



ABSURDITY IN COMMUNICATION IN MODERN PLAYS: DECODING THE LANGUAGE OF WAITING FOR GODOT AND THE BALD SOPRANO

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Abstract

Theatre of the absurd critically changed the stereotypical style of drama in modern literature. Post-world helped the existentialist and absurdist authors to question the significance of the earthy world and life. The absurdist dramas paved a new way to question the essence of early plays. Absurdism radically changed the narrative style of a drama, a new type of communication and expression was created with the absurd dialogues and characters. The language itself presents the idea of the real world that has no meaning. Absurdist plays contain a human condition that goes through an existential crisis, a voyage that only can end with nothingness. So the language plays a resilient role that works as the motion of the plot. The style is relevant for the modern literature and present time that is going through a condition that cannot be answered with logic or reasoning, so the language in absurdist fiction mirrored the absurdity of life in every era. This research aimed to focus on the languages used in the plays of Beckett and Ionesco to express the absurdity of the real world. This writing took examples from the famous theatre of the absurd plays like Waiting for Godot and The Bald Soprano. The absurd plays mostly question the existence though the peculiar languages and unique type of conversations.

Keywords: Absurdism, drama, language, fiction, existentialism, communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Drama is the oldest medium of literature and one of the oldest ways for communication. Ancient Greeks created drama not only for entertainment but also to give deep messages to the people. William Shakespeare recreated the style of drama with his rhetoric language, the same way many playwrights change the language of drama in their absurd style of plays. The two world wars not only changed the map of Europe and its people, it also affected the literary world and created a power vacuum in literature. Soon the world of literature excluded itself from glorification

and romanticism of war and accepted the harsh truth of suffering.

The poet Wilfred Owen once said, "All a poet today can do is warn. That is why the true poet must be truthful". In "Anthem for the doomed youth", Owen describes soldiers who "die as cattle" and the "monstrous anger of the guns" (Onion, 2018).

The Great War also changed the narrative style of many writers. Ernest Hemingway's novel A Farewell to Arms is one perfect example of how war can affect a love story. So romantic sentiments also portrayed the brutality and horror of the war. The post-world war also was a time of Philosophers

and writers who started questioning religion and God. The rise of atheism and agnosticism soon affected the literary world. Philosophies like existentialism and nihilism started doubting the existence of life and the meaninglessness of the world.

An era of the existential crisis made way to a new form of literary expression, the theatre of the absurd, the term was coined by Hungarian-British dramatist Martin Esslin, who himself was a refugee of the second world war. He started presenting the dramas of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco who were known for their dramas full of absurdism. Esslin defines the style with the quote of Ionesco, "Absurd is that which has no purpose, goal or objective" (Esslin, 1960). The philosophy of Absurdism was polarized by French philosopher Albert Camus, His novel *The Myth of Sisyphus* established the idea of Absurdism in literature.

The philosophy of existentialism and nihilism are many ways similar to absurdism, but still, they all are dissimilar in an ideological sense. Existentialism emphasis human individuality, existentialists believe that though the meaning of life cannot be achieved, still humans can search for the nature of existence. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre, 1946). Absurdism is also very distinguished from nihilism, which is very pessimistic in the approach to find any meaning. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche thought nihilism as a western phenomenon, he criticized the western values and foundations. Nietzsche famously quoted, "God is dead" (Nietzsche, 1882), that expressed the total meaninglessness and insignificance of human life and their god.

Absurdism is a philosophy that cannot give any meaning to human existence. Though Absurdism is very much like existentialism, it has no elements like free will. Albert Camus always separated himself with all the existentialists, he was always skeptical about existentialism. *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* both plays of Camus are based on the ideology of Absurdism, but denying

the fact of any slight meaning or free will like existentialism. Camus once said, "Freedom is nothing else but a chance to be better, whereas enslavement is a certainty of the worst." (Camus, 1960).

II. ABSURD LANGUAGE IN WAITING FOR GODOT

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is one of the most famous plays in the genre of Absurdism. In the play a character called Estragon has a dialogue, "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful", the dialogue itself is an example of nihilist ideology. The total emptiness of existence reflects from this bold line. Nietzsche once said the most extreme part of nihilism is eternal nothingness. So in a way absurdism in *Waiting for Godot* collide with nihilism also.

"We wait. We are bored. No, don't protest, we are bored to death, there's no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. ...In an instant, all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness", the quote also explained how Beckett includes his thoughts of existentialism and Absurdism in the language of *Waiting for Godot*. The search for Godot is used as a metaphor for all the characters, their absurd conversations are just their way to diversethem from emptiness of life.

The absurdity is boldly visible in the language of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, repetition in the play express a more deep understanding of absurdity and meaninglessness. The example of that can be seen in a conversation between characters Estragon and Vladimir:

Estragon: Like leaves

Vladimir: Like sand

Estragon: Like leaves

Silence (p. 110)

Almost the same dialogues are repeated with a minor modification in another scene:

Estragon: Like leaves

Vladimir: Like ashes

Estragon: Like leaves

Long Silence (p. 111)

Now the language itself is not only absurd but also ambiguous. Beckett wants to define vague auditory imagery with the help of natural sounds. Characters in these conversations repeatedly use leaves, sand, ashes to create a sense of belonging with nature, but thinking practically nature itself is absurd in the context of these dialogues. So the language itself reflects an absurd and meaningless world with repetition.

III. MEANINGLESS COMMUNICATION IN THE BALD SOPRANO

The theater of the absurd plays always is expressed with their confusing and ambiguous language. Eugene Ionesco's works can be taken as examples of perfect absurdist drama. French-Romanian writer Ionesco was known as the "Shakespeare of the Absurd" and "Enfant Terrible of the Avant-garde" (Guppy, 1984).

Ionesco himself never strongly expressed that the genre of Absurdism is a new creation, in an interview with Shusha Guppy he gave more credit to Martin Esslin, Samuel Beckett, and Albert Camus for the establishment of absurdist fiction. Ionesco gave examples like William Shakespeare's Macbeth and the Greek play Oedipus that were full of lines that can only be portrayed as tragic and absurd (Ionesco, 1984).

The Bald Soprano is considered as Eugene Ionesco's magnum opus. The language and the plot of the play are very strange and cyclic. Ionesco wrote the play when he was trying to comprehend the English language. Ionesco satire and stereotyped an English couple by using absurd language.

Mr. Smith: Which Bobby Watson do you mean?

Mrs. Smith: Why, Bobby Watson, the son of old Bobby Watson, the late Bobby Watson's other uncle.

Mr. Smith: No, it's not that one, it's someone else. It's Bobby Watson, the son of old

Bobby Watson, the late Bobby Watson's aunt. (58-60)

These types of nonsensical dialogues almost sound gibberish, but still, this was Ionesco's way to question the reality and existence of human beings. Bobby Watson is just a symbol of insignificant human life, Watson family has members with all the same name, it portrayed how naming is just an act, and the existence of human beings cannot be reflected with a person's name. So the author here provides all the elements of absurdity with this silly and weird language.

"The clock strikes as much as it likes. After several seconds, Mr. and Mrs. Martin separate and take the chairs they had at the beginning", (p. 139), the line is a direction intended by Ionesco in the play. In a way, it directly applies how Ionesco questions the existence of time that indicates the existential crisis. So in a way like every absurdist play, there are elements that will be linked with existentialism.

The language itself in the play defines the pessimism of being alive. For example:

Mrs. Smith: We shall have to go to their wedding, I suppose.

Mr. Smith: We shall have to give them a wedding present. I wonder what?

Mrs. Smith: Why don't we give them one of the seven silver salvers that were given us for our wedding and which have never been of any use to us? [Silence.]

Mrs. Smith: How sad for her to be left a widow so young. (46-49)

These dialogues though sound like an ordinary conversation, have an inner meaning like death and life. The dialogues reflect how irrelevant human existence is, and how it will end in death without concluding any purpose. So the way of Ionesco also portrayed the ideology of nihilism.

IV. CONCLUSION

Language reflects who we are as human beings; same way absurdist fiction mirrors our world that has no real meaning. In modern dramas

like Waiting for Godot and The Bald Soprano, the emptiness and hollowness of life are portrayed in a new kind of manner. Philosophy of the absurd changes the stereotypical barriers of the literary world and started a new genre of human existence.

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