives, which Lévy-Bruhl uses to denote the symbolic figures of the primitive view of the world, could easily be applied to the unconscious content as well, since we are actually dealing with the same thing. Primitive tribal lore treats of archetypes that are modified in a particular way. To be sure, these archetypes are no longer contents of the unconscious, but have already changed into conscious formulas that are taught according to tradition, generally in the form of esoteric teaching.

Another well-known expression of the archetype is myth and fable. But here also we are dealing with conscious and specifically moulded forms that have been handed on, relatively unchanged, through long periods of time. It is thus only indirectly that the concept of the archetype fits the représentations collectives, for it properly designates the psychic content that has as yet been subjected to no conscious treatment and so represents an immediate, psychic actuality.

Properly speaking, then, "archetypes" are a part of the Content of reality, and myths are the expression of an apprehension of that reality. The place of myth and fable, however, is ambivalent; for while they may be seen as a conscious creation, in the sense of being an artistic form which, therefore, falls on the right-hand side of our diagram, they eventually move back into the category of the archetypes themselves, which gave rise to them. In other words, we saw how Jung explains the way in which the primitive man mythologized events in nature as a means for making "symbolic expressions for the inner and unconscious psychic drama that becomes accessible to human consciousness by way of projection". These mythologies thus arose to satisfy archetypal needs of the unconscious. Therefore, myths, like the archetypes themselves, transcend particular temporal expressions of those myths, because they are rooted in the unconscious and they are ascribed with universal meaning. Myths, or what Jung speaks of as the consciously-defined formulae of archetypes, may, therefore, arise as specific representations of belief at a particular moment in a particular culture; but they ultimately supercede the moment and the culture and are reabsorbed into their origins. They remain as universal truths, part of the static body of belief, part of the Content of reality, for their effect upon us is such that they elicit a response and affirmation from us which go beyond any explanation we can give of their "meaning". They appeal to us not on a temporal level, but on an eternal level—the part of man which has some sense—perhaps basically unconscious—of eternity. Knowledge of the origins of such myths may be forgotten entirely, but the myths persist, because they take on an eternal life and reality of their own. And this is due to the fact that they continue to fulfil archetypal needs in mankind.
This idea of myth, then—what I have broadly designated as a shared body of belief (even though the sharing and the beliefs may be unconscious)—is given an active form through ritual. Our fourth pair in the diagram—archetype becoming myth—thus becomes, in the fifth pair, myth being given a form in ritual. We discover and express and reaffirm a transcending belief about reality by being witness to a particular, formal re-enactment of that belief, which becomes ritual through repetition. This is the function of the religious service of worship. The Christian, for example, who participates in the ritual of Communion is actively affirming his belief in the unchanging timeless truth of bread and wine symbolizing the body and blood of Christ, who Himself, is the symbolic representation of Incarnation and Sacrifice. Through Communion (ritual), he apprehends Christian belief (myth) through which, in turn, he approaches God (ultimate Reality). In the same way, passive witnessing (such as that of the Greek Chorus, or T. S. Eliot’s Women of Canterbury) becomes active (e.g. in several of Genet’s plays) through participation in ritual re-enactment.

Archetype, myth and symbol express what may be called "structures of feeling". Raymond Williams, in his book Modern Tragedy, uses this expression as a way of describing a relationship of beliefs at a particular point in history. For instance, he gives an example of this idea of structure of feeling, and its relation specifically to myth, when he speaks about Greek tragedy and the culture which produced it:

... it is a culture marked by an extraordinary network of beliefs connected to institutions, practices and feelings, but not by the systematic and abstract doctrines we would now call a theology or a tragic philosophy. The deepest enquiries and modes of understanding run back, continually, into particular myths, and this quality is of critical importance in understanding the nature of the art. For it is the nature of myth that it resists anterior explanation ...
What is least imitable, in Greek tragedy, is the most unique result of this process: a particular dramatic form. And this is not an isolable aesthetic or technical achievement: it is deeply rooted in a precise structure of feeling. This is where the modern system most clearly misinterprets the plays. Having abstracted a general Necessity, it sets within and against it suffering individuals, summed up as the tragic hero. The mainspring of the action is then seen as the isolation of this hero. But, uniquely, this is a choral tragedy. The specific and varying relations between chorus and actors are its true dramatic relations. The real action is the known and grievous history of particular ruling families, which have a representative general importance in the shared substance of myth. The dramatic form embodies, in a unique way, both the history and the presence, the myth and response to the myth. The known history is enacted by the three masked actors, who have separated out from the chorus but, as their sharing of roles and their formal relations with the chorus make clear, not separated out altogether. What the form then embodies is not an isolable metaphysical stance, rooted in individual experience, but a shared and indeed collective experience, at once and indistinguishably metaphysical and social... It is no accident that as this unique culture changed, the chorus was the crucial element of dramatic form which was weakened and eventually discarded. The structure of feeling which, in the great period, had developed and sustained it as the dramatised tension and resolution of collective and individual experience, weakened and was lost, and with it a unique meaning of tragedy.13

Williams says at another point that concepts of tragedy will vary according to the current concepts of structures of reality. Structures of feeling will be an expression of those current concepts. In the broad sense, one might define "structures of feeling" as being the result of the tempering of the body of mythical belief by the contemporary historical/political/religious etc., relationship.

The second part of the diagram consists simply of the conclusions reached from following through the pattern of relationships depicted in the first part. It rests, however, upon an hypothesis which, while

it is a useful concept about the nature of artistic vision, need not be considered as ultimately or categorically "true". Ionesco says in one of his essays: "I do not believe there is any contradiction between creation and knowledge, for mental structures are probably a reflection of the structure of the universe."\(^{14}\) Also, from an artistic standpoint, he says that:

> We seem no longer to realise that a world we invent cannot be false. It can only be false if I want to fabricate a truth and imitate truth, for in so doing I fabricate a false truth. I am conscious of being true when I invent and imagine. Nothing is clearer or more 'logical' than something constructed by the imagination. I could even go so far as to say that to me it is the world that seems irrational, that is growing irrational and baffles my understanding. The laws to which I try continually to adapt and submit it, I find in my own mind.\(^{15}\)

One need not go all the way with Ionesco in saying, definitively, that all mental structures are reflections of universal structures. But, what he says about creation and knowledge is indicative of the way in which man relates to the universe. Whether or not infinite reality and the finite mind of man have analogous structures, it nevertheless remains true that man's ideas and visions about reality will stem from his own mind. Visions, ideas about reality, or works of art may be ultimately false; that we cannot know. But they cannot be temporally false (in so far as they are inherently meaningful as works of art). We may say, then, that structures of the universe reflect structures of the mind. A philosophical example of this relationship is the old question about whether God created man or man


\(^{15}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 47.
created God. The statement has often been made that, if there were no God, man would have to invent one. This indicates exactly the fact that man has certain psychological needs (whether we call them in this instance conscious, personally-unconscious, or collectively-unconscious) for an object of worship. So, in the end, it doesn't really matter which one created the other, for either idea comes down to the fact that man will eventually create the structures he needs, or create a belief in what he affirms to be pre-existent structures; and it is through the creating and the structures that he "knows" the universe.

Now, structures of the mind (the imagination) create art, through which the artist attempts to reveal the structures of reality. Thus, art, the shared illusion, gives us an insight into reality; and the end of the whole process is that we are on the exact opposite side of the fence from that on which we began: that reality is made manifest through appearance/illusion. This is surely at least one of the movements, one of the processes of becoming, of which Eliot is speaking in "East Coker":

I shall say it again.
Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,
To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not.

If we look at the first part of the diagram especially from the viewpoint of artistic creation, we may see relationships analogous to the philosophical concepts about reality/illusion, content/form,
and unconscious/conscious. Through creation we gain knowledge—knowledge of the very essence and impulse behind the creation itself (both of things in the world, and of the work of art itself). Through the making of illusions, we gain insights into the reality which can only reveal itself through other illusions. Every genuine work of art is unique by virtue of the form of the illusion it creates to reflect, in a particular moment in time, the unchanging, internal, transcending forms of the unconscious—the archetypes of the content of reality. The underlying reality, we hypothesize, does not change; but as the forms change, so do the interpretations of that reality.

Hence, when we move from Monet to Picasso, we are not saying that ultimate reality or Content is changing, but rather, that the way in which we see the particular content of the world of things is changing; and we approach a vision of ultimate reality through a modulated context of meanings, or, if you like, a different structure of feeling. Impressionism and cubism are not contradictory or mutually exclusive artistic expressions; they are different hypotheses about the meaning of reality. Eric Bentley says at one point that "Form and meaning not being independent, new form implies new meaning too."16 This may be explained to indicate not that reality changes but that concepts of the meaning of it change, in the sense, for example, of asking the question: What does "water" mean? Or, What does the colour orange "mean"? Or, as Tuseinbach says in Chekhov's Three Sisters: "Meaning... Here it is snowing. What meaning is there in that?" (Act II). These are the kind of questions which are verbally nonsensical and are only asked implicitly and can only be tentatively "answered" indirectly—i.e.,

symbolically—through different artistic forms, in so far as all art is symbolic.

T. S. Eliot, in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", suggests the way in which the continuing creation of forms results in a body of illusions which is constantly changing, but always has an inherent order within itself. He says that

what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. 17

This order of relationships between the shared illusions which are works of art, may be seen to be analogous to the order of relationships we perceive between the appearances in the world. Consequently, something more than just what Eliot describes may be seen to happen when the new work of art arrives. Because the work of art is an illusion, it adds to the total body of appearances in the world, and hence adds to our ideas about reality. Thus, in the same way that the existing order among art works is affected by the introduction of the new work, so is our knowledge of the structures of reality (i.e., the structure of appearances by which we know reality) modified. The artist, seeing a vision of reality, creates a new illusion, and the result is

that the whole structure (of all art works and of all illusion and appearance, simultaneously) is affected. For the artist, apprehending the world of appearances involves a penetration of the conventions and traditions of art as well. As Northrup Frye points out: "The possession of originality cannot make an artist unconventional; it drives him further into convention, obeying the law of the art itself, which seeks constantly to reshape itself from its own depths, and which works through its geniuses for metamorphosis, as it works through minor talents for mutation." With the addition of a new work of art, the content of reality is increased by one. There is, then, an intimate reciprocal relationship, which is constantly changing, between reality, illusion, content, and form.

One can see here a partial explanation for why artists sometimes attack and renounce their immediate predecessors, and why, too, they are so often concerned with stripping away illusions. For it is by the structure of illusions and appearances in the world that we attempt to apprehend reality; and if an artist sees a previous artist as having contributed a false illusion, or a narrow, limited illusion which yet pretended to allow for the totality of human experience, the new artist will reject what has recently been added to the body of illusions, and forge a new form. He will call this a stripping away of illusions—which it rightly is, in the sense of being part of the continuing attempt by artists to make the structure of all our illusions adhere more closely to the particular artist's vision of the structure of reality.

The analogous relationship between reality/illusion and content/form extends to unconscious/conscious. Obviously, as the addition of new forms continually modifies the structure of appearances, our conscious awareness of external relationships will be similarly modified. For example, the world of industry, or the world of Picasso, is viewed differently from the pre-industrial, pre-Picasso world. In regard to the unconscious, we have seen how it may be argued that the unconscious is composed of ultimate relationships in the same way as is reality itself—relationships which we can only hypothesize through symbolic representation. Let us concede for the sake of argument that this is so, and, as was suggested earlier, that the unconscious is related to the static, internal and eternal structures of reality, i.e., the left-hand side of the diagram. But, in the same way that the creation of form and the addition to illusions modify the whole existing order of art and concepts of reality, so also does conscious experience continually modify subconscious relationships. It is believed, for example, that dreaming—an activity which every human being engages in every night, even though it may be forgotten the next morning—is the process by which the conscious experience of the day is subconsciously assimilated into the total body of the experience of one's entire life. Hence, we may say that conscious awareness, and forms, and illusions or appearances (the external activities of the right-hand side of the diagram) all emanate from, and result in reinterpretations of the static relationships of the forms of reality (the left-hand side). Enactment, ritual, symbol, witnessing, representation, rhythm of action, are the external structures and patterns by which man expresses his awareness, both conscious and unconscious, of these forms: the archetypes, myths, and structures of feeling.
In a general sense, what has occurred in the recent development of artistic forms of representation has been the result of a growing awareness of the complex relationship between reality and illusion. Early ideas of art kept a comparatively clear-cut distinction between the two; in general, the artist may be seen to have consciously and deliberately created an illusion in order to make some representation of, or statement about, reality. There was no intention of trying to suggest that art was life, and no particular concern, or even necessarily an awareness of, the Pirandellian sort of worry over the inherently paradoxical nature of what the work of art itself is. Where the confusion arose was in the concepts about the appearances in the world, when objectively-accepted ideas about relationships between things in the world were challenged by the increasing knowledge about the subjective nature of experience and interpretation. In the growth of modern art (in the post-Darwin, post-Freud generations) there has been a breakdown in traditional divisions between the created illusion (art), appearances in the world, and ultimate reality. In an effort to penetrate further and further into the reality underlying the appearance, the artist uncovered more and more layers of illusion. This is what Ibsen described in Peer Gynt (V, v), when Peer peels the layers from an onion and at the same time strips away all the layers of himself, till at last he realises that there is no kernel: "To the innermost bit it's nothing but layers, smaller and smaller. Nature's a joker!"

Raymond Williams describes the point we have reached in some modern theatre: an awareness that the most restricting illusion of all has become the inescapable fact of the artist's own creation; in other words, his realization that he is creating an illusion:
Illusion has often been used as an element of dramatic action, and the nature of art has always been a willing and shared illusion, which is made real. But what we have now reached, in some notable work, is a wholly illusory action, or an action attempting to be so. The illusion is not a means to reality, but an expression of illusion itself. Then the work itself protests, the artist protests, against those conditions of its expression by which it threatens to become real. Traditional procedures can be rejected on this ground alone. The credibility of successful illusion is itself menacing. Art must not aspire, even in its own mode, to any false reality which might disturb or shatter the experience of total illusion. The ordinary tension of expression is seen as damnable, Art must be anti-art, the novel must be anti-novel, the theatre must be anti-theatre, for this compelling reason. The most dangerous thing about any utterance, in this movement, is that it creates the possibility of communication, which is already known to be an illusion. The total condition of life, when seen in this way, leaves no theoretical basis for art, except its existence, which yet, ironically, has at some point to be willed. Then the very will to art has itself to be converted into bad faith. The creative process has to be separated from will and, at its extreme, from design. A condition of total illusion is thus precariously achieved by a method which must continually turn back on itself and dissolve what it has created. For without this continuous dissolution, the experience itself will be made unreal, by becoming falsely real. It is this development of expression about reality, appearance, and illusion which I want to trace—partially from a chronological perspective, and partially from the viewpoint of the increasing complexity of representation—in order to show how contemporary theatre follows directly, and with a certain inevitability, from the traditions giving rise to it.

Without being too schematic, I think that the original diagram may be expanded to incorporate three major forms of contemporary artistic expression. Such a scheme would not be meant to indicate a rigid pattern of divisions; it would simply function as a way of suggesting that each method of representation is primarily concerned

with a particular concept of creation. In other words, each artist approaches the appearances of the world from the standpoint of a certain perspective; he has a particular idea about where reality lies in relation to appearances and illusions, and consequently a particular concept about how ultimate reality is made manifest in a world of structures of appearance. Of course, here again we are caught in the chicken-egg question of creation and knowledge, as to whether he analogizes a knowledge of external structures to hypothesize the forms of reality; or whether he intuits a vision of reality and then builds his knowledge of perceived structures of appearances in an analogous way. At any rate, we may see how each of the three following methods of artistic creation reflects a preoccupation with one of the processes of "becoming" depicted in one of the pairs.

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| reality   | illusion   | naturalism/realism |
| content   | form       | impressionism     |
| unconscious | conscious | expressionism     |
| archetype | myth       |                   |
| myth      | ritual     | symbol            |
| structure | rhythm     | ceremony of       |
| of feeling| of action  | the theatre       |
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I will go on in the subsequent chapters of this paper to explain and demonstrate the implications of this scheme, and how it applies specifically to drama; but let me at least initially defend it by defining my terms. On the whole, one could say that realism and naturalism both concentrated on observing the world of things and appearances

with scientific objectivity. What was seen was then to be faithfully reproduced in the work of art. In realism, appearances and the reality underlying them have a close proximity; the realist presumably assumed that by holding up a comparatively literal mirror to nature, he would reflect reality by reflecting appearances per se. Hence, reality was to become illusion in the most direct way possible, with little or no interference on the part of the dramatist. The realist artist in general more or less effaced himself in order to create a direct one-to-one relationship: between the appearance of reality and the illusion as work of art; and between work of art and person seeing it.

Impressionism, on the other hand, is an artistic process which concentrates on penetrating into the appearance, on trying to see the "timeless Suchness" of the reality behind, or underlying, the appearance, in order to represent it in a temporal artistic structure. Where realism and naturalism might be seen to be predominantly selective in process—i.e., the choosing of certain events, actions, characters, etc., in order to accurately describe everyday reality (or, virtually, to "imitate" it, in the literal sense), impressionism is the process of transforming what is seen into something else, or, depicting the reality one "sees" below the surface. Another way of describing this difference might be to say that realism/naturalism selects from the continuum of life—the endless flow of events—and is often concerned to show a large spatial development, or the whole intricate composition of simultaneity, in a "slice of life". Impressionism, however, often confines itself to a small subject, caught at a particular moment, in order to transcribe a continuous reality which lies at the heart of the fleeting impression upon the eye, or to convey the active "life" which is con-
tained in a simple object.

Expressionism is an extension, a growth out of, impressionism. It may be seen to originate (in terms of the artist's perspective) not with the impression which things make upon the mind as the eye perceives them, but in the mind itself. What exists in the mind or imagination of the artist determines the way in which he will "see" appearances and the reality underlying them. He more or less imposes the structures of his mind upon reality, by consciously using them as a method of perceiving the structures of reality. Where impressionism moves like this:

appearances ——> perceived and transformed ——> leads to a
by the artist work of art,

expressionism works like this:

the artist's mind ——> interpreting appearances ——> produces a symbolic work of art.

And expressionism will be symbolic, because the artist is aware that both conscious and unconscious associations are interpreting reality; he is consciously delving below the surface of reality not simply to reveal the inner reality of the thing itself (e.g. impressionist painters representing the movement of water), but also to reveal the sub- or unconscious relationships within the thing itself, within the artist's mind, and within this very activity of artistic creation—i.e., the relationship between artist and thing. The representation will be symbolic of necessity, for there would be no other way to represent these relationships.

The ultimate result of this process is the discovery of archetypal relationships. Again, the representation is symbolic;
but, in so far as archetypes are the final reduction, the reaching of irreducible, unchanging relationships which are like mathematical axioms—known but not "understood"—they will be represented not in a personal mythology or set of idiosyncratic symbols, but instead, cast into a specific rhythm and ritual. Ceremony and ritual will transcend a specific symbolic relationship as, for example, the ceremony of Christian Communion, by implying Incarnation and Sacrifice, transcends a simple intellectual comprehension of bread = body, wine = blood.

It is this pattern of relationships—reality/illusion/realism; content/form/impressionism; and unconscious/conscious/expressionism—which I intend to explore in regard to the modern theatre, beginning with Ibsen and Strindberg (although the roots may be seen to go back to Buchner and Hebbel). Following from this development, we may see the way in which Pirandello became a fulcrum point in the development of concepts of reality and illusion, specifically as they apply to the nature of drama. Subsequent dramatists could hardly avoid being influenced by Pirandello's dramatic philosophy and technique; but they reflect this influence in different ways, generally depending upon their own growth from a basically expressionistic, or impressionistic, bias. But the over-all result of the various ways in which dramatic tradition was tempered and reinterpreted after the example of Pirandello, was a general return of theatre to its archaic ceremonial and ritualistic basis. More and more frequently, dramatists seem to be attempting to give to drama the kind of role and function it originally had when, at various points, it began to develop. We may suggest the nature of this early representation by looking at a few of the first stages of its
growth: the rise of Greek theatre; the Japanese No theatre; and the drama of Medieval England. For, in addition to the significance of the similarities between them, these particular dramatic forms are important as main sources from which many twentieth-century dramatists have drawn. And by starting here, it is possible to gain some idea both of drama in general, as distinguished from other art forms, and also of the vision underlying contemporary theatre.
CHAPTER II

ORIGINS OF THE DRAMATIC IMPULSE

Speculations about the origins of Greek theatre are as old as criticism itself, to wit: Aristotle's Poetics. The result both of what he says and does not say has been an endless battle among critics and scholars; and the lack of evidence, and the debates over precise definitions, will probably preclude agreement. It is virtually impossible for us to derive a comprehensive explanation for the early stages of development in this body of drama, for the pieces of the puzzle that are missing are mostly those which would show exactly how, at what point, and by what impulse or influence one form became, or gave rise to, another. This is primarily an historical question, but it is relevant to the present inquiry, and we may review here some of the main points of the argument.

The bone of contention concerns the relationship between the dithyramb, the satyr play, and "tragedy"—the thing itself, and the meaning of the original Greek word, tragödia. There are two untested references which are mentioned in almost every discussion of this subject. One is a statement by Archilochus (fl. 648 B.C.): "I know how to lead off (exarxai) the beautiful song of lord Dionysus when my wits have been thunder-smitten with wine." This statement offers some critics irrefutable proof that the dithyramb originated as a ritual ceremony to Dionysus. The other key reference is in the Poetics (4.1449a8ff), where Aristotle, in explaining the origins of

1. Quoted, for example, in Gerald F. Else, The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy, Cambridge, Mass., 1965, p. 13.
tragedy, says: "But in any case, having developed from an improvisational beginning, both it [sc. tragedy] and comedy: the former from those who led off the dithyramb . . ." The argument thus follows: that dithyramb is connected with Dionysus, tragedy with the dithyramb, hence tragedy with "Dionysus, at whose festival and before whose altar Greek tragedy became the austerely beautiful thing we—if but partly—know." The weak point in this argument is that Aristotle himself doesn't seem to make any such connection, though it may have been there.

At any rate, this comprised the basis for one widespread theory, summarized by one writer in this way:

The argument runs somewhat as follows: The dithyramb was an improvisational song and dance in honor of Dionysus (Bacchus), the god of wine, and was performed by a band of men provided with goatlike horns, ears, hoofs, and tails and clad in a goatskin (or in a goat-hair loin-band) in imitation of Dionysus' attendant sprites, the satyrs; on account of this costume the choreutae (members of the chorus) were sometimes called tragoi, which is the Greek word for "goats"; in certain localities, as the dithyramb became quasi-literary and took on a dramatic element, its name was changed to satyric drama; still later, as these tendencies increased, especially through the addition of an actor, the satyr-play came to be called tragoidia ("goat-song"), derived from the nickname applied to the caprine choreutae; the chorus still consisted of satyrs and, since these were licentious, bestial creatures, the performance was yet crude and undignified; Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.) was possibly the first to abandon satyric choreutae and was certainly the first to raise tragedy to the rank of real literature; during the fifth century each poet was required to follow his group of three tragedies at the dramatic festival with a satyr-play as a concession to the satyric origin of the performance.

2. Quoted in Else, Ibid., p. 12.


The writer counters this hypothesis (which, he says, is no longer held by anyone) with the argument "that tragedy and satyric drama are independent offshoots of the same literary type, the Peloponnesian dithyramb". 5

One of the many counter-arguments runs like this:

One subdivision was recognized in antiquity—the satyr play. The extant examples are the Cyclop of Euripides, and the Ichneutae of the Sophocles... Satyr plays belonging to the extant tragedies are sometimes known by title. Titles of early plays listed as tragedies suggest a concern with stories of the marvelous or grotesque, stories analogous to the plot of the satyr play. The early poets Choerilus, Phrynichus, Pratinas, and Aristias were noted for satyr plays, to judge from the surviving titles of their plays, and from the scant biographical information available to us. It is possible that the later fifth century wanted little but the satyr plays from these authors, so that their more serious plays mostly dropped into oblivion. 6 But unless this selective process occurred at an early date, there is history, not the mere conjecture that most scholars suppose, behind Aristotle's remark that tragedy emerged from a satyric stage. 7

And then, a counter-counter-argument:

the belief that tragedy was not the end-result of a gradual development but the product of two successive creative arts by two men of genius. The first of these men was Thespis, the second was Aeschylus. If Thespis did not exist, that is, if we had no tradition concerning him, it would be necessary to invent him... What emerges is not so much a development as a field


6. Cf. Rossiter's comment about the fate of Roman drama: "Greek tragedy and (new) comedy came in through Sicily and Southern Italy, but could not compete with their rivals in a field where 'giving the public what it wants' rapidly became the sole criterion. Thus the Comedia paillata (Greek-cloaked) and the Comedia togata (of Roman manners) came and went; Terence (c. 184-159) followed Plautus (254-184) in an exit to the library; and the theatre was left to the tastes of the rob, the soldier on leave and the tired businessman." Ibid., p. 29.

of forces in which two crucial acts can be identified: the creation of tragōidia by Thespis, the creation of tragic drama by Aeschylus.\(^3\)

H.D.F. Kitto had already expressed another aspect of the same viewpoint in 1956, saying that he could "see no sign, in the surviving plays, that the form was at all influenced by any Dionysiac 'ritual sequence'," and agreeing "with Pickard-Cambridge (in his Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy) that it is far from certain that Tragedy 'originated' in a Dionysiac Dithyramb, and that Aristotle's statement to this effect was only Aristotle's theory—and one which it is difficult to accept."\(^9\)

What is significant to note, even in these few extracts, let alone in the detailed arguments which support them, is the complexity of the issues at stake, and the amount of research which has been done (both by critics and by anthropologists), and the persistent disagreement. And yet, even as notable a critic as Professor Allardyce Nicoll can slide over these problems with deceptive facility. In his book British Drama, he states simply:

In Greece, both comedy and tragedy took their rise from religious ceremonial. We may think of the latter as starting from a chorus of worshippers standing or moving in a circle round the altar of a god, chanting in unison and indulging in unrehearsed dance. The first movement towards the dramatic came when one member of the chorus separated himself from the rest, uttering lines to which the chorus collectively replied. Once this single 'actor' had established his position, the rest was simple. Two actors, and then three, made their appearance, and with them formal dialogue took shape. On them the attention of spectators focused, and the chorus lost its original function as the protagonist.\(^10\)

8. Ibid., p. 2.
But, as we have seen, not so simple after all. Granted, this particular book is concerned with other matters; but general statements of this nature are all too common, and they exemplify an unfortunate kind of critical laxity.

Clearly, it is impossible for the writer who is not conversant with the texts in the original Greek to do any more than thrash among secondary opinions; and this can become a relatively futile occupation, because so very much depends upon linguistic interpretation. A translation of the Poetics, for example, which renders the "leader" of the dithyramb as the "authors of the Dithyramb" very much alters the possibility of seeing a connection with Archilochus' statement, or of explaining the rise of the first actor out of the chorus. The basis of much discussion rests on the derivation of the word "tragedy", and what the Greek word came from and meant. As A. P. Rossiter says: "What sort of extempore-cum-dance precurred tragedy has been a battleground for scholars, many of whom might have had more profitable (if less exciting) lives if Aristotle had only said that 'tragedy' did mean 'goat-song' and added a hint on why so odd a name was attached to something so serious and philosophical." But Rossiter goes on to add his own general conclusions that "it is now widely accepted that the Satyr Play ... was the surviving link with some ritual dance of beast-men, the primitive object of which was the service of fertility." So, we are back where we started from, for if tragedy rose from satyr plays as Aristotle suggested, then it has an ultimate source in ritual after all, the opinion discarded by Pickard-Cambridge and Kitto.

Even these few permutations of this problem indicate the questions involved; and while admitting the impossibility of adding to, or adjudicating on the debate, I would at least like to avoid the implication that investigation into the origins of Western tragedy is a simple inquiry with straightforward answers. A final question which has concerned some critics—and this need not be considered as merely passing the buck—is the relative significance, or even validity, of regarding "tragedy" as a form which has specific origins. Critics radically disagree even here. One point of view is that unless you clearly understand the origins of Greek tragedy, you run the risk of seriously misinterpreting the plays. And following from this, the idea that to misinterpret Greek tragedy is to misinterpret Western tragedy in general. But this view, and the inquiries which imply that there is an abstract thing which is "tragedy", are being countered more and more frequently by the strong belief that such an abstract does not exist. Kitto voices this opinion in affirming that "'Tragedy' does not exist, except as a [m] abstraction. Only plays exist, and the origin of these is the minds that make them... As soon as we think of men, real men, trying to do new things, we see how nearly meaningless it is to say that the Origin of Tragedy was this and not that." Taking all of this into consideration, we might say that the final importance (as opposed to interest) in this particular argument about origins, concerns contemporary interpretation and production of the specific plays. Therefore, it may not be too great a critical impertinence to pass over this problem of the absolute historical relationships between these forms of the forms.

in order to consider the similarities they bear toward forms which arose elsewhere.

In regard to the Asian theatre, records indicate that dances of some kind were performed in China as early as the Chou dynasty (1050-259 B.C.). The earliest extant Japanese history, written in 712 A.D., describes the legendary explanation of the beginnings of Japanese dance in "mythological" times. But neither country has the equivalent of the Poetics, or the plays of the three Greek tragedians. The paucity of historical records has precluded the kind of debate rampant in regard to the Greek heritage; conjecture is less open to attack, but it is still conjecture. In addition, fewer scholars have preoccupied themselves with the Asian sphere, for numerous and obvious reasons. But, several significant facts emerge, even from a brief glimpse at the Japanese (and peripherally the classical Chinese theatre, which has had some recognizable similarities to, and influences upon, the Japanese theatre): that the origins of Asian theatre were as firmly grounded in dance and ceremonial tributes to the gods as the Greek theatre; that the two dramatic traditions held a similar concept about the function of masks, costume, and dance; that the chorus played a role analogous to that of the Greek chorus; and that Japanese theatre had its own equivalent of the satyr play.

In the case of the growth of theatre in England, documents are plentiful, and a comparatively complete picture can be seen.  

16. I.e., "theatre" in the broad sense, as opposed to either the "drama" or "dramatic". 
It is well agreed that one must study Greek and Roman theatre in order to adequately account for the development of British drama. Rossiter gives a comprehensive indication of the importance of both Greek and Roman traditions:

The pagan underlay of Greece concerns us (1) because it has been carefully examined by the anthropologists; (2) because their examination reveals European types of ritual which dance their way down the ages in the background of more reputable arts, lasting on from remote pre-history to medieval and even modern times; and (3) because it shows some connections between the primitive dance and those developed conflicts and surprises which are the essence of the dramatic. To this we might add (4) that in the nominally Christian Europe of the early Middle Ages the pagan underlay of dance and revel had some effect at least on the nature of drama and the dramatic, because the older gods had been subsumed by the legions of the Christian devils.18

The influence came from ritual and ceremony, not from the tragedians, whose plays were completely unknown until at least the tenth century, and probably not until the sixteenth. In regard to Rome, Rossiter says:

Roman plays and players concern our story only in two ways, viz. (1) because they determined the attitude of the Christian Church towards 'theatrical spectacles'; and (2) because whatever tradition of professional entertainment survived the disintegration of the Empire goes back immediately, if not finally, to Rome. We should add, however, (3) that some Roman rituals also play an important part as 'primitive survivals' in a later age.

Few comparisons are made, however, with the Japanese or Chinese theatre. One very interesting fact is immediately obvious: that the period of greatest growth in the Chinese theatre coincides very closely with that of the rise of the theatre in Medieval England. This centered particularly in the Yuan dynasty (A.D. 1280-1368), but the development includes the years of the three dynasties from 960-1644.20 Similarly,

19. Ibid., p. 29.
the Japanese theatre developed from the 11th-14th centuries, culminating in the No in the 15th century. Interestingly enough, there are several closer similarities between the No and Greek tragedy than between the latter and Medieval types of drama. But in all three cultures, theatre and drama evidence the same early impulse, built upon bases of myth and ritual, expressed originally in dance and ceremony; the invocation, veneration, exorcism and ecstasy; and, at the same time, the ribald jest, the mocking profanity.

These similarities exist on such a fundamental level (e.g., Aristotle's recognition of man's ageless urge to imitation + an internal rhythmic sensitivity + fear in the face of a natural world not understood), lying beneath any specific "idea" which might "explain" the action or ceremony, that it becomes possible to ascribe the basic impulses toward dramatic representation not just to the particular culture involved, but, as Jung said, to a general human "need" or "motivation" or "concept" (call it archetypal if you will—for indeed, it lies below the purely conscious level of primitive and even civilized men). In other words, with just these four examples, we can see a generalization: that if the Japanese, Chinese and English can all develop theatres at about the same time (beginning 9th-10th centuries), all resembling each other and, in turn, resembling the early Greek theatre of 1400 years before them, and all of this without benefit of interacting influence, then we may assume that (1) motivation transcends the culture; and that (2) ideas or concepts (although they may be largely subconscious and hence primarily non-rational) about what the theatre should represent, i.e., the needs it is created to fulfill, are universal in their inception. In speaking of the ceremonies surrounding the concept of Dionysus, Rossiter explains:
At the roots of this lie beliefs which are anterior to anything we can think of as 'believing': primal intuitions which have no existence as 'myth' or 'gospel' apart from the rituals which convey and implant them. With Osiris, the Egyptian god, the same. To us these are allegories of the indestructible vitality of nature... of the whole rhythmic course of vegetation, sex, and all fecundity. Or, looking another way, they are the wild hypotheses of a primordial science, which we call magic; stories drawn upon the weft and woof of rituals meant to constrain the fertile powers to pour their riches forth and be to man as man would have them be: unfailing, inexhaustible, prodigiously vital.  

Obviously, this is applicable to far more than just Dionysus or the Greeks. One has only to turn to The Golden Bough for endless documentation.

Hence, if we cannot delineate a precise, step-by-step development in these various theatres, we can at least look at some forms, after the intermittent processes of becoming. Though we do not know just what happened between the satyr play and tragedy, we have some idea of both kinds of theatre; and we have enough evidence to be able to see the large number of similarities in technique, and in the concepts about what these techniques were thought to achieve. From dance to music to masks to chorus and recitation: it is all a part of what we may designate as ritual and ceremony in the broad sense:

Beyond the beginnings of recognizable dramatic art lies a world of rituals. The simplest and most primitive is the dance: always at its beginnings a religious act, a wordless ritual of temporary physical and emotive dedication to the unseen powers by whose virtue nature is as man takes it to be. In this primitive religious act the dancer becomes one with the spirit to which he gives himself, and the god becomes a real presence in the rite.  

The basis of dance is, in countless cultures, this kind of ritual. When dance becomes a structural element of theatre, it retained its

22. Ibid., p. 5.
ritual function. The Nō theatre of Japan is one of the best examples of this development, because comparatively complete and undebated records exist tracing its growth, and it has been transmitted through the years with very little alteration. It was the culmination of five dance forms preceding it: Kagura, or "god-music", dances of placation; Gagaku, "skill-music", one form of which was probably an exorcistic dance ritual involving the representation of a mythological animal; Bugaku, "dance-music"; Dengaku, "field-music", arising from harvest ceremonies; and finally Sarugaku, "monkey-music", which contained "a sense of mimicry and may be considered the first beginning of naturalism on the Japanese stage. This type of mimicry was called monomane (imitation of things) . . ."23

The intimate connection between dance and music is obvious. A similar kind of relationship is known to have existed in the Greek theatre, but records of the form of either dance or music have never been found. Another significant connection with Greek theatre may be mentioned here: the Kyogen. This is the Japanese equivalent of the satyr play, and may have borne the same relationship to Sarugaku that the satyr plays bore to dithyrambs and/or Dionysiac ceremonies.

Kyogen plays are described as

an adjunct of Noh, and are short comic plays interspersed between Noh's heavier items . . . Kyogen's primary origin is found in the earliest types of Sarugaku. Sarugaku's primitive realism and humor, which became etherealized beyond recognition in Noh, were retained in Kyogen. In the same way that Sarugaku developed as an interlude between Kagura dances in shrines, Kyogen similarly were comic interludes to relieve the strain of prolonged Buddhist temple services. They were adapted to Noh to serve precisely the same purpose.24

23. I owe this account to Bowers, Ibid., pp. 4-14.
In both the No and Greek tragedy, then, the seriousness was kept in one play and the comic in another. Medieval England developed a similar comprehensive outlook on life, but the two elements were co-existent, producing what has been called "gothic drama". Thus, within the most serious religious plays would be found risqué comedy extending even to quasi-sadism. (And it is in this kind of play, with its breadth of tone and technique, that we may see a source for the prevalent tragi-comedy of the twentieth century). But even comedy, in all these dramatic forms, was basically ritualistic, for, in one way or another, it arose from pagan rites and ceremonies, and community festivities: the Kyogen from the very early Kagura dances which stemmed from the legend that once when the Sun-god had been offended, he hid in a cave, and to lure him out again, the Goddess Uzume "'Bared her breasts, let down her skirt and danced. Then the Gods laughed till the high plains of Heaven shook.'" The satyr plays developed from drunken celebrations to Dionysus; and humour in the English Miracle Cycles from various sources, among them the Roman Saturnalia and Kalends.

Another "technique" used in these dramas gives a significant indication of a common concept about the role of the "actor" and the function of theatrical representation. This was the assumption of masks. The No plays (which occurred in a series of five) were preceded by a ritual dance called Okina, in which one actor walked on stage, ceremoniously took from an ornate box a mask representing old age, donned it in front of the audience, and then danced in very formal movement, incanting ancient words in praise of long life.

25. Cf. Rossiter, Ibid., Chapter IV.
26. in Arthur Waley, The No Plays of Japan, London, 1921, p. 15. Bowers maintains it was the "Sun-Goddess".
27. Bowers, Ibid., p. 16.
In the Kathakali theatre of India, the process of putting on the actor's multiple-layered make-up was itself a ritual and served to psychologically "remove" the actor from preoccupations with the here and now. The costumes in the Asian theatre were often ornate, and bulky enough to greatly increase the total size of the player. The actor becomes greater than life due to the nature of the role he was acting or the ritual he was performing. The fixed expressions on Greek masks were meant to represent the essence of a human position (e.g., old age), or emotion (e.g., grief). And it was this "essence" which Yeats, for example, was after, in his use of masks centuries later. In no case was the actor identified with a character; his reality as actor or as the symbolic representation for something general in mythology or the natural world was never forgotten. One of the furthest extremes of this approach to representation may be seen in classical Chinese theatre:

The actor's technique is the crux of the whole entertainment; the play itself is a vehicle which uses a hallowed theme presented in a fashion best calculated to create situations in which the virtuoso qualities of the actor may be used to the maximum advantage... The audience comes to see the actor rather than the play, they do not tire when they are confronted with stories which, although they may have been rearranged, are the dramatic inheritance of generations before them. They are thoroughly conversant with the conventions and symbolism of the actor's performance which, in their critical eyes, must not deviate in any way from the standards set by a line of master players before him and yet contain that intangible quality which springs from personality...

The effect of this kind of theatre was in its total rhythm. The Kathakali actor was silent; the entire action of the story was conveyed through movement, hence the name, "Kathakali, or Attakatha;

story play, or danced play." 29 In the Nō theatre, the chorus sits at the side of the stage and explains the action which the principal characters (two, as in Aeschylus) portray in action, though these characters do speak at other points. Greek tragedy exemplifies an extension of this form in that its principal characters are set against the chorus, providing in this way for large portions of debate in the play. But the Greek chorus also danced and were given long speeches of poetic comment upon present and past action, and like the Nō and Chinese chorus, they made a framework for the action, which created a distance, a separation between what was happening on stage and the reality of the audience-world watching it. The distancing effect of the formal rhythm of their dance and unison recitation is analogous to the extremely strict rules governing every movement of the Nō actor.

This last point is interesting to note as one of the ultimate examples of symbolic representation, and the evocative poetry contained in the suggestiveness of very subtle movement:

The Nō dance relies to a great extent on mime, but it is mime far removed from any realistic imitation being idealized to the extreme limit of symbolism. Weeping is simulated by merely touching the eyes with the hand, for instance . . . To assist [the actor] in his movements, he generally carries a fan which is used to express symbolic ideas in a number of different ways. It may represent the heavens or the elements, or, going to the other extreme, more material objects such as a wine cup or a sword . . . The sleeves of the dancer are also used symbolically, covering the head with the sleeves, for example, signifies looking far into the depths. Every motion of the hands and feet is controlled by set rules . . .


The No is described as being a dramatic remembrance-of-things-past, and the total visual rhythm of this highly formal drama creates for the audience a deliberate illusion. Because there is virtually no approximation to realism, the audience is not led, or even allowed to infer any connection with everyday reality; this was a theatre with high aspirations to Pater's "condition of music" in the sense of its etherealization of expression and its unrelatedness to normal, concrete experience. In and of itself, it had a form as totally self-contained and intangible as a sonata.

The Greek tragedies were obviously more comprehensive in technique than the No; but the general aim was the same. The inner essence of a situation was to be conveyed through a formal unity of total dramatic structure. Kitto explains that the Greek poet sought to apprehend the unifying simplicity, the fundamental laws; and these, once apprehended, became the framework of his drama. The immediate objects of his observation—the characters, actions, experiences of men—became, so to speak, his raw material, and out of it, discarding and rearranging, he built his new completely intelligible structure. From the material he selected only what was immediately relevant to his purpose, and the purpose was, not to represent a typical human situation, but to recreate the inner reality.31

Seami (1363-1444 A.D.), one of the first two great writers of the No theatre, wrote to similar effect: "The Book of Criticism says, 'Forget the theatre and look at the No. Forget the No and look at the actor. Forget the actor and look at the "idea" (kokoro). Forget the "idea" and you will understand the No.'"32 And this indicates precisely the way in which the audience were meant to see the drama as an illusion, and to penetrate straight through it to the "Reality" evoked by it.

32. Quoted in Waley, Ibid., p. 44.
Greek and No forms of serious drama are very pure; there are no extraneous elements, no conflicting perspectives, no clash between the comic and serious vision. And in the same way that the audience were never led to confuse actor and character portrayed, or the real everyday world with the artistic "illusion" on the stage, neither were they invited to become involved with the characters. They were to see an entire action and to judge it unemotionally. It has been said, in fact, that that oft-discussed character, the "tragic hero", does not exist in Greek tragedy. No one character assumes a dominant role in any of the plays, nor was a character meant to be seen as a single dramatic subject, for whom the action and the other characters merely served as background or illumination. It is the total pattern of action, to which all the characters are subordinated, that concerned the Greek poet; the unifying inner structure of a specific play was to be considered as implying an analogy to the vast structure—which men assume, or at least hope—unify the chaos of the world.

Compared to these plays, the early dramas of Medieval England seem very impure: self-contradictory combinations of multiple influences, multiple visions. To a large extent, the Miracle play, growing in the first instance from recitations of the Mass within the church, contained in one form the effects of two strong traditions: the pagan rituals and festivals, and the Christian establishment. The Church attempted at various times to provide within its own structure for the "pagan" impulses of the people; but abuses, in the direction of burlesque, grew rampant (this was particularly true in

33. An excellent example often mentioned, particularly in regard to the use of imagery, is Aeschylus' Agamemnon. See Leo Aylen's discussion of the play in his Greek Tragedy and the Modern World, London, 1964, Chapter II.
in such ceremonies as the Feast of Fools, and the Church was threatened from within its own walls. An attempt to graft Christian implications on to the pagan rituals (what E. K. Chambers calls "the religion of the folk") were not often successful, in spite of the fact that the original significance of many rituals had been lost or forgotten. It was the action of the ritual itself which remained important; and it was from such points as these that the drama arose.

The meeting of these two traditions resulted in what Rossiter describes as a

strangely two-ways-facingness [which] brings together in medieval art the remote, the transcendental, the noble, and the vulgar, the gross and the base: often switching abruptly from the one to the other, from pathos to brutality, or from reverence to blasphemy. The piquant clash of biblical persons and their entirely medieval, often English-village, settings is but one most obvious example. The contrast between the 'divine comedy' of the real design (which is also the world's tragedy) and the homely, vulgar, absurd, or human-trivial detail is but another aspect of the recurrent tonal clash between the rituals of devotion (which are of God) and those of the grotesque.

This combination may be seen to result in a form of drama quite different from the No, or Athenian tragedy; but it implies an analogous kind of world view, even though the comic and the serious were not confined to separate plays. The basic impulse toward dramatic representation evidences exactly the same motivation as that underlying the Japanese and Greek drama, and may be seen to arise from the same kind of sources. The difference is that the Miracle plays were the product of a greater number of influences—all of them ritualistic in conception and function. On the secular side was the latent dramatic potential of the whole bardic tradition which was

34. Rossiter, Ibid., p. 53.
part of the ritual of a tribal cult of heroism...
The kings who on occasion took the harp themselves, like the Norseman singing his own death-song, turning life to epic in a final Nordic frenzy as he fought his way to a heroic end: both drew about themselves that 'frame' which marks off the dramatic from mere narrative; and either, with a very slight extension of terms, might be said to have acted a part.35

On the sacred side were the "dialogues" in the Bible itself, and the antiphonal singing of (semi-) choirs in the service. Rossiter attributes the development of the "procession of the Prophets" to a sermon then ascribed to St. Augustine. The first playlet—of four lines—is the ninth-century Quem Queritis; and from there, more and more Biblical episodes came to be actively portrayed by the clergy, rather than just recited or sung: "The natural tendency was to evolve a single Christmastide play, still ritual, still sung, but no longer tied to the placenta which had nourished it. Already we can see a little Divina Comedia with a real plot (a child is born, is threatened, and escapes): an earnest naïf infant-drama almost crying out for delivery from the womb of Mother Church."36

Thus, through various sometimes-difficult-to-delineate stages of accretion, the Greek, No, and Miracle plays arose, all from analogous sources of tradition. Folk legends, Homer, the long Japanese epics of the twelfth century—Tale of the Taira Clan, and Tale of the Rise and Fall of the Taira and Minamoto Clans,37 and the Bible: story-telling became story-acting, as the dramatic potential of dialogue-within-narrative was given its head. The single reciter, or bard, gave way to several "actors". Alongside of these were the

35. Rossiter, Ibid., pp. 35, 36.
36. Ibid., p. 45.
37. See Bowers, Ibid., p. 29.
choral ceremonies, ritual dances, and religious festivals: here, unison action split, and individual participants took specific parts. In both cases, it was a movement from a singular expression of ritual, to diversity and complexity of representation. The three cultures finally developed unique and fully dramatic forms, peculiar to the particular culture; but the impulse was the same. And the source: ritual.

Rossiter has a useful definition of "ritual", which clarifies the idea of it which was suggested in Chapter I of this paper:

... RITUAL. By this I mean nothing specifically religious in any narrow sense. Armies, regiments, ships, societies, academies, freemasonries, professions, and even government departments all have their rituals; often ... accompanied by an esoteric and largely unintelligible language. In a work of art, the RITUAL is the offering, or the hinting of an offering, of a gesture of regard or respect for something which goes beyond the state-of-affairs or the EVENT. Seen from this aspect, every work of art is the presentation or adumbration of a ritual of veneration. The essence of this Ritual aspect is that it appeals from time to timelessness, though both the artist and his appreciators may be quite unconscious of this, both feeling only a 'satisfaction' with the performance which does not require analysis, or which entirely defies it. (italics mine.)

This is essentially the same thing which Jung said in describing how myths and fables are the indirect representation of archetypes.

This fundamental idea of ritual may be used to examine the concepts contained, or at least implied, in these dramatic forms about the relationship between reality and illusion. We have seen that on the external level of the actual "dramatic production" (even in its early stages of pure ritual or ceremony), the respective location of reality and illusion was readily comprehended by the audience. But on
a cosmic (or philosophic) level, the relationship surely became confused. We might look at this idea by proposing a reality/illusion hierarchy to demonstrate the relationship between the performer and the activity performed. First, in terms of simplicity, is the juggler or acrobat; he, as performer, and the skill he is performing, are one and the same. He is not (presumably) telling a story, not "saying" anything, but simply demonstrating his proficiency at this skill. Next would come the dancer, who is also performing a skill, though beyond this he may also be telling a story of some kind as well. But in any case, he is using his body as a means for symbolic expression. Even if he is trying to tell a deliberately realistic story, it will still be symbolically rendered. The technique is opposite from that of, say, the Nô actor, but the end is the same. The Nô actor works through understatement; a tiny symbolic gesture conveys worlds of meaning. The spectator is led through this finite gesture into non-finite impressions, the gesture being analogous to T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative". And in so far as the Nô actor's movements are a ritual in and of themselves, the actor is appealing from time to the timeless. By contrast, the dancer works through overstatement, in that he creates elaborate symbolic expressions for the inner essence, or meaning, or "reality" of a thing or activity. In primitive ritual, this may be a dance, for example, which invokes the gods for rain, or for the growth of corn, or a good harvest. The dance itself may attempt to symbolize in a visual form the unseeable processes of growth. Or, for another example, the participants may assume the role of an animal by wearing its hide, or even, as in ceremonies to Dionysus, subsume themselves, through drinking wine, into an identification with the god himself.
This kind of implication-via-overstatement is true in modern dance as well; even when a dance is telling a definite story, the action is symbolically portrayed. A dancer may take five minutes to cross a stage to answer a knock at the door. A good specific example is to see what a dancer does when he is pretending to play, or listen to, a musical instrument. He will use the most physical art of all to symbolically convey the inner reality of music, that supremely elusive, invisible, intangible, non-physical art form. In any case, while by definition the dancer is indistinguishable from his dance, like the acrobat and his acrobatics, he is yet moving beyond himself as mere performer. He and his art are totally unified, as Yeat's "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" suggests. But Yeat's question might also be seen to imply that, while the dance is something we can only know through the dancer, the dance transcends him. His whole dance is thus an objective correlative. Beyond this, we may say that because the dance is, as we have seen, fundamentally a ritual which itself transcends ultimate analysis, the dance, like ritual, emanates from subconscious and archetypal impulses. These impulses become "concrete" forms; but, as Jung explained, only indirect representations, which move back toward their abstract origins. This is Reality and Content and Unconscious becoming Illusion (art), Form, and Consciousness, through which man expresses his impulses toward comprehending that Reality.

The third and final major step on the reality/illusion ladder is the actor. Here, the role and the performer and the activity being performed comprise a complex relationship, and no simple generalizations can be made. Indeed, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, the concepts at various times about the relationship between the actor, the character he pretends to be, his representation of it through acting,
and the "story" being told, are one of the major variables in the ideas about reality and illusion. It is, thus, another significant fact that these three dramatic forms—Greek tragedy, the Mō, and the Miracle play—all developed a similar kind of reality-illusion juxtaposition. Here we may make a further set of definitions to clarify those proposed in Chapter I, for a distinction needs to be made between ultimate Reality, and the "reality" of which we normally think in terms of our everyday life. We said that Reality became appearance—the infinite made finite; but we speak of these things in different terms. We point to a table and say that this is a real table, not a picture of a table, let alone "appearance" of a table. This actually is the world of appearances in the philosophic sense, but we may call it "concrete" or "everyday" reality, as opposed to "abstract" Reality. This division parallels the division between "Content" and "content", and between the collective unconscious and personal unconscious.

The audiences of these three theatres were, and knew themselves to be, of the real world of cabbages and kings, towns and families. The actor moved out from this reality, stepped upon a stage and assumed a role. The dramatic representation was quite clearly an illusion—a pretence, a shared make-believe—which the audience immediately understood and accepted as such. There was no sense of an inherent confusion between reality and illusion within the activity being represented upon the stage, or between the actor and his character-role. The whole dramatic piece was an integral illusion, as separate and distinct from the audience as a painting is from the people looking at it. The role of the actor was clearly understood; it may be seen as analogous to the position of the painter as we watch him painting. The actor acts and
the painter paints; both are real everyday people performing a skill, but at the same time showing us something more than just their skilfulness. The actor was not equated with his character-role any more than was the painter with his canvas. The actor, like the painter, or the story-teller, was the means by which the play was made known. In other words, a dramatic performance is because an actor acts it, in the same way as a painting is, because a painter paints it. Both people exercise a degree of skilfulness, but the finished product is the result of skill plus inspiration plus a meaning or implication which transcend the actor or painter.

Because the dramatic illusion was created through a large degree of suggestion alone (the bare stage, symbolic gesture, poetic speech, music, choral rhapsodizing, etc.), the spectator was led through the finite gesture into these wide areas of non-finite implication. Fundamentally, the action was ritual (whether or not this was consciously apprehended), and the effect of ritual was to suggest the timeless, to appeal to the spectator in ways he probably would not be able to define. But the ritual was grounded in everyday reality, and to a lesser (as in the Nō) or greater extent (in Miracle plays), this reality was consciously recognized, and brought on the stage. In the Nō and Greek theatre, it was in the Kyogen and satyr plays, where the plots of the serious plays were parodied. In the Miracle plays, it was in the topical references and familiar low comedy. Because the actor was not identified with the part he was playing, he could not "step out of character" and thus threaten to destroy an illusion. The illusion had an integrity beyond the actor; all he might do would be to step out of his role as actor, in the same way that the story-teller might break
off his tale to make a joke with the listeners. There was, then, no attempt to pretend that the real world was not there, nor effort to "escape" from it by creating an illusion which embraced the audience—a technique fundamental to realism in art. Instead, the spectator, from his mundane perspective, watched an actor acting a story which had supramundane implications. One could represent this relationship thus:

spectator ————→ actor ————→ play ————→ meaning/Reality

Or, from the opposite direction,

Reality —→ represented in the artistic illusion, the play ————→ was transmitted by the actor ————→ to the spectator ————→ who led toward Reality.

The spectator would probably not be able to say much about Reality, but he definitely knew the relative positions of the audience, the actor, and the action portrayed.

In all three theatrical forms, drama was manifestly monomane or an imitation of things. It is this ceremonial basis of drama at its various points of inception which was lost or discarded in realistic theatre, and to which dramatists have just begun to return in recent years. Realism, by trying to make reality and the illusion of art dovetail into perfect unison, attempted to undermine an essential discrepancy; and this discrepancy is nowhere more fundamental, more obvious, and more felt, than in the theatre, the supreme artistic household of illusion.
CHAPTER III

REALISM IN THE THEATRE

And then, as Bjuma's eyes followed the path carpeted with detached leaves, her eyes encountered for the first time three full-length mirrors placed among the bushes and flowers as casually as in a boudoir.

Three mirrors.

The eyes of the people inside could not bear the nudity of the garden, its exposure. The eyes of the people had needed the mirrors, delighted in the fragility of reflections. All the truth of the garden, the moisture, and the worms, the insects and the roots, the running sap and the rotting bark, had all to be reflected in the mirrors...

The garden in the mirror was polished with the mist of perfection. Art and artifice had breathed upon the garden and the garden had breathed upon the mirror, and all the danger of truth and revelation had been exorcised.

—Anais Nin

The No play Atsumori by Seami opens with a speech by the principal character, a priest:

Life is a lying dream, he only wakes
Who casts the world aside.
I am Kumagai no Naosane, a man of the country of Musashi.
I have left my home and call myself the priest Rensei;
this I have done because of my grief at the death of
Atsumori, who fell in battle by my hand. Hence it comes that I am dressed in priestly guise.

And now I am going down to Ichi-no-Tani to pray for the salvation of Atsumori's soul.

(He walks slowly across the stage, singing a song descriptive of his journey.)

I have come so fast that here I am already at Ichi-no-Tani, in the country of Tsu.

Truly the past returns to my mind as though it were a thing of to-day...

1. In Arthur Waley, Ibid., p. 64.
This is the format for the opening of every Nô play: the principal actor enters, states his name, position, and reason for being there, and takes a long journey very quickly. In terms of everyday reality, this is a barefaced lie and an outrageous pretence. He is not really a priest at all, but the actor so-and-so, walking across the stage.

This is the first point at which reality and illusion can become confused in the theatre—a confusion which Pirandello illuminated in all of its ramifications in his plays. But the Nô audience would not have felt any such confusion, for they would have understood the actor to be simply representing an action in which the character he is representing once engaged. Bottom, in A Midsummer-Night's Dream, would have been much more at ease had he been able to rely on his audience to make this kind of distinction between reality and illusion. But instead, he felt it necessary to write an explanatory prologue for the play to be presented to Theseus and Hippolyta, to explain, for example, that Snug is Snug and not really a lion:

Bottom: Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck; and he himself must speak through, saying thus, or to the same effect, "Ladies," or "Fair Ladies, I would wish you", or "I would request you", or "I would entreat you, not to fear, not to tremble: my life for yours. If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life. No, I am no such thing; I am a man as other men are;" and there indeed let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner. (III, i).

But this kind of artistic illusion fails for those like Hippolyta, who demand a fundamentally "realistic" portrayal of events in order to effect a suspension of their disbelief. It is Theseus (through whom Shakespeare is surely speaking at this point) who comprehends the relative position of the theatre, and the necessary approach to it by the audience, for the dramatic representation to achieve the
intended result. In response to the playing of the Pyramus-Thisbe
story, Hippolyta remarks:

Hippolyta: This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.

Theseus: The best in this kind are but shadows; and the
worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.

Hippolyta: It must be your imagination then, and not theirs.

Theseus: If we imagine no worse of them than they of
themselves, they may pass for excellent men. (V,i)

An exercise of the imagination was more or less uncalled-for in
realism; the playwright intended to show the audience precisely what
he meant to be seen. If the location was a crossroads, or a parlor,
then the stage set was made into a careful replica of a crossroads
or parlor. In a sense, the attitude of the realist playwright was
antipodal to that of Bottom: where Bottom feared that the audience
would imagine too much, or too well, the realist implicitly con-
sidered the audience to be composed to Hippolytas—implicitly, because
he may not have known or realized this fact himself. His conscious
purpose, when realism and naturalism arose in the theatre in the
late nineteenth century, was to strip away the contrivances and
artificialities of the reigning French pièce bien faite, not to mani-
fest, above all, a particular attitude toward audience response.
Nevertheless, realism inherently contained, (perhaps unwittingly),
the idea that everyday reality itself provided the most intoxicating
illusion. Characters and stage sets must behave and look like people
and places outside of the theatre. Consequently, an opening such as
that of a No play would be totally impossible, because to the realist,
to admit the illusion was to destroy it completely.
A curious relationship between reality and illusion resulted from this approach to drama. Where in the No the relative position of reality and illusion has been something like this:

Reality—artistic illusion—actor—reality—world of spectators, in realistic drama this relationship telescoped in a confusing way, and one which was ultimately limiting to dramatic art. The everyday world of the spectators was brought on to the stage, to become the context of the artistic illusion. Illusion was still illusion in so far as it was art; but it dressed itself in the guise of reality. This made a precarious basis for the artistic illusion, since the illusion could never be admitted as such. Reinforcing this was the fact that the actor no longer pretended to represent a character who had performed an action in the past; he was that character, performing in the present. His identity as actor was lost, and consequently he could never be allowed to step out of the illusion; for his major pretence was to act as though there was no illusion on the stage, but reality itself. Because an open recognition of his role as actor was denied, the actor could no longer function as a mediary between the audience and the dramatic event. His connection with the real world was broken as he was subsumed into his character-role. The audience, left on its own, was stranded between the real-world reality outside the theatre, and the "apparent" reality represented on the stage—a problem made all the worse, in comparison to early theatre, by virtue of productions now taking place in closed buildings instead of out-of-doors.
The ultimate result of this approach was that Reality—the broad universal implications which had been suggested through non-realistic theatre—also tended to become telescoped into the "reality" now being shown on stage. Consequently, instead of a step-by-step linear relationship moving from the spectator toward Reality, there was now only the spectator on one side of the footlights and everything else on the other. This:

\[ \text{Reality} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{illusion} \quad \leftrightarrow \quad \text{actor} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{spectator} \]

resulted in this:

\[ \text{Reality} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{illusion} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{actor} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{spectator} \]

This would be all very well if Reality were something which could be represented directly; but we assume that it is not. However, it would seem that the realist playwright must have entertained one of three concepts about Reality: 1) that it was one and the same with "reality"; 2) that by holding up a literal mirror to concrete reality, he would be implying abstract Reality (—by analogy?); or 3) that there is no Reality and/or it is irrelevant to take it into consideration. In any case, in his most realistic stance, he not only severely limited his artistic vision and statement, he also undercut one of the chief potentials of theatre: Illusion's power of suggestion. By effacing himself and creating a direct one-to-one relationship (without authorial comment) between thing-in-the-world, and thing-in-the-world-as-shown-on-the-stage, the playwright limited his audience to a response to thing-in-the-world. His art tended to confine the statement of his vision within the exact temporal limits of his play, even if his vision went far beyond this. After
all, if a playwright is going to say to himself: I am going to show them how reality really is, by holding up a mirror to it, chances are that the audience will see only that reality which the mirror reflects, and nothing more. Such a playwright should not expect the audience to see beyond or through or around that mirror, because his technique actively discourages a creative participation by the audience. This is the artist who takes Hippolyta's words and makes them read: It must be my imagination, then, and not theirs.

It would seem, then, to be ironic but true, that the inherent nature of dramatic representation is such that if you deny the essential illusion, you not only rob the drama of its greatest potentials, you also create a confusion between reality and illusion which undercuts, or even completely cancels, the depth of the artistic vision you may be trying to communicate.

A distinction might be made at this point between "realism" and "naturalism", as they developed in the theatre, for the above analysis is more specifically applicable to naturalism. In 1881, Zola wrote an essay on "Le Naturalisme au théâtre". In it, he explained that he wanted to see a dramatist act on the stage what Flaubert, Balsac, and the Goncourt brothers had done in the novel:

I am waiting for someone to put a man of flesh and bones on the stage, taken from reality, scientifically analyzed, and described without one lie. I am waiting for someone to rid us of fictitious characters, of these symbols of virtue and vice which have no worth as human data. I am waiting for environment to determine the characters and the characters to act according to the logic of facts combined with logic of their own disposition... I am waiting for a dramatic work void of declamations, majestic speech, and noble sentiments, to have the unimpeachable morality of truth
and to teach us the frightening lesson of sincere investigation. I am waiting, finally, until the development of naturalism already achieved in the novel takes over the stage, until the playwrights return to the source of science and modern arts, to the study of nature, to the anatomy of man, to the painting of life in an exact reproduction more original and powerful than anyone has so far dared to risk on the boards. (italics mine).2

Naturalism followed realism, as an even more severe rejection of any kind of non-reality. As The Oxford Companion to the Theatre defines it, Ibsen and Co. had used "a selective realism. Naturalism discarded all compromise and came out strongly on the side of stark reality".3

Zola's ideas, and his definitions, are misleading, and indeed, it becomes difficult to believe that the novelists of whom he speaks treated their characters simply as "human data". Strindberg defines the difference between naturalism and realism in a more helpful way, and points out the limitations of Zola's theory. In 1889, speaking of Henri Becque's Les Corbeaux (1882), Strindberg wrote:

This is photography which includes everything, even the grain of dust on the lens of the camera. This is realism, a working method elevated to art, or the little art which does not see the forest for the trees. This is the misunderstood naturalism which holds that art merely consists of drawing a piece of nature in a natural way; it is not the great naturalism which seeks out the points where the great battles are fought, which loves to see what you do not see every day, which delights in the struggle between natural forces, whether these forces are called love and hate, rebellious or social instincts, which finds the beautiful or ugly unimportant if only it is great. It is this grandiose art which we found in Germinal and La Terre . . .4

3. p. 564.
This is a useful set of definitions, but for one reason or another, they became reversed. We would now say that naturalism is the false realism—false, because strict naturalism is, to a lesser or greater extent, unfaithful to the essential meaning and value of artistic communication. Since literary terms are always open to reinterpretation, let us define them this way: Absolute naturalism is the photography of which Strindberg speaks. At its best, it is a limited art form, or may even be non-art; for art, we argue, is a matter of selectivity, of deliberately-created form, and not just a statement saying "Thou shalt omit nothing". Naturalism is best seen as a technique; and when a work of art does not go beyond the technique itself, it is indeed narrowly circumscribed. Realism is a highly-selective naturalism, or, an art form which uses naturalistic techniques for bigger purposes. Or, to propose another definition: Realism is that form of art which tries to communicate its vision of Reality by making us see, in its natural colours, the everyday world around us; and it thereby tries to show us the significance, the meaning, the explanation for why things happen as they do.

In one way or another, what distinguishes realism from naturalism is the inclusion or implication of a framework of reference which transcends the physical and temporal limits of a play. We may apply what Rossetti said about ritual, to say that this framework may lie well below the level of conscious apprehension: for it is often the total structure of a play—as it is the structure of ritual—which implicitly communicates the framework. Hence, while we may not be actively aware of it when it is there, we strongly feel its absence. It would have been this kind of deficiency that led
Strindberg to say that *Les Corbeaux* "is so banal, so insignificant, so dull that after four hours of suffering you ask yourself the old question: how does this concern me?" The problem inherent in naturalism—and also inherent in realism when it is put on the stage—is the difficulty of holding up to reality an objectively-analytical mirror (that, itself, virtually impossible if one questions the possibility of "objectivity"), and at the same time making that mirror a window through which one might be led to "see" the Reality beyond. It is a rare Alice who can step through the naturalistic looking-glass.

The greatest advantage of realism at its best—and this is perhaps the reason for its wide appeal—is that by depicting things with as much objectivity as possible, instead of using a technique of deliberate distortion (as in impressionism, cubism, etc.), an artist can communicate his own vision and at the same time make us suddenly sensitive to the normal common things in the world which usually escape our attention or understanding. The naturalistic writer will tend to say: "This is the way things really happen"; the realistic writer will say: "Yes, that is the way things really happen, and this is what it all implies:

But realism in the novel is one thing; the attempt to make it the basis of drama is quite another. The novel allows the writer a long time to describe in great detail the minute things his eye sees. He also has the use of narrative to probe and explain the psychological complex of his characters, the network of motivations underlying actions. In addition, he may enclose all of the narrative description within a large framework of social and historical, and even mythological/ritualistic, contexts. And this is surely what the French novelists—Zola included—were doing, as Strindberg recognized.

In comparison to the novelist's freedom of movement and breadth of canvas, the dramatist's stage is very limited. Physical detail can only be crudely presented in a stage set; and the characters must communicate through dialogue and action all that a novelist can convey in omniscient narrative or internal monologue. In addition, the novel is remote enough from the reader that it can convey a great deal through suggestion. Its action is contained in the past tense, within the bound pages of a book upon the shelf, which the reader may peruse at will. From the novelist's descriptions, the reader creates his own vast mental pictures of the characters, places, and actions. The reader is not directly confronted with live people on a stage pretending to be real people in a real parlor. The conflict which is inherent between reality and illusion in the theatre is not present in the novel; consequently, realism can work to far greater advantage in the novel than on the stage.

The result of this is that when the truly visionary dramatist tries to use realistic technique, vision and technique often clash, producing a less-than-successful dramatic experience. And yet, to some extent, such a dramatist ignored, or was oblivious to, the problem. He tended to see reality and illusion not in a conflicting, but in a reciprocal relationship. He forgot the theatre itself—the paradoxical and precarious position of dramatic representation—and focused his attention instead on the everyday world outside the theatre, which he was going to depict. "Reality" was then seen as social and private "truth", and "illusion" as the social lies—the masks we put on to hide the truths of our private lives and selves. From this viewpoint,
there was a clear-cut distinction between reality and illusion, and they had a mutual interaction. Reality was identified with social conventions, because these conventions were abstract, transcending the individual, and tending toward the static and eternal. Because they constituted a kind of tradition, they served as an ordering influence over the chaos and perpetual change from person to person and day to day. But at the same time, these conventions—or "social realities"—were really only part of the world of appearances: deliberately fabricated, consciously constructed systems of belief, and methods for dealing with the political, social, and religious needs of large communities. These kinds of conventions have no ultimate truth, for they are constantly being overthrown, readjusted, reinterpreted. What Northrup Frye says about art, "which seeks constantly to reshape itself from its own depths", has its analogue in society, which also continually reforms itself by internal revolt against the external conventions.

Juxtaposed to these social conventions was the reality of the individual, who, ironically, gained his reality (his sense of meaning and personal identity in the Total Scheme of Things) by being assumed into the large contexts of social, cultural and religious illusions. He defined himself in terms of these illusions, and thus knew his place; and he thereby gave reality to these illusions by believing in them. This reciprocal relationship, which, one assumes, lay beneath the level of conscious awareness, led to a community of belief, which enabled individuals to counteract any fear of private, or isolated reality, by being joined together in the idea
of a truth, a reality which transcended each and all of them. But what the early dramatists of realism—Ibsen chief among them—began to see were the destructive or even tragic effects of general illusions upon private reality. The discrepancy which they saw between reality and illusion, then, was the distinction between an individual's true face in private life, and the masks he wore in order to live a lie which would give the appearance that he was conforming with the social body of illusions.

The bulk of Ibsen's plays are concerned with exactly this kind of hypocrisy; but it is always portrayed in a different, and somehow never-quite-adequate way. The plays tease the spectator, and often leave him feeling vaguely confused or dissatisfied. This is partially because they elude a pigeon-holed classification, but more specifically due to the fact that the internal conflict between vision and technique tends to break the backbone of dramatic unity. Ibsen was one of the truly visionary dramatists; but due primarily to the various influences of the dramatic tradition in which he came to write, he never completely succeeded in finding a form which would contain and express that vision. He deliberately rejected the empty theatrical tricks of the highly-contrived French well-made plays, the school of Eugene Scribe and Victorien Sardou—what Bernard Shaw called "Sardoodledom". He rejected romanticism, puppeted characters, and the emphasis on intrigue at the expense of poetic and symbolic depth, and personal truth. But in spite of the rejection, he was unable to escape the influence. The result was that his whole career—after abandoning the kind of poetic experimentation he had tried in
Brand (1865) and Peer Gynt (1867)—was an attempt to find a form which would contain both realism and symbolism.

His great plays, from Pillars of Society (1875-77) to Rosmersholm (1886), move closer and closer toward effecting this form, as the symbolism becomes less extraneous and more clearly knit into the fabric of the plays. But after The Wild Duck and Rosmersholm, his two most cohesive plays, he wrote The Lady from the Sea (1888); and from here until his last play, When We Dead Awaken (1899), the symbolism takes over. Ibsen's continued deference to surface appearances and the logic of realistic techniques simply could not keep pace with the symbolic vision. In his earlier plays, symbolism had been infused into the over-all realism; but now the semblance of realism was increasingly subsumed into the overbearing symbolism which dominated, or openly fought against, the thin realistic shell.

Ibsen tried to develop a form which would give the effect of a monolithic simplicity. He adapted the Greek tragic form of stringing an intricate net of circumstances which are only gradually revealed after the play begins. This has been called his "retrospective technique"; the net unravelled into a single thread leading to a tragic denouement. Again and again, this network is built upon various secrets which are finally forced into the open. The nature of these secrets gives a clear indication of the respective positions of reality and illusion. These secrets almost always concern some action committed in a character's private life, which he has had to cover up, or lie about every day, in order to continue to live in his society.

6. A Doll's House (1879); Ghosts (1881); An Enemy of the People (1882); The Wild Duck (1884); Rosmersholm (1886); The Lady from the Sea (1888); Hedda Gabler (1890); The Master Builder (1892); Little Eyolf (1894); John Gabriel Borkman (1896); When We Dead Awaken (1899).
This is the private face in opposition with the social mask. Ibsen builds his plays upon dramatic irony: the audience is informed of the various truths and lies in which the characters are living, while the characters are still interacting in ignorance. The dramatic effect of the plays is usually created through the stripping away of social masks, as the characters are gradually brought into the same awareness of complete truth that the audience holds. The rhythm of the plays is often seen as analogous to that in some Greek tragedy, particularly Oedipus Rex. Ostensibly, in an Ibsen tragedy, the characters who are brought into a violent juxtaposition with truth—that is, their own private reality made publicly known—are forced into self-destruction with the same fury as Jocasta or Oedipus.

Ibsen's plays, however, are less unified, less relentless, less inevitable in their movement toward tragedy. For example, the major difference between Ibsen's vision and the vision in Oedipus Rex is that Ibsen's central characters usually know quite precisely the difference between the truth and the illusion. And indeed, one of Ibsen's major concerns as a dramatist is an open rebellion against the external appearances and illusions of social conventions which fetter, and may eventually kill, an individual's freedom and personal will. Ibsen's characters, with their lies and hidden adventures, are finally exposed in public; but this is quite different from Oedipus Rex and what Aristotle says about it in the Poetics. In this play, it is the character himself, (like Agava in Euripides' Bacchae) who is brought face to face with his own illusions: illusions which he had thought all along were the actual truth. What drives Oedipus
and Jocasta to furiously self-inflicted punishment is the unbearable horror of self-realization, and what this realization means to them in terms of the whole complex of its religious, moral, ethical and political ramifications. It is self-realization, not the idea of public shame or embarrassment, which leads to tragedy. Granted, self-realization is central in *The Wild Duck* and *A Doll's House*; but in the first case, the tragedy does not fall primarily upon the disillusioned character; and in the second, there is no real tragedy at all.

Francis Fergusson points out the way in which the large framework of meaning which are always present in Greek tragedy are missing in a play like *Ghosts*:

The poetry of *Ghosts* is under the words, in the detail of action, where Ibsen accurately sensed the tragic rhythm of human life in a thousand small figures. And those little "movements of the psyche" are composed in a complex rhythm like music, a formal development sustained (beneath the sensational story and the angry thesis) until the very end. But the action is not completed: Mrs. Alving is left screaming with the raw impact of the calamity. The music is broken off, the dissonance unresolved—or, in more properly dramatic terms, the acceptance of the catastrophe, leading to the final vision of epiphany which should correspond to the insight Mrs. Alving gains in Act II, is lacking. The action of the play is neither completed nor placed in the wider context of meanings which the disinterested or contemplative purposes of poetry demand.7

To a large extent, it would seem, this deficiency is the result of an artistic vision and a technical approach which both, simultaneously, rest on realism and poetic symbolism.

The difficulty with many of Ibsen's plays is the problem of understanding what kind of emphasis Ibsen himself was trying to convey. His plays seem to imply one of three approaches: that

society, or social conventions, are primarily to blame; that the blame rests equally on society and the individual's response to it; or, that the responsibility lies with the individual. A Doll's House falls into the first category; society is to blame for personal tragedies because arbitrary authority of any kind impinges upon individual freedom. In The Theatre of Revolt, Robert Brustein goes so far as to argue that Ibsen is not concerned with knocking down any particular social conventions or edifices, but rather, just that he attacks the Establishment per se. Brustein's general conclusion is that the real quintessence of Ibsenism is total resistance to whatever is established, for his anarchistic iconoclasm extends not only to the current conventions of his time, but even to his own current beliefs and convictions. Unable to challenge any position without anatomizing its equally valid (or equally invalid) opposite, Ibsen emerges as the champion of no ideology other than the ideology of the negative assault.

Ghosts, written two years after A Doll's House, falls into the second category: where responsibility lies both with society and the individual. The society is wrong if the conventions by which it operates force a woman like Mrs. Alving to stay with her husband, simply because she had married him in better days. The play was written more or less as a vindication of Nora's leaving Torvald in A Doll's House; but it is built upon a substructure of guilt and responsibility which is complex and ambivalent. John Gassner points out the basis of Ibsen's criticism of Mrs. Alving and the society in which she lives:

Shaw was especially right in attributing to Ibsen the use of "irony" and "paradox", ... and of "parable", ... It is ironical and paradoxical,

for example, that Mrs. Alving's wrong doing in Ghosts consists of not having left her husband and that the rewards of Victorian conformity in the play should prove to be, in her son Oswald's case, softening of the brain. In Ghosts, so to speak, the wages of virtue are paresis.

At the same time, however, Ibsen tries to mould the play around the Greek idea of fatality, of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the sons; and then he chooses to convey this idea not through a personalized sin, but through a highly undignified social disease. Negative assault may be quite acceptable; but it is difficult to agree with Brustein's attempt to quintessentialize Ibsen in this way. It is not that Ibsen should not be allowed to make all-inclusive attacks if he so chooses; but the impression he conveys is that when he is attacking, he is attacking a particular what, why, and how, and that we ought to understand this. When the strands of a play like Ghosts are taken one by one, the separate threads seem so valid, so impressive, so true. But when they are all knit together and then enclosed within a veneer of realism tempered by the effects of well-made machinery and lingering romanticism, the dramatic unity strains under the internal pressure.

The Master Builder falls into the third category: where the responsibility appears to lie primarily with Solness himself. Here, Ibsen seems to be showing us the wages of pride and meanness, quite independent from an implication that social conventions have forced Solness to be treacherous. But again, Ibsen grafts other meanings onto the play: the inevitable progress of generations; the results of a man's ambitions to rise too high; ethical and moral responsibili-

ties; and a doubt about, or defiance against, religion. The preeminent sense of confusion one feels about many of Ibsen's plays is the impression of an ambivalence of tone, and to a large extent, this ambivalence is due to the complexity of the substructure.

Is he trying to write personal tragedy or social commentary? Ibsen might have replied that this is an irrelevant question. But the plays make it/virtually unavoidable one. In The Death of Tragedy, George Steiner argues that they cannot be considered tragedies:

Tragedies end badly. The tragic personage is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence. This again is crucial. Where the causes of disaster are temporal, where the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means, we may have serious drama, but not tragedy. More pliant divorce laws could not alter the fate of Agamemnon; social psychiatry is no answer to Oedipus. But saner economic relations or better plumbing can resolve some of the grave crises in the dramas of Ibsen.

There are specific remedies to the disasters which befall the characters, and it is Ibsen's purpose to make us see these remedies and bring them about. A Doll's House and Ghosts are founded on the belief that society can move toward a sane, adult conception of sexual life and that women can and must be raised to the dignity of man. Pillars of Society and An Enemy of the People are denunciations of the hypocrisies and oppressions concealed behind the mask of middle-class gentility. They tell us of the way in which money interests poison the springs of emotional life and intellectual integrity. They cry out for explicit radicalism and reform. 10

It would seem that we would have to accept this fact, and to say that in spite of what Ibsen may have been trying to write, tragedy was not the result. The tone is ambivalent because the vision increasingly conflicts with subject matter and technique. The broad

frameworks of implied meaning and reference clash with the limited social and personal contexts in which his characters move. In addition, Ibsen's use of symbolism, which grows more and more pronounced in the later plays, tends to break out of the bounds of realistic scenery and detail. In fact, in many of the plays, the technique itself is only partially realistic. It is perhaps more accurate to say that the subject matter is a prosaic realism which Ibsen tries to portray through a poetic symbolism. Muriel Bradbrook points out, for example, that *Ghosts* is not a realistic play:

To begin with, it is not at all realistic. The inexorable chain of cause and effect is far too rationally exact for that. In real life, things don't work out so neatly. Osvald cannot run out without his hat but it portends something—that he will catch a chill and bring on his fit. The dice are loaded... "

Ibsen almost achieved complete success in combining realism and poetic symbolism within a tightly knit monolithic structure in *The Wild Duck* and *Rosmersholm*. Almost, but not quite; and it is the way in which these plays just miss the mark that is indicative of the limitations of realistic theatre. In *The Wild Duck*, the symbolism surrounding the bird constitutes the very substructure of the play itself; but the significance of this symbolism is, again, the source of a disturbing feeling of ambivalence about the artistic vision of the play. Steiner asserts that "With the toy forest and imaginary hunt of Old Ekdal in *The Wild Duck*, drama returns to a use of effective myth and symbolic action which had disappeared from the

theatre since the late plays of Shakespeare." 12  Brian Downs, on the other hand, argues that in *The Wild Duck* (as well as in *Ghosts, The League of Youth, An Enemy of the People, and The Pretenders*), "The symbolism is, so to speak, detachable." 13 In regard to the actual significance of the duck itself, interpretations vary considerably. Two quite different critical statements will give an idea of just how wide the range of opinion is. One is from Raymond Williams. He suggests that Ibsen made of the duck

not a form, within which all the emotions of the play might be controlled and valued, but simply a pressure-point for all kinds of feeling: mature and immature, genuine and calculated, precise and vague. By its very function of uniting such varieties of feeling, it prevents that process of distinction and evaluation which a play of strong, overt emotion particularly needs. The figure, that is to say, while intended to integrate the minutely observed details of the drama, integrates only at the level of theatrical effect; its very sufficiency prevents the achievement of a more conclusive dramatic form. 14

This is very different from Steiner's feeling that the symbolism integrates the play not on a "level of theatrical effect" but on the level of mythology. The other opinion—which pushes the symbolism to the furthest extreme—comes from P. F. D. Tennant:

Ibsen gave the play the name *Vildanden* and I maintain that it was not a title chosen because of the association such a name would arouse but because the wild duck is the chief protagonist of the play... It is because the wild duck by its mere presence so affects the conditions of Gregers, Hjalmar and Hedvig by the various associations it suggests that it bears the sole responsibility for the final catastrophe. 15

This, of course, simply cannot be the case, for the whole net of circumstances culminating in Hedvig's death is strung long before the duck is even introduced, or Gregers made aware of its significance to the Ekdals. Other general opinions about the play range from calling it tragedy to quasi-tragedy to melodrama to pure comedy.

The question which emerges from this is: Why should there be such radically different viewpoints? Why should audiences and critics so often feel at least a vague dissatisfaction or unsettledness about the plays? A general answer to this would seem to rest on two points: the fact that Ibsen had to create a new form; and his increasing tendency to try to contain too many disparate elements within a single play. He tried to make a clean break with the school of Scribe and Sardou, but he did not escape their influence. He tried to make character portrayal, which had been sacrificed to intrigue in the well-made plays, a central concern in drama again; yet he often allowed his characters to be dominated by the overriding structure of a concatenation of (sometimes very contrived) events. He once wrote that his plays "aim at making the reader or spectator feel that during the reading or performance he is actually experiencing a piece of real life". At the same time, however, he tried to incorporate into the substructure of this "real life" a poetry and symbolism to which his characters were often quite unrealistically sensitive. In addition, he tried to utilize basic elements from Greek tragic structure, without taking along the essentially religious implications of fatality which lay at the root of that structure. Ghosts, for example, as Brustein points out, "while

closely patterned on Sophoclean tragedy, lacks one Sophoclean essential: a fatalistic acceptance of human doom."\(^1\)

In some ways, Rosmersholm is more successfully and unambiguously unified that The Wild Duck, simple because the symbolism actually is detachable. The white horses, and Rebecca's long shawl, are unnecessarily obvious symbolic references; but if they seem to intrude, they can be ignored because they do not function as a significant integrating principle on the level either of mythology or of theatrical effect. The motivation, action and fate of the characters transcend symbolic implication. There is also in this play a much greater emphasis on self-realization; and instead of the kind of escape to which Hedda Gabler turns, or the naive martyrdom of Hedvig, there is the implication of an assumption of guilt, responsibility, and need for expiation which at least begins to approximate the frameworks of reference in Greek tragedy. Muriel Bradbrook describes the play as "Ibsen's most perfectly balanced work. Architecturally, he never produced anything so harmonious: it is his most Sophoclean play".\(^2\) And yet, there is still a certain feeling of dissatisfaction, which results again from the fact that the symbolism exceeds the boundaries of realism. When fantasy becomes fact, and legendary horses are actually seen, the realism cracks, the symbolism becomes implausible. In addition, the joint suicide, drawn out and gently discussed beforehand by Rebecca and Rosmer, is a somewhat anticlimactic way of expressing relentless and inevitable doom.

After Rosmersholm and The Lady from the Sea, and at this point the symbolism begins to dominate Ibsen's plays. More and more is


left to implication, less and less being actually portrayed.

Raymond Williams describes Rosmerholm as an insufficiently dramatized psychological novel. This is also true of The Lady from the Sea and When We Dead Awaken, and to a lesser extent Hedda Gabler and The Master Builder. The dramatic unity progressively falls apart; the essence of dramatic action and conflict gives way to what Williams calls "a fictional refinement" of characters; and finally, the symbols themselves have now to be symbolically portrayed on the stage:

Anomalies like the changing colours of the baby's eyes in The Lady from the Sea, the vine-leaves in Eilert Løvborg's hair are carefully reduced to subjective imaginings—and for the White Horses of Rosmersholm Ibsen went perhaps to unnecessary lengths to provide a rationalistic explanation, in the white scarf which Rebecca is busy knitting through a considerable part of the action. But, frankly, the statuary group of 'resurrection Day', as it emerges from the allusions to it in When We Dead Awaken, seems to be an impossibility, and we have to choose between saying the same of Solness's tower and succumbing to the banality of supposing that he fell from the equivalent of a second-floor window.

It is important to look at these last plays in terms of Ibsen's whole career. He often said that his plays had to be studied in the order in which they were written for them to be fully understood. Looking at them from this viewpoint, one can see the impressive scope of his development, how he moved closer and closer to a realistic poetry, or a symbolic realism, which could be contained within, and expressed through, the lines of a clean, bare dramatic form, imbued with the broad implications of fate and the destiny of men. But

19. Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, pp. 90, 91.
vision eventually overshadowed form, and instead of symbolism providing the bone and marrow for realism, realism became just a frail figure on which to drape the heavy garments of symbolism. Rainer Maria Rilke, in his book The Notebooks of Walter Horst Jankel, summarizes in a very suggestive way the vision which Ibsen was trying to communicate, the problems confronting him, and the way in which the dramatic form he almost perfected ultimately disintegrated, due to its limitations. The "obstinate man" referred to is Ibsen:

There I sat before your books, obstinate man, trying to understand them the way those others do who do not leave you intact, but have taken their portion and are satisfied . . .
What did it matter to you whether a woman stays or goes and whether someone is seised with dizziness and someone else with madness and whether the dead live and the living appear to be dead: what did it matter to you? It was all so natural for you; you passed through it, as one crosses a vestibule, and did not stop. But yonder you lingered, stooping; where our becoming seethes and precipitates and changes color, inside. Farther in than anyone has yet been; a door had sprung open before you, and now you were among the alembics in the firelight. Yonder where, mistrustful, you took no one with you, yonder you sat discerning transitions. And there, since it was in your blood to show and not to fashion or to say, there you took the enormous decision at once and single-handed so to magnify these minutiae, which you yourself first became aware of only through glasses, that they should be seen of thousands, immense, before all eyes. Your theater came into being . . .

Given as you were to showing, a timelessly tragic poet, you had to translate this capillary action all at once into the most convincing gestures, into the most present things. Then you set about that unexampled act of violence in your work, which ever more impatiently, ever more desperately, sought equivalents among the visible for the inwardly seen. There was a rabbit, a garret, a room where someone paces to and fro; there was a clatter of glass in the next room, a fire outside the windows, there was the sun. There was a church and a rocky valley that was like a church. But that did not suffice; towers had ultimately to enter and whole
mountain ranges; and the avalanches that bury landscapes overwhelmed the stage with its surfeit of tangible things, for the sake of the impalpable. Then you could do no more. The two extremities you had bent together sprang apart; your mad strength escaped from the flexible shaft, and your work was as nothing.

Who should understand, otherwise, why in the end you would not leave the window, obstinate as you always were? You wanted to see the people passing by; for the thought had occurred to you whether some day one might not make something out of them, if one decided to begin.21

Clearly, Ibsen did want to make something out of them; and he thought that one way to do it was to encourage the individual to assert his own reality, to dare to live without social masks, by throwing the strength of his own character against the shams and lies of social conventions. For social conventions are illusions which perpetuate themselves through people who say: They exist, therefore they must be right.

This was the ostensible basis for the reality/illusion juxtaposition in Ibsen's plays. If this were all there was to it, they would be very limited works of drama. But Ibsen's vision went beyond this, for his plays carry an implicit, if sometimes confusing, concern with the ultimate Reality—fate, destiny, etc.—underlying all of the transitoriness of the everyday contexts in which we live. It is in this direction that he approaches the broad frameworks of a mythology, which carry the expression of his artistic vision far beyond a surface realism. If Ibsen did not succeed in finding or making the form he needed, it may be due, to a large extent, to the vapidity of the dramatic tradition immediately preceding him. It is often the case in the history of art—as in science—that the great innovators are the ones who hew out the general shape of things to come. It is then

left to others to chip away at these forms until the roughnesses give way to balanced and internally integrated works of art.

However, the limitations of Ibsen's plays are at least partially the result of the limitations of realistic drama per se. As Rilke points out, Ibsen had to convey more and more of the internal realities which he sensed, through external symbolism. Having confined himself to an overall realistic approach to character and subject matter, he was not able to rely upon the kind of implicit suggestiveness contained in a deliberately created dramatic illusion.

If the dramatic illusion suffered under realism, it suffered even more under naturalism. Strindberg's development from his first three plays of so-called naturalism—The Father (1887), Miss Julie and Creditors (1888)—to his expressionistic dream plays, parallels Ibsen's development up through, and beyond, Rosmersholm. His career evidences even more sharply than that of Ibsen how vision pushes out against the boundaries of realistic technique. Strindberg was specifically following Zola's ideas about naturalism in theatre when he wrote The Father; and like Ibsen, he was confronted with the necessity of finding a new form to express these ideas. He thought he had achieved the aims of la nouvelle formule of naturalism in The Father; but Zola wrote to him and said that the characters were too abstract, too much "êtres de raison", to conform to the "scientific" exigencies of naturalism. And indeed, the play is not naturalistic; the characters are monolithic, stripped of any individualistic traits, and presented almost as generalized warring elements. However, the technique is naturalistic. Raymond Williams

points out the technical differences between Ibsen's early plays and The Father:

Strindberg, more definitely than Ibsen in his The Doll's House—Wild Duck period, assumes the conventionality of his characters. He rejects the formal carpentry of the well-made play which Ibsen so persistently retained. The Father is 'formless' and is played out at a single level. But while this permits more adequate expression of the central experience (compare the speeches of Laura and the Captain with those of Nora and Torvald), the very formlessness, the absence of 'theatricality' only reinforces the illusion that this is a life-mechanism. And this is an illusion which limits and perhaps destroys the achievement of the essentially conventional literary expression.23

As we have seen, this is precisely the problem in plays which try to deny the essential illusion of theatre itself. When theatre tries to become the place for common reality, then that common reality will often appear to be (sometimes ridiculously) "theatrical".

In Miss Julie, Strindberg tried to correct the non-naturalistic errors in The Father; ironically, the play is even less naturalistic than its predecessors. Virtually what Strindberg did was to exchange the non-naturalistic characters and naturalistic technique of The Father for naturalistic characters (as Zola defined them) and non-naturalistic technique. He took the single level of The Father and expanded it into a play which operates on a multiple-level of suggestiveness. In the preface to Miss Julie, he congratulated himself upon the "multiplicity of motives" influencing his characters; he analyzed Julie from every angle, and then tried to make his sociological and psychological interest in the characters the very fabric of the dramatic action. He intended to take a slice of life, and in a sense, that is what he did do; but it was not the kind of

23. Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, pp. 117, 118.
slice of life Zola had been describing in terms of the novel. Zola had meant a slice of life in toto, as though one were to take a film of a whole city over a short period of time, and then analyze what everyone was doing and why. Strindberg transferred this idea to the stage in more or less the only way possible: he sliced down the middle of two or three characters, caught in conflict. It was not just deference to Zola’s remarks to him that made Strindberg abandon the characterization in The Father; it was also due to his own realization that people are unfathomably complex. He says in the preface:

I do not believe, therefore, in simple stage characters; and the summary judgments of authors—this man is stupid, that one brutal, this jealous, that stingy, and so forth—should be challenged by the Naturalists who know the richness of the soul complex and realize that vice has a reverse side very much like virtue... My souls (characters) are conglomerations of past and present stages of civilization, bits from books and newspapers, scraps of humanity, rags and tatters of fine clothing, patched together as is the human soul.

What he tried to do in Miss Julie and in some subsequent plays, was to catch his characters at a particular stage of conflict or on the brink of destruction, in order to analyze all of the things which might be motivating them.

At the same time, however, he tried to contain this multiplicity within an increasingly terse structure. In 1888, he spoke of "la nouvelle formule... make the pain brief, let the action spend itself in one rapid movement!"24 Zola had said: "The novel analyzes at length with a minuteness of detail which overlooks nothing; the stage can analyze as briefly as it wishes by actions and words. In

Balzac's work a word or a cry is often sufficient to describe the entire character. This cry belongs essentially to the theatre".  

Strindberg's technique was more, not less, selective than Ibsen's realism, but because he could make concessions to impressionism and expressionism, he could more easily afford to be selective than could Ibsen. He could rely on suggestiveness, where Ibsen had had to create externalized symbols.

In spite of Strindberg's theories and his intentions to write naturalistic drama, it is clear that his artistic vision went beyond naturalism. At the same time that he moved toward naturalism on one level, he was also returning to pre-realistic concepts about the place of reality and illusion in theatre. Eventually he was able to do what Ibsen had never done: to abandon realism altogether, and create a totally symbolic theatre.

Miss Julie is perhaps the best example of the way in which Strindberg's naturalism moved far beyond Zola's concepts, and beyond even Strindberg's ideas. But like many of Ibsen's plays, it fails to effect a total dramatic unity, due to an internal conflict between vision and technique. In spite of all he said in the preface in defence of Miss Julie as a demonstration of theatrical naturalism, the play refuses to fit the mould; at points it falls below the intention, at points it transcends it. There is a clash, for example, between Strindberg's sense of tragedy, and concepts of the artistic usefulness of objectivity. In the preface, he says:

> When I took this theme from a true story told me some years ago, which made a deep impression, I saw it as a subject for tragedy, for as yet it is tragic.

to see one favoured by fortune go under, and still more to see a family heritage die out, although a time may come when we have grown so developed and enlightened that we shall view with indifference life's spectacle, now seeming so brutal, cynical and heartless. Then we shall have dispensed with those inferior, unreliable instruments of thought called feelings, which become harmful and superfluous as reasoning develops.

That Strindberg could write two sentences so full of self-contradiction, and not realize the inherent inconsistencies, is an indication of the struggle he had to find a new form. It is not so much that naturalism and tragedy are ipso facto incompatible as it is that a totally objective, intellectual approach undercuts the possibility of developing a deep concern with what happens to the characters. If we are to see Julie only as the end product of many influences, then she remains only "interesting", sociologically or psychologically speaking; and her death would carry only the emotion of the solution of a mathematical problem. In theory, this overreaches even the scientific, analytical aims of Brechtian theatre; but, there is a big gap in Strindberg's writings between theory and practice.

There is another explanation in the preface to Miss Julie which also indicates ways in which Strindberg's creative insight went beyond his theories. Following the scientific aims of naturalism, he describes the various aspects of Julie's character:

I see Miss Julie's tragic fate to be the result of many circumstances: the mother's character, the father's mistaken upbringing of the girl, her own nature, and the influence of her fiancé on a weak, degenerate mind. Also, more directly, the festive mood of Midsummer Eve, her father's absence, her monthly indisposition, her pre-occupation with animals, the excitement of dancing, the magic of dusk, the strongly aphrodisiac influence of flowers...
The first few circumstances might make the basis for a naturalistic, even kitchen-sink drama; but all of the atmosphere evoked by the Midsummer Eve dance moves the play, in spite of Strindberg's theoretical intentions, out of the realm of naturalism into poetry and symbolism.

He also departs from naturalism in his use of ballet, mime and monologue. He tries to justify the use of these techniques in terms of naturalistic theory. In regard to monologue, he says: "It is, surely, natural for a public speaker to walk up and down the room practicing his speech, natural for an actor to read his part aloud, for a servant girl to talk to her cat, a mother to prattle to her child, an old maid to chatter to her parrot, and a sleeper to talk in his sleep." Mime, he explains, is used where monologue would be unnatural; and both mime and monologue he feels to be justified by the Midsummer Eve dance. The use of ballet is less forcefully defended: he explains that he uses it in place of a crowd-scene, "for such scenes are too badly played—a lot of grinning idiots seizing the opportunity to show off and thus destroying the illusion."

But these explanations do not really fit the play in question. Monologue, for example, is introduced because there is no other way for Strindberg to analyze and explain his characters. To some extent, William's comments about Rosmersholm being better for a psychological novel is applicable to Miss Julia as well; and like Ibsen, Strindberg was forced to utilize non-naturalistic methods for portraying the complexity underlying the action. A blatant example of non-naturalistic monologue occurs about midway through the play; after a fierce exchange of insults, Jean and Julie try to make some plans for going away. They have to act quickly, for the Count's return is imminent. Then Julie,
agreeing with Jean that they must escape, suddenly says: "We've got to run away, but we must talk first—or rather I must, for so far you've done all the talking. You've told me about your life, now I want to tell you about mine, so that we really know each other before we begin this journey..." And then she launches into her life history, saying: "But anyway everyone known my secrets. Listen..." This speech, by explaining why Julie is as she is, is necessary to the play; but as a monologue it undeniably reduces the tension, and at this particular point in the play, its occurrence is highly improbable. There are also the highly symbolic dreams which Strindberg gives to both Jean and Julie, as a way of describing the bases of their subconscious minds, and their respective feelings about their social positions. But this is, again, non-naturalistic, and even a bit too obvious in its functional role. The use of ballet, when the peasants enter the kitchen, also seems very contrived and improbable, and almost embarrassingly functional as a reason to allow the time and necessity for Jean and Julie to go into the bedroom.

Strindberg's problem was the difficulty of creating an extremely compressed form in order to "make the pain brief", and at the same time allowing for full-blown, closely-analyzed characters. The more compressed he became, the more he had to convey through symbolism and suggestion alone. But then, symbolic and impressionistic visions lay at the base of all his theatre. Even in the preface to Miss Julie, he says: "As regards the scenery, I have borrowed from impressionistic painting its asymmetry and its economy; thus, I think, strengthening the illusion. For, the fact that one does not see the whole room and all
the furniture leaves scope for conjecture—that is to say imagination is roused and complements what is seen." (italics mine). This is beginning to return theatre to its original status as a deliberately created illusion; and what Strindberg realized here was that one could simulate common reality much more effectively through illusion than through precise representation. He was still very bound in naturalism in this play, and he continued to use it through Creditors, The Stronger (1889) and Dance of Death (1901); but the seeds of his expressionistic plays are already evident.

It would be misleading to imply either that Ibsen and Strindberg failed to create effective and impressive works of drama, or that realism and naturalism are totally useless methods on the stage. On the other hand, one must admit that their plays are often less successful than more recent attempts along the same line. To a large extent, however, these later plays are more successful because Ibsen and Strindberg had cleared the stage, and provided playwrights with the general shape of a form and language with which to work. Many modern plays are analogous in form to plays of Strindberg (Ibsen's unique structure could not very well be continued); and like Strindberg's plays, they go beyond mere naturalism or even realism. Most often, they deal with realistic characters or subject matter, enclosed within a total structure which is built more openly and easily on illusion, symbolism, mythology or ritual, than are the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg.

A few recent examples might serve to indicate some differences and similarities. One is Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night (completed 1941). This is very like the kind of static action found
in Dance of Death. The situation is basically fixed, and either remains the same throughout, or returns to the point of departure. But where Strindberg objectifies the movement in action, O'Neill internalizes it. The play moves forward, not from some characters rising and others falling, but from a rapid alternation between characters who one minute suggest love for each other, and the next minute hatred. O'Neill implies a life-death struggle within the soul, mind, or emotions of the characters. In this way, I think, he suggests much more than Strindberg suggests through his particular husband and wife.

Edward Albee's The Zoo Story (1959) and Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962) bear similarities to The Father, Miss Julie and Creditors. These plays all involve the kind of struggle of which Strindberg speaks in an essay entitled "Psychic Murder":

The struggle for power has, from being purely physical (prison, torture, death), gradually developed into a more psychological battle, but a no less cruel one... Formerly one killed one's opponent without having converted him. Now one creates a majority against him, "converts" him, exposes his intentions, attributes to him different intentions from those he actually has, deprives him of his means of subsistence, denies him his social standing, ridicules him, in one word tortures and slanders him to death or drives him mad instead of killing him.26

The power of suggestion, the manipulation of one mind by another, and the power of language as a weapon (which is also taken up by the Absurdistes) are central ideas in all of these plays. In The Father, Laura manages to manipulate the Captain by making subtle

insinuations and by convincing the other characters that he is mentally unstable. In Miss Julie, Jean reduces Julie by a barrage of insults, and finally dictates to her to commit suicide, though Julie, of course, plays a large part in her own downfall. In Creditors, however, Gustav manages by himself, with language alone, to victimize Adolf; it demonstrates the influence of the stronger mind over the weaker.

The Zoo Story has essentially the same basic structure: action is contained in the tension of the dialogue between warring characters. Albee creates situations which, even more than those in Strindberg’s plays, move forward by words alone. There is almost no physical action in The Zoo Story. Peter sits on a park bench while Jerry talks his way around the stage. It is by Jerry’s sheer emotional energy and intellectual agility alone, which allow him to play a situation by ear, that he carries the play forward. Finally, he sits down; and it is by this simple action of sitting down that the final violet conclusion is precipitated. This is quite different from Jean chopping off the head of Julie’s greenfinch, or the externally-portrayed symbolism in Dance of Death, where the Captain actually performs a kind of dance in his gyrations between life and death.

The Zoo Story differs from Dance of Death in that Albee is concerned here to illustrate how a simple, innocuous situation can suddenly become desperately serious and complex. Action builds rapidly, through words alone, and suddenly the cumulative speed hurries the characters into violence. By contrast, Strindberg was showing the continued, unchanging tensions in a static situation like a marriage gone sour. It is more accurate to make an analogy between The Zoo
What Albee achieves in *The Zoo Story* is a thorough integration between form and subject matter. By taking the general situation of two strangers in a park and conveying in their conversation all that it is necessary to know about them, the play presents a completely cohesive event. In this way, Albee avoids the slight internal discrepancies found in *Miss Julie*.

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* follows from the tradition of *The Father* and *Long Day's Journey* in its use of three acts, one room and a few characters. Albee again uses a very loose situation and rapidly-modulating dialogue. Because the tension of the play is constantly held in the dialogue, and because the characters "explain" themselves in everything they say, Albee can afford to write a long play, and can avoid the kind of explanatory speeches found in Strindberg's plays. The characters are much more broadly defined than those like the Captain or Laura or Miss Julie, and their pervasive symbolic function never transgresses the naturalistic framework. Albee's play also makes a broader statement: it implies that life itself is a game, played by the rules people make up for themselves and others. Games may be salvation (as in the idea of the fantasy about the son—and here George plays God), or damnation, if the game-illusion is substituted for reality, and then lost. The tensions shown between the characters are indicative of life as a whole. Life involves the comic and the tragic and everything lies in between. It is as though Albee had taken one small section from the middle of one of Strindberg's naturalistic plays and put it under a microscope, infinitely enlarging all the implications. He sacrifices compression of statement, but he manages by so doing to sustain a consistent intensity from beginning
to end which Strindberg just missed in Miss Julie. The play is more successful than Dance of Death, which it resembles most closely; and again, one feels that it is because Albee already had the language which, before Strindberg and Ibsen, scarcely existed. Since Strindberg did not have the language, he had to rely more on situation.

All of these plays indicate another important difference from Strindberg's plays: concepts about reality and illusion. Strindberg, like Ibsen, was primarily concerned to illustrate the conflict between the reality of the individual who is confronted by the illusions of social conventions or, more important, the illusions other people have about him. When Strindberg speaks about a person having attributed to him intentions which are not his, he anticipates the Father's speeches in Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author (1921). It was Strindberg's growing awareness of the complexity of the individual which finally led him into the highly subjective dream plays. But in the naturalistic plays, he is still concerned with the reality of the individual—which can be understood if explained—which is in psychological battle with the world outside itself. In Albee's plays, however, reality and illusion are described within the single character. The games and characters play are built upon deliberately perpetuating some illusions while tearing down others. Through the playing of games, and specifically, the telling of stories—Jerry's story about the dog and the "zoo story" itself; George and Martha's whole story about their "son"—Albee greatly enlarges the scope of the plays. He implies a substructure of myth, legend and ritual, as the titles of the three acts to Who's Afraid indicate: "Fun and Games"; "Walpurgisnacht"; and "The Exorcism".
And through the nature of the stories, and the reasons his characters have for telling them, he creates by analogy a broad framework of meaning. By analogy too, the audience is made to feel that although the subject matter is basically realistic (in dealing with non-heroic, middle-class people and situations), the dramatic representation is not. Albee, like his characters, is telling a story. The subtle ritual framework, and the balance between the characters, tends to create just enough of a sense of distance to encourage the audience to see the meaning of the whole action—to become involved in the total movement of the play rather than lost in a realistic identification with particular characters or particular incidents.

The form and expression of many modern realistic plays is often such that action explains character, rather than character explaining action. In Ibsen's plays, characters eventually have to explain the dark secrets of their part. Rebecca must explain herself to Rosmer; Nora must sit down and talk to Torvald, and to Mrs. Linde; the women in Pillars of Society must explain Dina's past. Miss Julie has to describe herself in order that her actions may be understood. By contrast, Jerry, in The Zoo Story, acts and then explains; in fact, all of his speeches are really action in a particular sense. He talks his way around the stage. Speech and action are more highly integrated here. In Harold Pinter's The Caretaker (1960), Mick verbally plays with Davies, as Gustav played with Adolf in Creditors; but Pinter intensifies the dramatic experience by paralleling Mick's speeches with silent games. There is, for example, the episode with the bag, or the scene shortly later when
Davies enters and cannot turn on the light. In the latter instance, Pinter builds a sudden, threatening situation, which more or less explodes harmlessly when Mick finally says, simply: "I was just doing some spring cleaning." It is analogous to the sort of thing that happens in *Who's Afraid* when George explodes the threat of Martha's tirade by shooting the toy gun.

Naturalism is used in these plays less to convey external realism than to express the intensity of inner reality. Strindberg tried, through naturalism, to say that, in reality, such things as Julie's downfall and the Father's defeat can happen in everyday life. For these modern writers, naturalism itself becomes the symbol. They do not set out to convince us that everyday reality presents us with the situations which Albee and Pinter present. Instead, outer reality is stripped away, and naturalism and symbol function together to express the inner reality. A particularly good example of this technique is found in Sartre's *No Exit* (*Huis Clos*, 1944; also translated as *In Camera*). The theme is quite similar to that in *Dance of Death*. Very near the end of *No Exit*, Garcin says: "... So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the 'burning marl'. Old wives' tales: There's no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is—other people." To express this same idea, Strindberg had taken a real situation, put symbols into it, and implied his statement through the reality within the symbols. Sartre, on the other hand, discards the outer reality (or naturalistic situation) and presents a deliberately symbolic situation on the outside. In this way, he avoids the difficult task—which, as we have seen, Ibsen also faced—of having to integrate a real situation with a symbolic statement;
and thus he can concentrate just on the symbols and the reality they convey.

It is an interesting technique, and particularly effective in the way Sartre handles it. He puts a completely naturalistic, unsymbolic dialogue into an overtly symbolic situation—Hell—and then represents Hell as a thoroughly conventional "drawing-room in Second Empire style." And it works. No one knows any more or less about Hell as a location than Sartre; therefore, he may create it as he pleases. The attention and curiosity of the audience are immediately engaged. They can easily suspend disbelief because the hypothesis cannot be disproved. The cohesion of the play lies in the fact that Sartre creates a situation in which the "plot" demands that all the characters explain themselves. The disparate techniques do not fight each other, but instead join hands and propel forward the dialogue. Again, it is dialogue which carries the movement of the play. Strindberg might well have envied Sartre for finding such an effective integration between form and subject.

It would seem that one of the reasons why many modern playwrights are able to substitute language for physical action as the basis of movement in a play is that naturalistic speech has been polished over a long period of time, so that it can now sound natural and at the same time convey a great deal more than the sound of haphazard conversation. Also, the emphasis on language is to a large degree due to the idea of the difficulty or impossibility of communication. The Caretaker and The Zoo Story are both examples of plays which are constructed around the theme of the difficulty of communication; and both Pinter and Albee create a highly evocative language to express
this theme. In *The Caretaker*, three characters, all with very different personalities and manners of speech, are enclosed in a situation as isolated from the outside world as is the Hell in *No Exit*. Their experiences have been very different; all of them struggle to communicate them—communicate on a total level, that is—and none of them succeeds. Language is deficient, and personal action is no real substitute: Davies does not go to Sidcup; Aston does not build his shed; Mick does not redecorate the house. They talk instead; and in the language, particularly that of Davies, Pinter catches and remoulds typical kinds of speech. He heightens this speech until the language itself creates a rhythm, expressive of each character, which approaches poetry. The play moves along by a poetic kind of suggestiveness and symbolism. This is more or less the inverse of T. S. Eliot's approach, when he explains that poetry (that is, verse) should be so subtly created in drama that the audience is unaware of the fact that the medium is verse.  

Eliot sets out to fashion a form of verse which approximates the sounds of everyday speech; Pinter starts by creating a realistic speech which approaches poetry.

Eliot's discussion of verse in "Poetry and Drama" is illuminating in terms of playwrights who, like Pinter and unlike Eliot, have moulded a language from the raw material of ordinary, "realistic" speech. He says:

> In those prose plays which survive, which are read and produced on the stage by later generations, the prose in which the characters speak is as remote, for the best part, from the vocabulary, syntax, and

27. T. S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama", in *Selected Prose*, p. 65.
rhythm of our ordinary speech—with its fumbling for words, its constant recourse to approximation, its disorder, and its unfinished sentences—as verse is. Like verse, it has been written, and rewritten... I mean to draw a triple distinction: between prose, and verse, and our ordinary speech which is mostly below the level of either verse or prose. So if you look at it in this way, it will appear that prose, on the stage, is as artificial as verse: or alternatively, that verse can be as natural as prose.28

Northrup Frye, in his book The Well-Tempered Critic (1963) makes this same triple distinction. He says of ordinary speech that it is concerned mainly with putting into words what is loosely called the stream of consciousness: the daydreaming, remembering, worrying, associating, brooding and moaning that continually flows through the mind...

One can see in ordinary speech, however, a unit of rhythm peculiar to it, a short phrase that contains the central word or idea aimed at, but is largely innocent of syntax. It is much more repetitious than prose, as it is in the process of working out an idea, and the repetitions are largely rhythmic filler, like the nonsense words of popular poetry, which derive from them. In pursuit of its main theme it follows the paths of private association, which gives it a somewhat meandering course.29

He calls "the rhythm of ordinary speech the associative rhythm".30

What Pinter does in The Caretaker is to accentuate the rhythm, particularly of repetitiveness, of ordinary speech, and to thus make a language which is less remote, in Eliot's sense, than either prose or verse, but which still conveys a sense of rhythm, and is significant in terms of the individual rhythms used to describe each character. Rhythm is used the same way in The Zoo Story, and like The Caretaker, Albee's play is explicitly concerned with the difficulty of communication. In both plays, too, verbal rhythm is stressed by a

30. Ibid., p. 22.
parallel rhythm in action: Jerry's walking around the stage ("sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly"); Aston's patient tinkering with things mechanical; Mick's abrupt and violently jerky movements; Davies' shambling back and forth from lassitude to energy, from brother to brother.

What we have in all of these plays, then, is a core of naturalism or realism. It may function either as the substructure or basic subject or character matter, as in No Exit, or it may serve as a general framework within which occurs an impressionistic or symbolic action, as in The Caretaker or The Zoo Story. The techniques of realism vary, as does the emphasis; and what, in these plays, remains basically straightforward, becomes very complex and obscure when pushed toward an emphasis on symbolism. The situation in No Exit is thoroughly logical; it explores, in very conventional forms of feeling, language, and argument, the age-old concept of Hell. Sartre is presenting his own vision, true; but he is not creating a context of inquiry any more innovative than that of Dante or Milton. However, when a situation like this is pushed a bit further, we often land up confronted by an "Absurd" play. Ionesco's The Lesson (1951) is a convenient example. Here again, there is a concentration on language—particularly language as a weapon—and on the problem of communication; but Ionesco internalizes the problem, focusing it on the Professor and expressing it in a context of total non-reality. Realism often functions in Absurdist drama as an implicit framework—here, the teacher giving the pupil a lesson—in order that the audience be led
to see the abyss of portentous implication underlying what may seem to be common ordinary situations. Within the momentary realism of situation in *The Lesson*, Ionesco pushes the associative aspect of ordinary language to the extreme, and a very unrealistic, illogical language is created to convey non-communication. What happens here, as the Maid explains, is that "arithmetic leads to philology, and philology leads to crime..." The only way the Professor can communicate is through a violent and symbolic action. It is the same thing that happens in *The Zoo Story*; the only difference is that we understand—or think we understand—what Jerry is trying to communicate, but do not understand the Professor's motivations. Ionesco has merely chosen a more overtly symbolic way of showing the ultimate barriers in explaining oneself. The audience here is given the role of Peter in *The Zoo Story*: we can only watch, be baffled, maybe irritated, finally shocked and uncomprehending.

Samuel Beckett's plays evidence a similar use of realism—realism of speech, for example, as in *Happy Days* (1961), contained within a totally non-realistic situation. In Beckett's plays, the concentration on immobility and the uselessness of language is increasingly emphasized by overt symbolism: wheelchairs, ashcans, mounds of sand, etc. In Absurdist drama, expressionism (hence, symbolism) dominates a play, and realism may disappear altogether. But one can at least see here that the ideas contained within the symbolism of these plays are only a few steps removed from ideas contained in more realistic dramatizations of the same problems. As we shall see, Absurd drama has its roots in Strindberg's expressionistic plays; but it is worth
noting here that many essentially expressionistic plays of recent years also have strong realistic roots, stemming even back to Ibsen. These plays are often a combination of idiosyncratic forms of symbolism being tempered by conventional forms of realistic technique. Rather than symbolism bursting the bonds of realism, as in Ibsen’s late plays, or symbolism being used to create a private language (as in some of Strindberg’s work), it becomes concrete: an ashcan in Beckett has a definite and relatively obvious meaning. And realism is the means by which the playwright creates an immediate sense of understanding with his audience, so he may then explode the audience’s comfortably superficial interpretations of common experience. This same use of a basically realistic framework enclosing an overt and recognized symbolism is found in the works of Franz Kafka, in “The Metamorphosis”, for example, and in The Trial. Again, it is the intention of the writer to present the terror of the unknown which lies just below the surface of everyday experience. And like the Absurd dramatists, Kafka gives no ultimate explanations.

Perhaps the best way to summarize “realism” is to stress again that it is a technique—a means to an end—and not a form in and of itself. Where the audience feels that the technique becomes the whole dramatic form, they will also feel that the dramatic representation is too confined, too limited; and at its most restricted, they will be apt to say, with Strindberg, “how does this concern me?” But realism as a technique can be very effective, and indeed, the bulk of modern plays since Ibsen have utilized aspects of realism. The days of heroic tragedies and contrived comedies were ended by the dramatists at
the close of the last century—Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw, Chekhov—she began the difficult task of taking drama seriously again, (after its demise into the well-made play), and forging new forms. With Ibsen and Strindberg came "bourgeois tragedy", as Hebbel called it, in his preface to Maria Magdalena (1844); with Chekhov and Shaw came what might be called "creative", or "openended", comedy.
CHAPTER IV

IMPRESSIONISM: THE ILLUSION AND THE DREAM

... to my mind the modern theatre is nothing but tradition and conventionality. When the curtain goes up, and by artificial light, in a room with three walls, these great geniuses, the devotees of holy art, represent how people eat, drink, love, move about, and wear their jackets; when from these commonplace sentences and pictures they try to draw a moral—a petty moral, easy of comprehension and convenient for domestic use; when in a thousand variations I am offered the same thing over and over again—I run away as Maupassant ran away from the Eiffel Tower which weighed upon his brain with its vulgarity.

—Chekhov, The Seagull

In realistic drama, we saw that the relationship between reality and illusion focused upon the relationship between the individual and society. Illusion often concerned an individual's ignorance about the affairs of other individuals, or his misconceptions (in the dramatist's opinion) about the abstract importance of certain social conventions. There is another way in which illusion sometimes functions in these plays, and that is in the impossible dreams, the unattained ideals that the characters cherish. To a certain extent, both of these ideas of illusion work together in a play like Hebbel's Maria Magdalena; and it is because they are intimately linked that the tragedy, as Hebbel conceived it, occurs. Anton's ideal is to live in the strictest, even superhuman, conformity with the appearances of society; but, by setting up these conventions as the highest,
and indeed only, standard of value, he denies the personal life. Compromise is not permissible and individual illusions are unacceptable. Guilt and responsibility exist on a social level, and must be paid for in terms of the public currency of behaviour. Tragedy ensues because the value and vulnerability of the individual are not taken into account.

What Hebbel illustrates here is the way in which a man's adherence to an abstract rule can cause the complete moral disintegration of another person who does not, or cannot, conform in like measure. In the last analysis, it is Anton and not society who is responsible for Klara's death; for if social appearance per se were the only concern, Anton could adopt as Leonard adapts, by simply allowing Klara to marry the Secretary. One feels that Klara could herself accept this solution, for her sense of guilt revolves entirely around her father's attitude, and not around an innate sense of sin. But Anton is like Ilov in Chekhov's Ivanov (1887)—the young doctor of whom Sasha says: "He can't ask for a glass of water or smoke a cigarette without displaying his extraordinary honesty". (Act II). He has what Shabelsky in the play calls: "A stupid, pitiless honesty". (Act II) Later in the play, Ilov says to Ivanov: "Come, whom do you think you are taking in? Throw off your mask!" And Ivanov answers him:

You clever person, think a little! You suppose there is nothing easier than understanding me, yes? I married Anna for the sake of her fortune . . . they did not let me have it. I made a blunder, and now I am getting rid of her so as to marry another girl and get her money, yes? How simple and straightforward! Man is such a simple, uncomplicated machine . . . No doctor, there are too many wheels and screws and levers in any one of
us for us to be able to judge each other from the first impression or from two or three external signs. I don't understand you, you don't understand me, and we don't understand ourselves. One may be a good doctor and at the same time utterly ignorant of human nature. (Act III)

From Maria Magdalena through to the plays of Pirandello, one can see a more or less straight development in the treatment of social conventions (illusions) and private illusions or ideals. Hebbel illustrates the danger of equating the two, by describing a character in whom both are inextricably bound together. Ibsen illustrates the discrepancy in many of his specifically socially-oriented plays, by showing the conflict between society and the individual who is pulled in two directions. In The Wild Duck, Ibsen creates in Gregers a character similar to Anton; but the situation is different in that Ibsen implies the value, in some circumstances, of the "life-lie". He is satirizing Gregers in the same way that Chekhov satirizes Lvov, and at the same time showing that absolute honesty is not always the best policy. And to some extent, this is one of the reasons why the play is one of Ibsen's best, for the particular situation is only an illustration of an attitude, and not the necessary keystone to the theme, as was the case in A Doll's House and Ghosts. Gregers is destroying an illusion, not just this particular illusion. In this play, Ibsen anticipates the compassionate life-lies which exist at the very center of such plays as Pirandello's Right You Are! (If You Think So).

Chekhov, too, anticipates Pirandello in this way. The above-mentioned speech from Ivanov illustrates the same sensitivity to the complexity of the individual which Strindberg had perceived
and developed. Illusions become recognized and accepted as part of the process of living. And increasingly, illusions, dreams, ideals, are bound up with, and expressed through, the telling of stories. This is seen even in Gorky's *The Lower Depths* (1901), in the attitude of Luka and the story that he tells about the man who believed in the "true and just land". This play might almost be seen to stand midway between early realistic drama, where illusions are ruthlessly torn down simply because they are illusions, and the plays of Pirandello and others after him, which openly account for the necessity of illusions as a saving life-lie. Richard Hare, in a recent book on Gorky, explains how Gorky was torn between the facts, and the necessary illusions of life. Referring to Satin's speech in Act IV of *The Lower Depths*, where Satin acclaims the heights to which man can reach, Hare says:

> While this concluding speech of Satin may flow appropriately from the mouth of a thoughtful ex-convict in an expansive mood, we are hardly entitled to tear it from the context and present it as Gorky's own considered philosophic message. His central theme remained the disparity between factual truth and inspiring legend, and the human need for both. To make it a moving drama, Gorky needed Luka as much as Satin. He floundered in the mental conflict between them because he would never admit that faith and logic can belong to separate spheres. Where legend reveals a spiritual faith it need not lie, provided it makes no logical statement about verifiable facts, but goes outside them. Like a beautiful thing it can help people most by being simply what it is.

> Yet Gorky remained perpetually oppressed by the petty factual truths which (isolated from any faith) drip on a man's head like water in a Chinese torture, and slowly crush his will-power. Therefore he set out to justify not merely an unverifiable legend, but even a 'helpful lie', however demonstrably false, so long as either could revive the flagging will to live.

The Lower Depths is a good example of realism at its best, for Gorky encloses the action within the broad frameworks of what we have called "mythology", and through these particular characters he implies unparticularized movements within the individual man, and between men in societies.

Shaw, too, recognized the need for illusions. In his essay "The Illusions of Socialism", he writes: "Take from the activity of mankind that part of it which consists in the pursuit of illusions, and you take out the world's mainspring." When we come to look at Shaw's plays, we will see the way in which he was concerned to tear down some illusions through logical argument, while at the same time aware of the role of certain kinds of illusion. What is important to note here is that with these playwrights, and others such as Yeats and Synge, two significant things begin to happen: there is a change in the writer's focus on the relationship between reality and illusion; and there is a growing awareness by the writer of the essence of art as a form which, through an illusion, communicates reality. These two viewpoints move closer and closer together, becoming two aspects of the same consideration, until finally the questions of the relationship between the individual, social illusions, private illusions, guilt and responsibility, and the position of the work of art itself as an illusion, in relation to all other illusions, become one and the same question. And this question itself is the drama of Pirandello.

Raymond Williams suggests one of the ways in which the interconnections between these various concerns move from the plays of Chekhov through to Pirandello:

All Chekhov's work is rooted in a sense of society, and in the inescapable connection of what a less honest but more complacent period calls 'public' and 'private facts'. It is not that human beings are simple, or simply determined. It is that society is, inevitably, the sum of their relationships, and when these are badly wrong, or when people cease to understand them, there is a complicated structure of guilt and illusion which is lived through in every corner of experience, as well as at the most obvious meeting-points. Yet there is a stage beyond this, when the condition is so complete that it is taken for granted, and the particular structure becomes general and is taken for life itself. This seems to me to happen, decisively, in Pirandello.  

In this way, the relationships between reality and illusion, and society and the individual, begin to merge. And as we shall see, in many modern plays, e.g., those of Genet, the interconnections between illusion and guilt are particularly strong.

At this point, we may refer back to our original diagram in Chapter I. In that chapter, the hypothesis was made that realism and naturalism are primarily concerned with reality becoming illusion as directly as an object becomes an image of itself in a mirror, To a large extent, the manner in which the division between reality and illusion was conveyed was in the discrepancy between "public" and "private" facts, or, the social mask and the private face.

Individualized characters were presented in generalized contexts—i.e., moral and social contexts which were recognizably familiar to the audience. This division between character and context is, in fact, the basis of most all drama from the Greeks through to Shakespeare through to the realists. The contexts were general because people lived by certain accepted standards of political, social

3. Raymond Williams, Modern Tragedy, p. 146.
and religious behaviour; and when the individual transgressed these mores, the audience knew that disturbing consequences were bound to ensue. In realistic drama, the characters were less heroic (partially due to the democratic structures of State), but they were still strongly individual, primarily in their motivations toward personal freedom, often in defiance of the external standards.

With impressionistic drama, the playwright's concern with reality and illusion is focused on the individual character. The division between social mask and private face now becomes a tri-partition between social mask, social face and private face. In other words, what these dramatists often portray is a situation which reveals the character to himself, which shows him the discrepancy between what he thinks are his social attitudes, and what they actually are. Or, the distinction may lie in the difference between the social role he believes he is living because he believes he ought to be living it, and that social life which, were he living it, would be true to his private life as an individual. There is, at this point, a shift of emphasis away from the abstract social context toward the individual himself, the complexity of his own nature, and the complexity of his relationship with society.

The corollary of this development is that the impressionist dramatist (like the impressionist painter and composer) was not concerned with making reality into an illusion-of-reality, but with giving content a form—with seeing into things and representing the internal life through the external work of art. Form itself—particularly in the plays of Yeats and Chekhov, and also of Shaw and Synge—becomes a central concern. Hence, with impressionism, we move from the first category of the diagram to the second, and we
may now expand the diagram thus:

I  REALITY ———— ILLUSION ———— REALISM/NATURALISM

private face ——— social mask ——— Ibsen; Strindberg's
(individual reality) (social reality, which is an illusion, distinction between mark
reality) a mask)

individualized
characters in a ———— generalized context

II  CONTENT ———— FORM ———— IMPRESSIONISM

private face ———— social mask ——— Chekhov, Shaw; characters social face begin to lie to themselves.

because of the ———— dissolution of linear plot breakdown of moral structures per se,
realistic/naturalistic concentration on the social and/or lessening concern with society.

now becomes personality, impression becomes more important
personal become more important audience, actively.

A brief comparison between some aspects of Ibsen's plays and those of Shaw will illustrate how the relationships between reality and illusion, and society and the individual, change from realistic to impressionistic drama. In Pillars of Society, Bernick knows what actually happened in the private lives of those around him; but he deliberately puts on a social mask in order to keep up the appearances which are necessary for a comfortable life in the community. What Ibsen brings into line are the reality of the private face and the sham of the social mask. A similar development occurs with Rebecca in Rosmersholm, Mrs. Alving in Ghosts, and
Solness in *The Master Builder.* In *A Doll's House,* Ibsen begins to anticipate impressionist drama, where a character grows into self-awareness; this he portrays in *Nora.* There is still a particular attack on social customs and exigencies, but the main issue of the play is *Nora'*s own movement into a realization of her true self, in opposition to the life she has been living because a social role has been put upon her. Ibsen's primary intention, however, in the majority of his plays, is to reveal the reality of past and present events to all of the characters and the audience, by posing a situation where the characters, mostly known to each other already, and having a complicated interrelation in the past, are stripped of their social masks. Ibsen, like the Greek tragedians, cuts late into the action. The tragic net is already strung before the play begins. His characters acted, grew, became, in the past; Ibsen shows them confronted by consequence.

We may contrast this method to that of Shaw. Eric Bentley describes a primary difference between the two writers in this way:

> A friend of Bernard Shaw's said that when he saw *The Wild Duck,* the bottom dropped out of the universe. One difference between Ibsen and Shaw is that the former produced this effect on the audience, whereas the latter produced it on the characters in a play. Just as a character in a melodrama loses a fortune, so a character in a Shaw play loses a universe. The experience may be given a playful treatment, as with Raina and Sergius. In the case of Morell, the treatment is only partly playful. It gets more serious as the play *Candida* proceeds. Morell finally loses his image of his wife and of himself.

With Shaw, the question of the mask and the face, appearance and reality, is no longer a clear split between public and private life.

It begins to work within the individual character itself—the character with illusions and self-blindnesses. Morell is a typical example. So also are Raina and Sergius, who lose their romantic notions. Similar situations occur in *Widowers' Houses* (1891), in Trench's attitude toward Sartorius and how it changes; and in *Major Barbara* (1905), with Barbara's sudden defencelessness before Bill's mocking question: "Wot prawce selvvation nah?", and her seeing her mask for what it was when Undershaft convinces her that, compared to what he does for his men, "It is cheap work converting starving men with a Bible in one hand and a slice of bread in the other." And of course, there is Jack Tanner—for instance, in his eloquent defence of Violet in Act I of *Man and Superman* (1903), before she reduces him to blubbering defeat by announcing that she is married.

In order to portray the individual character, to reveal his private and social reality, Shaw, as much as Ibsen, had to reject the well-made play, and find a new form. But both men were heavily influenced by the tradition, and their escape from it was only partial. In *A Doll's House*, for example, there are secrets withheld, the letter in the mailbox, the shady villain Krogstad, and the coincidence of Mrs. Linde's entry, upon which the action turns. In Shaw's plays, there are similar well-made mechanisms, for example in *Man and Superman*:

This very "modern" and "twentieth-century" play is made up of narrative materials familiar to every Victorian theatergoer. We have a hero who spends the entire evening hotly pursued by his foes; a clandestine marriage celebrated in defiance of a hostile father; a lovelorn hero who sacrifices himself so that the girl will go to his rival;
a villain whose function is to constitute for a while the barrier to dénouement and happy ending. The subplot about the Malone family rests upon two separate uses of the "secret skillfully withheld," then skillfully released. Traditional farcical coincidence binds together Straker and Mendoza. The play bears every sign of careful workmanship—all of it School of Scribe. 5

Nevertheless, Shaw, like Ibsen, added his own innovations. He pointed to A Doll's House specifically, as the play which ushered in a new kind of drama—the drama of discussion. He wrote in The Quintessence of Ibsenism that: "Formerly you had in what was called a well made play an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second, an unravelling in the third. Now you have exposition, situation, and discussion; and the discussion is the test of the playwright." 6 Of course, discussion may be seen simply as one way of unravelling. But in some of Shaw's most successful plays, what he does is to make an exposition—situation—unravelling form run side by side with a discussion. Each technique gains its momentum from being pushed forward by the other. Major Barbara is a good example; Pygmalion (1912), another. This is one of the ways in which Shaw moved on from Ibsen, by remoulding some of Ibsen's techniques.

A primary difference between the two writers, however, (aside from the differing comic and tragic perspectives), is that where Ibsen became increasingly symbolic, Shaw became increasingly impressionistic. He is impressionistic in the sense that he is concerned to get behind the external event of appearance, to find out a person's thoughts, ideas and feelings. Like Chekhov in Ivanov, he destroys

5. Bentley, in Bogard and Oliver, Ibid., pp. 298, 299.
the notion that one can make simple cause-effect conclusions about what people do or why they do it, on either a personal level or a social level. He may use some particular techniques of the well-made play, but generally he turns them on their head, giving the audience the inverse of what was anticipated. He organizes not by plot, but by the convolutions of argument; and the way in which the characters move, develop and reveal themselves through this argument is the basis of the dramatic structure.

Shaw brings the audience into an active participation with the dramatic event, by stripping the self-illusions of both characters and audience alike. Ibsen had created situations which had coalesced long before the play itself began. He then wrote what was essentially the fifth act of a full-grown tragedy, instilling his drama with a certain sense of fatal inevitability. The feeling of fixity, of characters who are dominated by a relentless step-by-step movement of plot, of a plot which itself seems predetermined (or even, as we have seen, contrived), sets the play apart from the audience. It all seems so smooth and finished that the audience are left without any foothold, anything to actively grasp on to. Shaw, on the other hand, constantly surprises his audience, tricks them, will not leave them alone, above all will not leave them comfortable or passive in their seats. He demands an intellectual response simply to follow the turns of logic on which the action often swings. And because the audience soon learn that conventional expectations, responses, and interpretations will not do, they must always be alert. They will then be taken into the events, participating in the dramatic development.
Ibsen, of course, had deliberately created a form which would separate the play from the audience, in the same way that the Greek audience were separated from the tragedies, i.e., confronted by an inevitable event, which they could only witness. However, the crucial difference between Greek tragedy and an Ibsen tragedy is that Ibsen's audience were not bound together by the same unquestioned laws of morality, duty, religious or political behaviour. Ibsen took the form without being able to take the content, substituting his own content of an attack on the very kind of mores which had been the basis and measure of the Greek tragic action. Consequently, Ibsen's audience were not only separated from the play: they were more or less forced to be passive to it. The Greek audience, knowing what the implications of the action were in any given instance, were removed from the action, but they were intimately bound up with the overriding implications. It was not particular individuals—complex, impenetrable, ultimately unknowable—that they saw so much as the importance of a whole action. Ibsen, however, was writing in an age when all this kind of belief was breaking down. He asked his audience to see (and identify with) the rebels against the edifices which still stood, yet at the same time, he utilized a structure which did not allow him to develop his characters. Deprived of both fully developed characters and universally significant actions, the audience could only sit and watch a limited character perform a socially-circumscribed action.

This is not to say that Ibsen was insensitive to the individual character. His characters are all very distinctly drawn; but, they are also somewhat simply drawn. Unlike the impressionists, Ibsen does
admit a direct cause-effect relationship. Actions are done for certain reasons, and the important thing is that both action and reason be brought to light. If an action does not reveal the motive, it is generally not because the motive is complex, but because it has been hidden or disguised. Even Rebecca, one of Ibsen's most interesting characters, is attributed with easily-definable motives. Yet Ibsen suggests here an awareness of complexity. It was this awareness that became the basis of impressionistic drama. With the breakdown of external, objective standards, actions were seen to be relative. And more and more, subjective motivations were seen to be equally relative, because infinitely complex. The emphasis in art shifts from the external to the internal, from the social to the personal.

Shaw really stands somewhere between Ibsen and Chekhov, for he is only partially aware of complexity, or at least he portrays only one aspect of it: logical or intellectual complexity. Motives are often complex, but they can always be met, and finally reduced, by the logical argument. And because Shaw's characters are essentially debaters, representatives of ideas and sides of an argument, they are comparatively undistinguished from each other. They all talk with the same relative degree of agility and precision (save the particular idiosyncracies), and with just about the same language. But Shaw does reach down to the inner reality of the notions and ideas by which men live, with the belief that the intellect can serve the spirit.

Where Shaw becomes specifically impressionistic in form is in the continual shifts in vision, tone and viewpoint. The realist
dramatist had endeavoured to present an objective, face-forward vision of reality. By contrast, the impressionist constantly moves around his subject, weaving in and out of the characters and the action. Shaw does this in terms of the various ways in which the characters react to and interpret ideas and events—again, an aspect of showing the different sides of opinions. This is true even in his later plays, where he becomes more and more innovative in his structures. Even *Heartbreak House* (1913-16), which is often described as a sort of dreamlike ballet of changing partners, is a drama of ideas.

C. B. Purdom illustrates how this play, seemingly close to Chekhov's use of impressionism, differs from Chekhov's plays:

Shaw's particular likeness to Chekhov is thought to be in *Heartbreak House*, but had he not entitled his play 'a fantasia in the Russian manner', and referred to Chekhov in the preface, the likeness might not have been perceived. Shaw says his play is about 'cultured, leisured Europe before the war', as Chekhov might have said about *The Cherry Orchard*. Shaw wrote comedy as Chekhov did, and his theme was as serious as Chekhov's; and his play ends inconclusively and with an explosion, as Chekhov was apt to end his plays. But this kind of dramatic ending was already present in Ibsen and there was no need to go to Chekhov for it.7

Purdom goes on to add that

Chekhov was essentially a story-teller in his plays, while Shaw was not. Chekhov was much more realistic (a story writer has to be) than Shaw, who was hardly ever realistic. Chekhov's dialogue is direct, austere, and economical while Shaw's is rhetorical and abundant. Both were poetical, without writing verse. Yet the dramatic effects aimed at

by the two dramatists are radically different: Chekhov seeks to establish an atmosphere of intimate personal confusion, while Shaw is concerned with the idea. Shaw is no less interested in persons than Chekhov, but in a different way: personal clashes do not concern him but the clash of people's ideas.

Shaw's impressionism, then, was of a particular and comparatively circumscribed, kind. His plays are essentially dramatic, for the bases of argument are conflict and dialogue. But one would have to say that in comparison to other dramatic forms, his plays are not essentially theatrical, in the sense in which we have discussed the potentials of theatre toward expressions of Reality through illusions. Shaw was primarily a propagandist, and art as propaganda has its limitations. But often the execution went beyond the didactic element. Of Pygmalion he wrote: "I wish to boast that Pygmalion has been an extremely successful play all over Europe and North America as well as at home. It is so intensely and deliberately didactic, and its subject is esteemed so dry, that I delight in throwing it at the heads of the wiseacres who repeat the parrot cry that art should never be didactic. It goes to prove my contention that art should never be anything else." However, Eric Bentley has a more comprehensive explanation of the appeal of the play:

In short, the merit of Pygmalion cannot be explained by Shaw's own account of the nature of modern drama, much less by popular or academic opinion concerning Problem Plays, Discussion Drama, Drama of Ideas, and the like. It is a good play by perfectly orthodox standards and needs no theory to defend it. It

is Shavian, not in being made up of political or philosophic discussions, but in being based on the standard conflict of vitality and system, in working out this conflict through an inversion of romance, in bringing matters to a head in a battle of wills and words, in having an inner psychological action in counterpoint to the outer romantic action, in existing on two contrasted levels of mentality, both of which are related to the main theme, in delighting and surprising us with a constant flow of verbal music and more than verbal wit.\textsuperscript{10}

Whatever may be the ultimate limitations of Shaw's art, within his own sphere of creation, he wrote vibrantly alive plays, which are not only tremendously effective stage pieces, but are also important in terms of the direction in which drama moved away from realism and soulless, thoroughgoing contrivance for its own sake. One can see in the plays (even though it might surprise Shaw to say so) some of the roots of the vision which develops through impressionism to cubism: the shifting perspective; the presentation of multiple viewpoints; the movement, in plays like \textit{Saint Joan} (1923) and \textit{Heartbreak House}, through various tones which are suggestive of modulating relationships and interpretations. It was this kind of art which fully developed impressionistically in the plays of Maeterlinck and Chekhov, and cubistically in Pirandello.

In looking at impressionistic drama and how it developed, it is useful to consider impressionist painting. Wylie Sypher, in his book \textit{Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature} (1960), has a chapter on "The Impressionist Experiment", in which he explains what impressionism was and how it led to symbolism and cubism, making particular reference to Shaw's later paintings. What he

\textsuperscript{10} Bentley, \textit{Bernard Shaw}, p. 126.
has to say about pictorial art is particularly relevant to what was happening at the same time in music, and also in drama:

The impressionist notations slide from the naturalistic and scientific toward subjective poetry, causing an ambiguity inherent in painters like Monet... The impressionists discovered that space is qualified by light and also, under the Japanese influence, that different fragments of space can be combined as the angle of vision shifts. Monet treats space as a function of color, and Degas fixes our attention in a new mobile focus. Both learned that the structure of the world is relative, that as the angle of vision shifts, details are displaced, that color is not confined to contour, and that three-dimensional space is not an absolute value but, instead, "polysensorial."... Monet anticipates the technique of the non-objective cinema. Time, in the guise of gradually changing color, becomes a formula for space, since space here appears only as a passage from one vanishing tone to another along an oval surface... An art that began in optical notations adds a psychological resonance and becomes nuanced into symbolism, études entirely dissolving matter in light and merely "whispering" as they transcend sensation... [In the "harmony" paintings of 1894] He is no longer concerned with the facade—only with the effect. Like Mallarmé he is presenting "non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit."... Monet felt appearances come and go in an envelope of light in which frail forms can, for an instant, be evoked. Then they vanish again, leaving only the tonality that is their being; almost a memory. Monet's music therefore resembles that of Debussy, who said he wanted to write a score "assez souple, assez houtrée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux caprices de la rêverie."11

There is another passage in Sypher's book which follows on from the above, and is particularly significant in understanding the philosophical and aesthetical concepts behind impressionism. As one reads this, it is enlightening to keep Pirandello in mind—and

indeed, Sypher himself has a chapter on "Cubist Drama" in which he discusses Six Characters in Search of an Author. In the passage below, Sypher relates Monet's later paintings to some of the concepts expressed by Henri Bergson:

Because Monet's later impressionism merges into symbolism it, too, is relevant to the philosophy of Henri Bergson, who was convinced of the inadequacy of the intellect to deal with the "fringe of intuition, vague and evanescent," surrounding every clear idea. Bergson believed that "we change without ceasing" in the endless flow of psychic life, which is a zone of experience inaccessible to reason, a faculty able to deal with sense and outward things but not what Wordsworth called "fallings from us, vanishings." Our deep selves, according to Bergson, are immersed in a kind of time he calls duration, not to be measured by hours or days, but felt as a memory. Our intuitions have a mobility because in the medium of duration they penetrate each other, enveloping our deep experiences like an atmosphere, a quality saturating the level of consciousness where perceptions melt into each other as they do in dreams. Our genuine life is lived, not thought; for we think in categories of the clock and calendar, but we exist in a milieu of duration which is a continual passage from one state of soul to another. Monet brings into the Nymphéas these mobilities and interpretations, translating the intervals of time into passages melting into each other like a quality of experience. Bergson finds a secret and abiding "correspondence" behind our perceptions and actions, which are fixed by logic in an immobility that denies the unceasing transformations in the hidden self. Intuition, not reason, is the instrument to reveal to us the "very inwardsness of life" capable of being "enlarged" indefinitely by suggestions extending beyond, or around, space and time. Thus Bergson, along with Mallarmé and Monet, seeks connaissance beyond volupte, linking the art of the Nymphéas with Proust's research and with Thomas Mann, who explores the great modern augment of time, "the medium of life", manifesting itself in music or, more "oceanically", as a "heightening" of experience to enchantment.12

12. Ibid., pp. 181-82.
These sections from Sypher's book indicate how closely linked impressionism and expressionism are. In some cases, a meaningful line between the two cannot easily be drawn. This is particularly true of music; consider, for example, the difficulty of composing, or recognizing, a musical "symbol". Van Gogh is a good example of the way in which the two forms merge in painting. In some cases, for instance, between Three Sisters (1901), and Georg Kaiser's Gas I (1913). On the other hand, Strindberg's post-naturalistic plays indicate the immediacy with which one form gave way to, or inherently developed into, the other; for the impetus for his expressionistic "chamber plays" came directly from Maeterlinck, whose dramatic form is exactly analogous to pictorial and musical impressionism.

Maeterlinck's plays constitute one of the two principal ways in which impressionist drama developed—Chekhov's plays being the other. In 1896, Maeterlinck wrote Le Trésor des Humbles. In one of the essays in that book, entitled "The Tragic(al) in Daily Life", he wrote:

I have grown to believe that an old man, seated in his armchair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him; giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting, without comprehending, the silence of doors and windows and the quivering voice of the light, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny—an old man, who conceives not that all the powers of this world, like so many heedful servants,

are mingling and keeping vigil in his room, who suspects not that the very sun itself is supporting in space the little table against which he leans, or that every star in heaven and every fiber of the soul are directly concerned in the movement of an eyelid that closes, or a thought that springs to birth—I have grown to believe that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human, and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or "the husband who avenges his honor."14

The question that arises from a theory like this is: how dramatic is it? Can one take what is more or less a still-life painting, put it on the stage, and render a meaningful statement in theatrical terms? Even in Beckett's plays, where there is often a good deal of waiting, it is not a patient waiting, let alone a silent one. And what is particularly curious in what Maeterlinck says is that his old man is not even aware of just what is going on around him. At any rate, Maeterlinck anticipates the argument "that a motionless life would be invisible" by stating: "I do not know whether it be true that a static theatre is impossible. Indeed, to me it seems to exist already." The plays he mentions as examples of "tragedies without movement" are Aeschylus' Prometheus, The Suppliants, Choephoroi, and The Eumenides, and Sophocles' Electra and Oedipus at Colonus. Of these, he asks: "What have we here but life that is almost motionless?"15

In order to support his argument, Maeterlinck quotes Racine from the preface to Bérénice:

14. in Toby Cole, Ibid., p. 31.
15. Ibid., p. 32.
They have admired the Ajax of Sophocles, wherein there is nothing but Ajax killing himself with regret for the fury into which he fell after the arms of Achilles were denied him. They have admired Philoctetes, whose entire subject is but the coming of Ulysses with intent to seize the arrows of Hercules. Even the Oedipus, though full of recognitions, contains less subject matter than the simplest tragedy of our days.15

True; but all of this is quite different from an old man sitting in a chair. Francis Fergusson specifically compares Bérénice with what he calls the Sophoclean "tragic rhythm", and what he has to say about the two is, interestingly enough, more enlightening about the nature of impressionism than what Maeterlinck says. Fergusson argues that "in Sophocles' [dramaturgy] the basic unit is the tragic rhythm, in which the mysterious human essence, never completely or finally realized, is manifested in successive and varied modes of action."17 On the other hand, in Racine, he says, we have "both the ideal social hierarchy and the ideal, timeless moment of action of the theater of reason."18 It is a timeless moment, but it is still action. And in Racine, as well as the Greeks, there is always a development up to that moment of action, even if that action be no more than the "cry" that Balzac suggested. It is this movement through experience to awareness—or, as Ferguson points out, what Kenneth Burke has called "Purpose, Passion, and Perception"—that forms the action of these plays.

16. in Toby Cole, Ibid., pp. 31,32.
18. Ibid., p. 73.
19. see Ibid., p. 31.
Several important points emerge from these various ideas. One is that impressionism in drama bears a relation to earlier tragic forms in its concentration on character and motivation. Another is that, like Sophocles and Racine (among others), the impressionists move around their characters and subjects, trying to convey the internal Reality of their being (or their "essence", as Fergusson calls it—a word, by the way, which is also used by Jacques Guicharmaud in discussing the plays of Giraudoux). Maeterlinck was right in saying that external or violent action per se is not prerequisite to drama, and he points to The Master Builder as an example of a play whose action lies in the dialogue. And in his own plays, he builds upon this same kind of movement.

The third point is that the impressionists were concerned (again, like Sophocles and Racine, etc.) to communicate two things at once: the fleeting moment and the timeless Reality which lies behind it. Fergusson says of Oedipus that: "Behind the human scene we feel the wider scene, dim to us, which only the gods, in the surrounding hills or under the earth, fully understand. That is why the rhythm of human life can be presented here in its shifting forms, and in the varied perspectives of reason and pathos."

And of Racine's tragedies:

Racine feels that this abstracted moment of action contains by implication all the rest: that this mode of being is the human essence... Because the Racinian hero is assumed to intuit the essence of human life from the first, his tragedy is in every sense absolute. He is as responsible as God; is hero and scapegoat at once; his heroic action (like that of Eliot's Thomas of Canterbury) is the same thing as the martyr's suffering for the truth.

21. Ibid., p. 65.
Of course, whether Racine achieved this breadth of meaning, which Fergusson doubts, is another question. But this at least was his idea and his intention.

It is this simultaneous communication of a dual Reality—the reality of the moment and the Reality of eternity—which is the basis of impressionism; and it leads directly into cubism in the sense that the cubists tried to present multiple momentary realities on top of each other, in order to catch the essence of time and space. One final quote from Sypher will explain this development; and we shall see in the next chapter that it applies to the development in drama as well:

A new time-sense and a new space-sense are thus inherent in the impressionist atmosphere, and, illogically, in its care to record the fugitive, impressionism faces toward abstract art, the notation of a feeling that escapes the tyranny of the senses and represents a quality of experience. The impressionist object exists in a new milieu, a special temper of light and air that penetrates and encloses the figures, which appear in time, but with a presence that is also eternal, extracted from the changing hour and light. This is one way of refusing the object, as the non-objective painters say. Monet's atmospheric continuum not only trans-values time and the object; it also brings into painting an existential dimension, a sense of immersion in the fugitive, the transient—which is the real. The medium of this proto-existential painting was the little touch, the tache, the module that proves itself eventually to be a unit from which can be built up structures of great complexity. This modular principle, which underlies the entire cubist movement and its study of changing relations in space, originates in the impressionist "division" and brings into art—along with atmospheric time—a new geometry, a new method of organizing structures from identical, replaceable parts ...

The plays of Maeterlinck and Chekhov embody this new time and space sense. However, they might almost be seen to effect the opposite procedure from that which occurs in painting. The impressionist painters (Cézanne, for example) were often concerned to represent in two dimensions the essence of a three-dimensional perspective; and often too, they worked to convey the effect of movement (e.g., of water, and sunlight upon it) in the stillness of a painting. Chekhov, on the other hand, seems to take the "reality" of a painting—a moment caught and fixed, as in the cinema, too, when the film suddenly stills on one frame and traps the characters in mid-movement—in order to present its two dimensions in the three dimensions of the stage. The quasi-dreamlike "impressionism" of his plays is created through the disconnectedness of the dialogue. In effect, the dialogue proceeds like an unexplained stream-of-consciousness. Consider the following passage from *Three Sisters* (Act I):

Tchekbutykin: Nature our hearts for love created!

Andrey: Do leave off; I wonder you are not tired of it!

Fedotik: I say, they are at lunch already.

Roddey: At lunch? Yes, they are at lunch already . . .

Fedotik: Wait a minute (takes a snapshot). One! Wait another minute . . . Two! Now it's ready.

Roddey: My congratulations! I wish you everything, everything! The weather is delightful, perfectly magnificent. I've been out all the morning for a walk with the high-school boys. I teach them gymnastics.

Fedotik: You may move, Irina Sergeyevna, you may move (taking a photograph). You look charming today. Here is a top, by the way . . . It has a wonderful note . . .

Irina: How lovely!
Masha: By the sea-shore an oak-tree green. . . .
Upon that oak a chain of gold . . .
(Complainingly) Why do I keep saying that?
That phrase has been haunting me all day. . . .

Kuligin: Thirteen at table!
Roddey: Surely you do not attach importance to such superstitions? (laughter).

Kuligin: If there are thirteen at table, it means that someone present is in love. It's not you, Ivan Romanovitch [i.e., Tchebutykin], by any chance? (laughter).

Tchebutykin: I am an old sinner, but why Natalya Ivanovna is overcome, I can't imagine . . .

Compare this to the kind of interior monologue or stream-of-consciousness narrative one finds in prose, e.g., Faulkner or James Joyce. There, one sees the rapidity with which the mind moves from one idea to another through a particular association. Chekhov implies that the same sort of thing is going on in his characters (though one imagines that most of them would be less articulate); but what he shows is simply statement one and statement two, without the interconnection.

Much of this is, of course, the result of his characters being locked within themselves; for to some extent, they implicitly recognize that intimate communication is not possible. And this is complicated by an intricate criss-cross of unrequited loves. The characters to whom other characters are most drawn are the ones to whom they feel they might be able to truly express themselves; but, in fact, they are most excluded from them. Thus, character A, lost and floundering as she feels herself to be, believes, from external appearances, that character B, whom she loves, is profoundly sensitive (like herself) and at the same time able in some way to cope with life, by means of an independent strength.
The Seagull (1898) is a good example of this structure of relationships, which may be diagrammed thus:

```
Sorin            Mother            Trigorin
   |                |                  |
Treplow          Nina              |
   |                |                  |
Shamraev         Masha             Medvedenko
   |                |                  |
Polina           Dorn
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The pervasive melancholy, the supersensitivity, the difficulty of communication, are all made apparent at the very beginning:

**Medvedenko:** Why do you always wear black?

**Masha:** I am in mourning for my life. I am unhappy.

**Medvedenko:** Why? I don't understand. . . . You are in good health; though your father is not very well off, he has got enough. My life is much harder than yours. I only get twenty-three roubles a month, and from that they deduct something for the pension fund, and yet I don't wear mourning.

**Masha:** It isn't money that matters. A poor man may be happy.

**Medvedenko:** Theoretically, yes; but in practice it's like this . . .

What Chekhov conveys in these few lines are the quasi-comic excessivenesses of one character who lives on an abstract plane of feeling, and of another who is tied to small details of daily affairs. But this is only one perspective, and it soon modulates into other tones as we see the two characters from the viewpoint of Masha's love for Treplow and Medvedenko's frustrated generosity. Robert Corrigan points out that the basis of the shifting tone in Chekhov's plays stems precisely from the conflict between the concrete and the abstract, the pettiness of the here and now, and the aspirations
toward the ideal—a viewpoint we also saw contained in the *The Lower Depths*:

... the creative tension of Chekhov's work spring [sic] from his recognition that in all men there is a great disparity between the facts of their animal existence and the aspiring ideals by which they attempt to live. But he accepted both, and he saw the life of a man as the meaningful and at the same time pathetic, ludicrous, and tragic attempt to bridge this gap. In Chekhov's plays this conflict is seen in his characters who embody both a terrible earnestness of purpose and an awkward and ridiculous acting out of that purpose.23

In a society in which the old forms were breaking down, such as that suggested in *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), the playwright could no longer use that society as an expression of concepts of the ideal. Chekhov did not create a clearly-defined general context against which he measures the abstract worth or validity of his characters' actions. Instead, he creates a very vaguely drawn context, putting his emphasis not upon society but upon the individual; for, as Raymond Williams suggested, Chekhov saw society as the sum of individual relationships. Society as an aggregate body, even in terms of its progress toward knowledge, offers no answers, no solutions. It is the individual, alone and irrevocably cut off, who is left to live and die as best he can. In *Three Sisters*, Tassenbach explains this attitude:

Vershinin: ... Let us dream ... for instance of the life that will come after us, in two or three hundred years.

Tusenbach: Well? When we are dead, men will fly in balloons, change the fashion of their coats, will discover a sixth sense, perhaps, and develop it, but life will remain just the same, difficult, full of mysteries and happiness. In a thousand years man will sigh just the same, "Ah, how hard life is," and yet just as now he will be afraid of death and not want it. (Act II)

There is an exquisite passage which follows shortly after this, in which Vershinin argues that he is at least working for a better life for his children. Tusenbach replies that life will never change and that there is no meaning in it. And then the whole conversation ends, like a little contrapuntal melody in a fugue, with a comment by Tchbutykin, the wise old man. This section of dialogue illustrates again the sort of verbal dance performed by so many Chekhovian characters, who weave in and out of the configuration, moving toward other characters, but somehow always missing contact, preoccupied as they often are with their own locked-up thoughts:

Tusenbach: ... Not only in two or three hundred years but in a million years life will be just the same; it does not change, it remains stationary, following its own laws which we have nothing to do with or which, anyway, we shall never find out. Migratory birds, cranes for instance, fly backwards and forwards, and whatever ideas, great or small, stray through their minds, they will still go on flying just the same without knowing where or why. They fly and will continue to fly, however philosophical they may become; and it doesn't matter how philosophical they are so long as they go on flying....

Masha: But still there is a meaning?

Tusenbach: Meaning. ... Here it is snowing. What meaning is there in that? (a pause)

Vershinin: And yet one is sorry that youth is over....

Masha: Gogol says: it's dull living in this world, friends!
Tusenbach: And I say: it is difficult to argue with you, my friends, God bless you. . . .

Tchebutykin: (reading the newspaper). Balzac was married at Berditchev.

(Irina hums softly)

Tchebutykin: I really must put that down in my book (writes). Balzac was married at Berditchev. (reads the paper).

Irina: (lays out the cards for patience, dreamily). Balzac was married at Berditchev.

In the abstract, there had been no meaning; and then suddenly a simple fact about Balzac concretizes things. In facts, there is some "meaning", some sense of relatively. And then we are immediately off on another line; Tusenbach says: "The die is cast. You know, Marya Bergeyevna, I've resigned my commission."

We saw in Shaw's plays that at the same time there is a movement away from a concentration on the society to an emphasis on the individual, there is a simultaneous rejection of the linear plot, and the development of an action is structured on different lines. In Shaw, and in the late Ibsen, too, this movement is only partial, because both writers were still very much concerned with the society, either to attack it, or to use it as a measure against which to define their characters. In Chekhov, however, the abandonment of the linear plot is more complete, because his interest in society per se was virtually nil. It was simply implied through the relationships of individuals. Corrigan explains Chekhov's assumptions about the relationship between the individual and the society, and goes on to describe how this led him to create a new dramatic structure:
... for Chekhov to show "life as it is," each of his characters must be defined by his solitude and estrangement from life and not by his participation in life. Each man's existence is ultimately solitary, and his unique self can only be known, if it ever can, only after all of his social contexts have been stripped away. And yet, although this may be true, no man can exist in the vacuum of self, albeit Chekhov's characters try to. Each man attempts to build and then operate in his own little world, with no sense of social responsibility, totally unaware of the sufferings of others. Each character has his own thoughts and problems with which he is usually morbidly consumed. As a result, the people in Chekhov's plays never seem to hear or notice one another. Each has room only for himself and each acts in a social vacuum...

Chekhov believed that the drama as he knew it could never express the "is-ness" of experience because it was under the destructive tyranny of a sequential and chronological structure. So in its place he invented a form which might be called, to use the terminology of the new criticism of poetry, a contextual or concentric action... The structure of a Chekhovian play is epiphanic; its purpose is to reveal—literally, "to show forth"—the inner lives of his characters. In such a drama the plot has been twisted into a situation that is to reveal the psychic lives of the characters. There are many dramatic situations in a plot; here a single situation has been stretched to take the place of the plot. This inflation of the situation into the source of the dramatic action so that it replaces the plot is the vital secret of Chekhovian dramaturgy. To capture "the aimless, unclimactic multiplicity" of his characters' lives, Chekhov has created a form based on what Marvin Rosenberg has called "the tensions of context, rather than direction, of vertical depth, rather than horizontal movement."24

One can see how this fits in with what Sypher has to say about impressionism as a whole, and about Bergson's philosophy in particular.

Maeterlinck's plays proceed much in the same way, only here the detachment from even an implied society is complete. In general, the context of legend and mythology is created through the highly

24. Corrigan, in Bogard and Oliver, Ibid., pp. 82,84.
evocative and symbolic language. The characters, often legendary royalty, are acutely aware of nature, particularly its portentous aspects; they live in isolated houses or castles, surrounded by sky-obliterating trees, encircled by moats, built over subterranean caves, near to magic fountains. Maeterlinck's impressionism is similar to Chekhov's in that the dialogue is often disconnected, and concrete explanations of character or action are often lacking. But it is a further remove from Chekhov, in its creation of a real dreamlike haziness through an etherealized mythology.

Pelléas et Mélisande (1892) is a typical example. The dialogue between Mélisande and Golaud in Act I,ii sets the whole tone of the play, and Mélisande is like a Chekhov character in evading direct answers, skipping from one statement to another, locked within herself, although trying desperately to get out, and ultimately unknowable. As Arkel says to Golaud at the end: "L'âme humaine est très silencieuse... L'âme humaine aime à s'en aller soule... Elle souffre si timidement... Mais la tristesse, Golaud... mais la tristesse de tout ce que l'on voit... C'était un petit être si tranquille, si timide et si silencieux... C'était un pauvre petit être mystérieux, comme tout le monde..." She herself is the embodiment of an atmosphere. What is particularly interesting in this play, as in Alladine et Palomides (1894), is that violent action does occur (as is often the case in pure legend), and yet Maeterlinck contains it all within the tones and colours of an abstract and far-away dream. But this again is partly the nature of legend, in that by its very form, it abstracts the events, places them in a remote and undefined time and place; but Maeterlinck deliberately
enhances this remoteness. Violence is tempered by the quality of an implicit story-teller, recalling the long ago, and spinning around it multicoloured threads of a poetic and lazily dreamy language.

One could contrast the script with the script of a Wagner opera, which is also often legendary, and a Wagner score with Debussy's music for Pelléas et Mélisande. There is really only one similarity: the framework of mythology. The effect created by the two artists is completely different, and the difference is one between the indefiniteness of Debussy's impressionistic blues and greys, against the very brilliant colours of Wagner's symbolism and accurately defined tensions. Again, Debussy may be compared to the impressionist painters. The Oxford Companion to Music suggests the similarity by explaining that the methods of impressionist painters have "a close counterpart in the harmonic system of debussy, and especially in his use of the whole-tone scale ... with its lack of the semitones which definitely mark the middle and top of the major and minor scales, this lack producing an effect of dreamy vagueness. The parallel thirds, fourths, and fifths of both Debussy and Ravel, the parallel ninths of the former and the parallel sevenths of the latter, contribute to this misty effect."25 In Wagner, by contrast, everything develops through series of tensions to crashing climaxes and resolutions. In impressionism, there are almost no resolutions—either in the strict musical sense of a resolving chord, or in the sense of an action being completed and rounded off. Time, space, life, the human

spirit, stretch out into an infinite continuum, to a large extent "unchanging"; for this continuum reduces even violent action to a scale of relatively. Everything is relative, and in terms of eternity, of relatively minor importance.

It is this idea which is central to understanding the development away from pure tragedy into what J. L. Styan calls "dark comedy". And this development is integral to the impressionist vision. In previous societies, which were bound together by the strength of a common religious belief, there was a definite scale of relative value, of good and evil, benediction or damnation. Everything was subsumed into the whole; and being thus circumscribed by the religious framework, everything had a fixed place. It was a closed system. But when these systems were broken, they gave way to the openendedness of early existentialism. Consequently, the whole idea of relativity changed. With the recession of ultimate meanings, answers, solutions, ideals, compensations lying beyond time, etc., particular actions lost their immediate meaning within time. Viewed from this standpoint, the whole business of life could only be seen as comic; and it was as comedies that Chekhov (and later Pirandello) wrote his plays.

Corrigan, once again, points out the significance of this vision in Chekhov. What he says indicates again the close interconnections between impressionism, symbolism and cubism and, as they developed in the theatre, the drama of the Absurd:

Another way of describing "life as it is" is expressed in Santayana's statement, "Everything in Nature is lyrical in its ideal essence, tragic in its fate, and comic in its existence." This provides a very important insight into the form of Chekhovian drama, and it also accounts for the
complex overtones that are present in the plays, for Chekhov's characters respond to all three of Santayana's levels with an especial intensity. They are comedians by necessity, smitten with a tragic sense of life, lyrically in love with the ideal in a world poorly equipped to satisfy such aspirations.

The essential quality of the "is-ness" of life is, as we said earlier, its absurdity, its futility. Some would agree that this is tragic, perhaps the most tragic condition of all, but as Dorothy Sayers has wisely pointed out: "The whole tragedy of futility is that it never succeeds in achieving tragedy. In its blackest moments it is inevitably doomed to the comic gesture." Thus, when man comes to see his existence as absurd, that it is governed by the irrational, the inexplicable, and the nonsensical, he moves into the realm of the comic. For Comedy presupposes such a world, a world being made and turned upside down. As Gautier put it, "Comedy is the logic of the absurd", and thus it can admit the disorderly and the improbable into the realm of art. 26

Within the grand comedy, however, there was infinite room for suffering and death. And increasingly, this is portrayed as the result of a clash between the social mask and face. When the social mask and the social face become irrevocably confused, the individual is apt to lose all contact with the reality of his private face. When events develop in such a way that a confrontation between the social mask and face, and the private face is inevitable, the resulting situation may drive the character into self-destruction. This may be "tragedy", as in Oedipus Rex (given his position and the context in which he lives), or "comedy", as in The Seagull. It is this same situation which occurs in Hedda Gabler, and Ibsen tries to weight the play toward a tragic vision. George Steiner explains that

In Ibsen's vocabulary, the most deadly of these cancers is "idealism," the mask of hypocrisy and self-deception with which men seek to guard against the realities of social and personal life. When "ideals" seize upon an Ibsen character, they drive him to psychological and material ruin as the Weird Sisters drive Macbeth. Once the mask has grown close to the skin, it can be removed only at suicidal cost. When Rosmer and Rebecca West have attained the ability to confront life, they are on the verge of death. When the mask no longer shields her against the light, Hedda Gabler kills herself.27

In Hedda Gabler, Ibsen attempts to write what we may call "pure" tragedy; but the result is closer to the effect produced in Chekhov's The Seagull, which is a "comedy". Shaw, in The Quintessence of Ibsenism, expresses the opinion that this kind of ending is, in fact, less tragic than the ending of a play like The Cherry Orchard.

The post-Ibsen playwrights apparently think that Ibsen's homicides and suicides were forced. In Chekhov's Cherry Orchard, for example, where the sentimental ideals of our amiable, cultured, Schumann playing propriety class are reduced to dust and ashes by a hand not less deadly than Ibsen's because it is so much more caressing, nothing more violent happens than that the family cannot afford to keep up its old house ... If people's souls are tied up by law and public opinion it is much more tragic to leave them to wither in these bonds than to end their misery and relieve the salutary compunction of the audience by outbreaks of violence. Judge Brack was, on the whole, right when he said that people don't do such things.28

This expresses the tendency which was leading away from the violently decisive gesture and tone, and climactic action of pure tragedy, into the open-endedness of an unresolved development, an

27. Steiner, The Death of Tragedy, pp. 293,294.
ambivalent tone reduced from a tension of mood rather than a tension of event. The fact that characters live in a confusion about themselves, and know that they live in this confusion, precludes the kind of recognition (and reconciliation) which occurs in classical tragedy. And it is significant that this kind of situation begins to be found in Ibsen's plays. Styan, in tracing the growth of "dark comedy", says that

Ibsen was raising important issues for drama:
What are the near limits of the tragic world?
May the spectator's intelligence be used with his emotions to help rationalize his interest and yet allow the flow of the play to be preserved? Dare the dramatist risk hearing us laugh when he would wish us to weep? Can he risk diminishing the stature of his hero in order to ensure his individuality, as happens with Dr Stockmann of An Essay of the People, whom Ibsen variously declared to be 'muddle-headed' and 'an extravagant immature fellow and a hot-head'?29

This question of the relationship between tragedy and comedy, emotion and intelligence, came to a head in the plays of Pirandello which, decisively, are comedies (with the exception of Henry IV). These various considerations will be of importance when we come to look at recent attempts to write tragedy; what they help to explain at this point is the nature of Chekhov's comic vision, and the way in which he created, through an acceptance of a comic form, and the use of an impressionistic structure, a more cohesive dramatic tone than Ibsen was often able to achieve.

We may make a distinction between two main forms of impressionism as they later developed, following more or less respectively from

Maeterlinck and Chekhov. One is the attempt to create a structure analogous to a dream. This may be done by simulating the atmosphere of the dream, where colours, tones, words and action fade into each other. Action and dialogue in these plays may be slow and dreamily unpunctuated, as in Yeats's plays, and may either contain a definite story line or a more or less plotless action. Or, action and dialogue may be patterned after the occurrences in dreams themselves, hence disconnected and rapidly shifting, where effect does not clearly follow from cause, explanations are not obvious, and where the vagueness may verge either toward enchantment or toward terror. It is often the case that when it verges toward terror, the representation moves out of impressionism per se, into expressionism, as in Kafka's The Trial, for example, and in the later plays of Strindberg. And in this sense, Strindberg did not write "dream" plays. He said in the prefatory note to A Dream Play (1902) that

since on the whole, there is more pain than pleasure in the dream, a tone of melancholy, and of compassion for all living things, runs through the swaying narrative. Sleep, the liberator, often appears as a torturer, but when the pain is at its worst, the sufferer awakes—and is thus reconciled with reality. For however agonizing real life may be, at this moment, compared with the tormenting dream, it is a joy.

In Kafka, however, and some of the Absurdists, there is no "reality" to which one may awake. The dream becomes permanent symbol instead of transient impression.

The second main form of impressionism is that which concentrates on trying to represent the interior life of the characters—
the "is-ness" of a character, as Corrigan called it in speaking of Chekhov. The structure may be atmospherically dreamlike, as in Chekhov (and also in Shaw's *Heartbreak House*), or quite straightforward and more or less realistic, as in Strindberg's *To Damascus* (1898-1904). Impressionism is used in these plays as a means to try to communicate in an external form the innermost essence—thoughts and feelings—of the characters, more or less in terms of daily life, rather than at points of great crisis. The immediate problem involved here is that the material is, as we have seen, more directly pursued in a psychological novel. Nevertheless, it is a legitimate approach for the dramatist, for this reason: that we live in terms of action with other people, people whose feelings and motives are as difficult to ascertain as our own are to make known. Even within ourselves, we do not perceive on a level of continuous, articulated stream-of-consciousness, such as that represented in Joyce or Virginia Woolf; and our relationships with people, which demand immediate action and involve complicated responses, generally cannot be accurately analyzed on the spot. The individual is many different people, in the sense of the various roles he has to play in the numerous contexts in which he lives. Hubert Hefner, in an essay on Pirandello, speaks of this multiplicity:

Human personalities subtly shift and adjust according to the roles an individual is called upon to assume. A man as husband and father in a household exhibits a somewhat different personality than that which he assumes as the head of a big business, or as a good club member among congenial club mates, or as a leading citizen participating in an important town meeting. Moreover, the personality of father as each of the children sees him differs from the
personality of husband as the wife sees him. If he begins to play the role of big-business leader to his wife and children in the intimacy of his home, he becomes ludicrous and if he persists in such an incongruous confusion of his roles, he may well end upon a psychiatrist's couch or even in an institution. Sanity consists of being able to discriminate among the various roles we are called upon to play and in playing them properly at the appropriate times.  

From this, one can see the way in which impressionist writers—and Pirandello and others as well—were concerned with the relationship between the individual and society. In terms of our original diagram, which suggested that the discrepancy in impressionistic drama lay between the private face, the social face and the social mask, we may now see this as being the distinction between the individual's personal reality, the social roles he adopts, and the social masks he then puts on to hide his face, either because he voluntarily wants to cover up a dishonest or distasteful past, or because he feels forced to conform at all costs, whatever the damage to the integrity of his own soul. Beyond this, there are the attitudes a man has about the masks and the roles he adopts. Hence, rather than the perspective of Ibsen and other realists, which projects the individual into a social context, we now have a drama in which society is internalized, social relationships being funnelled into and depicted through the individual.

Modern plays which are basically impressionistic are fundamentally analyzable in terms of these two main forms of early impressionism. Various examples which one may point to are Arthur

Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), and *After the Fall* (1964); Thornto Wilder's *Our Town* (1938); Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1945); Arnold Wesker's *The Four Seasons* (1965), and *Their Very Own and Golden City* (1966); and James Saunders's *Next Time I'll Sing to You* (1962), and *A Scent of Flowers* (1964). And of course there are the plays of Yeats and Synge; and at times Eugene O'Neill moved into impressionism in his experiments with form, notably in *Strange Interlude* (1928).

In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller's original idea was to write the play in such a way that the internal workings of Willy Loman's mind would be objectified in external action, (more or less what is presented in the daydreaming sequences of the film *Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment*, written by David Mercer). In the same way that the impressionist painters wanted to represent movement in time within the static form of paint on a canvas, Miller wanted to represent on the stage what Joyce had represented in *Ulysses*: the simultaneity of multiple thoughts and feelings. Miller wrote in the Introduction to the *Collected Plays*:

> The first image that occurred to me which was to result in *Death of a Salesman* was of an enormous face the height of the proscenium arch which would appear and then open up, and we would see the inside of a man's head. In fact, *The Inside of His Head* was the first title. It was conceived half in laughter, for the inside of his head was a mass of contradictions. The image was in direct opposition to the method of *All My Sons*—a method one might call linear or eventual in that one fact or incident creates the necessity for the next. The *Salesman* image was from the beginning absorbed with the concept that nothing in life comes "next" but that everything exists together and at the same time within us; that there is no past to be "brought forward" in
a human being, but that he is his past at every moment and that the present is merely that which his past is capable of noticing and smelling and reacting to.

I wished to create a form which, in itself as a form, would literally be the process of Willy's Loman's way of mind. But to say "wished" is not accurate. Any dramatic form is an artifice, a way of transforming a subjective feeling into something that can be comprehended through public symbols. Its efficiency as a form is to be judged—at least by the writer—by how much of the original vision and feeling is lost or distorted by this transformation. I wished to speak of the salesman most precisely as I felt about him, to give no part of that feeling away for the sake of any effect or any dramatic necessity. What was wanted now was not a mounting line of tension, nor a gradually narrowing cone of intensifying suspense, but a bloc, a single chord presented as such at the outset, within which all the strains and melodies would already be contained.31

is anxious to find the various pieces with which to build the whole picture, while Willy is anxious to halt these memories. Eventually, as the past is filled in, the perspective of Willy and that of the audience run side by side, as both come to see the inevitable clash between the illusion and the reality of both past and present.

Essentially, then, Miller uses the loose disconnectedness of a dream structure as a means to communicate a crisis which accumulates speed and leads directly to tragedy. It is the combination of these two techniques which—as in Chekhov’s *The Seagull*—is at least partially responsible for the ambivalent tone. But, Miller does weight his play more heavily toward a tragic emphasis than Chekhov had done in his play, and he does this by creating a character who is meant to represent a modern everyman figure.

One of the central points of the play revolves around the idea that attention must be paid to every man, for what happens to one, happens to all by implication. In the second half of Act I, Linda says, in conversation with Biff and Happy, “I don’t say he’s a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He’s not the finest character that ever lived. But he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He’s not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person . . .” One can see the play as a kind of horizontal tragedy, if you like, rather than a vertical one. Willy, the low man, will not cause kingdoms to tumble; and probably he will have died in vain. For, as it is summarized in the *Requiem* to the play,
Willy was a man who "never knew who he was." Thus, not only is it that others do not know us, and that we cannot communicate ourselves to them, but also that we do not, or cannot, know ourselves. It is the same thing we saw in *Ivanov*.

Miller's *After the Fall* is similar to *Death of a Salesman* in its abandonment of a linear sequence of events. It is impressionistic in its representation of time, rather than in a simulation of a dreamlike vagueness of event. But the idea of character is almost the same as that which Strindberg conceived in the preface to *A Dream Play*: "The characters are split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystallise, scatter and converge. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all—that of the dreamer. For him there are no secrets, no incongruities, no scruples and no law. He neither condemns nor acquits, but only relates . . ." *A Dream Play*, is, however, more expressionistic than impressionistic; and *After The Fall* bears more similarity to *To Damascus*. It is interesting to compare these latter two plays, in terms both of what each writer was intent on portraying, and the form each created to portray it. Both plays are highly autobiographical—personal exorcisms of the past—and each writer tried to represent the crowding immediacy of one's whole inescapable past life. But Miller was the more successful in his choice of form.

Strindberg might have dramatized the psychological journey taken by the Stranger in the way that Maeterlinck had suggested: with the Stranger seated in his chair by a table. This would have allowed Strindberg the kind of suggestiveness which strengthens the illusion, of which he had spoken in the preface to *Miss Julie*. 
However, instead of this, he creates a carefully delineated and circumscribing dramatic framework, within which he tries to objectify the Stranger's state of mind. He attempts to combine naturalism of décor with expressionism of event with impressionism of dramatic experience and artistic vision. In a sense, the result led to the same kind of inconsistencies—inversed—which are felt in the naturalistic plays. The dramatic effect is limited by its lack of cohesion.

It is ironic that Strindberg should have utilized a quasi-impressionistic (and symbolic) form for Miss Julie, one of his most naturalistic plays. It is unfortunate that he confined himself to a naturalistic technique in scene structure and décor in To Damascus. But as we have suggested, this was part of the result of Strindberg's struggle to invent a form. Raymond Williams accurately points out the limitations and problems confronting To Damascus:

The new element of scenic imagery is not integrated with the words of the play, but is left in the form of stage directions. Thus the play is better designed for reading than performance. An Elizabethan dramatist would have taken the imagery into the speaking words of the play. Strindberg does not. At the height of his great powers, in his rejection of the limitations of naturalism, he remains the victim of naturalism; his drama is a conception beyond the range of the practice of his time.32

By the time of After the Fall, the range of practice had long since opened up to this form. Miller essentially takes the dreamer—Stranger of A Dream Play and To Damascus, in whose mind

32. Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, p. 132.
everything takes place, whose "consciousness holds sway" over all the characters, and places him on a stage whose set consists only of three levels of platform, a broken tower, and a chair.

Miller describes the scene in the opening stage directions:

> On the two lower levels are sculpted areas; indeed, the whole effect is neolithic, a lava-like, supple geography in which, like pits and hollows found in lava, the scenes take place. The mind has no colour but its memories are brilliant against the grayness of its landscape. When people sit they do so on any of the butments, ledges, or crevices. A scene may start in a confined area, but spread or burst out onto the entire stage, overrunning any other area. 
> People appear and disappear instantaneously, as in the mind; but it is not necessary that they walk off the stage...
> The effect, therefore, will be the surging, flitting, instantaneousness of a mind questing over its own surfaces and into its depths.

By taking his character out of the complex structure and imposed naturalism of *To Damascus*, Miller expresses in his form the subjectivity of his own dream play. The idea of smashing time and space is the same as Strindberg's; the characters and events slip and slide in and out of the dreamer's mind. But instead of trying to represent this movement in rapidly changing naturalistic settings as Strindberg does, Miller merely suggests it, and thus leaves the audience to construct their own pictures. Quentin says all that is necessary to describe the place and the time in which his mind is wandering. By addressing the audience directly, he invites them to participate in the same kind of mental activity. The very vagueness of the form makes the illusion far more cohesive than the precision of Strindberg's form.
After the Fall also differs from Strindberg's play and *Salesman* in that the dreamer—Quentin—is a conscious presence in the play, who knows that he is dreaming. Hence, in a certain sense, he "controls" the occurrence of events, rather than being dominated by them, which is more or less the situation confronting the Stranger and Willy. Quentin thus becomes a narrator, both involved with, and yet separated from, the action. This narrator (or pseudo-chorus) figure appears frequently in recent drama, being utilized by a dramatist to perform a double function: to make it obvious that the playwright is telling a story, thus creating a separation between the world of that story and the world of the audience; and at the same time, to draw the audience into an active participation with the dramatic event. In a certain sense, this narrator creates a relationship between audience and stage which is analogous to the relationship we hypothesized as existing in classical theatre. In that theatre, the relationship was implicit in the mythological framework, itself a story. In modern drama, where this framework is lacking, the narrator tells us about the story he is going to tell.

Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well* (1916), Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, and Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* are all examples of plays which use a narrator in this way. Yeats's play opens with the three Musicians, who call upon the audience's imagination:

I call to the eye of the mind
A well long choked up and dry
And boughs long stripped by the wind,
And I call to the mind's eye
Pallor of an ivory face,
Its lofty dissolute air,
A man climbing up to a place
The salt sea wind has swept bare.
In this play, Yeats deliberately returned to the tradition of the Japanese No theatre. He creates here the same kind of impressionistic and suggestive atmosphere, built upon the dream of a legend, which is found in Maeterlinck's plays. This is an impressionism of mood and tone, rather than of the human mind; and Yeats's concepts were very close to those held by the impressionist painters. Like those painters, he sought an Absolute lying beyond the transience of everyday reality; and at the same time, he believed that the poet must endeavour to capture the fleeting moment. He spoke of this in a series of essays entitled "Discoveries", written in 1906:

If it is true that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, the saint goes to the centre, the poet and artist to the ring where everything comes round again. The poet must not seek for what is still and fixed, for that has no life for him . . . but be content to find his pleasure in all that is for ever passing away that it may come again, in the beauty of woman, in the fragile flowers of spring, in momentary heroic passion, in whatever is most fleeting, most impassioned, as it were, for its own perfection, most eager to return in its glory.  

Yeats's intention was, of course, to return theatre to ritual: "The theatre began in ritual, and it cannot come to its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovreignity." He creates in the poetry of his dialogue much the same kind of effect that impressionist painters created with paint—the delicate modulations of suggestive tone and colour. In its ritualistic conception, however, Yeats's theatre went beyond mere impressionism;

34. Ibid., p. 170.
but it is significant to see at this point the way in which specific techniques of early impressionism were used in the creation of a theatre of ritual and ceremony.

Like other impressionists, Yeats creates in *At the Hawk's Well*, and in other plays, an over-all sense of non-movement, or what we may call a "static rhythm". The structure is analogous to "the tensions of context, rather than direction" found in Chekhov. The Musicians enter at the beginning, to represent a kind of tonal pedal-point to the action (like Masha, in *The Seagull*, who sets the tone with her opening statement), and to set the scene. At the end of the play, nothing has changed, except that Cuchulain has entered into the Old Man's world. Through these two characters, Yeats represents the conflict between instinct and intellect—a theme which runs through much of his work. Ultimately, Cuchulain bends himself to the same end as the Old Man, though from an obviously different attitude. Thus, the basic idea and situation of the play—the waiting for the water—ends where it began. The development of the action which centers around Cuchulain is a gradually modulated change: there is no climax, no recognition, no crisis. All of the delicate interweaving of vague movements is stilled into a pattern, circumscribed by this non-movement, and symbolized by the pattern of the Musicians' black cloth.

Finally, the Musicians, who are meant to convey the impression "that they have wandered from village to village in some country of our dreams", fold up their cloth and depart, perhaps to some other

land of the "mind's eye". They are not an original part of the context at the enchanted well. They lie somewhere between intellect and instinct. Their intellectual awareness causes them to become somewhat involved in the Old Man's world, for they have returned to the spot several times; but they are not addicted to the intellect or to a desire for wisdom, and their insights render their instinctual decision to "choose a pleasant life / Among indolent meadows" the more strong. In the end, they drift on.

The narrator appears again in Thornton Wilder's Our Town, and Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie. Both plays are dreams of the past; they utilize impressionism to create the essence of sadness and melancholy which is pervasive in the enchantment of a dream, rather than to create a sense of total inner reality of a character. The past is not exorcised, as in After the Fall or To Damascus, but sanctified—presented as an essential reality of the nature of all life. It is interesting to see the way in which all of these plays use similar forms, particularly adapted, for different purposes. One may recall what Wylie Sypher said about the "modular principle" in impressionistic painting, "a unit from which can be built up structures of great complexity", and which introduced "a new geometry, a new method of organizing structures from identical, replaceable parts." In these plays, there are various combinations of similar elements: the dream as enchantment or as terror; as past or present; as atmosphere or as structure of event; as a form for legend, or a realistic story (of past or present); or as a form to objectify the internal reality of personality and psychology. Yeats and Wilder follow from Masterlinck: legend, enchantment, melancholy; Miller,
from Strindberg: psychology, exorcism, fear of the uncharted; Williams, from Maeterlinck and Chekhov: the melancholy of the past, the essence of atmosphere, mood and situation, and a more or less simple, straightforward story.

The use of narrator in Our Town and The Glass Menagerie is analogous to Yeats's use of the Musicians, which in turn is basically analogous to the opening description in a No play. Our Town commences with the Stage Manager stating: "This play is called Our Town. It was written by Thornton Wilder . . .", and then the actual production staff of the particular presentation are mentioned by name. The stage is virtually bare and there is no curtain; the audience is asked, as the Stage Manager describes the town, to imagine the settings, in the same way that the reader is asked by the novelist to imagine the scene. Wilder, like Theseus in A Midsummer-Night's Dream, and the Chorus who open Henry V, asks his audience to indulge him, to endow the limitations of the stage with the breadth of their imagination.

Our Town is a dream and a remembrance of particular events and particular people; but it is at the same time a direct allegory for Life and Death. Wilder encloses a definite story within the indefiniteness of an impressionistic framework, thus conveying both the fleeting moment and the eternal truth: for this is just one of the countless analogous stories which will be repeated over and over again. The Glass Menagerie is also a memory, and bears obvious similarities to this, and Yeats's play. Tom, like the Stage Manager, and the Musicians, is narrator and chorus, explaining that the playwright is deliberately telling a story, which is removed in
time and atmosphere from the everyday reality of the audience whom he addresses:

To begin with, I turn back time ... The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic. In memory everything seems to happen to music ... I am the narrator of the play, and also a character in it ... Again, impressionism is used to contain a realistic and "eventual" story line; but the total structure is similar to Chekhov's, in its unresolved, unclimactic conclusion. Laura, like the two men in At the Hawk's Well, moves into a living but ossified fate. Tom, like the Musicians, sets the scene at the beginning and then moves on at the end.

Tom, however, differs from the Musicians, in that he establishes a closer link with the audience; and rather than existing somewhere between intellect and instinct, he roams between time past and time present. In the end, he explains how he passed out of the world of Amanda and Laura; but, like the Musicians, he still inhabits some less-than-real realm—a realm in the timebound memory of Laura, somewhere between the past, and the present reality of the audience's world:

I didn't go to the moon, I went much further—for time is the longest distance between two places ... I travelled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly coloured but torn away from the branches. I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise. Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass ... Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes ...
When Tom steps into the present here, some indefinite number of years after the events portrayed, the whole internal rhythm of the play becomes fixed, being bound by this recollection of it as a memory, and bound also by the actual play itself. The simultaneity of time past and time present is concretized at the end, for Tom delivers the above speech while Laura and Amanda continue on in time past. Then Tom, separated from that situation by time and distance, says: "Blow out the candles, Laura . . . and so goodbye . . ." And she does so. The whole play, like Our Town and At the Hawk's Well, exists in a state of suspension.

From these various considerations, we may suggest a few conclusions about what this kind of impressionistic play is trying to convey. To a certain extent, it is the attempt of these playwrights to find a form which will represent in dramatic terms the kind of awareness about time and duration, and how a man moves through them, that Bergson expressed. There is also the attempt to combine within one form both the word and the deed, the thought (the prerogative of prose fiction) and the action (that of drama). This sort of impressionistic play often exists on two levels of time; and in this way, the playwright conveys that dual sense of Reality which was fundamental to the impressionistic vision. There is the reality of the moment, the particular situation, the event caught and fixed in time, and the progression of events—both external and, internally, within the "psychic life"—through which a person continually moves and changes. And there is the unendingness of time and life, which may contain small internal rhythmic movements, but which, in the sense of eternity, reduces everything to a state of relative
stationess non-movement by virtue of repetition; by the fact that because everything cyclically recurs, there is no progress; and because, from a beyond-time, beyond-common-reality viewpoint, everything appears more or less reduced to insignificance.

These playwrights begin to move into the idea of theatre as confession; as exorcism of the past, of guilt, of regret; theatre as ritual in the sense of paying ceremonious tribute to the past, and trying to create a context of meaning for the present. They return drama to its original position as deliberate illusion, through which to convey Reality; and they begin to find a form which, by rejecting the confines of realism, allows for the simultaneous representation of external and internal, past and present, reality. Eugene O'Neill had tried to do something of this sort in *Strange Interlude*; to portray the discrepancy between reality of action and reality of thought. But again, within the strictures of realism, the dramatic cohesion was difficult to attain. By abandoning realism and returning to illusion, the impressionists could convey a multiple reality, through multiple and disparate techniques, which were yet unified into a cohesive dramatic experience by means of an emphasis on illusion and the creation of a pervasive tone and atmosphere.

Underlying this sort of play, there is the implicit question: Why? Why do men suffer so much for so little apparent reason? This is the compassionate and tragi-melancholic tone which pervades these non-tragic plays; for where everything is fundamentally meaningless, there can be no heroic action; and where there is no heroic action, there is no Tragedy. And yet, men suffer still. When
the essence of meaninglessness is pushed a bit further, we move  
into the realm of comedy and the comic-absurd.

The recognition of all these various dualities—of time and  
the moment, action and thought, intelligence and compassion,  
tragedy and comedy, the reality of movement in life and the fixed  
forms of art the illusion, come together in Pirandello. Post-  
Pirandellian impressionists tend to combine elements of Pirandello's  
form with the techniques of impressionism. One good example is  
James Saunders's Next Time I'll Sing to You. It is pure Pirandello  
in its form, in the way in which the characters keep talking about  
how they are putting on a play. At the same time that they are  
going to tell a story—about a hermit who died in 1942—they are  
also telling a story about the dramatic telling of a story. It is  
like Six Characters in Search of an Author, and it also bears some  
similarity to André Gide's Les Faux Moyenneurs. At the same time,  
the play is concerned to represent the problems in communication which  
occupied Strindberg and Chekhov and Arthur Miller, as well as  
Pirandello. Thus, the two forms of impressionism more or less come  
together here: the impressionism of non-linear event and of the poetic  
dream, and the impressionism which tries to convey what goes on inside  
of a man's head. Near the end of Act I, Rudge says:

Eighty-four years this creature spent pushing air  
in and out of his body. You think that's nothing?  
Think of the mind, then, think of the mind—  
eighty-four years shut up in its skull, in that  
little space, in that little brain, stoppered like  
a genii in a bottle. Think of it then, think of it.  
It doesn't take much effort. It's the same for us.

36. Cf. Sypher's chapter on "The Cubist Novel" in Rococo to  
Cubism in Art and Literature, in which he discusses this novel.
Never mind putting a fine point on it, it's the same for us—we're locked in here. . .

(He takes his head in his hands.)

You see, this is the only thing that matters. Never mind the colour bar, never mind the H-bomb; it doesn't matter, you see, it's a small thing, it's—irrelevant. There's only one thing worth understanding, only one thing worth thinking about, and that is that I am a mind locked in twelve hundred grammes of brain locked in a quarter of an inch of skull and the only key to this prison is death. No matter how I reach out towards you or you towards me, we are still locked in our skulls as before. We can pretend, we can fall in love, or join the same party. It makes no difference. . . Is it any consolation that we're all in the same boat?

Much the same sort of thing occurs in Saunders's highly poetic

_A Scent of Flowers_, which, even more than his previous play, is ceremonial and ritualistic in nature. As Saunders explains in the directions to Act II, it is played out against the Burial Service (Cf. the last act of _Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf_?), and:

"The effect is partly ritualistic, partly ironic; it acts as a background of ritual death against which the 'live' dialogue is played. . ."

In both of these plays, the drama itself is utilized as the idea of illusion, in order to present and probe the various illusions and appearances of life and death. Saunders does this by enclosing the whole action within the poetic melancholy and disconnected structure of the dream, the illusion par excellence. In _A Scent of Flowers_, the characters tell a story—about Zoe—and within that story tell numerous other stories, such as Edgar's fairy story to Zoe about the enchanted castle. This is the same kind of stories-within-stories which we saw in more realistic plays, such as those of Albee. The techniques and emphasis vary, but the basic idea is the same. Saunders writes his plays with a conscious awareness of his own
role as a maker of myths, a creator of illusions; and this process of making a play—in which the audience imaginatively participates—is deliberately shown on the stage. It is the same thing which is found in Six Characters, the subtitle of which is "A comedy in the Making".

The whole implication is that all of life, and death, is a story; and to console ourselves—indeed, just to make that life and death bearable—we enclose them within stories and legends. Man creates a mythology for himself, to which he gives active witness by participating in ceremonial ritual and re-telling. And this is precisely the nature and function of art. Consequently, the role of the artist is seen to be somewhat analogous to that of the prophet and priest; the transmitter of mysteries which lie beyond the reason, beyond the finite. And in an age such as our own, when we seem to be pushed more and more into an awareness of an irrevocable isolation, and when, at the same time, almost every bastion of a supra-individual faith or meaning or purpose is attacked or undermined, art does indeed begin to take the place of religion. If man no longer has a god or a religion or a concept of worship to communicate the mystery, then it will fall to the lot of the artist. And more and more, the dramatist at least implicitly responds to this need by creating a theatre as a place of ceremony, and a play as a new ritual to unite the society.

These are the latter stages of a development which begins, in one direction, in the later plays of Ibsen and Strindberg, and in another direction, in the plays of Chekhov. Corrigan attributes Chekhov with being the "legitimate father" of Absurdist drama.37

37. in Bogard and Oliver, Ibid., p. 79.
Martin Esslin points on the other side to Strindberg's expressionistic plays. Esslin has a useful summary of this development through naturalism to Absurdism in drama:

The Theatre of the Absurd is the last link in a line of development that started with naturalism. Once 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—had floundered in the aftermath of the rise of the philosophy of Locke and Kant, which based reality on perception and the inner structure of the human mind, art 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 lifetime's 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...

Any really fundamental analysis of reality as perceived by man leads to the recognition that any attempt at communicating what we perceive and feel consists of the dissection of a momentary, simultaneous intuition of a complex of perceptions into a sequence of atomized concepts structured in time within a sentence, or a sequence of sentences. To convert our perception into conceptual terms, into logical thought and language, we perform an operation analogous to the scanner that analyzes 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 associations, is one of the methods by which we can, however imperfectly, communicate the reality of our intuition of the world.

What we may see here, and in the foregoing, are some of the various sources for modern movements in drama; and already, we begin to gain a coherent idea of the intimate links in the chain of development.

Techniques which may at first seem, in modern drama, to be radical innovations and drastic departures from tradition are seen, when viewed from a close look at that tradition, to be recognizable stages in the growth of a concept of theatre. One form did not totally give way to another; rather, old techniques were assimilated into new structures, as the originality of innovation and idea culled its stimulus and direction from the artistic conventions preceding it. In the next chapter, we will go on to look at expressionism, as the stage of dramatic evolution which followed impressionism.
Like the term "impressionism", "expressionism" covers a very broad category. It is a label created by critics after the fact, to describe the fundamental nature of a particular artistic movement. In terms of the drama, it is primarily connected with the German drama in the second two decades of this century. But we may extend a discussion of expressionism to include Strindberg's dream plays and the theatre of the Absurd. We may hypothesize a distinction between these three kinds of drama at the outset: to suggest that Strindberg's plays are a combination of impressionism and expressionism; that the German drama was pure expressionism; and that the Absurdist theatre is a symbolic theatre, which is permeated with a philosophical awareness often lacking in
expressionism—for-its-own-sake, and which returns to the kind of poetry found in Strindberg's plays.

We have seen the way in which expressionism grew out of realism—naturalism—impressionism, and we may now go on to describe expressionism in more detail and to look at the way in which it has functioned in drama. In Chapter I, it was suggested that the essential distinction between these forms of art lies in the artist's idea of his relationship to the world he perceives. Realism originates in the object, in the sense that it makes an image upon the eye which the artist objectively (as possible) analyzes and transmits. Impressionism also originates in the object, but it is the result of the artist's interpretation and transformation of what he actually sees. Expressionism, however, originates in the mind of the artist. He imposes the structures of his own mind on what he sees, interprets sense data in terms of them, and creates a work of art symbolic of these structures. This might be diagrammed in this way:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{OBJECT} \\
\text{realism:} \quad \rightarrow \\
\text{impressionism:} \quad \leftrightarrow \\
\text{expressionism:} \quad \leftarrow
\end{array}
\]

Now, when the emphasis deliberately lies upon the subconscious or subjective element in art, as is the case in expressionism, one of two things may happen: the artist may use his imagination to create very broad statements of universal implication; or he may use it as a justification for manufacturing a very private and/or arbitrary language. This second form of expressionism we
will examine later. In the first case, there is the implication of an idea that the artist uses the structures of his own mind—both conscious and subconscious—as just one example of the structures common to all men. Consequently, he assumes an impersonal, non-subjective role: that of the means by which the unknown is made “known” through the formless being given a form. The perceptions about Reality which he intuits are given a symbolic form, and through these symbols he communicates the idea of a general Reality. By assuming that the structures of mind are similar for everyone, he assumes also that in creating a subjective work of art, he is communicating a perception of Reality viable and meaningful for all men. It is in this sense that his role and his vision are ultimately objective, and in this sense also that he efacces himself, removes himself from any particular subjective presence in his own work. The work of art transcends him because he merely uses his own subjectively as an analogy for all subjectivity.

This is what happens in Strindberg's two important expressionistic works, A Dream Play (1902) and The Ghost Sonata (1907). What Strindberg does in A Dream Play is to create the idea of a dreamer, for whom, as he says in the preface, "there are no secrets, no incongruities, no scruples and no law". But, the dreamer is not present in the play. The implication is that the dreamer is fundamentally analogous to God, in a general sense. The dreamer, who knows everything, creates a dream in the same way that God created the world: from the depths of a Reality which transcends conscious-
ness, or conscious interpretation. When we awake, our finite consciousness can only transcribe, and to a limited degree interpret, what happened in the dream. Similarly, man, or the artist, stands midway between Reality (as it exists in the mind of God) and the world in which he lives—and midway, too, between unconsciousness and consciousness. He transcribes and interprets; but the ultimate Reality of his work of art stems from the infinite, the intuitions of perception which are analogous to the suprarational constructions of the dreamer.

The way in which Strindberg creates a sense of this transcending Reality is by enclosing the expressionism of the play within an impressionistic framework. It is essentially the same use of dream-as-atmosphere found in Maeterlinck's plays—and here we may see just how Strindberg utilised Maeterlinck's ideas. The play, written in a highly poetic language, carries the connotations of legend and mythology—in this case even a religious mythology—and also of an implicit story-teller, all of which is also common to Maeterlinck. Strindberg thus distances his play from the audience, and in creating this impressionistic dream, he expands what otherwise might be an overtly subjective and personal symbolism into wider meanings which are immediately felt by the audience. In other words, instead of just confronting the audience with the rawness of a naked symbol (which is often what an actual dream is, and which is often the method of, say, the German expressionists), leaving the audience to react and interpret as best they can (if they are able), Strindberg first invites the audience into the realm of poetry, the realm of the story. This he establishes in the dialogue
between Indra and his Daughter. And I believe that in general, it is arguable that when people are told that they are going to be told a story—an imaginative once-upon-a-time—they are prepared to suspend disbelief, to submit themselves to the events, to give themselves over into the hands of the story-teller. The capacity of human beings to be taken in to, and by, the created fiction, is unlimited. It is through stories that we regain a sense of awe and wonder. It is as Zoe says to Edgar in *A Scent of Flowers*: “Tell me a fairy story, Uncle Edgar... Make me forget... make me a child again.” And we have seen the *ad infinitum* implications of stories within stories within...

Strindberg approximates this kind of concentric structure first by creating the "earth", which is peopled by characters who tell stories (or woes) to each other and to the Daughter. In this world, it is the consciousness of the Daughter that "holds sway", for it is her presence which integrates all of the events in the play. Then there is the "heavenly" realm of Indra, the creator of the Daughter, and a more etherealized being than herself: he cannot breathe the air of earth; he is present only as a voice. To him, the Daughter will tell the story of the stories on earth. Beyond Indra lies the artist telling the story of Indra and all the others, and beyond the artist, the dreamer, and beyond the dreamer: Reality. And how is this Reality conveyed? Through a representation of the subjective and subconscious processes of mind: a dreamer dreaming a particular dream. And in this case, it really is Strindberg's dream, in so far as many of the events in the play—e.g., the Officer
waiting outside the stage door for the actress—are events from Strindberg's own life. But a knowledge of these facts is not necessary, nor is it a detraction from the implications of the play, for the use of symbols or images in each case carries general truths—in this particular case, the essence of waiting.

When looked at from this viewpoint, the structure of the play is very interesting, for two things seem to happen at once. Because the play is organized primarily by association of idea, or incident—one scene immediately melding into another, and time constantly changing, from season and season and youth to age—there is the feeling of rapid movement. At the same time, virtually nothing happens. Year after year, the Officer waits, and Victoria never comes. Kirsten pastes, the Billsticker sticks bills, the Doorkeeper crochets; the Officer must go through his lessons again. The door, when it is finally opened, reveals nothing. The character "Theology" says: "That is the solution of the riddle of the universe. Out of nothing in the beginning God created heaven and earth." And "Philosophy" responds: "Out of nothing comes nothing." And in a sense, this is the essence of the play. Nothing really happens, no meaning is found in all the appearances of events. And yet, everything happens, for the idea of repetition and reiteration, of which the Lawyer speaks as the worst of all possible things, carries a double implication: when viewed as an unending continuum, there seems to be no progress toward anything; but when a minute portion of this continuum is examined—or put under a microscope, as Rilke spoke of Ibsen's method—the whole flux of
life is seen in all its interior rhythm. And it is in terms of these daily rhythms that a man lives.

We may note here the way in which Strindberg's idea of a dreamer differs from the impressionistic use of narrator/dreamer which we examined earlier. In those plays, the dreamer, by actively telling the story at hand, established himself as storyteller, and as an intermediary between audience and event. In Strindberg's play, however, because the dreamer is only implied—and implied as existing beyond the scope of the play itself—the vision which is portrayed is expressionistic. We see what is going on in the mind of the dreamer, as we saw it in Willy's head in *Death of a Salesman*. The post-impressionist plays which utilize a narrator may be seen, therefore, to be both an extension of the expressionist idea of dreamer found in Strindberg, and at the same time, a return to classical forms of drama which use a chorus to establish this same kind of audience/stage relationship.

There are some exquisite sections of dialogue in *A Dream Play* which convey its scope. At one point near the end, the Daughter is speaking to the Poet. The Officer, as usual, is waiting. The Poet and the Daughter both comment upon how this seems to have all happened before; and indeed, at a previous point they have had a similar discussion to the one which follows, on the nature of reality, dreaming, and poetry:

Officer: Well, I am waiting.

Poet: I seem to have lived through all this before.

Daughter: I too.

Poet: Perhaps I dreamt it.
Daughter: Or made a poem of it.
Poet: Or made a poem.
Daughter: You know then what poetry is.
Poet: I know what dreaming is.
Daughter: I feel that once before, somewhere else, we said these words.
Poet: Then soon you will know what reality is.
Daughter: Or dreaming.
Poet: Or poetry.

Poetry and dreaming convey to us a Reality which logic—comically lambasted in the play—cannot tell us, for logic leads to absurdity (a theme which also runs through Ionesco's plays). As the Daughter says to the Poet, when he asks a logical question about justice: "Your questions are difficult to answer, because there are so many unknown factors."

There is another passage in this play which indicates the nature of the expressionistic vision. This is in the section just after the Lawyer has been refused his laurel. The Daughter says to him: "Do you know what I see in this mirror? The World as it should be. For as it is it's the wrong way up." The Lawyer asks: "How did it come to be wrong way up?", and the Daughter replies: "When the copy was made." "Ah!", the Lawyer responds, "You yourself have said it—the copy! I always felt this must be a poor copy, and when I began to remember its origin nothing satisfied me. Then they said I was cynical and had a jaundiced eye, and so forth." Strindberg never indicates of what it is a copy; all he has said is the Nothing comes out of Nothing, and that the only Reality which we can find lies in our own dreaming and poetry.

The idea that emerges here is precisely that which we have indicates as being the essence of the expressionistic vision. If the
world came out of Nothing; then it is a copy of Nothing; but Nothing (Chaos, Eternity, etc.) is not enough to satisfy the dreamer and poet in man. Consequently, he endows Nothing with the richness of his own mind, his own imagination. "Nothing" is superimposed upon, and transformed into Something, something with a meaning, even if that meaning is no more than the final knowledge that "Human beings are to be pitied." Or, on the comic-Absurd side of Strindberg's vision, there is the lovely summary of the Nature of Things as expressed in terms of the Billsticker and his fishnet and box. The Officer asks the Billsticker if he is happy, having a net and a box, and the latter replies: "Yes, very happy. That was my dream when I was little, and now it's come true. I'm all of fifty now, you know." The Daughter, incredulous, says: "Fifty years for a fishnet and a box!" But the Billsticker says: "A green box, a green one." However, a few pages later, the Billsticker has returned from the summer of fishing, and the following passage ensues:

Officer: Here's the Billsticker with his net. How was the fishing?

Billsticker: Not too bad. The summer was hot and a bit long . . . The net was all right, but not quite what I had in mind.

Officer: "Not quite what I had in mind." Excellently put. Nothing ever is as one imagines it—because one's mind goes further than the act, goes beyond the object. . . .

Daughter: What was wrong with the fishnet?

Billsticker: Wrong? Well, there wasn't anything wrong exactly. But it wasn't what I'd had in mind, and so I didn't enjoy it quite as much . . .

Daughter: How did you imagine the net?

1. There seems to be an unexplained confusion in the text as to whether it is the box or the net that is green.
Billsticker: How? I can’t quite tell you . . .

Daughter: Let me tell you. In your imagination it was different—green but not that green.

"One's mind goes further than the act, goes beyond the object."

This is essentially the same idea which was stated by Oscar Wilde in his Intentions, and which Sypher quotes in his chapter on "The Nabis and Art Nouveau". We may take a minute here to refer again to Sypher’s book, and to pictorial art, in order to explain the significance of Wilde’s theories in terms of the development of expressionism. Sypher describes the Nabis and the position they occupied:

The so-called Nabi painters stand at the crossroads where a good many of the mannerisms of nineteenth-century art intersect to lead toward a new sense of style. The group is more important for its interests and theories than for its painting, which was a makeshift of symbolism, Gauguin, Japanese stylization, mediaevalism in its many forms, and the neo-tradition- alism that found its voice in the writings of Maurice Denis. The composite nature of Nabi speculation and technique is indicated by their relations with Gauguin . . . Gauguin told the poet Charles Morice, "Primitive art proceeds from the mind and uses nature. So-called refined art proceeds from sensuality and serves nature. Nature is the servant of the former and the mistress of the latter." 2

This, again, explains the way in which expressionism originates in the mind and interprets the world. Sypher goes on to fit Wilde’s theories into this general development:

In his Intentions Wilde, who temperamentally had little in common with the Nabis, expands his thesis that "the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature’s lack of design." This is precisely why Denis and the Nabis rejected the impressionists. Wilde also

writes the axiom with which that byzantine artist, the young André Gide, began his early half-symbolist work: "It is through Art, and through Art only, that we can realize our perfection." Anticipating Gide's character Lafcadio, Wilde advances his opinion that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life."  

From Intentions, Sypher quotes the following passage:

"Life holds the mirror up to Art, and either reproduces some strange type imagined by painter or sculptor, or realizes in fact what has been dreamed in fiction. . . . Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? . . . Nature . . . is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life."  

Thus, we move closer to pure expressionism. A Dream Play, however, had combined two things at once: impressionism with expressionism, and poetic symbol with visual symbol. The play is unified both by the poetry and by Strindberg's use of stage set, which remains unchanged throughout. The scene constantly shifts, but the stage properties are the same: a gate becomes a railing, becomes an office barrier: a flowering lime tree becomes, when leafless, a coat rack, and so forth. Strindberg achieves here the kind of suggestiveness of illusion he had wanted to create in Miss Julie, and which he might well have used in To Damascus.

In regard to pictorial art, Sypher explains one of the bases in the shift from impressionism to expressionism:

Gauguin explained what happened between impressionism and the moderns when he said that the impressionists studied color "but kept the shackles of representation." That is why Gauguin broke with impressionism: "I obtain by arrangements of lines and colors, using as pretext . . .

4. Ibid.
some subject borrowed from human life or nature, symphonies, harmonies that represent nothing absolutely real in the vulgar sense of the word; they express no idea directly but they should make one think as music does, without the aid of ideas or images, simply by the mysterious relationships existing between our brains and such arrangements of colors and lines."

With the move into expressionism in drama, which also involved a more or less total rejection of impressionism, the emphasis tends to shift from poetic symbol to visual and active symbol. And in some cases, we see this developing into the second kind of expressionism which was suggested earlier, i.e., the creation of a personal, overtly subjective (as opposed to ultimately objective) vision, and/or an esoteric language permeated by a sometimes-arbitrary violence. The real importance of expressionism as it developed in the German drama is the way in which it served as a transition from the early experiments in expressionism to the theatre of the Absurd, and to other adaptations of these earlier techniques. We need not spend too long over these plays, for they are little read and rarely performed—and this in itself is indicative of their limitations and, to some extent, the fact that it is a "dated" theatre. However, some of the theories involved here are worth looking at.

A useful anthology of some of these plays has been compiled by Walter K. Sokel. It includes plays by Oskar Kokoschka (the Austrian painter), Reinhard Sorge, Carl Sternheim, Walter Hasenclever, Georg Kaiser, Yvan Goll, Rolf Leuckner, and Brecht's early play


Baal. Other playwrights which Sokel groups under this general heading are Ernst Toller, Franz Werfel, Ernst Barlach, Paul Kornfield, Franz Th. Gsokor, Arnolt Bronnen, and Kurt Wolff. In his incisive introduction, Sokel examines some of the ideas and techniques which are found in these writers, while stressing that "Expressionism was not a program guiding individual authors as they wrote their works."7

The following points are quotations from this introduction, describing the nature of this expressionism:

1. extremism of theme, language, stagecraft, mixed with many features of realistic or classical drama. (xii)
2. elements of distortion, exaggeration, grotesqueness, and implausibility. (xii)
3. The extremism and distortion of Expressionist drama derive from its closeness to the dream... the Expressionists rarely reproduced actual dreams. Rather, the structure of many of their plays resembled, in some respects, the pattern of the human mind in dream and reverie. (xiii, xiv)
4. the projection of psychic situations into symbolic images, an essential function of the subconscious mind, becomes action on the stage. This principle offered Kokoschka, and Goll after him, a means of returning to the ancient nature of the theater as magic show, as visual and pantomimic liberation from the confining fetters of realist and propriety. (xvii)
5. The projection of abstract ideas and psychic situations into symbolic images and happenings is one of the most basic features of Expressionist drama. Consequently, language loses the pre-eminent rank it held in traditional drama. Dynamic utilization of setting and stage... expresses many things formerly expressed by language, or not expressed at all. Broad gestures, uninhibited overacting... the return to mask, buskin, and chanting—these are the demands made by Expressionist theory and frequently exhibited by Expressionist practice. An immediate appeal is made to the audience's visual sense rather than to its conceptual thought. The memory of empirical reality, with its demand for causal logic and plausibility, is suspended. (xviii)

7. Sokel, Ibid., p. xi. Page reference to this Introduction will be given in the text.
6. Such a theater would be a "total work of art," like the drama of the Greeks. It would restore the theater as cult. (xix,xx)

7. Because of its subjectivism, Expressionist drama does not allow genuine conflict to arise... Ultimately its structure can be traced to the Christian miracle and Passion plays. The protagonist in Expressionist plays usually serves as an existential example, a paragon, very much like Christ in the Passion plays. The other "characters" are not so much characters as functions in his mission or martyrdom. They represent his opportunities, obstacles, parallels, variations, and counterpoints. (xx,xxi)

8. The absence of conflict determines the pageant or pilgrimage-type structure of many full-length Expressionist plays... A loosely connected "life story", a series of "stations," pictures, and situations takes the place of a well-knit plot. (xxi)

9. Expressionism had two faces:... With their concept of the writer as visionary and savior, the Expressionists renewed the old dream of Romanticism... There was another side to Expressionism, the counterpart of the idealism contained in its "mission" themes; the acid and macabre presentation of a meaningless, insanely materialistic world... Distortion served the Expressionists as an X-ray eye for detecting the dynamic essence of their time, the direction in which history was moving. In caricature and nightmare they approached the truth. Their idealism, on the other hand, was a desperate attempt at self-deception, protecting them from the truth. (xxii,xxiii)

The essentially two-fold subjective nature of this expressionism is found in this last point. On the one side, there are characters in the plays which are undisguisedly used as a mouthpiece for the author; and what dates these plays are the specific references to where the drama has been, where it should be going, and how I-the-writer-of-this-play intend to take it there, or at least clear the ground for future development. On the other side, there are examples of the dramatist following these ideas of his characters' visions in his own plays, by a ruthless kind of attack on everything and a more or less indiscriminate throwing up of anything which lies outside the conventions.
Reinhard Sorge's *The Beggar* (written in 1911) is one example of a play which evidences both of these strains of subjectivism. At one point, for example, there is a long discussion between several critics and listeners, and between the poet and his patron, about the present state of the theater. The Poet, dismissing the conventional demands of his patron, says: "I do not need external inspiration for future creation, but I must gain experience of theatrical technique by seeing my finished works performed. I must be able to test in practice the extent of what is possible on the stage. I must test experimentally the limits of drama... The external world is necessary only secondarily, and sterility will never threaten me! My mission dictates this one path..." He then swoops into poetry and explains with emotional fervor the inspiration of his calling:

How shall I begin my tale?!
Shall I relate how this began in me with visions,
Even when I was a child, and then matured
And grew in might, compelling me and driving me
Into such loneliness and tortured grief...

My work! My work! My work alone was master!
How best to say it... I want to show you images
Of coming things which have in me arisen
In all splendor...

Just listen now: this will become
The heart of art: from all the continents,
To this source of health, people will stream
To be restored and saved, not just a tiny esoteric
Group!... Masses of workmen will be swept
By intimations of a higher life
In mighty waves, for there they will see
From smokestack and towering scaffold, from
The daily danger of clamouring cogs arise
Their souls, beauteous, and wholly purged
Of swarming accidents, in glorious
Sublimity, conquerors of gripping misery,
Living steel and spire soaring up
In defiant yearning, regally...

And so forth.

On the other side of this kind of idealistic, prophetic, visionary subjectivism is the subjectivism of undisciplined artistic creation. This is represented through the Poet’s Father; and through him, and his juxtaposition to his son, a curious kind of ambivalent statement arises. The Father is clearly "mad"; he exists in a world of fantasy quite separate from any concept of reality or responsibility. He beats on his drum, talks to Mars, and screams childish expletives at imaginary people to go away. At his first entrance, he seems a completely comic character, a parody of the serious expressionist artist. He has a great plan, a great life's work, as idealistic as the Poet's, but utterly ludicrous. At the same time, his deluded ego-centricity evidences a terrible capacity for cruelty when, unable to obtain red India ink, he stabs a fledgling bird to death, and then dips his drawing pen into its blood. But it is clear before this that the Father is a serious character after all, and that not only the Poet, but the author also, takes him quite seriously. And this is where the ambivalence occurs: for the torments of the Father's artistic temperament are real, but at the same time, his "artistry" is a joke. He takes his role as artist as a license to obey no rules; he rises to absurd and meaningless (and often quite destructive) heights of fitful creativity. It is not what he creates, but the fact, the power, of creating—something, anything—in which he exults. He is not drunk on artistic visions, like the Poet, but intoxicated with a fantastic vision of himself as artist. The arbitrariness of his creativity is expressed at one point in an ecstatically vehement
speech to his son—who, in the third act, poisons the Father, to release him from his torment. What is interesting and ironically confusing in this scene is that the Father, (whether Sorge realized it or not), symbolizes the excesses of expressionism, and it is hard to take him seriously (are we meant to?); but the reality of his anguish is very serious, and the Poet is obviously deeply involved with that anguish. But it is difficult to reconcile the vision with the torment, as Sorge conveys it here, in spite of the powerful quality of Sorge’s writing:

Father: ... and now, and now—I wish to
Shower happiness upon this earth! You hear! I’m holding Treasures—Miracles of Mars! Riches of the stars! World happiness!
I hold omnipotence in my hand! I can stamp This whole great earth into dust! When I stamp the ground It bursts asunder. The solid rocks rip apart In dead center! In dead center! Ah—they are bursting even now!
Mountains turn and wander far afield.
Whither I command. The chasms fill With rocks or flames or flowers.
Because I wish it so! ...
Yes, great! proud! glorious! blissful! marvelous! Mars filled all my brain when I created it! ...
Omnipotence created this through me! So proud ... so
Son, pacifying. Father.

Father: Let me glorify! You shall not stop me! Glorify!
Away and on!
Look here and marvel! This line here [on a blueprint] Undercuts the Himalayas! What this signifies is but this:
Away with Himalaya! I push it
Our of my way! Here this yellow bedbug—
Sahara is its name—will soon be in full flight from me,
God only knows where to! Himalaya, this tiny bug,
Shall likewise run from me ... ...
...
Here these lines,
All these black lines will soon gleam silver-white
With broad canals! They will bring lasting happiness to earth
Through power that is mine alone!...

Ah! I am weary from all that splendor! What splendor! Creating makes one weary! I want to build myself a house by the side of the road, and lie peacefully and view my happiness. From my windows. Lying there, Looking, I want nothing else... And I want to die! I am cold. Please cover me... I am so cold! My cover...

This is good...

Hear me... I want to die... I’ve longed for this All my days... My work is done! Creating has been beautiful! Create further, My son! You will do it! Thank you! You! Now give me your hand! Love me well and help me die. Remember... Give me poison! Give poison to your poor father!...

You have no inkling how I am tormented! Believe your father! It torments, torments, and no one knows the true extent! One is alone... and black with anguish is the world And one is mute. And turns insane! You too will suffer it, one day! Give me the poison! Poison me! Redeem your father! 10

That insanity has been the plot of many a visionary artist is certainly true, and the Father in this play might be seen as a tragic portrait of this kind of artist. Nevertheless, Sorge does hit upon a frequent element of expressionism: its vision of destruction, primarily of previous artistic conventions and techniques. In its inspiration as a negative force, it tended to concentrate on knocking down old buildings rather than creating lasting new ones. It was, as Sorge implied, an experimental theatre, a testing of the limits of drama. Years later, this same sort of deliberate pushing out at dramatic barriers was taken up by Ionesco, among others; and in the following quotation, he indicates the closeness with which the Absurdists followed from the German expressionists:

I personally would like to bring a tortoise onto the stage, turn it into a race horse, then into a hat, a song, a dragoon, and a fountain of water. One can dare anything in the theatre, and it is the place where one dares the least. I want no other limits than the technical limits of stage machinery. People will say that my plays are music-hall turns or circus acts. So much the better—let's include the circus in the theatre! Let the playwright be accused of being arbitrary. Yes, the theatre is the place where one can be arbitrary. As a matter of fact, it is not arbitrary. The imagination is not arbitrary, it is revealing... I have decided not to recognize any laws except those of my imagination, and since the imagination obeys its own laws, this is further proof that in the last resort it is not arbitrary.11

The crucial difference between much Absurdist drama and its forerunners, however, lies in its orientation toward building a new theatre instead of tearing down an old one, and in its greater awareness of the interrelation between imagination and intellect, and between the theatre and all other aspects of life and creativity.

Before we look at these plays, we may use the ideas which we have established so far to fill in the next stage in our original diagram, to show how dramatic expressionism fits into the development from realism. And, rather than have to extend this yet again in the next chapters, we may complete it here, and suggest how this development extends to what loosely may be called "the theatre of ceremony":

### Reality ——— Illusion ——— Realism/Naturalism

| Private Face | Social Mask (Social Reality) | Ibsen; Strindberg; Clear-cut distinction between mask and face, art and reality, stage and audience, latter of which is passive, acted upon.
| Individual Face | Generalized Context | Individualized Characters in a Generalized Context |

### Content ——— Form ——— Impressionism

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### Unconscious ——— Conscious ——— Expressionism

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<th>Chekhov; Shaw; Individualized Characters in Individualized Contexts</th>
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<td>Involvement of audience by the creation of worlds outside of common experience (so audience can not sit back, knowing and comfortable); or, by creation of ritual and/or ceremony</td>
<td>To compensate, in part, for the lack of a shared body of belief in a social context</td>
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### Pirandello

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We have seen how the concentration in expressionism lies upon the unconscious being projected through the form of consciously apprehended symbols. The second major element in expressionist development in theatre concerns the way in which the tripartition between social mask, social face, and private face now becomes further divided, with the split into private mask and face. It is specifically in Pirandello's plays that this split becomes a direct and open subject in a play; but in earlier expressionism plays, it is implied by analogy from the division between social mask and face. And this implication is almost unavoidable, because it is intimately connected with the whole question of reality and illusion. As the artist's vision moves more and more away from external reality toward the internal perceptions and workings of his own mind, the recognition of the conflict between reality and illusion becomes increasingly pronounced, until finally the position reached is that on no level, not even the personal, is there a fixed or stable "reality" to which a man may refer. Brustein points out how Pirandello's plays epitomized the end-result of the growth of this perspective:

The concept of the face and the mask has become the basis for a totally new relationship between the artist and his work. Thus, Pirandello completes that process of Romantic internalizing begun by Ibsen and Strindberg. Ibsen, for all his idealization of personality, still believed in an external reality available to all, and so did Chekhov, Brecht, and Shaw. Strindberg had more doubts about this reality, but believed it could be partially perceived by the inspired poet and seer. For Pirandello, however, objective reality has become virtually inaccessible, and all one can be sure of is the illusion-making faculty of the subjective mind. After Pirandello, no dramatist has been able to write with quite the same certainty as before.¹²

What we may note here is the way in which expressionism forms part of the general development up to the plays of Pirandello, and how this leads into thematic elements in Absurdist drama.

In Impressionism, there had been the growing concern with making content into form, and the concomitant of this was the idea of the relativity of reality and illusion. And this relativity began to apply not just to the distinction between the social and the private, or the mask and the face, but to the work of art itself. Shaw expresses this idea near the end of Back to Methuselah (1918-20).

Martellus says:

> Anything alive is better than anything that is only pretending to be alive. Your disillusion with your works of beauty is only the beginning of your disillusion with images of all sorts. As your hand became more skilful and your chisel cut deeper, you strove to get nearer and nearer to truth and reality, discarding the fleeting fleshly lure, and making images of the mind that fascinates [sic] to the end. But how can so noble an inspiration be satisfied with any image, even an image of the truth? In the end the intellectual conscience that tore you away from the fleeting in art to the eternal must tear you away from art altogether, because art is false and life alone is true.

When we move into expressionism and post-expressionism, we find not only that this statement is contained within the work of art itself, but also that the idea of art as an illusion—hence, an appearance, and therefore not a reality—becomes the implicit structure of the work of art. Art is a lie; but at the same time, it becomes the only means toward apprehending the truth. There is an increasing affirmation of the absolute and undeniable necessity of art. The assumption is that if we are condemned to live in a world which gives us no certainty, no way of discriminating between
Reality and appearance, truth and falsehood, then the one recourse open to us is to create something quite new—to create an illusion—and to state unequivocally that: The truth of the matter is, I have created an illusion, and that is its reality.

This is where the decisive break with realism occurred. The next step was the idea expressed by Wilde above: that life (i.e., daily appearances and illusions) is but a reflection of art (the reality which we create). Nevertheless, art is no real solution to the problem, for the ultimate and unavoidable discrepancy between art and life lies in the fact that art is a static and finished creation: the work of art, once completed, never changes, and in this sense, it is untrue of life, which is always changing:

Like the mask, the work of art is both a limiting and a liberating creation. Art is superior to life, because it has purpose, meaning, and organization—the illusion is deeper than the reality. But art is inferior to life because it can never capture the transitory, formless quality of existence. The work of art is thus a beneficial illusion, an ordered fiction—more harmonious than life, yet still a lie. 13

This double vision runs through Absurdist drama: that art is both more true and less true than life. In regard to Beckett’s plays, for example, Jacques Guicharnaud describes how Beckett sees the limitations of art, while at the same time he expresses an idea analogous to Wilde’s that nature reflects art: the implication that life imitates the theatre:

Beckett’s theatre . . . presents life as an imitation of theatre. The master in Fin de partie is called Hamm, implying a ham actor. Hamm tries to perform certain numbers, like

Pozzo and Mr. Rooney. All of them feel they are giving a structure to their lives by choosing particular events and telling about them in an affected style with rhetorical effects, and conscious, not of reliving, but of replaying them. "How did you find me?" asks Pozzo after his description of nightfall. Hamm demands an audience and constantly interrupts to comment on his own style: "Nicely put, that... A bit feeble, that..." And Mr. Rooney asks, after an interruption: "Where was I in my composition?" Such "composed" narratives are part of a system of rites by which Beckett's characters try to give form to life by fitting it into a framework of beautiful language or deliberately masking its horror.

In Krapp's Last Tape the hero records the narrative of his life as it unfolds and listens to himself. Proust's hero set about saving his past by making it eternal through art; Beckett's heroes try to save their lives from insignificance through narrative. But for Beckett, literature is not salvation; Pozzo and, particularly, Hamm are conscious of the vanity of their attempts; Krapp's tape turns silently at the end of the act. Literature then is not necessarily salvation; it is an effort made to save oneself, perhaps as futile as any other. Yet Beckett himself makes the effort. 14

These two ideas join to make the basic structure of much expressionist drama: the concept of no ultimate objective reality—not even an ultimate private face; and the knowledge of art as an illusion. Together, they resulted in two major shifts from impressionism: the concentration on the individual becomes a depiction of the general common man; and the general context of the drama becomes a highly individual construct of the artist. The devolution of the individual to the common man is the logical outcome of the end of any belief in personal reality. But, where in the German expressionists this general character had become a representative dreamer, or Poet, or as Sokel called it, an

“existential example, a paragon”, in Absurdist drama he becomes one of Beckett’s tramps, or Genet’s homosexuals, or an identity-lacking Martin or Smith, as in Ionesco’s The Bald Prima Donna (written 1948). Ionesco, however, carries the idea of lack of personal reality into another dimension—and implies an attack on society, as being at least partially responsible for the reduction of personal significance. Speaking of The Bald Prima Donna, Ionesco says: "The Smiths, the Martins can no longer talk because they can no longer think; they can no longer think because they can no longer be moved, can no longer feel passions. They can no longer be; they can 'become' anybody, anything, for, having lost their identity, they assume the identity of others... they are interchangeable." 15 This goes a long way to explain why characters change into personalities or physical beings quite different from the way in which we first see them, which is what happens, for example, in The Chairs (1951), Victims of Duty (1952), Jacques (1950), Rhinoceros, and other plays.

With the generalizing of characters comes an individualizing of context—the opposite kind of relationship from that which we hypothesized as being the basis of drama up to and including the early realists. The exception may be made here of the Medieval Morality plays and the like, which also involved the Everyman character. But these plays had been created specifically to demonstrate general social, moral, and religious truths. When the expressionists began to return to this kind of dramatic structure—the beginnings, by the way, of returning modern theatre to ritual and ceremony—they were able to take the form without being able to take the content.

15. Quoted in Eselin, Ibid., p. 93.
That is, they could utilize the Everyman or common man figure "passing through", but there was no binding general context to construct around him. It was precisely the same problem we saw confronting Ibsen in his return to the form of Greek tragedy without a return to the myth and "structure of feeling" which had constituted that particular rhythm of tragedy. And like Ibsen, the German expressionists not only did not try to substitute some modern social equivalent for myth: they attacked the substructure of the society in which, and for which, they were writing.

The Absurdists, of course, were faced with the same problem: the absence of a modern myth. What they did to compensate for this deficiency was to extend the concepts of the German expressionists in four closely-connected directions:

1) to emphasise the generality of the common man characters;
2) to put into practice the expressionist theory that drama should return to the roots of dramatic expression: theatre as cult, circus, music-hall, etc.;
3) to compensate for the lack of a modern mythology by stressing the ritualistic and ceremonial framework of dramatic representation; and
4) to extend both the subjective and social orientation until the theatre transcended them—went beyond a direct and limited involvement with either one.

In regard to the first point, there is Ionesco's suggestion as to how and why this technique is utilized. We may extend this idea to include several other points: 1) Personal identity had been given the death stroke by Pirandello. 2) The Absurdists, who in their turn were disillusioned with the expressionists, took a closer look at life and theatre, and lost the ability, or at least the
tendency, of the German expressionists to wrap their vehement disillusion and protestations in a covering of emotional optimism. It was not just people or society that were wrong; it was the whole existence of life. To attack the society would be as meaningless as to shake one's fists at the rain. Meaning had to be found somewhere else—in, for instance, ceremony, which contains an inherent meaning (Cf. the burial ritual in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? and *A Scent of Flowers*; and this particular ceremony is a pre-eminent example of inherent meaning, considering for whom it is meaningful). 3) As the structure becomes more ritualistic, characters devolve into playing the role of participants in the ritual. This, in turn, is intimately connected with the growing emphasis on the playing of games. The game, the ritual, the performance of a performance and pretence of a pretence, which the drama becomes, leads to a continuation of the breakdown of linear plot. Substituted in its place is the structure of ritual, or game. Within this framework, meaningless events occur, analogous to the meaningless occurrences in life. Consequently, it is not the particular characters or incidents, but the total pattern of the play, which organizes and communicates the experience and the vision. It is the Absurdist extension of Chekhovian impressionism: "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." 15

Beckett's plays, again, prove a good example of this kind of development. Esslin described the way in which the plays (like Chekhov's), are similar in structure to symphonic themes:

Beckett's plays lack plot even more completely than other works of the Theatre of the Absurd. Instead of a linear development, they present their author's intuition of the human condition by a method that is essentially polyphonic; they confront their audience with an organized structure of statements and images that interpenetrate each other and that must be apprehended in their totality, rather like the different themes in a symphony, which gain meaning by their simultaneous interaction.17

Jacques Guicharnaud, following his idea that in Beckett there is the assumption that life imitates the theatre, explains how the structure of Beckett's plays is an analogy for the whole concept of life as a game (a pretence, a ritual, a telling of a story). This is an Absurdist structure for the essentially similar ideas contained in Albee's plays:

Presented as theatrical numbers, the "narratives" and, by extension, literature and theatre, are games. Conscious of the esthetic quality of their monologues, Pozzo, Hamm, Mr. Rooney, and Krapp (who found a tape recorder the best means for listening to himself) play and watch themselves play. By the same token, Vladimir and Estragon never succeed in taking their own actions seriously. They rapidly become aware of the fact that their actions are theatrical numbers and that they are actors and spectators at the same time. Life consists in pretending to live—like children pretend that they fly or are animals—and yet we have nothing more than our lives. Thus there is a correspondence between our lives in the world and the essence of theatre, in which, paradoxically, what is performed is both reality and a game, and requires both participation and detachment.

Beckett's characters silently struggle toward forms of being or structures that are suddenly disclosed by a gesture or in words. Lyricism, eloquence,

invectives, and clichés are like fixatives which make existence intelligible and temporarily "save" it. The words hesitatingly move on from image to image toward the greatest possible precision or toward an enrichment or transformation of reality. Screams and swearing are often meant to "fix" a gesture or an impressionism. The poetry of the language is not in its profuse imagery, but in its precision, in the music of intersecting voices, in the calculated alternation of pauses and transparent words. But the fixatives are ephemeral and the word fall back into silence, just as water subsides to form a new wave. The pulsation of effort, forever repeated and forever vain, gives Beckett’s works their rhythm, their balance, their form. When all of life is a game, theatre, the game par excellence, has the last word. 18

Absurdist theatre is more philosophically oriented than was the expressionist theatre. It tends to be more meditative, and consequently, it often moves at a much more leisurely, less violent pace. When violence does occur, it carries much the same kind of arbitrariness as that found in the expressionists; but Absurd violence is precisely a demonstration of the total absurdity of life—an idea which the expressionists, with their reformist vision, clearly did not hold. Thus, arbitrary violence (the best example, perhaps, being Ionesco’s The Killer; 1957) is thematically integral to Absurdist drama—in addition to which, it isn’t always as arbitrary as it might at first seem. The sudden violent action in The Zoo Story and The Lesson is part of the philosophy of the difficulty of communication, the deficiency of language. The Lesson is particularly interesting to consider in terms of the idea of arbitrary power which we saw in Sorge’s The Beggar. What is arbitrary in The Lesson is not the Professor’s murder of the girl; that action

is prepared for throughout the entire play. Rather, it is in the means in which the Professor gains power over the girl: through language. Language is not only a weapon, as we saw in some of Strindberg's plays; it is an arbitrary weapon created by the Professor as a demonstration and expression of his power, his omnipotence. The play goes beyond the problems of communication per se, and involves, by implication, the same idea as that in The Beggar, of the artist's (teacher's) terrible power when wrongly used. As Esslin points out: "the professor derives his progressive increase of power from his role as a giver, a very arbitrary prescriber, of meanings. Because words must have the significance he decides to give them, the pupil comes under his dominance, which finds its concrete, theatrical expression in her rape and murder. The maid ... is immune when he attacks her with the same knife—simply because she is not one of his pupils."\(^{19}\) The theme which underlies the whole play is that language is as meaningless as life, and particularly absurd in terms of trying to apply logic to an irrational world, and in terms of trying to communicate the "meaning" of something meaningless. And yet, what else is there but the attempt to find significance—an attempt which, in the last analysis, is doomed to being arbitrary, but nonetheless necessary—? This, obviously, is a long way from the expressionists' optimism about the role of the artist in society.

In regard to the way in which Absurd theatre specifically returns to ritual and ceremony, and theatre as cult, etc., we will look at this in Chapter VII. These developments are, of course,

\(^{19}\) Esslin, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 95.
intimately connected with the whole movement of Absurdist drama out of expressionism; but as the structure of many of these plays is predominantly ceremonial, we may discuss some of them more inclusively in that context.

It is in the fourth point made above—that the Absurd dramatist transcended his own subjectivity and his own social context—that we see the way in which Absurdism is most clearly a transformed extension of the expressionist vision. And this, too, is closely connected with a number of considerations: the creation of individualized contexts; the return to ritual and ceremony; the difficulty of communication; the role of the imagination in artistic creation. Again, we may look at this from the standpoint of Beckett and Ionesco. In his short volume on Proust, Beckett makes the following statement:

But if love, for Proust, is a function of man's sadness, friendship is a function of his cowardice; and, if neither can be realized because of the impenetrability (isolation) of all that is not 'cosa mentale', at least the failure to possess may have the nobility of that which is tragic, whereas the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic, like the madness that holds a conversation with the furniture. Friendship, according to Proust, is the negation of that irremediable solitude to which every human being is condemned. Friendship implies an almost piteous acceptance of face values. Friendship is a social expedient, like upholstery or the distribution of garbage buckets. It has no spiritual significance. For the artist, who does not deal in surfaces, the rejection of friendship is not only reasonable, but a necessity. Because the only possible spiritual development is in the sense of depth. The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction. And art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication.

Several things are involved here, which we may look at, for instance, in regard to *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Some critics try to maintain that everything in the play—Godot, the tree, the two tramps, Lucky and Pozzo—all represent something specific. On the other side are those who argue that had Beckett meant that Godot, for example, should represent God, he would have said so more directly. This is substantiated by a statement from Beckett, when Beckett was asked in an interview what Godot meant: "If I knew, I would have said so in the play." The fact that a work of art may not have one meaning is not the equivalent of its having no meaning. In addition to which, art is always going to be individually received because the spectator will bring with him all of his own prejudices. This is particularly true in the theatre, where a dramatic representation is not only the work of an author, but also an "x"-way compromise between the "x" number of people involved in the production.

Now, Godot may be seen to relate to many traditions: the No theatre, which always involves a journey, and often has the single stage property of a tree; the Greek theatre (like the No), in its simplicity and small number of characters; and quite clearly it draws on the Christian tradition. All of this is implied in the play; or, to put it the other way, all or any of this may be inferred by the audience. People in the audience will tend to react to such an ambiguous multiplicity in a comparatively solitary way; and the individuality of response is strengthened by the decline of an external value structure. Consider, after all, what happened when the Greeks went to the theatre:

When the Greeks went to the theatre they knew what they were being told about or, more precisely, they had a frame in which to insert any new images. As a result they brought a sense of readiness with them, a sense of preparedness that was of incalculable value to the dramatist. He wrote for a known audience and could count on the audience's familiarity not only with the personages of his work but also with their significance. Euripides might shock, but he shocked because he as well as his audience knew the body of received ideas and could evaluate how far his interpretation strayed from established norms.

The modern situation is far removed from this; and the result is that if a society lacks any such structure to bind its members together into one community, then drama is not going to be the social artistic form that it used to be. And in spite of everyone going together into a theatre to witness people there before them, in the flesh, on the stage, their response will be primarily individual, either because an implied value structure will now be missing from the play itself, or because it contains a value system with which the spectator cannot agree or identify. In a certain sense, thereby, theatre almost becomes an anti-social form—and this is particularly true in regard to the plays which have as an underlying theme the inefficacy of language and/or the impossibility of communication.

The services of the church would not be meaningful to one who did not comprehend the significance of the ritual involved. And it is very disconcerting to go to an unfamiliar service where one must constantly be alert to grasp what is going to happen next. The form of the service occupies one's attention, at the expense of the content. A man looks to his neighbor, to see what he himself is

supposed to be doing. But if his neighbor is uninitiated as well—?
In a society where people are less held together by religious (or moral or political) doctrine than heretofore, the church takes on a pre-eminently social function. And this is similar to what happens in the theatre in another way: what is often presented is unfamiliar ritual, to which all the audience come as novitiates. This has two effects: it diminishes the social aspect of the theatre—what is really "social" about going to this kind of theatre today is the fact of people meeting one another before and after; and it undercuts a community response. For, once inside the theatre, each spectator is more or less forced into an individual confrontation with the play.

And this may be seen as a way in which art is, or has become, the "apotheosis of solitude". A solitude not only of the artist in his own creativity, but of the spectator as well, in his confrontation with that art. The essence of any community feeling which may arise in going to much modern theatre would seem to be an implicit realization, when we emerge, that we are, all of us, alone, caught in a universe we cannot understand, and basically unable to help either ourselves or other people. In this sense, it might be argued that modern theatre creates an indirect effect which reinforces the direct impression created upon the stage. If, for example, themes of the impossibility of communication are presented through characters in the play itself, these themes are made manifest in the concrete reality of the inability of the audience to communicate among themselves about the spectacle they have just witnessed.

These ideas, and Beckett's statements (ostensibly about Proust but, one feels, shared by Beckett) are quite similar to sentiments
expressed by Ionesco, and techniques which run through his plays. In the following statement from Notes and Counternotes, he explains how he understands his own solitude, as a human being and as a writer; he explains (what we have seen before) the relation of the artist to tradition; and he suggests the way in which the Absurdist vision goes beyond the personal subjectivism of the early expressionists:

The new dramatist is one who, contradictorily, endeavors to overtake what is most ancient: new language and subject matter in a dramatic structure which aims at being clearer, more stripped of inessentials and more purely theatrical; the rejection of traditionalism to rediscover tradition; a synthesis of knowledge and invention, of the real and the imaginary, of the particular and the universal or as they say now, of the individual and the collective; the expression, over and above classes, of that which transcends them. By expressing my deepest obsessions, I express my deepest humanity. I become one with all others, spontaneously, over and above all the barriers of casts and different psychologies. I express by solitude and become one with all other solitudes; my joy at existing or my surprise at being are those of everyone even if for the moment, everyone refuses to recognize it.  

Thus, Ionesco's plays are quite clearly expressionist, at the same time that they transcend any specific orientation in a society per se, and go beyond an inner-directed subjectivity.

He goes on at another point to say that

I find that the humanity of universal man is not general and abstract, but real and concrete; and man 'in general' is more real than man limited to his own period, diminished. Several times I have said that it is in our fundamental solitude that we rediscover ourselves and that the more I am alone, the more I am in communion with others; whereas in organized society, which is an

23. Ionesco, Notes and Counternotes, p. 49.
organization of functions, man is merely reduced to his function, which alienates him from the rest. 24

Hence, the general or common man character. This idea of man as a particular function—a particular role to play—in society, is one taken up again and again by Pirandello and Genet.

What we may cull from these statements is an idea first about the way in which breadth of suggestion, which we saw in Godot, may work; and secondly, about how the audience may become implicitly bound together in such a theatre, not by virtue of their all sharing a pre-existent set of beliefs, or being led through the structure of a logical argument, but through the play allowing for multiple levels of interpretation. Thus, the audience is not assaulted, as in expressionist theatre, but again taken into the context of the dramatic event, through whatever kind of imaginative interpretation they choose to, or are capable of, making. Interestingly, Guicharnaud has a different idea here. He suggests that Ionesco had no particular concern for how his plays were produced upon the stage because he didn't take them seriously:

Having produced a meaningless mirror of a meaningless world, it would be impossible for him to take the first any more seriously than the second . . . and the playwright himself shows no great respect for his own text . . . When he carefully gives details on how to stage his plays, on the rhythm to follow, etc., he does so either to make the director's job easier or to make certain of a particular effect on the spectator, and not in the name of his sovereignty as a poet or the aesthetic perfection of his play. 25

24. Ionesco, Ibid., pp. 80, 81.
We may counter this interpretation by another statement from Ionesco, this time from the standpoint of the actor: "I had learned that each of us is all the others, that my solitude had not been real and that the actor can, better than anyone else, understand human beings by understanding himself. In learning to act, I have also, in a certain sense, learned to admit that the others are oneself, that you yourself are the others, and that all lonelinesses become identified."26

This is closely linked with Beckett's vision, and we may interpret Ionesco from this standpoint rather than feel compelled to accept Guicharnaud's idea here. In other words, Ionesco's stage directions could be seen to indicate not a lack of respect for his work or his vision as a poet, but rather, an appreciation for the fact that a play, when it leaves a writer's hands, becomes a presentation of a director's and actor's own solitary vision of it as well—or, the product of many solitary visions compromised upon. To say that Ionesco is presenting a "meaningless mirror" implies that the plays themselves are without meaning. Rather than take this limited viewpoint, one might suggest that Ionesco simply allows scope for the individual spectator to respond to the play as he will, given his own particular solitude and vision. Thus, all solitudes are joined, all men (ideally) being able to recognize themselves in Ionesco through the very looseness of the symbols. Which is the same thing that happens in Godot.

Guicharnaud hits much closer when he says that in Ionesco:

"The entire universe may be questioned, but on the individual level,

26. Quoted in Esslin, Ibid., p.94.
there is no danger of any serious catastrophe. In other situations, when the danger of death becomes evident, all laughter stops and pathos takes over. And the laughter stops . . . because the characters are endowed with enough density and humanity to cause an identification with the general vision of the world and individual suffering."27 This is the intersection of the universal and the particular—T. S. Eliot's "rose-garden" moment—and, as Ionesco himself says: "Everything is a circumscribed moment in history, of course. But all history is contained in each moment of history: any moment in history is valid when it transcends history; in the particular lies the universal."28 Hence, "apotheoses of solitude" might also be understood to suggest the universalizing of (in terms of) the particular. It is in these ways, then, that the Absurdist dramatist moves beyond his own subjectivity, and beyond his own immediate society.

There is one other point which we may at least suggest here: and that is the way in which these various ideas underlying Absurd theatre are related to the abstract concepts of reality and illusion. In Chapter I, I quoted a passage from Raymond Williams's Modern Tragedy (see above, p. 23), on the role of illusion in drama, and we may refer back to part of that statement now. He says that in much modern drama:

The ordinary tension of expression is seen as damnable. Art must be anti-art, the novel must be anti-novel, the theatre must be anti-theatre, for this compelling reason. The most dangerous thing about any utterance, in this movement, is

27. Guicharnaud, Ibid., p. 186.
that it creates the possibility of communication, which is already known to be an illusion. The total condition of life, when seen in this way, leaves no theoretical basis for art, except its existence, which yet, ironically, has at some point to be willed. Then the very will to art has itself to be converted to bad faith. The creative process has to be separated from will and, at its extreme, from design. A condition of total illusion is thus precariously achieved by a method which must continually turn back on itself and dissolve what it has created. For without this continuous dissolution, the experience itself will be made unreal, by becoming falsely real.

This statement helps to illustrate what Ionesco often does, when it appears that he is shattering one notion of "reality" after another. It is possible, for example, to see the entrance of the Orator in The Chairs in this way; for the illusion suddenly turns in upon itself when the two characters exclaim, when he enters: "It's really he, he exists. In flesh and blood. This is not a dream! I told you so." A similar disintegration of illusion occurs on Jacques when Jacqueline says to her mother: "Don't faint just yet! Wait for the end of the scene!" In other words, what Ionesco seems to do at such moments is to break up the reality (hence, false reality) of the illusion he has just been creating. Often in his plays, he starts out with the impression of "realism", i.e., a reproduction, by the artistic method of realism, of reality. This we noted earlier, is a way of establishing an immediate sense of rapport with the audience. Gradually, however, he dissolves this, as in The Chairs and The Bald Prima donna. The spectator soon sees a very non-realistic world emerging, but the characters continue to act in a completely normal way, clearly accepting as natural and "real"

29. Williams, Modern Tragedy, pp.141,142.
the world which is strange to anyone watching them. The spectator is then asked to suspend his disbelief, which he does by comprehending the world presented to him as the characters comprehend it. As long as the artist presents a consistent world of fantasy, the spectator can comprehend it as being "real" in and of itself, true to itself (because consistent, hence "logical" in following its own laws). The spectator can believe in that world, because the characters believe in it. This is precisely the sort of thing that allows a construct like J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and the realms of science fiction, to work.

But it seems quite clear that Ionesco did not want this kind of suspension and disbelief. He did not want the illusion which he was creating to assume any "reality" at all. Thus, rather than create a world of fantasy which could be accepted as having its own reality, he creates a world of the imagination—i.e., dream, nightmare—the Strindbergian world where not only characters but things as well, slip and slide, multiply and divide, and where anything is possible, even probable. The spectator is never allowed— or at least never meant to be allowed—to feel that he has grasped the operative basis of an Ionesco world; for if he begins to settle back, believing he has suspended his disbelief in order to accept another belief, then the illusion takes on its own reality; and at that point, Ionesco will smash that illusion with another one.

In *Jacques*, for example, the operative principle is that a son who is any son at all will show honour to his family and respect to his society by adoring hash-brown potatoes (or, as it is sometimes translated, potatoes in their jackets). This is
clearly "absurd", yet the audience is led to accept this hypothesis—to share in this particular artistic illusion for the moment. The illusion begins to take on its own reality, and we are willing to accept the characters' reactions to a son who remains sullen and anti-hash-brown potatoes. But Ionesco will not leave it there. He suddenly drops that hypothesis and gives us others: A Jacques who wants an ugly girl with at least three noses—hence, Roberta I and II, who also has nine fingers, while Jacques has green hair. (Surely one of the most delightful of all stage directions is the one which reads, for Roberta: "She is revealed all smiles and with two noses.") This is, of course, partially just Ionesco, who wanted to exploit all the resources of the stage. But that is not an adequate explanation, nor a sufficient evaluation of the effect he achieves. The effect that he does make in this play is to constantly undermine any feeling by the spectator that he can anticipate what will come next or, it having come, that he will understand how or why the characters react as they do. In other words, in any world, actual or completely imaginary, so long as it operates on a consistently-invoked hypothesis, we can understand what is happening and, in understanding the framework, we comprehend how a character is likely to react within it—and more importantly, what his reaction signifies. But when the hypothesis is turned upside-down, or extended in a vastly unanticipated direction, the audience is jerked back. As Father Jack says: "Listen carefully to me: truth has only two sides, but it's the third side that's best!"

This kind of interpretation might be used to counter the criticism sometimes levelled at the Absurdists that their art is
kitch, or just plain travesty of art, because it is arbitrary, and art we have said, is selective, is above all, form. It might also answer such questions as those asked, for example, in the following criticism of The Chairs:

The most notable example of symbolic bungling in the canon of absurdist masterworks is the end of The Chairs. Why, having gone to great lengths to establish the emptiness of the illusion of the oldsters, must Ionesco bring on that claptrap figure of the Orator? Why not let the old couple introduce a nonexistent orator, and allow the audience to sit facing the empty chairs until they realize the play is finished and that the emptiness of the stage is a symbol, an idea made concrete? The Orator completely negates the allegorical frame of the play.30

This interpretation clearly implies that Ionesco was trying to establish an allegorical framework, with clear consistent symbols. It would seem that Williams's idea could more profitably be applied here.

And in fact, the Orator is the culminating expression of the tragedy in this highly poetical "tragic farce". Once again, we have the telling of stories. The Old Woman says, very near the beginning: "Tell me the story, you know, the story: 'Then at last we arrived...'." She begs the Old Man to tell it because, she says: "I'm not tired of it... it's your life". And as they try to begin, the Old Man says: "Unfortunately, I have so much difficulty expressing myself, it isn't easy for me." But she replies: "It's easy once you begin, like life and death... it's enough to have your mind made up. It's in speaking that ideas come to us, words, and then we, in our own words, we find perhaps everything, the city too, the garden, and then

30. William I. Oliver, "Between Absurdity and the Playwright", in Bogard and Oliver, Ibid., p.10.
we are orphans no longer." Thus he tries: "Then at last we arrived, we laughed till we cried, the story was so idiotic." Nevertheless, it is his stories which constitute the life of a man, his experience, his past and his future. By the time she is old, the Woman has only the Old Man's message to live for. To the Photo-engraver, she says: "For me the branch of the apple tree is broken. Try to find somebody else. I no longer want to gather rosebuds."

And so they both tell their stories—the Old Woman of her son, the Old Man of his mother's death. This is their life, and it comprises the Old Man's message: "Listen to me, I've had a rich experience of life. In all walks of life, at every level of thought ... I'm not an egotist: humanity must profit by what I've learned." So they hire the Orator to tell the tale, for they have "suffered much, learned much". And in the end, they choose to die together, trusting in the Orator, and confident that "We will leave some traces, for we are people and not cities. We will have a street named after us." But people, like cities, disappear, and street named with them, and the Orator cannot tell the idiotic tale, for there are no vehicles of communication. What one man (or artist) suffers and learns cannot be told, nor will people listen and understand. This is the tragedy of the artist, the tragedy of all men, to be locked in isolation, condemned to ultimate silence and terror, where communication is the only hope, death (as James Saunders's character says) the only release from the prison of one's head.

The impossibility of communication which is so often thematically contained within modern plays is analogous to the whole concept that the artist himself can communicate nothing. And yet, these
writers create a more and more poetic language to evoke this incommunicability. It may seem a contradiction; but this is the very essence of art, as Ionesco himself says: "A work of art is the expression of an incommunicable reality that one tries to communicate—and which sometimes can be communicated. That is its paradox, and its truth." In the poetry and in the ritual, drama begins to move back to its roots, the sources to which, as Yeats said, drama had to return before it could regain the greatness as an artistic form that it once held. What we may see here is the way in which the Absurdist theatre relates to the tradition immediately preceding it, to suggest a few general ideas about the philosophy underlying Absurdist technique. In Chapter VII, we will look at how some of these writers—like other modern writers who work in quite a different way—return to the basis of theatre as ritual and ceremony.

31. Ionesco, Ibid., p. 96.
CHAPTER VI

PIRANDELLO: A THEORY OF THEATRICAL REALITY

What am I? I ask. This? No, I am that. Especially now, when I have left a room, and people talking, and the stone flags ring out with my solitary footsteps, and I behold the moon rising, sublimely, indifferently, over the ancient chapel—then it becomes clear that I am not one and simple, but complex and many. Bernard, in public, bubbles; in private, is secretive. That is what they do not understand, for they are now undoubtedly discussing me, saying I escape them, am evasive. They do not understand that I have to effect different transitions; have to cover the entrances and exits of several different men who alternately act their parts as Bernard... Underneath, and, at the moment when I am most disparate, I am also integrated... Very few of you who are now discussing me have the double capacity to feel, to reason.

—Virginia Woolf

By this time, it must be evident to the reader that it becomes increasingly difficult to discuss separate and distinct aspects of modern drama, for each element, as our diagram indicates, becomes more and more contingent upon all the others. In Pirandello's plays, this is particularly true, for all the questions of relationship comes together: of reality and illusion, art and life, the theatre and the audience, the mask and the face, the social context and the individual personality. To talk about any one of these considerations is to implicate all the others. And above all else and all others, Pirandello wrote openended plays, or rather, circular plays: no
matter where one begins with them, one ends up at the same point. And this is true not just of the single plays, but of Pirandello's whole opus; the same themes are treated over and over again. Unlike Ibsen and Strindberg, and other dramatists who progress through a series of innovations, Pirandello wrote variations on a theme. There are a good many structural differences between the plays, but these differences are less the result of Pirandello's having a new form because he had a new meaning, than they are the result of the same theme finding analogous structures.

We might look at Pirandello first in terms of Ibsen and Shaw. Ibsen, as we have seen, wrote a drama which is basically tragic in tone; he concerned himself with the discrepancy between the mask of social appearance and the face of private reality; he modified elements of structure in Greek tragedies and the well-made play and introduced discussion. Shaw wrote comic drama; he used the idea of the split between the mask and the face more in terms of illusion and reality within the individual, by suggesting that the mask is the illusions a character has about his social appearance and what he believes to be his social attitudes, and that the face is the reality of these attitudes in that same character, once the mask is stripped away. He used elements of the well-made play and expanded Ibsen's use of discussion—fors—unravelling—at—the—end, to run the whole length of the play, coincident with, and integral to the comic plot. Both the intellectual element and the question of reality and illusion become more fundamental to the whole structural form of the play. Pirandello extended aspects of both of these kinds of drama. The well-made play per se—i.e., as a method of organization—was
abandoned or thrown out completely. Both the intellectual and emotional ramifications of the discrepancies between reality and illusion, art and life, form and spontaneity, etc., became the whole drama, both in form and subject. As these elements began to merge, finally to become confused with each other, the comic and tragic visions also became interwoven.

Elements of the well-made play may be utilized by Pirandello, but only as the most bare of skeletal structures. In *Diana and Tuda* (1927), for example, the "plot" is simple, developing in a linear sequence of events, observing basic dramatic unities, revealing a father-son relationship, and ending in death. But the theme and subject of the play—one of Pirandello's simplest and most unintellectually-passionate statements about the nature of art and life—determine the real plot which is, in essence, a dramatization of that statement by Martellus in *Back to Methuselah*, about the conflict between form and life. The play involves an old sculptor, Giuncano, a young sculptor Sirio, who is full of artistic ideals, and Sirio's model, Tuda. Pirandello uses the "convention" of art as a means to describe his concern with this clash between the stationess of art and the spontaneity of life. One may take, for example, the following conversation:

*Giuncano:* Make a statue of her the way she is now! When she's quivering with life, in perpetual change from one moment to the next!

*Sirio:* Very well! But if you don't freeze her in one single gesture, what have you? Nothing!

*Tuda:* What's that? Am I nothing?

*Giuncano:* Life! Life!

*Sirio:* Life that's fleeting—
Giuncano: Exactly!

Sirio: No longer today what it was yesterday, and tomorrow no longer what it was today, changing from one minute to the next: so many; I'm making her into one—that one there (He points to the statue)—forever!

Tula: Thanks! A statue, eh?

Ciuncano: One—forever—that can't move again?

Sirio: That's the function of art—

Giuncano: And of death, too!...

What this, and other of Pirandello's plays presents, is a philosophical extension of the double vision underlying impressionism: the truth of the moment (the particular) and the truth of all time (the universal).

One might say, then, that any similarity between Pirandello's plays and the well-made play is purely coincidental. The same might be said of any similarity to the specifically socially-oriented play, for social relationships function simply as one of Pirandello's many methods for approaching his particular theme. In The Pleasure of Honesty (1917), for example, essentially the same themes are treated as those found in Diana and Tuda; but the former is expressed through social relationships, whereas the latter is free from any real social considerations. Where in Diana and Tuda the convention of art was used to express the conflict between life and form, in The Pleasure of Honesty, it is the convention of marriage.

The play concerns a woman, Agata, who is carrying an illegitimate child. She and her family persuade Baldovino to marry her, simply for the sake of convention ("appearances"), in order to give the child a name and a father. Baldovino accepts this offer, finding it
much to his liking. After his marriage, he explains:

Here I live, in this beautiful house, but I scarcely see or feel and hear anything. Sometimes I am surprised at the sound of my own voice, or at the squeak of my own shoes, or at noticing that I need a drink of water, or that I need to go to bed! I am living, you see, de-li-ciously, in the absolute of a pure abstract form. . . . You know, there is a horrible beast in me—a beast from which I have tried to free myself by chaining it up here in terms of this bargain which has been offered me. It is in their interest that these terms be respected, as I have solemnly decided that they shall be. Because, once those restrictions were broken, I cannot tell where I might end, today or tomorrow. . .

The mask and the face are used on two levels here: the internal and external. There is the social mask of Baldovino assuming the role of husband, to hide the fact that Agata has had a lover. This would be a clear-cut Ibsenesque use of mask and face. On the internal level, there is the mask of Baldovino's own dispassionate logic, a mask deliberately put on in order to kill the beast of emotion and desire in himself. This second level of the play is closely linked with the kind of mask/face approach in Shaw, of the character who believes to believe one thing while actually believing another. For, Baldovino, while recognizing that he is adopting two masks, and confident that he is in control of the situation, is actually under the illusion that he can keep form and life, mask and face, reason and sentiment, quite separate and distinct. In other words, in the original situation established in the play, Pirandello implies through Baldovino that the putting on of masks is simply a particular kind of game of disguises; and to varying degrees, we do it every day, deliberately or unconsciously. But, only a slight extension of this
game (which, after all, plays with human personality) can lead to unanticipated complications. Strip off the mask, and another one appears. Strip away that one, and there is yet another, one that Baldovino is not aware of: his illusion that he knows exactly what is reality and what is illusion. And the face beneath that second mask turns out to be the fundamental reality of Baldovino's situation: that sentiment has invaded him, that he cannot kill the life within him by arbitrarily forcing upon it a static, logic-governed form. Passion and perception are revealed simultaneously (another telescoping of what, in conventional drama, would exist in linear relationship—perception following passion), in a moving confrontation between Agata and Baldovino, which concludes the play with a Shavian kind of tone and implication of things working out all right in the end now that the characters stand face to face, maskless.

But the extensions of stripping off one mask to find another, and how these masks relate to social forms, do not always end so happily. The Pleasure of Honesty is a genuine comedy; Right You Are! (If You Think So) (1917) blends the comic and tragic visions, although it still remains a comedy, at least from the viewpoint of Laudisi, the author's mouthpiece. The treatment of social conventions is similar to that found in The Pleasure of Honesty: the idea that the appearances of society can kill the reality of the individual by imposing forms and functions which deny personal life and relationships. And Pirandello attacks society in general, in his contempt for the meddlesome people who interfere in the lives of the three central characters, a contempt which is both poignant and bitter. But again,
this social framework is simply the means by which the idea expressed in the title is dramatized. The social "conventions" which are attacked are only implied, in the sense that the people who demand to know the "truth" about the three characters make this demand in the name of these conventions. They have no other way of dealing with the appearances of life than to pigeon-hole them into categories of social "truth" and "falsehood". At the end of the play, Pirandello unites his reality/illusion theme with the social framework, in Signora Ponza's "explanation: "What else do you want of me, after this, ladies and gentlemen? There is a misfortune here, as you see, which must stay hidden; otherwise the remedy which our compassion has found cannot avail... Tell you what? The truth? Simply this: I am the daughter of Signora Frola... and the second wife of Signor Ponza... and, for myself, I am nobody!"

This, of course, is no solution to the problem at all. Unlike the kind of situation which we have in a play like The Pleasure of Honesty, what we now have is a play whose central conflict between reality and illusion involves the audience as well as the characters. Not only the townspeople in the play remain unenlightened by the logical impossibility contained within Signora Ponza's statement; the audience as well is given no further explanation. And if we laugh with Laudisi at the simplistic meddling of the peripheral characters, then we must also laugh along with Pirandello at ourselves; for, in this brief unexplanatory explanation by Signora Ponza, Pirandello deftly removes us from any superior plane we might have felt ourselves to be on—as an audience looking down upon an action on the stage—and lumps us all in the same category with
the townspeople. We may be indignant; or we may laugh with Laudisi. But in the end, we can do no more than leave the situation as it is, in the way in which, to their best advantage, the three central characters have resolved the dilemma of their relationship.

The idea of stripping off one mask only to find another is extended in various ways and to various lengths in Pirandello's plays. Finally, one reaches the point of finding no face at all, no way of recognizing whose mask and face become two separate things. Walter Starkie suggests the way in which Pirandello's drama moves out from a starting point which is seen in Shaw's plays:

Against our will we are forced to doubt everything and dissolve all the shams to which we have become sentimentally attached. Bernard Shaw, with his normal gaze, has destroyed a great many of our petted illusions and conventions in order to bring us face to face with the truth. Pirandello starts where Shaw left off, and we might make him say, in the words of the latter, "I am greater than Shaw because I stand on his shoulders." The intellectual ideas that satisfy Shaw will not satisfy our author, for he refuses to look on them as a protection. According to him they are only the outer bark concealing the inner truth that he seeks ceaselessly. The plays of Shaw, with their sane, open-air morality, their brilliant comic spirit which acts as a corrective against our fads and fallacies, inspire us with a joy in life, a feeling of optimism and hope in the future; the plays of Pirandello, with their fictions which are more real than men and women, fill us with terror as though the earth were crumbling away at our feet. ¹

We may skip ahead just for a moment here to see a suggestion by Joseph McMahon of the way in which Genet follows on from Pirandello, a way which might be seen to be analogous to Starkie's

idea about Pirandello's relationship to Shaw. This may help to suggest how Pirandello fits into the whole movement of modern drama, and how Genet extends the theatre into ritual and ceremony. 

Mahon says of Genet that

If he does not spring—with the clarity literary historians like and, not finding, create—from Pirandello, he does represent a way of getting around the problem of creating ritual among those whose beliefs are divergent, simply because he preserves what the Greeks had—a sense of theatre as ceremony—and abandons what we can no longer possess, a common outlook. Not for him is the desire to speak with his audience about consciously shared beliefs or tendencies. He will show us the semblance of such beliefs in order, by showing them to us in this indelicate overcoating, to bring us closer to his idea of reality. It is here that he advances beyond Pirandello, who, for the most part, is limited to presenting his view of the multiple levels and depths of reality by expressing this multiplicity in terms of the old and worn-down conflict between art and reality. Genet needs no such antediluvian argument, since he has moved from reality into art as the result of a process which has convinced him that art allows the only way of expressing the complexity of reality. His theatre rediscovers ritual and its power, but the faithful, expecting a ceremony of the guaranteed innocence to which they have become habituated, find more often than not that they have been invited to assist at a Black Mass and, worse luck, that the blasphemy has been organized because it is, at the end of the day, what they wanted to assist at anyway. . . .

This is a bit unfair to Pirandello, of course, because the subject of art vs. life (at least in regard to theatre) more or less became "antediluvian" because Pirandello exhausted it. To a large extent, it may be argued that he became a turning point in dramatic interpretation, for, once having the example of Pirandello's plays, the playwright could move more easily and more concretely both

backward and forward. Pirandello set forth principles which the critic could use to reassess dramatic tradition, and he opened the way for the playwright to project the reality/illusion theme in new ways. Genet's theatre may be seen as one of these projections; and to some extent, one may hypothesize that Genet and others are able to move completely out of reality and into art simply because Pirandello, in bringing to a head all of the inconsistencies and conflicts inherent in art and particularly in theatre, enabled subsequent writers to move beyond him by transcending the particular issues. Ionesco has said, for example, that "Luigi Pirandello's theater does, in fact, meet the ideal exigencies of the structure, of the dynamic architecture of the drama. He is the manifestation of the inalterable archetype of the idea of the theater which we have in us..." Yet, no more than Genet does Ionesco write Pirandellian plays. He is another kind of extension from Pirandello, but one which, as much as Genet, evidences the far-reaching influence of Pirandello's theories and techniques.

We may relate Pirandello to dramatic tradition in a number of ways: in terms of the way in which he handles reality and illusion, and how he develops the comic and tragic vision; and how he extends the dramatic expression of the issues to which J. L. Styan pointed as being raised by Ibsen: i.e., the relationship of intellect to emotion, "the near limits of the tragic world". And these are perhaps all best examined in Pirandello's most famous play, and the one in which he most explicitly deals with these various issues: Six Characters in Search of an Author.

Central to an analysis of the structural problem handled here is the author's preface to the play. Here he describes, as an artist, how Fantasy brings characters into an author's mind, sets them into an autonomous movement by virtue of the story they carry within them, and leaves the author to form their story. Pirandello rejected this task in regard to the Characters of this play; but then, as he explains, he went on further to give them their raison d'être precisely as rejected characters. In so doing, he would "present this highly strange fact of an author who refuses to let some of his characters live though they have been born in his fantasy", and show their struggle for existence. Thus, both the drama within the Characters and their struggle for existence become bases for the action. The former, however, is only a means, for Pirandello has already made it clear that it is this aspect of the Characters he rejects: "What have I rejected of them? Not themselves, obviously, but their drama..."

The Characters, in their status of rejection, are Pirandello's primary concern for two reasons: first, because they alone have an integral reality which cannot change; and secondly, because through them Pirandello can describe the creative process, what it means in terms of reality and illusion, and what happens to the reality and the illusion when they are transposed into the work of art and then embodied by living characters on a stage. Consequently, he works from two perspectives at the same time: from the standpoint of the way in which the reality of life is made into the illusion of art, and the way in which the reality of the work of art approximates an illusion of life.
The inherent contradiction between these approaches has generally been resolved in one of two principal ways: by going over to the side of the reality—which, at its furthest end, results in realism; or, by opting for the reality of the work of art itself, without any necessary external reference. In both cases, the artist establishes a framework—an end point, or goal—by which the spectator may measure the dimensions of the artistic vision by comprehending the limits imposed upon it. These limits are, themselves, the structures of the work of art, and it is through them that the vision is created and communicated. Pirandello, however, chooses a third recourse: to describe and explore the contradiction itself, by standing in the middle of it; and it is this which leads to the dimensionless quality of his plays, the openendedness of which we have spoken.

He starts, then, from two points of reality and moves toward the illusion which lies at the other extreme. The Characters are his first point. They are real because they are born in the imagination and have an existence which is totally independent of any life or world outside of that imagination. Of them the Father says: "Our reality doesn't change: it can't change! It can't be other than what it is, because it is already fixed forever. It's terrible. Ours is an immutable reality." However, they work toward an existence, toward a life, which necessarily involves the element of time: one event happening after another. But, the Characters have no exterior (verbalized) form which would show their development through time. This is intolerable to the Father and the Step-Daughter, for each must justify the progression of their
actions from their own viewpoint. Therefore, they go to the theatre in search of a verbalizer; but this results in the central point of their reality being filtered through concentric circles of illusion. The Actors want to take the story out of the Characters and form it in their own particular likeness as actors. The Manager then wants to interpret their interpretation in terms of his adherence to particular conventions of the theatre—make-up, action, "Truth up to a certain point, but no further", etc. Out of this he will fashion a play, an illusion which he will present to the audience. The audience will then be left to penetrate through the illusion, or will take the illusion itself as the reality.

On this level of the play, Pirandello works from the position of the internal reality of the work of art itself. At the same time, however, he also starts from the other end: the reality of life. From this perspective, he analyzes the levels of unreality which contradict the reality of the Characters, impeding their attempted progress out of a fixed point into a sequence, or analogously, out of the imagination and into art. And, analogously too, Pirandello describes the same problem as it confronts the artist (as Esslin spoke of simultaneous perceptions having to be cast into a sequence).

We might propose a visual image here to suggest the complexities of this problem in terms of the theatre. It is as though, in between the two fixed points of reality—art and life—there was a series of one-way mirrors, representing reality on one side and unreality (illusion) on the other. If the dramatist begins from life and looks toward art, he sees the window side of these mirrors; the reality he intuits (simultaneously) about both art and life.
But as soon as he begins to move toward theatre—to put these perceptions into a form—each window becomes its mirror instead, throwing back to him the image only of his own reality, which is not the reality of art. And if he starts from the other side—that is, from art—and looks toward life, exactly the same thing happens. At each point lying between life and theatre, what is a reality in perception becomes an unreality in practice. The simple realist dramatist, when he finds himself confronted with mirrors, will take the image of life which is reflected and transcribe it for the stage. In a sense, he bypasses the barriers by ignoring them. On the other side is a dramatist like Genet who, starting from art itself, takes each reflection of art and analyzes it, and at the same time he analyzes the window/mirror itself. To make a philosophical analogy, it is like the problem of Achilles and the tortoise, or Zeno and the arrow. As soon as one intellectually dissect the stages of movement involved, one finds that no movement is possible. And yet, we continue to move, and drama continues to be written. But after Pirandello, it was harder to ignore the philosophical problems; and consequently, we have a theatre today which is permeated with an awareness of these problems—plays which, while they are presenting themselves, are analyzing the very techniques by which they are being presented, and then analyzing the analysis, and so forth.

This may be done with comparatively greater or lesser obviousness. In Six Characters, Pirandello is thoroughly explicit, in both his subject and his theme (the latter of which is, itself, the problem of giving a theatrical form to the subject). This movement
of the Characters toward expression serves as the action of the play, as the means by which the Characters and their story may become known; and simultaneously, it serves as the way Pirandello can set forth the dual realities which co-exist on the same, and different, levels. The Characters, because fixed, have an unchanging reality, containing within them time past, present, and future. At the same time, they are "unrealized, dramatically speaking", because they (their drama) do not have a form. They have reality as rejected characters, unreality in not being accepted by an author into a form. Their drama is real, in terms of themselves and art, yet unreal to the Actors and audience, because of their unique position in time, as the products of artistic Fantasy—i.e., they are both in time, both as characters of a Pirandello play and in their presence on the stage (which is dominated by the Manager, who lives here in terms of days of rehearsal), and beyond time in that they contain their unchanging story and are both "alive" and "dead". The Actors have their reality both as people who act and as characters of the play, but non-reality in being only the imitators of the reality of the characters they portray—the creators of an illusion—and, as actors, twice removed from the audience. Similarly, the Manager has reality as a character in the play and as a man who directs plays, but no reality in terms of the drama of the six Characters. He is both a creator of illusions, in his function as a manager, and part of the illusion created by Pirandello. Finally, the audience is both of the real world outside the theatre, and of the play, being drawn into it as a character observing a dress rehearsal.
In essence, this play is a multi-layered extension of the philosophical or aesthetic implications underlying the conventional play-within-a-play. Had Pirandello simply used this device, which he only approximates, the result would have been just the inverse, for he would have created thereby two conventional forms (i.e., two "plays") and three distinct levels of reality. By stopping short of this (or, if you like, going beyond it), he has given expression to this variety of levels of illusion and reality, culminating in the Manager's declaration at the end: "Pretence? Reality? To hell with it all! Never in my life has such a thing happened to me. I've lost a whole day over these people, a whole day!" This comes immediately after the culmination of the drama of the Characters, the point at which they are most most to the observer in terms of time and reality. So here, suddenly, one is explicitly brought back into time again: the end of the Manager's rehearsal day; the end of the period of time during which the audience sojourned in the theatre. The audience must extricate itself from the theatre—the having watched an illusion of reality—and from the participation as a silent character within the play.

The ambivalence which exists at every step between the audience and the theatrical work of art underlines the unavoidable relativity of reality and illusion—within life and within art, and in the relationship between the two. Dramatically, Pirandello has proven it: he has written a play; but at the same time, like the Boy, he is only "a presence watching and performing a gesture". He is an author who watches himself perform a gesture as an author writing a play he is refusing to write. We are an audience who are made to
watch ourselves perform the gesture of watching a play which is refusing to present itself.

All of this—the levels of unreality which contradict the realities of all the characters in the play—stem from Pirandello's perspective of moving from life toward art. This is an inner-directed vision which concentrates on analyzing the particular work of art itself. But, as we have seen, Pirandello also moves from art toward life, not specifically through the Characters themselves, but through the drama within the them—the story they want to tell. And this is an outer-directed vision, where the work of art transcends its own limits and makes general and far-reaching implications about the human situation, about the reality which lies beyond all illusions, including that of art itself. For, if there is a confusion as to whether the Characters themselves are a pretense or a reality, there is no question that what has happened to them is real, simply because it has happened. And because they are cast into the work of art, and are both "alive" and "dead", their story will be repeated again and again. Within themselves, it exists as a series of events within time, and hence involves an internal movement or rhythm. The nature of that rhythm is unchanging because it has been caught within the form of a play (Pirandello's play, which will not change), and because they themselves want to give it an unchanging theatrical form. But the progression through those events, by the Characters and by the audience who follows them, is, each time, a movement through, by, and into a rhythmic development.

Pirandello describes this in the preface to the play, when he speaks about the movement of the play culminating in the Mother's cry.
at the end when the Boy shoots himself:

If the Father and Step-Daughter began their scene a hundred thousand times in succession, always, at the appointed moment, at the instant when the life of the work of art must be expressed with that cry, it would always be heard, unaltered and unalterable in its form, not as a mechanical repetition, not as a return determined by external necessities, but on the contrary, alive every time and as new, suddenly born thus forever! embalmed alive in its incorruptible form. Hence, always, as we open the book, we shall find Francesca alive and confessing to Dante her sweet sin, and if we turn to the passage a hundred thousand times in succession, a hundred thousand times in succession Francesca will speak her words, never repeating them mechanically, but saying them as though each time were the first time with such living and sudden passion that Dante every time will faint. All that lives, by the fact of living, has a form, and by the same token must die—except the work of art which lives forever in so far as it is form.

What Pirandello implies in his play is that not only the play itself will be repeated again and again, but that the particular tragic rhythm involved will also recur. The rhythm of their tragedy is unending; but further than this, it is not just their tragedy, for they represent more than themselves, partially just due to the fact that they are in a play in the first place, and more particularly, due to the weight of the symbolism contained within them. Pirandello defines this symbolism in the preface: "The Father, the Step-Daughter, and also the Son are realized as mind; the Mother as nature..." Even without this statement, this conception of the Characters is obvious from the play, given the way in which they individually respond to the proposed re-enactment of their drama.

It is here that the inextricability of the basis of their drama, and Pirandello's drama (the two of which together make the total form of the play) becomes evident; for, the Father becomes
analogous, on a different level, to Pirandello, in the exercise of logic and intelligence. What the Father is concerned with is the relationship of one event in an individual's life—or one stage of consciousness—to the whole progression of events and stages of consciousness that constitute a whole life. What Pirandello is concentrating on is the complexity of the relationship between the fixed form of art—the caught, unchanging moment—and the continual change of life. Thus, both Pirandello and the Father are seeking to find a form which would reveal the reality of the particular and the universal simultaneously.

And Pirandello expresses this activity—as it exists on both levels—simply through the Characters themselves, and through them integrates all the aspects of the play. The Characters are immutable and encompass all time—past, present and future—and hence become themselves unalterable principles that remain; but they are also particularized depictions of those principles, and in this capacity are real human beings who must put their drama into time. Through them, Pirandello meditates upon and formally conveys the complexity of artistic creation by showing us, as the action of the play itself, the way in which the Father and the Step-Daughter meditate upon the complexity of their own story, and their inescapable need to act it out in order to convey this—from their own viewpoint—through the development of events in time, within the form of a play. The resulting implication of the entire structure which is Six Characters is that this particular relationship—between nature (passive feeling represented by the Mother) and intellect (the Father's, and by analogy Pirandello's, calculated effort to impose a logical
and rational form upon that passivity and emotion which are the spontaneous impulse toward the creation of life)—is eternal, and will be repeated, in particular examples, over and over again.

It is the process of making form out of chaos. And within the particular rhythm of this play, the chaos is tragic: tragic because absurd; and absurd because everything in it is relative, except for one thing: the relativity of reality and illusion. And because this relativity is constant, men continually find themselves confronted with an illusion when they had thought to see a reality, just as the artist finds himself dealing with mirrors when he had dreamed of windows:

the two planes of reality, that of the actual and that of imaginary life, are tragically fused into one. The result of this new process is, from an aesthetic point of view, that Pirandello's art can adhere more closely to life where the dispassionate observer finds a dream side by side with the most instinctive and elementary needs of man. From the point of view of sentiment, the obliteration of the boundary between the actual and the imaginary realities leads Pirandello's characters to the high plane of pure tragedy, since they are denied an escape from the talons of the grief that tortures them.4

But, because the tragedy is an absurdity, it is also laughable—or is made laughable through a conscious process of infusing the tragedy with comedy. And this, Pirandello implies, is the only way to render life tolerable: to transcend the tragic vision itself until the whole essence of the tragedy is made meaningless and hence laughable because absurd. Thus, the fusion of the comic and tragic vision—which is just another part, or result, of the meeting of mask and face, reality and illusion, intelligence and emotion. Things constantly threaten to dissolve into their opposites; con-

sequently, one may deliberately choose to begin with the opposite itself, as the means to deal with and describe the original (e.g., Strindberg's "copy" of the world; Wilde's Art imitating Life, etc.). Which, itself, is part of the larger process of artistic creation, where one necessarily starts from one point of reality (art or life) and moves toward an illusion in order to convey the reality of the starting point. And so Pirandello writes comic variations on a tragic theme by creating a form which analyzes every step at which, in the making of a play, a dramatist is confronted by a thing becoming its own opposite when a perception is converted into a technique.

One can see here one of the bases of the Absurd theatre, which is invariably, and of necessity, comic, and which extends this problem of a thing turning into its opposite into the illusion which turns back upon itself. We may illustrate this connection by comparing Pirandello's theatre with this statement by Ionesco:

> So if the essence of the theatre lay in magnifying its effects, they had to be magnified still further, underlined and stressed to the maximum. To push drama out of that intermediate zone where it is neither theatre nor literature is to restore it to its own domain, to its natural frontiers. It was not for me to conceal the devices of the theatre, but rather make them still more evident, deliberately obvious, go all out for caricature and the grotesque, way beyond the pale irony of witty drawing-room comedies. No drawing-room comedies, but farce, the extreme exaggeration of parody. Humour, yes, but using the methods of burlesque. Comic effects that are firm, broad and outrageous. No dramatic comedies either. But back to the unendurable. Everything is raised to paroxysm, where the source of tragedy lies. A theatre of violence: violently comic, violently dramatic.5

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This, in its way, is an extension of Strindberg's comment in the preface to Miss Julie: "Our inquisitive souls are no longer satisfied with seeing a thing happen; we must also know how it happens. We want to see the wires themselves, to watch the machinery, to examine the box with the false bottom, to take hold of the magic ring in order to find the join, and look at the cards to see how they are marked." What Pirandello does in his plays is to show us not only the machinery of the event or the action, or the reality, but the machinery of the stage and the illusion of theatre itself. And this extension moves the drama out of the tragic and into the comic, because the existential machinery is ultimately seen to be absurd.

Pirandello, however, remains closely allied with the tragic vision, for in spite of the comically-pathetic attempts of his little puppets (and all men are puppets because their attempts to understand universal reality and to control their own individual reality are doomed to failure; and this is rather different from saying, as some do, that Pirandello fails to create "characters"), Pirandello has great compassion for his characters. The essence of his "Umorismo" is the relation of intellect to passion. In Six Characters, it is a dramatic rendering of passion in terms of intellect—what Vittorini calls "passionate logic". And in Pirandello's vocabulary, the combination of intellect and passion should result in an equation whose (only possible) solution is compassion—i.e., a "compassionate logic" rather than, for example, "logical compassion". Almost all of the Father's speeches in Six Characters are concerned with explaining this relationship; reason demands that his passion—the experience in Madame Pace's shop—be enacted in order that that one
moment of passion be placed in the larger context of reason. He explains that

the drama lies all in this—in the conscience that I have, that each one of us has. We believe this conscience to be a single thing, but it is many-sided. There is one for this person, and another for that. Diverse consciences. So we have this illusion of being one person for all, of having a personality that is unique in all our acts. But it isn't true. We perceive this when, tragically perhaps, in something we do, we are as it were, suspended, caught up in the air on a kind of hook. Then we perceive that all of us was not in that act, and that it would be an atrocious injustice to judge us by that action alone, as if all our existence were summed up in that one deed.

Later, the Father explains the integral nature of reason and passion:

I feel what I think; and I seem to be philosophizing only for those who do not think what they feel, because they blind themselves with their own sentiment. I know that for many people this self-blinding seems much more "human"; but the contrary is really true. For man never reasons so much and becomes so introspective as when he suffers; since he is anxious to get at the cause of his sufferings, to learn who has produced them, and whether it is just or unjust that he should have to bear them. On the other hand, when he is happy, he takes his happiness as it comes and doesn't analyze it, just as if happiness were his right...

The Manager interrupts here, saying: "Look here! Look here! You're off again, philosophizing worse than ever." —"Because I suffer, sir! I'm not philosophizing! I'm crying aloud the reason of my sufferings."

And all of this, the drama that the Characters are seeking to enact, is cast in the play that Pirandello himself is writing and yet refusing to write, and thus it is their tragedy caught in
the form he is making and calling "A Comedy in the Making":

The power of Pirandello's theatre depends on the tug between these two elements—the intellectual comedy and the passionate tragedy set in it like a burning scar. The intellectual comedy by itself would become tiresome, and in one or two plays, where it is predominant, does become so. The suffering by itself, concentrated on and wept over for its own sake, would become either pathos or melodrama; but, revealed bit by bit in its fierce struggle against intrusion or misinterpretation, it approaches tragedy. The struggle between these elements in Pirandello's theatre, and if the emphasis is tipped too far to one side by directors or critics, the essence of it is lost.

Here again is the struggle, too, between art (form) and life, reality and illusion. Is reality in intellect or passion, in the drama of the Characters or of the Actors and Manager, in the play upon the stage or the audience watching it, in the theatre or in the world outside the theatre? The playwrights following Pirandello tend to suggest that it lies all in art; in Beckett's idea, for example, that theatre imitates life; in the constant telling and retelling of stories; in the concentration upon the imagination of man as the only source for recognizing and attempting to communicate reality. Everything in Pirandello's plays is in a constant state of becoming, as the characters in the various plays attempt to "describe" their reality, verbally and physically—the reality of the moment and of their whole lives—by a gesture which will contain it, express it, and communicate it to other people. But they never quite achieve this. What post-Pirandellian playwrights often do is to fix this gesture into a form of pure art (as Guicharnaud suggests of Beckett's characters), of ceremony or ritual, thus going beyond

Pirandello's concern with external reality, and creating an inherent reality within art itself.

The form that Pirandello creates over and over again is one of unending concentric circles of illusion and reality. In a sense, his form is analogous to that of the impressionists, in so far as he is constantly changing his, and consequently our, perspective of the action. But instead of just moving around his subject, he moves out, from one circle to the next. Thus, we are led to take one circumference of the action as the encompassing reality, only to see it the next moment from a further, wider circumference, which becomes the new reality, making our previous, narrower vision the illusion. But, at the same time he moves further and further away from the action, broadening the perspective, he also moves in closer and closer, stripping off one mask after another. And again, what at one moment is made to seem the face, the next moment is revealed as a mask when we see another "face" beneath it. This simultaneity of conflicting impressions is the cubistic extension of impressionism, which was suggested in Chapter IV.

Post-Pirandellians tend to utilize a similar concentric structure, but it is generally organized on a different basis. We have suggested the way in which Genet moves "beyond" Pirandello by moving out of the conflict between art and reality, and purely into art. The assumption underlying this movement is that art is the only reality, or at least the only approximation to reality. And even if it cannot communicate an ultimate Reality, it still has a reality of its own, by virtue of its being a work of art. More and more, as art moved away from representation into the "internal" world
of its creator's mind, it could claim an inherent reality, because it was not trying to imitate anything, or to follow any other rules of behaviour or construction than those of the imagination.

The modulations in structure, after the example of Pirandello's plays, specifically concern the relationship between reality and illusion. But rather than blurred and shifting circles of reality and illusion, leading to the impression that we simply cannot know where either one lies, there is now found a structure which implies circles of pure illusion radiating from a central point of reality. That one central reality was absent in Pirandello: his concept of the "naked mask" was one which involved the implication that there is no face underneath—hence, no sure idea of reality. Pre-Pirandellians had used the conflict between mask and face, but their ideas could be seen to represent what we may call the "naked face"—the basic reality of a person's attitudes and feelings once the masks had been stripped away. But in Pirandello's theatre, the ultimate reached is not reality, but, generally, a situation which is a compound of reality and illusion, determined by whatever appears to be the most compassionate equation of intellect and passion. Hence, the end of Right You Are! (If You Think So), and what Signora Frola calls "the remedy which our compassion has found". Intellectually, we can go no further toward discovering what is reality and what is illusion, for the new truth, entirely created by the three people involved, must be taken as being reality now, no matter what other abstract, logical, social or other concepts we may have entertained about reality and illusion.
So here, then, is the idea that the created fiction has its own integral, isolated reality; and beyond this, there is the seed for the idea of theatre as unending reflections in a hall of mirrors, which is to become the basis of Genet's dramaturgy. Pirandello himself called his theatre the "teatro dello specchio", or, "the theatre of the mirror", and explained this idea in his *Uomorismo*:

When a man lives, he lives and does not see himself. Well, put a mirror before him and make him see himself in the act of living, under the sway of his passions: either he remains astonished and dumb-founded at his own appearance, or else he turns away his eyes so as not to see himself, or else in disgust he spits at his image, or again clenches his fist to break it; and if he had been weeping, he can weep no more; if he had been laughing, he can laugh no more, and so on. In a word, there arises a crisis and that crisis is my theatre.\(^7\)

But where there had been a void between the images reflected in his plays, in more recent plays built upon the same idea, there is, in between these reflections, the reality of the work of art itself. It was this reality which Pirandello could not completely accept; or, at least, he could not accept it without trying to reconcile it with the reality of life. Often, this new reality is just the simple fact of the illusion of drama itself, which admits itself to be an illusion.

This is precisely what happens in Saunders's *Next Time I'll Sing to You*, which opens with Jeff reading the following statement:

There is pretence, and there is the pretence behind pretence. Through the ages of the groping of man from the dark chaos of his beginnings when shrouded by ignorance of his ignorance he stared first blankly at a sky devoid yet even of mystery and clawed himself awkwardly and for reasons unknown to stand

unsteadily on his two back feet—to this point in time when falsely secure in the perennial delusion of having reached the point of culmination beyond which stretches the smooth free-coasting slope to perfection of knowledge, perfection of behaviour, perfection of environment. He balances upright with such apparent ease as to be able to call his front paws hands... much has been gained—and lost. Gained—experience, know how, intellectual dexterity. Lost, simplicity. Lost the understanding beneath understanding, lost the ability to pretend without pretending not to pretend...

Modern dramatists such as Saunders enable us to pretend and admit that we are pretending, and through the pretences behind the pretences, and the illusions under the illusions, we shall perhaps approach some concept, some intuition into Reality. But the most important aspect of this kind of approach to theatre is that it attempts to re-establish a precisely-defined relationship between the audience and the dramatic event. Granted, this is obliquely done; but this is almost unavoidable, given the distortion which occurred through realism, the absence of a mythological framework which could establish that relationship directly, and a new sensitivity to the intellectual problems involved.

Again, the Reality can only be indirectly portrayed; but where Pirandello had tried to communicate the conflict between the reality and the illusion by synthesizing, in the very act of the plays themselves, the tangled web emmeshing them both, other dramatists following from him stand further back from their subject, presenting conflicting layers of illusion, and leaving the audience to make the synthesis themselves. Pirandello had left his audience in a deliberate confusion by synthesizing everything and thus demonstrating the unresolved conflicts. Subsequent dramatists, however,
create the confusion less in the play itself than in the mind of
the spectator, for the individual levels of action, of illusion,
of the game of mask and face, etc., are relatively simple, compared
to Pirandello. The confusion arises, often, from the combination
of very disparate (but simple) techniques, and from abrupt changes
in perspective and tone, which consequently alter our previous
interpretation. Again and again, through a variety of techniques,
the modern dramatist writes in such a way as to make us re-evaluate
the interpretation we have just made of the action being presented
to us.

J. L. Styan describes this general movement toward "a new
freedom of form" in twentieth-century drama:

Thus the dramatist has had an unprecedented freedom
to mix his effects and discover new responses in us.
Where, before, the laughter and the tears had been
so shaded together that they were effectively in-
distinguishable, now they have been thrust upon us
in deliberately incongruous, jarring arrangements.
If once we could be made to accept some realm of
fantasy, then the dramatist could juxtapose his im-
pressions in innumerable combinations and in innumer-
able varieties of proportion. He hoped that the
general act of synthesizing which had taken place more
on the stage might now take place inside the mind of
the spectator. The success of the new comedy would
rest upon our exceptional 'suspension of disbelief'
if the fusion was to occur, just as in neo-impres-
sionistic art the pointillist anticipated that small
splashes to pure unmixed colour would blend behind
the eye to create a consistent effect of extra-
ordinary vividness and luminosity, if the spectator
stood far enough away.8

Following from this idea, we may see how the development of
technique progresses through from Strindberg's dream plays to
quite recent modern plays.

The disparities of technique is often used in order to make us perform the same kind of activity which Pirandello's Characters had performed, i.e., the tempering of passion with intelligence. Brecht consistently uses this technique in order to make us appreciate intellectually the entire meaning of the action with which we have become emotionally involved—and further, to make us understand why we became emotionally involved at all. Anouilh does approximately the same thing, but through a more obviously Pirandellian technique. Styan suggests that Anouilh may be seen as the most direct successor to Pirandello:

Jean Anouilh is well in the running to be the natural successor to Pirandello. He touches here and there on the grim game of mask and face—we remember General St Pé in *The Waltz of the Toreadors*, the Mother and her lover Vincent in *Point of Departure* and many others—do not all his old roués wear their masks uncertainly, if rakishly? He reverts to questioning our need to accept reality—Anouilh's *Traveller without Luggage* prefers not to regain his memory, and Gaston's situation derives directly from plays like Pirandello's *Henry IV* and *As You Desire Me*. The dream world of the Prince in *Time Remembered* and of Georges in *Dinner with the Family* (Act I in this is all Pirandello) is set in direct opposition to the humbler, if not seedy, truth. By the superimposition of *marivaudage* on the dialogue of *The Rehearsal* and in the last act of *Colombe* which takes us 'behind the scenes', Anouilh even seems to adopt a little of Pirandello's theatrical trickery from *Each in His Own Way* and *Six Characters* to suggest the relative fiction of human behaviour. 9

Styan goes on to analyze in several of the plays the way in which Anouilh (like Pirandello), moves away from his subject at the same time that he moves in to strip off more masks. And at the same time, the action is permeated with comments upon the nature of the

theatre itself, the assumption of roles. In Dinner With the Family (1937), for example, when Georges is explaining to the two actors the roles they are to re-create for him, he suddenly becomes eloquently vehement about their misconceptions of what it means to create an illusion. He says to them:

You must realize that I didn't bring you here just to play-act. These characters exist . . . They're already half alive. Someone believes in them . . . and expects special words, special gestures from them: a special atmosphere around me . . . You, you cling to your professional conscience . . . Well, it must make you obey me as unquestioningly as you would the most finicky producer in the theatre. You must help me with all the talent you have. We have to bring to life the father, mother and friend that this young girl is expecting to meet. You probably think I'm crazy—you're used to the sort of theatre where the different kinds of play never get mixed up—and here you find a young man with a sad face and trembling hands pushing you into a farce instead of a tragedy! Some people seem to carry tragedy at their finger tips—given only half a situation, a leave-taking, a mere hint of pain, they can turn on the tears in a moment and draw them from the onlookers, too. It so happens that I'm not made that way . . . I always have to play my life as a farce. So help me, will you? Help me bring these imaginary people to life just for one evening. I'm more anxious to see them than any man has ever been to see his real father and mother, or his real best friend, even after years of separation. (Act I)

The similarities to Six Characters are obvious: we give a form to reality by consciously expressing the illusion. But again, the theatre and life may become confused, as a person moves in and out between the two, and by implication, moves (necessarily) between the "realities" of life, and the necessary illusions that make it bearable (art being one of them). The relativity of reality and illusion, as expressed through the theatre, is also suggested in the
dialogue between Paul and Colombe which ends the first act of

Colombe (1951):

Paul: Where have you learned so much?

Colombe: I just say it as I feel it. Acting isn't so difficult as all that . . .

Paul: And you only thought of yourself as Colombe, just as you are?

Colombe: Yes. But another Colombe, who loves the person in the play as it says in the script.

Paul: And when we come to rehearse the scene of farewell, will you really feel unhappy?

Colombe: Not really. But the tears will come into my eyes just as if it were life.

Paul: Has Julien ever made you cry?

Colombe: Now and then.

Paul: When you have to be sad on the stage, do you think of some time when Julien made you sad?

Colombe: No. Because one was real life, and the other's—just acting.

Paul: But whether it's acting or life, the same tears wet your pretty little cheeks?

Colombe: Yes. . .

Paul: So the same little drops of salt and water can be true one day and false the next?

Colombe: I suppose so.

Paul: Are you quite, quite sure that you always cried the true sort of tears for Julien?

Speeches of this nature, which often run through Anouilh's plays, imply that there is a truth and a fiction: there is a true Colombe, a true Julien, true people behind the roles they assume as characters in a play. In the same way, there is a truth behind the fiction of the play itself, and behind the plays within the plays. It is simply that we are left on our own to penetrate through the illusions to find the truth. And because we are in the audience, partaking of that illusion, we are implicated into that illusion;
and beyond the whole illusion of the theatre itself—the actors on the stage and the spectators in their seats—there is another reality (and other layers of illusion) which, again, we are left to find for ourselves.

The philosophy underlying this idea is not essentially different from what we interpret to be the effect of classical theatre: we create a theatre by deliberately assuming roles, by openly pretending to represent other people, by suspending our disbelief because we are entering a realm of fantasy which has no immediate connection with everyday reality. With a deliberate return to the ideas which we assume to lie at the base of classical theatre, there is also a return to similar techniques, primarily the various ways of using the multiple effects of mask and face: for the very essence of theatre lies in the unbelievably simple and utterly preposterous fact of an actor stepping on the stage and pretending to be someone else.

Guicharnaud illustrates how this idea works in Anouilh's plays which, he says, "are dominated by a theatrical vision of life", and describes the nature of Anouilh's use of mask and face:

Anouilh uses the device of the mask to get a double effect. First of all he brings back one of the essential and original elements of theatre: the assumption of someone else's identity or physical appearance which begins the very moment the actor pretends to be himself and another. One of the purest and most effective forms of theatricalism consists in producing a kind of chain of false identities, as in Beaumarchais' le Mariage de Figaro, in which a young actress is both herself and Cherubin, a young boy who during the play passes himself off as a girl. In many respects such

Theatre would seem to consist in superimposing masks on a face or in taking them off one after another, just as clowns manage endlessly to remove their multi-colored vests. Truth plays hide-and-seek on stage. And Anouilh has brought the game's spectacular aspects back to the French theatre of today.\(^1\)

The difference between a classical use of this element of drama, and modern renditions of it, lies in the relation of mask and face to reality. Dramatic representation had originally been a means to communicate a reality which lay beyond and behind the community structures of belief; but in Anouilh and other modern playwrights, mask and face play an unresolved game because reality and illusion play unresolved games in life. In Anouilh as well as Beckett, life imitates theatre; and like Genet, Anouilh moves beyond Pirandello into art itself as its own reality. Theatre has a reality which, because it is an illusion, because it is fixed and unchanging, and above all (as Pirandello suggested) because it is form, has a design and structure which are lacking in everyday reality, lacking in a contemporary world which is no longer sure of meaningful distinctions between reality and illusion, between the heroic and the mediocre.

This is the vision presented by Anouilh in Antigone (written 1942), which opens with all the characters on stage, including a single Chorus who begins by saying to the audience: "Well, here we are. These people are about to act out for you the story of Antigone." What Anouilh expresses in this play is the essence of tragedy—that is, tragedy in the theatre. Here, the design is supreme, and because it is virtually automatic, not admitting of struggle or escape, it

\(^1\) Guicharmaud, Ibid., p.127.
is satisfying on the deepest levels of response. The Chorus explains later that

The spring is wound up tight. It will uncoil of itself. This is what is so convenient in tragedy. The least little turn of the wrist will do the job...
The rest is automatic. You don't need to lift a finger. The machine is in perfect order; it has been oiled ever since time began, and it runs without friction. Death, treason and sorrow are on the march; and they move in the wake of storm, of tears, of stillness. Every kind of stillness. The hush when the executioner's axe goes up at the end of the last act. The unbreathable silence when, at the beginning of the play, the two lovers, their hearts bared, their bodies naked, stand for the first time face to face in the darkened room, afraid to stir. The silence inside you when the roaring crowd acclaims the winner—so that you think of a film without a sound-track, mouths agape and no sound coming out of them, a clamour that is no more than a picture; and you, the victor, already vanquished, alone in the desert of your silence. That is tragedy.

Tragedy is clean, it is restful, it is flawless. It has nothing to do with melodrama—with wicked villains, persecuted maidens, avengers, sudden revelations and eleventh-hour repentances. Death, in a melodrama, is really horrible because it is never inevitable. The dear old father might so easily have been saved; the honest young man might so easily have brought in the police five minutes earlier... In melodrama, you argue and struggle in the hope of escape. That is vulgar; it's practical. But in tragedy, where there is no temptation to try to escape, argument is gratuitous: it's kingly.

But, the tragedy in Antigone is in the play within the play about which the Chorus speaks to the audience. As the Chorus says at the end: "Only the guards are left, and none of this matters to them. It's no skin off their noses. They go on playing cards."

In a sense, the play might be subtitled "A Tragedy in the Making", for there is an ambiguous play-within-a-play structure which is somewhat analogous to that found in Six Characters: there is the
story of Antigone (which is like the story of the Hermit in Next
time I'll Sing to You) which is framed by the guards, which is
"realized" upon the stage by actors, who are commented upon by the
chorus, within the play that Anouilh writes. The analogy with
Six Characters lies in the idea that, in both plays, tragedy (tragedy
which is a reality) lies at the center of endless circles of
illusion, appearances which distort, to the spectator, the essence
of that tragedy which is particular and personal. And the same
thing happens in the theatre itself: the tragedy of the human
situation is that fixed point of reality at the center of all illu-
sions; and theatrical representation, like life itself, is an
unending projection of illusions. Caught at the very center is the
isolated individual, the particular and yet universal tragedy. The
reality, we know, cannot be directly presented; it cannot even be
represented through an immediate projection on the stage. This the
Father in Six Characters eventually realizes. Rather, the modern
playwright elucidates all the levels of illusion in life by emphasizing
the illusions inherent in the drama, and thus he indirectly illu-
minates a central reality—a reality which he creates and communicates
by giving it a form.

Essentially, this is simply an extension of the First Cause
(historically and technically) of dramatic representation: actors
assuming disguises. This later became actors assuming disguises as
characters who assume disguises within the play. Eventually, there
came the play-within-the-play, as in Hamlet. It was this internal
play which was to reveal to Hamlet the reality of the situation con-
cerning Claudius. Similarly in the dialogue between Hal and Falstaff
in *Henry IV*, Part I, when they assume different roles. But the illusion which is the play-within-the-play cannot help but implicate the play itself. Hal and Falstaff imagining an interview between Hal and the King is simply analogous to Shakespeare imagining the whole thing, the entire play which is *Henry IV*. What Pirandello did, then, was to explicitly state what playwrights before him had at least implicitly recognized: the discrepancies between reality and illusion in the theatre, and the playwright’s own role as the manufacturer of an illusion which is "realized" upon the stage. What many post-Pirandellians do is to create a form of multiple illusions which constantly turn in upon themselves, an ever-widening concentric structure which continually cuts back upon itself, to get to the reality within the illusions of the plays within the play—like turning an endless sock inside out. Endless, because there is no ultimate reality to be found. Consequently, the play (art) itself, is given an intrinsic reality, as both the illusions of theatre and life are endowed with a truth of their own, in their status as recognized illusions with which we must live, and through which we attempt to give a compensatory meaning to an existence which lacks a central reality, a central justification.
CHAPTER VII

THE THEATRE OF CEREMONY

Now Douglas knew why the arcade had drawn him so steadily this week and drew him still tonight. For there was a world completely set in place, predictable, certain, sure, with its bright silver slots, its terrible gorilla behind glass for ever stabbed by waxen hero to save still more waxen heroine, and then the flipping waterfall chitter of Keystone Kops on eternal photographic spindles set spiralling in darkness by Indian-head pennies under naked bulb light... Worlds within worlds, the penny peak shows which you cranked to repeat old rites and formulas... In the arcade, then, you did this and this, and that and that occurred. You came forth in peace as from a church unknown before.

—Ray Bradbury

It is easy to see Pirandello as the turning point which Brustein suggests, simply because he was so articulate, and so intellectually concerned with the nature of art and the theatre. But this is not to say that he radically or abruptly effected a one-man revolution, toppling all previous conventions and opening only one new road. No one artist can be accurately evaluated if he is abstracted from the tradition in which he is writing; and it is also very rare (if ever at all possible) that a single man will take a turn in artistic development (any more than a jump ahead in science) which is more than just a few steps beyond quite similar "innovations" being anticipated by others working in the same, and contingent, areas. Pirandello was new, and startling, because he expressed within plays themselves the theories and implicit ideas underlying various developments in the theatre. The mask and the face was just one—and one which, in fact, was first explicitly contained in Luigi Chiarelli's play of 1916, The Mask and the Face.
And Pirandello's theatre must also be seen as a direct outgrowth of the immediately preceding development in Italian dramaturgy. This was "the theatre of the grotesque", which, as Vittorini describes it, expresses a frenzied state of mind that forces men to burst into laughter before the harrowing contradictions of life. It flourished especially during the war, and it assumed the form of contrast between essence and appearance, between the face and the mask, the pathetic and the ludicrous.\(^1\)

At the same time that the theatre of the grotesque was emerging in Italy, expressionism was developing in Germany. As Walter Sokel suggested, it was concerned to return drama to ceremony and ritual, and to the concept of total theatre, through the utilization and combination of numerous techniques, and all the many kinds of theatrical "entertainment". It was Brecht who grew immediately out of this kind of theatre. Through Brecht and Pirandello, we may see the similarities in these two developments; both were concerned to emphasize the discrepancies and conflicts between reality and illusion in order to force the audience to both feel and reason, to grasp intellectually the significance of a whole action, the meaning of emotional response and empathy, and the role of theatre in projecting illusions.

In a sense, one can see two general paths of development in dramatic structure running side by side, gradually moving closer together. One stems mainly from expressionism as it developed through Brecht to more recent playwrights such as John Arden; and the other stems more or less from impressionism and the way it developed through

Pirandello to an implied cubistic form. Both these types of drama work through to ritual and ceremony; both are concerned with returning theatre to the very early forms of its conception, and with exploiting all the theatrical potentials of drama; and both are intimately bound up with questions of reality and illusion.

The primary difference between these two developments, and why I hypothesize this division, is that the first concentrates on conveying these things through the structure itself, while the second works through the thematic material in the plays. In the plays developing from expressionism (loosely speaking), the essential illusion of theatre is projected through the complex and/or startling juxtaposition of multiple techniques, while within this structure there may be contained a quite simple story which says nothing directly in plot or dialogue about theatre itself. The fact that this is theatre—a created illusion upon the stage—is brought home to the audience by the emphasis which the playwright throws upon the deliberate theatricalism of his presentation. We are always aware that this is theatre we are watching, and not life, not "reality", through the obviousness with which the playwright manipulates these techniques, and particularly the sequence of events.

The direct effect of this kind of theatre is that the audience is made aware, before anything else, of the way in which the story is being served up to them. Emotional involvement and/or intellectual comprehension of an event or situation can only take place through an evaluation of the sense data given. And it is through our sensory perceptions that the expressionist primarily makes an appeal to us. He confronts, or even assaults us with visual and linguistic symbols;
and we see and hear them before we apprehend them as symbols, and perhaps long before we comprehend their meaning. Above all, such a dramatist now hastens to assure us that this is theatre, and that these are theatrical techniques we are watching. This is quite the opposite from the effect of realism, which keeps us precisely in step with the events (if not straining ahead) both emotionally and intellectually, and draws in on the reins of any potential disbelief by openly expressing our own doubt: "Things like that only happen in books", a character proclaims. "On the contrary", the realist shouts back, "they happen in life!"; for this (the spectator must understand) is life, not a book, not a play, and it is happening (albeit in a book or in a play).

The indirect effect of this "techniques" approach to theatre—or what we might simply call "technical theatre"—is (or should be) to make the audience wonder why the playwright does not just tell the simple story in a simple way. The writer's presence is strongly felt in plays of this kind: he is only just up in the fly tower above the stage, pulling the strings, directing the little songs between snippets of action, signaling his choral mouthpieces to speak to the audience in his voice, stilling the event into a tableau, as a conductor holds his orchestra at the end of a symphonic movement. And because we are always aware of him, we are led to analyze what he is doing, and why he is doing it that way; for he constantly conveys the impression that the story—its significance, why the writer writes it, what he means to communicate through it—all of which is filtered through the techniques, can only be understood through understanding those techniques. To perceive the structure of the illusion is to open the door to the Reality.
This, too, is what a dream is, and why it is so hard to describe it to anyone. It is an emotional atmosphere containing a visual experience; and because our conscious mind is asleep, we give ourselves into the dream completely, being unable to analyze what is happening at the time. Only after we awaken do we analyze the structure of that experience.

Similarly in stream-of-consciousness prose: we comprehend a character's "comprehension" of an event by the structure in which his mind spontaneously links impressions and reactions. And this is what theatre is, or can do, if we could give ourselves to the experience as completely as we are released into the dream. It is as Esslin said in speaking of the Absurd theatre: that the total image of the play is only put together when it is finished, and that then we may begin to analyze the structure of that image. When we go to the theatre, we start from one point in order to reach another (from reality to Reality) by going through several stages of illusion; but as an audience, we need to understand the point from which we are starting, or the whole business of relativity is obscured from the beginning. Thus the dramatist now tells us, in various ways, what we are and where we are. Explicitly, he re-establishes what, in early drama, was an implicit relationship. In a certain sense, then, this kind of theatre becomes a symbol for itself, as it becomes its own illusion; and it is in this way that theatre moves out of reality and completely into art. Theatrical symbols become symbols not for reality, but for the theatre itself.

By contrast, plays developing from impressionism often tend to create a dramatic structure which is apparently more or less conventional, but within this structure, a "theatrical" plot or discussion takes place. We are made aware that this kind of play is theatre not
through the external structure so much as through the internal action and
dialogue. The kernel of the story, once uncovered, is often very simple,
but it is complexly told because the characters themselves are complex
and, like Pirandello's characters, often live on multiple levels of
articulate consciousness. And over and over again, there are sets of
characters, often themselves actors or pseudo-actors, who talk and talk
about theatre and acting and audiences and make-believe, life, reality
and art and so forth and so on. By analogy, we unwittingly find our-
selves drawn into the play, implicated into the illusion of theatre.
These characters often quite happily announce (directly or indirectly)
that, yes, things like this only happen in plays—then wait for us to
get the point. And the ironic thing is that the point has a much better
chance of going beyond the characters, than it does in those realistic
plays whose characters pretend that what happens in books and plays has
no bearing on them.

Again, the English version of Anouilh's Colombe, by Denis Cannan,
is a very good example of this kind of procedure. Styan points to
the effect achieved when we see Mme Alexandra and Co. acting La
Maréchale d'amour to an audience which, if we could see it, would be
facing us:

We are given the odd impression that we are looking
towards ourselves, the audience that had been looking
at this same stage during the second act. At once
we are aware that conclusions we reached earlier were
those of a fiction deriving from a fiction, and that
we too were playing a part. It compels us to suspend
our judgment by separating us from the play of Julien
and Colombe by several removes. . . . This effect of chill
distancing is enhanced by our seeing all the dead
apparatus of back-stage: the reverse sides of the flats
and ground-rows, the wire that supports a cardboard moon,
the stage-hands in the wings, the waiting actor who reads
a newspaper . . . We reject the imaginary audience now

2. In regard to this version, see Styan, The Dark Comedy, p. 213.
applauding the false recanticism and gay abandon of the scene: in doing so, we reject a little of ourselves. Nor are we alone: immediately the play is finished, Lagarde confirms that our view is his: 'Phew! What a damn silly lot of swine out there tonight!' Which is, of course, a venomous remark addressed indirectly at us.

The ultimate effect of this kind of structure is the same as that of an expressionistic structure, in regard to creating theatre as theatre. But the immediate effect is the inverse. Expressionism, in terms of the way in which it uses theatrical techniques, works from the outside in toward the center; and this includes the Absurdist idea of the illusion which constantly cuts back on itself. (This should not be confused with the idea that it originates not in the external object, but in the mind of the artist). The technical effects which are always being placed between us (our conventional reactions) and the actual events of the play, work like an obstacle course. The goal is always there, unfolding before us; but the technical forms which carry us along actually make it impossible for us ever to make conventional responses. We may refer here to the previous image of a series of window/mirrors standing between the dramatist and the play he would write. The same sort of barriers lie between the audience and the finished play. The expressionist dramatist, as we have suggested, leads his audience through those barriers at the same time that he examines them and presents them for what they are. Because theatre becomes a symbol for itself, the dramatist can present the theatre by presenting the symbol, and likewise present the symbol by presenting theatre. The expressionist presents the symbol, using it as the technical means to arrive at the central reality of theatre, while the impressionist, as we shall see, works in the opposite direction,

presenting theatre itself (i.e., a play) in such a way as to imply the entire symbolic nature of theatre. This is simply another way of visualizing the concentric structure we looked at earlier: in expressionistic theatre, we start on the outside ring and move in toward the center, through all the layers of theatre and ceremony and illusion, to find the myth at the center, the essence of a simple story.

In impressionism and its extensions, we move from the inside out. We think we see the simplicity at the beginning, so we settle comfortably in our seats, secure we know what's what, only to see that each new movement is the addition of another layer; confusion radiates from the center, begins with the story or outline of the plot, and moves out through the continual construction of changing perspectives, making us reinterpret what has just preceded. And it is often the case that these new perspectives are implied through characters who appear one way or another to be themselves theatrically oriented, or at least conscious of various levels of reality and illusion and the several roles they play. In plays of this sort, the dramatist's presence is not directly felt; rather, his role is analogous to Pirandello's, when he speaks of being passive before Fantasy, who sets everything in motion herself and simply leaves the playwright to give it a form. Because characters in this sort of impressionistic play so often speak about aspects of theatre themselves, the playwright does not need to intervene—and in fact, as the characters become more articulate, one tends to feel that it is they themselves who have created their own drama, and the dramatist may even make himself the butt of their jokes (as Pirandello does in the beginning of Six Characters). But it is generally just the case that we
do not feel the dramatist's hand, nor see him pulling the wires as we are made to do in expressionist drama. Rather, we eventually analogize from the internal theatricalism of the subject out to the dramatist's technique, where in expressionism, we analogize in from the dramatist's manipulative technique to infer the theatrical elements of the plot.

The end result of both these kinds of drama is more or less the same: that theatre is more "real" than life—more real in two ways. First, it is ruthlessly honest with itself in not pretending to be anything more than it is, i.e., theatre; and secondly, it affirms the nature of all art—the idea that Reality can only be indirectly apprehended. Thus, both of these kinds of theatre move out of reality and into art itself. But they also contain within an individual play, multiple implications about the conflicts between the various aspects of reality and illusion which had concerned Pirandello. Actually, the sources for these two general types of drama are principally the same, in terms of the way in which we have described expressionism growing out of impressionism. The emphasis and meaning may shift as these ideas are expressed through different forms; but the underlying concepts are very similar. And the end result of both lines of development has become a theatre of ritual and ceremony.

In his book Four Playwrights and a Postscript, David Grossvogel speaks of the fact that ceremony becomes ceremony, or ritual ritual, because society or culture or tradition has need of the way in

4. The four playwrights are Beckett, Brecht, Genet and Ionesco.
which the formality of ceremony transcends change or inner content. But, by its very definition, it is thereby sterile and will always remain so:

The exact repetition of a gesture occurs either because that gesture was first deemed significant enough to be isolated from the run of gestures or because the act of exact repetition endows it with significance. Whatever its genesis, the gesture repeated in sterile as praxis; its only meaning is in its sacred significance as reiteration. The dramatic act is a ritual, learned, rehearsed, and performed, in a world calculated to encourage its mystery—the spectator's isolation, darkness, nighttime (it is a ritual with which the Brechtian actor would interfere because of his independence). Mystery and sacredness suggest areas not normally traveled by man; the ritual thus proposes to reveal something to man which is not normally his.5

One may couple this idea with a suggestion by Northrup Frye, of the three major ways in which myth is utilized in literature:

We have, then, three organizations of myths and archetypal symbols in literature. First, there is undisplaced myth, generally concerned with gods or demons, and which takes the form of two contrasting worlds of total metaphorical identification, one desirable and the other undesirable. These worlds are often identified with the existential heavens and hells of the religious contemporary with such literature. These two forms of metaphorical organization we call the apocalyptic and the demonic respectively. Second, we have the general tendency we have called romantic, the tendency to suggest implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience. Third, we have the tendency of "realism" (my distaste for this inept term is reflected in the quotation marks) to throw the emphasis on content and representation rather than on the shape of the story. Ironic literature begins with realism and tends toward myth; its mythical patterns being as a rule more suggestive of the demonic than of the apocalyptic; though sometimes it simply continues the romantic tradition of stylization. 6


In terms of these two statements, we may suggest that after Pirandello, playwrights seem, on the whole, to attempt to move out of Frye's third category, and more or less out of the second category of "romance" as well. This is also a movement away from, or beyond, the culmination of "Romantic internalizing"—which Erastein described as being reached in Pirandello—and into Frye's first category of undisplaced myth. But, mythical content (i.e., structures of belief) is virtually non-existent in the modern world; consequently, the projection reveals itself in the form of myth (ceremony, ritual, sacrifice), and the emphasis again falls upon "the shape of the story".

There are various ways in which the shape of the story has been emphasized by recent dramatists. We may divide these approaches into four major groups: the narrated or choral theatre; historical theatre; poetic theatre; and the theatre of story-telling, playing, fantasy. Each of these general techniques has several extensions, and these, in turn, have been combined with the others in numerous ways. In addition, the same idea may be treated either impressionistically or expressionistically or, more frequently, with a combination of techniques from both, which leads to different structures and a different emphasis. It would be impossible to mention, let alone discuss, all of the plays which fall into these categories; but we may at least describe some of the permutations of the techniques, and suggest a few of the plays which illustrate how they work.

We may begin with the narrated theatre. We have seen how the use of narrator works in impressionistic plays like Wilder's Our Town and Williams's The Glass Menagerie. The narrator is a direct
story-teller, recalling the past in memory and dream. In Williams's play, the memory is personal and thus circumscribed; but the subject of that story moves into themes of general relationships—between parents and children, age and youth. In Wilder's play, the narrator becomes not only story-teller, but stage manager as well. Both the technical and thematic dimensions of the play are wider than those in The Glass Menagerie, for the narrator not only tells the story, but as stage manager he also tells the telling of the story, i.e., the way in which it is told through theatre. In addition, the particular detailed story of a few characters is made into an explicit allegory, by the titles given to each act. Recent plays using the narrator character tend to combine the impressionistic story-teller with the expressionistic, sometimes Pirandellian, stage manager, whose functions and roles may be extended to various levels.

Such a character frequently appears in historical plays. In Peter Shaffer's The Royal Hunt of the Sun (1964), for example, Old Martin (like Tom in The Glass Menagerie) is both story-teller and a character in that story. Time is compressed in the same way that Williams compresses it; and the distant historical event (when Martin was a young boy) is brought into the present through Martin as an old man. At the same time, however, the events are twice removed from the audience: once by the story-teller himself, and twice by the fact that the historical event itself distances the action from an immediate audience involvement. This is a play which illustrates how impressionistic and expressionistic techniques have moved closer and closer together, to become interwoven in such a way as to emphasize what are essentially the classical roots of dramatic representation. All of the events,
given the way in which they are enacted, have the atmosphere of being Martin's dream. The characters, including himself as a young man, are projections of his memory. The action, however, is a symbolic and deliberately theatrical representation of his impressions. Martin, then, is the simple impressionistic narrator who tells the story and asks for our imaginative indulgence; and at the same time, he is Strindberg's implicit idea of the dreamer made explicit, while the production is a highly exaggerated and sumptuously stylized use of mime—another extension of early Strindberg theory. It is Martin who takes us through the play, who bridges the gap between past and present, stage and auditorium, by directly involving us in this action which, yet, remains separate and remote from us. Our sense of involvement derives from our being asked to participate in the theatrical presentation by creating in our imagination the full scope of an action which, on the stage, can only be suggested. This, again, is Yeats's Musicians, Shakespeare's Chorus introducing Henry V, the beginning of the No play, the historical descriptions given by the Greek chorus. Actually, all we have in this kind of structure is a combination of all the aspects of dream; and the illusion as dream underlines the theatre as illusion.

The use of the narrator in historical play varies. Essentially, it is just a way of emphasizing what the historical event itself achieves: the distancing of an action, and the implicit idea of the dramatist himself as story-teller. In a sense, a reader or spectator lets go of contemporary life when he moves into remote history, just as surely as he escapes from the mundane when he enters the worlds of "Once upon a time . . ." History itself becomes a story, and
stories by definition have no rules—at least when they are told by artists. We are asked to be imaginatively receptive to whatever comes next—and we willingly are so. Consequently, by using a framework of history, the dramatist is initially creating the same effect that the impressionist narrator creates. The playwright himself is the narrator of events, and we sense his presence as a story-teller, half relating, half interpreting, although he is only indirectly felt. By combining history with dream, the playwright offers a two-fold invitation to the spectator to release himself into the world the dramatist is creating; and by adding the narrator on top of this, as confidant and guide, the dramatist provides the final excuse for the reluctant modern intellectual to be defenselessly receptive to the action which is to ensue. The combination of these three elements creates a dramatic event which is self-contained and independent of the audience, but which at the same time directly involves them. This kind of structure has overtones of ritual and ceremony, first because history itself bears these connotations, and secondly because the structure of ritual itself is such that it has a self-perpetuating form which, however, exists and has meaning only in so far as people actively participate in that ritual.

We may mention here the other primary reasons for which a dramatist may choose to use an historical framework. One is that it allows him to compensate for the lack of structures in a contemporary society which tends toward anarchism and iconoclasm. By taking an historical event, he is able to investigate general qualities of human behaviour as they are measured against the well-defined social, religious and political standards which formed the structures of com-
Enmity belief. In addition, he is able to take a situation which allows, or even forces a character into heroic and/or tragic action. And finally, by using the historical event, the dramatist creates a context which we need not question. The characters, in other words, act in terms of certain laws of what we may generally call "morality" which were in force at the time. We do not evaluate those laws by comparing them to modern laws, nor do we judge the quality of an action by measuring it against the way we think people might act today. Rather, we respond to that action in terms of the conditions imposed upon that action at that time.

The playwright who uses these ideas as his dramatic means may be doing so for one of several reasons: he may take a previous social structure in order to write the tragic play which he does not feel a modern context affords him; he may write of a past event with the intention that we make a direct analogy to the present; or he may simply wish to describe the abstract quality of a gesture, leaving the audience to make whatever interpretations they choose about the relevance of that action from a contemporary viewpoint. There are numerous examples of recent historical plays: Durrenmaat's Romulus the Great (1957); following much from the style of Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra; Camus's Caligula (1945); Brecht's The Life of Galileo (1938) and Mother Courage (1939); several of Henri de Montherlant's plays: Queen After Death (1942), Malatesta (1944), The Master of Santiago (1945), and Port-Royal (1954); John Arden's Serjeant Musgrave's Dance (1959) and Armstrong's Last Goodnight (1964); Ann Jellicoe's Shelley (1965); Arthur Miller's The Crucible (1953); Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral (1935); Robert Bolt's A Man for all Seasons (1960). The latter three plays move into religious history—which forms a kind of doubly strong, twice-defined structure for action—and they afford examples of
various uses to which history has been put in these several plays. The latter two plays also illustrate further uses of the narrator figure.

To begin with Miller's play, there is a self-contained historical episode; speech and action depict the dramatist's idea of what might have happened at the time. Miller, unlike Shaw in *Saint Joan*, for example, does not endow his characters with anything that hints at a twentieth-century consciousness or a foreknowledge or foreshadowing of twentieth-century events. No modern parallel need be drawn; but that parallel may be drawn—and has often been suggested—from a knowledge of the impression that the events which occurred in witch-hunting Salem were not dissimilar to the Communist-hunting activities during America's reign of McCarthyism, and that Miller himself was subjected to investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee. If we look at the play from this perspective, we may find that the theme is applicable to a modern situation, and that the decision to die rather than perjure oneself, or the refusal to save oneself at the cost of perpetuating a life-killing lie, is an admirable action at any time. By implication, then, we may make an analogy (and this may be felt rather than specifically thought), and thus be more sensitive to the kinds of contemporary pressure—which—even if they seem less dignified—can threaten a man to the same degree and can also provide the opportunity or necessity for an action which is just as heroic as the action which others, in more classically "tragic" circumstances, have taken.

This particular play makes no direct comment about contemporary society. It does not say that the past context is like the present context, therefore the past action should be the guide for the present
action. Nor does it say (as Osborne's Jimmy Porter says) that there are no brave causes left. Rather, it simply implies that the present action in an "x" society—whatever that society's causes and conditions—can be inherently meaningful, difficult, and noble as that past action, even if the present society remains totally unaffected by that action. Paradoxically, then, by leaving the present entirely alone, Miller actually writes a kind of modern tragedy, and, true to the strengths which dramatic representations contains, he allows for a wide range of imaginative, individual response while creating a community experience in the witnessing of an historic gesture.

There are numerous religious/historical dramas: most of Paul Claudel's plays; the plays on Saint Joan by Anouilh, Claudel and Shaw; Anouilh's Becket (1959); Gheldrode's Parabas (1928) and The Women at the Tomb (1928); Giraudoux's Judith (1931); John Whiting's The Devils (1961); Osborne's Luther (1961). Murder in the Cathedral is a particularly good example to study, not only for its special use of history, but as another example of a post-Pirandellian play which combines impressionistic and expressionistic techniques. It is impressionistic in its atmosphere of dream and memory (which is part of history), in its poetic structure, and in the highly evocative and symbolic language given to the characters. Here, the single narrator becomes a chorus of women, which is patterned after the Greek chorus in the way in which it creates a framework around the play, commenting upon the action and representing the common man observer who witnesses—even if he does not fully comprehend—a tragic action. But the play moves into a Pirandellian expressionism through the characters who speak theatrically and are aware of themselves as
playing a role. We move, also, into the game of masks and faces through the Fourth Tempter who disarms Thomas in his role-playing by parroting Thomas's "You know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer" speech. Thomas, standing maskless in front of this mirror image of himself, tries desperately to cover his nakedness, but finally admits the depth of the problem in which he is involved, and so states the theme of the play: "Is there no way, in my soul's sickness, / Does not lead to damnation in pride?" Within a particular religious and political context, then, Eliot investigates the conflict contained in the idea that: "The last temptation is the greatest treason: / To do the right deed for the wrong reason."

But, unlike Miller in The Crucible, he moves far beyond the historical event itself. He intends us to make a direct analogy to the present day, and he expresses this intention through his open manipulation of dramatic techniques. This theatricalism is suggested in Thomas's sermon to the audience, and then made explicit in the explanations of the Four Knights. Thomas himself, as well as the Knights, speaks with a twentieth-century consciousness, which implicitly conveys Eliot's own awarenesses as a Christian living in a society no longer absolutely bound by Christianity. Eliot wants us to see an historical event whose meaning can be directly applied to our own times, and wants, thereby, to strengthen the structure of the Church today. Through his second, modern chorus of the Knights, he creates a deliberate confusion in the audience's sense of time; the past and the present, the reality of history and the illusion of theatre, are brought together, as the remoteness of the twelfth century is brought into the immediateness of the twentieth.
This is both the play's strength and its weakness. It is its strength in that the disparate techniques and changing perspectives combine to create a very integrated structure which exploits the potentials of theatre as we have described them. But this structure is also a weakness if we view the play from the thematic idea which Eliot seems to be trying to convey. For, ironic as it may seem, Eliot actually begins to imply an Absurdist framework when we begin to make a direct analogy to the present day. Thomas's gesture, after all, has meaning in terms of the context against which that gesture takes place. And if, in watching the play, we take away the Christianity and take away the historical context, we are left with a meaningless gesture placed against a meaningless framework. For consider: if the Four Tempters represent Thomas's own doubt, then when the Tempters—full of a contemporary sense of existential disenchantment—speak of how "Man's life is a cheat and a disappointment...", it is Thomas's own doubts they are expressing. At the same time, however, Thomas, like the Women, achieves an idea of self-meaning, and believes in a meaningful gesture, because there is a structure of common and unquestioned belief. In such a context, when it comes to the business of living, it is not the question "Why?" but the question "How?" that is asked. But if we try to make the analogy between Thomas's world and our own, we find ourselves confronted by an Absurdist premise, for we lack the structures of belief which would give significance to a contemporary gesture of the nature of Thomas's martyrdom. It is the question "Why?" which is prevalent today. To some extent, one may see Eliot as trying to demonstrate this Why? in terms of history; and in terms of history, it makes sense, makes meaning. But in terms of the
twentieth century, it serves to underline our lack of binding religious structures.

Eliot tried to do precisely what the Absurdists gave up; he tried to write plays which would bind his audience together into a common context of meaning which would transcend every particular action. But the essential community belief was not there to begin with, and because of its absence, one can see how close Eliot comes to presenting the negative side of the positive statement at which he was aiming. When it came to the Absurdists—as W. H. Mahon pointed out in regard to Genet—they abandoned all pretensions of a common outlook. Instead, they took the relativity of all action, of all part-playing, of all illusions, and gave to them their own meaning, quite divorced from any reference to external codes. One can see how a good many of the ideas contained in Absurdist drama are not very different from those in Eliot's plays; but the vision is reversed. The meaningful movement in an Eliot play—the "fare forward" movement of a Thomas or Harry or Celia—is outward. It is the impressionistic vision of the intersection of time with the timeless, in the character who transcends the limited context, the circumscribing patterns of repetition, while at the same time is part of that pattern, being turned upon the wheel, but enlarging the total meaning of that pattern. In Absurdist drama, as in expressionistic drama in general, the movement is inward. The characters do not transcend themselves; they transcend the outside world by constantly moving into themselves. Reality does not lie beyond illusions, but at the very heart of them. The parts that characters play are not a part of a larger pattern, capable of moving outward in meaning as spiritual
awareness increases. At most, they are the enactment of the layers of illusion which exist within themselves, as characters cut off and unknowably alone.

A further example of an historical/religious play is Bolt's *A Man for all Seasons*. It is similar to *Murder in the Cathedral*, but goes beyond it in the extent to which it adds to the straight history play a modern emphasis on the pure theatricalism of story telling. Here, the narrator becomes a single chorus figure who, himself, is very modern, very much the direct link between dramatist and audience, while at the same time he carries a suggestion of his classical prototype. Bolt's use of this character is a multiple extension of the use of narrator we saw in impressionist plays. He is the Greek commentator upon the action, the Medieval everyman (and sometimes clown), the teller of the story, the teller of the dramatic telling of that story and also not simply a character in that story, but the actor who plays many roles in this very theatrical production. He is the Common Man, Steward, Boatman and general property man, opening the play in a manner similar to the Chorus of *Our Town* and Anouilh's *Antigone*:

It is perverse! To start a play made up of Kings and Cardinals in speaking costumes and intellectuals with embroidered mouths, with me... Is this a costume? Does this say something? It barely covers one man's nakedness. A bit of black material to reduce Old Adam to the Common Man...

Again, theatre is a telling of stories, a creation of fine tools of expression, exactly as it is in Beckett's plays. Guicharamaud pointed to the Beckett characters who constantly comment upon the way in which a thing is being expressed. Neff does the same thing
at the beginning of Saunders's *Next Time I'll Sing to You*; the Common Man does it at the beginning of Act II in Bolt's play:

The intermission started early in the year fifteen-thirty and it's now the middle of May, fifteen thirty-two. (Explanatory). Two years. During that time a lot of water's flowed under the bridge and one of the things that have come floating along on it is—(He reads.) "The Church of England, that finest flower of our Island genius for compromise; that system, peculiar to these shores, the despair of foreign observers, which deflects the torrents of religious passion down the canals of moderation." (He looks up.) That's very well put.

Bolt's use of history is much more general than Eliot's—closer to Miller's use of it in *The Crucible*. Where Eliot had implied a direct ratio between past context and action, and present context and action, Bolt leaves this potential ratio incomplete. Past action is to present potential for action as past context is to "x". The present context is not commented upon, for what Bolt is interested in is the abstract quality of an action, not the significance of an action as applied to the present day. Thus, the context serves only as a means to illustrate his theme in such a way that we can contemplate a universal significance in the abstract; and at the same time, the theatricalism of the production effects an immediate confrontation between ourselves (our reality), the illusion of theatre, and the Reality of an artistic vision.

Bolt follows from Brecht, and both of them relate to Pirandello. Both were interested in abstraction, in the shape of a whole event, in evoking a response which would combine intellect with feeling. John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and Armstrong's *Last Goodnight* follow from the same tradition; and both Bolt and
Arden acknowledge Brecht's influence on the development of their dramatic technique. In a sense, one can see both Bolt and Arden as working toward a refinement of Brecht's techniques. Brecht, too, had made a division between the event being told and the way in which it was told—between content and form. The story, and the structure in which it is contained, are juxtaposed, balanced against each other in order to create an atmosphere which is ultimately neutral. The audience are pushed from one perspective to another, from level to level, illusion to illusion; from an emotional response to an intellectual evaluation of that response, to a synthesis of the two, and so on through the play. Brecht does this by inserting into his form one technique after another—that is, by enlarging theatre to the proportions of what he called "epic drama". Esslin explains that by the term "epic" Brecht meant a drama which would be utterly different from the conventional 'well-made' play: a kind of illustrated lecture or newspaper report on a political or social theme, loosely constructed in the shape of a serious revue: a sequence of musical numbers, sketches, film, declamation, sometimes linked by one or several narrators.7

Like the expressionists, and other dramatists who concentrated on the meaning of a total action, Brecht's intention is to emphasize the shape of a story by reducing the importance of the individual character. He said that: "Everything depends on the story; it is the centre-piece of the performance."8 The method of acting itself was to be one of the primary ways of creating this emphasis. Esslin describes it in this way:

8. Ibid., p. 118.
The basis of the Brechtian technique of acting is the conception that the actor should not regard himself as impersonating the character so much as narrating the actions of another person at a definite time in the past. To illustrate these actions and to make them fully understood by the audience he goes through the motions the character made, imitates the tone of his voice, repeats his facial expression, but only to the extent of quoting them. The Brechtian style of acting is acting in quotation marks.9

According to this idea (which is very close to the idea of the method of acting in the No and classical Chinese theatre), there should have been a clear separation between audience, actor, and event, with all of them existing on an equal level, and the audience always aware of the exact relationship between the three. However, Brecht actually creates a different effect in many of his plays, and in its own way it is rather curious. In a sense, because he is so obviously theatrical, so persistent in presenting a shifting perspective, the audience tends to penetrate through the structure (perhaps ultimately to ignore its "interference"), straight to the story. And this is often because Brecht upsets the balance of which he speaks, by concentrating too heavily on the way in which the story is told. It is clear from his theoretical writings that he had little trust in an audience's ability to remain detached; and therefore, he often went to the other extreme, in consistently cutting back upon the audience's response. He juxtaposed all kinds of disparate visions and tones, with the hope that they would cancel each other, emotionally speaking, and leave the audience with an attitude toward the play which would be analogous to the passionately abstract attitude of a

crowd watching a boxing match.

The corollary of Brecht's tendency to weight his plays toward the objective structure rather than the personal content, is his habit of emphasizing the impersonal social framework which causes people to be and act as they do, at the expense of developing the subjective potential of his individual characters. Esslin, once again, described how this relationship between the external and the internal works in *Mother Courage*, and suggests here one of the ways in which Brecht's plays transcend his theories about them, and how the audience circumvents his specific intentions:

Had he set out by a conscious effort to make *Mother Courage* a latter-day Niobe, he would only have succeeded in producing a sentimental character— for Brecht had his sentimental, self-pitying side. But by following his rationalist, behaviourist conception, which denied the very existence of the deeper levels of human character and saw man as merely the product of the social environment he finds himself in at any moment, Brecht made *Mother Courage* a battlefield of contradictory impulses. Behind the rigid sociological framework the human side constantly reasserted itself: while the politician in Brecht piled on the social villainy, the poet in him drew on the subconscious feeling he had for the archetypal mother-figure, on his fund of pity—and sentiment—and cunningly smuggled these elements into the language, loading it with the subtlest overtones. And so in spite of Brecht's conscious and often declared intention of producing one-dimensional social schemata, the character he has created has all the depth of a great tragic figure. And it is to this that the audience responds.

In *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*, and *A Man for all Seasons*, Arden and Bolt create a more equal balance between content and form and between the illusion of theatre itself and the "reality" of the story they are telling. This balance is,

in fact, the basis of a great deal of modern drama, besides just those plays which deal with historical events. Guicharnaud, in the introduction to his Modern French Theatre, speaks of this balance; and he goes on to suggest that many modern playwrights create it by combining the classical mask/face discrepancy which lies at the base of all drama with contemporary ideas about the relationship between reality and illusion:

The mask of non-realistic theatre is ambiguous: it presents true and false at the same time. With anti-realism, theatre stops being documentary; but it is only art when it provokes a dual state of consciousness in the spectator, who at once believes and disbelieves. When the suspension of disbelief is total, the esthetic experience is nil. When disbelief is not suspended, the play remains an outer object and estheticism is void of all human content. In the simultaneity of the two states of consciousness lies the state of grace which is precisely that of a complete dramatic experience...

The play of masks leads to questions about life, theatre, and their reciprocal relations. It is not the creation of a new art but the return, with the help of new forms, to a simple and ancient conception, outside of which there is no theatre, only entertainment. Writers and directors have obviously gone back to the source, whether it be Greek or Shakespearian, and have directly or indirectly been influenced by foreign contemporary theatre, principally that of Pirandello.11

In all these historical plays, we have a theatre which is very close to both Greek and No theatre, in that it relates history, and it does it in such a way that the audience must exercise its imagination to make the theatrical illusion work. In this kind of structure, the actor regains his status as actor, as the conveyor of illusions, the mediator between the audience and the event. History becomes ritual, and in many cases this ritual element is increased by a specifically religious ritual, stemming from Christian mythology.

Mythology itself is another of the extensions of the historical framework. Yeats, for example, went to Celtic mythology; others have gone to Greek mythology and Greek tragedy: Giraudoux in *Tiger at the Gates* (*la Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*., 1935); Jean Cocteau in *The Infernal Machine*; Anouilh in *Antigone*; Sartre in *The Flies*. In some cases, a legend, or the form of a Greek tragedy, is simply implied; or used as the structure for a parallel event in a modern setting. This may be done with more or less explicitness, from Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), to Anouilh's *Eurydice* (1942), Eliot's *The Family Reunion* (1939), and Tennessee Williams's *Orpheus Descending* (1957). This may be seen as the inverse approach of the play which describes an historical (mythological, etc.) event through a contemporary language and sensibility. In both kinds of play, however, this double time sense, combined with conventional and innovative techniques which produce this "dual state of consciousness" of which Guicharnaud speaks, is often a means for the playwright to make us more sensitive to the past (its value, ritual, ceremony), while at the same time he communicates his vision of the human predicament—in any society. Beyond this, he may imply an analogy to history or mythology in order to reinforce the weak structures of contemporary belief and interpretation of meaning. This, one believes, was O'Neill's intention in *Mourning Becomes Electra*; but one tends to feel that the substructure of the Orestes trilogy—sometimes extravagantly explicit, as in the characters' names—functions primarily as an attempt to make a modern tragedy out of an otherwise realistic, domestic closet drama. *The Family Reunion* runs into similar difficulties, which Eliot himself later recognized.
This kind of idea has actually been more successfully used where it has functioned not as an internal reference, but as an external, and openly admitted, framework. This Anouilh does in *Eurydice* (and in *Antigone*, too), where he puts a modern setting and a contemporary interpretation into a mythical structure. By working in this way, Anouilh allows old and new ideas to join together, each enriching the other. The audience is immediately brought into a world of Once-upon-a-timeness (the myth itself carrying the awesomeness of ritual, of which Grossvogel spoke) and they are also left open for Anouilh's own interpretation.

One more example of a play which makes a highly effective use of classical connotations is Frisch's *Andorra* (1961). Here, the similarity lies not in the story, but in the technique of Greek tragedy. Frisch implies the parallel in his "choral" speeches—yet another adaptation of the use of narrator. In general, a narrator emphasizes the idea that the action is not unfolding before our eyes, and that we are not watching a three-walled drama. Instead, the events have already taken place and are simply being re-presented for us. Where historical or mythological material is used, this is obvious from the outset; but a play which has a modern setting may use a narrator/chorus/stage-manager figure to convey the same sense of foreboding and fatal inevitability. This is the kind of atmosphere which Frisch's vague reference to Greek choral speeches conveys. He creates a modern equivalent for myth; and he gives this unknown-to-us story the emphasis of (known) myth through his character's explanations that what is to happen (and has already happened) is not their fault. So also does the Greek chorus proclaim its innocence, declare that it can do nothing but witness, and
express its fear of an action which lies beyond itself but whose consequences will touch them all. And the entire dramatic re-presentation contained in Frisch's play has this same kind of atmosphere of a ceremony which the audience witnesses and in which they participate.

In other plays where mythology is used, the myth is taken over in its complete form—not substantially altered, nor incorporated in any way into a contemporary context. Yeats's *Deirdre* (1905-6) and Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910) are examples. Yeats's theatre as a whole is yet another combination of various modern approaches: poetry; mythology; impressionism of dream and memory; deliberate emphasis on theatre itself in the use of masks, music, dance and choral speeches; and finally, an explicit return to classical techniques and ideas about the inherent ritual of theatre, in the plays which he patterned after the *Nô* plays. To a large extent, one may see Yeats's dramatic forms as an impressionistic parallel to Brecht's expressionistic forms. Yeats once said: "All imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance, once chosen, must be firmly held against a pushing world. Verse, ritual, music, and dance in association with action require that gesture, costume, facial expression, stage arrangement must help in keeping the door."12 Brecht had much the same idea; and like Brecht, too, Yeats concentrated on the shape of a whole action, rather than upon creating well-defined, highly individualized characters. Both dramatists wanted to convey the innermost essence of a situation, to lead an audience through an event into a pure contemplation of meaning. Brecht did this expressionistically, through a vast and

"epic" form whose techniques manipulated audience involvement in such a way that the final impression was a distillation of all those responses into a pure, refined essence: the essence of the event, and of theatre itself. Yeats did it impressionistically; working from the inside out, he presented that essence itself as his theatre—a highly etherealized form whose weight and substance came, not from an epic technique, but from the epic quality of legend and mythology itself. And the poetry together with the mythology created a theatre of ceremony.

Besides mythology and religion, the idea of an historical framework has several other extensions. It moves into politics and it moves into war. Sometimes the contexts are real, as in Sean O'Casey's The Shadow of a Gunman (1922) and The Plough and the Stars (1926), Willis Hall's The Long and the Short and the Tall (1958), and Arthur Miller's Incident at Vichy (1964). Sometimes they are fictitious, but written with the same emphasis and atmosphere as found in the genuine historical play. This kind of structure provides a playwright with the opportunity of writing a modern play, in a modern context, which allows for a tragic action on the scale of classical tragedy. Often in this kind of play, time and place are not defined; a contemporary language and sensibility may be used along with references to recent events, while at the same time the atmosphere creates an idea of long ago and far away. This impression of history distances the event, thus making it easier to imply an inherent structure of belief and significance. This is an indirect and subtle way of compressing, or confusing, past and present—what Eliot does quite directly in Murder in the Cathedral. Sartre's Dirty Hands (1947),
and Ugo Betti's *The Burnt Flower-bed* (1953) and *The Queen and the Rebels* (1951) all work through this kind of structure.

*The Queen and the Rebels* is a particularly good example of this kind of play. The setting is that of a modern revolution against the aristocracy. The plot revolves around a common slut, Argia, who happens to discover the Queen, the object of the rebels' hatred, when the Queen, disguised as a peasant woman, is trying to escape the country. Argia eventually helps her to get away, and the Queen gives her a ring as a gift of appreciation. Due to this ring, Argia is subsequently mistaken for the Queen herself, and is ironically accused at one point of living in unconcerned ignorance about the squalor surrounding so many people in her kingdom. Argia, at first amused and then astonished at this mistake, gradually begins to assume the role foisted upon her, and in a passionate speech near the end, during which she decides to play the part out to its conclusion, she explains her position to her deceived captors, who do not understand or believe a word she is saying:

*What you're saying, in fact, is that if there were here, in my place, some less fortunate woman that I, someone who'd had to cook herself an egg in her room, you're saying that there'd be some real merit in her, if she were courageous at this moment? Commissar Amos, there was once a woman whom they played a joke on. I was told about it. One Sunday, this woman went to the seaside. And the bathing-attendants, for a joke, knowing the sort of woman she was, got out for her a bathing-costume of the kind that becomes almost transparent in the water. There was a good deal of merriment. And all of a sudden, the woman noticed that everyone was looking at her, and that there was rather a row going on... And at last that woman saw that she was standing there almost naked! Alone and naked. She stood there bewildered. And suddenly, do you know what she did? She tried to laugh with them. And after all what did they see? That she was a woman. We know what a woman is. A man comes up to her...*
cheerful, with his big, sweaty hands, and says:
"Do this ... go like this ... do that ... go on ...
..." Well, do you know what I think? I think
there comes a time when the only thing to do is
to stand up and say ... (as though actually
turning on someone) ... "Why do you insult me
like this? And my God, why have I allowed you
to? Get away from me! Go away! Go away! Leave
me alone! You take advantage of an immense mistake,
a monstrous delusion! Respect me! Show me respect!
Respect ... because I am ... the Queen! The Queen,
and destined for other things than this." What I
want to do is to go out of doors, as if it were a
fine morning, and as if I had seen down there, at
the end of the street, the cool fresh colour of
the sea, a colour that makes the heart leap! And
someone stops me, and then someone else, and someone
else, with the usual rudeness. But this morning I
don't even hear them. I'm not afraid any longer.
My face expresses dignity. I am as I would always
have wished to be. Palaces have nothing to do with
it. It was my own fault.

The balance in this play is exquisite, and it evidences yet another
direction in which theatre developed after Pirandello. It not only
brings the "historical" event into a contemporary context, but it
also combines this with a theatre of masks and faces, and a theatre
of ceremony. It is essentially an outward-looking play, like Murder
in the Cathedral, for its ceremonial or ritualistic aspects imply
areas of meaning and significance which lie beyond time or place
or individual. And in this way, too, it is an impressionistic play,
in the intersection of time with the timelessness conveyed through
the vagueness of the context.

Some of the above-mentioned historical plays indicate ways in
which dramatists have tried to create a modern poetic theatre. Some
playwrights—Eliot, Yeats and Christopher Fry, for example—were
concerned to write specifically poetic drama with verse as the formal
element of structure. They more or less started from the idea of the
structure they wanted and moved toward a subject which that structure
could contain and, in turn, be strengthened by. Mythology and
history were a natural choice, because they carry the same kind
of decorum and dignity which a verse form itself conveys. Other
dramatists, like Lorca and Synge, moulded a poetic language through
elevating and refining the speech patterns of the people they were
describing, and created, too, a simple language which was yet
highly evocative of poetry and image and symbol.

This approach tends to begin with realism and move toward poetry.
It is very similar to the kind of thing which Pinter does in The
Caretaker and Albee in The Zoo Story, which we looked at when dis¬
cussing realism. It is an emphasizing of rhythmic patterns of
speech which, in turn, forms the substructure for the internal
rhythm and movement of the whole play. And these plays move almost
entirely by language. This is not dissimilar to what Synge and
Lorca were doing; and correspondingly, the forms created by the
latter two writers are not far removed from the language given by
the Greek tragedian to his Chorus. In general, an over-all impres¬
sionistic structure (e.g., the plays of Saunders) easily accommo¬
dates this kind of imagistic dreamy language. It is not verse; but
neither is it realistic prose. It may create poetry through image
and symbol, or through the kind of "polyphonic" interplay of dialogue
which is found in Chekhov. Such is the poetic texture found in
Arnold Wesker's two recent plays, The Four Seasons (1965) and Their Very
Own and Golden City (1965). And it is particularly interesting that
a social commentary playwright like Wesker should depart from his
earlier realism and begin to move in this direction.
The suggestion of poetry is also contained in expressionistic plays—in far-reaching, sometimes abstruse, ways. The German expressionists, as we have seen, could often rise to great heights of inspired writing, because their optimism and sense of "mission" about the potentials of theatre were so enthusiastic. And they often wrote about characters who embodied this feeling and directly expressed it for them. On the other side are the expressionist plays which are essentially one extended symbol or metaphor, and are thus "poetic" not necessarily in language, but in the concrete image evoked. In early expressionism, this symbol could often be chaotic, disjointed, even outrageous. This was part of the testing of the limits of the stage. In Absurdist drama, it is generally more integrated and sophisticated. Ionesco's The New Tenant (1956) is an example. Virtually nothing need be said in the play at all; the unrelenting pile-up of furniture speaks for itself. The Chairs while a longer and more complex play, follows the same sort of pattern, and is filled as well with impressionistic word-painting and story-telling. Pinter's The Dumbwaiter (1958) and The Room (1957) and Beckett's Happy Days (1961), Play (1963), and Krapp's Last Tape (1958), are similar to The New Tenant in the brevity and compactness of the symbolism; Waiting for Godot (1953), Pinter's The Birthday Party (1958), N. F. Simpson's The Hole (1958), and Ionesco's Rhinoceros and The Killer are similar to The Chairs in that the metaphor is extended and may be interpreted on many more levels of suggestion. In fact, Absurdist theatre as a whole is a theatre of poetry, for it takes the imagery, symbolism and metaphor of poetry proper and transfers them to the stage, visually representing them in characters, objects, and action.
Beyond this, of course, Absurdism takes drama back into the total theatre suggested by the German expressionists and developed in Brecht's epic drama, and also creates a form which often communicates its idea through story-telling, play-acting and fantasy. Hence, we may now suggest that the Absurdist theatre is more than just the outgrowth of expressionism which was suggested earlier. Like so many of the recent plays we have looked at, from Eliot to Bolt to Saunders and Arden and a great deal in between, Absurdism is one of the structures which integrates forms of both impressionism and expressionism as they developed after the influence of Pirandello. The impressionism of the narrator who dreams a dream, the expressionism of structures which symbolically represent that dream, the creation once again of a theatre of language (which Yeats demanded) combined with a theatre of visual image, the playing of roles and the adopting of masks, the games and pretences, realities and illusions are all brought together in this theatre which is manifestly myth, ritual and ceremony: based on ancient conceptions of theatre and utilizing classical techniques, in an effort to create a dramatic experience which is both thematically and technically meaningful.

It is perhaps in Genet's theatre that we encounter the furthest projection so far of all the Pirandellian ramifications of mask/face, reality/illusion themes into a theatre of ceremony. His drama bears strong similarities to all the various kinds of post-impressionist plays we have considered; but it works in the opposite direction, being as it is an Absurdist vision. In Genet's plays, there is the same equation between mask and face, and between the reality of the social framework and the illusion of theatre, which is suggested in Piran-
Genet's techniques with those of Pirandello, in order to illustrate how far, and in what direction Pirandello's influence is felt. Such a comparison also indicates how even those Absurdist plays which seem totally unrelated to traditional ideas of dramatic structure are actually closely related to that tradition, and to other recent developments within it.

As we have seen, Pirandello projects a series of concentric circles of reality and illusion. This is expressed dramatically in the concept of the "naked mask". Strip away one mask and you find, not reality, but another illusion. Yet, any mask or any illusion may be posited, or may appear, to be the face or the reality itself. Genet, using this as his working basis, creates concentric circles of ceremony. As in the plays of Pirandello, there is, increasingly through Genet's plays, the explicit recognition that the characters are actors acting characters; but where Pirandello's primary concern is to illustrate just this fact (or the tragedy that gets caught in the middle of illusion/reality), Genet enunciates the ceremonial aspect of each layer, or level, of mask and face, illusion and "reality".

Genet takes the kind of discrepancy between social form and sentiment about which Pirandello writes in a play like The Pleasure of Honesty, and projects it into a conflict between one's function in society and the attitudes that are supposed to accompany its respectability, and the darker, "perverse" aspects of human personality which, because of social pressure, are realized only as
fantasies. The situations he sets up in *The Balcony* (written 1956) and *The Blacks* (written 1957) and, to a lesser extent, in *The Maids* (1947), are those in which the individual is given the opportunity to enact whatever fantasies he may have, and to come thereby to an open and clear comprehension and acceptance of the exact balance within himself of reality and illusion, of good and evil, or what he is supposed to feel and do as opposed to what he actually feels and wants to do. Genet is not, therefore, attempting to make a simple statement that everything is an illusion or that truth and reality can never be known. Nor should he be seen as saying: The world is merely a meaningless projection of my own subconscious, and communication is impossible, therefore I may be as arbitrary in my "art" as I choose. And yet, clearly these feelings are inherent in his drama and at points explicitly stated. Irma, at the end of *The Balcony*, addresses the audience—not so much as Irma as much as just a person who is an actor upon the stage—and tells them that their own "reality" is falser than the falseness upon the stage. And the situation underlying *The Blacks* reveals an endless reverberation of limited, if not misconceived, ideas about individuals and races and their interpretations of themselves and of the others.

But it is all enclosed within something larger, as it is in the plays of Pirandello—and here again the comparison is useful. One of the major theoretical points that Pirandello makes in his preface to *Six Characters*, and which he continually dramatized on the stage, is the realization that art is both dead (static, fixed in a form, unchanging), and alive (an expression of the artist's perception of life). Art thus becomes a ritual itself, attaining the sterility of
ritual of which Grossvogel speaks, by being forever repeated in a single unchanging form. Until the end of time, Othello will kill Desdemona, over and over and over again, as many times as the play is performed or read. And it becomes ritual by virtue of the fact that it becomes known, that the spectator knows what is going to meet his eye and ear before it happens for him again. The life of that art is contained in the vitality and force of the artistic vision, which is expressed in the content. This is not to imply that there is a neat schematic division of content = meaning, and form = ritual. Rather, it is meant to suggest that the mere existence of the completed work of art puts it (by the fact of its form as art) into the area of ritual, and that what that work of art is and what it says keeps it alive, vibrant, and personal, given the uniqueness of vision and statement.

In Genet, the questions of reality/illusion are enclosed within a larger framework of a similar recognition of art as ceremony. But Genet, instead of just implying the ritualistic nature of art as a whole, brings this element down into the basic structure of the play itself. He creates concentric rings not simply of people playing characters playing actors playing . . . etc., and thus creating layers of illusion/reality, but rather, of people playing people who are playing out a specific ceremony. It is the essence of the ceremony itself which is of primary importance; and the effect of that ceremony within the ceremony of the theatre itself is Genet’s primary concern.

It is at junctures such as this that one can see the decisive breakthrough which Pirandello made. Pirandello and Genet have very similar concepts about reality, illusion, and social forms, and the
individual's relationship to them all. But their fundamental assumptions in regard to what a man can do in order to live in these unavoidable conditions are quite different. Pirandello (and Genet, too, though more disguisedly) infuses his drama with a tremendous compassion for his characters. For Pirandello, compassion should be the result of the meeting of passion and intellect, both of which themselves revolve around the confusion between reality and illusion. Since there is no objective reality, each character must make his own, and create his own illusions. Pirandello never scoffs at those illusions, when they are the result not of self-deception or social hypocrisy, but of passionate-intellectual-compassionate probing.

This, he seems to say, is enough—or all that can be done. It is the ideal working-out propounded at the end of Bight You Are; it involves recognition by the character of the terms with which he must deal. Genet uses the same basis in his emphasis on the necessity for the character to recognize and admit to the elements of reality and fantasy within himself (which are closely connected to the Good which respectable society demands, and the Evil, or "perverse" aspects of human nature which society sublimates into fantasy). But this is not sufficient for Genet, for he clearly indicates that man is not isolated enough to create, and live within, his own modification of the reality/illusion complex. Where Pirandello used social situations as a means to describe the individual man's situation, Genet seems to see society as having a greater, more all-inclusive influence. Society is not just the sum of personal relationships; rather, it is the abstract of those relationships; class differences,
racial prejudices, particular functions. And it is because they have become abstractions that they have acquired a force of their own which has become divorced from the needs and reactions of the people living and moving within them. As abstract formal patterns, endlessly repeated and continued, they attain their own status as ritual and ceremony.

The breakdown of cohesive value structures creates a ritual which has lost both formal and substantive meaning. Man is thus caught not only in the web of the reality/illusion complex in terms of his own self and of other people, but also in the decayed and life-killing forms and functions of society. The ritual aspect of society no longer exists so as to contain and transcend the chaos of inner content; rather, the awareness of the individual man about his own nature now makes it such that he is simply impinged upon by forms which do not admit of inner complexity or self-contradiction, and whose substantive value is therefore outdated.

This is the basis upon which Genet seems to work: that not only must a man come to terms with his own fantasies, and the lack of an objective reality; he must also create new abstract, or social, meanings. He might do this in one of two ways: 1) by injecting new meaning into old ceremonies; or 2) by putting new ceremonies into old forms or functions. It is a long-armed extension of Pirandello's theories, and it incorporates a good number of connected assumptions. For example, since a man cannot know himself, nor, always, why he behaves as he does, nor believe that other people understand him or he them, then the motivation for any gesture cannot be understood. And if a man cannot understand motivations, he cannot probe very
far at all into knowledge (truth, reality). He can only create
illusions which themselves are only endless reflections of illusion
because there is no Reality to which he can relate, to say: this
other, then, is an illusion. But, suppose that the motivation and
the gesture are wilfully separated, and the gesture deliberately
stylized to the point that it is given a meaning simply as gesture
qua gesture. Motivation then becomes the substantive element. The
two are no longer just torturedly inextricable as in Pirandello.
Gesture is separated from motivation by being cast into a self-
meaningful ceremony. This is what Genet does; and thus, rather than
taking the first alternative of trying to infuse old ceremony with
new meaning, he attempts instead to project new ceremonies into the
old forms.

Hence, The Maids, with their illusion/reality/identity complex
contained in their position as sisters who are maids who, in that
position, discuss the motivations of their actions; and their gesture
of protest/revenge/recognition of fantasy, etc., is projected into a
ceremony—a repeated ritualistic play-acting which establishes
particularly for them the significance of the old form in which they
live: that of poor maids who serve a wealthy Mistress.

A similar situation is presented in other plays. In Deathwatch
(written 1947), the characters have rejected the forms of society by
breaking its laws. Their fundamental position is that of being three
men who, among other things, have committed crimes. As individuals,
they discuss their motivations, and this discussion is the action, or
content, of the play. The identity that each of them has is con-
tained in the larger context of being men who have revolted against
the forms of society, men who are thus labeled as criminals, and beyond this, men who are physically confined by that society and thus given the role of being prisoners, which role itself is a form or function created by that society. Gesture and motivation are clearly separated, and it is this separation which creates what I have called concentric rings of ceremony. Discussion of motivation toward crime constitutes the gesture which is the play Deathwatch itself (and as a play is a ceremony of theatre). Green Eyes recreates the motivation of his crime (his gesture against society) through the gesture of a dance. As McMahon describes it:

Through this dance, Green Eyes becomes aware of the true significance of himself as a man who committed a crime. He demonstrates how, by his action and his understanding of that action, he not only rejected social forms but also, by the ceremonial quality of his crime, created a new meaning in the old form of "criminal".

The discussion of motivation, like that in The Maids, creates the movement and tension of the play. Set against motivation/action in Green Eyes is motivation/action in Lefranc; and the discrepancy between the two characters' attitudes constitutes Genet's statement. Lefranc (whose murdering of Maurice suggests a serious treatment of Pegeen's statement in Synge's The Playboy of the Western World:

"there's a great gap between a galling story and a dirty deed") attempts to make a ceremonial gesture like that of Green Eyes'—ceremonial in the sense of being impersonal, devoid of mean, human emotion (greed, jealousy, etc.), and motivated by a force or power which virtually makes the doer of the crime a passive participant in an essentially "religious" relationship between man and the universe. But, as Grossvogel points out in discussing The Maids:

The symbol of sacredness is not required to create, but merely to convince. The maids, no more than the theater, need produce the corpse of their victim. Their responsibility is only to make the spectator feel that he has witnessed a murder in that he felt the splendor of the act and thrilled to its mystery. For this to happen, the ritual must remain sterile. The reality of a corpse turns the play away from ritual as the spectator moves from awe to identification, as the mystery of an act becomes the reality of that corpse. Horror unalloyed must not be allowed to replace the more subtle feeling that blends with horror the image of beauty and the stirring of singular experience.14

Unlike The Maids, there is definitely a corpse in Deathwatch, but this does not destroy the ritualistic element of the play. Instead, it serves to explain Green Eyes' superiority. Lefranc's action is monstrous, precisely because in attempting to make a ceremonial gesture comparable to that of Green Eyes' murder of the girl, he chooses a totally wrong action. It is an action filled with petty emotion and motivated by a mean will, a murder committed to function as a method of attaining a result quite divorced from any inherent meaning the murder itself might have contained. It is an action which totally fails to be ceremonial exactly because it

turns attention from awe to identification, from mystery to corpse; and because of that, Green Eyes rejects him, and Lefranc is alone, excluded from participation in the community-identification which the gestures of Green Eyes and Snowball can create.

Following from this, one can see the levels of ceremony in The Balcony quite readily. The characters discuss their own reality as frequenters of a brothel. They recognize and accept their fantasies and mould them into ceremonial enactments, and by keeping a clear understanding of the basis of illusion, by means of ceremony they inject new meaning into old social forms. They make a simultaneous gesture on three levels: 1) accepting the old social forms or functions as their framework; 2) rejecting the common superficial reactions of society to them by 3) giving personal illusions a universal reality through a ritualistic repetition of an interpretation of those functions (Judge, General, etc.). Throughout the play, and by means of Irma's last statement which causes the audience to review the whole play, Genet makes it clear that the people on stage are actors enacting characters in a brothel who are acting out common social roles in very uncommon ways by means of ceremony, and that by so doing, these original actors are performing a ceremony in the theatre in which the audience has been participating. And this is exactly what occurs in The Maids, where we see men acting as actresses acting sisters who take on the role of maids who enact a ritual of impersonation; and in The Blacks, where there is not only this kind of discrepancy but also an even more explicit statement of overt presentation of ceremonies.

The final differences between Genet and Pirandello seem, then,
to lie in this: that Pirandello saw the individual as having to come to terms with reality and illusion himself, and in the end to ignore society and create what illusions were necessary to make the most compassionate compromise possible. But the final compromise itself would, almost inevitably, be powerless to escape an imbalance heavily weighted toward tragedy. Genet, on the other hand, cannot escape society (or, in the larger sense, other people) so easily; but a man can come to terms with it in two ways: by making a "criminal" gesture and so removing himself from society's apparently-respectable forms, by moving into its openly non-respectable forms; and/or by a truthful, unhypocritical acceptance of his own illusions and fantasies and a comprehension of how they relate to what at least appear to be the external realities. It is debatable whether "and" or "or" is preferable in Genet's eyes. It would seem that his choice of the anti-social, criminal gesture appears to be a Good-in-itself because he does not believe that a man could recognize both the good and the evil in himself within the respectable social framework. Being in prison, outside these forms, frees a man; but, if he could be equally free in society, then this could be the good, and he would not have to do evil in order to find good for his own self.

Genet's statement is thus ambivalent, both more optimistic and pessimistic than that of Pirandello. Pirandello offers something of an escape from society by implicitly affirming the dignity and inviolability of each individual, but no escape from the tragedy inherent in personal relationships. Genet hypothesizes an escape: total and frank admission by all of all levels of reality and illusion, and good and evil, from social functions right down to the
individual personality. But, having made the hypothesis, he affirms the total impossibility of its realization, by seeing men too weighed down by social functions, and thereby inextricably caught up in unending multi-layered battles between reality and illusion, good and evil. Meaning may be created by creating a ceremony which, by definition, has an inherent meaning; but ritual will end in sacrifice and murder. The carnival of cross-purposed motivation will lead to death, simply because the overriding forms and functions of being, in order to remain self-perpetuating, will demand it. And it would seem that that is why Genet thus turns his attention to making death a ceremony—full of beauty, majesty, and pomp.

This, then, is Genet's idea of ceremonial theatre. It is a kind of modern, theatrical, and ritualistic enactment of Peer Gynt's onion peeling. To a certain extent, Genet might be seen to represent a culminating point in the development of this kind of inward-moving ceremonial theatre. Co-existent with it is the outward-directed theatre, which moves ultimately toward the early expressionistic return to total theatre, which, too, is the direction that Genet's theatre takes. Brecht was one of these dramatists; Michel de Ghelderode another. Guicharnaud describes how Ghelderode's theatre moved toward broad combinations of tone and technique, and how these functioned as part of a deliberately ceremonial drama:

Ghelderode's force lies precisely in that skillful mixture of the greatest horror and the most knockabout farce, a kind of exaggerated Romanticism. One cannot exist without the other, one issues from the other. The mystery of death is so grandiose that it must be enveloped by rites, by ceremonies which of themselves turn to buffoonery. Ghelderode's theatre indicates a way toward the realization of a "primordial" drama, where tragic horror and the frankest guffaws are indissolubly
mixed. By using local tradition and pushing it to the limit of its possibilities, GheIderode is not far removed from the Elizabethans and the Spanish dramatists. He touches on the primitive joys of the body, its appetites and their satisfaction, inseparable from the ambiguous fear of individual or collective death, annihilating and revealing at the same time—in other words, an Apocalypse.\(^{15}\)

Here, then, is another example of how theatre moves into Northrup Frye's category of myth. And we may also see a suggestion as to why so many modern dramatists use the clown or tramp figure. The unheroic quality of many modern dramatic characters is also partly the result of the concentration on creating contexts: the particular artist's need to make his own structures for universal Reality. And into these structures he puts the Common Man, bewildered, deprived of meaning, and capable of coping with life only in the most general terms. But because men do go on living, witnessing, intuiting, acting and suffering, they do yet attain some measure of heroism. If we cannot find any sense of personal identification in the modern world, we can perhaps feel a degree of social identification with all other men. In the end, as Saunders's character says, it may be no consolation that we are all in the same boat; but it may at least relieve some of the terror of a thoroughgoing existential vision. And in this way, curiously enough, drama begins to become a social form again, in just the opposite way in which it used to be a social activity in the days when social structures were the foundation of community life. When audiences went to that kind of theatre, they understood their position in terms of these structures, identifying with those roles, and not with the heroic figures of

tragedy. Now, if anything, we identify with the Common Man characters, and move with them through the strangeness of the worlds with which the dramatist so often presents us.

But at the same time, we are meant to explore that world, in the same way in which we would move through a fairy-tale world; for, as Guicharnaud describes it, and as Ionesco implied, the modern dramatist (or artist in general) is a maker of myths, as well as of ceremonies and rituals. The ceremony and ritual are the ways in which we actively witness the myth; and the myth is a metaphor for the Reality behind universal structures:

Because of the variety, the modern spectator is led, more than ever in the history of theatre, to consider each play as a possible metaphor, an objectivized hypothesis of man's and the world's condition. Not only is each adventure exemplary, as in all theatre, but the play's universe itself is a metaphor of a hidden structure of the proposed universe. Writers of the past simplified, discovered, or poetized the real universe. Modern writers invent their own systems. Although an occasional playwright, such as Claudel, considers his own universe as the only truth for all eternity, the spectator must think of each as a possible system. In other words the modern spectator must regard his playwrights as poets, as makers of metaphors, tangible symbols of a truth that is always transcendent.16

Thus, the modern dramatist often does two things at once: he first creates a sense of comfort in the audience by establishing an initially recognizable framework for the action. This is the function of familiar forms to allow us to remain detached—superior to the action and the characters. The effect of this is to make us believe that, from this vantage point of distance and identification with the structures for the action, we will sit back and judge the

action of these characters, so different from ourselves, and so seemingly confined by their contexts. Seeing both characters and context from a wider perspective, we feel knowingly secure. But then the tables are turned. The dramatist, after all, intends to jolt us out of this complacency. The familiarity suddenly gives way to strangeness—a strangeness both of content and of dramatic form—which often careens into a nightmare world portending gratuitous violence.

Some dramatists leave us right there, with absolutely nothing but our own terrifying aloneness to hold on to. But more often, they go beyond this and create a second effect: they lead us into a compensating sense of "security" by allowing us now to identify with those common man characters, and by constructing new ceremonies and rituals. But this new sense of community feeling, if indeed we achieve it, can only come if we allow ourselves to completely let go of our illusions, our false modesties and self-satisfied ways of superficially dealing with life and people. And if we can do this, then our new sense of identity will be far more perceptive, far more genuine, and above all, far more compassionate. It is precisely this which Genet means to convey by Irma's final statement in The Balcony. If we are insulted by this remark, or if we laugh it off as a joke by some irresponsible crank artist, it is our own fault.

For if many modern dramatists seem to us to be pretentiously egotistical, in their preoccupation with creating personal fantasies which, presumably, satisfy themselves but strike us as meaningless and precocious attempts at drama—it may be because we have been unwilling to trust ourselves to those dramatists. If an audience
stubbornly clings to the wellworn and safe structures of socially-accepted ways of looking at things, then these plays will tend to strike the spectators as distasteful jokes. They will tend to see the characters as more fantastic creatures, or perhaps as just the poor ignorant tramps they are. But, if the audience can dare to let go—of themselves, of society, of all the familiar illusions which seem to be "real" only because they are familiar and common—then they might really enter into another illusion, and thus be led to see the relativity of all illusions. Ideally, then, this kind of theatre would bind the audience together into a deep sense of common identification with all men, participating in the ceremony of theatre and the myth of this particular play, just as religious ceremony and religious theatre once did.

But this kind of response is difficult to attain—difficult for both dramatist and audience. It demands a very broad vision by both; and even when the dramatist may see it, it takes a long while for an audience to do so. A dramatist may see precisely where his vision is leading and how to get there. But if an audience gets lost in the middle, caught in the confusing techniques and trapped at the points where the playwright is being deliberately destructive, they may give up this unsettling effort altogether. And this problem is compounded by the fact that there is bad drama being written, drama which not only includes gratuitous violence and confusion, but which seems itself to be a gratuitous act of irresponsible creativity.

On the whole, one might say that it is more difficult to distinguish the irresponsible play from the irresponsible novel, for this reason: drama is composed of blocks of action, succinct and
timebound events, involving immediate confrontations between characters. These blocks are put together, in the form of one scene after another, or, more minutely, one speech after another. By definition, drama is ultra-selective and also disjointedly episodic. The dramatist has no opportunity to indulge in stream-of-consciousness or to construct a continuous narrative which would take us smoothly from one event to another. Nor can he give us an omniscient perspective. We cannot see the simultaneity between internal thought and external action, nor can we get far enough away from the whole development to see exactly how everything—action, motive, thought and speech—fit together.

The novelist can do any of these things, in any number of ways. We may take Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* as an example. This is essentially what may be called an Absurdist novel, a label which has also been given to John Barth’s *The Sotweed Factor*, Cunter Grass’s *The Tin Drum*, and Elias Canetti’s *Auto-da-fé*. The structure of Heller’s novel is like that of much modern drama in that it is built on small self-contained units of action which seem to have no connection until we find that past and present are all mixed up, and a future reference is found in a past event. But gradually the total pattern emerges, all centering around Snowden’s death: how it happened and what it meant. It is as though, from far above, we were watching Heller put together a giant jigsaw puzzle with which he is so intimately familiar that he can put the pieces down at random—one here, one over there—instead of having to join them on to each other. By the end, the total pattern emerges, everything fits into place, and we now see how the sequence of events—in-time took place. Heller deliberately,
and very powerfully, creates an Absurdist structure, contained within "Catch-22" itself and radiating out to all levels of the book, in order to communicate the total absurdity of war. Form and content perfectly dovetail.

Drama, too, is constructed by self-contained sections, often separated from each other in time, but overlapping each other as we see first one encounter, and subsequently another encounter, which is actually taking place at the same time as the first; or as we see the original action being commented upon from a different perspective by different characters. The confusion in the structure of modern drama is, to some extent, just an extension of this. As an increasingly existential vision begins to prevail, along with a development of perspective in the essential theatricalism of drama, this disconnectedness is accentuated, through a violent juxtaposition of theatrical techniques. The difficulty which confronts the spectator is the necessity of penetrating through the techniques, through the structure, in order to see the total pattern. At the same time, he is meant to understand the techniques as techniques. The serious dramatic artist intends that the spectator both feel this difficulty and work through it to see the shape of a whole action. But he is more or less left on his own to do so. He is brought into the action, into an active participation not only with the illusion of theatre itself, but with the illusion unfolding before him on the stage. The separation between stage and auditorium is broken down: characters and spectators alike take part in the dramatic event.
Simply because the over-all pattern in this kind of play is inherently difficult to see, it is easy to think it missing altogether. But on the other hand, it is easier for the pseudo-dramatist to try to slide in under the wire by a purely haphazard combination of unrelated things. For all that Ionesco said about the theatre being the place where one can dare anything but generally dares little, he himself always had binding ideas, a thread of unity running through the chaos which, if it is not visible while we watch the play, is seen when we come to review the whole action in our mind. It must be granted, though, that some recent drama, which may seem to be only pseudo-drama, is the result of taking Ionesco at his word: i.e., a continuing experimentation to find the limits of drama. Taken by themselves, such plays may appear not only meaningless, but also judged not even to be art. However, if we look at them, even the less successful efforts, from the standpoint of tradition, we may begin to see at least what they might be attempting to do. Then the experimentation itself, in its seemingly radical innovativeness, may not appear so radical after all, if it emerges as part of the process of artistic development which reshapes itself from its own depths. And the depths from which much contemporary drama grows are the very roots of theatrical expression itself: the classical forms and ceremonial functions of our one essentially social form of art: the shared, community experience of the dramatic event.
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