

## Transition: A Theory of Stylistic Change

The crisis experienced by the Drama at the end of the nineteenth century (as the literary form embodying the (1) [always] present, (2) interpersonal, (3) event) arose from a thematic transformation that replaced the members of this triad with their conceptual opposites. For Ibsen, the past dominates instead of the present. The past itself and not a past event is thematized; it is remembered and is still active internally. Thus, the interpersonal is displaced by the intrapersonal. In Chekhov's plays, active life in the present gives way to the reveries of remembrance and utopian thought. Event becomes incidental, and dialogue, the interpersonal form of expression, becomes a vessel for monologic reflection. In the works of Strindberg, the interpersonal is either sublated or seen through the subjective lens of a central *I*. Because of this internalization, (always) present, "real" time loses its position of absolute dominance: past and present flow into each another, the external present calls forth the remembered past. With regard to the interpersonal, the action is reduced to a concatenation of meetings that are simply markers for the actual event; internal transformation. Maeterlinck's *drame statique* eliminates the notion of action. In the face of death, to which this *drame* is wholly dedicated, interpersonal differences—the conflict between one figure and another—also disappear. Death confronts a speechless/blind group of human beings. Finally, Hauptmann's social dramaturgy describes the particularity of interpersonal life in terms of the extrapersonal—political and economic conditions. The uniformity these conditions dictate eliminates the singularity of the (always) present: it is also the past and the future. Action gives way to that conditionality of which humankind is the powerless victim.

Thus, the Drama of the outgoing nineteenth century denies in its content that which, out of obedience to tradition, it still wants to express formally: interpersonal activity. What unites the various works of this period (and can be traced back to the transformation in their thematic) is the subject-object opposition — an opposition that determines their new dimensions. In Ibsen's "analytical drama," present and past, revealer and revealed, confront each another as subject and object. In Strindberg's "station drama," the isolated subject becomes its own object; the humanness of Indra's Daughter is objectified in *A Dream Play*. Maeterlinck's fatalism damns humankind to passive objectivity; the people in Hauptmann's "social Drama" appear in the same objective light. Of course, the thematic of Maeterlinck's and Hauptmann's work can be distinguished from that of Ibsen and Strindberg insofar as it conditions the objectivity of the dramatis personae rather than a subject-object opposition; but the subject, in the guise of an epic *I*, becomes a formal requisite of their presentation.

In this subject-object relationship, the absoluteness of the three fundamental concepts of dramatic form is destroyed and, along with it, that of this form itself. In the Drama, the (1) present is absolute because it has no temporal context: "the drama does not know the concept of time: . . . the unity of time signifies a state of being lifted out of the duration of time."<sup>1</sup> The (2) interpersonal is absolute in the Drama because neither the intra- nor the extra-personal stands next to it. By limiting itself to dialogue, the Drama of the Renaissance elected the sphere of the "inter" as its exclusive space. And the (3) event is absolute in the Drama because it stands above both internal conditioning of the soul and external objective conditions. It alone engenders the dynamics of the work.

When these three factors of dramatic form move into relation as subject or object, they are relativized: Ibsen's present by the past that it must reveal as its object; Strindberg's interpersonal by the subjective perspective in which it appears; Hauptmann's event by the objective conditions that it is supposed to present.

The thematically conditioned subject-object relationship (as a relationship, it is, *eo ipso*, formal in nature) must, of necessity, be anchored in the principle of form governing the work. But the principle of dramatic form clearly represents the negation of any separation between subject and object. According to Hegel's *Aesthetics*, "this objectivity which proceeds from the subject together with this subjectivity which gains portrayal in its objective realization and validity . . . by being *action* provides the form and content of dramatic poetry."<sup>2</sup>

The internal contradiction in the modern Drama, therefore, arises from the fact that a dynamic transformation of subject and object into each other in dramatic form is confronted by a static separation of the two in content. Of course, the Drama in which this contradiction appears must have already resolved it in some provisional fashion to have come into being at all. The contradiction is both overcome and maintained insofar as the thematic subject-object opposition

is provided with a foundation within the dramatic form — one that is motivated and, therefore, itself thematic. This subject-object opposition, which is at once formal and contentual, is represented in the fundamentally epic situations (epic poet/object) that, thematically framed, appear as dramatic scenes. Ibsen's problem is that of representing an internally experienced, prior time in a literary form that recognizes internally only in its objectification and time only in its (always) present moment. He solves the problem by inventing situations in which individuals sit in judgment on their own remembered past, which, in this manner, is nudged into the openness of the present. The same problem is posed for Strindberg in the *Ghost Sonata*. It is resolved by the introduction of a figure who knows all about the other characters and, thus, can become their epic narrator within the dramatic fable. Maeterlinck's characters are speechless victims of death. The dramatic scene entitled *Intérieur* shows them as mute figures within the confines of a house. Two characters who watch them from the garden maintain the dialogue — a dialogue that has these mutes as its objects. Hauptmann has a stranger visit the characters he wishes to present. In *The Weavers*, the individual acts represent narrative or revuelike situations. Chekhov eventually solves the problem of representing the impossibility of dialogue within the dialogic form of the Drama by introducing a figure who is hard-of-hearing and by letting the characters speak at cross-purposes.

This rent in the formal principle of the work and the double, formal and contentual, employ of a character or situation — which is bound to harm them — disappear in the dramaturgy of the following decades. But the new forms that mark these years arise out of the formal and thematic conceptions of the transitional period: Ibsen's tribunal on the past; Strindberg's staging of an epic figure; Hauptmann's introduction of a social researcher.

The process, which will be dealt with in detail later, adumbrates a theory of stylistic change that differs substantially from the current explanations about the succession of one style to another. It suggests that a third style, one that is internally contradictory, lies between the two periods and, thus, sets in place the developmental stage, in the tripartite movement of the form-content dialectic. In addition, the transitional period is not simply defined by the fact that, in it, form and content move from an original correspondence (see "The Drama") into opposition with one another (see "The Drama in Crisis"). This sublation up to the next stage of development is, in fact, prepared for in the thematically disguised elements of form already contained within the now-problematic-old-form. — And the transformation into a style that is in itself contradictory is realized when a formally operative content is fully precipitated out as form, thereby exploding the old form.

This process, attested to by the resultant twentieth-century dramaturgy, can also be discovered in examples taken from other artistic areas. Within the traditional epic style, a style resting on an opposition between narrator and object,

the nineteenth-century psychological novel develops the *monologue intérieur*. This interior monologue no longer presupposes an epic distance, however, since it is fully ensconced in the interiority of the represented characters. As long as the epic style is not abandoned, the *monologue intérieur* must be mediated through the narrator (e.g., the almost stereotypic, "he said to himself," in Stendhal, perhaps the most frequent word group in *Le rouge et le noir*). At the same time, it should be noted that Stendhal's psychological analysis, which takes the psyche as its object, once again legitimates epic distance). As long as it is mediated by the narrator, the interior monologue remains thematic. But the progressive psychologization of the novel in the twentieth century makes the interior monologue more and more essential; the transformation in style (if one omits DuJardin) takes place with Joyce: internal monologue becomes the very principle of form and explodes the traditional epic style. *Ulysses* has no narrator. Just as this stream of consciousness style was prepared for within the traditional narrative, so too Cézanne's painting (to give an extraliterary example), which, finally, maintains the principle of direct observation of nature, already contains the roots of perspectivism and the synthetic quality of later styles (e.g., the cubists). And Wagner's late romantic music tends toward a thoroughgoing chromaticism and, thus, toward a full acceptance of the twelve-tone scale, thereby preparing for Schönberg's atonality.

Therefore, prior to the collapse of the old style, the new can be discovered lodged in its interior as an antithetical principle.

The three examples — Stendhal, Cézanne, and Wagner — also show that even transitional situations allow for the highest level of completion in a work. But the uniqueness of this reconciliation of contradictory principles — a reconciliation at which these artists succeed — and the immanent dynamics of a contradiction that does not call for reconciliation but, rather, resolution, cannot be overlooked. They explain why the works of these men could not serve as models for later artists or, at least, could become so only insofar as they strove after it in an effort to leave it behind.

Just as "The Drama in Crisis" deduced the transition from the pure style of the Drama to a contradictory dramatic style by examining thematic displacements, the next transformation, which sees little change in thematics, can be conceived of as a process whereby the thematic material was precipitated out as form and exploded the old form. Thus came about those experiments in form that were previously examined only for their own sake and that were, therefore, easily interpreted as childish games, as antiburgeois, or as expressions of personal inability but whose inner necessity becomes clear as soon as they are set within the framework of this change in style.

An example would help here, because it can shed light on the opposition between the thematic and the formal and, at the same time, clarify the process through which form originates. Singing is thematic in a Drama in which a song

is sung but formal in the opera. Therefore, the dramatic personae can applaud a chanteuse, whereas the figures in an opera must not show awareness of their singing. (Romantic irony is the term used to describe the fact that the dramatic personae in the comedies of Tieck and others comment on things formal — on their roles, for example.)<sup>3</sup>

Before examining these new forms in which the contradiction between the epic thematic and the dramatic form is resolved, some mention must be made of the trends which, instead of *resolving* the antinomy in the sense of a historical process — that is, instead of letting the form arise from the new content — held fast to dramatic form and tried in various ways to *rescue* it. It must also be noted that these rescue attempts, despite their formalistic-conservative intention, cannot do without new modalities of expression.

Beyond this crisis in the Drama and the attempts at an epic resolution, but fully comprehensible only with them as a background, stands the lyric Drama of the turn of the century, especially the early work of Hofmannsthal. Its indirect connection with the crisis of the Drama is easy to see. The form-content tension of the modern Drama can be traced back to the contradiction between the dialogic unification of subject and object in the form and their confrontation in the content. Epic dramaturgy comes about when the contentual subject-object relation precipitates as form. The lyric Drama escapes this contradiction because the lyric is rooted neither in an actual transformation of each into the other nor in a static separateness from each other with regard to subject and object but, rather, in their essential and original identity. Its central category is mood. But mood does not belong to isolated interiority; at its origin (according to E[mil] Staiger) mood is "precisely not something that exists 'in' us. Rather, through mood, we are eminently 'out there', not confronting objects, but *in* them as they are in us."<sup>4</sup> And this same identity marks I and you, then and now in the lyric. However, formally, and for the problematic in Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov, this means that the lyric Drama does not distinguish between monologue and dialogue; therefore, the theme of solitude does not call the lyric Drama into question. Dramatic language is tied strictly to an action that unfolds in the uninterrupted present; that is why analysis of the past stands in contradiction to dramatic form. In the lyric, on the other hand, time becomes one, the past is also the present, and speech is not thematic — it needs no motivation and is not subject to interruption by silence. What is lyric is, in itself, speech, and, for this reason, speech and action do not, of necessity, coincide. This is what R[udolf] Kassner suggests when he writes that in Hofmannsthal's early works, "one can, as it were, run one's finger between the language and the action and separate one from the other."<sup>5</sup> Since it is independent of the action, lyric speech is able to cover up the cleft in the events that would otherwise announce the crisis of the Drama.

### III. Rescue Attempts

ern."\* The passage of the Drama from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century corresponded to a historical process; the naturalist incorporation of the proletariat on the Drama circa 1900 was, on the other hand, an effort to evade history.

That is the historical dialectic of the naturalist Drama. It has a dramaturgic dialectic as well, however. The social distance that was first made possible by the naturalist Drama was fatal to that same Drama when it became dramaturgic distance. That pity was considered the category central to Hauptmann's writing does not undermine, rather it strengthens the notion that Hauptmann stood before his creatures as their observer and not behind them or in them, because pity presupposes the distance it later overcomes. The true dramatist (and the true spectator), however, does not stand at a distance from the dramatis personae; he is either one with them or not at all present in the work. This identity of author, spectator, and dramatis personae becomes possible because the subjects of the Drama are always projections of the historical subject: they are in full accord with the current state of consciousness. In this sense, every true Drama is a mirror of its epoch; its characters mirror those social classes that, so to speak, embody the avant-garde of the objective spirit. This is the reason there is no true historical Drama. The mythological-historical Drama of the French neoclassical era was that of the aristocracy and the king. The rapprochement between Olympus and the court, which is embodied in Molière's *Amphitryon*, is not simply a piquant bit of eccentricity, it is an expression of the historico-intellectual connection between the age and the *tragédie classique*. And Büchner, despite the greatest care in accurately reproducing parliamentary speeches, did not hesitate to let his Danton parish because of a boredom that, in terms of intellectual history, emerged after Napoleon's fall and became very much his own when he recognized the untimeliness of his revolutionary program. (Stendhal's works are particularly rich in information about the rapport between boredom and the post-Napoleonic situation.) In the naturalist drama, which, thanks to anachronisms in the present, manages to avoid fleeing into history, it is not the turn-of-the-century bourgeoisie nor the class that provisions the Drama with its characters that sees itself reflected. Instead, one group regards the other: the bourgeois author and the bourgeois public observe the agricultural class and the proletariat. This distance leads to some negative consequences in the resultant dramaturgy, however.

As was demonstrated in the analysis of *The Weavers*, the naturalist discourse presupposes an epic *I*. The problem of milieu is closely tied to this fact. The reproduction of milieu cannot simply be explained by way of the naturalist project. It does not just point toward the author's intention, it points to his position as well. The background to peoples' actions, the atmosphere in which they move, these are visible only to the author who stands before them or who visits them as a stranger: the epic narrator. This positioning of the Drama relative to

#### 6. Naturalism

The last German Drama that still was Drama was written by Gerhart Hauptmann—one only need think of *Drayman Henschel* (1898), *Rose Bernd* (1903), and *The Rais* (1911). These late successes make possible a naturalism whose conservative tendency in the realm of dramaturgy was already discussed briefly in relation to Strindberg.

Naturalist Drama elected its heroes from the lower strata of society. It found there people whose willpower was unbroken, who could engage their entire being in actions toward which their passion drove them, who were not separated from one another by anything fundamental—neither self-centeredness nor reflection—people who were able to carry the weight of a Drama essentially limited to an (always) present, interpersonal action. Thus, the social difference between the lower and upper classes corresponded to the dramaturgic difference: capacity and incapacity for Drama. Naturalist *parole*, which, with the best of intentions, announced that the Drama was not solely the property of the bourgeoisie, concealed the bitter insight that the bourgeoisie had long since lost possession of it. The question was really one of rescuing the Drama. As one became aware of the crisis in the bourgeois Drama (Hauptmann's *The Coming of Peace* [1890], *Lonely People* [1891], *Michael Kramer* [1900], etc.), one began to flee one's own epoch, not into the past but into the alien present. By climbing down the social ladder, one discovered the archaic in the present; one turned back the hands on the clock of the "objective spirit"—and, as naturalist, became "mod-

the narrator, which is a prerequisite for the naturalist Drama, is mirrored within it by the relative position the characters assume vis-à-vis their milieu, which seems alien to them. The much-maligned "abstraction" of the *tragédie classique* and the fact that its language is limited to a select vocabulary are fully understandable in terms of the formal principles of the Drama. Abstraction permits events, which here transpire between people and always in the present, to emerge in their greatest purity: the limited vocabulary becomes, as it were, the particular property of the Drama and points not to the empirical (as does naturalist Drama) but beyond it.

Finally, much the same can be said of action. Action in the naturalist Drama usually belongs to the domain of the *fait divers*. The *fait divers* is an event that is interesting enough in itself to be reported, even when alienated from its context. To whom it happens is, therefore, of little consequence; it is essentially anonymous. A newspaper report, for example, "Pauline Piperkarka, servant, twenty years old, living in North Berlin," is sufficient to confirm the validity of the *fait divers*. The movement of the action back into the inner sphere of the subject and the objectification of this interiority in the action (which Hegel demands of dramatic works in general) are precluded by the very nature of the *fait divers*. Therefore, it can never be completely built into the naturalist Drama. It forms a sort of evaporated action within the naturalist text, one into which the characters and their surroundings can never be fully integrated. The dissociation of milieu, character, and action in the naturalist Drama, the alienated condition in which they appear, destroys the possibility of a seamless union of these elements in an absolute and total movement such as that required by the Drama. The movement toward fragmentation that marks almost all of Hauptmann's naturalist works, *Der Rote Hahn* (1901) in particular, is rooted in this problematic, which once again can be solved only within an epic framework: the disparate elements can be united only by an epic *I*.

Thus, naturalist dramaturgy, in which dramatic form attempts to survive its historically conditioned crisis, is, because of the very distance from the bourgeoisie that had at first enabled it to rescue the Drama, constantly in danger of transforming itself into epic.

## 7. The Conversation Play

A second rescue attempt began on the level of the dialogue. The source of the danger appeared earlier on this level: when the interpersonal relation disappears, dialogue is shredded into monologue; when the past prevails, dialogue is transformed into the necessarily monologic site of memory.

The desire to save the Drama by rescuing dialogue can be traced (especially in theater circles) to the notion that a dramatist is someone who is able to write good dialogue. The preservation of "good dialogue" is achieved by cutting it off

from a subjectivity whose historical forms put dialogue into jeopardy. If dialogue in true Drama is the common space in which the interiority of the dramatic personae is objectified, here it is alienated from the subject and appears as an independent entity. Dialogue becomes conversation.

The conversation play dominated European, particularly French and English, dramaturgy from the middle of the nineteenth century. Its identity as the "well-made play" or *pièce bien fait* certified its dramaturgic qualities and thereby hid its basic character, that of an unintended parody of the neoclassical Drama. Its negative aspect—that it did away with the possibility of subjective statement when it was cut off from the subject—turned into something positive when the empty dialogic space was filled with the topical concerns of the day. The conversation play revolves around questions of women's suffrage, free love, divorce law, misalliance, industrialization, and socialism. Thus it acquired the appearance of the modern while actually opposing historical process. As both a modern and an exemplary dramatic model, the conversation play formed the theatrical norm at the beginning of this century. All attempts to produce new statements, new forms, required great effort to separate them from this norm, and they were always criticized on the basis of a comparison with it. Only in Germany was the path through the barricade of the now canonical conversation play less obstructed—because there was no German society and no German conversational style.

Despite this situation, one must not overlook the fact that the conversation play only appeared to be serviceable as a dramatic model. The total transformation of dialogue into conversation leads not only to quantitative but also to dramaturgic retribution. Because the conversation play hovers between people instead of uniting them, it is not binding. Every line of dramatic dialogue is irrevocable and full of consequence. As a causal series, it constitutes its own time and, thus, lifts itself out of the temporal flow. This is what engenders the absoluteness of the Drama. In the case of the conversation play, things are somewhat different. It has no subjective origin and no objective goal; it goes nowhere and is not transformed into action. Therefore, it has no time proper to it alone. Instead, it participates in the movement of "real" time. Because the conversation play has no subjective starting point, it cannot define individuals. Just as the conversation play quotes from the problems of the day, so are the dramatic personae quotations of real social types. But, whereas the typology of, say, the commedia dell'arte is intrinsic to it and refers to an aesthetic reality without pointing beyond its own borders, the typology of the conversation play can be traced back to social typecasting and is, therefore, contrary to the requisite absoluteness of the Drama. Because conversation is not binding, it cannot become action. Action, which is needed for the conversation play to appear "well made," must be borrowed from an external source. Such action is unmotivated. It arrives in the form of unexpected events, which further subvert the absoluteness of the Drama.

The theatricality of the dramaturgy that emerges along with the thematic triviality of the conversation play provides the first real justification for including it in that group of rescue attempts that simply refused to deal directly with the crisis of the Drama. Despite this radical critique of the conversation play, its positive aspects must not be overlooked entirely. They appear at the moment the conversation begins to reflect on itself—when the purely formal becomes thematic.

Hofmannsthal's *The Difficult Man* (1918),\* perhaps the most fully realized play in recent German literature, is constructed on the dual foundation of the conversation play and the comedy of character. It escapes emptiness and thematic quotation both because the aristocratic Viennese society it portrays lived mainly in conversation and because this conversation is deepened and transformed by Count Bühl, the title figure, who is the only modern member of that gallery of characters displayed in the major comedies. For him, conversation becomes thematic, and the problematic it generates points out the dubiousness of interpersonal communication and even of language itself.<sup>1</sup>

Everyday French is consolidated in a different manner in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952). The otherwise purely formal limitation of the Drama to conversation becomes thematic in this work: nothing but empty conversation remains to confirm the existence of those beings who wait for Godot—this deus not only *absconditus* but also *dubitabilis*. Constantly pressing toward the abyss of silence, retrieved from it over and over again but only with great effort, this hollow conversation still manages to reveal the "anguish of man without God"\* in this empty metaphysical space—a space that gives importance to whatever fills it. At this level, of course, dramatic form no longer contains any critical contradictions, and conversation is no longer a means of overcoming such contradictions. Everything lies in ruins—dialogue, form as a whole, human existence. Negativity—meaningless automatic speech and unfulfilled dramatic form—is now the only source of statement. What emerges is an expression of the negative condition of a waiting being—one in need of transcendence but unable to achieve it.

## 8. The One-Act Play

The fact that, after 1880, dramatists such as Strindberg, Zola, Schnitzler, Maeterlinck, Hofmannsthal, Wedekind, and, later, O'Neill, W. B. Yeats, and others turned to the one-act is not simply a sign that the traditional form of the Drama had become problematic. It also often represents the effort to save "dramatic" style from this crisis by presenting it as a future-oriented style.

The element of tension, of "being ahead of itself" (*Sich-voraus-Seins*, E[mil] Staiger),\* is anchored in the interpersonal events of the Drama. It is, finally, the future that is inherent in the dialectic (qua dialectic) between one human being

and another. In the Drama, the interpersonal relation is always a unity of opposites that strives toward sublation. Awareness of the necessity of this sublation, the anticipatory thoughts and actions of the dramatis personae as they try to achieve or prevent it, generates a dramatic tension that is quite different from the tension produced by the omens of an approaching catastrophe. The fact that the element of tension is anchored in the dialectic of interpersonal relations explains why the crisis of the Drama also entails a crisis of "dramatic" style in the modern theater. Loneliness and isolation, as they are thematized by Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg, certainly sharpen the opposition between individuals, but, at the same time, they destroy the drive toward the sublation of this opposition. On the other hand, the powerlessness of the individual, which Hauptmann and Zola describe from a social and Maeterlinck from a metaphysical perspective, allows no opposition and leads to the nonconflictual oneness of a fated community. In addition, the process of isolating these figures generally brings with it an "abstraction and intellectualization of their confrontations" in which the sharpened opposition between the isolated individuals is, in a certain sense, always already bridged by means of the objectivity engendered by the intellectualization.<sup>1</sup>

Chekhov's and Hauptmann's Dramas witness to the dwindling tension that results from this process. But the manner in which the one-act is called upon to help provide the theater with an element of tension that is not derived from interpersonal relations is most clearly visible in Strindberg's dramatic oeuvre. The position of the *Eleven One-Act Plays* (1888–92), written between *The Father* (1887) and the station plays *To Damascus I–III* (1897–1904), has already been touched upon.<sup>2</sup> In *The Father*, it becomes clear that subjective dramaturgy no longer corresponds with the traditional form of an unfolding action. Everything is seen from the point of view of the Captain, and his wife's struggle against him is, in the end, also staged by him. The play of oppositions operates within him and can no longer be expressed in terms of an "intrigue." Therefore, in his essay "The One-Act Play" (written in 1889, two years after *The Father*), Strindberg is led to reject intrigue and, with it, the "full-evening play."<sup>3</sup> A scene, a "Quart d'heure" seems to be the type of theater piece for people today.<sup>4</sup> This statement presumes not only a quantitative but also a qualitative difference between the one-act and the "full-evening" Drama—in the nature of the unfolding action and (in close relation to it) in the nature of the element of tension.

The modern one-act is not a Drama in miniature but a part of the Drama elevated into a whole. The dramatic scene serves as its model. This means that the one-act, although it does indeed share its starting point, the situation, with the Drama, does not share the latter's action, in which the decisions of the dramatis personae constantly modify the initial situation and move it toward a final point of resolution. Because the one-act no longer draws on interpersonal events for its tension, this tension must already be anchored in the situation. And not

simply as a virtual tension that is embodied in each line (this is the manner in which tension is created in the Drama); in the one-act, the situation itself must provide all the necessary information. Therefore, if it is to maintain a semblance of tension, it must elect a borderline situation, a situation verging on catastrophe—catastrophe that is imminent when the curtain goes up and that later becomes ineluctable. Catastrophe is a given, lurking in the future: gone is the tragic personal struggle with a destiny whose objectivity humans could (in Schelling's sense)<sup>4</sup> resist through their subjective freedom. What separates the individual from destruction is empty time, time that can no longer be filled by an action, time that encompasses a pure space stretching out toward catastrophe and within which the individual is condemned to live. Thus, even on the level of form, the one-act proves to be the Drama of the unfree. The period in which it arose was the age of determinism, and this determinism, regardless of stylistic or thematic differences, links the dramatists who seized upon it—both Maeterlinck the symbolist and Strindberg the naturalist.

Maeterlinck's one-acts, his *dramas statiques*, have already been considered. Therefore, it will only be necessary to add a comment on this "dramatic" characteristic that is produced by the situation of catastrophe. Nothing would be further from the truth than to conclude from their static condition (which Maeterlinck emphasized in programmatic fashion) and their hidden epic structure that these plays lack the tension that is the hallmark of the Drama as such. The powerlessness of the characters no doubt precludes action or struggle and, thus, interpersonal tension as well, but it does not prevent tension from arising out of the situation into which these individuals are thrust—a tension they must endure while being sacrificed to the situation. Time, stretched taut, time in which nothing more can happen, is filled with growing anxiety and reflection on death. In *The Blind* and *Home*, this tension is no longer marked by the approach of death—it too lies in the past; the timespan is simply that required for death to be discovered. And, as always when it is not filled with action, time is spatialized—like the path to knowledge in *The Blind* and like the path the message takes in *Home*. From the scenic point of view, this becomes palpable [in *The Blind*] as the diminishing distance between the blind and their dead guide (who had, from the beginning, lay in their midst) and [in *Home*] as the line separating the seemingly well protected home (in which the family, free of care, awaits nightfall) from the garden in which two men stand who know about the daughter's suicide but who hesitate to erase this boundary by communicating their knowledge of her death. And in each case, the curtain falls when the path of knowledge or that of the message has, nonetheless, been traveled to its end—when the catastrophe has been experienced and the "project" (E[mil] Stager) that created the tension has been overtaken.\*

Strindberg's one-act *In the Face of Death* (1892), which carries on the thematic line of *The Father*, is not unlike the *dramas statiques* in its basic con-

ception. It can be regarded as a transposition of the latter into the one-act form which, at this point in his development, Strindberg thought "might be the formula for the drama to come."<sup>5</sup> By examining the play in this light, we can see what distinguishes the one-act from the "full-evening play" and what allows it to stand in for the now rather problematic Drama. Mr Durand, "pension manager, formerly an official in the state railroad administration," is a "man in a female hell," as was the Captain in *The Father*. But because he is a widower, he no longer has an antagonist—a sign indicating Strindberg's renunciation of intrigue and, at the same time, the movement of the one-act, which no longer inscribes an event, toward the "analytical-technique." The "female hell" is created by Durand's daughters, who oppose him because their mother has raised them to do so. The threat of destruction does not come from them, however, but from outside his family: the pension that he manages is on the verge of bankruptcy. This shift corresponds to a displacement of the interpersonal by the objective, the refounding of dramatic tension, which will now be guaranteed by the situation rather than by a conflict between individuals. To be sure, Strindberg does not make his hero completely helpless. Durand escapes bankruptcy by setting fire to his house and taking poison so that his daughters can live comfortably from his insurance benefits. But the "action" of this one-act is not a series of incidents leading to his decision to kill himself or a portrayal of the psychological development that precedes this decision. Instead it is an exposition of family life undermined by hate and discord—an Ibsenesque analysis of an unhappy marriage, which, in the taut space of approaching catastrophe, achieves "dramatic" efficacy despite the absence of any additional new action.

In some of Strindberg's other one-acts, *Pariah*, *Playing with Fire*, and *Creditors*, for example (all of which can be termed "analytical dramas" without secondary action in the present), the moment of tension engendered by an impending catastrophe is also absent. It must be admitted that dramatic precipitation in this case originates in the impatience of the reader or spectator, who can no longer bear the hellish atmosphere that has been revealed and who, beginning with the opening exchange, has been thinking ahead to the end—an end that holds out the hope of his deliverance if not that of the figures in the Drama.

At this point, it is necessary to repeat that in Strindberg's work the one-act form was adopted at the moment of crisis. When he realized subjective Drama had surrendered the style of tension at the same time it had given up the direct portrayal of interpersonal events—after a five-year pause—Strindberg turned to the epic formulation found in the station technique.

## 9. Constraint and Existentialism

The crisis experienced by the Drama in the second half of the nineteenth century can also be traced to the forces that drove people out of interpersonal relations

and into isolation. The dramatic style called into question by this isolation survived nonetheless because the isolated individual, whose formal equivalent is silence or the monologue, was forced back into the dialogic of the interpersonal relation by an external agency. This transpired in a situation of constraint, which is the basis for most of the recent Drama that has escaped the movement toward the epic.

The historical origin of this situation can probably be found in bourgeois tragedy. In the preface to *Maria Magdalena* (1844), Hebbel indicates that "the internal element particular to [such tragedy]" is the "harsh closure with which individuals incapable of dialectic face each other in the most confined of spheres."<sup>1</sup> One wonders whether Hebbel was conscious of touching on both the crisis and the salvation of the Drama in this formulation. "Closure" and the incapacity to engage in any (interpersonal) "dialectic" destroyed the possibility of the Drama that had arisen from the decision of individuals to disclose themselves to one another.\* It did so at least as long as the "most confined of spheres" did not force open this closure, as long as these isolated individuals, isolated although chained to one another, individuals whose discourse strikes wounds in the closure of the other, were not forced to join in a second dialectic. The constraint that reigns here denies people the space they need to be alone with their monologues or silent and alone with themselves. In a literal sense, the speech of one wounds the other, it breaks through his closure and forces him to reply. Dramatic style, which the impossibility of dialogue threatens to destroy, is rescued at the very moment when, under constraint, monologue itself becomes impossible and, of necessity, turns back into dialogue.

This dialectic between monologue and dialogue is the basis for works such as Strindberg's *Dance of the Dead* (1901) (actually *The Dance of Death*) and Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba. A Drama about Women in the Villages of Spain* (1936). The longing for solitude and silence, and their impossibility in a situation of constraint, is expressed clearly by one of Lorca's heroines, Bernarda Alba, whose husband is dead, has transformed her home into a prison for her daughters, a prison of mourning. Early in the play she says that "for the eight years of mourning, not a breath of air will get into this house from the street. We'll act as if we'd sealed up doors and windows with bricks. That's what happened in my father's house—and in my Grandfather's house."<sup>2</sup> The second act shows "a white room in Bernarda's house. . . . Bernarda's daughters are seated on low chairs, sewing." Magdalena notices the absence of Adela, the youngest daughter, and goes to find her. Then:

(*Magdalena and Adela enter.*)

*Magdalena:* Didn't you say she was asleep?

*Adela:* My body aches.

*Martirio (with hidden meaning):* Didn't you sleep well last night?

*Adela:* Yes.

*Martirio:* Then?

*Adela (loudly):* Leave me alone. Awake or asleep, it's no affair of yours. I'll do whatever I want to with my body.

*Martirio:* I was just concerned about you!

*Adela:* Concerned? —curious! Weren't you sewing? Well, continue. —I wish I were invisible so I could pass through a room without being asked where I was going!<sup>3</sup>

Earlier Drama has nothing like this. The interpersonal relation and its verbal expression (dialogue, question and answer) were not painfully problematic. They were, rather, the self-evident, formal context within which the immediate theme moved. Here, on the other hand, this formal condition for the Drama itself becomes thematic. The problem that faces the dramatist at this point was first noted by Rudolf Kassner. In an early essay on Hebbel's characters, he wrote that "they really resemble people who, after spending a long time alone in solitude and silence, are suddenly expected to speak. In general, speaking is much easier for the author than for his characters at such moments, therefore, he often takes over where we would prefer to see them speak."<sup>4</sup> In this statement, Kassner already anticipates the tendency toward the epic in the Drama: the inclusion of the author, who begins to speak in the guise of the epic *I*. Later, Kassner adds that "one may say these people are born dialecticians—but they are so only superficially and against their will. First of all and fundamentally, one senses in all these characters the individual who has long been alone and silent, the individual who, although brought into the play by the author, could also be a spectator."<sup>5</sup> The dramatist's activity is once again the focus here—an activity that first becomes visible during the Drama's crisis period. It becomes even more visible in those works whose thematic constraint represents a secondary, formal expedient for enabling the drama. Constraint is justified only when it is an essential part of the lives of the individuals whose dramatic representation it makes possible. Such is the case in bourgeois tragedy, in Strindberg's marital Drama, and in Lorca's Drama of social convention. Because this constraint determines the fate of the dramatis personae, because the characters and their situation are not separated by a gap, the dramatist remains unseen. The situation is quite different in the numerous recent theatrical works in which the characters, because of a dramaturgic act prior to the Drama, are displaced in a situation of constraint that is in no way characteristic for them but nonetheless makes their entrance into the Drama possible. Such works are set in a prison, a locked house, a hideout, or an isolated military post. Reproduction of the particular atmosphere of these places should not prevent us from recognizing their formal role, however. And, as in the conversation play, the dramatic style that they make possible has more appearance than reality. The absoluteness of such accidental situations of constraint is canceled both by the dramatis personae, who point the way out of the

situation (which is external to them) back to their epic origins, and by the dramatist, who is drawn into the work as the subject of this crowding of characters. The internal dramatic tension is, as it were, purchased at the price of an epic exterior. What comes of this is Drama in a glass house. The "picture-frame" stage, which was meant to create a closed sphere for the neoclassical Drama, one that could reflect a reality limited to interpersonal relations, becomes a wall fending off the epic aspects of the world outside, becomes a retort: what occurs within is no longer a reflection, it is a transformation that takes place because of the dramaturgic "experiment in compression." This dramaturgy is infected by the artificiality of such constructions; too much is invested in making it formally possible for its thematic space to remain undamaged. This attempt to rescue dramatic style can be artistically justified only when it can free itself from its artificiality. This is exactly what seems to take place in those dramatic works produced by existentialism.

Existentialism, as a Weltanschauung and as literature, is an effort, however problematic, to create a new classicism aimed at preserving naturalism. Limitation to the human was essential for both the neoclassical spirit and the neoclassical style: neoclassical philosophy was humanistic; the notion of freedom was central to it. Neoclassical style was perfected in those artistic genres whose formal principles were based completely on the human being: tragedy and sculpture.

Naturalism is always a late phase in the process of reification. Around 1900, before they broke with their own formal principles, which date back to the Middle Ages, the novel and painting were naturalistic. But the Drama, when it became naturalistic, began to resemble the novel, and its settings became genre paintings.

Naturalism's central category is milieu—the quintessence of everything alien to the individual and to which a hollow subjectivity must finally submit.

Existentialism attempts to return to the neoclassical by cutting through the controlling power that milieu exercised over the individual. It radicalizes the alienation. Milieu becomes situation, and, from that moment on, the individual, no longer bound to milieu, becomes free—but within a situation that is simultaneously his own and alien to him. Free, not merely in the private sense, he first confirms his freedom by deciding for the situation, by binding himself to it, in accord with the existential imperative of engagement.

The affinity between existentialism and the neoclassical depends on this reestablishment of the notion of freedom. It is also the condition that seems to make the rescue of dramatic style possible. Indeed, existential dramaturgy stands in close proximity to those efforts that employed the situation of constraint to save the Drama from contamination by the epic. Owing to a strange agreement between the formal elements of such an effort and the thematic intentions of the existential dramatist, form, which prior to this had been empty, was able

to make a formal statement and, thereby, to release the dramaturgy of constraint from its artificiality.

This artificiality is rooted in the pretextual, dramaturgic displacement of the characters in a situation of constraint and in the accidental nature of this situation. It is because of its intellectual presuppositions, however, that existentialism demands precisely this displacement and this accidental quality for its thematic—the essential strangeness of situation and the perennial human condition of "having been thrown"—can, from the dramaturgic point of view, only become evident in an action that (according to existentialism) is marked by these general features of human existence. The essential strangeness of every situation must be transformed into the accidental strangeness of the situation represented. Because of this, the existential dramatist does not set people in their "normal" surroundings (as the naturalist set them in their milieu), instead, he removes them to a new context. This displacement, which, as it were, repeats the metaphysical "throw" as an experiment, allows the *existentia*,\* that is, "Dasein's character of Being" (Heidegger), to appear in estranged form as the situationally determined experience of the dramatic personae.

Most of Jean-Paul Sartre's works follow this basic idea. In his first play, *The Flies* (1943), the action of the classical Electra fable is transformed into an existential experiment. Having grown up far from home, Orestes returns to the place of his birth as a stranger, just as every individual, according to existential doctrine, enters (is added to) the world. To cease being a stranger in Argos, Orestes must confirm his a priori freedom—by binding himself, by freely surrendering his freedom. He takes vengeance for Agamemnon's death and rids the city of the flies/furies by becoming a murderer and, as a murderer, by drawing the flies to himself. *Morts sans sépultures* (1946) shows six men from a resistance group in prison; *Dirty Hands* (1948) displaces a young man from the bourgeoisie into the communist party. The most complete balance between dramaturgic and existential displacement, where the profound relationship between the dramaturgy of constraint and existential dramaturgy becomes clear, is, however, to be found in *Huis clos* (1944).

The title (*No Exit*) is already an indication that the play experiments with hermetically sealed space. The scene opens in a "Second Empire style" drawing room in hell. That a profane work could be set in hell and depict it as a drawing room can best be explained in terms of the "inversion method" elucidated by Günther Anders in the work of Aesop, Brecht, and Kafka.<sup>6</sup> Through this secularization, Sartre suggests that life in society is hell, but he inverts the predicate and shows that hell is a "drawing room in Second Empire style."\* It is in this drawing room, shortly before the curtain falls, that his hero makes the key statement of the play: "Hell, is other people."\* This inversion estranges a now problematic *existentiale*, being-with-others, which is the basis of social life, and

which makes the drawing room possible. But in the "transcendental" situation of hell, it is experienced as a new condition.

Formally speaking, this inversion, too, touches on the crisis of the Drama. When being-with-others becomes problematic as an existentielle, the interpersonal relation, the formal principle of the Drama, is called into question. But inversion is also the means of rescuing the dramatic style. Of course the interpersonal relation remains questionable as thematic material, but, thanks to the constraint imposed by the closed "drawing room," it is formally unproblematic. The essential difference between this work and the rest of the dramaturgy of constraint consists of the fact that, here, hell is not a purely formal structure used to make the Drama possible. On the contrary, what is expressed through the inversion is the hidden nature of that very societal form which would otherwise destroy the possibility of the Drama.

The transposition into a "transcendental" situation signifies more than just a distancing from human existence as such; it allows a backward glance at the particularity of that which is entirely one's own. Thus, *No Exit*\* continues the tradition of the "analytical drama" but without suffering from the errors found in Ibsen's works. Sitting in judgment on one's own past no longer needs to be motivated by some external event (e.g., the arrival of a family member), because it is already contained in the scene of the action. And the backward glance can hardly be called epic here: the past becomes an eternal present for the dead. In this respect, *No Exit*\* is linked to another tradition, one that may have been founded by Hofmannsthal's *Death and the Fool*. The retrospection that death makes possible gives adequate expression to the process whereby one's own life becomes an object of examination. Hofmannsthal's text gives shape to the life-denying quality of reflection, the "mind overly awake"<sup>8</sup>: on the threshold of death, the life of reflection becomes the object of reflection—a lyric reflection, to be sure. This motif haunts the literature of the twentieth century in several guises and can be found in boulevard pieces as well as in high art. In the *Incommu d'Arras* (1935), A[rmand] Salacrou allows a suicide to relive "thirty-five years in a fraction of a second," enacted by the people who had been determining factors in his life. And in Th[eodor] Däubler's expressionist manifesto, *The New Standpoint* (1916), one finds the following lines: "According to a popular saying, when someone is hung, he relives his entire life in the final moment. Now that's expressionism!"

## IV. Tentative Solutions

### 10. I Dramaturgy: Expressionism

The first meaningful direction taken by the dramaturgy of the new century and the only one that, up to now, has been embraced by an entire generation, did not itself find an answer to the dramatic crisis out of which it arose; instead it borrowed from that great solitary figure who had distanced himself as far as possible from the Drama during the final years of the previous century. In terms of their form, the plays of German expressionism (ca. 1910–25) are indebted to Strindberg's station technique. What is striking here is that the model could be supplied by the work of an author who, more than anyone before him, made private use of the stage by filling it with the fragments of his own life story. It is not simply that Strindberg, by confining himself to his own *I* (for which he had found an adequate form in the "station drama"), had already broken out of the particular into the general; the element of anonymity, of repeatability, and, in a certain sense, of the formal was already contained in his self-portrait, in the picture of the solitary figure. Important evidence for this is his name in *To Damascus*: The Stranger. Because this name equates Strindberg with "Everyman," it is simultaneously more personal and more impersonal, more unequivocal and more ambiguous than a fictive personal name. This is similar to the dialectics of individuation presented in Th[eodor] W. Adorno's *Minima Moralia*. "For however real [the individual] may be in his relation to others, he is," according to Adorno, "considered absolutely, a mere abstraction."<sup>9</sup> The *I* becomes "ever richer as it increases the freedom with which it unfolds itself and reflects"