

NAZI INFLUENCES IN IONESCO'S RHINOCEROS

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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qih8bwcfh1U&feature=em-share_video_user

INTRODUCTION

Eugene Ionesco was born in 1912 in Slatina Rumania. There is some doubt about his date of birth. Some records claim he was born in 1909. At birth his name was Eugen Ionescu. He was the eldest child of a Rumanian lawyer who had married a French woman Therese Icard. Eugene Ionesco had a troubled childhood. As a small child he experienced the death of his sibling Mircea who died of meningitis before he was two years old.

When he was just eighteen months old his family moved to Paris. For the next two decades his family kept shuttling between Rumania and France. So he had a very unsettled childhood. In 1916 his father returned to Bucharest and in 1925 his mother took the family back to Rumania. The young Eugen was a sickly but sensitive young boy. At the age of nine years he and his sister Regine were moved to a farm in the provinces, in La Chapelle-Anthenaise in Mayenne to recuperate as she was not keeping well. It was during his stay in the farm that his name got changed to Eugene Ionesco.

At a young age, Ionesco was separated from his parents and this left an indelible impression on him. He was happy at the village farm but it is probably there that he developed the ideas that happiness exists only in solitary solitude (like Berenger at the end of the play, ***Rhinoceros***) and not in any collective action.

The family was re-united in Bucharest in 1925. Much to his dismay Eugene discovered that his father had divorced his mother. So now from a lonely childhood he also experienced the trauma of a broken home. His dislike for

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Totalitarianism of all kinds emerged during these adolescent years. His father had re-married and his new wife Lola's parental family was domineering, fastidious, overbearing and right wing (shades of Jean bullying Berenger in Act One of the play). He started disliking his father for maltreating his mother. However later when he became more mature he realized that his father was just a conformist like many other people and toed the line (similar to the boss Papillon who turns into a rhinoceros in the play out of convenience).

He also disliked his father for not paying alimony to his mother who had returned to Paris and was looking after his sister Regine there. It was whilst studying at the University in Bucharest that Eugene Ionesco's antipathy for fascism and totalitarianism began. He disliked the Rumanian Iron Guards whose numbers kept increasing (like the rhinoceros' in the play) and was upset that his trusted friends gradually changed ideologies and did not resist them. So we can see that there is a strong autobiographical element in the formation of Berenger's character. During the play Berenger goes through the same process, aghast seeing his friends and colleagues conform and become rhinoceros. Of course Berenger is shaken out of his ennui by the rapid changes that take place in his city. Ionesco also resented the prevailing anti-Semitism that existed in Rumania with the rise of the Iron Guards and later in Nazi Germany.

As a literature student at Bucharest University, Ionesco developed an interest in Rumanian folk poetry and read many Rumanian authors. He was very fond of Philosophy also. He became a prolific writer and was fond of music, sculpture and drama.

After graduation he taught French and in 1936 married Rodica Burileano. In 1938 he returned to France on a government grant to do research on French poetry. But with the advent of the 2nd World War in 1939 he had to do military service. He disliked the disciplined regime in the Army. Afterwards he worked in the production department of a law-publishing house (just like Berenger in ***Rhinoceros***). He wrote his first play in 1950, ***The Bald Prima Dona*** in 1948.

The Works of Ionesco

His play ***The Bald Prima Dona*** was first produced in 1950 in a small theatre directed by Nicholas Bataille. Then for the next two decades Ionesco wrote a series of plays which were often experimental and became the vanguard of the **Avant -garde** movement. Avant-garde basically means

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advanced guard. They are plays which move away from the tradition of realistic, psychological or poetic drama and are attempting to convey truths through several non-verbal means. In these Avante-garde plays several strange visuals got used as the playwrights and directors were trying to "revolutionize the arts, the theatre, people's perception of reality, which they all believed the realistic theatre was unable to do because of the burden of its form." (Dilip K. Basu, Introduction to **Rhinoceros**, p. XV). In the decades after World War II, some of these dramatists were described as writers of the Theatre of the Absurd by Martin Esslin in his scholarly book of the same name.

Ionesco's plays were also seen as experimental and attempting to do something new in drama. It was drama with a limited storyline, but instead focused on existential problems of loneliness, terror, despair, listlessness or boredom.

His plays have lots of outrageous happenings, like a rhinoceros running across the stage, people turning into a rhinoceros, a person turning into a corpse and flying, hundreds of eggs and women with extra noses. Such visuals were produced with the help of technology and stage and lighting facilities. Comic ludicrousness is also shown with verbal language collapsing as a means of communication (conversations of the logician and Old Gentleman in the play).

English translations of Ionesco's plays and other works in prose in book-form include ten volumes of plays published by John Calder, London and Grove Press, New York. The play in our course **Rhinoceros** appears in Volume IV along with **The Leader** and **The Future is in Eggs** (**Rhinoceros** ed. by Dilip Basu, Worldview publications, pg. 260). Most of the translations are done by Donald Watson. But the three plays in Volume IV, which includes the play in our course is translated by Derek Prouse. Though he wrote many it was **Rhinoceros** which gave Ionesco an international reputation. The success of this play written at the peak of the Cold War is that it dealt with contemporary political events

The Cold War 1945–1991 was not a physical but an ideological war, basically the political and economic rivalry between the Communist or Soviet bloc of nations and the democratic, capitalist nations of the Western World, with the United States of America in the forefront. This struggle for the supremacy of an ideology, either Communism or Capitalism, took place in countries all over the world in Asia, Africa, Europe and South America. The essence of Communism was that it valued the collective over the individual. In contrast Capitalism valued individual freedom and invention, competition and freedom of expression

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A European audience which had witnessed the horrors of Nazi Germany just two decades ago empathized with the subtle political themes in Ionesco's play. Ionesco himself had conceived the play as a post-mortem of the Nazification of Europe during the inter-war period. The play was seen as a critique of all collective hysteria, when it was produced in the 1960s.

In contrast to his earlier experimental plays in the late 1950s, Ionesco began to explore more sustained dramatic situations featuring more humanized characters. **The Killer** written in 1959 is Ionesco's second full-length play. Bérenger, a central character in a number of Ionesco's plays, is included in **Rhinoceros**, **The Killer**, **A Stroll in the Air** and **Exit the King**.

Bérenger is a semi-autobiographical figure expressing Ionesco's wonderment and anguish at the strangeness of reality. He is comically naïve, engaging the audience's sympathy. In **The Killer** he encounters death in the figure of a serial killer. In **Rhinocéros** he watches his friends turning into rhinoceroses one by one until he alone stands unchanged against this mass movement. It is in this play that Ionesco most forcefully expresses his horror of ideological conformism, inspired by the rise of the fascist Iron Guard in Romania in the 1930s and of course Nazi Germany. **Exit the King** (1962) shows him as King Bérenger 1st, an everyman figure who struggles to come to terms with his own death.

Ionesco and the Theatre of the Absurd

Ionesco is often considered a writer of the Theatre of the Absurd. This is a label originally given to him by Martin Esslin in his book of the same name, placing Ionesco alongside such contemporary writers as Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov. Esslin called them "absurd" based on Albert

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Camus' concept of the absurd, claiming that Beckett and Ionesco better captured the meaninglessness of existence in their plays than in works by Camus or Sartre. However it is difficult to confine Ionesco to the specific context of the Theatre of the Absurd. Ionesco has repeatedly expressed discomfort with such a label. Due to this loose association, Ionesco is often mislabeled as an existentialist. Ionesco claimed in **Notes and Counter Notes** that he was not an existentialist. He frequently criticized existentialist figurehead Jean-Paul Sartre.

Although Ionesco knew Beckett and honored his work, the French group of playwrights was far from an organized movement.

Ionesco's plays were also experimental, many of his plays do not tell a story but it is difficult to label him. His plays, particularly **Rhinoceros** have a strong political context. The play's politics is of supporting the status quo. The one-horned and two-horned varieties of rhinos have no difference, has a significant political message. Ionesco wrote the play when the Cold War was at its peak. So the play is an attack on all Totalitarian ideologies, which includes Communism and Fascism as practised by the Nazis, Mussolini's Italy and the Red Guards in Rumania. Ironically, though Ionesco is against all types of ideologies, he seems to be supporting the perception in many parts of the Western World that communism, like Nazism or any other fascism is a variant of a totalitarian political philosophy, which curbs human freedom. In the play Ionesco's broad attack on all types of collective activity makes the play politically vague and it resembles the "apolitical theatre of the Absurd." (Dilip K. Basu, Introduction to **Rhinoceros**, p. XXXVII).

The play was written in 1959, well after the end of the World War II, and Ionesco "explores the themes of conformity, culture, mass movements, philosophy and morality". So it was not just totalitarianism of any variety Communism, Fascism or Nazism alone. The play shows the dangers of extreme conformity to any form of political ideology. In the 1950s, conformity was not confined only to the erstwhile Soviet bloc of nations (countries in Eastern Europe which had Communist governments). Even in a democratic country like the United States of America (USA), the champion of human rights, there was ample evidence of mass hysteria against people who were sympathetic to socialist ideologies or questioned USA's foreign policy or what was then termed as the "American way of life."

Post-war USA also went through the turmoil of McCarthyism that implied making accusations of disloyalty, subversion, or treason without proper evidence. McCarthyism can also be synonymous with the term witch-hunt, both referring to mass hysteria and moral panic. McCarthyism is a term

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coined because of Republican senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy's frequent attacks against people with socialist and liberal sensibilities. This was similar to the Stalinist purges of the 1930s in the erstwhile USSR.

It was ironic that a nation like the USA that had, along with an alliance, defeated fascist dictatorships in the 1940s, indulged in attempting to acquire similar features and regimentation of the defeated fascist societies. Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* (1952) used the Salem witch trials as a metaphor for McCarthyism. The views of Bertram Gross as stated in his book "*Friendly Fascism*" considers (in the Cold War era) a "capitalist" country like the USA to have characteristics similar to those of Nazi Germany. But this according to him is the 'new' fascism which wears a friendly mask.

Don't think that modern fascists are like Hitler or Mussolini. Today's Big Government-Big Business tyrants are just as willing to use violence. But they do it more efficiently than the old-time fascists-- with higher tech and lower costs to them. They have the best looks, politicians, celebrities, and control mechanisms that money can buy. (p. 4)

The McCarthy witch-hunt did not even last during the mid-1950s. But the effects and many aspects of the massive security apparatus established during the McCarthy era still exist. In the post McCarthyism years the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) ensured that there was no open support for organised labour or for socialistic and communist ideologies. The "American way of life" meant the disinterest in anything to do with 'dirty' politics and the meek acceptance of everything 'American'.

What is Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism is a form of government that theoretically permits no individual freedom and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of the individual's life to the authority of the government. Italian dictator Benito Mussolini coined the term *totalitario* in the early 1920s to describe the new fascist state of Italy, which he further described as: "All within the state, none outside the state, none against the state." By the beginning of World War II, "totalitarian" had become synonymous with absolute and oppressive single-party government. It is the "total" in totalitarianism that gives the best clue to its meaning. The term refers to the type of government that attempts to assert total control over the lives of its citizens. This form of

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tyranny was a 20th-century development that was instituted to serve the goal of transforming society according to socialist principles. Totalitarian governments first appeared shortly after World War I. They lasted in various like Germany, Italy and Spain for about 70 years before proving to be political and economic failures.

In the broadest sense, totalitarianism is characterized by strong central rule that attempts to control and direct all aspects of individual life through coercion and repression. Examples of such centralized totalitarian rule include the Maurya dynasty of India (c. 321–c. 185 BC), the Ch'in dynasty of China (221–206 BC), and the reign of Zulu chief Shaka (c. 1816–28). However in the 20th century totalitarian rule acquired a different context and meaning. The totalitarian states of Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler (1933–45) and the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin (1924–53) were the first examples of decentralized or popular totalitarianism, in which the state achieved overwhelming popular support for its leadership. This support was not spontaneous; its genesis depended on a charismatic leader; and it was made possible only by modern developments in communication and transportation.

Totalitarianism is often distinguished from dictatorship, despotism, or tyranny by its supplanting of all political institutions with new ones and its sweeping away of all legal, social, and political traditions. The totalitarian state pursues some special goal, such as industrialization or conquest, to the exclusion of all others. All resources are directed toward its attainment regardless of the cost. Whatever might further the goal is supported; whatever might foil the interests of the state is rejected. This obsession spawns an ideology that explains everything in terms of the goal, rationalizing all obstacles that may arise and all forces that may contend with the state. The resulting popular support permits the state the widest latitude of action of any form of government. Any dissent is branded evil, and internal political differences are not permitted. Because pursuit of the goal is the only ideological foundation for the totalitarian state, achievement of the goal can never be acknowledged.

Under totalitarian rule, traditional social institutions and organizations are discouraged and suppressed; thus the social fabric is weakened and people become more amenable to absorption into a single, unified movement. This is evident, in the play as people with different temperaments, Jean the civilised bully, Botard the ardent trade-unionist, Daisy's cousin and his wife, the aristocracy like the Duke of St. Simon all become rhinoceros', a cohesive unified movement. Participation in approved public organizations is at first encouraged and then required. Old religious and social ties are supplanted

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by artificial ties to the state and its ideology. As pluralism and individualism diminish, most of the people embrace the totalitarian state's ideology. The infinite diversity among individuals' blurs. It is replaced by a mass conformity (or at least acquiescence) to the beliefs and behaviour sanctioned by the state. Towards the end of Act III of **Rhinoceros** the dangers of mass conformity are amply revealed. Many of Berenger's friends including his girl friend Daisy and the Deputy-Head of his firm of law publications, Dudard gradually compromise, conform and get transformed into a rhinoceros.

Rhinoceros as a Critique of Totalitarianism

In disturbed times, Totalitarianism, with its emphasis on efficiency, order and brotherhood seems an attractive proposition. However Eugene Ionesco's play **Rhinoceros**, written in 1958 at the height of the Cold War, exposes the ensnaring allure of Totalitarianism and the fascist ideology, as exemplified by Nazism in the 20th century. The recurring features of all Totalitarian dictatorships like in Nazi Germany was monopoly of all effective weapons of mass destruction, control of mass communication, projection of an ideology and creation of mass terror by use of the secret police. In the inter-action of characters and events in the play **Rhinoceros**, the author exposes the major facets of Nazism. So though the play is a critique of all collective hysteria as precipitated by either Fascism or Marxism, the author shows through incidents in the play, the horrors of Nazi Germany. Ionesco believes that all ideology is idolatry but in the play appropriates history and disturbing events like Nazism to make his point about conformism and totalitarianism. At the end of the play, the anti-heroic Berenger has an intuitive sense of responsibility and though isolated tries to uphold the truth of humanity. Individual resistance is not seen as a solution. Berenger remains isolated in the end, as Ionesco has lost faith in politics of both the Revolutionary Left and the organised right. To understand the play better we must analyse the socio-political turmoil in Germany in the 1920 and early 30s which led to the rise of Nazism.



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9G4sl8VtSY&list=PL419FBD0775045321>

Historical background: Political turmoil in Germany which led to the rise of Nazism

Before we analyse what are the factors which led to the rise of Fascism/Nazism in Germany, let us examine some aspects of Fascism. An aspect of fascism, as commonly understood, is hatred of the Jews. Persecution of this community has existed for centuries in the Europe and the Arab world. In the Christian world the Jews were condemned since they were considered responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. They were also hated because of their wealth largely made by 'money lending', wealth transfers and similar activities carried on by modern banking. In short they provided 'banking' facilities. The interest or other fees they charged (responsible for their wealth) were considered usury both in Christianity and Islam. It was a sin. An evil, but a necessary one. The loaning of money became even more vital as the market economy flourished.

It must also be remembered that the road to Germany's model of Fascism (compared with Italy's) was longwinded. The Great War (World War I, 1914–18) left in its wake a shattered Germany. Not because of any carpet bombing but because of defeated Germany having to pay reparations (compensation to the 'victor' countries) and other humiliating conditions including restricting its industry. The Versailles Treaty was an unequal treaty and was responsible for the 1939-45 war described as World War II. It was significantly responsible for the rise of fascism in Germany in the form of Nazism. The National Socialist (Nazi) party and its eventual success were rooted in the resentment of the German people.

Now let us analyse the factors and understand the time span which led to the Nazis acquiring political power. By the end of the decade of the 1920s, politics in Germany had descended into a desperate struggle among the increasingly ineffectual democratic parties, which struggled to hold the centre. Political power changed on an alarmingly regular basis. Between 1920 and 1933, Germans found themselves governed by 11 different chancellors of the Reich, two of whom led the country twice.

The national election on Sept. 14, 1930 brought an unexpected result. An unknown splinter group of the extreme right, which called itself the National Socialist Workers Party of Germany (NSDAP) became the second strongest party in the country by raising their percentage of the vote from three per cent to more than 18 per cent. Two years later they more than doubled that

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result and their leader Adolf Hitler was in a position to demand the post of Chancellor. On January 30, 1933, President Von Hindenburg relented and Hitler was asked to form a cabinet.

The Nazis termed January 30, 1933 as the day of seizing power and conveyed the impression that the whole of the country accepted Hitler as the strong man to lead them out of desolation. The propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, propagated these feelings. However that was not the case. The Nazis were seen just as another party and would go away as quickly as they appeared. The economy had improved during the latter part of 1932, whereupon the Nazis lost over four million votes in the national election and were on the defensive in subsequent municipal elections. This trend continued into March 1933, two months after Hitler's appointment, when Germans were asked to vote in yet another election. The Nazis were not willing to leave anything to chance, so they sent out their ruthless paramilitary wing (SA—Storm Troopers) to beat up or intimidate democratic voters and politicians, which robbed the opposition of many potential voters. Still the Nazis got just 44 per cent of the vote share.

The burning of Reichstag on February 27, 1933 by Marinus van der Lubbe a Dutch ex-Communist as an individual act of protest against the injustice done to the working class gave Hitler an excuse to annul the constitution and allowed the Nazis to arrest the Communists and Socialists. The Nazi leadership considered it as the product of a well-planned Communist conspiracy. An individual's act was projected as the manifestation of a political conspiracy, Propaganda was spread by Goebbels. Violence and repression were let loose by the SA—Storm Troopers.

After the March election, he presented Parliament with the Enabling Act, which basically meant that the government would henceforth issue laws and regulations just as it liked. The act was passed because more than 100 elected representatives could not be present at the ballot. They were in jail or on the run from the SA. This act is in itself a feature of Totalitarianism, which likes to create mass terror to subdue rivals by the use of secret police.

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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dX-h71SLkvs&feature=em-share_video_user&bpctr=1380610358

Significance of the Title of the Play

The author has chosen the Rhinoceros as the title of his play very aptly. The rhinos, with their greenish-gray skin and powerful hides in their collective movement on the stage and destructive urge represent the Panzer divisions of the Nazis, impenetrable, green, short-tempered and ruthless. The ferocity of these rhinos is also a reference to Hitler's ideas of the man of the future where there is no compassion and the weak have to be eliminated. The rhinoceros is a thick-skinned creature with a one-track mind bulldozing its way and destroying any opposition towards a goal it has set for itself.

When some characters in the play like Jean get transformed into a rhinoceros, he displays the same destructive and aggressive qualities as the thick-skinned creature. This aspect is best revealed in Act 2, Scene 2, the transformation scene when the good-natured Berenger goes to visit his ailing friend and discovers to his dismay that Jean is gradually changing into a rhinoceros. The metamorphosis is gradual, the voice becomes hoarse, the hearing declines, memory fades, the skin become shard and green and a bump is forming on his forehead. When Jean is transformed into a rhinoceros he becomes both absurd and violent. The absurdity is shown when he drops his pyjama trousers and says it is "Hot—far too hot!—clothes itch, they itch!" (p. 67). What is more disturbing is the violent streak that he develops. Ionesco writes in his stage directions that "He (Jean) lunges towards Berenger head down" (p. 67). Later when Jean gets trapped and locked in the bathroom he bellows, "I'll trample you, I'll trample you down." The ferocity and lack of tolerance of a rhinoceros gets reflected in Jean's behavior in the locked bathroom. There are sounds of a shattered mirror, objects falling and as Berenger closes the door his coat is pierced by a rhinoceros' horn.

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In the play we see that the worlds of Berenger and the rhinos are not absolute binaries, apolitical versus the political or individual versus the collective. The opposites are perceived to be implicated in each other. Ionesco's comment on his play and his image of the Rhinoceros is revealing.

They would kill you without a qualm if you did not think as they do. And in the last quarter of a century history has given us clear proof that people transformed in this way are not just like, but truly become rhinoceroses. (153, Notes 213)

That is why the title of the play is both appropriate and significant.

Absurd elements in the Play

In his play *Rhinoceros*, Ionesco reveals his fears about the savagery latent in the human heart and also, through the character of Bérenger, projects himself and his own struggles into his drama. To achieve a clear rendering of his themes, Ionesco uses many unconventional dramatic techniques. Through such techniques, Ionesco presents a visual portrayal of the underlying existential conflicts of the play. The various thematic and dramatic elements of the work combine to present a picture of Ionesco's disjointed, chaotic inner world.

One method by which Ionesco conveys his themes is through the senselessness of the characters (besides Bérenger) in the first and second acts. This ridiculousness can be seen especially through the reactions of the people assembled at café, to the two rhinoceroses that run past the café in the first act. The people say, almost simultaneously, "Oh, a rhinoceros!"(pgs. 6 & 7) and then "Well, of all things!"(p. 8). Their comments are all repetitive and very similar, and they seem to lack the ability to make original judgments. Even at this early juncture in the play we see something of a "mass mind" at work, in which each person unthinkingly repeats the actions and echoes the words of someone else. As the dialogue progresses it becomes clear that no one sees the rhinoceroses as portents of a future trend or understands the meaning behind their appearance at all. There are no comments also on the dangers of such a ferocious animal being allowed to run across the streets. The reactions of the people are mechanical.

After seeing the first rhinoceros, the housewife panics, runs onto the stage, and drops her basket of food. The grocer's wife sees the rhinoceros only as

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an instrument of revenge upon the housewife for not buying food from the grocer (p. 9). The old gentleman shows only passing interest in the rhinoceros. He is mainly interested in winning the housewife's affection by helping her gather the scattered provisions. (As she finishes picking up and prepares to leave, he offers to accompany her.) After the second rhinoceros runs over the housewife's cat, she commences a pitiful mourning which continues until the logician addresses the question of the rhinoceros at the end of the first act. These peripheral, single-minded characters are incapable of understanding the significance of the rhinoceros. It is this lack of thought that leads to their eventual transformation into rhinoceroses.

The mechanical and repetitive reactions of the Housewife, Grocer, old Gentleman and Logician are used by the author in ridiculing the narrowness of the characters' concerns. Ionesco also mocks the characters that have pretensions to sensibility and logic. Their reasoning is nothing but a comic farce, which is in some cases made more ridiculous by an egotistical belief in their own intellectual superiority. This group of characters consists primarily of Botard and the logician. The logician is considered to be the wisest and most reasonable person among the characters in the first act, and they look to him to resolve their dispute about the rhinoceros. His answers to their questions, along with his earlier "proof" that Socrates was a cat, reveal his logical propositions to be nonsense.

Botard, although not so highly regarded by his colleagues, prides himself on his "methodical mind," (p. 38) and he holds a precise, scientific view of life. He scoffs at the reports of the rhinoceroses and attributes them to the imaginations of journalists. Even after seeing a rhinoceros, Botard says, "I can't see a thing. It's an illusion." (p. 46). After it becomes abundantly clear that Botard was wrong, he denies ever having doubted the existence of the rhinoceroses. He says that he has been following the problem from the very beginning, and furthermore claims to know who is responsible for allowing such dangerous animals to run wildly on the streets.(p. 52). He is unwilling to admit his own mistakes, and he contradicts himself and makes totally unfounded accusations to avoid doing so. Through the illogic of Botard and the logician, Ionesco presents his view that human reasoning, despite its pretensions to the contrary, is essentially meaningless. Ionesco's inner world is irrational and absurd, and he sees no overriding set of logical rules that tie the universe into a comprehensible whole. According to Ionesco, human reasoning is incapable of bringing order into the world because it itself amounts to nothing but nonsense.

Another instance of absurdity in the play is revealed in Act 2, Scene 1, when Mrs. Beouf enters the office out of breath. She claims her husband, who

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works in the same firm of law publications has got a touch of flu. She had been chased to the office by a group of rhinos. One of the animals tries to climb the stairs to the office which crumbles under his weight. It keeps trumpeting outside the office. When Mrs. Beouf peers down she gasps in astonishment as she realizes that the rhinoceros is actually her husband. The reactions to this shocking metamorphosis are again mechanical and none of her colleagues are really sympathetic. Botard only assures the shocked Mrs. Beouf about "the union's support." (p. 49). Dudard, the young employee with a future talks about insurance and consulting a solicitor. Only Mrs. Beouf's reaction is human and she says, "I won't abandon my husband in such a state." (p, 50). Finally she jumps onto his back and the animal gallops away. The stage directions add to the absurdity. "She jumps; Berenger who tries to restrain her, is left with her skirt in his hand." (p. 50).

Political Passivity

Hitler's acceptance by the German population raises important questions about political passivity. There were many amongst the German population who could be labelled "fellow travellers", who considered themselves apolitical without realising that such a thing was no longer possible. An exhibition in the German Historical Museum which opened in Berlin on October 15, 2010 displays prosaic artifacts, like an old purse, playing cards, a lantern but they emphasize the everyday way that ordinary Germans accepted and often celebrated Hitler. The household items had Nazi logos and colours. This exhibition, entitled "**Hitler and the Germans: Nation and Crime**" displays the self-mobilisation of society. It focuses on the German society of the 1930s that nurtured and empowered him. It foregrounds the view of many historians who have argued that Hitler did not corral the Germans as much as the Germans elevated Hitler. The exhibition shows that how the Nazis as extremists were not isolated from society but instead became members of high society. The exhibit also had many photographs, which shows that young and old alike adored Hitler. The message of this exhibition is more vital for Germany in 2013 than at any time in the past six decades as rising nationalism, hostility to immigrants and a generational disconnect from the events of the Nazi era have older Germans concerned about the repeating the past. (p. 3, **Hitler Exhibit Explores Germany's Circles of Guilt, The Asian Age**, October 23, 2010 reproduced from **The New York Times**.)

In the play the aspect of political passivity is shown in the transformation of the boss Papillon and the logician into rhinos, as revealed in the conversation between Berenger and Dudard in Act 3. In the case of Papillon,

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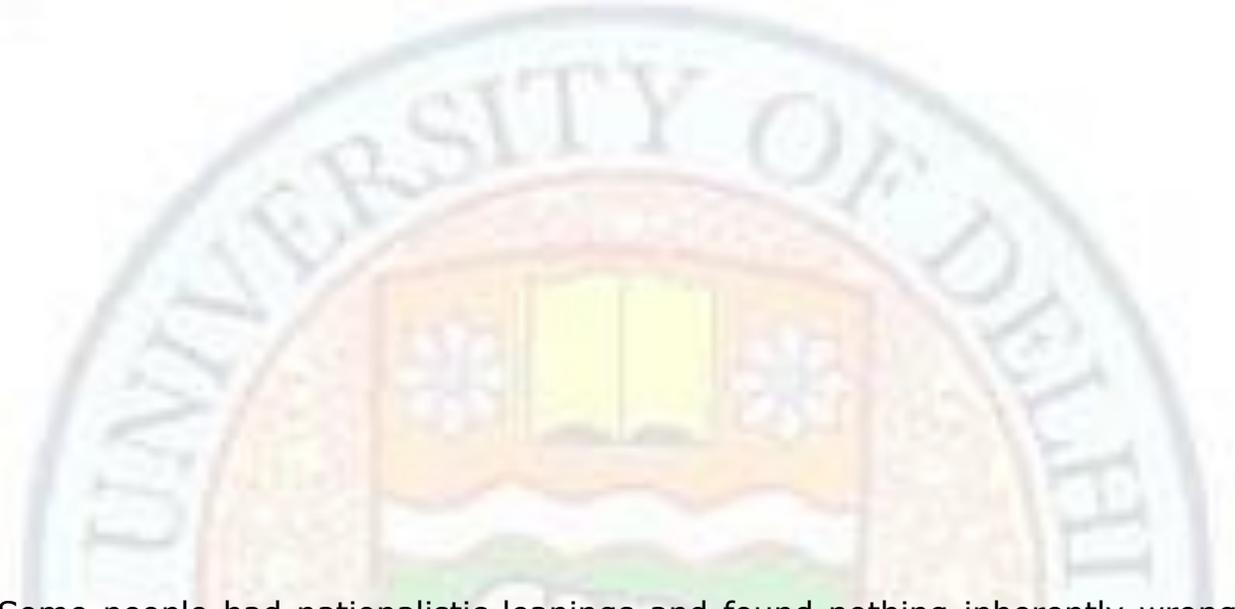
it is seen as an involuntary and disinterested gesture. The logician shown in an absurd manner with his boater hat pierced by the horn also becomes a rhino to conform. Whilst talking to Berenger in Act 3, Daisy (pg. 88) reveals that even the aristocracy 'the Duke of St. Simon' and religious authorities, 'Cardinal of Retz' and Mazarin have compromised and become rhinos to preserve themselves. In the play this implies the support of the Church for Totalitarian regimes. In Nazi Germany, the aristocracy and the Catholic Church compromised and never spoke out against the massacre of the Jews. A tapestry, displayed at the German historical Museum, woven by a church congregation at the behest of their priest was a tribute to the union of church, state and party. An investigative journalist John Cornwall reveals in a book about how the Pope of that time, Pope Pius XII followed a policy of no opposition to the Nazi regime to increase the power of the Papacy.

Hitler's Pope is a book published in 1999 by the British journalist and author John Cornwell that examines the actions of Eugenio Pacelli/Pope Pius XII before and during the Nazi era, and explores the charge that he assisted in the legitimization of Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany, through the pursuit of a Reichskonkordat in 1933. The book is critical of Pius' conduct during the Second World War, criticizing him for not doing enough, or speaking out enough, against the Holocaust. Cornwell argued that Pius's entire career as the nuncio to Germany, Cardinal Secretary of State, and pope was characterized by a desire to increase and centralize the power of the Papacy, and that he subordinated opposition to the Nazis to that goal. He further argued that Pius was anti-Semitic and that this stance prevented him from caring about the European Jews.

In 2009 he described Cardinal Pacelli (the future Pope Pius XII) as being an example of a "fellow traveller" of the Nazis who was willing to accept the generosity of Hitler in the educational sphere (more schools, teachers and pupil places), so long as the Church withdrew from the social and political sphere, at the same time as Jews were being dismissed from universities and Jewish pupil places were being reduced. For this he considers Pacelli as effectively being in collusion with the Nazi cause, if not by intent. He further argues that Monsignor Kass, who was involved in negotiations for the Reichskonkordat, and at that time the head of the Roman Catholic Centre Party, persuaded his party members, with the acquiescence of Pacelli, in the summer of 1933 to enable Hitler to acquire dictatorial powers. He argues that the Catholic Centre Party vote was decisive in the adoption of dictatorial powers by Hitler and that the party's subsequent dissolution was at Pacelli's prompting.

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The background of the page features a large, semi-transparent watermark of the University of Delhi logo. The logo is circular with the text 'UNIVERSITY OF DELHI' around the perimeter. Inside the circle, there is a central emblem depicting an open book, a sun, and a river with mountains in the background.

Some people had nationalistic leanings and found nothing inherently wrong in a dictatorial system. In the play this is reflected in the transformation of Jean in Act 2, Scene 2. Jean's passive dictatorship of routine is witnessed in Act One. At the café where the friends meet at mid-day Jean badgers his best friend Berenger about being late, importance of punctuality, dressing well and importance of efficiency. Jean is shown as making a fetish about personal appearance. *"This is the way to come out: wear a hat, a tie like this, a well-cut suit, shoes well-polished."* p. 19. This is the tyranny of routine. Later he lectures him about improving his mind (ironic reference to see avante-garde theatre, an interesting play, p. 21) and curbing his desire for alcohol (*'squandering your spare money on drink'* p. 21). Others were susceptible to the prejudices the Nazis turned into a racist ideology. The play ***Rhinoceros*** is a critique of collective hysteria as precipitated by either Fascism or Marxism. This gets reflected in the transformation of Botard, a dogmatic trade union leader, who decides to *"move with the times."* (p. 87) and so conforms to a collective ideology. He is the classic case of an individual because of rigid adherence to an ideology, submitting to herd instinct. Thus for Ionesco, a rhinoceros becomes a metaphor for any form of collectivity. Still others thought of themselves as too simple to understand events outside their own small, private world. "We were only obeying orders" led to the Nazification of German clubs and culture. The Nazis

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gradually monopolised the social space. The takeover of the people's lives happened with their consent. In the play this is shown in the transformation of Dudard. In Act 3, he says, "I feel it's my duty to stick by my employers and my friends through thick and thin." (p. 91). Later he says, "I prefer the great universal family to the little domestic one." (p. 91).

Aspects of Totalitarianism in Nazi Germany and the Play

Two important aspects of Totalitarianism are projection of an ideology often based on racial superiority and control of mass communications. In Nazi Germany, the projection of an ideology started in the mid-thirties. The Nazis' education minister Bernhard Rust ordered the expulsion of Jews from welfare organisations, youth groups and sporting clubs. This was known as *Gleichschaltung* (forcing into line). The *Gleichshaltung* was an extension of the party doctrine that said no sphere of life should remain beyond the grasp and the influence of the Nazis. Most sports organisations willingly toed the line. On April 1, 1933, the German Boxing Federation had excluded Jews from taking part in official contests. On April 12, a prominent Jewish tennis Daniel Prenn was dropped from the German Davis cup team. The same month the Swimming Federation of Germany suspended its Jewish members. The German Football Federation (DFB) and its affiliated clubs also joined the bandwagon as they did not want to be termed as unpatriotic. On April 19, 1933 the DFB used ***Kicker*** magazine to make an official announcement stating that "members of the Jewish race and persons who have turned out to be followers of the Marxist movement are deemed unacceptable." (p. 63 *Tor! The story of German football*)

The transformation of so many characters and ordinary people into rhinos in the play reflects this forcing into line attitude. All this is done by the manipulation of mass communications and the building up of hysteria. There is also a hint of the expulsion of the Jews in the opening act of the play. In Act 1 of the play there is a reference to the killing of pets, like the blood-stained corpse of the housewife's cat who was run over by a rhinoceros. The reference here is to what happened in Nazi Germany in the mid-thirties, the killing of the pets of the Jews was like a warning to them to leave the country. The Nazis controlled sports clubs and trade unions through their organisation Strength through Joy (a subsidiary of their Labour Union). Hitler wanted German youth to be 'firm as steel, tough as leather and quick as greyhounds.' Admiration and hero worship of strength is an attribute of totalitarianism. In the play we see this when in Act 3, Daisy in admiration of

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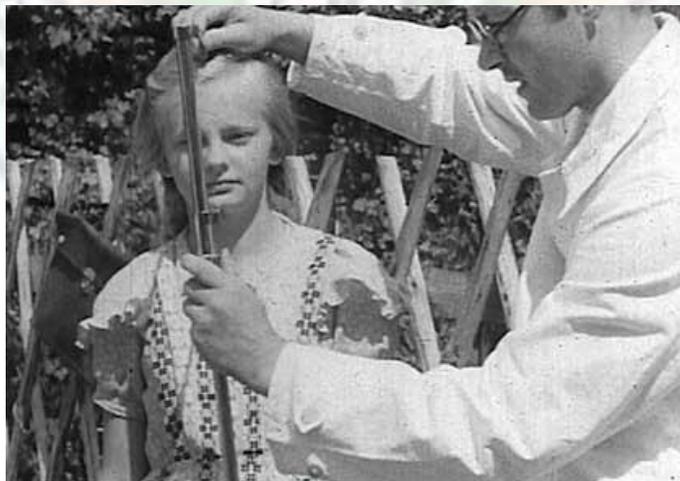
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the rhinos says, "*human love....just doesn't compare with the ardour and the tremendous energy emanating from all these creatures around us.*" (p. 102).

The control of mass communications, a pre-requisite for any totalitarian state is evident in Act 3 in the play, when Berenger says, "Let's turn on the radio for the news." (p. 98). Instead of the news and the human voice there is the trumpeting of the rhinos. The changing mindset because of control of mass communications is seen in the reactions of Daisy to the noises of the rhinos. She thinks they have become melodious and they are singing and that their movement suggests they are dancing beautifully. Berenger is aghast at such a description but cannot change her mindset because Daisy is a prime example of how a perfectly normal society succumbs to the phenomena of fascism and how individuals start admiring attributes of fascism like worship of strength.

Racism

Racial superiority and the colour question, an important aspect in the Nazification of German society also gets reflected in the play. In Act 1 both Berenger and Jean are arguing vehemently about whether the Asiatic or the African rhino has one or two horns. The argument becomes heated and Jean makes a derogatory remark about Berenger calling him an "Asiatic Mongol" (p. 28). Others in the scene like the Old Gentleman and Waitress make condescending remarks about Asiatic people. Jean refers to Asiatic people as being yellow. While accepting that Asiatic people are like us, the old Gentleman says to the grocer, "*there are white Asiatics as well, and black and blue, and even some like us.*"(29). The implied notion is that European civilisation is superior but some liberals profess the view that a few Asians can be "like us".



Source : <http://nesara.insights2.org/FaceMeasurement.jpg>

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The significance of the last scene

Ultimately the anti-heroic Berenger has an intuitive sense of responsibility. The play is about the conscience of a rare individual, who attempts to straighten out the aberrations of society. The resistance to Nazism is only instinctive but this is the only positive aspect of the play. In the last scene Berenger keeps repeating, *"I'm not joining you; I don't understand you! I'm staying as I am. I'm a happy human being. A human being."*(104) He has doubts, keeps wavering which further shows the human aspect of his character. He keeps looking at the mirror and some photographs to reassure himself that he is human and handsome. He is wavering because his girl friend Daisy has walked away claiming that human love cannot compare with *"the ardour and tremendous energy emanating from the creatures (rhinoceros') around us."* (102). This sense of doubt and uncertainty about his worth makes Berenger more human. He nearly succumbs at the end and says that *"I'd love to have a hard skin in that wonderful dull green colour---"*(105). But quickly recovers and says *"I'll put up a fight against the whole lot of them, the whole lot of them! I'm the last man left, and I'm staying that way until the end. I'm not capitulating."*(105). So though the play ends on a decisive note, Berenger offers no alternative plan of action or resistance. It is an instinctive act of preservation but which in itself is positive even though not heroic. It upholds the playwrights' view that the individual is more important than the collective.

Throughout this play, the individual is shown as diminished and no regeneration is hinted at. Ionesco like Genet is not offering political solutions or alternatives. His play is a critique of all collective hysteria, the extreme dangers of which are manifested in Nazism. Ionesco believes that all ideologies are dangerous to humanity and he is wary of the active dictatorship of dogma. The playwright is not professing an ideology but ideologically loaded meanings are found in the dramatic narrative.

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