SURREALISM IN THE THEATER

OF JEAN COCTEAU

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1961
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to determine which of the fourteen plays of Jean Cocteau, well-known contemporary literary figure and member of the Académie française, are surrealistic. In order to do this, Cocteau's position in modern French literature and some of his ideas on poetry will be discussed. The major themes of his theater as stated by critics will be listed and pointed out in the analyses of his surrealistic plays. Cocteau's surrealistic devices of plot, language and staging will be shown as fitting in with the larger definition of surrealism rather than with any specific contemporary literary movement. Finally, the surrealistic plays of Cocteau will be discussed as his most original and important contribution to French literature.

Only Cocteau's fourteen major plays are included in this study, although three of his films are closely related to three of these plays. Cocteau's development as a writer will not be discussed, and as little reference as possible will be made to his life or to contemporary history. No reference will be made to Cocteau's prefaces to his plays.

1"Orphée," "L'Aigle à deux Têtes," and "Les Parents terribles."
This study was undertaken at this time because Cocteau is nearing the end of his literary career, therefore a comprehensive view of surrealism in his theater is tentatively possible. Also, there are few longer specifically literary studies of Cocteau's theater, and even fewer studies emphasizing the surrealist nature of his plays.

Neal Oxenhandler's *Scandal & Parade: The Theater of Jean Cocteau* is an excellent study of Cocteau's theater, but often relates material in the plays to his life. Pierre Dubourg's *Dramaturgie de Jean Cocteau* does not stress surrealism.

Jean Cocteau's entire literary output is a rich and controversial field for study and criticism, but of all his *Poésies*, his theater is the most interesting and original and the one for which he is best known.

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2 *(New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1957).*

3 *(Paris: Bernard Grasset Editeur, 1954).*
CHAPTER I

COCTEAU'S THEATER IN MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE

Jean Cocteau has one of the supreme qualifications of youth; he remains "virtually indefinable." Throughout his half-century-long career as a writer he has been identified with so many different literary and artistic movements that he has not been taken seriously enough or studied with enough thoroughness; his role in the public mind is a light clownish one; he is regarded as a skillful pasticheur without deep convictions. Because of him a new word has even been added to the French language: cocteau, meaning, hypocrite. Yet, despite his reputation, Jean Cocteau was received into the Académie française on October 20, 1955. His acceptance was interpreted at least once as being just another rebellion on his part. He supposedly decided to become a candidate to the Académie because it was conventional

1Oxenhandler, Scandal &..., p. 3.


to attack it—therefore, the unconventional thing to do would be to join it.

Cocteau himself freely admits that his "successive sincerities" must be puzzling and that he must be hard to classify. "I am well aware what a man risks who belongs neither to the right nor to the left. He is called an opportunist." Since Cocteau first began to write he has realized how he must look to the public and to the critics, who are only too glad to condemn his indefinability for,

... being in this state makes a man universally suspect. He escapes all classification or registration. It is as though he had run away, without his papers or military identification card... This composite status, which is so difficult for an onlooker... to understand, and so trying to the sufferer himself, leads to both scandal and disaster.

However, Cocteau's stature as a writer has not suffered from his diverse career as a literary figure.

All the traditions of French art of the last seventy-five years meet in him and fertilize a marvelously ready mind, a little dry, and Parisian par excellence, a mind that might have been born

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5Jean Boorsch, op. cit., p. 76.


in the eighteenth century under the sign of Voltaire. But he feels himself sufficiently rich to throw all these traditions overboard and to play the part of the prodigal son.

This is not to say, of course, that the different styles and moods of Cocteau's work have all been equally successful or equally suited to his talents.

Cocteau is extravagantly praised by some of his admirers. One claims that Cocteau's position in all the domains of French art has been more active and vital than that of any other single artist (1) and that Cocteau's activity between the two wars and since then is much more in evidence and more influential today than the work of André Breton, for example. The entre deux guerres period could be characterized as the period of subjectivism, for at that time several literary movements emphasized the importance of subjective art. They taught that the self creates its own world, the artistic expression of which produces a more valid world than the world of common sense.

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10 Surrealism, Futurism, and German Expressionism.
11 Oxenhandler, Scandal & ..., pp. 16-17.
Cocteau, perhaps more than any other artist, is the spokesman of the *entre deux guerres* period. Cocteau was sympathetic with, but not a member of, the Dadaist movement in 1920, but characteristically broke away and became its bitter enemy shortly thereafter. However, despite Cocteau's refusal to pledge himself permanently to any school, "many a name may rightly be associated with surrealism which never was actually on the select list of the initiates." (A member of Breton's surrealist group, that is). Of course, it is not necessary officially to belong to the Surrealist movement in order to write surrealistically.

Cocteau's literary endeavors include poetry, novels, stories, films and criticism as well as plays. He has also made drawings, written ballets and designed stage settings. His theater, however, is his most important contribution to French literature. "Through him the surrealist tradition penetrated the French theater. Though his primary importance lies in his authorship, yet he represents a synthesis of all the tendencies which have made the French art theater, since the first World War, the most vital theater movement

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The theater of Cocteau can best be described as surrealistic, although strictly speaking he is not a Surrealist with a capital S. His theatrical heritage comes partly from Romanticism in its lyricism, its use of the supernatural, its mixture of comedy and tragedy. It is partly from Symbolism in its use of mystery, fantasy and dream-like settings. In his most original works his strange world of poetry can be compared with that of Maeterlinck, Giraudoux or Rostand for in their plays also the characters move in obedience to the laws of a fantastic destiny. Surrealism itself is related to Romanticism because of the revolutionary attitude and liberation from tradition it demands. Both the surrealist artist and the romantic artist are subjective; they seek in themselves the rules and form of their art. Part of the surrealist movement in modern art is the rehabilitation of commonplace objects and situations in order to give new meaning and perspective to modern life; Cocteau in his theater tries to create a new poetic language which will reveal the hidden meaning of objects, or which


16 Oxenhandler, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

will make words appear new.

Since Cocteau considers himself first of all a poet, no matter what the literary form, and, since all of his plays are classified as poésie de théâtre, it is useful here to examine his ideas on poetry. He writes that poetry "implies a predisposition to the supernatural. The hypersensitive atmosphere in which it envelops us sharpens our secret sensibilities and causes us to put out feelers which probe into depths which our official senses ignore . . . . Poets live on miracles. They happen on the slightest pretext a propos of anything, great or small. Objects, desires, sympathies lace themselves spontaneously under their hands. For their sake the incoherencies of fate take on a rhythm of their own."

Sensitivity toward and receptiveness to the supernatural and to mystery imply a surrealist attitude as well as the rehabilitation of the commonplace which Cocteau describes as one of the aims of poetry: Poetry "unveils in the fullest sense of the word. It reveals naked, and lit by a light which arouses the mind from its torpor, all the surprising things by which we are surrounded and which our senses registered mechanically." What the poet should do for the

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20 Ibid., p. 158.
reader is "to show him the things which his mind and eyes pass over every day, but from such an angle, and at such a speed that he seems to be seeing them and experiencing them emotionally for the first time." The everyday world hides many wonders waiting to be uncovered. Mockingly or seriously, the surrealist artist applies himself to the task of interpreting the world he sees. "Take a commonplace, clean it, polish it, and light it so that it produces the same effect with its youth and freshness and spontaneity as it did originally, and you will have done a poet's work." Or a surrealist's work.

If Cocteau were to be identified with any particular esthetic, it would have to be with poetic idealism. Like the surrealists, he is trying to depict a personal ideal world behind the obvious world, and like them, his works are full of unexpected verbal and ideational relationships. "The poet himself knows his voyages but he does not succeed in convincing his public that he ever understood them. Under the guise of one story or another, Cocteau often returns to the ancient solitude of the poet whose speech is not understood." It may be, of course, that his speech

21Ibid.
22Ibid., p. 159.
23Xenhandler, Scandal & Parade ..., p. 30.
cannot be understood. "Committed to the world of reality
and the world of art in equal degree, the poet lives at the
very point where tradition and anarchy enter into conflict." Cocteau's tendency toward touches of anarchy in his art
implies a surrealistic attitude. If "the poet is a man who
frees himself from the world by making images, by entering
into an oneiric world where the freedom of language is
equivalent to the freedom of action," then Cocteau's poésie
de théâtre is surrealistic, because the surrealistic state
of mind is one in which opposites no longer conflict, where
there is an identity of matter and spirit. In this realm of
the imagination, freedom of language can be equivalent to
freedom of action, and free association of words and ideas
can be the result of the poet's search for himself on all
levels of consciousness.

According to the surrealists, a work of art should
stand by itself. Cocteau also says "Le rôle de l'artiste
sera donc de créer un organisme ayant une vie propre puisée
dans la sienne, et non pas destiné à surprendre, à plaire
ou à déplaire, mais à être assez actif pour exciter des sens
secrets ne réagissant qu'à certains signes qui représentent
la beauté pour les uns, la laideur et la difformité pour les

25Pucciani, p. 17.

26Neal Oxenhandler, "Poetry in Three Films of Jean
Three words— invisibility, style blanc, angelism— are associated with Cocteau's writing. A brief discussion of these terms may clarify some of Cocteau's artistic methods. "Invisibility" is a poetic term Cocteau applies to himself and to his works.

Je suis sans doute le poète le plus inconnu et le plus célèbre. Il m'arrive d'en être triste... mais si j'y réfléchis je moque ma tristesse. Et je pense que ma visibilité constituée de légendes ridicules, protège mon invisibilité, l'enveloppe d'une cuirasse épaisse et étincelante, capable de recevoir impunément les coups.  

That the "real" Cocteau should be invisible is hardly surprising after over seventy years of an extremely diverse life. Very likely his invisibility is in part willfully induced by his constant public affirmations of "l'insolite de sa position."

"Jean Cocteau est bien caché. Derrière son masque, la houppé de cheveux gris, à visage de Picasso, qu'il ôte le soir pour dormir, qu'il abandonnera pour mourir, et devient lui-même, cet adolescent aigu, riche d'un presque profond tourment. Caché encore derrière sa légende, son personnage——

27 André Fraigneau, Jean Cocteau par lui-même (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957), p. 120.
28 Ibid., p. 113.
29 Ibid., p. 120.
Ces injures qu'il appelle, provoque—dont il souffre, dont il saigne (avec désinvolture), qu'il lui arrive de mériter, mais moins que notre sévère et constante amitié. . . . . Dans tout cela où est Cocteau? . . . . Où aller chercher Cocteau? Dans ce qu'il a écrit. Là est son secret, là sa blessure, et là sa vérité." 30

Cocteau's invisibility is still relatively safe even in a careful study of his works, for there mystery, which can also be called invisibility, is the recurring metaphor presented by means of Cocteau's particular style. "His invisibility is assured by the tempo of his writing, by its swiftness, its precision, and bareness, by all the traits of this writer's artistic asceticism which is of a spiritual order. His language corresponds to his spirit. He so organizes his words and so projects them that they seem never at rest, always poised, balanced in mid-air where timing is of the greatest importance." 32

This description leads to the second term applied to the writing of Cocteau: "style blanc."

Cette mystérieuse osmose poétique des mots et de l'être entraîne les uns et les autres à une identité qui, dans toute la mesure où ils coïncident provoque ce qu'on appelle, à propos de Jean Cocteau: le style blanc... Il y faut, non pas la simplicité, mais bien au contraire, une haute dose de chimie. Car ce n'est que de la condensation et de la complexité que naissent la lumière froide et les revanches de la lucidité. Il est remarquable que tant de feux divers... aboutissent à n'être perçus que sous une visibilité claire et comme en altitude.

Cocteau's style, then, is concise, letter-like and unadorned. He himself writes "I have few words in my pen. I turn them over and over." His greatest mannerism as a writer is to reduce mystery, by means of his style blanc, to dimensions of every-day reality. Cocteau describes his method as "a very simple way of saying something complicated." In this respect Cocteau is not surrealistic, for his work is pondered and re-written, groping for artistic form instead of being uncontrolled automatic writing.

"Angelism" is another word associated with Cocteau. As understood by a critic it is a system of contradictions closely relating the human and the divine. The supernatural

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34Cocteau, The Journals of,..., p. 39.
35Pucciani, p. 21.
36Cocteau, A Call to,..., p. 115.
37Oxenhandler, Scandal & Parade ..., p. 17.
is presented by means of the commonplace, simply, without artificial ornamentation. When Cocteau first defined this doctrine it seemed to be an innovation, but during the fifty years of his career he has moved from innovator and experimentalist to classic figure. He has become a stylist who, because he is copied by his age, represents it. "Not that the true poet is ahead of his epoch, or above it. He is it."

Cocteau explains his idea of angels by saying that poets can use without commentary terms which do not mean the same thing to their readers as to themselves. Hence, angels to Cocteau are "midway between the human and the unhuman. An angel is a brilliant young animal, full of vigor and charm, plunging from the seen to the unseen with the powerful gestures of a diver, and the thunder of a myriad wild pigeon's wings. The radiant swiftness of its movements hides it from our view. Were it to slow down, doubtless we should perceive it . . . . Death has no meaning for this magnificent specimen of a sporting monster. It strangles mortals, and impassively tears out their souls. I imagine it to be something between a boxer and a sailing ship. . . ."

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39 Cocteau, A Call to . . ., p. 128.
40 Ibid., p. 141.
The angel as envisaged by Cocteau is a surrealistic creature, being supernatural and belonging to the world of fantasy, the world of children.

If Cocteau did not invent this type of being, he was the first writer to describe the inviolability of its character and those traits which have been called 'angelic' because of the absoluteness and their purity, traits which are lost in adulthood with the practices of adjustment, compromise and search for security. Destiny grants to these adolescents for a precariously limited number of years a life of grace and ease and ingenuous enthusiasm. They are the race of children opposed to the race of grownups and their fantasies, when prolonged through the years of adolescence, appear blasphemous and provocative and evil.41

Such angels in different guises often appear in the theater of Cocteau.

Cocteau's creative energies have led him to write in many different literary genres and to apply his talent to drawing and to the ballet. "Poète de la fantaisie et du feu d'artifice, poète naif et divers, Cocteau a mis à peu près tous les masques possibles et impossibles."42 He delights not only in changing genres but in displaying his versatility within each one. "... it is my custom, as soon as my flock has come back to the fold, to scatter them again."43 Cocteau's versatility has been made much of.

43Cocteau, A Call to ..., p. 114.
"Ce poète ne s'enferme jamais dans un genre, et semble n'en préférer aucun. Il s'attache avec un bonheur égal aux vers, au théâtre, à l'essai, au roman, au cinématographe." But his works of greatest importance are his plays. "Like a true citizen and genius of the Renaissance . . . . Jean Cocteau is a man of many parts and diversified accomplishments . . . ." But his greatest role, that on which I believe his fame will have its surest foundation, is playwright. Cocteau is essentially a man of the theatre. In his research for a poésie de théâtre, Cocteau is contributing to the solution of an artistic problem: a renewal of poetic vitality in the theater. He begins with a total poetic conception and realizes it in the complex form of a play.

According to Eric Bentley, "France is the only country in the western world where the theater can be considered a living art form. Cocteau's position as a French playwright makes him a figure of first importance in the contemporary

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45 Fowlie, Age of , p. 120.
Cocteau himself has expressed a preference for the theater. "Since those evenings of my childhood when my mother and father left for the theater, I have had the 'red and gold' sickness. I have never recovered." His innovations, departures from tradition and his originality have never ceased to provoke controversy.

Il n’est pas domaine privé, qui, offert en public, ne soit l’objet de la convoitise, de l’erreur, ou de l’indignation collective. Or le poète est par nature celui qui manifeste au dehors son être le plus intime. S’il ajoute à cette audace d’en faire 'Parade' selon certaines exigences et pentes de son caractère, ainsi qu’il est notamment pour tous ceux dont le théâtre est une des formes les plus affectées de l’expression, le résultat ne peut immanquablement provoquer que les réactions les plus violentes.

Obscured by scandals and by changes in literary fashions, Cocteau’s theater is not easily classifiable. His six most original plays, however, may be described as surrealistic in the larger sense of the word. The term surrealism "is useful but it is inaccurate . . . it had always existed and had not yet been named," writes Cocteau. Surrealism in general has a much broader scope than the

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48 Pucciani, p. 11.
50 Lannes, p. 32.
twentieth century literary movement of the André Breton group. "L'état d'esprit surréaliste, il vaudrait mieux dire: le compartement surréaliste est éternel." This permanent surrealism has been called a far-reaching attempt to change many areas of human endeavor besides literature and painting—psychology, philosophy and even man himself.

Surrealism in the larger sense emphasizes childhood. The attitude children have toward the world is considered valid and desirable because they are capable of great enthusiasm and because their view of the world is original and unrehearsed. They readily accept absurdity and give free play to the imagination. Another important element of this surrealism is censorship of traditional ideas and forms of expression, which leads to the frequent use of satire and mockery. Surrealism in the larger sense may be called idealistic, for it claims that there is a higher reality behind the seen world. Since each artist's conception of this higher reality is different, there is much room for mystery in surrealist works of art.

The surrealistic artist is free to create a miracle

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53Peyre, p. 34.
54Lemaitre, Chapter V.
in his work, and to employ magic. One interpretation of this development of surrealism is that the role of the writer has gradually become identified with the role of the priest or miracle worker. The poet especially has become a man endowed with supernatural vision, the effect of which, in his work, evokes witchcraft. "The poet then is the priest who causes the miracle by a magical use of words, by an incantation which he himself does not fully understand. And the work thus brought into being is a mystery which can be felt and experienced without necessarily being comprehended." 

Cocteau, with his emphasis on miracle in his ideas of poetry, and in the occurrence of miracle in his work, fits admirably, in this respect, into the definition of surrealism in its larger sense. He is doing the same thing the surrealists are doing: showing the truer than true, the higher reality behind the seen world. "Cocteau's manner has slowly imposed itself on the world. It is a mixture of classical restraint and romantic fantasy, sharply conditioned and influenced by the techniques of the surrealists. He strives constantly in his works to achieve the universality of myth and to incarnate those elements of poetry and fiction

56 Mauriac, p. 30.
which are the artistic needs of every age."

The surrealists "forced the locomotive of the human spirit off the rails of logic and reason and lured the imagination to the heights where it can soar freely and meet the unknown away from the mediocre and dull province of what is known and understood rationally." The surrealist world is highly imaginative and subjective, as is the world Cocteau exhibits in his plays. "This is a universe dedicated to adolescence, to dreams and angels, to ancient, medieval and modern legendry, in which a surrealistic perspective commands the elaborate horizons of reason. A subjective world, perhaps, but a world of authentic poetry and myth implying a mysterious commitment to reality. Distortion is the order of this universe, Cocteau's tribute to rational reality, while the cause of this distortion is to be found within the autonomy of a controlled and disciplined personal vision."

The world in Cocteau's theater is a distortion of the ordinary world, such as might be seen through the eyes of a child, for, as he says, "nothing comes between the eyes of a child and what he looks at."

57Pucciani, p. 18.
58Peyre, p. 49.
59Pucciani, p. 15.
60Cocteau, The Journals of ..., p. 89.
Jean Cocteau rend plus transparente la réalité, plus spirituel les visages, plus aigus les caractères. Il simplifie pour alléger; il ment pour surprendre par ce détourn la vérité . . . . le monde nous apparaît soudain dans la fraîcheur terrible de sa nouveauté—tel qu'il se montrerait au spectateur désintéressé, surgi d'une autre planète.

Cocteau's characters do not live in a real world. Surrealistically distorted, they lack classic or naturalistic fullness and roundness. They are rather personifications of a single obsession, vehicles of ideas, representations of personal symbols. Anything can happen in this world. Indeed, miracles and coincidences are the order of the day. Referring to Apollinaire's wound which had been prophesied by a di Chirico painting, Cocteau writes "that is how events take place in our world. Everything unfolds by a system of mathematics unrecognized by mathematicians and which belongs to poets. All things considered, nothing totters in it. And everything totters from beginning to end."

61 Mauriac, pp. 75-76.


64 Cocteau, The Journals of . . . , p. 84.
It is a rigorously orderly world, but the key to the order or the system remains a mystery; beyond a certain point nothing more is revealed. No particular system of philosophy can be derived from Cocteau's world; it is a purely poetic one requiring not so much to be understood as to be felt. "The poet is a believer. In what? In everything."  

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65 Cocteau, A Call to, p. 165.
CHAPTER II

PRINCIPAL THEMES OF COCTEAU'S THEATER

Before analyzing Cocteau's surrealist plays individually, his approach to and the general themes of his theater must be considered. On the one hand he is accused of having become a "lost soul" whose plays are pretexts for dressing-up games, full of an "awful vacuity" and a "deliberate but in no way justified meaninglessness." ¹ But surrealistic writing cannot have the same meaning for everyone, and, indeed, may have no meaning at all for some, an inevitable result of art that is subjective, non-traditional, sometimes absurd and on several levels of consciousness. On the other hand, a scholar writes "Perhaps more than any other writer in France, Cocteau has contributed to the creation of the modern myth." ²

What is a myth? There are several accepted definitions: a myth explains some phenomenon or belief; a myth exists only in the imagination; a myth may be arbitrarily

² Pucciani, p. 15.
invented; a myth is usually concerned with gods or god-like things. A more literary definition by Aristotle is that myth is plot or narrative, the irrational or intuitive as against the systematically philosophical. In modern criticism myth refers to an area of meaning shared by religion, folklore, anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis and the fine arts. It is sometimes opposed to history, allegory, science, philosophy, and truth. A myth may also be the pictureable intuitive against the rational abstract, or a concrete story signifying and illustrating certain aspects of human destiny.

What is meant by "modern myth" is an even more thorny problem. Some modern myths found in Cocteau's plays are the alienation of the poet from society because he is no longer understood—he speaks not for the group but for himself; security is impossible in a world where change is the order of the day and miracles take place as a matter of course; an intelligent man with poetic feelings cannot adapt to a materialistic, unimaginative society; man is a victim of machines.

Despite the difficulties of defining myth and modern myth, critics say that Cocteau is sensitive to the modern

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4 Boorsch, p. 78.
consciousness. He has "ce mystérieux privilège d'être à la fois secrète et en constant rapport avec les mythes, c'est à dire, avec l'expression de la conscience universelle, des temps et des nations. Ses dieux sont cachés, mais il a su faire les siens aussi ceux de la Grèce et ceux du Moyen-Age chrétien, en se payant également le très grand luxe moral d'en inventer au monde d'aujourd'hui d'autres, inexplicables et dangereux."

But Cocteau's presentations of myths are far from unexplainable. Indeed, he has been accused of being too precise, of handling the myths he employs with too much levity so that they no longer have the effect of symbol and irreality. One is inclined to forget that they are myths. This transposition of illusion and fantasy into every-day "reality" is one of the characteristics of Cocteau's surrealism, and the extent to which he carries this method is part of his originality, as we shall see later.

It has been said that Cocteau interests himself in true and false instead of good and evil or beautiful and ugly, that he attacks truth in the same way the surrealists

5Lannes, p. 13.
6Boorsch, p. 79.
7Lannes, p. 90.
attacked realism, but this brings up the problem of defining generic terms like truth and reality. It is more clear to begin with the immediate and the precise. Cocteau's manner is to present acts and facts. Therefore, if in a play like Orphée two of the major themes are death and poetry, there is a character named Death, and certain lines are specifically designated "poetry" in the play. What keeps his plays from remaining on such a simple level of truth is that they take place in an atmosphere between dream and everyday life, in an intermediate zone between the real and the unreal (or what is called the unreal), in a land of enchantment. "Cocteau ne sait pas de quoi est fait le temps." A brief discussion of Cocteau's major themes is possible here, but they will not be clearly perceived except in the analyses of the plays. In general, the major themes of Cocteau's theater are death, poetry and the poet, liberty, love, destiny, time, invisibility and machines.

In common with Surrealism, Cocteau has the themes of death ("le surréalisme vous introduira dans la mort qui est

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8Fowlie, *Dionysus*, p. 80.

9Raymond, p. 259.

A central Cocteau theme is the identification of love and death—love is unattainable except through death. Liberty is treated chiefly as the problem of alienation from and persecution by society, especially for the poet. Cocteau is obsessed with machines which he uses surrealistically to approach the themes of enchantment, magic, miracle and mystery.

A critic writes of Cocteau's use of death that death for him is a daily experience by means of which Cocteau attempts to know truth and to understand objects and events in his daily life. This seems rather presumptuous. Death has been a favorite theme of writers in all ages and in Cocteau's case it would be better to say that death is an every-day event in the daily lives of his characters. Cocteau himself writes that death is a kind of poetry we feel always within ourselves but which we cannot know. "Imagine a text of which we can never know the continuation, because it is printed at the back of a page of which we can only read the

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12Peyre, p. 41.
13Crosland, p. 164.
14Oxenhandler, Scandal & ..., p. 8.
15Fowlie, Dionysus ..., p. 87.
front . . . . the idea of the mysterious 'underneath' makes every one of our actions, words, even our slightest gestures, seem as though they were suspended in a void . . . ." This is a fascinating and poetic view of death but may safely be attributed only to a playwright's characters; it should not be considered as his personal philosophy.

The surrealist hero is the unadaptable man, the wanderer, the dreamer, the idealist, the perpetrator of illogical action. This description fits Cocteau's heroes who dialogue "with themselves" in an effort to know destiny and to know themselves. They are involved in a psychological rather than philosophical dilemma, in an adventure they transmit by means of poetry. They long for and flee from commitment, trying to make the world over for themselves but never really succeeding; in other words, Cocteau "places his characters in a world and then proceeds to make the world uninhabitable for them." Of course this does not apply to all the characters in Cocteau's plays. There are other more decidedly surrealistic characters: a horse, a magician, an

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16Cocteau, A Call to . . . , p. 162.
17Fowlie, Age of . . . , p. 18.
19Ibid., p. 35.
20Ibid., p. 28.
ostrich, a fairy, a lion, the Sphinx, two phonographs, and others.

The plots of Cocteau's plays consist of his characters' reactions to the surrealistic furniture of his theater: machines, dreams, animals, personified ideas. The worlds thus created exist by means of an inner logic not related to the every-day world at all, or by means of a distorted version of the operation of the natural or realistic world. These surrealistic worlds are each poetic in a different way.
Orphée, Cocteau's surrealistic adaptation of the Orphic legend, retains the original theme of the magic powers of language but the magic is of a gratuitous, surrealistic character. The poetic phrase around which the play is constructed appears meaningless at first but actually summarizes the chief event of the play. Whereas in the original legend Orphée charmed animals, in this play the poet is charmed by a surrealistic animal. As before, Orphée descends into hell to negotiate with Death, but here Death also comes to Orphée's villa. Anachronistic characters and devices as well as the intervention of the author add to the surrealism of this play.

Orphée takes place in Thrace. Orphée, a renowned poet, has retired to a country villa in order to devote himself to a horse which dictates poetry to him by means of tapping the alphabet with its feet. Eurydice is jealous of the horse, as Orphée lavishes all his attention and affection upon his discovery. Appropriately enough, the horse taps out "Merci." Orphée departs for Thrace to enter one of the horse's phrases in a poetry contest to be held by the Bacchantes. This enigmatic but important phrase is "Madame
Eurydice reviendra des enfers."

During his absence, Eurydice confides her distrust and fear of the supernatural horse to Heurtebise, a glazier who comes every day to repair the glass panes that she has purposely broken. He is standing on a chair and remains in the air for a full minute while Orphée, who has momentarily returned for his birth certificate, uses the chair. Henceforth Eurydice distrusts Heurtebise as well as the horse. He has brought a poisoned sugar-lump for the horse, sent by Aglaonice, the head of the Bacchantes. Aglaonice and Orphée are enemies, for she dislikes to have any Bacchantes leave the group, and Eurydice did so in order to marry. Eurydice wishes to send a message to Aglaonice, who has sent her own envelope. Upon licking the envelope to seal it, she discovers she has been poisoned and sends Heurtebise for Orphée. But it is too late.

Death, an elegant young woman, enters through the mirror with her two assistants, Azraël and Raphaël, dressed as two surgeons. Death gives the poisoned sugar to the horse and he disappears. Then the trio sets to work with short wave radio equipment and mysterious dialogue, and finally the soul of Eurydice, in the form of a dove, is released. They depart again through the mirror, accidentally leaving behind Death's rubber gloves.
Orphée, upon his return with Heurtebise, at first thinks Eurydice is sulking but is heartbroken and repentant when he finds that she is really dead. Avowing his desire to follow her to hell, he takes the advice of Heurtebise to return Death's gloves to her and to obtain the release of Eurydice as a reward. By means of the gloves, Orphée enters into the mirror. The postman delivers a letter while Heurtebise waits for Orphée.

Orphée returns almost at once with Eurydice, who has been returned to him on condition that he not look at her again; if he does, she will die again. After several narrow escapes, Orphée looks at her by accident; she disappears, and he, thoroughly annoyed with the troublesome condition of his wife's return, pretends he did it on purpose. He discovers the letter left by the postman; it warns him that the Bacchantes mean to kill him because the first letters of the words in the phrase of poetry he submitted to the contest spell an insulting word.

At this moment the mob of Bacchantes arrives at the villa. Orphée refuses to save himself, believing that the horse has tricked him. He says he wishes to join Eurydice. He is stoned to death by the mob; only his head is left. Eurydice comes out of the mirror and guides the invisible body of her husband to hell. Upon the arrival of the chief of police and his clerk, Heurtebise puts Orphée's head on an
empty pedestal. The chief of police questions Heurtebise. It seems that there was an eclipse of the sun. The townspeople, thinking the sun angry for their having reviled Orphée, one of her former priests, wish to atone by honoring the poet. Of course his body cannot be discovered.

Heurtebise replies unsatisfactorily to the questioning until suddenly the head of Orphée replies in his place, giving the name, age, address, etc., of the author, Cocteau himself. Heurtebise disappears into the mirror. Finally the two officials notice his absence but cannot imagine how the glazier escaped, the villa being surrounded by policemen. They leave, taking Orphée's head with them.

The last scene shows Orphée, Eurydice and Heurtebise in heaven; the poet says grace, thanking God for having removed the spell of the horse from him, for having permitted him to save his wife because of his love for her, for the presence of their guardian angel, Heurtebise, and for poetry.1

Orphée is the key to Cocteau's attempt to explain the nature of man and poet, and his belief that life is only a short space of time between one death and the next.2 In this play the poet is opposed to his society which rewards him for his poetic innovations by murdering him. This is the

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1Jean Cocteau, Orphée (Paris: Librairie Stock, 1927).
2Crosland, p. 80.
tragedy. The words that the poet considers poetry come from a mysterious horse (in which Orphée finally claims to recognize the devil) and happen to be a joke, or an insult, according to the tribunal of the poetry contest. These words—"Madame Eurydice reviendra des enfers"—also predict one of the highlights of the play: the descent of Orphée into hell in order to retrieve his wife whom he had neglected in favor of the horse until she died. Eurydice predicts this: "je mourrais que tu ne t'en apercevrais pas." However, after the return from hell, Orphée tires of the difficulty of never looking at his wife and pretends not to be too upset when she disappears after he has glanced at her accidentally. Yet later he welcomes his fate (death) and lets himself be killed in order to join her, rather than run away from the mob to save his life.

Orphée in one sense represents the difficulty of marriage for a poet. There are jealousies on either side: Eurydice is jealous of the horse who occupies all her husband's attention because the horse is a great poetic discovery. Orphée is jealous of Heurtebise, since every day Eurydice breaks a pane of glass in order to be able to employ the glazier, who incidentally is very fond of her. The final scene, in which the household including all three major

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3Cocteau, Orphée, p. 30.
characters is shown in "heaven" is unsatisfactory. There is no real solution to the problem of either the marriage or the problem of the ultimate nature of poetry. Orphée in the end seems to have given up the horse as a source of poetic inspiration and returned to being a celebrated and popular poet, following the wishes of his society.

Orphée's prayer of thanks to God appears artificial and forced. No "gods" except poetry and love are even considered up to that point, and the mention of God in this conventional way spoils the tone of the play. This scene in heaven, however, illustrates the theme that love is only possible in death, for now the household of Orphée is happy and peaceful and the presence of Heurtebise, instead of provoking jealousy and suspicion, is seen as beneficial; he is their guardian angel.

"Le pouvoir magique de langage, telle est l'essence de l'orphisme, tel est un des themes préférés de Jean Cocteau." 4

The problem of the alienation of the poet from society is clear in this play. Orphée is under the spell of the horse, whose magic language he believes to be poetry. But Orphée is the only one who considers these phrases poetry. To Eurydice they are meaningless, ridiculous and a little frightening. To the judges of the poetry contest they are

4Lannes, p. 51.
interpreted unjustly as spelling a vulgar word. The poet is alone in his battle. But the poet does not arrive at a definition of poetry. When Eurydice maintains that "Madame Eurydice reviendra des enfers" is not really poetry, Orphée replies "Sait-on ce qui est poétique et pas poétique." He is defending with his life something irrational and supernatural, which he can only justify to himself by intuition. As it turns out, the poetry is a prophecy, and Orphée becomes so involved with Death and Eurydice that he forgets about poetry until the last scene where he says to God, "Nous vous remercions de m'avoir sauvé parce que j'adorais la poésie et que la poésie c'est vous." From this we must believe that Orphée is now in heaven because of his love for poetry and that poetry is divine. Of course it may be said that Orphée loved not only what he considered poetic words but also poetic deeds, such as descending into hell in order to obtain the return of Eurydice, and allowing himself to be stoned to death by the Bacchantes in order to rejoin her and to prove his belief in what he considered poetry.

The element of time in Orphée is presented in three different ways. The setting is neither modern nor ancient. One rather expects it to be ancient Greece since Thrace is

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5 Cocteau, Orphée, p. 24.
6 Ibid., p. 119.
named as the locale, but the costumes are modern, not necessarily Grecian. The atmosphere is at times that of antiquity (the Bacchantes, the priests of the sun and moon, the conception that certain people are privileged to enter and return from "les enfers"), and at times modern (the police commissioner and clerk, the birth certificate, the short wave equipment and surgical attire of Death and her assistants). There are also magic or surrealistic elements: the horse, the mirror as the gateway to hell, the role of Heurtebise as an angel who is acquainted with Death, the traffic between the villa and "les enfers," the poetic riddle, the mention of Aglaonice as a magician, the role of Death as an elegant, beautiful woman. This mixture of time gives the play an atmosphere of taking place anywhere at any time.

Another aspect of time is illustrated by the interval of Orphee's sojourn behind the mirror. This interval in which the postman delivers the letter is a scene identically repeated twice, with a short interval curtain between, representing the idea that our conception of time is applicable only to our world and that in other worlds it may be very different. Death says of one of her assistants: "Azraël est à mon service depuis plusieurs siècles." When Heurtebise tells Orphée he will wait while Orphée descends into hell,
Orphée says "Je serai peut-être long."

HEURTEBISE: "Long... pour vous. Pour nous, vous ne ferez guère qu'entrer et sortir."

The last scene in heaven, in which the characters have hardly changed and are still at the villa, illustrates Cocteau's idea that life is only an interval between one death and the next. Eurydice has died twice. Orphée believes his life to have smelled of death before his discovery of the horse and he dies again at the hands of the mob. Heurtebise, because of his knowledge of death must be dead already. Yet they are all alive again—or dead again—in heaven. The conclusion then is that death and life are not as definite as is commonly thought and that it is our attitude toward time which fixes them. Cocteau writes "Nothing fascinates me more than the angle which the slow-motion machine forces out of everything... Since our centuries, in terms of God, last the space of a wink, our picture is taken in slow motion."

Life as we see it is in slow-motion and only the poet realizes and believes that time is fiction. In Orphée's case, his poetic belief in hell, in the horse, in death as a person,

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as well as in supernatural time, causes these things to exist. The chief of police, on the other hand, does not believe in miracles. "Je ne crois pas aux prodiges. Une éclipse est une éclipse. Une table est une table. Un inculpé est un inculpé. Procérons par ordre." He refuses to accept any supernatural explanations for actions even when they happen in his presence. Therefore, for him, as for all insensitive and unimaginative people, magic, mystery and surrealism do not exist. Obviously, the poet is bound to have a difficult time in such surroundings.

Although Orphée is a tragedy, there are numerous comical lines in the play. Colette in her days as a dramatic critic said Cocteau’s plays reminded her of Shakespeare because no French dramatist before Cocteau except Molière had excelled in such a blending of moods. Tragedy, comedy, absurdity, mystery, magic, banality—all these can be found in Orphée. The author does not even hesitate to make fun of himself. The head of Orphée gives Cocteau’s vital statistics (in guise of Heurtebise’s) to the chief of police who believes the glazier to be a vagrant, for, of course, he cannot give his age, address, place of birth and so forth, since he is an angel.

11Cocteau, Orphée, p. 115.
12Crosland, p. 159.

HEURTEBISE: J'ai . . . (Il hésite.)

LE COMMISSAIRE: (Il interroge en tournant le dos, les yeux au ciel, remuant le pied, comme les examinateurs.) Je suppose que vous avez du moins un âge . . .

LA TETE D'ORPHEE: Dix-huit ans.

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LE COMMISSAIRE: Né a . . .

LA TETE D'ORPHEE: Maisons-Laffitte.

LE COMMISSAIRE: Maison quoi?

LA TETE D'ORPHEE: Maisons-Laffitte, deux f, deux t.

LE COMMISSAIRE: Puisque vous me dites votre lieu de naissance, vous ne refuserez plus de dire votre nom. Vous vous appelez . . .

LA TETE D'ORPHEE: Jean.

LE COMMISSAIRE: Jean comment?

LA TETE D'ORPHEE: Jean Cocteau.

LE COMMISSAIRE: Coc. . .


LE COMMISSAIRE: C'est un nom à coucher dehors . . .

In this same scene the chief of police says he needs a bust of Orphée, but upon being shown Orphée's head he says

13Cocteau, Orphée, pp. 111-114.
"Il n'est pas ressemblant," and tells the clerk to record
"Tête prsumée d'Orphée."

There is a double play on words in Orphée. The word
spelled by the initial letters of "Madame Eurydice reviendra
des enfers" almost appears in another place. At the beginning
of the play the horse is dictating and has tapped out M, E,
R, Orphée forbids Eurydice to laugh. The horse assures
Orphée that he has counted correctly.

ORPHEÉE: (Au cheval) Mer. Mer. . . et après mer? M. E. R.,
(Le cheval frappe. Orphée compte.)

The next two letters, however, are C and I.

We have seen from the analysis of Orphée Cocteau's
treatment of the themes of love, death, liberty, time, poetry,
and machines. Love for Orphée and Eurydice is not possible
except after death; even the realization of his love for
Eurydice does not take place for Orphée until Death has taken
Eurydice. Death may very well be a person like the elegant
young woman (it is quite easy to visualize "la mort" this
way), actually invisible to us because we do not recognize
her as being Death. We are accustomed to thinking of death
as a skeleton with a shroud and scythe, but, as she says,

14 Ibid., p. 108.
15 Ibid., p. 109.
16 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
"si j'étais comme les gens veulent me voir, ils me verreraient. Et je dois entrer chez eux sans être vue." This particular conception of Death is as valid or as invalid as the conventional shrouded skeleton with scythe, or any other.

Orphée is relatively free as long as he plays the conventional role of famous poet (or famous figure) but as soon as he discovers something new he is condemned and executed by society, in this case the towns people led by the Bacchantes. "Poets who break with tradition will be prosecuted." Just what tradition Orphée is breaking with is not named, but it is unimportant. The poet must suffer alienation and misunderstanding for his poetic imagination, at any time in any place.

Time is a fiction which exists in an infinite number of measurable forms. It may be changed by objects like the mirror or by machines like the short wave equipment. Death is an aspect of time which exists for us because we cannot see the whole picture of our lives unfolding in slow motion the way God can.

Poetry is not defined in Orphée. Rather, the idea is presented that poetry may be almost anything and that to make a definition of poetry is too limiting. Poetry must be subjective; the phrases of the horse were appreciated only

17 Ibid., p. 58.
by Orphée. Also, poetic inspiration may come from almost anywhere. Certainly the horse is a ridiculous figure and hardly dignified enough to be the source of poetry for a great poet like Orphée. But this is a prejudice poets, especially the surrealistic poets, should not have.

The horse is as worthy a source of inspiration to Orphée as anything else and he knows this. He says to Eurydice that last week the horse dictated to him "une des phrases les plus émouvantes du monde. Je me propose de la mettre en œuvre pour transfigurer la poésie. J'immortalise mon cheval et tu t'étonnes de l'entendre me dire merci. Ce merci est un chef-d'œuvre de tact. Et moi qui croyais . . . . (Il enlace le cou du cheval.)" The horse does not actually dictate the poetry because his code is interpreted by Orphée after his own fashion.

In addition to the sugar lump which caused the horse to disappear, and the short wave equipment, other magic objects in this play are Death's rubber gloves. These allow Orphée, a living person, to enter into the mirror to the realm of the dead.

The only machines in Orphée are Death's short-wave equipment which she needs to be able to change space-time so that she may touch objects in this world. This machine

\[18^\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 24.}\]
is magical for it performs a supernatural feat, or rather, it does something which is not yet commonly done. All scientific objects are magical and mysterious to those who are not familiar with the explanations for invisible happenings. Science, especially machinery, is what might be called "modern magic." This is a poetic conception of contemporary knowledge and an appropriate one for the twentieth century; it is one of the themes Cocteau has used for more than thirty years.

Besides Death, her assistants and paraphernalia, and the horse, the head of Orphée which speaks, another surrealistic figure in this play is Heurtebise. He is an angel, but not the same type as the angel described by Cocteau in his theory of angelism. Heurtebise can "fly"—that is, he is able to remain suspended in the air without help. He appears whenever a pane of glass is broken in Orphée's villa as if he knows he is needed. The glass he carries on his back in frames may well be his wings, and his profession of glazier relates him to Death. Instructing Orphée for his journey into hell, he says "Je vous livre le secret des secrets. Les miroirs sont les portes par lesquelles la Mort va et vient. Ne le dites à personne. Du reste, regardez-vous toute votre vie dans une glace et vous verrez la Mort travailler comme des abeilles dans une ruche de verre . . . .
ORPHEE: Où avez-vous appris toutes ces choses redoutables?
HEURTEBISE: Vous savez, les miroirs, ça rentre un peu dans la vitre. C'est notre métier.

"La poésie et la mort, voilà donc les deux thèmes d'Orphée. Tout le drame de la destinée du créateur est là . . . . Mais la pièce n'est certes pas dogmatique . . . . théories sont traduites en images théatrales . . . . Les personnages y obéissent à la règle des fées, mais il faut noter avec quel réalisme Jean Cocteau consigne l'irréel. La poésie est précise. Elle fuit le vague et les nuages, chers aux faux poètes. . . . . la pièce entière n'est que le drame de la poésie et de ceux qu'elle possède."

The other surrealist play that takes place in ancient times is La Machine infernale, taken from the story of Oedipus.

The plot of the original story is retained but distorted to include three entirely new points of emphasis: Laius' ghost attempts to warn Oedipe, the Sphinx momentarily loves Oedipe, and the coincidences of Oedipe's temporary blindness, his scars and the belt of the Sphinx should have served to warn him. The numerous near misses of Oedipe's

\[19\]Ibid., pp. 71-72.
\[20\]Dubourg, pp. 40-43.
fate, however, make his destiny seem even more inevitable than in the original version. *La Machine Infernale* gives more behind-the-scenes detail: who the Sphinx really is; and what really caused Oedipe to guess the riddle; what really happened on Oedipe's and Jocaste's wedding night.

The play opens with La Voix recounting the life of Oedipe; the prediction and fulfillment of his parricide and incest are a machine conceived of by the infernal gods for the destruction of a man.

The first act takes place on the ramparts of Thebes. Two soldiers on guard discuss the ravages of the Sphinx among the young men of the city. The younger soldier believes the victims of the Sphinx have died of love; the elder thinks the Sphinx is a vampire, for all the corpses are wounded in the neck. The commander wants to know who has informed the queen that the ghost of Laius appeared on the ramparts. This phantom appeared to the soldiers telling them to inform Jocaste and Tiresias with all speed. During his last appearance the ghost became excited, saying he knew something he shouldn't know.

Jocaste and Tiresias arrive, she full of complaints about her scarf trying to strangle her, blaming Tiresias for the sorry state of her kingdom. She is upset because of a recurring nightmare: a baby turns into sticky dough in her arms and she cannot rid herself of it.
Interviewing the younger soldier, Jocaste thinks of her own son. She is told of Laius' ghost who actually appears at this moment, but now no one can see or hear him. Even when touching him the soldiers are not aware of his presence. Jocaste becomes more impatient than ever with Tiresias, whom she has disrespectfully nicknamed Zizi. If she had a son, he would guess the riddle! Moreover, what would be so bad about being married to a young man? As she leaves the young soldier steps on Jocaste's scarf, almost strangling her.

After the queen and the priest have left, Laius becomes visible again; he says a young man is approaching Thebes and under no circumstances... Never finishing the statement, he disappears for the last time. The soldiers decide against warning the queen again; let royalty take care of itself.

La Voix tells the audience at the beginning of Act II that the encounter of Oedipe and the Sphinx took place at the same time as the first act. Meanwhile the Sphinx, on a hill near Thebes, prepares to meet Oedipe. She and the "jackal" Anubis converse. The Sphinx hopes the gates of the city are finally closed for she is tired of killing. Anubis admonishes her to obey their gods. Anubis has the head of a jackal because that is the way people imagine the god of death. If the pair were capable of being moved by their
victims, they would not have this duty.

A mother with two children passes by and converses with the Sphinx, thinking the latter is only a young woman who has lost her way! The Sphinx is variously believed to be a were-wolf, the scape-goat of the authorities of Thebes, and a convenient oracle for the priests. Just as the woman leaves, her little son insists that this lady is the Sphinx.

The Sphinx vows that she will no longer kill, that a young man will appear whom she will love, he will guess the riddle and her duties on earth will be ended. Oedipe arrives; he thinks she is a young woman here at this late hour because she is curious to see the Sphinx. (A girl would be safe from the mysterious monster.)

Oedipe tells the Sphinx he has been looking for the Sphinx for a month in order to undergo the test and gain the promised reward of glory and fortune. The Sphinx, however, has a different idea of happiness: she wants to be loved. Oedipe tells her about his life at Corinth and how he left after having heard the words of the oracle. The Sphinx suggests he marry a woman younger than himself but Oedipe prefers the glory of having conquered the Sphinx. Confident of being able to solve the riddle, he gives the Sphinx a sash which will enable him to recognize the young woman, should she wish to see him after he has become King.

Oedipe recounts how he once accidentally caused the
death of an old man, but it wasn't his fault. He feels sure he will guess the riddle, for he has had a superior education.

The Sphinx then "leads" Oedipe to the Sphinx. He closes his eyes and counts to fifty while she climbs on her pedestal, complete now with wings and claws. Having Oedipe under her spell, she makes him look ridiculous for he cannot fight her charm. She describes her power and ties him with an invisible thread; all the while Oedipe resists her, pleads for mercy, calls for his mother.

The Sphinx asks the riddle and answers it herself. Oedipe does not take the riddle very seriously. "C'est trop bête!" he cries when the solution has been given. After freeing Oedipe the Sphinx asks the riddle again in the presence of Anubis. Of course Oedipe gives the correct answer and joyfully runs off.

This ingratitude infuriates the Sphinx but Anubis refuses to run after him. Now the Sphinx hates Oedipe and is delighted to hear from the jackal the future fate of Oedipe, for she is actually Nemesis. Oedipe returns for Anubis' body. The Sphinx and Anubis assume their divine forms. Oedipe goes off toward Thebes congratulating himself on his victory.

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Jocaste and Oedipe are so tired when after the celebrations of the day they are finally alone that they fail to see the trap fate has prepared for them, says La Voix at the beginning of Act III, which takes place in Jocaste's bedroom. Full of ambitious plans for the future, Oedipe remembers only vaguely that Anubis had said Nemesis would be present when he learns his true relationship to Jocaste.

Oedipe is persuaded by Jocaste to receive Tirésias for it is customary for the high priest to bless a royal marriage. Oedipe is opposed to Tirésias, however, because he is a rival power in the kingdom. Refusing to believe that his marriage displeases the gods, Oedipe claims he had always wanted a wife older than he. But when he looks into Tirésias' eyes and sees his happy future up to the fatal point he is momentarily blinded.

The young king is only a little disconcerted when he is told by Tirésias that a young woman (Nemesis, of course) left a sash for him. Ominous claps of thunder are heard but there is no storm in the vicinity. The guard is asleep. Jocaste becomes confused and says this young guard from the first act resembles Oedipe whom she did not yet know. This leads Oedipe to fabricate a story about his encounter with the Sphinx, but Jocaste falls asleep and does not hear. They finally decide to nap, and both dream; Oedipe dreams
Anubis, in the form of Jocaste's animal-skin rug, is mocking him. Jocaste dreams again of the dough-baby.

Oedipe's screams for help awaken Jocaste who comforts her husband by babying him. He inadvertently calls her "mother." Jocaste sees the scars on his feet, which Oedipe explains as a hunting accident. Jocaste in turn explains her fright by telling the true story but attributing her own actions to a foster sister.

Outside a drunkard makes fun of the difference in age between the newlyweds, but is soon quieted by the now-awakened guard. Jocaste looks at herself in a non-existent mirror while Oedipe sleeps peacefully.

Seventeen years pass in a twinkling. In Act IV a plague has beset Thebes, La Voix tells us, and now Oedipe will know real unhappiness after having known false happiness. This act takes place in a courtyard. A messenger from Corinthe reveals that Polybe has died. Oedipe is happy until he learns he is only the adopted son of the King of Corinthe. Tirésias and Jocaste try to keep Oedipe from finding out more about himself, but the King insists. The messenger tells him he was found in the woods, his feet pierced and tied together. But Oedipe still does not believe the oracle, for he thinks he didn't kill his father; his victim was just an old man. Upon hearing his description, Jocaste hangs herself with her fateful scarf.
Oedipe finally learns the truth of his origins and blinds himself with Jocaste's gold brooch. Completely humiliated and unhappy, he accepts Tirésias' divining wand to guide him.

The dead Jocaste appears, seen only by Oedipe and Tirésias because they are blind; she and Antigone lead away the blind king, who from now on belongs "au peuple, aux poètes, aux cœurs purs." The infernal machine has accomplished its purpose.

The principal themes in La Machine Infernale are the infernal machine (destiny), death, the gods, and time. This play is the opposite of a suspense play; the Oedipus legend is already well-known, and La Voix summarizes the plot at the beginning of each act. But this makes the play no less interesting. The conception of an infernal "machine" acting upon the life of a man with complete fatality despite a number of possible escapes from fate makes La Machine Infernale an original and surrealistic adaptation of the Greek legend.

The infernal "machine" is not an actual physical machine but the idea of destiny working like a machine. This metaphor is translated into modern mythology and described in mechanical terms a modern audience can easily understand.

\[22\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 217.\]
"Regarde, spectateur, remontée à bloc de telle sorte que le ressort se déroule avec lenteur tout le long d'une vie humaine, une des plus parfaites machines construites par les dieux infernaux pour l'anéantissement mathématique d'un mortel." Here the purpose of a machine is seen as gratuitously destructive. Oedipe was destined to sin and to be punished for no discoverable reason.

The infernal gods responsible for this machine are unknown but are evidently higher gods than Nemesis and Anubis, for the latter says, "Les dieux possèdent leurs dieux. Nous avons les nôtres. Ils ont les leurs. C'est ce qui s'appelle l'infini." There is an infinite hierarchy of gods, some knowing more and others less. Anubis can see what Oedipe's fate will be, whereas Nemesis cannot. The oracle which predicts parricide and incest also knows Oedipe's destiny, so it is a kind of god. All the gods seem to direct human life more or less mysteriously. Their sum total could be called destiny.

Of the gods that are actually characters in the play, Anubis, the god of death, is a sensible god who knows there is nothing to do but obey. Nemésis, the goddess of retribution, modernized as "le criminel à la mode," is more

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23 Ibid., p. 15.
24 Ibid., pp. 81-82.
complex for she has some of the characteristics of a young woman, the form she has on earth. But in the end the goddess part of her nature wins over the human part, and she works her magic spell on Oedipe, as she must. When Oedipe runs to Thebes and to his awful destiny she says, "Les pauvres, pauvres, pauvres hommes . . . Je n'en peux plus, Anubis . . . J'étouffe. Quittons la terre."

A human being cannot escape his destiny. There were many chances for Oedipe to be saved from his fate; the warnings of Laius' ghost, the love of the Sphinx for him, Jocaste's story of the infant abandoned in the forest, Oedipe's scarred feet, the appearance of the Sphinx in Tiresias' temple and her message of the sash. Oedipe might have suspected the man he killed was his father, and he might have taken the precaution of marrying a younger woman. But all the warnings were unheeded and served only to close the circle of fate more tightly. The infernal machine was perfect, and so delicately balanced that although at times Oedipe was a hair's breadth from escape, he did not avoid his fate.

There are two kinds of love in La Machine Infernale. One is that of the Sphinx for Oedipe. Weary of killing, she wishes to be released from this duty but this can happen only

\[26\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 135}.\]
if someone answers her riddle. She expresses her wishes to Anubis: "Un jeune homme gravirait la colline. Je l'aimerais. Il n'aurait aucune crainte. À la question que je pose il répondrait comme un égal. Il répon-drait, Anubis, et je tomberais morte." But this love is actually a whim, and when she finds that Oedipe loves only glory and does not even consider loving her, she thinks like a goddess again and hates him. The fact that she revealed the riddle to him did not help Oedipe; ironically, it actually furthered him on his fatal way to Thebes.

One feels it is with some relief that Oedipe finally finds out Jocaste is really his mother, and in the last act her relationship as mother, only suggested in Act III, wins completely. JOCASTE: "Je te panserai à la fontaine." Oedipe (abandonné) "Mère..." The only really striking presentation of love in this play is Nemesis' so-called love for Oedipe. This impossible love is only a part of the principal idea of the play, destiny.

The chronological time of La Machine Infernale is at first traditional or classical (the first and second acts take place at the same time but in different places). Suddenly seventeen years elapse, dividing the first three acts, or the winding up of the infernal machine, from the

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27Ibid., p. 96.
28Ibid., p. 216.
fourth act, or the ultimate function of the machine.

An entirely different conception of time is attributed to the gods. This is explained by Anubis: (Il montre la robe de Sphinx) "Regardez les plis de cette étoffe. Pressez-les les uns contre les autres. Et maintenant, si vous traversez cette masse d'une épingle, si vous enlevez l'épingle, si vous laissez l'étoffe jusqu'à faire disparaître toute trace des anciens plis, pensez-vous qu'un niaud de campagne puisse croire que les innombrables trous qui se répètent de distance en distance résultent d'un seul coup d'épingle?... Le temps des hommes est de l'éternité pliée. Pour nous il n'existe pas." Only the gods are conscious of eternity; a mere man cannot even see into his own future except by means of an oracle.

The characterization of the goddess Nemesis as an attractive young woman is reminiscent of Death in Orphée but the Sphinx has many more human traits, due to her terrestrial form. Her role as the Sphinx is only a role; she must dress up for it, putting on wings, claws, and gloves. Her eternal form is not seen; it can only be guessed for all the audience sees is a large veiled shape. The Sphinx is capable of love, hate, jealousy, and anger, as is a normal woman. But she has superhuman powers; she causes Oedipe to become

\[29\text{Ibid.}, \text{ pp. } 123-124.\]
incapable of movement by means of her will, and proceeds to recite a long mysterious enchantment to him: "... ce n'est ni par le chant, ni par le regard que j'opère. Mais, plus adroit qu'un aveugle, ... plus subtil que la foudre, ... plus lourd qu'une vache, ... plus incorruptible qu'un juge, ... plus nocturne que l'œuf, ... ; je sécrète, je tire de moi, je lache, je devide, ... j'enroule de telle sorte qu'il me suffira de vouloir ces noëuds pour les faire et d'y penser pour les tendre ou pour les détendre; ... bouclé comme la mer, la colonne, la rose, ... machine comme les décors du rêve, invisible surtout, invisible et majestueux comme la circulation du sang des statues ... .

The speech that follows is a type of litany consisting of phrases beginning with je: "... je calcule, je médite, je tresse, je vanne, je tricote..." designed to make Oedipe even more conscious of the Sphinx's power. She seems to be describing how she is making Oedipe powerless, or taking away his humanity: "... te rende pareil au bras inerte sur lequel un dormeur s'est endormi."

Jocaste's dream is actually a sickening version of the incest that is to occur. She recounts the nightmare to

30Ibid., pp. 116-117.
31Ibid., p. 117.
32Ibid., p. 118.
Tiresias, who is supposed to be able to interpret dreams.
(However, either he will not or cannot interpret this dream.)

"Je suis debout, la nuit; je berce une espèce de nourrisson.
Tout à coup, ce nourrisson devient une pâte gluante qui me coule entre les doigts. Je pousse un hurlement et j'essaie de lancer cette pâte; mais ... oh! Zizi ... Si tu savais, c'est immonde ... Cette chose, cette pâte reste reliée à moi et quand je me crois libre, la pâte revient à toute vitesse et gifle ma figure. Et cette pâte est vivante.
Elle a une espèce de bouche qui se colle sur ma bouche. Et elle se glisse partout: elle cherche mon ventre, mes cuisses. Quelle horreur!

The gods of course are immortal. Only the terrestrial forms invented by Cocteau die (Anubis' dead body is carried off by Oedipe). But in this play mortals also have a certain life after death. Laïus returns as a ghost, but is seen only by those who believe in spirits. Jocaste returns after her death but is seen only by those who are blind. She is not a ghost:"(Jocaste morte, blanche, belle, les yeux clos. Sa longue écharpe enroulée autour du cou)"
Death, then, may be only a transition or another level of life. Oedipe's father and mother try to protect him and care

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33Ibid., p. 45.
34Ibid., p. 213.
for him after they are dead, although ironically enough they attempted to kill him when they were alive. Death is described to Oedipe by Jocaste as an amoral state of being: "Les choses qui paraissent abominables aux humains, si tu savais, de l'endroit où j'habite, si tu savais comme elles ont peu d'importance." 

The surrealist elements, then, in *La Machine Infernale* are the gods Nemesis and Anubis in more or less terrestrial form, the easy transitions between life and death, the mystery of time for man, the use of dreams to predict and explain events in the play, and destiny as a machine. There is also quite a bit of counting aloud; the gratuitous enumeration of figures is a favorite device of Cocteau.

"*La Machine Infernale* est le modèle de l'oeuvre où tout est compté, où le thème choisi est épuisé dans ses ressources, où le moindre détail concourt à l'utilité de la démonstration, où la situation est complètement exprimée dans le langage de la scène. Le pouvoir de fulguration propre à Cocteau, ce visionnaire lucide, n'a jamais mieux joué qu'ici." 

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37*Dubourg*, p. 61.
The two other Cocteau plays based on Greek legends, Oedipe-Roi and Antigone, are not surrealistic in construction. These plays are translations and adaptations of Sophocles. They were "operated on." The only thing that could be considered surrealistic is the element of time in these plays. They are both extremely condensed versions, containing only the essentials of the plot. Everything necessarily happens at a high rate of speed; no sooner is an event mentioned than it has already happened. Surrealistic staging effects in Antigone and Oedipe-Roi will be discussed in a later chapter.

40 Fowle, Dionysus ...., p. 78.
CHAPTER IV

THE PLAYS FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO MODERN TIMES

Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde is based on the legends of the Holy Grail, an appropriate source for a surrealistic adaptation as these legends themselves emphasize mystery, miracle and magic. The quest for the Grail in this play is the quest for truth, or, the effort to be honest with oneself. The persons who see the Grail are those who do not ignore what is going on around them. They accept the facts presented by daily life because they have ceased to escape from "reality."

Act I. Artus' chateau at Camaalot is bewitched, some think by the Graal. The magician Merlin, however, is the cause of the enchantment. He has sterilized the country because he needs the forces of nature for himself. At the court he confuses everything by substituting a young demon in his service named Ginifer for several of the characters. (This invention of an invisible important character without the aid of a machine is unique in Cocteau's theater.)

1G. Lanson and P. Tuffrau, Manuel illustre d'histoire de la litterature francaise (Buenos Aires: Librairie Hachette, 1945), Chapitre II.
the beginning of the play Ginifer "is" Gauvain. Merlin had saved the young demon from imprisonment in a bottle and is now using him for his own purposes. Ginifer, however, is lighthearted and gay and likes to make fun of everything. His affectation of pronouncing the letter "x" in a word as "s" (esplicer) endangers the success of his impersonations of characters using normal pronunciation. But Merlin is really pleased with the effect the false Gauvain has had on Artus by being the opposite of the real one—frivolous, witty, fun. Merlin instructs his servant further: if Galaad, who has just arrived, succeeds in sitting in the siège périlleux, the magician will fill the room with fumes and have a voice instruct the knights to follow the Graal. The false Gauvain will immediately propose the quest of the false Graal.

The false Gauvain persuades Artus to let him sit at the Round Table dressed comfortably as he is, like a valet of the hounds! The king consults Guenièvre the queen and Blandine and Ségramor, his children about this new fashion. Of course they disapprove of such lack of ceremony. Blandine who is engaged to Gauvain, suspects her fiancé is not himself. Ségramor assures her she is only being tested in her love. But Blandine suspects Merlin of causing not only the change in Gauvain but the change in her father and in the kingdom as well. The queen tries to allay her daughter's
doubts, for the false Gauvain is doing her a favor by distracting Artus from her affair with Lancelot.

Lancelot, after eighteen years of loving Guenièvre, begins to feel guilty and thinks the enchantment of the chateau is due to his adulterous love for the queen. He also regrets not having searched for adventure for so long and is unwilling to blame the Graal for the misfortunes of la Bretagne. He is determined to clear up the mystery of the enchantment; he too suspects Merlin, having been previously warned of just such a creature.

Artus tells everyone he has a surprise: a box from the magician king Beaudemagu, a knight of the Round Table.

At the approach of Galaad, the men seat themselves at the Round Table. Galaad surprisingly knows the names of all the absent knights. Artus opens the mysterious box, revealing La Fleur qui Parle, a flower which has the power to record conversations, and the power to erase them if a leaf is removed! Beaudemagu greets the new knight by means of the flower; Galaad promises to return it to him. He identifies himself as Galaad dit Blancharmure and promises to go to Gorbenie, there to find the Graal. Artus reads him the ritual prophecy of the Round Table (the knight Très Pur will find the Graal and its truth will be revealed). Galaad sits in the siege perilleux without receiving a wound. The false Graal speaks; all the knights, despite Artus' objections,
are wild to seek it. Galaad suspects foul play but Merlin insists Galaad could not be deceived. However, the forebodings of the queen in regard to the departure of the knights induce Artus to give Merlin carte blanche—anything to stop the quest. The magician arranges the first stop at the Château Noir.

Galaad tells Merlin he knows his identity and methods and promises to unmask him. Merlin becomes desperate upon hearing Galaad is the son of Lancelot, for here is a formidable adversary. (Lancelot and Galaad have the blood of fairies in their veins). It is Ginifer who will be the cause of their downfall, however, for during Merlin's ritual departure from Camaalot the servant allows La Fleur qui Parle to record all the magic words, to spite his master. Then Ginifer climbs on Merlin's shoulders, they recite the magic verses, and "fly away."

Act II. Lancelot and Ségramor arrive first at the Château Noir, controlled by Merlin. Doors open by themselves, furniture moves without help. Ségramor dreams his good-luck falcon Orilus was killed here; in the dream the falcon tried to warn him of something. Lancelot dreams the same thing, after which he plays and wins a game of chess from an invisible opponent who leaves in a huff. Ségramor dreamed the game; the opponent, dressed entirely in scarlet, had the blood of the dead Orilus on his glove.
Ginifer in the form of Guenièvre arrives. Lancelot, astounded at her inexplicable coarseness and loudness, attributes the queen's shocking behavior to Gauvain's evil influence. She must be under a spell. When the false queen mocks her lover he is at his wits' end, especially when she produces a table covered with food from the wall by means of an incantation. She drinks wine (which Guenièvre never does) and gets drunk. She loves Galaad now, she says; Gauvain let her peek through the keyhole while the Knight of the Grail was dressing!

Lancelot, enraged and ashamed is leaving when the voices of the fairies tell him she is the false queen and he should slap her. He does so; Ginifer rolls on the floor in a fit.

Galaad explains the queen's spell to Lancelot. But Merlin is still determined to ruin Lancelot, and sends a message by bat to Artus, revealing the adulterous affair. Ségramor and Galaad return with Gauvain, who had been imprisoned in a tower by Merlin. The three knights return to Gamaalot by means of the ritual recorded by La Fleur qui Parle.

Promising to change Ginifer back to himself in order to catch the horses Galaad has let loose, Merlin instead avenges himself on his disobedient servant by "changing" the false queen into a horse.
Act III. At Camaalot Artus has received Merlin's message. Distraught, and angry with his wife, he has her place a note on her bedroom door telling Lancelot to come in. Believing Lancelot to be on the quest, Guenièvre readily agrees. Artus will sleep in his wife's room.

Artus questions Blandine to see if she has noticed that Lancelot prefers one of the children. (Segramor is actually Lancelot's son, instead of Artus'). Alone, the king hears imaginary incriminating conversations between the two lovers.

Lancelot enters Guenièvre's bedroom. The trap has worked. Artus, furious, kills his friend and then temporarily loses his mind. Lancelot, awakened briefly, hears the fairies telling him to take Guenièvre with him. She describes to Artus how she is joining Lancelot and dies.

As Artus grieves Blandine and Segramor come in to tell him the good news of the disenchantment of Camaalot. The false Galaad (Ginifer again) tells Artus the whole thing was a farce and he (the false Galaad) has been acting on the orders of Lancelot. But Galaad causes his substitute to disappear and recounts the true story to Artus. Merlin could not get away with having his servant impersonate a Knight of the Grail!

The spell has ended and life has begun again at Camaalot. But life will be hard. Artus exiles Merlin and
Ginifer. Galaad shows Artias how his children have "become" Lancelot and Guenièvre. Everyone who remains is able now to "see" the Graal. It has come to Camaalot because each person is at peace with himself. Only Galaad cannot see the Graal, for it is he who causes others to see it. He must leave them; he is only a poet and cannot become attached to anything. The play ends with everyone rejoicing at the return of life to Camaalot. The birds sing that one must pay for everything in life.

Enchantment, magic, mystery, falseness or rather, truth (life) as opposed to falseness (death) are the principal themes of Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde. The plot proceeds from the initial enchantment on Camaalot due to the presence of Merlin (a magician disguised as Artus' astrologer) "qui étérilise une contrée par sa seule présence et qui a besoin pour vivre de toutes les forces qui se distribuaient jadis en herbe, en arbre, en vignobles." Merlin's enchantment is that he has caused life to leave Camaalot, thereby creating an atmosphere of falseness or death. "Ce château ne vit plus, il dort. Ce château dort debout et nous sommes ses rêves. La vie est morte, morte, morte."

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2Jean Cocteau, Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1948).
3Ibid., p. 84.
4Ibid., p. 94.
In such an atmosphere Merlin is able to carry out his intention to remove all life from Artus' court by using Ginifer to impersonate Gauvain, Guenièvre and Galaad. These false characters are believed by the others because under the spell of falseness anything seems possible. Some are suspicious but are powerless to act. Artus himself falls completely under the spell of the false Gauvain and the rest of the knights blindly follow the quest of the false Graal. Even Lancelot becomes restless as la Bretagne continues to remain "dead" under Merlin's spell. "J'ai assez de cette lumière morne, de ces campagnes stériles, sans jour, sans nuit, où ne survivent que les bêtes féroces et les rapaces, où les lois de la nature ne fonctionnent plus."  

But all this falseness is prophesied to end sometime, and in the ritual of the Round Table, truth will reign when the "Tres Pur" knight finds the Graal. It is predicted that then "les choses lourdes deviendront légeres et les choses légères deviendront lourdes et le Graal cesserait d'être une énigme et le sens de ce qui était obscur se déchiffrera et l'esprit dominera la matière et les dragons mourront et répandront leurs langues sur le sable et la vérité sortira toute droite de sa housse de paresse et d'enchantements."  

5Ibid., p. 96.  
6Ibid., p. 104.
Galaad dit Blancharmure is the knight of the Graal; he has magic powers, for he is the son of Lancelot and the fairy Melusine. His power is as great as Merlin's but no greater. However, through Ginifer's treachery Galaad is able to outwit and unmask Merlin. The false may at times bring about the ultimate victory of the true. As Merlin and his servant leave the country the atmosphere of falseness and death disappears from la Bretagne; life returns. Life becomes difficult; but Artus says "J'aime mieux de vrais morts qu'une fausse vie," meaning that he prefers to suffer and know the truth about Lancelot and Guenièvre than to live in a pleasant delusion. As soon as life has returned to Camaalot, everyone sees the Graal. It could not manifest itself under the spell of falseness for "Il est en vous. On le voit aussitôt qu'on est en règle avec soi-même."

In this play the isolation of the poet is briefly treated. Galaad, who causes others to see the Graal, mysteriously cannot see it himself. Asked to stay at Camaalot, he says "D'autres m'attendent. Je ne séjourne en aucun lieu . . . . je quête la grande aventure. Il faut payer, payer toujours. Payer de sa personne et de ses actes."

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7Ibid., p. 170.
8Ibid., p. 174.
9Ibid., p. 175.
He also refuses the titles of king or knight: "Je ne suis que poète." Although Galaad is the hero of the play, his position seems entirely unenviable especially when he says "C'est par la moindre tache qu'on prend contact avec la terre. Mes armes sont sans tache et je ne peux prendre contact avec personne... On m'enlève à tous ceux que j'aime."

After the lovers are dead Artus realizes that the love of Lancelot and Guenievre was a great love; he tells his children "... votre mère et Lancelot s'aimaient. Leur véritable vie était l'un avec l'autre. Je la leur ai volée et je viens de la leur rendre... J'exige que ce jour soit jour de fête... Tous doivent adorer la chapelle ardente des nouveaux époux."

Love triumphs, but as is usual with Cocteau, only in death. Even after death the monumental love of Lancelot and Guenievre is not to be forgotten, for Blandine and Segramor suddenly and miraculously look just like the dead couple! "L'un après l'autre les mensonges s'envolent. Les morts sont passés en eux."

\[10^{ibid.}\]
\[11^{ibid.}\]
\[12^{ibid.}, pp. 165-166.\]
\[13^{ibid.}, p. 172.\]
The character of Ginifer exists and does not exist at the same time. This young demon, rescued by Merlin from eternal imprisonment in a bottle is the most original element in Les Chevaliers. He is high spirited and witty, disrespectful of Artus, Merlin, and even of the Graal. "Le Graal a bon dos," he says, as he and Merlin discuss the enchantment of la Bretagne. (The use of the Graal here resembles the use of the Sphinx in La Machine Infernale, but the Graal is never seen by the audience.) Ginifer is as playful as a child; he takes nothing seriously; he changes sides without compunction. Compared with him, the other characters in the play are unbearably stuffy, serious and pious, as no doubt they were in the old legends. The introduction of Ginifer changes the tone of plot, adding the surrealistic elements of absurdity and mockery.

La Fleur qui Parle is another original invention. A rather unimportant character, it is a plant which functions as a machine: a simple tape recorder. But upon it rests a major part of the plot: Ginifer's treason. Unlike the "machine" of destiny in La Machine Infernale, La Fleur qui Parle serves only the forces of life or truth.

As in the other surrealistic plays of Cocteau and in fairy tales a host of items is never explained; Why did Merlin

\[1\textsuperscript{4} \text{Ibid.}, p. 85.\]
want to remove life from la Bretagne? Why was the invisible chess player dressed in scarlet and why did he lose? Who was he? Why did Galaad come to Camaalot in a stone bucket? Why couldn't he see the Grail? Why was La Fleur qui Parle sent? and many others. These devices must evidently be accepted as surrealistic and not explained rationally.

The surrealism of Les Chevaliers is found in the invisible character of the demon Ginifer, who is only seen on stage in other people's bodies; in the magic powers of Merlin and Galaad; in the use of dreams to interpret events in the play; La Fleur qui Parle; all the fairies, enchantments and magic, which are real and believed in the play; the invisible appearance of the Graal; and the incantations of Merlin, which resemble certain kinds of surrealistic poetry:

Deux et deux ne font plus quatre
Tous les murs peuvent s'abattre
Chiffres délivrez-nous d'eux
7. 8. 9. 5. 3. 6. 2.
Par le sec et par l'étanche
A cheval sur l'inconnu
Chèvre, chèvre, chèvre blanche
Coq de colère et bouc cornu.

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Ibid., p. 116.
"Voilà sans doute l'une des œuvres de Cocteau les plus déconcertantes par l'apparente désinvolture, la diversité du ton et les ruptures de rythme. L'élégance de cette œuvre consiste à ne pas faire état de ce qu'elle prodigue. .. Le véritable objet du drame, c'est le combat de la vérité et du mensonge, du vrai et du faux qui se partagent le cœur de l'homme, le déchirent, l'apaisent, l'endorment, le réveillent. Ce combat est l'un des thèmes majeurs de Cocteau .. .."

Renaud et Armide is a tragedy written in verse, a love story involving a king and a sorceress. It is a classical play in its use of four characters, twenty-four hours and one place. But Renaud et Armide is more nearly a fairy tale because in it magic is taken seriously; the magic objects and devices actually work and operate as important parts of the plot. The drama is hardly psychological for it is controlled by supernatural powers.

Renaud loves Armide, although he cannot see her. He persists in remaining in her enchanted garden despite his squire's (Olivier's) urging to leave. Oriane, Armide's follower, also a fairy, attempts to discourage her love for Renaud as

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16 Dubourg, pp. 62-63.
he is only a mortal, whereas Armide can have immortality. In Armide's enchanted garden Renaud cannot be bothered with thoughts of his country, his army or his wife. He is only interested in finding Armide, but she remains "invisible" although he can talk with her sometimes.

Oriane continues to ridicule Armide's love for a mere man, trying to excite her jealousy by speaking of Renaud's mistresses. At last Armide appears to Renaud but he is frightened and displeased to find she is a sorceress. Angry, she causes Renaud to sleep and places a spell on him which crazes him. He raves prophetically about the future (his death and Armide's). Armide is now sorry she revenged herself on him. He is completely in her power; he does not even recognize Olivier who prays to God to deliver them from witchcraft.

Renaud asks Armide for her ring, which, should she give it to him, will kill her if he kisses her. The crazed Renaud talks about his wife Armide; he does not love Armide the sorceress at all! But Armide decides to give him the ring anyway, thereby losing all power of witchcraft and disenchancing the garden. As Renaud awakes from his enchanted sleep he is no longer mad; he will never leave Armide, and he is content to abandon his throne, his army and his wife. But Armide persists in sending him away, believing that they should wait until they are dead to be
reunited. Just as Renaud is about to leave she allows him to kiss her. Of course she dies.

In *Renaud et Armide* love is possible only in death. Neither of the lovers is ever quite satisfied except by means of some artificial device—Armide's invisibility, Renaud's madness. In other words, they try continually to escape "reality," Armide by being a sorceress, Renaud by wishing to remain in the enchanted garden. When at the end of the play Renaud is going to leave, not to rejoin Armide until they are both dead, Armide allows Renaud to kill her; she cannot face reality and wait. The surrealistic elements in this play are the magic objects and the enchantments. Armide is a sorceress apprenticed to the fairies, represented by Oriane. Armide willfully gives up immortality and life for her love of Renaud, the King of France, but only a mortal. At first she thinks only of keeping him (the enchanted garden in which Renaud and Olivier find themselves is not enough to hold them) and bewitches him by means of a magic incantation:

*Fil, fil, fil, sur mon coeur enroule ta pelote.*

*Sors de moi, fil, fil, fil. Fil qui cours, fil qui flottes,*

*De cet homme orgueilleux regarde le profil.*

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But, dissatisfied with a senseless madman as a lover, Armide decides to let him return to his duties after giving him her magic ring which some unknown power (perhaps God, to whom Glorifer prayed) made him ask of her. This ring will cause her death, mysteriously but surely. Oriane reminds her of the power of the ring:

Si tu gardes l'anneau d'où vient notre secret,
Sois une enchanteresse avant d'être une fée.
Si tu quittes l'anneau que possédait Orphée,
Sois une simple femme et perds notre soutien.
Si tu donnes l'anneau comme s'il était tien,
Tu gagneras l'amour de celui qui le porte,
Mais son baiser te fera morte.

Armide chooses to assure herself of Renaud's love by giving him the ring, but chooses also to die by his kiss at the last minute, changing her mind as she sees him leave her.

Renaud et Armide "est une histoire d'anneau; il n'y a pas de caractères, encore moins de ressorts psychologiques,

\(^{18}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 252-253.}\)
\(^{19}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 284.}\)
Les états d'âme des personnages... leurs changements, sont produits tout au long de la pièce par des moyens magiques, c'est-à-dire artificiels..."

This play has decided surrealistic elements, but the surrealistic impression it gives is somewhat diluted by its classical characteristics and by its lack of humor and lack of absurdity.

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__L'Aigle a deux Têtes__ is a traditional romantic melodrama which is surrealistic in tone because it bears the imprint of Cocteau's vocabulary. A young queen who is anarchistic, who never shows her face unveiled, who moves restlessly from château to château, who never sleeps in the same bedroom two nights in a row, and who target-practices in her library falls in love with an anarchist poet. He is supposed to assassinate her and she knows this. He looks exactly like her dead husband.

This queen also loves to gallop on her horse, loves storms, and keeps a deaf-mute Negro as a personal servant. The surrealistic tone of __L'Aigle__ may be described as a façade:

20 Dubourg, p. 110.


22 Ibid, passim.
"...le romantisme est ici une simple façade qui masque de
son apparence brillante une vérité de toutes les époques.
Cette façade donne à L'Aigle à deux Têtes une allure irréelle
de conte de fées . . . ." — Aside from a rather mysterious
atmosphere, the story is a conventional one: a series of
court intrigues lead to the death of both the queen and the
poet. They represent the two-headed eagle on the royal coat
of arms, neither part of which can live without the other.

Bacchus, another play in the group which takes place
between antiquity and modern times, has nothing particularly
surrealistic in it. It is written in a style of "concise
realism" and treats the alienation from and persecution of
the poet by society, and the poet's freedom, in a historical
setting (sixteenth-century Germany). In this play "the poet
is misunderstood even by those who love him; he is the victim
of a conspiracy against his purity. He refuses the weapons
of deceit, conformity and compromise . . . . he lets himself
be torn to pieces . . . . he is simultaneously stubborn child,

23 Dubourg, p. 129.
24 Jean Cocteau, Bacchus (Paris: Librairie Galli-
mard, 1952).
rebelling adolescent, revolutionary and saint."

Of course this does not make the tragedy surrealistic. Bacchus "n'a pas de façade mais elle est simple et subtile, à multiples facettes, synthèse des éléments variés du cœur, peinture des contradictions de l'homme." Bacchus is a historical drama about a young man who feigns madness in order to achieve a peculiar position of power; he abuses his privileges with great abandon; he is killed by an admirer to prevent him from basely renouncing his convictions and thereby saving his life.

Romeo et Juliette, Cocteau's translation and adaptation of Shakespeare's play, has no great value today; this is acknowledged by the author himself, who "carefully removed every trace of poetry from the language. The true poetry was re-created, Cocteau believed, by the diverse elements of the production." Romeo et Juliette will be discussed in a later chapter for surrealistic elements in the staging.

26Ibid., p. 123.
27Dubourg, p. 148.
29Fowlie, Dionysus ..., p. 77.
30Crosland, p. 79.
CHAPTER V

THE PLAYS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The most surrealistic of the group of Cocteau plays taking place in the twentieth century is Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel. This play is a surrealistic musical comedy composed of clichés in words and situations. It spoofs common sayings by taking them literally and executing them on the stage. Clichés are forced to their logical conclusions—that is to say, to absurdity. Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel takes place on the first platform of the Eiffel Tower on Bastille day. The only two speaking characters are two phonographs which describe the action, and recite the speeches of the characters loudly, rapidly and distinctly. All other characters (except the camera) perform the appropriate actions but do not speak.

At the beginning of the play the stage is empty. An ostrich crosses the stage, followed by a hunter who shoots at the bird but brings down a telegram. The noise brings the director of the Eiffel Tower, to whom the hunter explains that he thought he saw the ostrich caught in the Tower. The photographer of the Tower appears next. His camera is out of order, for instead of a bird flying out of it, today the
ostrich came out. He is looking for the ostrich in order to make it return into the camera.

The director discovers the telegram is for him; a wedding party wishes to reserve a table. The photographer is named waiter of the Eiffel Tower, the table is prepared and a typical wedding party arrives, each described as he or she enters by a cliche ("The bride, gentle as a lamb," etc.). The general, part of the wedding party, makes a speech which is a musical composition played by the orchestra. He also tells about a mirage of which he was a victim in Africa; he was eating a cake covered with wasps which were really thousands of miniature tigers.

Next a young lady on a bicycle rides in; she asks if she is on the road to Chatou. The general, believing her to be a mirage, tells her just to keep following the street-car tracks, and she rides off. Mirages are common on the Eiffel Tower.

The photographer prepares to photograph the wedding party, but when he says "Don't move. Smile. Look at the camera. A bird will come out," a young lady in tights, a bather from Trouville, comes out and does a dance. The wedding party thinks she is a pretty postcard but the photographer is unhappy about his camera's always playing tricks on him. At last he decides to pretend he did it on purpose and tells the group he can't present the number "Bather of Trouville."
again due to lack of time. He still worries about the missing ostrich.

Another picture is posed. The bulb is pressed, a large child comes out carrying some books and a basket; wearing a crown of green paper. He is the portrait of the wedding party. He greets his mother and father (the bride and groom). There are the usual comments about his features and his future from his relatives. The child pelts the wedding party with bullets, causing them to make typical comments about a child's ingratitude. The photographer threatens him and pleads with him to return to the camera, but the child wants "to live his own life."

The director admonishes everyone to be quiet so as not to frighten the cablegrams. Many girl-cablegrams enter, scuffling; everyone runs after them and tries to catch them. The prettiest one salutes and announces that she is a cablegram from New York. The cablegrams do a dance and leave. The child insists on being photographed with the general. The photographer trembles—what will be the next apparition? It is a lion. Everyone runs for cover except the general, who tells them not to be afraid, for there could not possibly be a lion on the Eiffel Tower. The general believes the beast to be a mirage but upon approaching it, the lion roars and chases the general under the table. There he eats the general and returns promptly into the camera.
The father-in-law gives a typically eulogistic speech at the general's grave. Next a band plays a composition, "Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel," to which everyone dances a quadrille. The child wants to feed the Eiffel Tower but is not allowed to because it can only be fed at designated times. At last the ostrich returns, after having hidden in the elevator all this time. The photographer hides the ostrich from the hunter by covering its head with a hat, rendering it invisible, and tricks it into entering the camera. The photographer is content.

The wedding party has posed again when an art dealer and a collector enter. The dealer tells his customer that the picture was painted by God, praises it extravagantly and fixes the price at 1,000,000,000,000. The collector buys it. Just as the photographer is about to snap the picture his camera tells him it wants to return the general. The general comes out of the camera, much subdued, and takes his place with the group. This time the camera works: a dove flies out.

The wedding party enters the camera by couples and the Eiffel Tower closes. The hunter asks when the last train leaves. There are no more trains except the camera which is moving across the stage with much waving of handkerchiefs.
from the wedding party inside it.

The ensemble of humorous devices in *Les Mariés* produces a satirical comedy without traditional plot, actors, or dialogue. "C'est le dialogue le plus utile qu'on ait jamais entendu." The two leading characters, Phono Un and Phono Deux, recite everything that happens in the play, with a few stage directions to indicate an entrance, an exit or a dance. The animals (the ostrich and the lion), the camera and the cablegrams, are characters just as important as the actual people.

The central theme is embodied in the traditional words of a photographer about to take a picture: "Un petit oiseau va sortir." However, from this particular camera appear an ostrich, a lion, a bather, a cyclist, and a child. The photographer is as mystified as everyone else but decides to make the best of the situation. "Puisque ces mystères me dépassent, feignons d'en être l'organisateur." Finally even the camera becomes a character in the play:

**PHONO DEUX:** Le photographe s'apprête à prendre la photographie, mais, ô prodige! son appareil lui parle.

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PHONO UN: Que lui dit-il?

L'APPAREIL: (voix lointaine.) -- Je voudrais . . . Je voudrais . . .

PHONO DEUX: Parle, mon beau cygne.

L'APPAREIL: Je voudrais rendre le général.

The only characters who speak in the play, then, are machines. The people and animals are mute.

The clichés that are satirized are given a new and literal meaning in *Les Mariés*.

PHONO DEUX: Vous vous demandez où sont partis le chasseur d'autruche et le directeur de la Tour Eiffel. Le chasseur cherche l'autruche à tous les étages. Le directeur cherche le chasseur et dirige la Tour Eiffel. Ce n'est pas une sinécure. La Tour Eiffel est un monde comme Notre-Dame. C'est Notre-Dame de la rive gauche. 4

PHONO UN: C'est la reine de Paris.


PHONO UN: Il faut bien vivre.

The "photograph" of the wedding part is sold at a fantastic price as an unsigned painting by God. But after it

5Ibid., p. 56.
has been sold the general returns and rejoins the posed wedding party.

PHONO DEUX: Voilà une bonne surprise pour le collectionneur de chefs-d'oeuvre. Dans un chef-d'oeuvre on n'a jamais fini de découvrir des détails inattendus.  

Neither art nor literature are spared in this satire. When the ostrich finally reappears and is covered by the hat, the photographer uses a pretext to persuade it to re-enter the camera.

PHONO DEUX: Le photographe s'approche de l'autruche sur la pointe des pieds. Que lui dit-il?

PHONO UN: Madame, vous n'avez pas une minute à perdre. Il ne vous a pas reconnue sous votre voilette. Dépêchez-vous, j'ai un fiacre.

PHONO DEUX: Il ouvre la portière de l'appareil. L'autruche disparaît.

PHONO UN: Sauvée, mon Dieu!

The mainspring of clichés is the wedding party itself. They march in "like dogs walking on their hind legs in a circus act." Each member of the group personnifies a

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6 Ibid., p. 66.
7 Ibid., p. 64.
8 Oxenhandler, Scandal & ..., p. 50.
hackneyed description of himself or herself: "La mariée, douce comme un agneau; le beau-père, riche comme Crésus; le marié, joli comme un cœur; la belle-mère, fausse comme un jeton; le général, bête comme une oie; les garçons d'honneur, forts comme des Turcs; les demoiselles d'honneur, fraîches comme des roses."  9

The dialogue of the wedding party is typical of parents and relatives when the child ("Voilà encore un des dangers de la photographie." 10 ) appears. "C'est le portrait de sa mère; c'est le portrait de son père; c'est le portrait de sa grand'mère; c'est le portrait de son grand-père; il a la bouche de notre côté; il a les yeux du nôtre." 11 This child (who is not yet born) is suddenly represented as an adolescent. He throws bullets at the group, "massacring" them. "Quand je pense au mal que nous avons eu à l'élever; A tous nos sacrifices; Misérable! je suis ton père; Arrête! il en est temps encore; N'auras-tu pas pitié de tes grands-parents? N'auras-tu pas le respect du galon?" 12 The child also has a typically phony picture taken with the general. "L'enfant, à cheval sur le sabre, fait semblant d'écouter—

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9Cocteau, Les Mariés ..., p. 54.
10Ibid., p. 58.
11Ibid.
12Ibid., p. 59.
There are many applications of clichés in *Les Mariés* which make the clichés true of this particular situation (one begins to think clichés can only be applicable if they are forced). The general, who has been eaten by the lion, returns after the photograph of the wedding party has been sold to the collector. "Si elle [la noce] reproche au général d'être vivant, le général pourrait lui reprocher de s'être laissé vendre."

The stupid general is the single person most heavily satirized in the play. Even his speech is left to the imagination for he does not actually speak it.

PHONO UN: Le général se lève.
PHONO DEUX: Discours du général.

*(Le discours du général est à l'orchestre. Il le gesticule seulement.)*

PHONO UN: Tout le monde est ému.

After having been so foolish as to believe the lion a mirage, he is eaten by it.

PHONO UN: Pauvre général.
PHONO DEUX: Il était si gai, si jeune de caractère. Rien

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ne l'aurait plus amusé que cette mort. Il aurait été le premier à en rire.

PHONO UN: Funérailles du général.

PHONO DEUX: Le beau-père parle sur la tombe. Que dit-il?

PHONO UN: Adieu, adieu, vieil ami.

Des vos premières armes, vous avez fait preuve d'une intelligence très au-dessus de votre grade. Vous ne vous êtes jamais rendu, même à l'évidence.

Votre fin est digne de votre carrière. Nous vous avons vu, bravant le fauve, insoucieux du danger, ne le comprenant pas et ne prenant la fuite qu'une fois que vous l'aviez compris.

Encore une fois, adieu, ou plutôt au revoir, car votre type se perpétuera aussi longtemps qu'il y aura des hommes sur la terre."

Nine musical compositions are an important part of the play. They are by the modern French composers Auric, Milhaud, Poulenc, Tailleferre and Honegger (Les Six) minus Durey. Some of the titles are in the surrealistic and satirical mood of the play: "Le Massacre," (when the child throws bullets at the wedding party), "Discours du général" and "Valse des dépêches."

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16Ibid., p. 62.

17Ibid., p. 52.
In *Les Mariés* "The phonographs speak for the actors in the way that a sophisticated person repeats an amusing conversation, bringing out the gaucheries and the vulgarisms which might normally pass unnoticed. The actors move like puppets, satirizing themselves ... the marriage party represents the banal world of daily life. On the other hand, the photographer, with his surprising camera ... represents the marvelous. The two worlds are reconciled (at least to the eye) when, at the end of the play, the members of the wedding party disappear one by one into the camera."

*La Voix Humaine*, which has been called a concerto for the left hand requires only one actress. It is based on the hackneyed situation of a woman abandoned by her lover and faithfully recites the entire story of the affair, but in such typical detail that it is almost a satire. The setting is a woman's bedroom. By means of the telephone the actress "creates" several other characters, principally her lover.

At the beginning of the play a woman in a robe is lying on the floor beside the bed. She gets up and starts for the bathroom; the telephone rings. It is for her but

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18 Oxenhandler, *Scandal & ...* p. 50.
20 Crosland, p. 160.
another woman on the party line picks up the phone also. This happens twice. Someone else has dialed a wrong number and wants a doctor. The woman finally asks the operator to interfere and is connected with her call, (her lover) but the woman on the party line keeps asking if she is Doctor Schmidt! The lover, upon her advice, calls back.

Finally they are able to converse. It is eleven-fifteen. The woman tells him (obviously a lie) that she just came back ten minutes ago from a dinner with Marthe. Last night she took a pill because she couldn't sleep and had a headache. She had lunch with Marthe, did some shopping, came back and put all the love letters into the yellow bag. She assures him she is very brave and that Marthe has been very good to her. She tells him what she wore to Marthe's dinner, saying even that she still has her hat on. Thinking they have been disconnected she tells him to call back immediately if they are cut off. He can call for the yellow bag any time. She tells him not to excuse himself and describes unconvincingly how well she is hearing the rupture of their affair and how grateful she is for his frankness. She assures him she is not just pretending to take the blow with good grace. The shock was difficult at first but she is getting used to it.

She does not regret having chosen five years of happiness with him without security. Their love was priceless to her and now she has gotten what she deserves, for she takes
upon herself all the blame, claiming that she took the ini-
tiative in the affair. She learns to her surprise that he
is being married as soon as tomorrow!

She will leave the letters with the concierge. She
wants him to take back their dog, who is very unhappy without
him. He can have Joseph call for it and tell anyone who
asks that it is the dog of a friend. He asks if he has left
his fur gloves. She tells him she can't find them, all the
while holding them lovingly against her cheek. If she finds
them before tomorrow, she will leave them with the letters.
She asks him to burn the letters and put the ashes in the
cigarette case she gave him; overcome, she begins to cry
but regains her bravado. However, she would like to have the
ashes. He agrees.

In a foreign language (the one the actress knows
best) she tells him she has burned his sister's papers. In
French again, she tells him he shouldn't work so late at
night if he has to get up early tomorrow morning. He can't
hear her clearly, then she can't hear him—it's like being
dead, she says. She is surprised the operator has let them
talk this long. His telephone reverberates—it doesn't
sound like his own telephone.

She can imagine how he looks; he is wearing his red
scarf, his sleeves are rolled up, he is leaning toward the
left, doodling, profiles, hearts and stars. She doesn't
want to tell him how she looks. She is a little afraid because she isn't used to sleeping alone any more. She doesn't like to look at herself in the mirror any more for she sees an old woman, thin, white-haired and wrinkled. He tells her she is beautiful but she liked it better when he teased her insultingly about her looks. She is glad he loves her and is awkward, otherwise the telephone would be an awful weapon, silent, leaving no traces. They are disconnected. She tells the operator the number she wants, but it is busy. She rings again and gets the wrong number. Finally she is connected again, and finds out from Joseph that her lover is not at home at all and will not return this evening. She feels almost ill at the news of this deception. Her lover calls back. She pretends she has just been waiting for him to call back. She cries, telling him that nothing is the matter, except she had forgotten that their conversation would have to cease some time.

She tells him she lied to him about dining with Marthe; she is really only dressed in her nightgown and coat, and has been going crazy waiting for him to telephone although she knows everything is over and there is no hope for her. She hasn't eaten and last night she took twelve sleeping pills. She didn't want to live. She dreamed that their break-up was a dream but upon awakening she thought she couldn't go on living. She suffered terribly for an hour and
then called Marthe, for she didn't want to die alone. Marthe arrived with a doctor at four in the morning. She hadn't taken enough to poison herself. Marthe stayed until this evening but was persuaded to leave. The woman wanted to be alone for her lover's last telephone call.

She is all right now and sorry she worried him. She had wanted to say good-by just as though they would see each other again tomorrow. It is terrible to hang up and be alone. Just hearing his voice makes everything better. She knew all the time the affair would come to an end. She even saw pictures of his future wife but didn't tell him, not wanting to spoil their last weeks. She pretends he is at his apartment, and tells him to have the neighbors turn their music down; they have developed bad habits because he had hardly ever been at home for five years. She refuses to engage his doctor. Besides she feels much better.

She wants to prolong this awful scene for the telephone is her last link with him. She paces up and down. The first night of their rupture she slept with the telephone in her bed. She dreamed she was connected to him by the tube of a life-jacket and begged him not to cut it. For five years he has been her entire life. At first her suffering distracted her but now, two days later, she doesn't know what to do with herself. She has never had any other occupations except him. She is like a fish who is expected to
learn to live out of water. The only thing that made her forget her suffering was when the dentist touched a nerve in one of her teeth.

The dog has become vicious; it wants to bite her. It attacked Marthe. It thinks probably that she hurt her lover. Joseph should take it away; if not that, she will have someone else keep the dog. The animal feels her suffering. She tore up an entire packet of photographs without even knowing it, even the ones for permits. She no longer needs permits for she doesn't want to travel for fear of encountering him accidentally.

The woman on the party line accuses the couple of being uninteresting and ridiculous. She is told to hang up. The lovers resume their conversation. The woman again says she does not regret anything. She met someone who asked if her lover had a brother whose marriage was being announced. She had given up all her friends during the five years of their affair because she didn't want to lose a minute of his company. She doesn't care what people think--they couldn't know this was different from an ordinary affair. She cries again, and promises not to attempt suicide again. She might take pills if she can't sleep but she won't buy a revolver. She tells him she would be displeased if she found out he was lying to her just to make her feel better.
They are disconnected. She prays to God to have him call back. He calls back. She wraps the telephone cord around her neck. His voice is around her neck now; the executioner must cut off the conversation haphazardly. Her lover is going to Marseille; she asks him not to stay at the hotel at which they used to stay, for if she can't imagine things they hardly exist. She gets into bed holding the telephone in her arms. She tells him to hang up quickly as she says over and over again, "I love you." She drops the receiver.

Although only one character is listed in *La Voix Humaine*, actually there are several. The monologue-dialogue introduces four characters who are actually present by means of the telephone—the other lady on the party line, the telephone operator, the lover and Joseph. They could be considered the cast. Marthe, the doctor and the dog are secondary characters with whom the woman does not actually speak. It is also possible to name the actual cast as a woman and a telephone, or a machine.

A machine and its use is the main theme of the plot. To a woman who has just been deserted by her lover, the telephone is her only means of communication. It is her verbal life—hence the title. Her conversation interspersed with pauses serves as her part of a dialogue. Her lines are the only written lines, but the pauses "are" the lines of the
other characters, lines which exist and do not exist at the same time.

*La Voix Humaine* is an abstraction of a typical situation: the end of a banal love affair. She and her lover are so common that they do not even have names.

"Il ne s'agit ... pas d'un cas particulier mais de l'amour, de l'amour malheureux, de ses ravages peints en dehors de circonstances d'époque ou de lieu, le thème le plus banal du théâtre de tous les temps, auquel la force et la pénétration du poète impriment ici une marque nouvelle." The woman is still in love with the man. It is he who broke off the relationship, creating all the attendant circumstances: the return of their letters, their dog, her attempted suicide, her grief, the hopelessness of the situation. "L'héroïne passe donc par toutes les phases de la souffrance, le poète ne lui épargne rien. Il acheve lentement sa victime." The whole story is conveyed by one side of a telephone conversation.

The surrealistic use of a machine as a transmitter of human emotion leads to other surrealistic elements in *La Voix Humaine*. The telephone "contains" all the other characters, all their lines. It is much more important

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21Dubourg, p. 76.

22Ibid., p. 78.
than La Fleur qui Parle of Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde which also "contains" lines by four characters. The woman is at the mercy of the machine. Upon what proceeds from the telephone depend her sanity and, almost, her life. The machine, "instrument du supplice de l'héroïne," is seen as evil, but also as the only possible communication between the two people involved. But it removes their communication from the ordinary human level; they speak to each other without seeing or touching each other, thereby making possible lies and subterfuges that would be impossible without the interference of the machine.

The other three Cocteau plays having the twentieth century as settings are not surrealistic. Les Monstres Sacrés is a play about a middle-aged couple, a renowned actor and actress on the stage. The actor has a brief fling with an ambitious young actress but returns to his wife, refusing to transfer his talents to the cinema. Besides, he is a grandfather, too old for young mistresses or changes in profession. Les Monstres Sacrés "a pour thème le théâtre lui-même, sa grandeur, ses difficultés, ses jeux de glaces, ses rapports avec la vie réelle et le danger de les mêler

23 Ibid., p. 74.
l'une à l'autre. Elle montre les comédiens, leurs ridicules, leur noblesse, la mythomanie des jeunes actrices avides de gloire et qui, en l'attendant, inventent des histoires où elles s'attribuent les rôles de premier plan . . . . Le théâtre, ses miroirs déformants et pourtant fidèles, voilà Les Monstres sacrés."

La Machine à Écrire is a detective story. A provincial town has been inundated with anonymous letters, causing suicides and scandals. A sentimental detective on his last case is sent to solve the mystery; he encounters strange suspects, including identical twins but the actual culprit, a woman of whom he is very fond, commits suicide rather than accept his help to escape punishment. Although the ending is melodramatic, La Machine à Écrire is an example of Cocteau's virtuosity with modern material: "une intrigue exposée peu à peu, merveilleusement conduite jusqu'à la fin du second acte, tenant l'intérêt sans cesse en éveil par le savant dosage des coups de théâtre et des explications; surtout la présence de deux jeunes gens, parfaits mythomanes, qui n'arrêtent pas de jouer la comédie et de se la jouer à eux-mêmes, embrouillant le fil au point que les autres personnages et les spectateurs ne savent plus où donner de

26Ibid., p. 101.
Les Parents Terribles is a naturalistic play in the tradition of Ibsen. Cocteau does not use any machines, magic, miracles or other surrealist devices of plot or language; "... tout se passe dans les cerveaux et dans les coeurs." Les Parents Terribles takes place in two houses, one the picture of disorder, one the picture of order. It is the story of a mother who loves her only son to the exclusion of all else, including her husband. Her husband takes a mistress, but this girl is also the son's mistress and he wants to marry her. Rather than uncover the intrigue, however, the girl is forced to reject the son. But the aunt cannot bear to see these young people unhappy; she brings them together again with the help of the father. The mother, finding that she is to lose her son (everything) after all, commits suicide.

27Ibid., pp. 101-102.
29Oxenhandler, Scandal & ..., p. 196.
30Dubourg, p. 84.
A tragedy with many comical lines and situations, Les Parents Terribles again illustrates the idea that love is impossible on earth. The son in winning the girl "kills" his mother. There are three antitheses which come up frequently during the play. The aunt and the girl represent "order"; they triumph in the end over the "disorder" of the father, mother and son. The girl and the aunt are also "grownups," whereas the other three are "children"—completely unconscious of the consequences of their acts, completely selfish. The father, mother and son are "pure" in their disorder, generally speaking, for they are not capable of anything else. The aunt and girl are "impure" in their order because they can conceive of disorder.

Les Parents Terribles has also been seen as a transfer to modern times of certain elements of the Oedipus legend. "L'ordre anarchique de la mère-enfant était celui d'Antigone, l'ordre social de la tante ... et de la jeune fille, celui de Créon. Entre les deux oscillait ... le fils, candide comme un jeune Oedipe, meurtrier involontaire, non cette fois-ci de Lalus, mais de Jocaste."  

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31 Oxenhandler, Scandal & ...., pp. 188-191.
32 Fraigneau, p. 76.
CHAPTER VI

SURREALISM IN THE STAGING OF COCTEAU'S PLAYS

"Cocteau is not merely a writer to be read, but he is a writer to be seen and heard." ¹ The surrealistic elements of plot and language discussed in the preceding chapters are much more evident and effective when they are considered in the context of a play as a whole. Visual expression makes ideas clearer and stronger and gives a precise description of what the author means in the dialogue. This is especially true in the case of a poetic playwright like Cocteau. His *Poesies de Théâtre* are "a sort of projection made to be seen from a distance, under magnesium lights, of an ensemble of unusual gestures and strange revelations which constitute a code with entangled signs, and this code is the sparkling and enigmatic face of poetry itself." ² The use of his term "poésie de théâtre" becomes more significant when his plays are studied not only for ideas and language, but also for staging. "The universe he has created is opposed

¹Crosland, p. 134.
²Ibid., p. 39.
³Raymond, p. 262.
to the natural universe. He is best seen in the artificial
light of the stage, from the confined night world of the
theater..."

The mysterious and puzzling elements in Cocteau's
surrealistic plays are actually very concrete and precise
on the stage. Sets, costumes, properties and actions cannot
be separated from dialogue and plot in a Cocteau play; all
these elements are integrated, reinforcing each other like
words and images in a poem.

On the other hand, Cocteau has been accused of con-
sidering drama as simply dressing up. But dressing up is
certainly a part of the theater; costumes are necessary in
some plays, and not necessary in others. On the other hand,
a Cocteau play has been characterized as a celebration.
"[Cocteau] dira des choses très discrètes et très rares, il
abandonnera d'exquises et fragiles confidences, dans un
éclairage théatral et violent, avec une orchestration chaude
et brutale, une mise en scène fastueuse et agressive, ... re-
trouvant ici un des grands secrets de l'art classique, la
notion de célébration, de fête... Fête: c'est un jeu,
mais solennel, mais réglé, mais significatif; image de ce
qu'on n'est pas d'ordinaire, de l'état où les efforts sont

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4Fowlie, Age of..., p. 120.
5Bentley, In Search..., p. 126.
For the sake of uniformity the discussions of the staging of Cocteau's plays will be in the same order as the discussions of the content. Surrealistic staging is very evident in the surrealistic plays discussed previously: Orphée, La Machine infernale, Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde, Renaud et Armide, Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel and La Voix Humaine. The plays that are not surrealistic in plot and language however also contain surrealistic effects in staging.

The role of death in all of Cocteau's works is strongly decorative; this is particularly true in Orphée. In this play "La Mort est une jeune femme très belle en robe de bal rose vif et en manteau de fourrure. Cheveux, robe, manteau, souliers, gestes, démarche à la dernière mode."

This fashionably dressed woman wears a mask with large blue eyes painted on it, and speaks rapidly and distractedly. Even her surgeon's blouse is elegant. During the entire scene in which she works at Orphée's villa muted drum beats can be heard. The lights are dimmed. She enters from the

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6 Roy, p. 207.
7 Crosland, p. 153.
8 Cocteau, Orphée, p. 15.
mirror with her assistants who are dressed as surgeons, complete with rubber gloves and gauze masks. The men carry two elegant black valises.

The trio begins working methodically. Death removes her coat and is helped into her surgeons' blouse. She washes her hands and puts on her rubber gloves, directing her assistants and supervising their work. Death orders the horse to eat the sugar lump; it disappears; a black curtain covers its alcove. Azraël and Raphaël cover a table with cloths, set out metal boxes and cover the mirror. Death places the chair Heurtebise stood on in the middle of the room. The sound of an electric machine is heard.

Next Death blindfolds herself with a handkerchief and instructs her assistants: "Nous avons une onde sept et une zone sept-douze. Règlez tout sur quatre. Si j'augmente, vous irez jusqu'à cinq. Ne dépassez cinq sous aucun prétexte." Azraël and Raphaël stand at the table, their hands inside the metal boxes. Death goes to the chair, there massaging an invisible head. Azraël explains: "La Mort, pour toucher les choses de la vie, traverse un élément qui les déforme et les déplace. Nos appareils lui permettent de les toucher où elle

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9Ibid., pp. 54-55.

10Ibid., p. 58.
les voit, ce qui évite des calculs et une perte de temps considérable.\footnote{Ibid., p. 59.}

Drums are heard. Death holds a bobbin from which runs a thread going into Eurydice's room. "Azraël compte avec une main en l'air comme un arbitre de boxe. Raphaël exécute lentement des signaux pareils à ceux du code naval." Death enters the room, returning without the blindfold and with a dove at the end of the thread. End of drums and machine. She cuts the thread; the dove flies away. Death rests. "Elle passe lentement son bras droit et sa main sur son front comme un somnambule qui se réveille, comme pour se sortir de l'hypnose."\footnote{Ibid., p. 62.} The paraphernalia is collected, and the trio leaves.

The white horse, whose limbs resemble those of a man, lives in an alcove in Orphée's villa as though it belonged there. It seems almost part of the furniture. It taps with its feet and moves its head up and down if asked a question. On one occasion, Orphée embraces it. There is no color in the villa except for red velvet curtains above the horse's box and a patch of blue sky seen beyond the

\footnote{Ibid., p. 63.}

\footnote{Ibid., p. 16.}
balcony door. "Le décor rappellera les aéroplanes ou navires trompe-l'oeil chez les photgraphes forains." 

Heurtebise wears a light blue laborer's jacket, a dark scarf and tennis shoes. He is sun-burned and carries on his back a frame of glass panes which reflect continually. Upon returning with him after Death has taken Eurydice, Orphée can see his wife in Heurtebise's panes of glass. Eurydice looks as though she is simply sleeping sitting up in a chair, but actually she is dead.

Orphée and Eurydice wear simple contemporary country clothing. The chief of police and the clerk wear anachronistic frock-coats, panama hats, goatees and boots. The head of Orphée which talks with them is the actual head of Orphée; a paper one is substituted while the opened door hides the pedestal behind which the actor has been kneeling.

As in all of Cocteau's surrealistc plays, the surprising stage effects are supposed to be accepted simply. They fit naturally into the tone of the play and constitute an important part of its surrealism.

The settings of La Machine Infernale correspond to the fate theme of the play. "Les quatre décors seront plantés sur une petite estrade au centre de la scène, entourée de

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15Ibid., p. 17.
16Ibid., p. 67.
toiles nocturnes. . . . Outre les éclairages de détail, les quatre actes baignent dans l'éclairage livide et fabuleux du mercure." The well lighted platform upon which the action takes place is what is "known" and seen; the rest of the stage, hidden by nocturnal curtains is the "unknown" night, the abode of the gods. "The infernal machine unrolls behind the curtains."

The "ghost" of Laius who appears in Act I is not heard or seen at certain times, although he speaks and cries out. The young soldier is unaware of Laius' presence even though he touches him with his hand.

The second act takes place in front of a small temple, a wall and columns, all in ruins. On a pedestal are a wing, a paw, and a flank, "vestiges d'un chimère." The Sphinx is a young girl dressed in a white robe. She holds on her lap the head of a jackal (Anubis), also a young girl whose body is hidden behind the Sphinx. Anubis, an "animal," is able to smell the approaching Oedipe.

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17Cocteau, La Machine Infernale, p. 19.
19Cocteau, La Machine Infernale, p. 79.
20Ibid., p. 85.
As Oedipe counts to fifty, preparing for the Sphinx's riddle, the Sphinx runs behind the pedestal and reappears, "... le buste dressé sur les coudes, la tête droite, ... ses bras couverts de gants mouchetés, les mains griffant le rebord, que l'aile brisée donne naissance à des ailes subites, immenses, pâles, lumineuses, et que le fragment de statue la complètent, ... ."

So that Oedipe can have a body to take to Thebes as proof, he is given Anubis, "la jeune fille "à tête de chacal." He carries off the body and "derrière les ruines, ... apparaissent deux formes géantes couvertes de voiles irisés: les dieux." A roar emanates from the two gigantic shapes; their veils fly around them at the end of the act.

Jocaste's bedroom is described as "rouge comme une petite boucherie." The skin of an animal which lies at the foot of the bed becomes Anubis during Oedipe's dream. Anubis ridicules and frightens Oedipe but when he awakens the skin has become only a skin again.

Against the wall of the room stands a full length swinging mirror. Jocaste approaches it at the end of Act III, "Comme le clair de lune et l'aube projettent une lumière en sens inverse, elle ne peut se voir. Elle empoigne la psyché

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21Ibid., pp. 113-114.
22Ibid., pp. 133-134.
23Ibid., p. 141.
par les montants et l'éloigne du mur. La glace, proprement dite, restera fixe contre le décor. Jocaste n'entraîne que le cadre . . . . Elle roule le meuble avec prudence jusqu'au premier plan, . . . de sorte que le public devienne la glace et que Jocaste se regarde, visible à tous . . . . Jocaste, le visage contre le miroir vide, se remonte les joues, à pleines mains."

The lighting of Act IV is described as "Lumière de peste." A sinister roar is heard when Antigone, informs Tiresias and Créon of Jocaste's suicide. At the end of the play, "Jocaste morte, blanche, belle, les yeux clos" appears, invisible to all except the blind.

The chorus in Oedipe-Roi is a statue with an open mouth, through which the actor who has this role speaks. It is a "statue dorée, drapée de rouge, d'un jeune homme couché soulevé sur son coude, la tête droite et la bouche ouverte."

The lighting and set of this play correspond to the enlightenment of Oedipe. "La pièce commence dans l'ombre et se termine en plein soleil, Oedipe aveugle. Lorsque la vérité

\[24\] Ibid., p. 190.
\[25\] Ibid., p. 195.
\[26\] Ibid., p. 209.
\[27\] Ibid., p. 213.
\[28\] Cocteau, Oedipe-Roi, p. 5.
se devine, le mur du fond s'approche peu à peu jusqu'à rejoindre complètement le praticable sur la dernière réplique de Jocaste," (just before she hangs herself).

For one performance of Antigone the costumes used were designed to present the characters as a family of insects. "Les tragédiens portaient des masques transparents du genre des masques d'escrime, sous lesquels on devinait leurs figures et sur lesquels, faits de laiton blanc, des visages aériens étaient cousus. Les costumes se mettaient sur des maillots noirs dont les bras et les jambes étaient recouverts. L'ensemble évoquant un carnaval sordide et royal, une famille d'insectes."

At the beginning of the play Antigone and Ismene are facing each other, touching, immobile. When Antigone and Creon discuss her crime, their foreheads touch. Verbally they are not communicating at all. After Creon has left the stage to open Antigone's cave there is a musical interlude. "Un prologue masqué, sorté de statue vivante, précédait la pièce et traversait la scène pendant ce vide

29Ibid., p. 6.

30Cocteau, Antigone, p. 11.

31Ibid., p. 12.

32Ibid., p. 20.
musical."

The settings of *Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde* are walls, different for each of the three acts. The lighting remains the same throughout the play except for Merlin's departures and the return of life at the end of the play.

La Fleur qui Parle can be seen when the lid of its box is opened. It is a type of cactus with a thick stem upon which grows a yellow flower. "Cette fleur inouïe possède la propriété de retenir les paroles qu'on prononce devant elle. La fleur les répète après pour peu qu'on presse la tige. Il suffit d'arracher une de ses feuilles pour que les paroles s'effacent et que la fleur soit toute prête à retenir de nouveau." 35 The flower duly delivers its message from Beaudemagu and Galaad speaks his message to it. At the end of Act I Ginifer treacherously causes the flower to record 36 Merlin's magic transportation formula, which is used by Gauvain, Lancelot and Segramor to return quickly to Camaalot. This ritual is as follows: a circle is drawn on the floor with magic chalk; Merlin, blindfolded, is placed at the inside

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34 Cocteau, *Les Chevaliers ...*, p. 77.
edge of the circle; the false Gauvain, also blindfolded, jumps on Merlin's shoulders. Merlin crouches as his servant recites the incantation. A stormy wind agitates their clothing and the light changes as the curtain falls. Just after Galaad has sat in the **siège périsseux** without incurring a wound the room becomes filled with shadows. A luminous sign floats over the heads of the knights seated at the Round Table; it passes from the door to the window. The voice of the false Grail is heard.

At Merlin's chateau no one is on stage at the beginning of the second act. "Soudain une chaise qui s'est trouvée adossée au mur du fond, remue et glisse lentement jusque derrière une table au premier plan. Lorsque cette chaise s'immobilise de nouveau, les pièces d'échecs qui gisaient en désordre sur la table se dressent sur l'échiquier selon l'apparence que présente une partie en train. C'est alors que la porte du milieu s'ouvre d'elle-même."  

Lancelot plays a game of chess with an invisible opponent—that is, the chess men move by themselves. As Lancelot wins time after time, suddenly "tous les échecs sont renversés sur l'échiquier. La chaise vide tombe à la renverse, la porte s'ouvre et se ferme." Later the false

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38*ibid.*, pp. 115-117.
39*ibid.*, p. 118.
40*ibid.*, pp. 122-123.
queen is able magically to provide herself with food and drink. She traces a star of David on a wall, recites a magic verse, and strikes the wall with her riding whip. "Aussitôt le mur s'ouvre. Il en sort une petite table couverte d'une nappe. Biscuits, fromage, fruits et vin."

The false queen, at Merlin's orders, is forced to climb on a chair and catch a bat. Merlin attaches a message to its paw, recites a magic verse to it, telling it to carry his message where he wants it to go. He throws it out of the window. When the false queen later reveals, to Merlin's rage, the place of arrival of those who use the magician's ritual, the chessmen, who had been thrown over previously, suddenly and noisily arrange themselves on the board again.

At the end of Act II Merlin revenges himself on Ginifer by "changing" the false queen into a horse. The false queen lies face down on two chairs, and is tied there by Merlin. Despite his servant's violent protests and pleas of mercy, he chants an incantation as he straddles the false queen, pulling her hair as though it were reins and whipping his "steed." There are shadows and flashes. A wind arises and the walls disappear.

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\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 130.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 138.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 141.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 146-147.
In Act III Artus hears the voices of his wife and Lancelot whispering together, and the voice of the false Gauvain. After having killed Lancelot and after Guenievre has died, the voices of the fairies are heard speaking to Lancelot. The curtain of the alcove in which the lovers are lying closes by itself.

Merlin and his servant leave Bretagne. Life returns. Suddenly the countryside becomes fertile and green again, the birds sing loudly, and sunlight enters the room. The assembled company "sees" the invisible Grail.

In the first act of *Renaud et Armide* Armide is "invisible" to Renaud; they are on opposite sides of the stage but think they are touching each other. Renaud looks all over for Armide. When Armide finally reveals herself to Renaud, a glittering beam of light falls on her. Armide in Act II puts her spell on Renaud. "Elle commence les charmes et marchera pendant toute la scène en cercles de plus en plus étroits autour de Renaud endormi." Armide

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47 Cocteau, *Renaud*, pp. 229-244.
and Oriane later become "visible" to the two men.

Oriane appears from a transparent wall in the third act. The enchanted garden is filled with shadows as Armide takes off her magic ring. She speaks with Renaud after the shadows have lifted and after sunlight has entered the garden. They kneel, facing each other on opposite ends of the stage. Renaud and Armide never touch during the play, just as their love is never fulfilled.

Bacchus contains no surrealistic details of staging. The setting is the audience chamber of the duke, a room furnished in the style of sixteenth-century Germany.

The actor playing the prologue to the first act of Roméo et Juliette flies by means of an optical illusion; he carries a long trumpet. The only other prologue, that to Act II, is draped over two actors and accompanied by drums. "Le déplacement des acteurs avait été réglé sur des musiques qui furent supprimées à la représentation; leur démarche devait en tirer une vive singularité dans le silence."

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50 Ibid., p. 255.
51 Ibid., p. 283.
52 Ibid., pp. 287-288.
53 Cocteau, Bacchus, p. 15.
54 Cocteau, Roméo ..., p. 4.
55 Ibid., p. 96.
56 Ibid., back cover.
The lighting of this play includes a set of intensely red footlights; the costumes are black with white collars and cuffs, representing the simplicity and single-mindedness of Roméo's and Juliette's love.

L'Aigle à deux Têtes has no particularly surrealistic effects of staging.

Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel takes place on the first platform of the Eiffel Tower. The backdrop represents a bird's eye view of Paris. The camera is of human size, the front opening like a door and the rear connected with the wings. Phono Un and Phono Deux, one on each side of the stage, are two actors dressed as old-fashioned phonographs with trumpets.

Music is an important part of this play; there are nine compositions. The "Ouverture" ends as the curtain goes up. An ostrich runs across the stage, and the hunter "shoots down" a telegram (one falls from the top of the stage). The "Marche nuptiale" is played as the wedding party marches in; the director of the Eiffel Tower and the hunter bring a table with the dishes painted on the cloth, and the general

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57Crosland, p. 79.
58Cocteau, Les Mariés, p. 52.
59Ibid., p. 53.
60Ibid., p. 55.
gesticulates to the "Discours du général." A girl rides in on a bicycle and rides off again. The wedding party poses behind the table and watches a bather from the camera dance to "La baigneuse de Trouville," after which the photographer throws a terry-cloth robe over her shoulders. This girl enters the camera, skipping and throwing kisses. After saying "Puisque ces mystères me dépassent, feignons d'en être l'organisateur," the photographer bows.

The child who comes out of the camera wears a crown of green paper and carries a basket and some books. To the accompaniment of the musical composition "Le Massacre" he throws bullets from his basket at the wedding party, which collapses, screaming. The cablegrams enter, scuffling, then form a line and do a dance to "Valse des dépêches." The lion from the camera roars, chases the general under the table and emerges carrying a boot with a spur in his mouth. He enters the camera.

The wedding party forms a funeral procession as "Marche

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. } 55.\]
\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. } 57.\]
\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. } 58.\]
\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. } 59.\]
\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. } 60.\]
\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. } 61.\]
funèbre is played. Then the wedding party dances a quadrille to "Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel." The photographer drinks a glass of champagne. The ostrich returns; the photographer puts his hat on the bird and it walks around, "invisible."

Once again posed, the wedding party is admired and sold; the art dealer shows a large poster bearing the figure 1,000,000,000,000. On the reverse side this poster reads "VENDU." He places this side against the wedding party. The general comes out of the camera, without one of his boots, and takes his place among the others. A dove comes out of the camera. The "Marche nuptiale" is played as the wedding party enters the camera by couples. The director of the Eiffel Tower announces the closing by means of a speaking trumpet. Then "L'appareil se met en marche vers la gauche, suivi de son soufflet comme de wagons. Par des ouvertures on voit la noce qui agite des mouchoirs, et, par dessous, les pieds qui marchent."

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67 Ibid., p. 62.
68 Ibid., p. 63.
69 Ibid., p. 65.
70 Ibid., p. 66.
71 Ibid., p. 67.
The stage of La Voix Humaine is reduced by a frame of painted red curtains. It represents a distorted angle of a woman's bedroom, dark and bluish, with white furniture, ceiling, and blankets. The bed is in disorder. On the wall is the photographic enlargement of a portrait of malignant aspect. The only light is from the bathroom door and from a lamp on the telephone table. "Le rideau découvre une chambre de meurtre. Devant le lit, par terre, une femme en longue chemise est étendue, comme assassinée."  

During the play the woman speaks on the telephone sitting up, sitting down, her back turned, leaning, pacing up and down until in the end she falls face down on the bed, her head hanging down. The telephone is wound around her neck as she says "Coupe! Coupe vite!" "La nervosité ne se montre pas par de la hâte, mais par cette suite de poses dont chacune doit statuer le comble de l'inconfort." The actress should give the impression of bleeding, of losing her blood, "comme une bête qui boîte, de terminer l'acte dans une chambre pleine de sang."  

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72 Cocteau, La Voix ..., pp. 17-18.  
73 Ibid., p. 18.  
74 Ibid., p. 69.  
75 Ibid., p. 19.  
76 Ibid., p. 20.
Les Monstres sacrés, La Machine à écrire and Les Parents terribles are not staged surrealistically.

There are two original categories of visual effects repeated in Cocteau's plays. Divine and supernatural beings are personified, or at least represented physically: Death, the Sphinx, Anubis, and the Graal. Machines assume a role much more important than their simple mechanical nature: the short-wave equipment, the infernal machine of destiny, La Fleur qui Parle, the phonographs, the camera and the telephone. On the stage these machines have connotations that surpass their ordinary functions; they are either members of the cast or integral parts of the plot. Machines are imaginatively exploited by Cocteau to represent ideas which are not clear but which leave an impression of the large role of machinery in modern life. Perhaps the important roles played by machines in Cocteau's surrealistical plays predict a time when machines will replace people for certain functions. Indeed, perhaps they already do.

The effects of sound, lighting and color employed by Cocteau serve to make his surrealistical devices appear "real" or to appear just real enough to be accepted surrealistically inasmuch as surrealism includes all sorts of magic, deception, prophecy and coincidence.
Cocteau's use of imaginative visual effects in his plays is ahead of his time, according to one critic who claims the visual area of theater is becoming more important and in the future Cocteau's staging, which has been considered simple prestidigitation, will be seen as an anticipation of the visual era in theater. The surrealism of Cocteau's staging is best described as an enchanted fairyland where the poet tries to "Découvrir le hasard apprenant à tricher/ Et des statues en train d'essayer de marcher." 

77Grosland, p. 211.
78Cocteau, as quoted in Boorsch, p. 80.
CHAPTER VII

THE ORIGINALITY OF COCTEAU'S THEATER

The best evidence of Cocteau's artistic originality is to be found in his theater. His non-surrealist plays, although they might be acceptable and entertaining translations, adaptations, melodramas or naturalistic theater, are not so memorable as the plays in which he interprets myths surrealistically or invents new characters and devices.

"In the age of surrealism, Cocteau religiously created magic out of the theatre. The simplest of objects, when placed together in startling juxtaposition, create a surrealist decor and upset the monotonous routine of daily life. Cocteau presents the most commonplace objects, but from such a new or surrealist angle, that the spectator may well believe in the presentation of something new."^2

Cocteau's non-surrealist plays are sometimes clever, original, and interesting for their psychology. They are entertaining but lack the creative inventiveness of his surrealist plays. When his theater as a whole is considered

^1Lemaitre, p. 147, and Peacock, p. xi.

^2Fowlie, Age of ..., p. 122.

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they drop into the background; someone else might have written them, perhaps. The surrealistic plays, on the contrary, are unmistakably marked by Cocteau's creative genius. They stand out distinctly. They could not be mistaken for the work of anyone else.

Les Parents terribles, which was very successful and received much acclaim, is nevertheless only "a fine play in the tradition of Ibsen." It has no original inventions such as the horse of Orphée or La Fleur qui Parle of Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde. A good writer conforms to existing genres but stretches them at the same time. A repetition of something too familiar is boring and unoriginal. Cocteau's Roméo et Juliette is much inferior to Shakespeare's; his "operations" on Antigone and Oedipe-Roi likewise lack the sparkle of originality found in Orphée and in La Machine infernale, in which Cocteau treats familiar myths surrealistically, joining a plurality of worlds, mixing a "cocktail of spheres."

If a writer presents something entirely new, however, he risks becoming unintelligible. Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel would be in danger of this if it were not a satire

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3 Oxenhandler, Scandal & ..., p. 196.
4 Wellek, p. 245.
5 Ibid., p. 200.
based on existing cliches.

The idea of a plurality of worlds is surrealistic in that it makes possible visible manifestations of unseen worlds, or of higher realities. Cocteau mixes the worlds of machines, animals, plants, gods, dreams, fairies, death, ghosts and angels with the world of ordinary human beings in his surrealistic plays. These supernatural elements are given an actual existence in the staging of the plays; they are part of the plot, are seen and very naturally become "real." "Ce qu'il y a d'admirable dans le fantastique, c'est qu'il n'y a plus de fantastique: il n'y a que le réel."

It is no doubt possible to interpret some of Cocteau's surrealist devices symbolically, but such equations would narrow the effects of these devices too much. One of the best qualities of surrealistic theater is that interpretations of it can be completely personal and subjective, and therefore infinitely varied. The dangers of unfixed interpretation are a degeneration of the devices into absurdity. Absurdity, however, is one of the principles of surrealism.

It is possible to make some broad generalizations about Cocteau's theater without making too definite interpretations. All of his surrealist plays present at least three levels of thought: reality, unreality, and the "void"

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6Breton, p. 25.
between the two. All contain "impossible" things: the poetic horse, the Sphinx, the talking flower, the woman Death, the speaking camera and so forth. These elements are legitimately "possible," however, in surrealistic theater because nothing is unacceptable in surrealism. These devices are the result of the application of two surrealistic methods of creation: the use of familiar things in an unfamiliar way, and the use of unfamiliar things in a familiar way. Obviously these two methods allow an infinite amount of artistic creation, all of which is acceptable surrealistically, and any of which may be original.

Cocteau's magic juxtaposition of different worlds is the principal basis of his originality in the theater. "The magic which is necessary to the universe of reality is the essence of his trade." These worlds lead to the invention of surrealistic characters that represent or inhabit a milieu of unreality. In Orphée Death, Azraël and Raphaël are from the world of death, as is the angel Heurtebise. The horse and the dove may also be from the realm of death. The Sphinx and Anubis of La Machine infernale are from the world of immortal gods; the phantom of Laius and the dead Jocaste are from the world of the dead. The dreams of Oedipe and Jocaste are caused by the infernal machine. Galaad and Lancelot

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7Pucciani, p. 16.
have connections with the world of fairies; the voices of the fairies are heard by ordinary men. Merlin, Ginifer and the Graal are from the world of magic. La Fleur qui Parle is a plant-machine, Orilus the falcon speaks in Ségramor’s dream, and Ségramor understands the language of the birds. Armide and Oriane are fairies and Armide’s ring is magic in Renaud et Armide. The world of machines is also represented by the two phonographs, the camera and perhaps the cablegrams in Les Maries de la Tour Eiffel, and the world of animals by the ostrich, the lion and the dove. The telephone in La Voix humaine represents other people as well as the world of machines.

All these animals, machines, magic objects and so forth need not be interpreted as symbols, however. They represent their worlds in the same sense that delegates to a convention represent a group or a country. The nature of the group represented cannot be deduced from one delegate alone. "Au sortir du réalisme et du naturalisme, et de ce symbolisme qui en est le prolongement naturel (quoi de plus réaliste et matériel qu’un symbole?) il s’agit de retrouver un art dont le dessein soit moins de représenter les objets, les passions et les êtres que de nous en proposer des équivalences. Substituer le trompe-l’esprit au trompe-l’œil ...."
Cocteau has been accused of using devices with too much levity in his plays, of being insincere. It has been said that Cocteau is a case of witchcraft having overwhelmed the apprentice sorcerer. But an artist is not required to be consistent; this is unnecessary if his works have no philosophical implications. Cocteau's apparent levity is perfectly justified by the element of absurdity in surrealism.

"Sincerity" in a work of art is hard to trace, especially if the work betrays the surrealistic enthusiasm characteristic of Cocteau, who appears to be "magician, rabbit, and delighted child-spectator" all at once. The sincere or insincere intention of the author is not necessarily related to the effect of a play on others. His intentions are not even important, because what counts is the result. The question of sincerity, then, has nothing to do with a work of art.

In Cocteau's surrealistic poésie de théâtre the problems posed are not solved, the solutions are not found, the mysteries are not explained. In his plays the answer to all problems is that there is no answer; the mystery justifies itself. Cocteau states that his works do not "mean"

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9Boorsch, p. 80.
10Fowlie, Age of ..., p. 120.
11Wellek, p. 215.
12Oxenhandler, Scandal & ..., p. 36.
anything—they are what they are. This is the ultimate acceptance of surrealism in art.

The originality of Cocteau's theater is to be found in the plot, language and ideas of his surrealistic plays, and in their staging. It is also evident in the staging of some of his non-surrealistie plays. An artistic study could be made exclusively of the staging of Cocteau's plays without any attempt to consider them as surrealistic literature.

An interesting part of Cocteau's theater (in the broad sense of the word) is his cinema. A study could be made of his films and their relation to his plays, as surrealistic in dialogue and ideas, and as surrealistic because of their visual effects. Comparisons could be made between Cocteau's graphic art (his drawings, stage designs and films) and his verbal art. Although Cocteau has been functioning as a creator for approximately half a century, his various modes of artistic expression have elicited controversy and scandal rather than the serious analysis and study for which there is much opportunity in his voluminous creative accomplishments.

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13Grosland, p. 184.
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF JEAN COCTEAU'S THEATER


SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


