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Dionysian Becoming and Posthuman Liberation in Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*: A Nietzschean and Harawayan Reading

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Abstract

This paper attempts to re-propose the interpretation of the rhinoceroses' epidemic as a Dionysian and posthuman liberation by applying together the theories from Friedrich Nietzsche and Donna Haraway to analyse Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*. The play has traditionally been interpreted as an allegory of fascism, conformity and ideological contagion. These readings are important but this paper suggests that the metamorphoses of each rhino also perform an ecstatic dissolvement of the hard-wired humanist identity. The study refers to the Dionysian force that challenges rationality, individuality, language and the anthropocentric supremacy, in light of Nietzsche's conception of the Apollonian and the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy,* and reads the rhinoceros epidemic as such. Haraway's theories of hybridity, anti-anthropocentrism, and posthuman becoming provide further illumination to the play's collapse of distinctions between human and animal, civilisation and nature, and self and collective existence. The paper, by examining the changes, surplus and the inability of language, suggests that the rhinos represent both violent destruction and vivid energy. Berenger's last resistance, then, is not just heroic humanism, but a mournful clinging to Apollonian individualism and the delusion of a stable humanity. In the end, the absurd in *Rhinoceros* is not a meaningless chaos, but a radical becoming and a Dionysian change.

Keywords: Rhinoceros, Ionesco, Nietzsche, Apollonian, Dionysian, posthumanism, Haraway, Theatre of the Absurd, becoming-animal, anthropocentrism

Rhinoceros 1959, by Eugène Ionesco is one of the most significant and lasting plays of the Theatre of the Absurd. The play has continued to generate critical interest since its premiere, for its ability to fuse absurdist comedy with political allegory. Martin Esslin located the play in a stream of existential questioning, noting that the play's focus on questioning rational structures of meaning and its depiction of the loss of personal resistance in the face of authoritarian pressure (Liu, 2023). The play is a depiction of the changing nature of ordinary citizens of a provincial town of France turning into rhinos, with the protagonist Berenger being the last surviving human. The vast majority of critical readings read this transition as an emblematic representation of an ideological corruption, fascist contagion and the terrifying subordination of the individual to collective movements (Fletcher 2025).

These readings, however, tend to be confined to humanist suppositions that assume rationality, individuality and anthropocentric identity. They believe that the turn to animalism must be that of degeneration and irrationality and loss of morality. This paper offers an alternative and complementary reading of the play in the light of the intersecting philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Donna Haraway. In this prism, the rhino epidemic can be seen as political conformity and at the same time as Dionysian and posthuman liberation, which is capable of breaking categories. In this prism, the rhino epidemic is seen not only as political conformity, but also as Dionysian and post-human liberation, capable of breaking the categories.

The concept of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, as presented in *The Birth of Tragedy* by Nietzsche, is a useful theoretical tool for analysing the changes in the play. The Apollonian is rational, ordered, individual, structured civilisation, and the Dionysian is ecstasy, instinct, bodily intensity, collective experience, and the dissolution of identity (Mendoza, 2021). The rhinoceroses' epidemic is a Dionysian explosion which overturns the delicate edifices of bourgeois humanism and brings the people back to a primal and collective state of becoming. In Nietzsche's ideas, this opposition between these two forces is not only a moral opposition but it is also a fundamental opposition that is in the very heart of all cultural and artistic life (Segovia, 2022).

At the same time, Haraway's posthumanism calls into question the anthropocentrism of the traditional interpretations of the play. In books like *A Cyborg Manifesto* and *When Species Meet*, Haraway dispenses with the barriers between human and nonhuman life and draws attention to hybridity, relationality and the fertile fissures between species (Greve, 2024). Theories that she has developed shed light on the rhinoceroses' transformation as a destabilisation of the seemingly stable category: The human itself. In this reading, the transformation isn't a fall from grace, it's a discovery of what humanity has always been: unstable, relational, permeable.

This paper, thus, proposes that, in the process of its violent, but affirmative, destruction of the humanist identity, The rhinoceros indulges in Dionysian ecstasy and posthuman becoming. The play challenges anthropocentric humanism and the rational individuality as both unstable constructs, and envisions life outside of anthropocentric rationalism. The argument will be developed in five main parts, dealing with the failure of Apollonian humanism, Dionysian ecstasy and collective becoming, Haraway and the breakdown of the human-animal dichotomy, the excess, instinct and resurgent animal vitality of the body, and Berenger's tragedy of resistance.

The Failure of Apollonian Humanism:

The Apollonian and Dionysian, as described in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), is a key concept for understanding the ideological tensions that pervade Rhinoceros. The Apollonian Nietzsche identifies with logic, self-control, individuality, beauty and principle of individuation, the principle of individuation which keeps people believing that they are separate and constant. Well-defined boundaries between self and other, reason and instinct, the human and the animal are crucial to Apollonian civilisation (Mendoza, 2021). The Dionysian is the dissolution of those divisions through intoxication, ecstasy and the sharing of primal forces.

The town is set up at first glance according to these Apollonian principles. The characters are quite committed to social respectability and the rationality of their reasoning, as well as

that of their conversation. After the first rhino shows up and smashes into the town, the people retreat into discussion and analysis of what they've seen rather than facing the existential threat. This is objectified by the question of the one or two horns of the rhinoceros: Logical language is used to solve a problem that is beyond anyone's ability (Liu, 2023). These characters debate the issue with a feverish intensity and seemingly seriousness, showing the way Apollonian culture creates an obsessive belief in logistical classification as the means of protecting itself from existential disorder.

The Logician is particularly the rejection of rationalism. He is not seen in the play, but he is heard from him often, as a figure of comic authority, giving elaborate and ultimately meaningless logical syllogisms to anyone who will listen. His formal arguments are cast as a caricature of philosophical speech, making use of language in a performative sense, not as a means to truth (Fletcher, 2025). As characters try to maintain order through logic, the world around them grows increasingly crazy. Human rationality fails to manage the power of transformation that is unleashed in society, and the Logician's eventual metamorphosis into a rhino is ironic: the most rational of characters is the loudest voice of their rejection of reason.

This failure in reasoning shows the weakness of humanist civilisations. The basis of humanism is that rational thinking distinguishes man from animal and that it gives him control over instinctive life. This is the basis of western modernity and the rational subject is the stable moral/political axis around which it is built. But the rhino epidemic dispels this fiction and shows that under the guise of civilised order lies an unmanageable becoming, a force of the body and the people. The social world appears rational, but is actually a veneer over flows of life that it can manage only partially if at all (Biswas Mellamphy & Vangeest, 2024).

Jean's metamorphosis is one of the most theatrically spectacular instances in the breakdown of Apollonian identity. At first, Jean embodies discipline, moralism and self-control as they are traditionally expressed by the bourgeoisie. He condemns Berenger's laziness, drunkenness, and lack of seriousness in life in an attempt to express the ideals of rational masculinity and responsible citizenship. But then as his transformation unfolds, these carefully-chosen identities become clearly visible to the audience as they collapse. His body grows too big, too loud, his speech takes on animalistic qualities, and his instincts overrule rational restraint this horror and dark comedy is Ionesco's "sequence of events" (Fletcher, 2025).

In a traditional humanist view, Jean's change is terrifying, for it takes away what makes civilised human beings civilised: the individuality, the ability to think, and the capacity for language. But, from a Nietzschean standpoint, the annihilation of the Apollonian self also marks the liberation from the confining social forms and fabricated identities that are created by civilised life. Jean's metamorphosis is not only a loss; it's also a rescue from the energy drainer of bourgeois respectability. The play never really settles on where the loss ends up being greater than the liberation, or if the two is one and the same.

This reading is supported by the general process of which the townspeople transformed. People who have been defined by the social roles, professional identities, and ideology associations that they previously held lose those definitions rapidly, as if they were not as basic as they may have seemed. Each change of social identity suggests that the social identity was built atop something more primitive (Carvalho, 2023). Therefore, the play is not

about the highest potential of mankind but rather about a repression of a sort, the suppression of forces that are inescapable.

Dionysian Ecstasy and Collective Becoming:

The Dionysian is the condition Nietzsche describes as intoxication, ecstasy and totality, a loss of the individual into the collective experiences. The Dionysian subverts the false sense of "otherness" created by Apollonian culture, reuniting the individual with his primal energies, energies which civilisation has suppressed. Under the Dionysian, the sense of self and of the world, the sense of individual and collective, of human and natural, vanish—Nietzsche calls it terrifying and exhilarating, to be sure (Segovia, 2022). In *Rhinoceros*, the rhino epidemic is the very thing that comes into the neat, civilized world of the provincial town, with the power and capriciousness of a natural event.

The changes did not take place with rational arguments, but rather through infectious passion. The intent of drawing the characters to the rhinoceroses is not to persuade them by logic, but to allure them by means of their mesmerizing vitality. In contrast to the tired and disorganized lives of the characters, the rhinoceroses have tremendous physical strength, freedom of movement, and energy, which contrasts starkly with the human characters' exhausted and disjointed lives (Liu, 2023). The theme of human life in the play is boredom, alienation, petty social conflicts and general sense of meaninglessness. In this context the rhinos seem more enviable for their energy and wholeness.

The stampedes of the rhino through the town streets are like collective life processions. The town is swamped by noise, activity and physical power to a degree beyond the power of human social organisation to resist or contain. The rational discourse gradually gives way to the instinctual existence of language, whose meaning fades over time (Carvalho, 2023). Language breaks down and is rendered ineffective. Berenger begins to discover that words can never reach others, that the bonds he tries to forge with others using language break apart in the presence of the rhino world.

According to Nietzsche, Dionysian experience is the destruction of individuation. The Dionysian state is essentially communal; it uncaps the isolation and alienation of the person into the collective sharing in a greater tempo of life. Likewise, the rhinos are not single entities, but rather bodies in motion: "rhino groups are not individuals, but groups moving together in a rhythmic intensity" (Segovia, 2022). The characters' isolation and fragmentation are in direct contrast to their herd living. The rhinoceros are united, and the humans, despite all their social exercises, can't be united.

A collective becoming can also be explained in the context of the philosophy created by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. They define their notion of becoming-animal as not a literal change but a destabilisation of the fixed identity of humans in transformative processes. In this context, the becoming-animal is a process of turning toward intensities, effects, modes of inhabiting the world, which are beyond the fixed categories that western humanism defines the properly human subject (Wang, 2022). The rhinos in Ionesco's play are just such a destabilisation. They break the borders that civilisation has set for humanity, as rational, superior and other than animal; they are not naturalistic representations of animals but symbolise a way of living together that goes beyond human classification.

The play depicts this metamorphosis as intimidating and enticing at the same time; such a duality is a crucial aspect of the theatricality of the play. The rhinoceroses are destructive; they trample buildings, overrun social order and destroy the possibility for the human

characters to have an individual life like they did before. But they also have an irresistible energy that is conspicuously lacking from the sagging human world (Fletcher 2025). It is not possible to completely subsumed the epidemic into political allegory, to make it a mere image of fascism or totalitarianism, because it also plays the game of seducing the liberation from rational and social restrictions. It would seem that some characters do not suffer from their transformations, but others do; and some seem to gain in their transformation which they cannot obtain within the scope of human social life.

Perhaps the most heart-wrenching example of this is when Daisys turns into a fairy. Daisy is the only other human being with whom Berenger has a close connection, and when she joins the rhinoceroses, she feels an abandonment that is awful to him. But as much as it's a metaphor for change, it's also a metaphor for choice, a turn toward the vitality and connectedness that has been lacking in the human world. Her final comment about how the rhino is beautiful, how they appear happy, the play is not just saying that the transformation is pure loss (Liu 2023). The Dionysian force, Nietzsche reminds us, is not evil, it is the force of life itself: powerful, all-powerful, unbeatable.

Haraway and the Collapse of Human-Animal Boundaries:

The theories of Donna Haraway offer another and complementary perspective on the changes in *Rhinoceros*. The posthumanism of Haraway starts with a critique of the humanist dream of the autonomous bounded and pure human subject. In *A Cyborg Manifesto,* she contends that identity is always already hybrid, relational, and intertwined with nonhuman systems and processes. Western humanism's division of the human, the natural, the cultural, and the organismic from the animal, the nature, the non-human, and the mechanical is more of an ideological assertion than a natural reality, more of a political strategy than an objective truth, and more of a mask for the human condition than a reality (Greve, 2024).

In her later writing, however, as in this piece, Haraway's attention usually turns to technology and the cyborg, but she cannot draw a clear line between human and animal life. *When Species Meet,* she posits that human life is constantly and constitutionally in relation with non-human species, and anthropocentrism places humans above and beyond other species, with the consequence that it is a falsehood (Inokuchi & Strom, 2022). For Haraway, human identity is not a completed project but a process of relation, entanglement and becoming with and through nonhumans. The human is not a thing but an act, perpetually in need of upkeep, perpetually at risk of being thrown into disarray.

This epidemic of the rhino, which is unprecedented in *Rhinoceros*, disassociates with a suddenness that shocks the book's reader from the anthropocentric premises of the usual interpretations of the play. The transformations illustrate that man is not a fixed substance but a fragile social construct which can be destroyed. As one character after another straddles the line between humans and animals (as the supposed boundary between human and animal is erased) (Portier-Le Cocq, 2024). The transformations show that human beings were not essentially animals all along, in the reductive sense, but that the distinction between human beings and animals is not as clear or as significant as humanist discourse has suggested. Human becomes contingent, performative and porous when it is a category.

This collapse is understood as degeneration because Western humanism is a negative one, and sees animality as irrational, primitive and inferior to the rational human being, as is the case in traditional readings. As part of this, to be an animal is to lose value, to fall, not to change. But Haraway's posthumanism beggars an entirely different way of thinking. Unlike

seeing 'hybrid' and 'species instability' as a 'catastrophe', Haraway sees boundary collapse as 'productive' because it is the condition of possibility for new forms of relation and existence (Biswas Mellamphy & Vangeest, 2024). The rhino figures in this reading are not dehumanised but posthuman; animals who exist outside of the realm of the function of the ideologically constrained human.

The category human is shown to be not stable, even before the transformations begin, in the play as a whole. In the course of normal interactions, characters that are "civilized" expose their petty-mindedness, their conformity, their social pressure, and their intellectual shallowness. The epidemic is not a destabiliser of the social world of humans; it is a destabiliser which was already there. As in Ionesco's play, so also in Haraway's theory, 'civilisation' is an ongoing performance that needs to be constantly maintained, and is always on the verge of falling apart (Portier-Le Cocq, 2024).

In addition, the rhinoceroses question the anthropocentric hierarchy that puts rational language at the top of the pyramid. The quality of human speech decreases throughout the play and the world of human action and movement becomes more dominant. The change puts at risk the humanist belief that language is the defining accomplishment of human life and that language is the indicator of human superiority over animals (Acampora 2022). The play implies, through its theatrical enactment of this diminution, that language is not the source of sense making but one of the ways of communicating, and not at all the best or most suited to the circumstances of being.

Haraway's concept of the "rhinoceroses' transformation" can thus be understood as a radical transition into post humanity, a breakdown of ideologies separating humans from nonhuman. This reading doesn't ask us to uncritically rejoice the rhino or to turn a blind eye to the many losses inherent in the changes. In contrast, Haraway's posthumanism is not a simplistic aestheticizing of "the nonhuman" but a careful consideration of the assumptions that support the human-animal binary, and make it appear natural and necessary (Greve, 2024). In this reading, the play plays out exactly that interrogation, breaking down the boundary in dark and illuminative ways.

Bodily Excess, Instinct, and the Return of Animal Vitality:

The dimension of the rhinoceroses' transformation which stands out the most is the return to the body's intensity and instinctual life. The rationality and self-control of the mind are traditionally valued over the excesses of the body in western humanism which has defined civilisation as much as it is the disciplined control of the body and its drives. The Western tradition has built the properly human subject for whom bodily life is submissive rather than rule, from Plato's suspicion of the passions to Kantian moral philosophy, in which duty outweighs inclination. (Osborne & Rose, 2024). In this context, the systematic repression of instinct is the basis of the civilised order of society and the unity of the person.

The rhinoceroses simply topple these over with no negotiation. They can't be considered thinkers, not rational thinkers anyway, nor are they deliberators they can't be considered rational thinkers anyway, but they live, move, and are moved by force, sound, and sheer physicality. Their stampedes swirl past architecture, social systems, and linguistic order, and the force they make can't be argued, and can't be reasoned away. In the world of the rhinoceroses, the body is more powerful than rational discourse and more real than the social performances which uphold the human identity (Portier-Le Cocq, 2024). In

Nietzschean terms it is the return of the repressed Dionysian: the vitality that has been quelled by Apollonian civilisation coming back with an irresistible force.

Nietzsche's philosophy of Dionysus is an emphasis on the salvific power of the bodily experience. In the Dionysian state, the individuality is obliterated, the instinctive life is immersed in an ecstasy of energy and instinctual living, energies are liberated which the rational mind is able to control. For Nietzsche this release is not regression but renewal and creativity, the force that gives rise to the artistic impulse, the source of great tragedy itself. However, Apollonian culture, if deprived of Dionysian, would be sterile, rigid, and life-denying (Carvalho, 2023). The rhinoceroses symbolize exactly this reawakening of long-suppressed life energy; indeed, the play's darkly comic mood is a reflection of Ionesco's ambivalent attitude towards this reinvigorated life energy.

The breakdown of civilised bodily restraint is more evident in Jean's transformation. His body becomes more and more uncontrollable, animal instincts taking over rational identity. His skin becomes hard, his movements become aggressive and powerful and his language gradually breaks down into primitive sounds, until finally it vanishes completely into the sound of the rhino's trumpet. This transformation shows that the civilised subject is never truly distinct from animal life, and that difference is not natural, that it is not essential, but rather something that must be worked at; that difference is not natural, it is not essential, but rather something that must be worked at, (Fletcher, 2025).

The rhinos are also a liberation from the fatigue of the modern bourgeois life for which the play cannot be completely forgotten. The people who inhabit the play are bored, isolated, disenchanted with meaningless social routines, and generally experience a disintegration of experience. Berenger's dissatisfaction and emptiness and the lack of meaning and connection he feels in the social world around him is constant. Contrastively, the rhinoceroses seem to be alive and integrated, and live lives that are far more intense than that of human life as described in the play (Liu, 2023).

This comparison indicates that the epidemic can not be taken as a one-to-one picture of the degradation of human values under fascist pressure. The changes also reveal the sterile rational civilisation and the authentic appeal of instinctive vitality. The rhinoceroses stand for something that lives outside of the constraints of humanist ideals of self-control and self-individuation, something that can be dangerous and destructive, and perhaps in some way more alive than what it supplants (Wang, 2022). The play does not resolve this tension; it leaves it unresolved, and the audience must resolve it at once, dealing with both dimensions at the same time.

The play is careful not to romanticise the rhinoceroses in a simple or uncritical manner, while at the same time, it does not demonise them. Meanwhile, the play is not romanticising the rhinoceros in a simple or non-critical way, nor demonising them. They are indeed lethal, they wreck property and endanger human life and when they succeed, they herald the end of the world inhabited by the human characters. It is this ambiguity that makes the play not only allegorical but also philosophical. Both the rhinoceroses are both violent and liberating, both destructive and renewing, and no reading that resolves one of these aspects to the exclusion of the other can be adequate to the power of the play (Portier-Le Cocq, 2024). Ionesco himself did not want to be read allegorically, but asserted that its meanings transcended any one political reading.

The play's return to vitality of animals can also be understood in terms of Haraway's relational constitution of all life. As human life is already in a state of entanglement with nonhuman processes and energies, the rhinoceros epidemic reveals what is typically buried: the nonhuman aspects of human life erupting with explosive force (Acampora, 2022). The epidemic is not something they have never known inside the human world, but an explosion from within the human world: what was there all along but they did not yet realize.

Berenger and the Tragedy of Human Resistance:

Conventionally, Berenger is read as the heroic person who defies the conformity of the collective and safeguards the values of humanity from the rhino virus. His last statement, in which he affirms his intent to resist, even as the last of his kind, has been interpreted as one of affirmation of personal freedom, moral purity, and resisting societal pressures (Fletcher, 2025). In the humanist tradition that forms the basis for traditional interpretations of the play, it is Berenger's opposition that provides the moral centre of the drama, from which the audience will wield its judgment about the changes in the drama's surrounding world.

But a Nietzschean and posthuman reading of it makes a great deal more sense—and a lot more interesting. Berenger is not a representative of humanism's virtues in the play, but a very contradictory and unstable one. He is withdrawn, lacking in confidence, drinking too much, not participating in social activities in a way that implies a basic discontent with the world of humans as he has known it (Liu, 2023). In contrast to the other characters, he has an absence of trust in the values of bourgeois civilisation, can not sustain the social performance which those around him sustain easily, and has no clear positive vision of the human life he hopes to save.

But, even though Berenger is annoyed, he is still rooted in the belief of human identity being stable. More and more characters change around him, and he finds himself increasingly in a humanist worldview that is falling apart, and unable to think in any other terms. Thus, his last refusal to turn into a rhino seems heroic in the context of mainstream humanism, but can be seen as a tragic embrace of Apollonian individualism, a refusal to engage with an identity that had already been made precarious and provisional by the forces of change (Balthasar, 2023).

Nietzsche attacks the human habit of holding onto the false comforts of the belief in stability, rationality and permanency. Nietzsche's reactive attitude is a denial of life, turning away from the creative and destructive forces that are necessary for life. Berenger's resistance is just such attachment (Lipowicz, 2023). He is not ready to give up on himself and to be changed into something new. The rhinoceroses have evolved into a collective and instinctive way of living, while Berenger is still living as the lonely and fearful individual in a world he has outgrown.

In this light, it is all the more ironic that Berenger came to hold his final role. He says he will stay human, but he says it by himself, without witnesses, without audience, without the context and sense of human identity that is found in social relations (Fletcher, 2025). The humanity that he is acting to protect is already a hollowed and diminished one: it is the abstract commitment to a social and relational absence. In the end, what he's defending is not humanity as it is lived, but rather humanity as it is defined.

Resistance is not only a moral act from a posthumanist point of view, but also a failure of imagination. Haraway's posthumanism calls for the rethinking of identity, relating and life forms as it is beyond the traditional humanist notions, and to find new forms of being that

recognize the entanglements, hybridity and instability that all life embodies (Biswas Mellamphy & Vangeest, 2024). When Berenger cannot make this imaginative leap, when he refuses to acknowledge that the human is inadequate at a time when this has been most clearly demonstrated, he is a character of tragic limitation, not of heroic triumph.

But this is not to suggest that the play predisposes an unmistakable view of the rhinoceroses' ways of life as necessarily good, or that the rhino world celebrates the killing off of the human world. Ionesco was a truly complex thinker and is a writer that doesn't accept simple solutions. The play leaves the tension between the real losses resulting from the shift, and the real failures and repressions exposed by the pandemic open (Liu, 2023). Berenger is heroic and tragic, courageously stubborn and sadly constrained, and any interpretation that treats his character as one or two of these qualities is simply not giving the play the credit it deserves.

The last scene in which the lone man fights the rhinos is thus highly ironic beyond the standard interpretation. Berenger does not stand for triumphant man proclaiming his essential values; he stands for the last vestiges of an Apollonian order that has failed to hold up to the return of Dionysian life. His opposition is real and pointless, is significant and antiquated (Balthasar, 2023). He is left standing in a world that has become other than what he knew, one beyond his categories with which he understands himself and this world.

Conclusion:

The humanistic perspective of *Rhinoceros* is not limited to the fascism and conformity that is otherwise the dominant approach to the work; by reading the play from a Nietzschean and posthuman perspective, other layers are seen. The narrative of the rhinoceroses' epidemic, analysed in the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Donna Haraway, is a Dionysian and post-human becoming that unsettles the humanist identity in an epic theatrical way and deep philosophical understanding. The alterations obliterate the binary logic of human vs. animal, mind vs. body, one vs. many, and subject vs. object, revealing these oppositions as ideologies, not reality.

The rhinoceroses are the Dionysian, the excess of the body, the primal life, and Haraway's posthumanism makes visible the dissolution of anthropocentric limits and the precariousness of what is human. The Apollonian forms of rational discourse, social respectability, and personal identity prove to be insufficient to hold back the Apollonian force of becoming, and the play is a vehicle for exposition of this inadequacy, featuring both dark humour and heart-felt pathos. Ionesco does not only account for the change, he does not only lament it, but he is filled with a dialectical tension between two aspects that are not harmonious and yet not separable.

Instead of absurdity being seen as a meaningless chaos, *Rhinoceros* demonstrates that destruction is a precondition for transformation. The rhinoceroses reveal the fragility of the rational civilisations and question the ideology that places human beings above nature. They show that the human being is not given but a performance, not essence but construction that can be affected by forces of life, forces which have been violently denied by that Apollonian culture.

This reading of Berenger's resistance proves to be deeply tragic. His focus on individuality and rational humanity keeps him from being able to accept change and transformation. The rhinoceroses are in a new posthuman becoming, but Berenger is stuck in an exhausted humanist frame that is now unable to support itself. He is heroic in his

resistance, but he is also heroic in not being able to think outside of the boxes that he has been given.

In essence, *Rhinoceros* is not just a statement against conformity but also a radical examination of the Dionysian liberation and the posthuman transformation as well. The play demonstrates the destabilising power of the 'otherness' of the human, which could lead to the exposure of the contingency of the human and to the possibility of existence beyond the limitations set forth by humanist tradition. It does not clarify the ambiguities of the play, but rather adds to them; Ionesco's theatrical vision was more philosophically nuanced, more receptive to the vital dynamism of the nonhuman than allegorically driven interpretations have recognized.

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