



The Dramatic, Absurd Reality in Endgame Looks Back in Anger

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Abstract ;

The meaninglessness of existence and the relationship of art to existence inspire a new way to discuss the themes of everyday life, starting from the first sip of coffee and the gentleness of sunlight reaching the dreariness of night and its irresistible atmosphere. This paper aims to discuss the undefined localization of meaning in both the absurd and realism. It also sheds light on some of their differences through the themes of love, passion and time particularly. The explanatory part relies also on Camus's assumptions. The practical one is based mainly on Osborne's Look Back in Anger and Beckett's Endgame.

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1. Introduction

When defined, realism is always designated as an artistic representation at first glance; a depiction that is partly built on the pillars of fiction. It is, therefore, beyond the possible to render such complex realities into words. While nihilistic thinking devoids the notion of objective meaning and existentialism emphasizes the importance of consciousness and individualism, absurdism is the combination of a continuous loop of quests and the inherent realization of the meaninglessness of life. In fact, what distinguishes the absurd is the localization of meaning which is undefined yet, as a rebellious character, the absurd embraces revolt through both accepting the irrationality of life and rebelling against it. In Beckett's *Endgame*, for instance, the characteristics of the absurd are greatly embraced, and this, in fact, aligns reality with the absurd. In other words, absurdism emerged from realism and absurdist playwrights were able to attain truth by making a brand-new path to it. Paths are paved by walking. They walked the path to reality hundreds of times. Even though their attempt to make their way out of it failed as the walk never ended. They were never walking away from reality; they were just making another path to it under the name of the absurd. This differentiation

between realism and absurdism can be comparatively applied on *Look Back in Anger* by Osborne and *Endgame* by Beckett.

2. Concepts Explained

Art, in many contexts, is knitted in times of paralyzing and overwhelming pain. There are countless reasons that attract the human mind to such sombre inexplicable ends which surpass the boundaries of rationality. Artists – and mainly dramatists - ponder upon the mysteries that connect life to death. The realisation of how close death is to life sets a ground for an endless discussion that is, by no means, separable from human existence. It is one of the existential questions that will exist as long as there is life on the face of the globe. In addition to that, religion can indeed be a refuge and faith is itself an answer to many questions. However, in order to find refuge in religion one has to walk miles of doubtful spiritual investigations, faith is not grounded overnight and the road to inner faith is built upon the pillars of doubts. In drama writing, the aforementioned strings of thought gave birth to tragicomedy and the theatre of the absurd.

2.1 Reception of Realistic Drama

Theatre as an art form and reality are parallel. Realism's attempt to decrease this distant, ironically, widened that vacant space. Theatre is too much like itself as an art before it can be perceived as something more; that is reality. The perception of reality in *Look Back in Anger* put into question the veracity of both its artistic value and its depiction of reality. The principal muse for the individual is the individual; therefore, the central themes, in any theatre, revolve around individualism one way or another. The difference that one is propelled to highlight is that of uniqueness and commonness. More precisely, while there are traits that maintain the commonness among people there are also conditions and qualities that categorize them. Brown asserted: "*In spite of its surface realism, our realistic theatre comes no closer to reality than a blown kiss does to a true one.*" (108). As an artistic medium theatre is a limited means of representation of what is real, reality is thus, prone to alteration.

This friction between fiction and reality is primarily a friction between imagination and reality. Imagination is a sword with two edges, it may be the stimulus triggering progress, as Einstein proclaimed: "*Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution.*" (49). Indeed, the need of something inspires the first breeze of its creation. However, imagination, is likely to lead to a definite end which consists of exaggeration and overstatement. Taking into consideration the noble position that imagination occupies in the realm of art, it is inevitable to think of realism as unreal and nothing like verisimilitude.

Audiences in this case are limited in terms of choices; they either accept reality as presented to them or ignore it out of rage and denial. It would be harder for people to connect to reality, at times, even traumatizing, not because they depict reality but they make prominent some aspects of life over others which provokes a disequilibrium in one's understanding of life. To quote Brown: "*Unless we comprehend the nature of modern theatre's lies we can never fully appreciate the value of its*

truths.” (111). In order to be true to actuality it has to be true to its ambitions and purposes. The audience is partly responsible for what it is conveyed, the essence of enjoyment can be found in the realisation of its flawed nature. Once people are conscious about the values, they have been transmitted they develop their critical thinking and therefore learn to filtrate what is seemingly accurate from the fraudulent.

2.2 Theatre of the Absurd Versus Realism

One ambiguous difference that separates the theatre of the absurd from that of realism is the reactionary mind. Usually the absurd opens people's minds to universal concepts and horizons. Simply because life itself is the problematic core of any context. People are dissolved by the individualistic tendency of the absurd and feel triggered. It launches their thinking and compels them to meditate about life and its meaning. In this same line of thoughts, absurdism is the result of the decay of the real world. By the same token, Camus introduced the world to his theory of the absurd in his essay from which several works, ideologies and beliefs originated: *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Camus classified questions depending on their urgency, he put it:

“To tell the truth, it is a futile question. On the other hand, I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions.” (p4)

Instead of reverting to the endless quest of the absolute truth, Camus projected his attention on the meaning of life, the answer to this question would bring clarity about to the controversies of human existence. But this sounds too optimistic for an absurdist. In fact, it is not about the answer itself but rather about the rebelliousness of seeking meaning knowing that there might never be an answer to such a question.

In a more practical analysis Weiss clarified:

“The achievement of Osborne is that he has probed into personal relations and bared their social determinants, that his image of private tensions adumbrates profound public issues. His hero will not rub his nose in the golden trough. He will not be meek and love his foes, but rather is bitterly contemptuous of those whom he indicts of cruel insensitivity and lack of brains and guts. Since Alison, ironically but inevitably, belongs to the very group Jimmy detests, his marriage to her must be regarded not as an alliance with the enemy, but as a marauding venture into his territory.” (286)

Look Back in Anger was first performed in Britain at the Royal Court Theatre on May 8th, 1956, and immediately became the outstanding dramatic success of a decade. It has suffered in critical discussion from the myth which almost immediately started to grow around it. The chief offenders have been what Jimmy Porter calls the ‘posh papers’, which seized on the play as a peg for yet more of the pseudo-sociology that has characterised the period (one wonders, retrospectively, how chimeras like ‘outsiders’, ‘lucky Jims’, ‘angry young men’ could have attracted so much attention

whilst Rome was burning), and found in its hero a symbol of his whole generation, or at the very least of a 'movement' of some kind inside it. The phrase 'angry young men' was coined with direct reference to this play, and has since had a truly remarkable success.

On the other hand, Beckett's body of work seems to hold together coherently through Beckett's quest to test the limits of communication through his constant experimentation with language. The language in his plays range from spewing language "out" of the "Mouth" and "into the world" in *Not I*, to a single, sustained breath in *Breath*, to no language and miming in his *Act without Words I* and *Act without Words II*. But the amount of words or amount of silence does not quantify how much is being said. It is, rather, as if Beckett realized that realistic language could not express the inexpressible, so Beckett needed to destroy language, making it inexpressible, to adequately express the inexpressible. While thoroughly revolting against traditional realistic language, Beckett's earlier plays (let us say, the ones that came out in public in the first ten years since *Godot* was published in 1952) – *Godot* (1952), *Endgame* (1957), *Act without Words I* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Act without Words II* (1959), and *Happy Days* (1961) – still displayed a certain amount of causality due to language. Despite frequent non-sequiturs, the conversations and plot lines do meander back, usually in some type of circular fashion, and communication is had. In a sense, whether the language is verbal or not (as in the case of the two "mime" plays), the audience sees how communication, while utterly ineffective, does produce some type of results that do make some sense.

In his other longer plays, *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, the earlier *Endgame* is stylistically filled with non-sequiturs, much like *Godot*: there are bursts of monologues and dialogues that are perfectly logical and causal in communication, mixed with illogical leaps between topics and statements. *Happy Days*, on the other hand, is essentially one giant monologue: Winnie not only converses with herself, as we see in *Krapp's Last Tape* (a conversation, in a sense, between an old man and his younger [previously-recorded] self), but her pronouncements affect her behavior in the first act, when she still has the ability to move her arms and pick up objects, and then her reasoning in her conversation (throughout both acts) leads her to constantly conclude that "this is a happy day." Ultimately, while Willie never speaks to her until the final moments of the play, and thus the audience feels as though Winnie really is only talking to herself, the pronouncement of "Win" by Willie demonstrates that Winnie was successful in communicating, both with herself and with Willie, having her repeated line, "this is a happy day," justified by the single word of recognition that Willie utters at the end of the play.

2.3 Dramatic Surge and Effect

In spite of the fact that the drama composed for an edified bourgeoisie has another "feel" than that written for the fate-ridden Greeks (or for battling proletarians), Aristotle's examination appears to be essentially valid. The passionate effect is based on a sudden turn, a peripety; it needs a component of shock; the surprise must not be of the nature of a wonder, i.e., it must be a propelled, logical occasion. Typically as distant as these two plays will go in educating us something around the sensational impact, and the reason why they cannot go any further lies absolutely in their being review. This may be seen from a later play carefully built for the most reason of making an enthusiastic affect: Marcelle Maurette's *Anastasia* (1952). The awesome enthusiastic minute in *Anastasia* comes in a scene exceptionally comparative in structure to those in Beckett's and Osborne's plays. A grandmother -who fortunately is of majestic rank-, denies offer after offer from the lady who wishes to be recognized as her granddaughter, Anastasia. At the exceptional minute

when everything appears to be misplaced. Anastasia happens to cough a little dry cough and her clarification of it tears down with one shocking stroke the dividers of her Imperial Majesty's resistance. A surge of fondness and delicacy clears over the two ladies. Everything is here, the sudden turn from coldness to warmth, the surprise which is however superbly intelligible once the occasions have taken put. The scene would likely be moving indeed on the off chance that played by itself, out of setting. However the most quality of its affect collects to it from the savvy development of the preceding scenes. We have come to be affectionate of Anastasia. We have been made to feel sorry for her. Our cherishing and empathy have made us trust for her acknowledgment. But our trust has as of now been disillusioned once (in a scene with an ancient subject who denies to distinguish her as Anastasia). This has expanded our pity, it has made our trust more frantic, and we presently emphatically fear that she will never get the acknowledgment which we so much wish her to receive. It is this whole turbulence of pity, hope, and fear of which we are finally relieved by the surprising and yet explicable turn, the recognition, the affection, the tenderness between grandmother and granddaughter. It has taken the better part of the play and great skill in husbanding effects to build up the emotional turbulence from which the sudden turn of events relieves the audience.

3. Core Themes

As a tragicomedy, the depiction of reality through fantasy is one of the issues on which Osborne shed light. As a play, the first hint to this is the stage itself. Everything about theatre is unreal with the exception of the themes treated artistically. Abbotson made a relevant remark saying: *"Though the blurring of fiction and reality was an issue in the play, it is only one of a number of issues Osborne explores in that text."* (173). One can deduce that settling for one single issue would desert the remaining themes. This also reveals the power of words and how writers developmentally start to become what they write and believe. This is another way to approximate the relationship between reality and fantasy.

3.1 Clash of Social Classes

If one glimpses in Osborne's direction, it can be perceived that class conflict stands as a central theme in his play. Class struggle and political tension are merely the result of what history taught people. People are born the same but learn with time how to be different and embrace their differences. This invisible division deeply injured their hearts and minds and stole away their innocence. Jimmy is the character foil of Alison, marriage way therefore a reconciliation of opposites that resulted in disaster. The images portrayed by Osborne which exhibit the characteristics of Realism are tightly knitted in the restrictive tradition of social life. Certainly, those images did portray reality successfully by means of foils. But does such faithfulness contribute in the intimidating awakening of people's inferiority/superiority? Or help both of them focus on their own individuality as a central goal? This is the problem to which the next theatrical movements aimed to abolish the same way theatrical realism came as a reaction to the unrealistic forms of theatre. That is to say, Absurdism would have never existed without Realism.

In *Endgame* Beckett wanted his readers to not only relate to the characters but to question meaning, and the best evidential proof to this is the distinct interpretations that followed the play. It starts from the dull routine of everyday life and slowly makes of the ordinary the absurd using the suitable devices and developmental sequences that explore the absurdity of reality. To epitomize the previous idea, the characters Hamm and Clov throughout the whole play tackle the theme of interdependency and the inevitability of socialization which controls their destiny. In fact, Hamm's physical disability and blindness may be viewed as a constant reminder of a person's fragility and vulnerability. Through Clov's eyes he was able to acquire a vision of the outside world. Additionally, this dependency is reciprocated in the way that Clov experienced a moral dependency that manifested itself in the ways he abided by Hamm's orders and needs. For instance, in the following passage from *Endgame* it is obvious that their interdependency is inexplicable, yet if one considers the absurd about their situation it can be perceived in their despicable yet plain ways of expression that set the ground for meditation:

Hamm: Why do you stay with me?

CLOV: Why do you keep me?

HAMM: There's no one else.

CLOV: There's nowhere else. (Pause.)

HAMM: You're leaving me all the same.

CLOV: I'm trying.

HAMM: You don't love me.

CLOV: No.

HAMM: You loved me once.

CLOV: Once! (3)

To put clearly, Osborne, following the footsteps of realism, drew a faithful representation of class struggle using his characters as foils and this may cause people to feel absent-minded in some parts as it cast a spell of distraction, while Beckett's characters display a sense of freedom and rebellion that is clearly perceived in their dialogues which demonstrate their absurdity and revive the sense of contemplation in people. Therefore, one can deduce that in realism, conventions are not difficult to accept or depict; whereas in absurdism, the dimensions of controversy and individual thinking are launched. Many people are likely to find a chaotic solace in the Beckettian context, Albee is one of them, as he confessed:

I have learned so much from studying Beckett. I have learned that the simplicity based on clarity and precision is essential to permitting complexity of thought without obfuscation. I have learned that a playwright must "see" and "hear" what is actually happening (as he writes)—fact rather than meaning—for in no other way will the audience be able to share the experience." (430)

Similarly, people were able to share more than just the experience but also establish a brand-new perspective. People learn how to let down their striving for existence and substitute it with striving for what is beyond existence: the meaning of it.

3.2 Love and Passion

Love is one of the hardest things to render into words; it is hard to grasp how everything happens involuntarily in the highest degree; of dignity, power and at times absoluteness. The strangeness of this invisible bond that links people to one another, or even to the distinct activities one exerts does not come out of the blue. It is complex, some kill for love others live for it. The premise of this argument is that love for both an absurdist and a realist, in all its forms, can be satisfactory, cruel, seductive and sometimes without meaning. Love from the perspective of Beckett is a passion, and no passion is as powerful as love, thus, it holds a very dear place in his heart, he clarifies: *“Love is of all the passions the most powerful passion and indeed no passion is more powerful than the passion of love. That is the mode in which the mind is most strongly affected and indeed in no mode is the mind more strongly affected than this.”* (24). This vision of love can be interpreted distinctly and this multiplicity proves that the absurd individual does not live by habit. It pictures love as some kind of unequivocal power which instantly arises from the rebellious hazy desire to find meaning. Logically speaking, if one ponders upon the sacrifices that were made in the name of love, one concludes how powerful it is to love and be loved. However, the writer of the stranger tackles a bigger question; the love of life. Camus emphasized the intertwinement of love and despair saying:

“There is no love of life without despair of life,’ I wrote, rather pompously, in these pages. I didn’t know at the time how right I was; I had not yet been through real years of despair. They came, and managed to destroy everything in me except an uncontrolled appetite for life. I still suffer from this both fruitful and destructive passion...” (127)

For Camus, despair comes in waves; that is to say, there are various types of ocean waves, from tidal ones to tsunamis, and this, in fact, is what keeps the ocean in motion. It is also worth mentioning that people react to sorrow in mystic ways and little attention is paid to the exchanging parts one is willing to give way as long as this will soothe their pain. Camus was a martyr of time, he went through years of utmost despair and ended up in pieces yet nothing stole away from him his hunger for life; this love that both nourishes his motives and deprives him from absolute truth is what Camus qualified as passion. It is clear as crystal that for the absurd individual, love is deeply anchored to passion and its profound nuances since it reflects one of the most irrepressible feelings and resembles the intermingling of meaninglessness and meaningfulness, it ignites passion and scratches numbness, it is simply absurd.

Endgame’s characters Nell and Nagg experienced a cyclical routine which constrained Nell’s vision of life, her responses brimmed of boredom and uselessness. While Nagg seemed so hooked in their love which pushed him to recede from his shell. To illustrate from the play:

NELL: What is it, my pet? (Pause.) Time for love?

NAGG: Were you asleep?

NELL: Oh no!

NAGG: Kiss me.

NELL: We can't.

NAGG: Try. (Their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again.)

NELL: Why this farce, day after day? (Pause.) (5)

Nell referred to this unnecessary action as a 'farce', she believed it was no longer necessary yet ridiculous to challenge one's disabilities knowing beforehand that it was inclined towards failure. For Nagg, conversely, this so-called farce kept him alive and was the only way for him to express his love and find meaning in the midst of their isolated meaninglessness. Each one of the characters expressed their absurdity differently and this, once again, proves the intelligibility of the absurd.

Jimmy and Alison's relationship was summed up in Jimmy's repressed anger towards the upper class. This example was one out of many, his mind was consumed by the idea of oppression and inequality. While Beckett's characters deal with their own absurdity separately and hold onto their quests, Jimmy wanted his wife to suffer so that they can connect on a vulnerable dimension. In the context of Beckett, their social alienation is caused by their inability to understand and relate to one another. Man is driven to seek meaning by the very absurdities and contradictions of existence and by the fact that as a self-conscious being, he is not simply carried along by the endless stream of life but stands on the motionless bank to watch it flow.

People keep telling themselves and everyone around them that time as repetition is an empty time, while they conform to that mundane clock, that ticking bomb blowing up their dreams. It is not, therefore, nonsensical to attribute regret with time; while some regret their past others preserve their hopes for a better tomorrow. Such is the case for Jimmy and Alison's father Colonel Redfern; her father is tormented by the overwhelming stagnation that puts the past in display since it was a time of stability. Jimmy is consumed by the idea that nothing has changed the same way her father is shaken by the realisation that everything has changed.

The interconnectivity of time evokes confusion in the absurd context. Firstly, as it underlines the flexibility of the character of the absurd which leads people to the conclusion that the asocial absurd individual already exists in every arena of life and the writers did not create but rather introduced their readers to what they never segmentally noticed in themselves as well as in others. Horowitz

put it plainly in his analysis of *Endgame* that it is, indeed, not as easy as it may sound to analyse the ending and thus the interpretation of the play as a whole is complicated and altered by any slight ambiguous remark: “*What complicates our interpretation of the end also complicates our interpretation of the play: determining whether there is hope when it's clear that there is and there is not.*” (127). As clarified earlier, eventually everything connects and the alternation of the past is nothing more and nothing less than a delusional retrospect. In addition, there is no such thing as the future. Time is basically divided into what has already passed and cannot be changed connectively related to what is happening at the moment, the future may be sketched differently depending on the individual's longings and aims but never ascertained unless it occurs, delivered to people as either a curse or a gift.

4. CONCLUSION

To put it in a nutshell, the themes tackled in both realism and the theatre of the absurd revolve around the reality. But the way they approached such horrific realities is what make the difference. The absurd is mostly centred on the individual that infuses the sense of meditation in the minds and hearts of the audience. Realism is shockingly traumatizing sometimes which compels people to ponder upon what they have been watching. The localization of meaning is therefore important to predict the reactionary mind of any person. The derivation of absurdism from realism is evidence to its lack of connectivity with the audience. The themes evoked usually revolve around the usual, such as the themes of love, passion and time in *Endgame* and *Look Back in Anger*. The themes are merely the same, the main difference includes the impact it invokes in people as well as the ways in which it is delivered.

Both plays bring into fruition the long-standing meditation on the cultural and existential significance of creative power and value. In a gale of a feeling of freedom and absoluteness everything, or almost everything, happens involuntarily. Painstakingly studying the shortness of life, praying and hoping for a long life distracts the person from living life accordingly and slows their construction of a sense of morality. Therefore, the need for the awakening of a profound moralistic creativity requires the limitation of the meditation on death. Art is as important as meditation; meditation is the theoretical inclusion of the creative and the imaginative as together have the power to alter the humanity's understanding of itself. The analytical description of *Endgame* and *Look Back in Anger* reports their confusing nature rising from the ashes of comedy; be it tragic or dark. This disquisition also covered up the double-faced nature of fairy tales. All in all, the study as an inseparable whole was based on the absurd nature of death, art and life. The provocation of death by articulating its character is best done through art, but meditation on life, is an urgent subject compared to death, considering the fact that life is too short to mourn its end while it is still happening. Art is a beautiful refuge from mystery but it is also its main source. The aim is, eventually, to learn as much as possible for the fear of death and its certainty will not prevent it.

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