Rhinoceros, and Other Plays Study Guide

Rhinoceros, and Other Plays by Eugène Ionesco

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Rhinoceros is an allegorical play about the nature and causes of totalitarianism. Berenger watches with horror as everyone around him is transformed into a rhinoceros. The transformation is not only physical; the rhinoceroses' philosophy is one which reverts man to his brutish, might-makes-right instincts.

The play begins with Berenger meeting his friend Jean on their day off of work. Jean is frustrated with Berenger because he does nothing to improve his life: He is always disheveled, he is a drunkard, and he has no ambition in life. Jean, on the other hand, is the picture of tidiness and worldly ambition. During the course of their conversation, two rhinoceroses are seen—surely a strange and terrifying occurrence for a "small provincial town" somewhere in France. The town is excited by the news, but life goes on as normal. Berenger goes to work, but before long, another rhinoceros is sighted, this time outside the office. Evidently, it is one of the office's employees—whom the boss assumed was neglecting his work duties; somehow, he has become a rhinoceros. The employees escape the office and Berenger heads over to Jean's apartment.

Jean has fallen ill and his voice has become quite hoarse. Jean, usually cordial if somewhat demanding, seems different. He is outright belligerent now. He denies the value of friendship and instead asserts that a man ought to just take what he wants and not let anyone stand in his way. He condemns morality and advocates a return to the law of nature where the strong dominate the weak. Berenger is quite shocked by his friend's unwonted behavior and tries to get him to see a doctor, but Jean is completely unwilling, even as his condition continues to deteriorate. His skin is turning greener by the moment and is even starting to become leathery. His voice, at first just hoarse, is so deep that Berenger can barely understand it. The bump on his head is well on its way to being a horn and he even tries to use it to gore Berenger. Berenger locks him in his bathroom and runs for help, but discovers that he is now surrounded by rhinoceroses.

He manages to escape to his apartment where he holds out with Dudard, one of his co-workers. It seems that virtually the entire town has become rhinoceroses. While Berenger is disgusted by the rhinoceroses and their brutish philosophy, Dudard is more sympathetic. As they discuss it, Dudard gradually finds himself sympathizing with them. The breaking point occurs when Daisy, an attractive blonde girl who works at their office, arrives. They both are attracted to her, but Daisy's seeming preference for Berenger drives Dudard to leave and join the rhinoceroses. Berenger and Daisy develop a relationship with astonishing speed, quickly confessing their love for one another. For a time, she is a distraction from the rhinoceroses, but he is quickly reminded of them. She tries to urge him to find a way to co-exist, but he cannot. Their disagreement ends with her leaving and Berenger winds up the last man alive, vowed to resist the rhinoceroses until the very end.

"The Leader" is a brief play depicting the citizens of a nation watching their leader with awe and admiration. They finally discover that he has no head, but they rationalize that it means nothing.

In "The Future is in the Eggs" two young lovers, Jacques and Roberta, are forced to procreate by their families, who are eager to perpetuate the "white race" and create new members of industrial society.

Rhinoceros: Act I, Scene I

Rhinoceros: Act I, Scene I Summary

Two men, Jean and Berenger, meet at a cafe in an unnamed "small provincial town" (3). Jean is tidily dressed in a suit and tie; Berenger is disheveled and looks like he just woke up. Though they arrive at the same time, Jean chastises Berenger for being late. They had agreed to meet a half hour previously and Jean, knowing Berenger is always late, waited to show up. Berenger asks what Jean is going to drink, and Jean scolds him for drinking this early. Berenger tries to act as if he were not planning on ordering an alcoholic drink, but Jean sees through his lie. Berenger still wears all the signs of a hangover and reeks of alcohol. He is a habitual drunk, and not only on Saturdays; all throughout the week he is always the same. Jean gives him a spare tie and a comb to clean himself up a bit. Berenger explains that he just gets so bored in the town and there is not anything else to do. He works so hard, he says, that he needs to drink to relax.

As they talk, the audience hears a loud noise, as if a beast were running around nearby. The waitress comes by and asks them what they will have to drink. Before they can answer, the noise becomes louder and, looking off-stage, they realize that it is a rhinoceros running around the town. Everyone nearby screams with surprise—the same words, "Oh, a rhinoceros!" Berenger, still in a daze, is the exception and sits, perhaps only a little confused at all the excitement around him. Meanwhile, an old gentleman and a logician enter. The noise subsides and the people calm down some. Berenger infers from talking to Jean that there was a rhinoceros; he only noticed the dust it kicked up.

During the commotion, a housewife dropped her basket. The old gentleman helps her pick up her things and asks if she would like to be walked home, but she declines, saying her husband is waiting for her. She broke a bottle of wine and the grocer, capitalizing on the opportunity, brings out one of his bottles to sell to her as a replacement. The housewife evidently has the habit of shopping somewhere else and the grocer points out that if she shopped there, perhaps she would not have such an accident again.

The waitress, spurred back to work by the cafe owner, takes Jean and Berenger's drink order. Berenger asks for two pastis, a kind of liqueur; Jean does not seem to hear. While they wait for their drinks, Jean asks what Berenger thinks about the rhinoceros. He is still rather unfazed and just comments on the amount of dust it kicked up. Jean again scolds Berenger when the drinks arrive and sees that he ordered alcohol. Berenger pretends that he ordered mineral water and that the waitress made a mistake. Jean returns to the subject of rhinoceros and how extraordinary it is that one would appear in town. Berenger, bored by the subject, tries to come up with various explanations for it. Perhaps it escaped from the zoo or a traveling circus; perhaps it has been hiding in the marshes. Jean is astounded by these explanations, for each portrays

serious ignorance about the town: It has not had a zoo in decades; circuses are banned; and there are no marshes nearby.

Berenger finally agrees that a rhinoceros roaming around the town is bad, but he still does not think it should be occasion for so much excitement, especially since it is gone now. Berenger reaches for his drink and Jean, taking a swig from his own, admonishes him and makes him put it down. An attractive, blonde typist named Daisy walks by the cafe. Berenger is horrified and hides: he does not want to be seen in such a state by her. He returns to the table when she is gone and explains how out of place he feels when he is sober. He uses drinking as an escape from his anxieties. He feels almost as if life is pointless and questions whether he wants to go on with it. Jean points out that he obviously does not hate everything; he fancies Daisy after all. Berenger points out she already seems to like someone else at the office. Jean suggests that he see it as a challenge to be the better man. He gives him a litany of advice: to dress better, to clean himself up, to drink less, to become more cultured and more educated. Reluctant at first, Berenger decides that Jean is right and resolves to improve himself. He asks if Jean would like to accompany him to a concert or art gallery that day, but Jean declines, saying that he is going to get a drink with some friends later. It is okay for him to drink, he explains, because he practices moderation.

While they are talking, the old gentleman and the logician return. The logician is trying to teach the old gentleman the fundamentals of logic, but is utterly butchering it. He explains that since all cats have four paws, his two pets, Isidore and Fricot, who both have four paws, therefore must be cats. When the old gentleman mentions that his dog also has four paws, the logician concludes that his dog, therefore, is a cat, but that "the contrary is true also" (19). The old gentleman marvels at how beautiful logic is. After "proving" that Socrates was a cat—all cats die, Socrates died, therefore he must be a cat—the logician turns the exercise around the old gentleman and begins questioning him. He asks how many paws there are between two cats. After much confusion and thought, the old gentleman finally concludes there are eight. The next question is how many paws the cats have if two are taken away. Again after much consternation, he says six. The logician now ups the difficulty: How many paws, he asks, does each cat have? The old gentleman realizes that there are many possible answers—one cat might have four and the other two, each could have three, one could have five and the other one, or perhaps one could have all six and the other none. The logician praises the old gentleman for his ability, but points out that it would be unjust if one were to have all the paws, and justice is part of logic. A cat with no paws, after all, could not hunt mice, and that belongs to their nature.

The loud noise from the rhinoceros returns again, but this time from a different direction. As before, the men carry on their conversations for awhile before noticing that they have to scream to be heard over it. Everyone returns and screams excitedly at the sight —"Oh, a rhinoceros!" The housewife enters with the bloody corpse of her cat, trampled by rhinoceros, wailing over her loss and heaping increasingly absurd praise upon her lost pet (claiming, for example, that it talked once). The townspeople do everything to try to console her. The old gentleman is especially attentive and tries to give her a glass of brandy from the cafe. She is not interested, but the people make her take a drink. The

grocer tries to offer to give her a new cat, as if it could be as easily replaced as the bottle of wine she broke earlier.

Meanwhile, some of the people question whether it was the same rhinoceros that they saw earlier. Jean argues that it was not. He claims the first rhinoceros was an Asiatic rhinoceros with two horns, but the second was an African rhino with only one horn. Berenger is annoyed by Jean and claims that he could not possibly know how many horns each rhino had, since they passed by so quickly and kicked up so much dust. Jean claims that since he is sober he can count horns quickly. This only makes Berenger angrier and he retorts that he does not even know his rhinoceroses: It is the Asiatic, rhinoceros, with one horn and the African that has two, he says. The argument heats up and devolves into a discussion of Asiatic people, whom Berenger defends while Jean calls them "yellow." Enraged, Jean swears he will not be Berenger's friend any longer. The logician interrupts and tries to settle the argument. He points out that if the first rhinoceros had two horns it could have lost one of its horns by the time it was seen the second time. However, he also notes that there could have been two rhinoceroses with two horns and each could have lost their horns before the second sighting. The only conclusive evidence would be that if the first rhinoceros had one horn and the second had two; there was not enough time for it to grow another horn. The logician comes to no conclusion about how many rhinoceroses there were, or what kind there were, but he is satisfied simply to have properly framed the question. Upset that he angered Jean, Berenger decides not to go to the museum but orders a brandy instead.

Rhinoceros: Act I, Scene I Analysis

Whenever reading a drama, the reader should always attempt to understand the play from the perspective of an audience member. This is especially important when reading the sections of this play in which conversations—sometimes two or three at a time—overlap with one another. Realistically, an audience member could probably only focus one conversation and understand what is being said. Ionesco, of course, realizes this, and the effect is surely intentional. There are several potential explanations for this tactic. First, it creates a sense of confusion among the townspeople. As this style is employed only after the rhino makes an appearance, the source of the confusion is obvious. However, the way the conversations are woven together is not incidental as they often parallel one another. For example, Jean's attempts to improve Berenger run parallel with the logician's (poor) attempts to teach the old gentleman the basics of logic. This parallel links Jean with the character of the foolish logician, and thus casts some doubts upon the quality of advice he gives to his friend.

Another striking feature obvious in this first chapter is Ionesco's bizarre, exaggerated depiction of his characters. Jean and Berenger—so far, at least—are believable characters, but everyone else seems almost to be a caricature. The grocer and his wife are capitalists willing to pounce upon any situation that seems profitable—it may be assumed that the grocer's wife was not going to give the housewife their cat for free—and use any excuse to get more business, like suggesting that the housewife would not

drop and break her groceries if she shopped with them. In like manner, the proprietor of the cafe is only worried about making money. He pauses from tending his business only briefly when the rhinoceros appears and even charges the waitress for the glasses she dropped out of fright. The logician is a fool who dresses up his stupidity in the educated language of a philosopher. His logical syllogisms are outright absurd, as is their pious reception by the old gentleman. The housewife's grief over her cat crescendos to the point where she attributes human qualities to it: "He was so gentle. Just like one of us. . . . He was devoted to us. . . . He always made himself understood. . . . He could almost talk—in fact he did" (31-32). While certainly funny, the more important effect of this overblown style is to detract from the reality of his characters and to instead emphasize the exaggerated characteristic. The play, then, becomes less about accurately depicting people and more about making some kind of commentary about certain kinds of traits. For now, the reader must wait to discover the exact content of that commentary.

Rhinoceros: Act II, Scene I

Rhinoceros: Act II, Scene I Summary

The next day, work resumes as usual at Berenger's office. Before the day officially begins, the employees, including Mr. Papillon, the boss, are gathered around a newspaper discussing the rhinoceros appearance. Berenger has not yet arrived so Daisy, the typist, is the only eye-witness. Everyone is amazed except for the skeptical Botard, who does not believe Daisy and thinks that the whole thing is a hoax perpetrated by journalists eager to sell newspapers. Nine o'clock arrives—when work begins—and Berenger arrives a few minutes late. Daisy sneaks him the time card so that the boss will think he is on time. The boss is eager for everyone to begin work and threatens to dock pay if they continue discussing the rhinoceros. The conversation begins anew, however, when he leaves and Botard is just as untrusting of Berenger as he is of Daisy: doubly so, given his reputation of drinking.

Mr. Papillon comes back out and asks where Boeuf, another employee, is. No one knows. Furious—apparently he has some great need of Beouf—he says that if this keeps happening, he will fire him. Soon, Mrs. Beouf, his wife, arrives, panting. She informs Mr. Papillon that her husband has the flu and that is why he is not available. She is asked why she is out of breath and informs everyone that she was chased by a rhinoceros. Amazed, they run to the door and verify that there is, in fact, a rhinoceros waiting downstairs. It seems to want to come up the stairs, but when it tries it just crushes the wooden staircase, leaving no exit to the office place. Botard is finally convinced of the existence of rhinoceroses in the town—and acts like he never denied it—and begins to suspect that this is some traitorous conspiracy. Mrs. Beouf picks up something from the rhinoceros' behavior that makes her believe it is, in fact, her husband; when she says so, the rhinoceros makes a noise in affirmation. She jumps down the broken staircase and rides off on him. Daisy calls a fireman to rescue them and learns that there have been rhinoceros sightings all over town. As of this morning, there were seven rhinoceros and now there are seventeen. After a wait, the firemen arrive and begin taking the workers out through the window. Dudard asks if Berenger would like to join him for a drink, but he declines. Instead, he heads to Jean's, hoping to reconcile with him.

Rhinoceros: Act II, Scene I Analysis

The most important revelation in this scene is that the rhinoceroses seem to be transformed people. What exactly causes this transformation is, for now, completely unclear. The question of the number of rhinoceros seems also to have been definitively settled. People around town, apparently, are transforming into rhinoceroses at a rapid rate.

Mr. Papillon is another example of a caricatured personality. His existence is entirely one-dimensional: He only cares about workplace productivity. As soon as nine o'clock rolls around, any talk of rhinoceroses or cats being trampled is strictly forbidden, reinforced by the threat having one's pay docked. Even after it has become apparent that the rhinoceros outside of the office is Mr. Beouf, Mr. Papillon still talks openly about the necessity of firing him, seemingly unconcerned about Mr. Beouf's concern or the situation that is facing them and the town as a whole.

Rhinoceros: Act II, Scene II

Rhinoceros: Act II, Scene II Summary

Berenger arrives at Jean's apartment. He knocks on there door but there is no answer; Jean is in bed, resting under a blanket. When he yells out his name, an old man in another apartment comes out in the hall, thinking that he is looking for him; his name is Jean, too. Berenger explains he is there to see the other Jean, but he will not or cannot open the door. The old Jean says he has not seen him go out, but that he did come back the previous night in a bad mood. Berenger scolds himself again for angering his friend.

Finally, Jean comes to the door. His voice is very hoarse (though he thinks Berenger is the hoarse one) and he explains that he missed work because of an illness. Berenger tries to figure out what it is, but Jean denies feeling any kind of weakness, and even seems to resent the suggestion. Overall, Jean is combative and sour. He mentions his head is sore—he assumes that he hit it on something, though he does not remember doing so—and, upon taking a look, Berenger discovers a small bump above his nose. Not trusting his friend, Jean looks for himself in his bathroom mirror and sees that Berenger is right. When he comes back into the bedroom, his skin is noticeably greener. Berenger suggests that he see a doctor and Jean becomes riled, saying that he does not trust doctors because they invent illnesses.

Jean's mood and physical condition continue to deteriorate. When Berenger tries to examine his green skin, Jean pulls violently away. He denies that Berenger is his friend; indeed, he denies the concept of friendship in general. As he paces wildly around the room, he explains that while he does not hate people, he does not like them either. He says, they just better get out of his way or he will "run them down" (64) because he has one goal and he will let nothing stand in his way. Jean begins to feel very hot and starts to undress. Berenger notices his skin has become leathery. Jean acknowledges and is happy; it means it is waterproof. His voice has progressively been getting hoarser and he has now started even making animal sounds; he is barely intelligible.

Berenger begins to make a connection and mentions that Beouf turned into a rhinoceros. Jean initially denies that Beouf really turned into a rhinoceros—perhaps, he says, it was just a disguise—but Berenger insists that he really did. He says that he did not do it on purpose and Jean flares up. What would be wrong, he asks, if someone did want to become a rhinoceros? Berenger admits there is nothing wrong with a rhinoceros, but a rhinoceros just does not have the same outlook on life as people do. They cannot share as humanity does, for example. Jean scoffs; the law of nature, which rhinoceroses follow, is superior to any moral law. He has become entirely unreasonable and even becomes violent. The bump on his head is steadily developing into a horn and he uses it to lunge at Berenger.

Jean disappears briefly into the bathroom and when Berenger looks in on him, he discovers his friend has become a rhinoceros. He closes the door on him and rushes out to get help. He passes by old Jean and his wife on his way to ask the porter to call the police. On his way back up, he discovers the old man and his wife are now rhinoceroses, too. He goes back into Jean's apartment and finds him still locked inside, but pushing mightily on the door. Outside, the street is packed with rhinoceroses. Trapped, Berenger collapses against the wall.

Rhinoceros: Act II, Scene II Analysis

In this scene, the reader discovers that the rhinoceros transformation is directly connected with an ideological transformation. The philosophy of the rhinoceros, so to speak, is "might makes right." Jean, who once styled himself sophisticated and cultured, is now only concerned with achieving his goals through brute force. The law of the jungle is all that matters; all morality does is get in the way. Human relationships, too, go by the wayside as Jean does not even recognize Berenger as his friend anymore.

At this point, the reader can start to take some guesses as to the play's symbolism. The rhinoceros mentality is one which, essentially, forgoes intellectualism and just gets what it wants through force. Ionesco surely has a specific, real-world attitude in mind. Indeed, such an attitude could easily be found among businessmen and Ionesco has painted businessmen (such as the grocery store owner and Mr. Papillon) in a negative, ruthless light. However, it seems that this ruthlessness is not confined to just businessmen. Anyone can find some value in giving up living ethically to achieve his goals. It is the ultimate realization of the Nietzschean notion of freedom from morality; but freedom from morality, Ionesco argues, leads not to true freedom, but instead returns mankind to his "primeval integrity" (67) taking what one can through violence. In other words, it is the decay of civilization and the trampling of reason. By the vast numbers of rhinoceroses, it seems that the seeds of the rhinoceroses are in everyone.

Jean seems to characterize his transformation as a voluntary one, but it could easily be argued that part of the illness is accepting it. After all, Jean certainly went through a pretty dramatic moral evolution overnight. It seems, instead, that Jean, like the rest of the rhinoceroses, are people who have somehow become infected with a disease. (There is a pun implied, perhaps: the virus that causes the common cold is known as a "rhinovirus.") Symbolically, this implies that the barbaric rhinoceros ideology is something which is spreading across the world and infecting society. Such an ideology certainly resembles the ideologies of fascism and communism; the latter was becoming increasingly popular in 1960s France. Such a reading is bolstered by the fact that Botard, an unsympathetic character, paraphrases Marx in Act II, Scene I: "Just like religion—the opiate of the people!" (81).

Rhinoceros: Act III, Scene I

Rhinoceros: Act III, Scene I Summary

Berenger is in his apartment with Dudard. The thought of so many people—and especially Jean—around him becoming rhinoceroses fills Berenger with fear that he will become one, too. Dudard is largely dismissive of Berenger's anxieties. They discuss what possibly could be causing this rhinoceros epidemic and Berenger notes that Jean was very proud and ambitious, while he, who so far has not been affected, is (perhaps excessively) unambitious. A group of rhinoceroses pass by the window, shocking Berenger. Dudard chastises him and tells him that he must get over his fear. Besides, he notes, the disease does not seem to be harmful; maybe, even, it is good. To calm his nerves, he pours himself a brandy and offers one to Dudard, but he declines. As Berenger has said that willpower is the best protection against catching this disease, Dudard jokes that perhaps he should exercise some by not drinking anymore.

When Berenger expresses his anxiety over leaving his apartment—and he knows he will have too—Dudard asks him why: The rhinoceroses do not go out of their way to attack people; one just has to stay out of their way. Berenger explains that it is not physical harm that he is worried about. Just seeing them makes him upset, because he feels personally involved in the situation, as if he has to do something about it. Dudard says that it used to trouble him more, but now he has gotten used to it, and suggests that Berenger do likewise. He points out that Berenger cannot make everything his business. But Berenger will not be discouraged: He plans to write the papers and contact the authorities to do whatever good he can to combat this "evil," perhaps even call for international aid. Dudard's attitude is the opposite; though he says he does not approve of the rhinoceroses, he feels one should sit back and let the situation take care of itself.

Berenger then asks about work. Dudard explains that the staircase still has not been prepared and, in a roundabout manner, finally admits that Mr. Papillon has become a rhinoceros. Berenger is shocked that Mr. Papillon would do such a thing, given how good of a job he had and how committed he was. He concludes that it must have been voluntary and Dudard points out that his sacrifices prove his sincerity. Dudard tells Berenger that Botard was outraged when he heard that Mr. Papillon became a rhinoceros. Finally seeing something worthwhile in the man, Berenger repents of his ill opinions of Botard, saying that he really must be a good man. Dudard, however, does not approve of Botard's conduct. Botard's arguments, he says, were too passionate and not sufficiently logical. One needs to work to understand the viewpoints of others before dismissing them like Botard did. Berenger gloomily predicts that Dudard will be one of the rhinoceroses eventually. Dudard will not admit it, but neither will he condemn the rhinoceroses or their worldview. Berenger tries his best to argue against the rhinoceroses but finds himself unable to formulate response to the reasonable-sounding arguments Dudard makes. He insists that he is right and says he trusts his intuitions on the matter over complex philosophical justifications. Hoping to find an opponent worthy

of Dudard, he has the idea to bring over the logician. The plan gets nowhere; however, the men see a rhinoceros through the window with logician's hat: He has become one, too.

Daisy arrives with a basket under her arms. Dudard—Berenger's rival for her affections—is jealous that Daisy seems to be familiar with Berenger's apartment. After checking on Berenger to make sure he is physically well, she informs the two that Botard has become a rhinoceros. Berenger is shocked—after all, Botard was an outspoken critic of Mr. Papillon's decision—but Dudard is unmoved, saying that anyone has the right to change his mind. Botard's last human words were, she reports, that one must keep up with the times. Berenger ponders Botard's conversion and finds that, in the last analysis, it was not very surprising, given his pretentiousness and hatred of authority. Daisy brings more news, too. Apparently the rhinoceroses are quickly becoming a majority in the country, and they have even spread to the ranks of the aristocracy and clergy.

Daisy starts to prepare a meal for them, but Dudard declines to join them. Between his growing jealousy and growing attraction to the rhinoceroses, he would rather not stay. Berenger tries to stop him, and asks Daisy to restrain him, but she stands by and does nothing. They go to the window and find that he has become another faceless rhinoceros in the stampede. The only distinction among the rhinoceroses is that some have two horns while others have one.

Berenger turns his attention to Daisy and professes his love for her. Daisy, perhaps less enthusiastically, tells him she loves him, too. She distracts him from the rhinoceros crisis and is lulled, at least for the moment, by her suggestions to leave the rhinoceroses alone. When he starts to get riled again by the rhinoceroses—whose loud trumpetings and footsteps serve as a constant reminder outside of his window—she tries to distract him and change the subject. The phone rings and, despite Daisy's protests, he answers. The only sound on the other side are rhinoceros sounds and he hangs up. The radio, too, is now filled with rhinoceros sounds. Berenger begins to despair that they seem to be the last humans, but Daisy asks him if that is not want he wanted, to be alone with just her. She says that perhaps they can adapt to living among the rhinoceroses, and even learn their language. After mentioning she has a headache, Daisy becomes increasingly sympathetic to the rhinoceroses. She says that it was the right decision for the people who decided to join them. This change coming over her even saps her ability to love; it pales, she says, in comparison to the energy she feels coming from the rhinoceroses. Frustrated, Berenger slaps her, but immediately regrets it. Daisy is not terribly troubled; she assumes that he resorted to violence just because he ran out of arguments. She gives her promise that she will stay with him until the end and help him resist, but before long they are arguing again and she leaves.

Now alone, and perhaps the sole human left in the world, Berenger reflects on his appearance in the mirror and concludes that man is really not that bad. He regrets how his relationship with Daisy ended but refuses to become one of the rhinoceroses, no matter what happens. The rhinoceros sounds are so loud and annoying that he puts cotton in his ears to drown them out. He reasons that the only way he can change things is by talking to them, and to do so he will have to learn their language, or they

his. His resolve falters momentarily and he regrets that he seems unable to join their ranks. Finally, he regains his senses and declares once and for all to never to give up his individuality and fight the rhinoceroses until the end.

Rhinoceros: Act III, Scene I Analysis

The entire play can be legitimately seen as an allegory for the spread of totalitarian, collectivist political philosophy (whether it be of the communist of fascist flavor). Act II, Scene II outlines the basic tenets of this philosophy: Force is supreme to everything and morality is useless. In this act, the rhinoceroses are now understood as a society. In the rhinoceros world, there is no room for individuality; at best, one can be distinguished by having one or two horns.

Dudard represents those who, while not friends of totalitarianism, are also not enemies. They are those who passively adapt themselves to their times and, inevitably, wind up getting swept up in the movement with everyone else. One might imagine that the majority of people are of this sort. People with strong beliefs—either for or against something—are rare; most just "move with the times" (89). The transformation into a rhinoceros is always gradual, as is the case with Dudard. In his transformation, the reader comes to understand the arguments often put forth in favor of totalitarianism. Like the logician, philosophers can take up the cause and convince the unsophisticated that the new form of government is logically and scientifically superior to the current one. Like Berenger, the people might not be able to argue effectively against the philosophical arguments but should nonetheless stick to their intuitions about the value of individuality. In this sentiment there is a hint of intellectualism; Ionesco does not really suggest that there are any good arguments against the rhinoceros mentality, but, nonetheless, one ought not to believe anyway.

Daisy represents a different, equally flawed approach one can take. Instead of passively falling into line like Dudard's mindset, Daisy represents a total escape from reality. This allure is effective on Berenger for a time. He leaves the window and focuses only on his love for her. He does not even care if they are the only two of their kind left, so long as he can be with her. This oblivion can only last so long; inevitably, the fruits of totalitarianism will burst into one's life, like the rhinoceroses' noises through his window.

Berenger represents the individual who is devoted to sustaining freedom and independence, even more "sophisticated" economic and political systems can seem more attractive or exalted for a time, just as the rhinoceros heads began to look more beautiful compared to the photographs of people. Just as Berenger is far from perfect—perhaps the most imperfect of all the characters in the play—he is distinguished, at the end, by his courage in standing up and not allowing himself to be assimilated into a movement which would destroy individuality and revert humanity back to its bestial roots. For, in the last analysis, for all of communism or fascism's intellectualized trimmings, Ionesco argues that those philosophies wind up turning people away from that attribute which distinguishes them from all other animals: reason.

The Leader

The Leader Summary

A group of people sit and wait in awe as they watch their leader. They are amazed and exhilarated to just see him do the most mundane activities, like eat breakfast and read his newspaper. The celebration is led by the announcer who diligently awaits and calls out the leader's every action. While the crowd is engulfed in excitement, a young boy and girl meet and fall in love. They frolic about the stage amid the rest of the commotion. One of the admirers, a girl, notes with horror that the leader has no head. The announcer points out that he has no need for a head since he possesses genius.

The Leader Analysis

This short play is a rather straightforward criticism and satire about the way in which people adore or even worship their political leaders. Though the exact political situation of the leader is unclear, it would be reasonable to assume that he is a totalitarian leader, as "Rhinoceros" focused on the same theme and such personality cults are most common in such regimes. The significance of the leader's lack of a head is that, though he lacks any intelligence or vision, it will always be attributed to him by his obedient subjects.

The Future is in the Eggs

The Future is in the Eggs Summary

The families of a young married couple gather around and watch as the couple—Jacques and Roberta—affectionately cuddle with one another. The family is annoyed; they think Jacques and Roberta are wasting their time when they could be "productive": that is, they could be producing children. Finally, the family members shake the two back into reality. After eating, Jacques' father tells Jacques the he has some unfortunate news for him. He points to a painting of Jacques' grandfather (played by an actor standing in a frame) and asks him why he thinks he no longer hears his grandfather sing. Jacques is confused and cannot produce an answer. Finally, they tell him: His grandfather has died. Jacques does not seem to understand this revelation and stands there emotionless. He finally comes around after being encouraged by his family and starts to weep. The two families commiserate together—even Grandfather-Jacques, though dead, joins in. When the family is done mourning, they become annoyed that Jacques is still crying. They have made him too sensitive, they realize. Finally, they jostle him into silence. Jacques' father decides that his son ought to know how his grandfather died and they let the grandfather himself explain. He was in the middle of singing, he says, and to illustrate, he starts to sing. His widow, Jacques' grandmother, stops him though, and insists that he will not sing. The grandfather decides that if he cannot sing then he just will not speak at all.

Jacques' father explains the significance of Grandfather's death: In order to ensure the perpetuity of the white race, Jacques and Roberta must produce offspring. Both sides of the family lament that the first three years of marriage have been unfruitful but express their hopes for the future. The women of the family take Roberta offstage to coach her in the art of child-bearing and the men stay with Jacques to advise him. They tell him to "be a man" and produce offspring. After much confusion, Jacques finally starts to concentrate on having a child and starts to writhe in pain. Meanwhile, offstage, his wife can be heard making sounds resembling those of a chicken. Roberta's father retrieves a basket of eggs from off-stage and proudly shows them—which, apparently, are the offspring of Roberta and Jacques—to the family members. While Jacques sits on the eggs to hatch them, his family members contemplate all the various types of people the eggs could grow to be: popes, drunkards, chemists, and nearly everything else. They are shocked, however, when Jacques suggests that they might grow up to be anarchists or nihilists. They scold him but quickly return their attention, happily, to the eggs, in which they see their future and the future of the white race.

The Future is in the Eggs Analysis

The principal point of this play is to satirize and condemn a certain view of child-birth, and therefore people in general, according to which the only value of a person is his value to society as a whole. The families are completely impatient with the affections of

the young couple. They do not care about them being happy, they just want them to be "productive," a term significantly borrowed from industry to describe procreation. The families represent the cogs of industrial society, who do not care what people do, so long as they fall in line. Thus, when Jacques suggests that his children might grow up to be anarchists or nihilists, the family is outraged; seemingly, it would be better if the child were a drunkard.

Characters

Berenger (Rhinoceros)

Berenger is, in many ways, an exceedingly average person. Unlike Jean, he is not exceptionally ambitious. In fact, he says at several points that he is actually completely content with where he is in life (cf. 75) even though it does not seem he has an exceptionally great or well-paying job: After all, he does not seem to be able to afford to do laundry. He goes through none of the motions prescribed by etiquette for professional or even personal advancement. He drinks too much and dresses poorly. Unlike Dudard, he is also not a great intellect. He is somehow impressed by the logicians twisted reasoning and finds himself unable to answer Dudard's arguments in favor of the rhinoceroses. Instead of relying on intellect, he relies instead on his intuition. Insofar as Ionesco implicitly sides with those intuitions, Berenger is an embodiment and even endorsement of a kind of anti-intellectual elevation over everyday common sense over the "sophisticated" reasonings of the elite.

In other words, Berenger is an Everyman. He represents the average person and the fact that there is something in everyone's mind—however deep down—that revolts against the tenets of totalitarian government. He, and therefore the common man, is above all an individual, unwilling to sacrifice it to become part of a faceless mob (in Berenger's case, of rhinoceroses). In the final act, Berenger becomes the hero of the story by becoming the sole resistor of the rhinoceroses' barbaric philosophy. He first resists Dudard's sophist justifications for, first, inaction and, second, acceptance. The more difficult challenge is what Daisy presents: escape. Daisy gives no arguments, but rather provides an easy way to forget about the troubles of the outside world and just obliviously focus on the sweeter things of life. Ultimately, Berenger is unable to ignore the rhinoceros epidemic and must reject her, too.

Dudard (Rhinoceros)

Dudard is a lawyer who works at the same office as Berenger. They are rivals for the affection of the pretty typist, Daisy. When Berenger locks himself away in his apartment after Jean's transformation into a rhinoceros, Dudard comes over to help and console him. While Berenger expresses horror at the rhinoceroses, Dudard is more sympathetic. Initially, he does not accept them; he just wants Berenger to try to understand them. Above all, he thinks it futile to try to stop things; times are changing and, for better or worse, there is little that can be done to alter the course of history. It is important to note that such thinking is characteristically Marxist insofar as it expresses the belief that there is inevitability to the way history unfolds.

As his discussion with Berenger goes on, Dudard gradually becomes more sympathetic to the rhinoceroses. Whether or not Dudard truly has reason on his side, his education puts him at a great advantage arguing against Berenger. Berenger relies upon intuitions

which he can express only inarticulately and defend poorly. Dudard, however, as a lawyer, is trained in the art of persuasion (whether or not truth is on his side) and is able to undermine Berenger at every turn of the argument. For example, he scolds Dudard for describing the turn of events as lunacy—after all, what does lunacy mean and who defines it? Berenger knows lunacy when he sees it, but he is unable to philosophically define it. Dudard ultimately represents the intellectual power that helped propel the totalitarian regimes of World War II and after into power.

As he argues, he seems to convince himself of the righteousness of the rhinoceroses. Between his attraction to them, and the jealousy over Daisy's apparent preference for Berenger, Dudard winds up joining the rhinoceroses and becoming part of the faceless mob.

Jean (Rhinoceros)

Jean is Berenger's good friend. He is tidy, professional, and ambitious and tries to impress these traits upon Berenger. He winds up embracing the violent philosophy of the rhinoceroses and turns into one before Berenger's eyes.

Logician (Rhinoceros)

The logician is an old man who can speak convincingly but, in fact, knows very little. He tries to teach the old gentlemen the fundamentals of logic but his lessons are patently absurd. He winds up becoming a rhinoceros, representing, perhaps, the weak philosophical foundation of totalitarianism.

Daisy (Rhinoceros)

Daisy is a pretty blonde typist who works at the same office as Berenger and Dudard. Ultimately, she comes to represent the temptation to escape the harsh realities of the world in favor of pleasure and fantasy.

Batard (Rhinoceros)

Batard is a worker at Berenger's office. He is characterized by his hatred of authority and suspicion of the media (and almost everyone else). When Mr. Papillon decides to become a rhinoceros, he is an outspoken critic, but winds up falling in line and becoming one himself.

Mr. Papillon (Rhinoceros)

Mr. Papillon is the work-obsessed manager at Berenger's office. His only concern—even when one of his employees has transformed into a rhinoceros—is to make sure

his workers are productive. His transformation into a rhinoceros is a shock to Berenger, but ultimately a logical conclusion of his character.

The Leader (The Leader)

The Leader is a symbolic representation of all totalitarian political leaders. Though he does nothing of any importance in the story, he nonetheless earns the adulation of his adoring public who for some reason worship him.

Jacques (The Future is in the Eggs)

Jacques is the young man who has disappointed his family by so far not bearing any children. Through his family's prodding, he is able to concentrate enough to go through the painful, loveless process of procreation.

Roberta (The Future is in the Eggs)

Roberta is Jacques's wife. Driven by her family's obsession with "producing" she "produces" eggs through a process which involves clucking like a chicken.

Objects/Places

The Rhinoceros (Rhinoceros)

There is a seeming pandemic spreading through the town which turns people into rhinoceroses. The rhinoceros represents the brute, violent, bestial nature of totalitarian political ideologies.

The Rhinoceros Horn (Rhinoceros)

One of the first signs that one is turning into a rhinoceros is the development of a bump on one's forehead. Eventually, this bump turns into a full-blown rhinoceros horn.

Alcohol (Rhinoceros)

Berenger is an alcoholic, but gives up alcohol as a sign of the willpower needed to resist becoming a rhinoceros.

The Cafe (Rhinoceros)

The play opens with Berenger and Jean meeting at a cafe. The cafe proprietor is obsessed with money and barely pauses to look at the rhinoceros when it first appears.

The Grocery Store (Rhinoceros)

There is a grocery store near the cafe. The owner and his wife hate the housewife for not shopping there, but capitalize upon her misfortune to make money.

Berenger's Office (Rhinoceros)

Berenger is a writer. His office is managed by the tyrannical Mr. Papillon.

Jean's Apartment (Rhinoceros)

After work is canceled—on account of the rhinoceros attack—Berenger visits Jean, who has stayed home sick from work. Before his eyes, Jean transforms—both ideologically and physically—into a rhinoceros.

Berenger's Apartment (Rhinoceros)

Berenger escapes through the streets to his apartment when the rhinoceroses have taken over the town (and maybe the world). There he resists the temptations presented first by Dudard and then by Daisy and commits himself to fighting against the rhinoceroses.

The Leader's Head (The Leader)

The Leader lacks a head, representing his lack of political wisdom. The people, ever worshipful of him, think he is a genius nonetheless.

Eggs (The Future is in the Eggs)

Eggs are the dramatic representation of Jacques and Roberta's children. Children are not seen as individuals with inherent dignity, but instead commodities that can grow up and become productive members of society.

Themes

Rhinoceros as Allegory for the Rise of Totalitarianism

The symbolic and allegorical nature of Rhinoceros is immediately suggested by Ionesco's style of writing. The fact that the characters—and plot—are bizarre, exaggerated, and even surreal immediately detracts from their reality and forces the reader to instead reflect upon them in an abstract and general sort of way. The characters are seen less as concrete human beings and more as ideas or types and, therefore, the events which happen to them and the interactions that take place among them become commentaries on the ideas they embody.

The basic idea underlying the play is the nature and origin of totalitarian government. The basic totalitarian philosophy is presented in Act II, Scene II when Berenger watches Jean slowly morph into a rhinoceros before his eyes. Jean's philosophy is one which idolizes violence. According to it, when one wants something, one takes it. One cannot let anything—morality, other people, even logic—stand in the way. This kind of amoralism is characteristic both of the fascist philosophies which rose to prominence in Germany and Italy (and elsewhere) and also communism, which was gaining popularity in the 1960s, the period in which this play was written and published. These ideologies see morality as an impediment to progress and, as such, are notorious for violating human rights to advance their goals. They are fundamentally brute and bestial ideologies, and that is why their followers are symbolized by the powerful but irrational rhinoceros. They are also characterized by the sacrifice of the individual to the state, represented visually in "Rhinoceros" by the fact that rhinoceroses are all but indistinguishable from one another.

In Act III, Ionesco presents the way in which totalitarianism comes to power. First of all, it benefits by the idleness of people like Dudard who do nothing, though they do not support it. As this inaction is inspired ultimately by cowardice and convenience, it will turn into acceptance when it becomes sufficiently widespread. Thus, Dudard finds himself gradually convinced of the righteousness of the rhinoceroses. He uses his argumentative skill to try to convince Berenger to come along, but Berenger sticks to his intuitions and resists. Daisy is the final and most difficult temptation Berenger faces. A pretty blonde, she represents the temptation to avoid the sacrifice and hardship that come along with political opposition by distracting oneself with pleasure and gratification instead.

The Defense of the Individual Against Collectivist Ideologie

Both "Rhinoceros" and "The Future is in the Eggs" focus on the struggle to preserve individual identity in societies which celebrate only social and national progress. Such societies were surely fresh on Ionesco's mind from World War II. The governments that

arose in Italy, Germany, Spain, and many other places were obsessed with collective goals and diminished or even condemned individual achievement. This collectivist spirit did not die at the end of the Second World War, of course. Writing in 1960, the high point of the Cold War, Ionesco surely looked with fear upon the growing popularity of communism in the West and specifically in his own country. Though often depicted as opposites, Ionesco's plays see communism and fascism as two sides of the same totalitarian coin.

In "Rhinoceros" the loss of the individual is lost in the stampede of rhinoceroses. When Dudard leaves Berenger's apartment to join them, Berenger looks out the window but cannot figure out which one is his old friend; he has become part of the faceless mob. The only distinguishing feature among the rhinoceroses is that some have one horn and some have two horns. It might be plausibly suggested that this is meant to illustrate that, though they are often depicted as opposites, socialism and fascism are essentially the same brutish form of government. Berenger is the only person left—in his town, in the country, perhaps in the world—willing to make a stand for individuality. He is not an exceptional individual; indeed, he is exceedingly average. His character's intuitive hatred of the rhinoceroses suggests that inside each individual, perhaps especially the common man, there is a natural resistance to totalitarianism.

"The Future is in the Eggs" presents this theme even more loudly. Jacques and Roberta are happily married, and, left to their own devices, it seems as if they would be quite content to go on as they are. Their nosy families are upset that they have not produced any children and decide to interfere. While it might seem perfectly normal and human for parents to desire grandchildren and grandparents to desire great-grandchildren, the desire here is of a different nature. Their sole concern is that "white race" be perpetuated. Child-bearing—referred to as "production"—is the only way to ensure the race does not get wiped out and that industrial society continues on its course. Jacques and Roberta finally fall in line and sacrifice love—dramatized by the fact that when they procreate, they are not even near one another—for the "common good" of society.

Ionesco's Bizarre Depictions Emphasize Symbolism

Ionesco's primary concern in each of these three plays is to make a political argument against totalitarian, collectivist ideologies. In order to make sure his point is understood, Ionesco creates worlds which are vague, exaggerated, and even outright bizarre. By doing this, the reader is not tempted to focus too much upon the reality of the characters or settings. Instead, the play is seen abstractly; characters cease to be substantial, concrete human beings and, instead, become representatives of types and ideas. Thus, the action of the play is interpreted as an ideological commentary. Consider, for example, the character of Dudard in "Rhinoceros." Initially, he is sympathetic with Berenger's opposition to the rhinoceroses. Unlike Berenger, however, Dudard has no inclination to try to do anything about it. He would rather let things blow over and adapt to whatever winds up prevailing. As he and Berenger discuss and argue, he gradually finds himself agreeing with the rhinoceroses. Finally, he leaves Berenger to become part of the faceless stampede. It is important to realize that Ionesco is not greatly

interested in the character of Dudard himself. He, like all of Ionesco's character, is not well-developed and lacks the substance of a character in, say, a Shakespearean play. Ionesco is really interested in what Dudard represents: The kind of person who idly sits by as totalitarianism takes over. Dudard's eventual assimilation shows that passive inaction in the face of evil winds up ultimately amounting to support for it.

Style

Point of View

All three of the plays included in this collection make strong arguments against totalitarian forms of government. Indeed, these arguments are not a mere subtext of the plots, but really constitute the essences of each play. In "Rhinoceros," the pandemic which transforms people into rhinoceroses symbolizes the spread of totalitarian political philosophies like communism and fascism. These philosophies deny the reality of any kind of moral law and replace it with brute force; in other words, they turn man into a mighty, but irrational beast, like the rhinoceros. The philosophies, which focus so heavily on collectivism, also destroy man's individual identity, depicted by Berenger's inability to distinguish one rhinoceros from another.

In "The Leader," Ionesco satirizes the cult of personality which often develops around dictators. The people wait anxiously to see their leader do even the most mundane activities, like eat breakfast. One of the admirers even uses a quote from the Gospel to describe the leader: "He suffers the little children to come unto him" (113; cf. Mark 10:14). The most frightening part of this leader-worship is that it is totally unconditional: The people discover that their leader has no head, but they are not troubled. "What's he need a head for when he's got genius?" (116). In other words, the people are willing to attribute wisdom and virtue to their leader even when all evidence points away from it.

In "The Future is in the Eggs," Ionesco mocks a certain utilitarian attitude towards children (and people in general) according to which their value is measured by their material productivity. While not expressly associated with any particular kind of political system, this idea has a clear affinity with collectivist political philosophies like communism. For, according to those systems, the individual ego is (ideally) destroyed and replaced by a selfless devotion to labor for the state.

Setting

The settings for these three plays are all intentionally vague and, ultimately, unimportant. For example, "Rhinoceros" takes place in an anonymous "small provincial town" (3). It is important to understand that Ionesco makes no effort to create a concrete, detailed environment for his plays because he does not want his audience to focus on the reality of the characters or situations. All three of the plays are highly abstract and symbolic; he is making no attempt to accurately depict human nature. Therefore, focusing on exact historical and geographical details would be a distraction. In "The Leader," for example, Ionesco would diminish the force of his point by, say, making the leader into Mussolini and setting the play in 1930s Italy; the audience might mistakenly think that he is trying to make a point confined just to Italy and just to Mussolini. Ionesco has no real interest in this kind of specific criticism; rather, he wants to demonstrate how totalitarian governments in general, regardless of nation or era, are

destructive. Ionesco's direction for producing his plays suit his vague settings. He always directs scenes be set with only a few essential props and he even emphasizes that scenes should not differ very much from one another. For example, he says that Jean's apartment should not look that different from the office.

It is important to note how Ionesco's minimalist, bizarre style suits his symbolic style of writing. Since the readers will not be tempted to focus on the concrete reality of any of the characters, he will be inclined to see them as representations of types or ideas. Therefore, the events of the play are perceived as commentaries on the relationships between abstract objects. For example, when the foolish logician becomes a rhinoceros, Ionesco is dramatizing the false philosophical defenses that are often given in favor of totalitarian regimes.

Language and Meaning

Ionesco's writing is highly experimental and breaks with many conventions regarding character development and dialogue. His characters are, for the most part, one-dimensional. They often do not seem like real people, but rather as caricatures of certain types of people or embodiments of ideologies. Characters are generally developed only insofar as it is necessary to make Ionesco's political points. Berenger, for example, is certainly the most developed character in all of the plays, but all of his traits are summarized in the term "everyman:" He is an embodiment of the average, common person. His resistance to the rhinoceroses shows how contrary totalitarianism is to the common sense of the "average man."

At times, his writing style can be confusing. Several conversations will sometimes occur at once on stage, chaotically interwoven together. From the point of view of an audience member, it is hard to imagine that it would be plausible to pay attention to more than one stream of conversation. It could plausibly be suggested that this tactic is used more for its effect than to express content in the conversations; he is trying to show, for example, the confusion and excitement caused by the rhinoceros appearances. The conversations also parallel one another, though, and so a close study will find that Ionesco is subtly implying parallels between characters or themes. For example, while Jean is giving Berenger advice about how to improve his life, the logician is giving his absurdly flawed logical lessons to the old gentleman. At times, the conversations match each other verbatim, implying that in both cases, the teacher (Jean or the logician) does not really know what he is talking about.

Structure

The collection is composed of three plays. "Rhinoceros" is by far the largest of the three, comprising 104 pages. "The Leader," the shortest, is only nine pages and "The Future is in the Eggs" is twenty-one pages.

Though the three plays were not written as a collection, there is a certain thematic unity in the collection. Each play deals with the problem of totalitarian government in a

different way. "Rhinoceros" is a metaphor for the rise of totalitarian government. The spread of ideology is likened to the spread of a virus; the only difference is that one must consent to a rhinoceros. The consent is often pressured by various factors, social pressure being a large component. The nature of totalitarian ideologies like fascism and communism is likened to the brute, irrational nature of a rhinoceros, who destroys everything in its way to achieve its goals.

"The Leader" dramatizes the cult of personality that often develops around political leaders, specifically dictators. The reverence for a leader can become so severe that people cease to be capable of seeing flaws in him, symbolized by the indifference over the leader's lack of a head.

"The Future is in the Eggs" decries the attitude which values human life only for its productivity. The passionate love between Jacques and Roberta is sacrificed for the sake of impersonal "production"—creating more offspring to perpetuate industrial society and the "white race."

Quotes

"Jean: [interrupting him] I'm just as good as you are; I think with all due modesty I may say I'm better. The superior man is the man who fulfills his duty.
Berenger: What duty?
Jean: His duty . . . His duty as an employee, for example." p. 7

"Logician: Fear is an irrational thing. It must yield to reason." p. 10

"Berenger: [continuing] I'm conscious of my body all the time, as if it were made of lead, or as if I were carrying another man around on my back. I can't seem to get used to myself, I don't even know if I am me. Then as soon as I take a drink, the lead slips away and I recognize myself, I become me again." p. 18

"Housewife: He [her cat] could almost talk—in fact he did." p. 32

"Botard: I'm sorry, I don't mean to offend you. The fact that I despise religion doesn't mean I don't esteem it highly." p. 41

"Papillon: It [Mr. Boeuf's transformation into a rhinoceros] means one employee less, who has to be replaced." p. 53

"Jean: [not listening to Berenger] It's not that I hate people. I'm just indifferent to them—or rather, they disgust me; and they'd better keep out of my way, or I'll run them down. . . . I've got one aim in life. And I'm making straight for it." p. 64

"Jean: Humanism is all washed up! You're a ridiculous sentimentalist." p. 68

"Berenger: Jean was very proud, of course. I'm not ambitious at all. I'm content to be what I am." p. 75

"Dudard: There again we need to define exactly what we mean by lunacy . . .
Berenger: Lunacy is lunacy and that's there is to it! Everybody knows what lunacy is. And what about the rhinoceroses—are they practice or are they theory?" (84)

"Berenger: People who try to hang on to their individuality always come to a bad end!" (107)

"Announcer: What's he need a head for when he's got genius!" (116)

"Father-Jacques: [to his son] The future of the white race is in your hands. It must go on, go on and extend its power more and more!
Jacques: What can we do?
Jacqueline: If it's to go on, we must stop it from going back.
Jacques: Through what means?
Father-Jacques: [to his soon] Through production. Whatever disappears must be

replaced by new products, more numerous and varied than before. It's up to you to instigate production . . ." (132)

Topics for Discussion

In "Rhinoceros," what is the significance of the number of horns the rhinoceroses have? Why do some have one and others two?

In "Rhinoceros," what is the relationship between Jean's personality and his transformation into a rhinoceros?

In "Rhinoceros," what does Daisy represent and why does Berenger ultimately have to part ways with her?

In "The Leader," what is the significance of the leader's lack of a head?

In "The Leader," what does the Announcer mean when he says that the leader does not need a head because he has "genius"?

In "The Future is in the Eggs," why are Roberta and Jacques's offspring eggs?

In "The Future is in the Eggs," the family lists revolutionary as a possible occupation for the new off-spring, but are outraged when Jacques suggest they might be anarchists or nihilists. Why?