ALEMBIC

FALL 1965
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Autumnal:
The Search, The Mood, a Story, and somewhat of a Message

STEFEN V. GRILLO ’67

The Search:

Acknowledging a painfully microscopic speck of space with brooding figure and stale cigarette smoke, a boyish man, a paradoxical mixture of moods and minds, sits searching silently. Stacking life-layers skyward, time passes. The thin curling smoke explores the room and then settles, low-hung and floating. The silent searching goes on, but void of fruition—its vain processes mingled with the smoke.

Outside, autumn ruthlessly rushes the landscape towards winter.

The Mood:

The ocher and vermilion hues
Splashed on branch, bark, and fade-out green,
bring thoughts of just past summer—
snapshot, beachsand, youthful dream.
But that verdurous earth went without notice
when a band of two noble knights
bounding, galloping on an unbound steed
slew Evil the verbose dragon
then disappeared into the subtle nuances
of the warm, creatively silent night.
No wonder, then, that we forbid the mourning
of frolic, sun and stargaze huddling.
Here comes brisk, wind-whisked winter,
and the joy of long-night cuddling.

The lines obviously equate joy and love, but fail to expose the many moods and/or modifications that each season effects. Dissatisfied, the young man turns to music, that
great mental stimulus, and even greater effector of moods. The royal-blue Motorola stereo imbues the room with organized sound.

Impressions:

The piano player strikes the keyboard sounding a D seventh chord; an alto saxophone slurs three pickup notes, and, on the downbeat, a quartet fills the room with the sound of *Autumn Leaves*.

Listen! A Story:

A camera crew, a director, script writer, and producer (one man holding a camera), actors (two unsuspecting young men), an actress (an unsuspecting young lady), walk through the autumn colored woods in search of a setting for a low-budget, new-wave film.

Success!

A clearing has been fashioned into a picnic area: Someone has ingeniously utilized several large flat rocks as picnic tables and benches. Viewed quickly, the arrangement resembles archaic ruins—possibly Roman, or, better yet, Stonehenge.

The weather, time, place, coloring, and characters suggest a flashback memory of childhood, and the heavy foliage facilitates impressionistic photography. More specifically, it's one of those Saturday afternoons in October when no one complains about New England weather.

Well, that takes care of time and place, and, somewhat, coloring. As for the characters, hold on—what could be more dramatic than having a villain, a naked heart, and a beautiful girl placed beneath the October sky in triangular conflict. The villain—precise, cold, and perfectly formed, vies with naked heart—defenseless, silent, and brooding, for our heroine—“Miss October Sky.”
The director of this new-wave movie scans the area, frantically searching for meaningful symbolism. Oh No! Guess what! At an unbelievably opportune moment the area is filled with young boys playing cowboy and Indian games. Naturally the director immediately incorporates this event as a symbol of the triangular conflict which will dominate his film. The camera continues to scan and incorporate: there are massive, craggy rocks; thick, time-textured trees; and always the leaves. The leaves move in and out of focus; they undulate in the breeze; they move according to their color properties: the faded greens lie flat against the blue of the sky; the vermillions splash the scene with involvement; various neutral tone unify the composition; the sun causes and controls all movement.

As expected, the villain makes the first move, confidently boasting of his powers; and, in typically villainous style, captivates our heroine. The heroine, however, makes no attempt to escape. She does not call out frantically to her lover Naked Hart. Indeed not! This is a new-wave film—intellectually complex, highly symbolic, psychological, and beneath it all, very simple. Just wait, you'll see!

Meanwhile, Naked Hart just sits passively watching his adversary maneuver. This is where the dialogue begins. The director concentrates his camera on the previously described leaves and at the same time Naked Hart's thoughts are overheard by the intensely disinterested audience. Needless to say, the effect renders the audience pro-Naked Hart, and from this point on he's referred to as "Our Hero." It is doubted that you are surprised.

Once the director has won support for his hero, he concentrates on the lovely heroine: her hair falls long but unwillingly—gently caressing her face as it falls, but the breeze
catches it and it falls off lovesick; her smile is subtle and wisp, like the joyous strands of hair that have succeeded in clinging to her face and mouth; her stance foreshadows copious fruition as she unconsciously poses as an earthy goddess; the color of her garment paints her into the scene. She is truly Miss October Sky, but also May’s finest flower, December’s purest snow, and July’s beachsand dream. All these epithets are written with her large dark eyes. The camera is enthralled.

The director is ecstatic about his “new find”. The hero—“Our Hero”—concludes that the villain can’t really help himself—she’s much too attractive; and so, instead of fighting our hero makes friendly gestures to the villain.

The three characters talk and eat a hearty meal at the hero’s home. The soft afternoon light turns to an autumn evening’s crisp coolness, and the dancing leaves dance only in the glare of street lights. Outside, autumn ruthlessly rushes the landscape towards winter. Suddenly, the villain leaves, feeling unexplainably defeated. The hero and heroine, not noticing his departure, adapt to the season’s change. Somewhat of a Message:

two-by-two precludes three
unless divisible by one, two, or falsity.
Two Tanka

THOMAS J. BRAGA '66

Shawl

Absorbing life and
Heat, the long black Shawl, burned in
Sun's Blasphemy, cloaks
Distraught face, and smudges all
With Ash of concerned Harmony.

Madness

The noxious Essence
Of psychic Grape strained and
Restrained in Mind's press,
Madness ferments in the Kegs,
Stored and aged in Cellars' thoughts.
Holocaust
On the 700th anniversary of the birth of Dante Alighieri
(1265-1321)

The Song of a Cockleshell

L. BRUCE PORTER '67

And David danced with all his might before
the Lord.—II Kings 6:14

O Navigator of this ancient bark
that cleaves the vast, primeval ocean's roar,
behold us who, hearing thy redolent harmonies,
follow in descant chorus
this way to the distant shore.

The sand and the salt with the sea that heaves
its bosom to the skies
cry forth with labored sighs
and in foaming exultation dash themselves upon the
shore.

Thou, before the Ark,
did beat your heart upon the temple floor
did dance upon a palette
and sweat
and spin
and sing
till every tincture, tint and tinge
were summoned forth and spilled across
three kingdoms of the dead.
The Song of a Cockleshell

Now exultant jubilation
   with redundant animation
        summons sweet intoxication,

While the fervent syncopation
   of the waves against your bark
reverberates the raptures of your heart
    as when you danced before the ark.
 — and so conceived thy triptych of the soul.

Yet:

   murmuring stand the multitude
      upon the mutant shore.
these whisper of love in solitude
   and watch the ocean roar.
but we, in the smallest of cockleshells, still follow . . .
A Tree In Autumn

Edward A. Sklepovich '66

The Judas-kiss of night
Has betrayed the promise of spring,
And, now, with bare outthrust limbs
The tree resigns itself to threnodic winds
Which moan across the palling land.

Its garments of bright death,
Cast-off, lie at its feet,
Violated by the nut-seeking squirrels;

Its pierced trunk relinquished its life,
Squeezing it into the void of a waiting world.

All seems desolate, a scene without hope.
But then, from the garments upward winds
An incense pure for the skies
And is accepted into their cerulean depths.
Fado
fate or fate song

THOMAS J. BRAGA '66

J'entends mon fado gémir,
La psalmodie à venir,
Envoyée par la Voix adoucie,
Portée par le Mot endurci.

Glisse dans mon port
La barque chargée de mon sort—
Sur quoi je me demande quelle confiance
Hante la grotte de telle méfiance.

Sonnent partout les sons de ces Cordes,
Musique qui se met à se tordre
Afin de faire fleurir une grande richesse
Quin n'aboutit qu'à une petite tristesse.

Ce moment je ne sens que le Départ
Où mon fado se cache à part
Pour se sauver du Destin
Que je lue apportera enfin.
Intensity
The gulls sing to each other
across water
That murmurs threats, shaking
Its straw-gray hair
at the wind.

The gulls call over the water
and dip
snatching at the hair of the sea
As a challenge
and tip up on a wing—

While the sea strains
onto the shore
And drums pound up
From the ocean floor
spraying the beach.
Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*: an introduction

Dennis Weintraub '67

Eugene Ionesco's expressionistic satire, *Rhinoceros*, was first produced on stage in Paris on January 25th, 1960. The world of Ionesco's play is certainly the world of today; it is the frenzied youth rallies of the thirties in Nuremburg and this year's May Day parade in Moscow or Peking; it is a world in which ideologies have become idolized at the expense of individuality in thought and action, and freedom in general. Ionesco’s world is a world of conformity in which the masses, the “herd,” are stimulated to action, springing like Pavlovian animals to act in behalf of passionate but vacuitous phraseology. The particular phrases are in themselves of secondary importance; it may be the cry of “Bolshevik,” “Jew,” “imperialist warmonger!” and perhaps it may even be one of the empty cliches which would exhort us to purchase the latest brand of soap suds.

Three of the characters of *Rhinoceros* are of essential importance to an understanding of the play's theme. The central personage is Berenger, an employee in a law publishing firm; he is an apparently sloppy looking individual who would seem to drink too much too often; by his own confession life for him is a “dream.” Above all Berenger is established as an Unconventional, neither finding it easy nor desirable to adapt himself to the regimentation of the 8-hour-a-day-6-day-a-week-3 weeks in the summer life of his fellow office workers. Jean, Berenger’s friend and co-worker, is a perfect foil to the latter’s nonconformity. Jean is fastidious in every way and argues with Berenger that the superior man is one “who fulfills his duty”; Jean sets out to try and correct his friend’s unkempt appearance, while sug-
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gesturing that he introduce himself to the world of contemporary "culture" by attending an Ionesco play for example. At moments Jean is almost a parodied version of a Prussian military officer in his unmitigated desire for a strict order; he may even be a second cousin to Malvolio! It will follow that Jean will be one of the first to catch "rhinoceritis." A third character, Daisy, a young blonde co-worker, is desired by Berenger; Daisy leaves Berenger to join the herd of rhinoceri when she realizes that she can't stand to be different from the majority. A minor but important personage is the Logician whose "logic" is a gauge to measure the kind of world which the playwright has chosen as a framework for his theme.

The plot in outline is quite clear. While Jean and Berenger are having an argument concerning the shortcomings of the latter's living habits, a rhinoceros is heard and seen charging through the city streets; soon it becomes apparent that the number of these pachyderms is rapidly and mysteriously increasing at an alarming rate. What is even more astounding is that all of Berenger's fellow human beings are metamorphisizing into these creatures. At the end of the play only Berenger, huddling in a corner of his apartment while herds of rhinoceri demolish the city, has not "capitulated."

Ionesco's play is primarily about the totalitarianization of a society. The physical transformation of the characters in the play is an objective rendering of a mental morphosis which takes place in all those who surrender their individuality in an act of conformity. The herd of rhinoceri is nothing more than an expressionistic objectification of the mentality of a group of people who have dedicated themselves mind and body to a System. Ionesco has vividly—
and certainly not without humor—depicted the process of dehumanization which takes place in all who would make their ideology their God.

All the characters in the play who become rhinoceri do so because they are subject to "rhinoceritis" in one way or another. Jean is a case in point. For Jean, rhinoceritis arises from his intense desire to look "respectable" and to do what society considers to be "the right things," such as shaving regularly, wearing polished shoes, attending artistic functions, etc. It is Jean's strict adherence and idolization of an abstract—and Ionesco suggests essentially meaningless—set of rigid norms that renders him predisposed to become a rhinoceros; it is the type of person which Jean represents who is quick to dedicate himself unthinkingly to any Order such as Nazism, Ionesco is saying. On the other hand, Daisy becomes a rhinoceros simply because she can't bear being different from the majority of her fellow citizens.

Ionesco's metaphor has become a symbol. The collective psychosis of a mob—be it "legitimized" by whatever ideological name—is destructive, powerful, noisy, "instinctive," and rash in their reactions; above all they are unthinking and in a metaphysical sense the individual is non-existent. Those who echo the vacuities of a set of meaningless slogans and react at their bidding are nothing more than a herd of rhinoceri.

Ionesco's play is witty and at times in its genuine absurdity, uproariously comic; yet although his play is laughable, the implications themselves are not in the least funny. At the conclusion of the play it becomes obvious that Ionesco is raising a question to his audiences. Huddled in his crumbling apartment, Berenger, the one individualist who because of his unconventionality is inherently unable to
join the majority, affirms shakily that he will not “capitulate.” The question of whether Berenger will or will not capitulate is of little importance; the question is will we, the audience, capitulate.

Ionesco is asking if we will join the herd, the majorities in life because it is convenient or “safe,” or whether perhaps, like Berenger, we will continually attempt to exercise a minimal degree of objective critical thought and in this way retain our individuality, while at the same time combatting “rhinoceros-like” thinking. All of us are rhinoceri when we begin to respond automatically with stereotyped (unthinking, patterned) reactions to the shallow, hollow slogans of propaganda, be they pronouncements from the totalitarian capitals of the world or, unfortunately, from Madison Avenue U.S.A.

**The Community of Souls**

**Bob Hutson '67**

I walked along a pebbled beach one day
And found that in my stride
I passed among the members
Of a huge community of sleeping, stoney souls—
Silent, dark and huddled;
Brooding there—yet disarmingly open and plain;
Waiting their turn upon the deserted land
To be claimed by the eternal sea,
To be washed in, washed out
Washed flat and mute
By changing, ever-changing lunar tide,
Yet, somehow paramount upon that shore.