

A CRITICAL STUDY OF BORIS VIAN'S THEATRE :
LES BATISSEURS D'EMIRE; ITS 'SCHMURZ'
HAS BEEN THE DRAMATIC ENIGMA OF THE
THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

By

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Boris Vian is, perhaps, the direct disciple of Alfred Jarry and Antonin Artaud in spite of almost half a century between them. Like Cocteau and most of Jarry's friends and followers, he joined the Collège de Pataphysique. Again like Artaud and Jarry he died young and his real name and fame began to flourish on the literary scene after his death. Vian was a Satrap of the Collège de Pataphysique and an ardent admirer of Jarry's works and dramatic use of childish guignolesque as the best medium for his satire. Vian shares with Jarry and Artaud the experience of the progressive aspect of death, with its grotesque and macabre hallucinations. Hence 'Death', like the objects that come alive in Ionesco's plays, proliferates on Vian's canvas; death occurs so often, either too horrifying, or too playful to appear tragic; in fact all death-scenes are totally absurd. Vian's dramatic variety of the threatening Nemesis of death which come out of his personal experience must have inspired the dramatists of the 60's with the panoramic death-theatre from Orton's *Funeral Games*(1), to Ionesco's *Here Comes a Chopper*(2). Ionesco is the nearest to Vian, where the stage can be piled up with corpses, and the audience can still find something to laugh at. In both Vian's and Ionesco's theatres the macabre and grotesque, the comedy and tragedy are closely intertwined. In their dramatic technique they depend on what they inherited from their predecessors, Jarry and Artaud; that is their guignolesque form, through which the characters are de-humanized, and accordingly their action, gestures and dialogue are totally absurd.

Artaud, in his first essay describes his suffering in being the prisoner of his own mind as follows :

"... I suffer because the Mind is not in life and life is not Mind.
I suffer because the Mind is an organ, the Mind is an inter-

preter or the Mind intimidates things to accept them in the Mind...(3)

Jarry was the slave of his 'Gidouille'; the 'Savage God'; and "the last sublime debauchée of the Renaissance".(4) Vian was the prisoner of his sick heart; hence he identifies himself with death, while Jarry has become Ubu, who stands for everything likewise Godot(5). Artaud introduces himself as the saint, with a prophetic message for the theatre and the dramatists :

I am the saint, I am he who was
A man, insignificant among other men;
With only a few garland thoughts,
I vent with a confused sound.(6)

Vian sums up his life in these lines :

I shall die a little, much,
Without passion, but with interest,
And then when all shall be finished,
I shall die. (7)

Vian died in 1959 at the age of thirty-nine, after experiencing all the agony of physical death. The constant presence of the threat of death infused the author with urgent vitality; he was racing against death; and the result as one critic describes it: 'La Poursuite de la Vie totale'. (8) Death or rather annihilation in the form of a game of strip poker or Russian roulette; or terrible Noises and Schmurzes, ends the role of every character in Vian's works.

As Jarry and Artaud and a host of writers such as Apollinaire, Henri Rousseau, Eric Satie were caught in the era of 'La Belle Epoque' (9) Vian's short life was confined within the hot time between the two world wars and their aftermath. During that time there were three distinct types of theatres in Paris; the National theatres, the Boulevards, and the Studios, which were experimental theatres mainly. The most famous of the Studio theatres were founded by Jacques Copeau and the Cartel des Quatre that consisted of Charles Dullin, Louis Jouvet, Gaston Baty, and Georges Pitoëff. It was in their theatres that most of what was new, was created, developed into new genres. The Comédie-Française, as the principal national theatre refused to open the doors to young playwrights; its budget was tight and risks could not be taken.

Its members were not allowed to perform anywhere else in Paris, and thus they had to supplement their earnings by working in the Cinema, or in the provinces, or abroad. The Edéon was the second national theatre; it was under the direction of Firmin Gamiér, the creator of *Ubu Roi* in 1896, and had had ample experience in both the experimental and commercial theatres. The term Boulevard theatres is used for those theatres which are solely commercial enterprises. They include many small theatres, known as *bon-bonnières*. The condition was similar in London during the nineteenth century, when the theatres were divided into legitimate and illegitimate. The former were Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and The Haymarket in summer only; and the latter were hundreds of little theatres (10). Vian witnessed all these changes, and being an artist of wide interests, he must have been fully aware of the literary experiments and their outcome.

Boris Vian was born on 10th March 1920, in the little town of Ville-d'Avray near Paris, of French parents despite his Russian-sounding name. At the age of twelve he became a cardiac patient, and therefore he was given too much parental care which he resented. The father, Paul Georges Vian, was eight years younger than the mother, Yvonne Vian, and thus there was no family rows as such. However Boris's comments indicate that he did not enjoy his childhood; the reasons, perhaps, were the suffocating care of the parents and his bad health. Boris is reported to have said: "There is no such thing as a good parent," or "All parents are the same ... in so far as the thickness of blood is concerned, I don't believe in it." (11) In *L'Herbe Rouge* he explained: "Never have they beaten me ... one could not make them angry. To make them angry, you had to do on purpose. It was necessary to kick them into it..." One thing he had against his parents was the choice of his name, Boris, for he had to explain to his friends that 'Boris' has nothing to do with his origin. Perhaps that was why he used a variety of pseudonyms: Baron Visi, Vernon Sullivan, Adolphe Schmurz and others. Vian was trained as a civil engineer, but he chose to follow various careers as song-writer, cabaret artist, film-actor, jazz musician, novelist and dramatist. He inherited a good deal from his father; first his literary interest in translation, for Paul Georges Vian did a number of translations. Secondly Boris followed his father's attitude in politics, being liberal, and in religion for being savagely anticlerical. The eco-

conomic situation of the Vians deteriorated, especially in the early 1930's; and this is expressed in Boris's works as it is obvious the fall from rich to poor of many characters. His father's death in 1944 during the disturbance of the liberation period when he was the victim of a mysterious assassination was surely a blow to the son. A late investigation showed that the father was killed because of collaboration with the occupying German forces. All these events are used again and again in Vian's works.

In 1932 Boris had an attack of rheumatic fever, and his heart was affected. From 1932 to 1936 he attended Lycée Hoche in Versailles, but his studies were interrupted in 1935 by another health difficulty. Then he had typhoid fever and because of the wrong treatment he developed an insufficiency of the aorta. However, in the same year, he passed his Latin-Greek Baccalaureate, and in 1936 he was able to enter the Lycée Condorcet in Paris, where he pursued mathematical studies in preparation for joining the Ecole Centrale. His illness subjected him to the suffocating parental affection; and thus he expressed his resentment of maternal love later on in *L'Herbe rouge*: 'I was being drowned in love ...' (12) Some critics, even, attempted to identify Mame Vian with the monstrous mother of *L'Arrache-Coeur*. The image of the father however, in *L'Arrache-Coeur*, and *Les Bâtisseurs d'empire* is due to Vian's later modification of his ideas on parenthood; and most probably the father, described in those two works, represents Boris Vian himself and not his father.

It was in 1937 that Boris Vian began to be interested in jazz and to play the trumpet; then he joined the Hot Club of France, and that was when he went to listen to a concert of Duke Ellington, which was an experience and a revelation. Vian considered "this concert as one of the three great moments of (his) life", the other two having also to do with jazz, namely the concert of Dizzy Gillespie in 1948, and that of Ella Fitzgerald in 1952. (13) It is perhaps through jazz that Vian became interested in American literature, and thus translated many American authors. In 1939 Vian passes the entrance examination at Ecole Centrale: he placed 125th in 313 admissions. Because of his heart ailment he was not mobilized when the war began. During the war his class was transferred to Angoulême, and in summer the family took refuge at Cap-Bréton, where Vian met Michelle Leglise. In 1940

Vian continued his studies, while courting Michelle, whom he married on 3rd July 1941, when he began his first literary work, 'Les Cent Sonnets'. In fact Michelle was Vian's first inspiration; as Michel Rybalka stated, "... it was in order to amuse Michelle that Boris began to write ... It is for her that he composed the first of the 'cent sonnets', and it is also to her that he dedicated the entire unpublished volume. *A mon Lapin*, he ventured, a *darling* dedication which is surpassed only by the one addressed to her in *L'Ecume des Jours*, and which reads : *Pour mon Bibi*. Michelle had, of course, a likeable and lovable character, as Simone de Beauvoir corroborates : "One always liked her because she never preferred herself. Gay and a little mysterious, very discreet and very present, she was always a charming companion." (14)

At that time he was writing, playing jazz at the Claude Abadie jazz Orchestra, and finishing his studies of engineering at the Ecole Centrale. As soon as he got his engineering Diploma he got a job as engineer for the Association Française de Normalisation, where he worked till 1946. Once he established a permanent income for his family, he managed to devote enough time for his writing . Thus early in 1943 he began to write *Trouble dans les Andains* and *Veroquin et le plancton*. At the same time he published poems for the Bulletin of the Hot Club of France under the pseudonym of Bison Ravi. During 1944—45 following the liberation of Paris, Vian had many contacts with American soldiers and even participated as trumpet-player in a jazz orchestra for the special Service. Meanwhile he went on with his literary writings; his short stories of *Les Fourmis* and his chronicles which he wrote under the pen name of Hugo Hachebuisson appeared in a periodical called *Les Amis des Arts*. He also became acquainted with the Existentialism of Sartre and in 1946 he made the personal acquaintance of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir . In spite of Vian's great admiration of Sartre, he did not follow his school of thinking being *en situation* (15). Vian, as it is expressed again and again could never have the discipline necessary to total *engagement*. Vian is not a preacher, his works are neither *romans* nor *pièces à thèse*. In fact he is very much like Jarry, in his personal life, as well as in his literary work; there is a mixture of the grotesque and the macabre; the comical and the austere which defies definition and categorization; but it is a total theatre. His attitude during the war years is one which describes best his *non-engagement*, for

he was not attracted either by the resistance movement, nor by the possibility of collaborating with the enemy.

This attitude is best expressed in his first play *L'Equarrissage Pour Tous* (16). It shows Vian as a master of a bitter, black humour, although it is a tragicomic farce, and still fits into the traditional pattern of Jarry and Artaud. Cocteau greeted it as an event comparable to Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles de Tirèsiàs* (17), and his own *Maries de la Tour d'Eiffel* (18). *L'Equarrissage Pour Tous* pointed the way to *Le Gôûter des Généraux* (19) which enjoyed a great success in London in 1966. It had a very long run in spite of the critics's biting criticism, relating the whole performance to Jarry's *Ubu Roi*.

Vian's rebellion against the French government was expressed in playing jazz, buying forbidden books by American authors, and participating in what was called then the Zazou movement. The Zazous liked to translate into French American jazz compositions whose performances had been forbidden by the occupying German forces : thus the song of George Gershwin "Lady Be Good" is translated into "Les Bigoudis"; "Tiger Rag" and "St. Louis Blues" are turned to "La Rage du Tigre" and "La Tristesse de Saint-Louis", respectively. However, Simone de Beauvoir asserted that Vian's activities in the Zazou movement were not limited to translating American songs. He and his friends "Organised terrible parties : emptied cellars full of wine and broke furniture, thus imitating warlike procedures; they dabbled in the black market, were anarchists, apolitical, against their pro-Pétain parents, and displayed a provoking Anglomania ..." (20).

Vian's attitude during the war was shown clearly in his mockery of Sartre's well-known argument according to which the cowardly man prefers to objectify himself rather than come to grips with decisions. Vian remarked that the ultimate way of objectifying oneself is through death. Therefore suicide must be avoided; hence war must be avoided: "War is a social phenomenon of capital interest because all those who engage in it may earn a pure and complete objectification and thus reach corpse state ... but war does not provide a solution because often one is not killed." (21) Here Vian implies that those who choose to go to war, especially volunteers, are cowards, and unintelligent cowards at that, because if they remain alive, their efforts have been in vain. In fact:

the one who is a conscientious objector becomes a truly courageous person for he refuses to turn into an object. This opinion sounds like an echo of Bernard Shaw in *Arms and The Man*, which appeared on the English stage in 1894 in which the romantic hero of war Major Sergius Saranoff is simply a mad coward, while Captain Bluntschli, the professional fighter, is a 'chocolate cream-soldier', as he carries chocolate instead of ammunitions; chocolate which symbolizes all kinds of food is as necessary to fighters as cartridges. The idea of war as Shaw presented is no more than a game of killing for fun, exactly as half a century later Vian presented it in *The Generals' Tea-Party*, where the three generals who are an American, a Russian, and a Chinese, commit suicide in a game of Russian roulette, by playfully pulling the trigger. The main difference between the two plays; *Arms and the Man* and *The Generals' Tea-Party* is the form rather than the contents; Shaw's play is written within the realistic framework, while Vian's is in the Jarryesque style. Vian's characters are just puppets which the author can manipulate at will for the purpose of showing how the burlesque of their attitudes underscores the danger, they represent.

Brecht presented a similar attitude of protest against war in *Mother Courage*(22), *Schweik in the World War* (23) and *The Days of the Commune* (24). In fact since 1945 the time of uneasy peace and hostilities war has become a major theme for playwrights all over the world in general and France in particular. The main reason was that while war hostilities ended as far as Europe and England were concerned France continued to be deeply preoccupied in the disaster of Dien-Bien-Phu, then with the war of independence in Algeria. This pre-occupation was reflected in all forms of literature, and particularly in the theatre. 'Theatre of War' became a recognized genre; three war-plays, as representatives were collected in one volume, with an introduction by Robert Baldick, includes *Vasco*, *The Generals' Tea-Party*, and *The Civil War* (25). On the back jacket there is a critical comment which is worth quoted as it sums up the idea behind these three war-plays :

From Black Comedy and the Theatre of the Absurd, Penguin plays move on to the Theatre of War. The three plays... originated in French and all concern war : if two of them cry havoc light-heartedly enough, all contain barbed allusions

to the way the game is played today. *The Civil War*, by the French novelist who wrote *Chaos and Night*, is ostensible about Caesar and Pompey, but Algeria and Indochina are never far from the reader's mind. In the same way Schehad's fantasy comedy, *Vasco*, has one foot in a Ruritanian setting at the start of the century and one foot in the military realities of today. The most hilarious of the three, *The Generals' Tea-Party*, is a send-up of a group of senior officers of whom Wellington might have made his famous comment : ' I don't know what effect these men will have upon the enemy, but, by God, they terrify me.' (26)

Vian's protest against war was not only expressed in plays, novels, and essays like Camus and Sartre; he was more like Brecht, for in the middle of 1950's at the time of the Algerian Crisis, he composed and interpreted a number of songs which drew the ire of the *anciens combattants*, and of government censorship. His "Le Deserteur", whose public performance became posthumously a national and international success : the Peter, Paul and Mary group performed it at numerous domestic festivals where the Vietnam war was being questioned, and in 1966, in France, it was the most popular American Import. (27) Vian's protest was even severer in the early novels, under the pseudonym of Vernon Sullivan (28). When *J'ai Cracher sur Vos tombes* appeared Vian pretended to be a translation from an American novel, but the people has their doubts, and there was a public accusation that he " was spitting on tombs that were still fresh". Vian's answer appeared in *L'Equarriage pour Tous* (1950) by explaining his opinion on war :

I regret to be one of those to whom war does not inspire any patriotic reflections ... nor any murderous enthusiasm, nor any poignant, or sudden piety- it gives me nothing but a despairing anger, total, against the absurdity of battles which are word battles but which kill men of flesh ... War is a grotesque thing .. and those who are amused by it believe that they are, in general, entitled to extend it so that it should incorporate those who are not amused by it. War is one of the multiple faces of intolerance, and a most destructive one. That is why, in the reduced measure in which something written, and therefore artificial, can have any effect, I have tried to react against it. (30)

Vian considers all surviving *anciens combattants* as failures of wars, who are responsible for future wars, and the only solution to eliminate future wars' is to get rid of those who would take part in them' (31). Total destruction of all those fighters is the only solution, and this explains the denouements of all his plays and some of his novels. In addition to those two obsessions, antimilitarism and total destruction of the 'old war veterans' Vian treated also man's disintegration mentally and physically; the most terrifying aspect is the presentation of his constant fear and disgust of death, being a sick man, living under the threatening nemesis of Death.

Vian's way of living, working and writing was like racing with the Enemy of man, Death; he was producing every year at least a major work—a novel or a play—in addition to speeches, songs, articles, as well as doing many other jobs. In 1946, for instance, he produced two full-length novels: *L'Écume des jours* (32), and *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* (33), and during the same year he continued writing the short stories of the later *Les Fourmis*, as well as articles for Sartre's *Les Temps modernes*. In June of the same year, 1946, he became a candidate for the coveted Prix de la Pléiade, which went instead to the Abbé Jean Grosjean. Vian, understandably was upset, and later on ridiculed his rival in giving the name Petitjean to a ridiculous priest in *L'Automne à Peking*. (34)

J'irai cracher sur vos tombes was a tremendous success; it sold more than half a million copies and provided Vian with a financial security for some time. However an accident of murder took place in a small hotel of Montparnasse, which was like one of his scenes. The accident was the killing of a young woman by her lover, and next to the corpse a copy of *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* was found opened to the passage where the hero kills his mistress. Hence Vernon Sullivan was described by the press as an indirect murderer. The case was debated in court and in the press for a number of years and Vian was heavily fined, but it earned him an incredible popularity, and his publications proliferated. In 1947 *Vercoquin et le plancton* hit the market; Vian was obviously so enthusiastic that he published three more novels: *L'Automne à Peking*, *Les Morts ont tous la même peau*, and *Et on tuera tous les affreux*. He also turned *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* into a play, and translated it into English, under the title, *I shall Spit on Your Graves*. At the same time he was playing the trumpet for many musical groups and taking part in many Radio programmes. 1949 marked a reverse of fortune in Vian's personal life; first being a spendthrift he was unable to pay his taxes, and secondly the relationship between him and his wife

began to break down. Tired and depressed Vian began to look for a refuge somewhere else. At one of those open-air cocktail parties, given weekly by the editor, Gaston Gallimard he made acquaintance of a young Swiss dancer, named Ursula Kübler, who had recently moved to Paris. That was the beginning of a new stage in his life; he actually moved to a small flat to live with Ursula, on the Boulevard de Clichy, for some years, till he got a divorce in 1952, and they got married in 1954.

As for his literary career, in 1949 there was a lull in the sales, although Vian went on writing at his rapid speed; there was a change towards writing plays instead of novels. His first play *L'Equarrissage pour tous* made his name as a man of the theatre. In this burlesque-vaudeville Vian's antimilitarism is especially biting; Vian followed Jarry's technique in presenting marionette-like characters to carry out his attack on wars and fighters, and get killed at the end; and thus his antimilitarism and total destruction are used effectively. In the preface Vian explained his aim : '... The play is ... a burlesque : it seemed to me that the best approach to war was to laugh at its expense, a craftier but more effective way of fighting it ... '. The influence of Jarry can be seen from the drawing and explanation accompanying the play on the cover of the original theatre programme which presented a strong soldier with the head of a horse, and which labeled the play an ' anarchist vaudeville'. (35)

It is interesting to give a brief summary of this 'para-military vaudeville', as it is described, on one of the programmes once (36). The plot takes place on 6th June 1944, in the town of Arromanches, that is, during the day of the invasion of France by Allied Forces in World War II. While bullets fly all around and shells explode closer and closer, a knacker is concerned exclusively with the problem of whether or not he should marry his daughter to a young German with whom she had an affair for four years. Although war is going on outside, domestic relations remain prominent inside; the two themes run side by side, cancelling each other out, by being too absurd for words. Shaw used the same themes in *Arms and the Man*, in a comedy presented within the realistic framework. At the house of the knacker arrive military persons of many nationalities : German, American, a Soviet female soldier, a Japanese parachutist, and even some French F.F.I.'s. In spite of their apparently different background these soldiers are interchangeable; they change uniforms and immediately they change nationa-

lities and German soldiers sing cowboy songs and Americans sing German songs.

The ending of *L'Equarrissage pour tous* brings out the biting satire on war and warriors. War emerges as the victor, the laughing devil; a lieutenant arrives, to tell the knacker that his house must be destroyed as it is blocking some realignment project of the Ministry of Reconstruction. The lieutenant introduces three sappers armed with axes who 'are scurrying around shifting furniture and lugging in cases of dynamite' while another officer tries to explain to the knacker the great reasons behind the decision of his Ministry: "Now, out there will stretch, in the future, a great vista lined with Japanese poplars. Pleasure gradens and ornamental fountains will enhance the beautiful scene. Flowering plants and bushes will waft their perfume on the breeze." And with usual Vianesque mockery, while the officer talks, the sappers light the fuses, and hence "total blackness descends on the scene, followed by a shattering explosion". When light returns, the stage is covered with ruins, debris, and the corpse of the knacker, body separated from his head. The officier's comment completes the black humour: "Bah; You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs".

The two officers, then, shoot each other, falling dead with their last words of cheering: "Long Live France"!; accompanied by the tune of the *Marseillaise* in the background; specifically described in the stage directions as being played "abominably out of tune", and the curtain falls. Are those officers ironically supposed to be the *Bâtisseurs d'Empire* ?.

L'Equarrissage pour tous is written and presented on the dramatic lines of Artaud; and as David Naokes noted, Vian anticipated Ionesco, who might have known him being a member of the Collège de Pataphysique. The liveliness of the theatre of Vian and Ionesco as well as of the exponents of the theatre of the Absurd springs from and is maintained by the constant arrival and departure from the stage of marionette-like characters who babble a few words and perform any clownish act, appearing and disappearing without the least logical or chronological order. Then the confusion of names is another aspect; their characters answer to any name. The most important point of similarity, particularly in the works of Ionesco and Jarry is the dramatic ability of the author to place his characters below the tragic grandeur of circumstances, with which they fail to cope.

In the same year (1950) Vian wrote *Le Dernier des métiers*, *L'Herbe L'Herbe rouge* and *Elles se rendent pas compte*, but he and his editor had to spend a good deal of time in court and thus he could hardly cover his expenses. Therefore Vian had to turn to something quicker to make money, and that was translation. The list of authors translated during 1951-53 includes Strindberg, Dorothy Baker, Ray Bradbury, A.E. Van Vogt, and General Omar Bradley. At the time he became an *aficionado* of science-fiction and began to attend the Club des Savanturiens.

In 1952 Vian joined the Collège de Pataphysique, originally introduced by Alfred Jarry. Most of the avant-garde writers, perhaps, joined this collège by way of protesting against pompous ceremonies, meetings, and consecrated official bodies. It greatly appealed to Vian, as he had a lot in common with Jarry and *Ubu*; it would give vent to Vian's sense of humour and need of sarcasm as a defence mechanism. Vian was the promoter of the "Ordre de la Grande Gidouille" (38). Among the members there were Eugène Ionesco, René Clair, Jean Cocteau, Jacques Prévert, and many writers of the theatre of the Absurd. In 1953 Vian published his last novel, *L'Arrache-Coeur*, and his two musical operas, *Le Chevalier de neige* (39), and *L'Incendie de L'Opera* (40).

Vian married Ursula Kubler in 1954, and pursued his musical activities, and got himself a permanent job as the artistic director of Philips Recording Company; a job he held till 1959. In 1958, unfortunately, his health got worse as he underwent a crisis of pulmonary edema. This crisis made him aware of a near death. He was obliged to rest in bed most of the time, and on 7th September 1956 there was a notice in *L'Express* which said: "Just before summer vacation, the death sentence had been pronounced. Having come out miraculously from the edema crisis, Boris Vian can no longer engage in any efforts now. His doctors advise him to take it easy while waiting for the surgery techniques to improve in order to assure to him normal existence." The operation never took place, and he was put on daily medicine, and in 1957 he suffered another attack.

Under these circumstances he wrote *Les Bâtisseurs d'Empire*, and many articles for *Jazz-Hot*, where he made frequent allusions to his heart disease. The most important symptom was the palpitations of his heart, which he could hear clearly and loudly to the extent that they

would make his chest vibrate, and which were constant, audible for the others, and reminder of his near death. These symptoms are what the artist dramatizes in *Les Bâtisseurs d'Empire* ; the threatening nemesis of death, in the character of the strange figure, Schmurz, and the noises are perhaps nothing but the palpatations of his heart.

In spite of the deteriorating condition of his heart Vian kept up the struggle. In 1958 he finished the opera, *Fiesta* (41); he made speeches here and there and continued writing articles. In 1959 he supervised a film version of *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*, and took the part of Prevert in *Les Liasons dangereuses* . In the same year he changed his job from Philips to Barclay Recording Company, in the same capacity.

On 23rd June 1959, while waiting to view a part of the film, he collapsed and died. Immediately after Vian's death in 1959 *Les Bâtisseurs D'Empire* enjoyed a tremendous success, and the Association of the Friends of Boris Vian was formed; the members include many writers and artists.

Like Artaud and Jarry, Vian went through the experience of death; as death was medically diagnosed, scientifically delayed, romantically awaited for with a mixture of fear and courage, he kept his struggle up to the last moment. This experience is dramatized in his last masterpiece, *Les Bâtisseurs D'Empire*; written in the same stream of sarcasm, poured on antimilitarism, fear and struggle against disease and death, and total destruction at the end. While the touching news of Vian's death was still hot Professor Henri Peyre introduced Vian as follows :

“He is one of the numerous *enfants terribles* of French Existentialism... he may be amusing, spiritual and funny, although never solid nor convincing”. (42)

Les Bâtisseurs D'Empire's incredible success is mainly due to the strange character, ‘*Schmurz*’ ; it turned the name of Vian into a world dramatist, likewise Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, and Beckett's *Godot*. The piece is such a dramatic enigma that it drew hundreds of interpretations and comments. Written right at the end of his life, it made it necessary to go through Vian's life thoroughly to be able to see what Vian had in mind while writing this play of grotesque, macabre and absurd.

Vian began to write it while he was resting in bed with a heart crisis in 1957, and it first appeared in *Dossier 6* of the Collège de Pataphysique on 23rd February 1959. Its first performance was by the

Theatre Nationale Populaire under, Jean Vilar, the well-known director. Many many editions have been published, and has been translated to many languages, and produced on the English, European, American and Alexandria stages (43).

The author's original idea was the writing of a novel called *Les Assiégés*; the idea was to present a child who is under 'house siege', such as Zénobie is in *Les Bâtitseurs D'Empire* and in *L'Arrache-Coeur*. Vian thus commented : ' Everything will take place in the house. They receive a letter and they move to a floor above'. Later Vian abandoned the idea of the novel and replaced the letter with the Noise and invented the character of Schmurz.

The play is in three acts; it presents a family on the run from a mysterious but terrifying Noise, from which they try to escape by moving on to a higher and higher floor, into an ever-smaller apartment. The curtain opens, in the semi darkness of the stage, amid shouted instructions, noisy stumblings and obvious confusion, the family spills out of the stairway, dropping luggage and household possessions all over the room, and collapsing in relief . Whatever the dreaded, encroaching danger was, it must have been really close because the characters are terrified. The lights flood the stage and the members of the family-father, mother, daughter Zenobie, and their maid Cruche, are shown petrified in their places, in a two-room apartment; "one can hear, coming from outside, a noise that is frightening to hear but difficult to describe. A deep reverberating noise with overtones of shrill throbbing".(44)

Zénobie is the only one to express her fear from the Noise; it is obvious that the Noise is what had chased them away from their previous apartment, and from the one before that; and from several others in the past. It is also suggested that each time the family has moved, one member disappeared, and each time the apartment above was smaller and poorer.

Zénobie, the daughter, is sixteen or seventeen years old; she is the only one who asks direct questions about their troubles, particularly the meaning of the Noise, the reason of moving, and the most difficult enigma of all, the character of Schmurz. The mother, Anna, is thirty nine or forty; just a complementary part to her husband. The maid Cruche whose name is changed to Mug in the English version for no reason

whatsoever, goes about her housework mechanically, talking like a machine, ignoring what is happening; and her monotonous, constant talk sounds like trying to fill the silence or to amuse her listeners' or perhaps, as Stragon and Vladimir say, 'not to think ... when you talk you don't think'. (45) In the opening scene when lights invade the semi darkness a strange figure was waiting lying down in a corner. "Its limbs are swathed in bandages, ... dressed in rags. One of its arms is in a sling. It is holding a walking stick in its free hand. It limps, bleeds, and is ugly to look at. It cowers in its corner." (46)

The word "Schmurz" has a history behind it. It was Ursula Kubler, Vian's second wife, invented it in 1957, in order to designate something or someone against one's wishes. The word was a kind of a code-word, frequently used in the Vian household in such expressions as 'Schmurz alors, Il est bien Schmurz, ce type-là, and Schmurzérie'. (47) As it is used by the Vians, 'Schmurz', obviously is derived from the German Schmerz, meaning pain, and Schmutz, signifying dirt. As Cismaru points out, the sound of the word must have pleased Vian more than its derivations, for he employed it in a variety of ways in a number of works : "there is a town called Schmoutz in a radio sketch entitled "Elsa Poppins," a Doctor Schmurz in a review published in January, 1958, in the magazine *Constellation*, an orchestra leader called Schmurztzwangler in *En avant la zizique*, and the author himself adopted the pseudonym of Adolphe Schmurz for a number of articles which appeared in *Constellation* from June to August 1959." (48)

This figure Schmurz is mute; he does not personally participate in the action, but he has a dominant role to play against all the other characters. With the exception of Zénobie, they all flog, kick, hurl things at him, all the time, pretending as if nothing is happening and obviously getting good satisfaction. It is also true as Jacques Bens asserts that 'le mot Schmurz n'est jamais prononcé par les personnages de la pièce. Ce n'est pas eux qui l'appellent ainsi, mais seulement l'auteur, dans ses indications scéniques'. (49)

Hence Schmurz is the unnameable, it is 'le machin'; he has also got the power not to talk, and his gestures are obviously mechanical.

All the characters pretend as if he does not exist.

Zenobie : ... And *that* wasn't there !

Father : What wasn't there ?

Zenobie : *That* ! (*She points at the motionless schmurz.*) (50)

There is a very long silence.

Mother : (carefully) . Zenobie, my dear child, what are you talking about?

The parents refuse to admit that Schmurz is there; and they refuse to give him or it a name; hence negate his existence. However that machine that has no name, must have some definition. Francois Billetdoux gave this enigma an interesting interpretation :

Bien sur, on aurait tendance à penser que le schmurz est un symbole ! Mais non, c'est un schmurz. Représente-t-il l'âme, la mauvaise conscience, l'auteur, le passe, le héros de notre temps, la vérité difficile ? Certainement pas. Ce n'est pas un uniforme; c'est un être. L'important est qu'il est là, "présence réelle", sans jamais exprimer ce qu'il est ... "(51)

Before going any further into analysing this figure Schmurz, it is perhaps necessary to look through the second part of the enigma, *The Noise*, which probably has the same clue. Schmurz is mute by comparison to the other characters and to the audience, but he is the only one who does not get frightened on hearing the Noise. Could the Noise be his language ? Does the Noise say what he cannot say ? The Noise chases the family, and obviously other families, as it is shown in the case of their neighbour, from one floor to another and each time the Noise occurs; the moving up ends with the disappearance of one of the family. Vian describes the Noise in the original French Play as follows: "On entend, venu du dehors, un bruit à faire peur, dont la nature reste à préciser. Un bruit grave roulant surmont de battements aigre".(52) In what way is this Noise associated with this strange, bandaged up, bleeding figure, Schmurz ? Zénobie thus asks : ... What is this noise ? Tell me, mother ...

Mother : Zénobie, my little angel, you've been told a hundred times not to ask that.

Father : (evasively) . We don't know what it is ourselves. If we knew, we'd tell you.

Zenobie : But usually you know everything.

Father : Usually, yes. But that's just it, this is an exceptional circumstance. And then, the things I know about are really important, not just mirages.

Zenobie : So this noise isn't really important ?

Father : Basically, no.

Mother : It's an image.

Father : A symbol.

Mother : A reference point.

Father : A warning. But one mustn't confuse the image, the signal, the symbol, the reference, and the warning with the thing itself. That would be an awful mistake.

Mother : A confusion.

Father : You keep out of this discussion. After all, this child is your daughter.

Zenobie : But if it's not important, why do we leave ?

Father : It's more prudent.

Zenobie : It's more prudent, even if it means leaving a six-room apartment where we were alone, and ending up in two rooms where ...!

She looks at the schmurz).

Father : Prudence above all. (*He goes up to the schmurz, spits on it, and returns.*) (53)

In the final tirade of the father he contemplates further on The Noise :

... To return to the noise - I am convinced that it must be a signal. (*He breaks off. Then, pensively*) I always felt sure that it was only the absence of real tranquillity that prevented my discovering the origin and basic pattern of things. (*In a tone of satisfaction.*) Is this not the proof ? I have a feeling that I am on the brink of a tremendous discovery. (*A pause.*) A signal. (*A pause.*) An alarm signal, primarily. My alarm signal. At least, as far as I'm concerned. Who is responsible for sounding the signal ? (*A pause.*) Suppose the problem were resolved. I get the hell out. (*He corrects himself.*) No ... I climb up one floor. Good. Why ? Because I hear the signal. It is evident that the signal is therefore directed *against* the fact that I remain.

Who, then, can be so annoyed by my remaining ? (*He goes up to the schmurz and beats it .*) (54)

Do all the father's queries indicate that Schmurz is the one who is responsible for the Noise ? And being mute, no answer is expected. ? Thus Jacques Bens comments : ' On ne saura bien entendu jamais *de quoi* le bruit est le signal, quelle alerte il sonne, quelle attaque il annonce. Comme celle du schmurz, sa signification immédiate, matérielle et précise, ne nous sera jamais révélée. Voilà qui devrait nous donner à réfléchir'. (55)

Schmurz is described by Alfred Cismaru as an ' Antiperson, .. he is perhaps a double of the Father, an unbearable presence whom Father and Mother hit, throw about, torture, eventually shoot, and who refuses to die. ' (56) In Freddy de Vrees's interpretation, " the Schmurz was a Schmurz ... Schmurz does not mean freedom, malady, fear, Boris Vian, God, youth ... but rather what is meaningless ... ' (57) Another critic, whom Vian attacked more than once, Jean-Jacques Gautier was greatly astonished by this fascinating character, Schmurz, and thus gave a good review of the play and a detailed analysis of the role of Schmurz :

" ... Un point de détail m'a amusé et rassuré sur mes limites. " Dans les trois actes figurait un personnage muet, une espèce de monstre bardé de badages et d'énormes plaques de caoutchouc mousse. En passant chacun (sauf la jeune fille) lui donnait un coup de pied. A la fin il semble étouffer l'homme discoureur, le solennel imbécile, le faux courageux resté seul. Et paraît d'ailleurs aussitôt mourir avec lui. Rien ne nous dit qui est ce personnage. La devinette est bien dans le goût du théâtre d'aujourd' hui. Je me perdais en conjonctures, non sans honte de mon peu d'aptitude à résoudre ce genre de rébus. Et je n'osais dire à personne qu'aucune de mes hypothèses ne "cadrait" avec toutes les caractéristiques du Bibendum en question. Soudain, à la fin, voyant sortir tous mes confrères le front lourd de pensées que j'imaginai claires, je me dis: "Tant pis, eux savent toujours; pour une fois, je veux en avoir le coeur net, je vais le leur demander." L'un me dit" Eh bien ! Voyons, c'est la jeunesse! " Je m'inclinai, maté.

Quand il me vint l'idée d'en interroger un autre qui m'assura que c'était la conscience. J'allais me résigner à le croire lorsqu' un troisième passant par là, je le pris à témoin. Il m'avoua ne rien savoir. Le quatrième avait cru déceler l'incarnation de la vérité intérieure des héros. Le suivant déclara qu'il s'agissait de l'idéal. Du coup, cela fit un rassemblement et au bout de quelques instants, on épilouait plus librement . Selon celui-ci , le monstre loqueteux symbolisait l'amour. D'après celui-là, il y avait de la pureté là-dessous. Quelqu'un remonta jusqu' à Dieu. Voici enfin trois éclaircissements, les plus originaux qui me furent fournis: ce mannequin rembourré représentait le corps; cette sombre statue effrayante qui meurt avec nous était notre propre mort; ce hideux bonhomme sur lequel nous tapons est l'espèce de bouc émissaire que chacun porte en soi, le lieu de défolement, l'abcès de fixation. (58)

The controversy and the innumerable interpretations and comments on that strange figure, Schmurz, form an anthology of dramatic opinions, perhaps, excelled that on *Ubu* or *Godot*. It is interesting to present some of these opinions, particularly those which appeared as a spontaneous reaction to the first performance in 1959.

Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, the critic of *Le Monde* described it as being a work of tension, boldly autobiographical "Le mystérieux bruit tant redouté, le resserrement du logement autour du père que ses proches abandonnent, la vigilance du monstre, discrète puis absédante, tout évoque l'angoisse du cardiaque que son mal isole et enveloppe ..." (59)

Robert Kanters of *L'Express* gave a similar analysis, asking surprisingly " .. Que veut dire cette fable abacababrante ? ... " (60)

Max Favalelli of *Paris-Presse L'Intransigeant* describes it as a legend of a sick heart (61)

Morvan Lebesque of *Carrefour* deplored the whole genre as, it presents nothing but symbols (62).

Therefore Schmurz, like *Godot*, stands for everything from God to Death.

Another question, of equal importance and mystification is the title of the play; who are the Empire Builders ? This title sounds like a distant echo of Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, who was also obsessed with the threatening nemesis of death. The central action of *the Master Builder* is the climbing of a tower, which ends in Solness's downfall. The death of the children, caused by fire, drained the life of the mother, Aline, who became a walking death, dressed in black, that seems as a perpetual accusation to her husband, perhaps, like Schmurz. Throughout the two plays, the impression is that Zénobie's father is running away from Death, while Solness is defying Death. Solness, the architect started by building churches, and when the great but gloomy house that belonged to his wife, was destroyed by fire, Solness made his name as an architect by using its ground to build small houses for the community. Soon after the fire he built a tower for an old church, and though he could not stand heights, had for once ascended the tower and from its summit challenged the "Mighty One", God, asserting that he would henceforth be a free builder; but the result was his final fall. The idea of climbing as high as one can build, means to live one's art. In this defiance, there is danger, which troubles his conscience, and thus he grows dizzy and falls; dizziness is the equivalent of a troubled conscience.

Solness's fear of the younger generation springs from his yearning towards it, and that is why he responds so readily to Hilda Wangle. During his final fall, Hilda sees a mysterious figure with whom Solness is striving; and 'in the air' she hears 'nightly song'. He falls. Hilda stares upwards.' in a while as though still seeing him, and is surprised to find him gone. In a voice of 'quite spell-bound triumph' she comments : "But he mounted right to the top. And I heard harps in the air.' Then with a wild intensity, she cries: "My — my Master Builder !"

In Vian's play the word *bâtisseurs* appeared once in a speech by the Father :

... if it depended solely on myself, all false senses of security would long ago have been replaced by those truly gilt-edged securities : morality, progressive ideas, the advance of the physical sciences, street-lighting and crushing of all the rotten remnants of an increasingly disintegrating demagogy, in the manner ... eh... in the manner of those great builders of other ages who based their enterprises on a sense of duty and of public responsibility ... (63)

Jacques Bens gave an interesting interpretation of the title; he suggested that “*Les Bâtisseurs d’Empire* pourraient donc être les philosophes, les maîtres à penser, les modèles, les dieux du Père et de ses semblables, les auteurs des préceptes, des règlements, des traités dont le respect aveugle précipite la catastrophe finale ... ” (64)

However, like Beckett, Ionesco and all the dramatists of the Absurd it is impossible to find a definite explanation to these questions. Perhaps les Bâtisseurs are ironically the Schmurzes !

In addition to the obvious questions of the Noise, Schmurz and the title, there are many others which are not only difficult to explain, but impossible to find a direct interpretation. For instance, the relationship between Zénobie and Schmurz. If Schmurz is the threatening némesis of death or the double of the Father, or the wounded soldier, or Boris Vian’s failing heart, why is Schmurz inclined towards Zénobie? Why does Schmurz prevent Zenobie from going down stairs in Act II, when she tried to go down to see what was happening :

Zenobie : Well, I want to go downstairs again. *The schmurz has moved slightly, and begins dragging itself slowly toward the staircase.*

Mug : Your father has blocked up the stairway ...

Zenobie : I’ll unnaïl the planks ... I want to go down ... I want to go and see who’s living in our place ... Yes, I want to go all the way down, as far as the room I used to have, when I had a record-player and could listen to music.

Zenobie goes toward the staircase, sees the schmurz lying on the planks across the top of the stairs, crouched down like an animal, barring the way. She makes a despairing gesture and leans against the table. (65)
It is the first time that Schmurz actually interferes in the action. Is he trying to protect the young girl? Is he forbidding any retreating to the past? Is he stopping the time?

All these questions which one cannot help raising without finding any answer, can only help in probing into this dark atmosphere for new hypotheses which again raise more questions.

Act I ends with Cruche flogging Schmurz while the family are enjoying their meal, and happily commenting on the food. Their commentss can be on the flogging of Schmurz; meanwhile Zenobie

drops her head to her chest, and puts her hands over her ears, in order not to see or hear anything. Act II begins with the moving up to the new flat, which is just below the attic, with Zenobie, stretchine on the couch, obviously ill, and Cruche is sitting on the couch's edge. In their dialogue Vian pours all his biting satire. Like all characters in the theatre of the Absurd they talk at random about the past, the present in the form of a meaningless chatter. They throw some light on the past, but when it comes to actual time there is no sequence or order or even awareness of specific time. Like Pozzo when he became furious when stragon and Vladimir asked him when he lost his sight; when Zenobie asked Mug :
 "What day is it?" Mug answered: Monday, Saturday, Tuesday, Thursday, Easter, Christmas, Whitsundat, Wet Sunday, What Sunday, or no Sunday at all, probably.

Zenobie : Just as I thought. Time passes slowly. (66)

In Act II there are two incidents which are worth discussing separately. First the glass of water which Zenobie offers to Schmurz, and ' *with a quick movement, as if striking with a claw, it knocks the glass away and she shrinks back frieghtened ..* ' (67) Does Vian mean it to be a libation act on the dead ? The whole scene is done in miming. The second miming scene is the re-enacting of the parents's wedding. Here Vian followed closely the *guignol* technique; it is a stage-within-a-stage and Anna introduces Leon as a marvelous mimic. In this scene Vian pours out his bitter sarcasm on church, priests, mayors, marriages and all the sacred constitutions. We are told that the father was a horse knacker in Arromanches before joining the army, which takes us to the first play, *L'Equarrissage pour tous*. The act ends with another Noise, running upwards, and the disappearance of Zenobie.

Act III opens with the disappearance of the mother, Anna, in another Noise invasion ; thus the whole act is given entirely to the Father, facing Schmurz on his own. He introduces himself, by way of recapitulating : " Who am I ? (*Declaiming*) Dupont, Léon, age 49, teeth in excellent condition, ... (68)

The Father in this finale is Everyman, being summoned to meet God; finds himself alone, and his one-room attic flat is his cell. He defines the ascent as a retreat from an enemy. It is the first time he acknowledges that the Noise is the reason for his ascent; the Noise is the signal for the attack, which entails defence. This one man show is punctuated by his struggle with schmurz, putting on his military uniform, and playing

the different parts of his life. Schmurz is addressed as his naked soul, which he killed first, then dashed up the window and hoisted himself astride the window ledge. The finale is accompanied by the terrible Noise, when the Father slipped off; "darkness filled the stage, and perhaps schmurzes enter ..." (69)

Are these schmurzes the angels, while the schmurz throughout the play was Death, or perhaps, the seven virtues or the seven deadly sins? Does the Noise represent the trial of Léon alias Vian?

The language of Vian, likewise Jarry, distinguishes its author; it is a linguistic exercise of a game of words, phonetically arranged to bring out the dramatic images. The dialogue sounds like Ionesco's style in *The Bald Prima Donna*, or the long tirades in *The Chairs*; sometimes it is just an enumeration of expressions to kill the time or fill the silence as in Beckett's plays. On the surface it seems common, simple everyday jargons and banal. Each of the four characters has his or her singularity. While they say nothing, they are talking all the time about everything; they talk about life, hatred, love, indifference, egoism, generosity, revolting and despair. In fact there are four different styles; the style of each character is worth some dramatic analysis.

The Father is a victim of his language, the word has an upper hand; it is an alive object that controls him instead of being controlled. He often admits: "I wonder if I am not simply playing with words... And supposing words were made for just that purpose?" (70) The Father has ready made speeches for his various roles, and for every occasion, but sometimes he mixes them up, and confesses: "Je crois que les mots m'entraînent".

Anna, the Mother, is playing a complementary part to her husband; just to feed-back. She follows his line of thought, in order to remind him in case of digression.

Zenobie who does not shy away from reality does not accept any bluffing and insists on asking direct questions. She is the only realistic character, quite attached to the past, and is trying to find an explanation for what is happening at present. She is just the opposite of her parents. She examines, accuses and retorts in order to discover what her parents

are trying to hide. When they pretend that they just discover a new neighbour she makes them feel and look stupid.

Voisin. C'est quil (Xavier) va sur ses dix-huit ans ...

Zénobie. Il y va comment ? A pied, à cheval ou en patins à roulettes ?

This is the point which the Father took up and advised her : "ne prends pas tout au pied de la lettre, tu ne me donnes le vertige". Probably this is the truth that gives him the final dizziness which finishes him at the end. Zenobie's language manifests the refusal of a certain life which her age and the circumstances surrounding her do not allow her to refuse. The strength of her revolting clearly indicates that her battle is not a battle of words like her father; only in her language she seeks salvation.

The case is different with Cruche, whose resistance, indignation manifest themselves through the enumeration of her expressions. Cruche's speech is made up of synonyms and antonyms. She is a challenge to her master ; perhaps she is more capable of playing with words that the Father.

Here and in all the theatre of the Absurd language is an integral part of the general characterization; language show the vacuum in which the characters live. In fact Schmurz, the mute, is more impressive, and perhaps expressive than all the talking personnages.

Footnotes :

1. **Joe Orton**, *Funeral Games* (1970).
2. **Eugène Ionesco**, *Here Comes a Chopper* (1970).
3. **Antonin Artaud** , *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 48
4. **W. B. Yeats** called *Ubu Roi* the 'Savage God', and Apollinaire Called Jarry 'the last sublime debauchée of the Renaissance, quoted by R. Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, p. 251.
5. **S. Beckett's** *Waiting for Godot*.
6. **A. Artaud**, *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p.231.
7. **B. Vian**, *Je voudrais pas crever*.
8. Subtitle of **Henri Baudin's** book, *Boris Vian* (Paris, 1966).
9. See **Roger Shattuck**, *The Banquet Years* (1969).
10. **Z.M. Raafat**, M.A. Thesis on "Melodrama in Charles Dickens's Writings" University of Wales, 1962.
11. Quoted by **Michel Rybalka**, *Boris Vian* (Paris, 1969), p. 21
12. *L'Herbe rouge's* preface.
13. Reported by *Jazz-Hot* (June, 1952), p. 17.
14. **Simone de Beauvoir**, *La Force des choses* (paris, 1963), 277.
15. An existentialist term which points to the necessity of being in and living for one's own society.
16. Written in 1946—47 and first performed in 1950.
17. A Surrealistic play by Apollinaire.
18. A Surrealistic play by J. Cocteau.
19. First produced on 24 th September 1965.
20. **Simone de Beauvoir**, op. cit., p. 73.
21. A speech delivered, June 1949, at the Pavillon de Marsau; published in *Dossier 12* of the Collège de Pataphysicians, p. 44.

22. Written in 1939, first performed in 1941.
23. Written in 1941—44, first performed in 1957.
24. Written in 1948, first performed in 1956.
25. *Penguin Plays, Theatre of War* (London, 1967).
26. The back jacket, *Ibid.*
27. Simone de Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
28. He wrote three Novels : 1. *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* (1946).
2. *Les Morts ont tous la même peau* (1947)
2. *Et on tuera tous les affreux* (1948)
29. Quoted by Alfred Cismaru,, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
30. Quoted by Cismaru, *Ibid.*
31. *Dossier* pp; 44—48.
32. Translated by Stanley Chapman under the title : *Froth on the Daydream* Penguin Books 1970.
33. The cover states that Sullivan is only the translator of the work.
34. Published in Paris 1947.
35. Cp. Jarry's drawings and prefaces of *Ubu Roi*.
36. The programme arranged by the Theatre Municipal de Lausanne in which the play is described as a para-military vaudeville.
37. David Neekes, *Boris Vian* (1964), p. 111.
38. Gidouille was the emblem of Jarry and it became a sacred order for his disciples.
39. An opera presented at the Normandy Festival of Caen.
40. An adaptation from Georg Kaiser.
41. In Collaboration with Darius Milhaud; first performance was in Berlin.
42. Quoted by Jacques Gaspard-Dutariel in *Jazz-Hot* (October, 1959), p. 47.

43. In Alexandria, Sayed Darwish Theatre in French by Les Treteaux de Bourgogne on 11th April, 1971.
44. Stage-directions, Act. I. p. 7.
45. S. Beckett, *Waiting For Godot*, Act. II.
46. *The Empire Builders*, Act. I. p. 8.
47. Jacques Bens, *Boris Vian* (Bordas 1976) pp. 106—7.
48. A. Cismaru, op. cit. p. 114.
49. Jacques Bens, op. cit., p. 107.
50. *The Empire Builders*, ActI, p. 15.
51. Francois Billetdoux, "Hors propos", preface au *Theatre*, quoted by Jacques Bens, op. cit., pp. 107—8.
52. *Les Bâtitseurs d'Empire*, ActI.
53. *The Empire Builders*, Act. I. pp. 12—13.
54. *Ibid.* Act. III. p. 50.
55. Jacques Bens, op. cit., pp. 108.9.
56. A. Cismura, op. cit., p. 114.
57. Freddy de Vrées, *Boris Vian* (Paris, 1965), pp. 136—7—8.
58. *Le Figaro*, 25—12—1959. p. 8.
59. Collected by Michel Faure, *Les Vies posthumes de Boris Vian* (Paris, 1975), p. 17.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*, p.16.
63. *The Empire Builders*, Act, I. p. 21.
64. Jacques Bens, op. cit., p. 115.
65. *The Empire Builders*, Act II. p. 29.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid*, Act. III.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*, p. 53.