

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Influence on Samuel Beckett's Selected Works

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Abstract:

This paper examines Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* influence on Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* and "The Winter Journey Over the Hartz Mountain" on "The Vulture." The paper will rely on David Lodge's *The Art of Fiction*, Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* and Edward Said's *Beginnings: Intention and Method* as a theoretical framework. Critics such as Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon argue that Goethe's writings had a great impact on Beckett's fiction and poetry during the 1930s. This paper argues that there is textual evidence demonstrating Goethe's influence on Beckett's novel, especially the use of specific terms which are love, heart, despair, nothing to be done, fate and death. It investigates the image of the vulture explored in both poems. It analyzes how Beckett overcomes the influence of his precursor to show his originality.

Key words: influence; textual evidence; themes; Goethe; Beckett.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literary texts are creative and imaginative writings that can reflect their authors' societies, histories and cultures. These authors can rely on different literary genres and styles of writing that reflect their attitudes. Every writer can be influenced by previous writers from different cultures and periods. Therefore, this writer can unconsciously utilize the same themes, ideas, styles or words. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is a German writer whose literature is regarded as a world literature. In fact, Samuel Beckett is a modern novelist, playwright and poet who is influenced by Goethe. This article attempts to investigate the anxiety of influence between these two European authors. It relies on David Lodge's *The Art of Fiction*, Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* and Edward Said's *Beginnings: Intention and Method* as a theoretical framework. It aims to expose Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* influence on Beckett's *Murphy* and "The Winter Journey Over the Hartz Mountain" on "The Vulture." It also focuses on Beckett's creativity as he overcomes Goethe's inspiration in his literary writing.

Beckett was fascinated by German culture and literature, mainly the classical period (Nixon, 2007, p. 262). In a letter to his friend Thomas MacGreevy, Beckett confesses, "I begin to think that Germany's charm is perhaps all mainly for me a matter of associations" (Qtd. Nixon, 2006, p. 259). This shows that Beckett regards Germany as a magnificent country and thinks of possible affiliation. Moreover, a few scholars have mentioned that Beckett is inspired by his precursor. In *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, S. E. Gontarski argues that Goethe has "creatively inspired" Samuel Beckett's fiction and poetry (2010, p. 135). In the same context, John Bolin explains that Goethe's writings include elements of romanticism and disillusionment. He states that Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* has influenced Beckett's production of *Murphy* (Gontarski, 2010, p. 101). He investigates the theme of romantic disillusionment in both literary texts.

Mark Nixon stresses Goethe's impact on Beckett's poetry. He considers Goethe's works as the essence of Beckett's writings (Nixon, 2006, p. 267). Therefore, some of Beckett's poems allude to his precursor. Nixon focuses only on Goethe's significance to his ephebe, Beckett. He provides some titles such as the influence of "Schiller's Xenia on Gnome" and "The Winter Journey Over the Hartz Mountain" on "The Vulture" (Nixon, 2006, p. 267). Indeed, no scholar examined how "The Winter Journey Over the Hartz Mountain" has an impact on "The Vulture." This paper, subsequently, scrutinizes the influence of the German poem on his ephebe providing textual analysis. Besides, it delves into how Beckett overcomes it since he puts the word "vulture" in a new modern context.

2. Theory of Influence

This study relies on David Lodge's intertextuality, Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence, and Edward Said's beginning. Lodge and Bloom are some of the influential theorists who have introduced intertextuality and influence. This study also focuses on Said's definition of anxiety of influence because he is a contemporary theorist. In *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Said discusses the ephebe's attempt to overcome the influence. His new concepts are beginning, point of departure, homelessness and discontinuity, which show the relationship between the original text and the influenced one.

a. David Lodge's Introduction to Intertextuality

In *The Art of Fiction*, David Lodge defines intertextuality. In this context, he argues, "Some theorists believe that intertextuality is the very condition of literature, all texts are woven from tissues of other texts, whether their authors know it or not" (1992, p. 98-9). In other words, writers may draw inspiration from previous authors unconsciously. Therefore, the reader can identify recurring themes, words and

expressions derived from the precursor's text. Intertextuality manifests in various forms, including parody, direct citations, and allusion. More significantly, Lodge writes, "novelists have tended to exploit rather than resist it, freely recycling old myths and earlier works of literature to shape, or add resonance to, their presentation of contemporary life" (1992, p. 99). Put differently, modern and postmodern writers attempt to use a text for various reasons, especially to situate it in a new contemporary context.

b. Harold Bloom's Definition of Anxiety of Influence

Intertextuality is a multifaceted term encompassing concepts such as the anxiety of influence. In *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Bloom emphasizes the impact of one author on another. Influence arises writers' familiarity with literature from previous epochs. Bloom asserts that a poet "helps to form another... strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (1997, p. 5). This unveils that a proficient writer may misread his precursor's literary texts to provide an opportunity for his new writings. Therefore, he is determined to surpass his precursor's influence. The precursor's influence may instill a sense of "anxiety" in the influenced poet and writer. Consequently, he seeks to express his originality by misreading his precursor's literary text. In this context, Bloom argues,

For every poet begins (however "unconsciously") by rebelling more strongly against the consciousness of death's necessity that all other men and women do. The young citizen of poetry... is already the anti-natural or antithetical man, and from his start as a poet he quests for an impossible object, as his precursor quested before him. (Bloom, 1997, p. 10)

In other words, the ephebe, the influenced writer, aims to defy his precursor to overcome his influence. Consequently, to be acknowledged as a strong poet, one must demonstrate a misreading of the predecessor's text. The ephebe intends to overcome the anxiety of influence by presenting new ideas that contradict those of his precursor.

Bloom introduces six types of influence. He coins poetic misprision, completion and antithesis, repetition and discontinuity, the counter-sublime, purgation and solipsism, and the return of the dead. Since Beckett misreads his precursor's literature, this article focuses on Bloom's concept of 'clinamen'. In this regard, Bloom writes,

Clinamen, which is poetic misreading or misprision proper [...] where it means a "swerve" of the atoms so as to make change possible in the universe. A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem so to execute a *clinamen* in relation to it. This appears as a corrective movement in his own poem. (1997, p. 14)

From the above excerpt, the ephebe misinterprets his precursor's literary text to deviate from it and provide a new reading. Thus, the ephebe's primary objective is to diverge and show to his audience that he cannot acquiesce to the influence of his predecessor. In this context, the ephebe's narrative might provide the reader with a revised interpretation by giving the same images and themes from a new perspective.

c. Edward Said's Ideas on Influence and Beginning

Edward Said extends the theory of anxiety of influence and theorizes beginning. The latter has different significations such as "starting point" and "point of departure". The main concern of an influenced writer is originality and newness. In this sense, he argues, "For any writer to begin is to embark upon something connected to a designated point of departure. Even when it is repressed, the beginning is always the first step from which (except on rare occasion) something follows" (1975, p. xii).

Beginning, therefore, is the essential starting point of any writer, as it enables the creation of new original texts. According to Said, the writer attempts to be different rather than repeating the same ideas.

An ephebe can transcend the influence of his precursor. In this regard, Said writes, "we can regard a beginning as the point at which, in a given work, the writer departs from all other works already existing, relationships of either continuity or antagonism or some mixture of both" (1975, p. 3). The writer can address the same issue, contest it or intertwine both of them. He can oppose his precursor as he seeks to create a new context for his work. Hence, the writer's aim is "to contribute to a contemporary criticism" (Said, 1975, p. 4). In other words, the author recontextualizes an antiquated narrative to criticize contemporary issues. Therefore, the ephebe is described as an active member since he avoids repetition. Moreover, he aims to overcome his precursor in his writings. The influence does not appear clearly in the ephebe's text since his work is "the study and the production of de-formations" (Said, 1975, p. 8). Subsequently, the ephebe attempts to de-form the original text by producing a difference.

Said highlights the role of the critic/ writer. This individual does not adhere to a particular tradition, as his primary goal is that of a wanderer who collects information (Said, 1975, p. 4). He has to traverse from one spot to another and persist in a state of existing "between homes" (Said, 1975, p. 8). Hence, a critic/ writer must be homeless as he exists in a liminal state in-between tradition. By doing so, Said repudiates adherence to a certain tradition and precedence. Furthermore, a homeless critic/ writer is not committed to a singular tradition as he intends to be different. His written text is considered as a "discontinuity," and "initial rupture ad infinitum" (Said, 1975, p. 10). The modern writer/ critic breaks away from his precursor because he attempts to create something new.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section aims to analyze the theme of anxiety of influence in Beckett's literature, particularly fiction and poetry. It scrutinizes the similarities between *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Murphy*. It focuses on the common themes such as romantic disillusionment, fate and death. It compares the image of the vulture in "The Winter Journey Over the Hartz Mountain" and "The Vulture." It also discusses how Beckett overcomes Goethe's influence in these selected literary texts.

1) Influence in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* on *Murphy*

This part examines the literary influence of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* on *Murphy*. It tackles selected themes, which are romantic disillusionment, fate and death in both novels. Then, it shows Beckett's anxiety and originality in his novel.

a. The Theme of Romantic Disillusionment: A Comparative Study

Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) revolves around Werther's unfortunate life in the city. Therefore, he decides to escape to the countryside in search of joy, happiness, a humble life and friendship. Through his various writings, Werther implicitly describes his happy feelings. On May 10th, Werther is overwhelmed in the countryside. In this sense, he writes, "I am alone, and feel the charm of existence in this spot... I am so happy, my dear friend... Almighty, who formed us in his own image, and the breath of the universal love which bears and sustains us" (Goethe, 1902, p. 5). This denotes Werther's happiness and positive feelings after changing the place. He could not anticipate discovering a pleasant place inhabited by loving people. Besides, he portrays the countryside as peaceful, as individuals enjoy their time in the natural world. He believes that nature can create "the greatest masters"; hence, he argues, "These things resemble love. A woman hearted youth becomes strongly attached to a maiden" (Goethe, 1902, p. 12). Put differently, Werther is a romantic character who links the beauty of nature with love. In such a beautiful place, one can fall in love with an attractive woman and enjoy time in her company.

In this remote place, he meets Charlotte, called Lotte, and falls in love with her. Werther admires Lotte because she is a caring woman who devotes her life to her family members. More significantly, he realizes that she is a loving and faithful woman. In this context, he says, "She is a sacred being. A passion is still in her presence: I cannot express my senses when I am near her. I feel as if my soul beat in every

nerve of my body” (Goethe, 1902, p. 38). This entails his love for Lotte. In different incidents, he writes letters for Wilhelm expressing his love owing to her soul and perfection. Therefore, he wants to see her whenever he finds an opportunity. However, his love for this woman is a dilemma since she is Albert’s fiancée.

Goethe describes Werther’s romantic pessimism stemming from his pessimistic vision towards life once he discovers Lotte’s engagement. The novel describes the protagonist’s psychological condition. He writes that life “has now become an insupportable torment” (Goethe, 1902, p. 52). He adds, “the most innocent walk deprives of life thousands of poor insects: one step destroys the fabric of the industrious ant, and converts a little world into chaos” (Goethe, 1902, p. 54). These statements reveal his current feelings as he represents his life as chaotic. He is a desperate individual who associates his life with anguish due to his inability to solve his romantic problem. Furthermore, because of his pessimism, he depicts his terrible life and deception. In this sense, on August 10th, he writes, “Nothing in the world can be more absurd than the connection, and yet the thought of it moves me to tears” (Goethe, 1902, p. 44). He illustrates the absurdity of life because of his feelings of confusion and deep loss.

Goethe describes the protagonist’s loss of hope and despair resulting from his disillusionment. At the early beginning of the novel, the word ‘heart’ is employed to portray his positive feelings while his residence in the countryside. To illustrate, he argues that he has a “sensitive heart” (Goethe, 1902, p. 4). His life looks like “paradise” because he is overwhelmed and happy (Goethe, 1902, p. 6). Moreover, Charlotte used to represent joy and happiness in Werther’s heart. In this regard, he writes that she is “the joy of my heart” (Goethe, 1902, p. 27). The heart symbolizes Werther’s positive feelings when he loves Charlotte. Nonetheless, upon learning of her engagement to Albert, he depicts his sick heart. Through his letters, Werther employs several words that expose his hopelessness and disappointment after the loss of his beloved. On August 18th, he writes to Wilhelm,

Must it ever be thus,- that the source of our happiness must also be the fountain of our misery? The full and ardent sentiment which animated my heart with love of nature, overwhelming me with a torrent of delight, and which brought all paradise before me, has now become an insupportable torment- a demon which perpetually pursues and harasses me. (Goethe, 1902, p. 52)

From the above quote, his love for Charlotte causes his despair and torment. He also endures an unhealable broken heart. Subsequently, Goethe represents the negative impact of blind love on a person’s heart, particularly at moments of sorrow. The quote marks the beginning of Werther’s sadness. Werther employs other adjectives with a heart to dramatize his feelings. He refers to his “wasted,” “aching,” and “oppressed heart” (Goethe, 1902, p. 54). He usually portrays his “sorrowful heart” (Goethe, 1902, p.80). These adjectives uncover his sadness because of his loss and desperate heart.

Werther further describes his emotions by employing several words that uncover his sadness and disillusionment, especially memory and despair, on different occasions. He also portrays his experiences and memories. One day, he feels sad and depressed after the return of Albert and Charlotte. In this sense, Goethe writes, “His mind now became oppressed by the recollection of every misfortune of his past life. The mortification he had suffered at the ambassador’s, and his subsequent troubles, where he revived in his memory” (Goethe, 1902, p.105). In other words, whenever he remembers Charlotte’s relationship with Albert, he feels miserable. This reflects his inability to overcome Charlotte’s love and memories; he is disenchanted by love relationships. Furthermore, in order to depict his disillusionment, he portrays his growing despair. Charlotte does not accept Werther because she is loyal to her fiancé, Albert. In this context, Goethe writes, “The whole force of these words fell upon the unfortunate Werther. Full of despair, he threw himself at Charlotte’s feet” (Goethe, 1902, p. 123). These words unveil his feeling of

desperation and discouragement when he is rejected by his beloved. Goethe dramatizes Werther's desperate state by employing specific utterances as unfortunate, despair and fell.

In "Beckett and Romanticism in the 1930s," Mark Nixon argues that Samuel Beckett had a particular fascination with the disillusionment of German Romanticism (2007, p. 70). Beckett is drawn to Goethe's portrayal of romantic disillusionment in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Beckett subsequently develops this theme in his modern novel. Beckett's *Murphy* is an Irish novel that delves into the life of an Irish character, Murphy. The protagonist is a frustrated character who wanders the streets of London without seeking employment. Currently, he is engaged with Celia who takes care of him. He confesses to Celia that a man has to work to pay a prostitute. Murphy works as a nurse at Magdalen Mental Mercy seat and is given a night shift. While Celia and her friends wait for him, he does not appear. Murphy is beaten and unable to come back home; therefore, Dr. Angus Killiecrankie informs them about his death. By the end of the novel, Celia confirms Murphy's identity to the police.

Beckett depicts Murphy's love relationship with Celia to expose his emotions. Murphy becomes increasingly desperate with the idea of love. Therefore, Beckett represents the theme of love through Murphy. For example, Beckett writes, "Murphy's purpose in going to sit at Neary's feet was not to develop the Neary heart, which he thought would quickly prove fatal to a man of his temper... Murphy had such an irrational heart that no physician could get the root of it" (1938, p. 10). Simply put, Murphy's irrational heart is associated with his lifelong emotional struggles. He is unable to determine whether he loves himself or other characters. Besides, like Werther, Murphy struggles with love issues. Nevertheless, Murphy seeks an opportunity "where he could love himself" (1938, p. 07). This unveils his need for self-love due to his simultaneous struggles with various emotions. He is consumed with self-love and fails to love other people (Keller, 2002, p. 53). Subsequently, Beckett's novel represents Murphy's inner struggles in his daily life. Beckett incorporates Goethe's words in his novel, which are heart, despair and love. The use of the same words serves as textual evidence of Goethe's influence on Beckett, as both characters struggle with their love issues.

Murphy tackles Murphy's love of the outside world. The narrator believes that Murphy and Celia are remarkable lovers. In several incidents, Celia is portrayed as a caring character since she attempts to convince Murphy to work. She resorts to leave him for a given time if he does not find one. In another incident, she enters his room to assist him. In this vein, John Robert Keller argues that

A light of life is 'worming its way into the dark' – this is Celia's love for Murphy, her wish to help him love her, himself, and perhaps a child. Celia has entered Murphy's darkened room, disrupting him by generating a conflict: to love and lose his total control, to risk a devastating, re-traumatizing disappointment, or to die. (2002, pp. 54-5)

Keller asserts that Celia loves Murphy; hence, she supports him in moments of despair. Celia embodies resistance, whereas Murphy represents despair (Keller, 2002, p. 55). Celia cares about him and is indifferent to the consequences. She recognizes that helping him may lead to complications for herself, yet she decides to help him. According to Keller, Murphy associates love with failure, hate and murder; hence, he finds loneliness as the best solution (Keller, 2002, p. 65). Murphy abandons her due to his inner fears of being deceived. He does not have the courage to handle love relationship for a long time. Therefore, like Werther, Murphy is disillusioned about love.

Beckett's misreading, originality, and point of departure manifest as he describes Murphy's love circle. The narrator portrays Murphy's profound emotions for his patient, Mr. Edon. In this regard, Beckett writes,

It seems to Murphy that of all his friends among the patients there was none quite like his "tab," Mr. Edon his "tab." It seems to Murphy that he was bound to Mr. Edon... by a love of the purest possible kind... They remained to one another, even when most profoundly one in spirit. (1938, p. 184)

From the excerpt, his love for Mr. Edon is incomparable; therefore, they spend their time with each other. Through this excerpt, Beckett illustrates Murphy's profound desire to love others without caring about their gender. Murphy experiences joy when he loves his male friend. Moreover, *Murphy* represents the protagonist's need for brotherly affection. Hence, Murphy cannot bear Mr. Edon's separation from him. When he remains alone, he struggles with the "split self" (Beckett, 1938, p. 188). Murphy is deceived once he discovers that Mr. Endon considers him as a game of "chess" (Beckett, 1938, p. 242). This indicates that Mr. Endon regards the protagonist as a mere diversion rather than a human being. Consequently, Murphy becomes a desperate individual. Murphy's feeling of hopelessness is the climax of the novel, as this feeling precipitates his anxiety (Keller, 2002, p. 82). This demonstrates his failure to choose the right person to love. Like Werther, Murphy is disillusioned due to his inability to have good relationships with others. Beckett is influenced by Goethe's theme of "romantic disillusionment" (Bolin, 2007, p. 101). In this regard, Beckett's protagonist is disappointed once he is rejected.

Applying the theory of influence, it can be noticed that Beckett deals with the theme of romantic disillusionment in *Murphy*. Beckett uses the same words, which are love, heart and despair to describe romantic disillusionment. The employed words serve as textual evidence illustrating Goethe's impact on Beckett. The latter overcomes his precursor's influence by misreading the text and offering a new reading. Besides, following Said's theory, Beckett can be regarded as a homeless writer since he goes back to romanticism. He departs from the previous text by dismissing romantic ideals and describing Murphy's split identity. Beckett's *Murphy* is a satire of romantic disillusionment because the protagonist has an "irrational heart" and grapples with self-love, and love for Celia or Mr. Endon.

b. The Theme of Fate: A Comparative Study

Both Goethe and Beckett tackle the theme of fate. In *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Werther expresses his conviction in God's providence. He believes he has no options; subsequently, he is unable to act since Lotte, Charlotte, is already married to Albert. In one of his letters to Wilhelm on August 30, he confirms his unhappiness. He says, "Unhappy being that I am! Why do I thus deceive myself? What is to come of all this wild, aimless, endless passion? ... my imagination sees nothing but her" (Goethe, 1938, p. 56). Upon hearing the news of the engagement, he experiences profound misery and heartbreak. He is deceived because of his inability to accept her marriage with another man. In addition, he believes that there is something wrong with his fate. By the end of the novel, Werther is convinced that he is fated to experience sadness. In this sense, he says, "But what am I saying? It is but my own desire, my own purpose, against which I acted so unthinkingly, which destiny is again bringing in my way" (Goethe, 1938, p. 416). Put differently, Werther unveils his ambivalent feelings of misery and despondency. He assumes that he is destined to lose his beloved woman; therefore, nothing can be done about it. Moreover, this sentiment of nothingness engenders his despair and unwillingness to live, particularly when he perceives himself as unfortunate because of his fate. It appears that Werther endures because he cannot find a solution. This entails that Goethe criticizes destiny from the beginning of the novel.

Beckett's *Murphy* discusses the same theme as *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. *Murphy* revolves around Murphy's fate. Beckett depicts Murphy's desperate life characterized by sorrow and lifelessness. In this context, "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new" (Beckett, 1938, p. 1). This indicates that Murphy does not have an alternative because he is destined to live his life as it is. Additionally, Neary, Murphy's tutor, is unable to assist his former student. He informs Murphy, "I can do nothing for you" (Beckett, 1938, p.12). Neary is desperate since he assumes that he cannot help Murphy get rid of his "irrational heart" and negative feelings. Beckett describes Murphy's difficulties stemming from his inability to take action. Furthermore, Murphy has nothing to do since he finished his studies six

months earlier. He remains in his house sitting in his chair for the whole day; accordingly, there is “nothing new” (Beckett, 1938, p. 9). During this period, he repeats the same actions which are drinking, eating, wearing and getting off his clothes. Later on, he must repeat the same actions as before. Like Werther, Murphy grapples with nothingness because of his unfortunate fate. Beckett utilizes the word ‘nothing’ to portray the theme of fate. In this context, in *Samuel Beckett and the Primacy of Love*, Keller explains that the opening of the novel reveals that Murphy lives a deterministic life (2002, p. 51). The novel depicts Murphy’s meaningless life due to his repetition of the same actions. Ironically, Celia is the only character who seeks to conduct his behavior by obliging him to find a job. She disagrees with Murphy’s belief in routine and “providence” (Beckett, 1938, p. 21). However, when he starts to work as a nurse, he consistently maintains a belief in fate. Consequently, Beckett is influenced by Goethe’s theme of fate and destiny. This justifies his use of the same words in his novel. But, unlike romantic characters, modern characters, like Celia, do not accept destiny.

Beckett portrays the characters’ attitudes about Murphy. In the novel, the chandlers’ function is to ridicule Murphy. For the chandlers, Murphy is neither “smart,” “boy” nor “a human being” (Beckett, 1938, p. 77). This suggests their effort to deprive him of his fundamental rights and self-confidence. The protagonist embraces his destiny and refrains from pursuing any change. He is conscious of this “derision” yet becomes familiar with it (Beckett, 1938, p. 77). This may show that his sense of helplessness profoundly impacts him, rendering him reluctant to make modifications. Beckett, subsequently, embodies the psychological condition of modern characters. Furthermore, nothing can change his sense of alienation (Keller, 2002, p. 60). Simply put, Murphy struggles with the meaninglessness of his life. As a result, Goethe’s ideas of nothing new and fate influence Beckett’s literary writing.

In the light of anxiety of influence, Beckett is impressed by Goethe’s theme of fate. Both novelists expose their protagonists’ destinies. While Werther is powerless regarding his love, Murphy struggles with inaction. Beckett overcomes his precursor’s influence by demonstrating the theme of the meaninglessness of life. He puts the previous theme within a modern context that illustrates the modern reality. Therefore, he unveils his satirical perspective on human acts and ideas regarding nothingness and the meaninglessness of life through fiction. This implies that Beckett is a homeless writer since he relies on a romantic writer to develop his modern themes. His main concern is the modern feeling that nothing can be done because of people’s destinies. Beckett is regarded one of the modern playwrights of the Absurd theatre that represents the meaninglessness of life and nothingness. He is the writer of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* where life is meaningless and nothing can be done. For this reason, the characters keep doing the same thing throughout the plays.

c. The Theme of Death: A Comparative Study

Death is another theme that is explored in both novels. This article conducts a comparative study to examine Goethe’s influence on Beckett. In this regard, Bolin argues, “Both protagonists make an effort to step back from the seemingly ineluctable circumstances that lead to their deaths” (2007, 115). Both characters aim to change their lives, but they are hindered by their intertwined destiny and path. This indicates that these characters can never experience a happy life. In *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Werther becomes a pessimistic character who believes that suicide is the optimal solution to end his suffering due to his inability to bear Carlote’s separation. In this vein, Ignace Fenerlicht argues, “Goethe’s *Sufferings of Young Werther* probably contains the most famous suicide in literature” (1978, p. 476). Fenerlicht’s reading suggests that Werther’s pessimistic perspective and romantic disillusionment are the main causes of his suicide. In the same context, Werther’s decision to commit suicide indicates that he prefers his emotions to the conventions established by his own culture; thus, he achieved “moral freedom” (Trogan, 2013, p. 2). Moreover, he decides to commit suicide because he cannot express his

emotions using language (Kuzniar, 1989, p. 18). In other words, Werther's failure to attain free will in life triggers him to commit suicide.

In *Murphy*, Beckett addresses the issue of death. Murphy's death occurs under ambiguous conditions this is why scholars have different readings. The narrator explains that he died because of an explosion in the hospital that occurred as a result of a conjunction between fire and the gas heater. In this context, the narrator explains, "soon his body was quiet" (Beckett, 1938, p. 269). Beckett does not provide his reader with an answer "to what degree his death was a suicide" (Keller, 2007, p. 49). Since the reader does not know if Murphy committed suicide, the novel allows multiple interpretations. This signifies the inception of reader-response theories as Beckett invites his reader to interpret the ending.

Both Goethe and Beckett portray the theme of death by the end of their literary works. Whether commits suicide because he is romantically disappointed after Celia's wedding. Beckett overcomes his predecessor once he does not follow the climax and resolution in his literary text. As a modern writer, Beckett creates an open-ended closure since the ending is interpreted differently by his readers. This article argues that Beckett overcomes his precursor's influence because he describes death as ambiguous in the modern world. An open-ended narrative establishes Beckett a creative writer because he does not accept one final ending. Therefore, he is a homeless modern writer as he transcends the confines of his era.

2) The Influence of Goethe's "The Winter Journey Over the Hartz Mountain" on Beckett's "The Vulture": A Comparative Study

Having already started with influence on fictional works, it is paramount to examine Goethe's "The Winter Journey Over the Hartz Mountain" influence on Beckett's "The Vulture." In his poem, Goethe explores the image of the vulture and focuses on the character's journey to reach his goal. In this vein, Goethe says,

LIKE the vulture
Who on heavy morning clouds
With gentle wing reposing
Looks for his prey, (Goethe, 1853, lines 1-4)

From the above lines, Goethe compares a human being to a vulture whose aim is to undergo a journey to fulfill his dreams. Hence, the character's journey is to reach the summit of the Hartz mountain. It also refers to the poet's journey to the Brocken by the end of 1777 (Sharpe, 2002, p. 46). Additionally, it is necessary to struggle against "all barriers" (Goethe, 1853, line 15). Subsequently, Goethe's poem urges the reader to work hard like a vulture to avoid defeat and failure. The poem conveys that an individual must persist in his journey and avoid distractions.

Beckett's "The Vulture" is derived from Goethe's poem. He relies on the same image to develop his poem. This poem, however, deals with the writer's difficulties as a poet. In this regard, he states, "prone who must/ soon take up their life and walk" (1906, lines, 3-4). Simply put, Beckett attempts to overcome his challenges as a poet/ writer. According to Nixon, Beckett employs the same image of the journey in "The Vulture" to portray the poet's struggles at that time (Nixon, 2007, p. 268). A writer who abandons his life is ridiculed by society (Nixon, 2007, p. 268). In the same vein, Ruby Cohn (2005) argues that Beckett uses simile since he compares himself to a vulture (62). In other words, the vulture reflects to artist's hunger. This entails that Beckett is a brilliant writer and poet since he uses the image of the

vulture and recontextualizes it in a new context. While Goethe's image refers to people's journeys in general, Beckett's vulture refers to the poet. Beckett's departure is explicitly seen in his portrayal of the poet. This may uncover Beckett's endeavor to be a vulture by overcoming his literary influence and creating his own modernist movement. Beckett is a famous modernist poet, writer and playwright who is known for the Absurd drama. His plays gained widespread critical attention for several decades.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research paper investigated Johann Wolfgang Goethe's influence on Samuel Beckett's selected literary texts. It provided a textual analysis to show to what extent Beckett struggles with anxiety of influence and how he overcomes it. Through a comparative study between *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Murphy*, both writers tackle the themes of romantic disillusionment, fate and death. Beckett's beginning and departure is explicitly shown in his literary text. His novel is a satire of romantic disillusionment owing to Murphy's split-identity and love circle. It is also a satire of human's feeling of nothingness and meaninglessness of life. This theme is going to be developed in the following years to the Absurd Theatre. Beckett also provides an open-ended narrative that allows readers and scholars to have their own understanding of Murphy's death. Besides, after comparing "The Winter Journey Over the Hartz" and "The Vulture," this study also concludes that Beckett is impressed by the image of vulture and people's journey. In his poem, Beckett refers to the poet/ writer's hunger and attempt to be creative. To illustrate, Beckett becomes an acclaimed playwright who is one of the founding figures of the Absurd Theatre.

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