

The Survey of Existential and Social Motives at the Post Modern Theatre

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Abstract: One major factor whose trace can be clearly seen in the plays of both Beckett and Pinter given rise its own share in the creation of man's existential problems, no doubt, is attributed to the ever-increasing impact of technology on our life. Alongside the provision of solutions for many diseases, creation of many amenities for better, safe, and comfortable life, it has had great changes on all aspects of our life. One major contribution may be the impression it has left on our identity and the reality of our existence. Such prevalent views, no doubt, have everything at their mercy even the aspect which is more existential in nature, that is the question of man's self and identity at the shadow of these advances in technology. The present study deals with the existential and social motives giving rise to the problems of man at the post modern era in the plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter and reveals how they are reflected at the post modern theatre.

Keywords: Beckett and Pinter, impression, modern theatre, social motives.

DISCUSSION

One major problem may be seen in man's failure in his attempts to achieve all knowledge as they are crying-out necessities of postmodern life. The desire for knowledge and the inability to obtain the necessary knowledge have turned to crucial disasters in the world of existence. That is why the existential absurdity dominates the mind and soul of the modern life.

A reference to Beckett's *Krapp's Last tape* can be a good initiating discussion. What exists in our mind as memory is significantly different from what is inscribed on a disk or something like that. "This paralysis of attention and altered perception [have been] brought about by modern technology and the ease of mechanical reproduction"[1]. This may be due to the fact that the nature of tape's memory and the man's memory belong to two different worlds, which can never be reconciled, compared, and evaluated as serving the same purpose. Before the discovery of this media, no doubt, humanity has had a better link to the transcendental and metaphysical sources as he has had no other way of recording his thoughts except through the rituals of different types. If there has ever been any Krapp, what he is doing and what he is obsessed by, in a part, is exacerbated by this media. As Deidre [2] maintains, the machine, once a solace and a source of pleasure, has now become an instrument of trouble and torture for man because it consigns him to the melancholy of failure. There is no other mediation possible except in a permanent dislocation and

disappearance of subjectivity. The imagination of mortality and affect of mourning shadow the influential memory of the machine from which Krapp is excluded by the mere fact of his discrepancy with that of the tape recorder. Krapp is tracing his past hoping that based on these artificial recordings he can get to the reality of his self and identity not knowing the fact that it may be one reason for disabling him to achieve his real self and identity based on the logic and power of his own memory. Maybe his creativity in the deployment of technology on the way of achieving the reality and feeling the nature of those unseen and intangible correlates with the human's effort on the line of improving technology in the hope to get out the absurdity within which he is stuck. But in the end, he may come up with the silence of Beckett and Pinter in the absurd crying-out use of language. The speed of technological change is a function of contemporary desire to escape from the status of absurd to the dream of virtual reality as permanent supersession. Subjectivity is the inhibition of a complex of actual occasions, a nexus of events which is unique in its temporal occurrence, no matter how much it is a function of repetitive structures or subject to what Whitehead calls the "ingressions" of the non-actual (for example, the recurrent causality of technical progress or the serial law of neurosis). In that sense, the subject is a function of belief, not as the object of desire but as a mode of desiring, principally desiring to be conscious of the material reality of mortality. Hence, the antithetical dualisms which riddle our thinking and our

culture dominate our life, existence, and ourselves and identities as Beckett writes in *The Unnamable*, "the role of objects is to restore silence".

The more he surpasses the boundaries of technology, the more he develops its accompanying malicious devices which nowadays have become a global concern and obsession calling the elite from different parts of the world to come up with solutions for controlling or neutralizing them like global warming and the threat of another great world war. Maybe what Beckett has exercised on the catastrophe-stricken people in *the Endgame* has been a prior illustration and manifestation of these catastrophes in case of their occurrences. In a part, maybe half paralyzed Nagg and Nell, the stuck to the wheel chair, Hamm, or all-wondering Clov are paragons reminiscent of the previous world wars, cool war, political uproars in different parts of the world, or the ever-in-action and progress campaign of the nations on the line of capturing the newest possible technology in any field, be it positive or the negative one like the atomic or the hydrogen bombs. In part, Pinter highlights these threats on the face of humanity guided by super powers in the world. In his noble lecture, he frankly targets and accuses the countries behind these sorts of policies of the 'tapestry of lies' they feed the whole world. He sympathizes with the innocent individuals who are the victims of gruesome atrocity suppressed by these governments. Not quite politically orientated, the harassment, Stanley, to a larger extent, Goldberg, McCann, and Lulu, to a lower extent, in *the Birthday Party* are facing and challenging can be a reflection of these modes of governments, their policies, and their behaviors in many countries and many places at the post modern era.

If people in our time fall into the abyss of desperation and loneliness, it is because they find nothing, neither on Earth nor in Heaven. The only thing to which they can cling as a shelter from the fears of the earthly living is a small room, a room which, in most cases, fails to protect its own dwellers" [3]. This room no longer can protect Stanley's ruin, provide Davies with shelter, fulfill the expectations of Mick, be a soothing place for Aston, be a residence for the catastrophe-afflicted Nagg, Nell, Hamm, and Clov, and cannot even offer a chance of rest to Estragon and Vladimir, and prevent Vladimir from being beaten in the ditches. Even this room as located in colony in the society is susceptible to the dangers of the society. This is because, in contemporary society, for many people social life and society have an impersonal character. They feel that they don't have control of their lives and of decisions that affect them. Globalization, bureaucratization, over night political changes, and laws passed in the parliament can culminate in the feelings of alienation or even the individual's victimization which in the end converge upon and target his sense of his self

and identity. The inaccessible cost of the house, the required amenities it calls for in another sense has captured the real being of people. They have to sacrifice all their life in the hope to possess one single room or a part of technology. Regarding the question of intrusion and the subsequent victim or victimizer it may bear, Christopher Innes has called special attention to the idea of victimization in a short general overview of Harold Pinter. What he asserts is that Pinter's "characters are normally victimized, reflecting the oppressive conformity imposed by society, or hinting at the fate of so many artists in totalitarian states"[4]. The idea of victimization, to the researcher's reflection which is an everyday exercised practice of different type in different parts of the world at this era is considered a key term which repeatedly reminds us that Pinter's "plays are variations on the subjects of dominance, control... and victimization". He further describes the characters in *The Birthday Party* [15] as a "victimized boarding-house population". Moreover, he announces "*The Caretaker* is yet another study in victimization". Davies in the *Caretaker* may be one victim of such advances and its accompanying regulations. As he is old, may be illiterate, unable to do any professional job, unqualified for the many expectations of post modern lifestyle, and many more other requirements obsessing and demanding on humanity, he is rejected everywhere. All his efforts in claiming to be a man of nobility, prestige, and a man of all trades bear no practical results and is run over by the wheels of the society. Seemingly, he is not fit for the society and should be driven to the corner. His effort to conceal his miserable condition from Aston fails.

Aston: What did you say your name was?

Davies: Bernard Jenkins is my assumed one.

Aston: No, your other one?

Davies: Davies. Mac Davies.

Aston: Welsh, are you?

Davies: Eh?

Aston: You Welsh? Pause.

Davies: Well, I been around, you know ...what I mean...I been about...

Aston: Where were you born then?

Davies: (darkly). What do you mean?

Alongside the question of identity, he cannot meet all the requirements and cannot fulfill all the duties assigned. Modern technology does his job much better than him.

Mick:...yearly examination of the relevant archives, tea laid on, disposal of shares, befit extension, compensation on cessation, comprehensive indemnity against Riot, Civil Commotion, Labor Disturbances, Storm, Tempest, Thunderbolt, Larceny or cattle all subject to a daily check and double check. Of course we'd need a signed declaration from your personal medical attendant as assurance

that you possess the requisite fitness to carry the can, won't we? (The Caretaker, p.34)[16]

In the postmodern world in which lifestyles and values are differentiating, intimacy is increasingly not found locally but with people who are spatially distanced and reached by the means of communication technologies and with whom there is no previous familiarity like what is going on in the internet through chat, face book, and many more ways of developing relationship with strangers, for sure, these demanding features have assigned modern a different view of his self and identity. Nowadays upon the exposure to these devices, the majorities of youths imitate, follow, and try to build their identities on the paragons either true or false based on those seen through these media. Its type ranges from the degree of exposure to these media and advances. That is why the question of identity has become something fluid and at the dispose of everybody to be detected and violated with little effort. At this post modern era, we clearly see that many people deem identity as what is really static, implicit, and readily discernable; therefore, the notions that 'I am who I am' can be seen without much difficulty, a notion that can be assigned to all humanity at the shadow of the technology and its side effects.

Social motives in the form of social life and community with its labyrinth of relationships either virtual or the real one as one of the manifestations of post modern era has harassed people psychologically by the idea of seclusion, that is, losing their membership to a party, a society, a specialized centre, or the like. That is why many people like the endless efforts of Davies try to keep themselves in touch with the rest of the society to maintain their identity and security. When rejected by Aston, Davies helplessly tries to preserve the relation and the situation and says:

Davies: You mean you're throwing me out? You can't do that. Listen man, Listen man, I don't mind, you see, I don't mind, I'll stay, I don't mind, I'll tell you what, if you don't want to change beds, we'll keep it as it is, I'll stay in the same bed, maybe if I can get a stronger piece of sacking, like, to go over the window, keep out of the draught, that'll do it, what do you say, we'll keep it as it is? (Pause)

Aston: No. (The Caretaker, p.75)[16]

Mick's miserable refuge to Aston to stay in the room resembles Nagg's appeal to Hamm, his son, for more respect, attention, and affection. His references to his childhood does not prove promising in attracting Hamm's attention due to the catastrophe-stricken identity and self of Hamm who is treated similarly by Clov, his own son, and a paragon of modern social, moral, and behavioral norms.

Nagg: It's natural. After all I'm your father. It's true if it hadn't been me it would have been

someone else. But that's no excuse. (Pause) Turkish delight, for example, which no longer exists, we all know that, there is nothing in the world I love more. And one day I'll ask you for some, in turn for a kindness, and you'll promise it to me. One must live with the times. (Pause) Whom did you call when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark? Your mother? No, me. (The Endgame, p.55)[17]

What is reflected here is the fact that Davies, Hamm, and Nagg are all the micro cosmetic portrayal of the condition of many other people who are in constant rival against their miseries of existential, material, or other types whose macro cosmetic manifestations can be attributed to and detected at the post modern era. Indeed, "the stage comments savagely on man's condition and his best desire to make a self-important out of his meaningless existence to see himself as having play his best for a loss not a win"[5]. Nagg's appeal, seemingly, does not change Hamm's attitude. Moreover, Hamm's own request to Clov for staying does not prevent him from leaving; he leaves in the end which to Hamm means the end of everything and that he should get ready to face the imminent death and meet the end.

Clov: I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little, trial of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never seen in lit...It's easy going...when I fall I'll weep for happiness. (Endgame, p.81)[17]

More pertinent to our references we want to deduce in connection with the characteristics of post modern era and the underlying causes behind the existential problems, Esslin raises this question if Clov or Lucky can be symbol of or the manifestation of many intellectuals who are compelled to serve the emotions, instincts, and expectations of a system and trying to free themselves from such disorderly and vicious masters but they cannot. He asserts that they are doomed to die because of their service and connection with the animal side of their personalities which is staged in *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* [18]. He further maintains that the world outside neutralizes for the victims of such states; nevertheless, the ceaseless argument between parts of their personalities inside their minds goes on. That is why one can clearly envisage that Beckett's creative intuition reveals the elements of experience and tries to manifest whether all human beings are obsessed with such states of depression, challenge, dislocation, and disintegration in the deeper layers of their minds, personalities, and their senses of their selves and identities. As can clearly be seen and felt, one comes to the same conclusion with regard to Beckett's works and their reflection of man's condition that indeed, "this is

the key to wide success of Beckett's plays: to be confronted with the concrete projections of the deepest fears and anxieties, which have only experienced at a half conscious level, constitutes a process of catharsis and liberation analogous to the therapeutic effect in psychoanalysis of confronting the subconscious contents of the mind"[6]. Indeed, what Nagg is trying to do in his long appeal to Hamm is his effort on the way of enabling him to visualize his own catharsis and the one in which Hamm will one day would get stuck.

Nagg: I hope the day will come when you'll really need to have me listen to you, and need to hear my voice, and voice. (Pause) Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope. (Endgame, p.55)[17].

This kind of therapy goes on in *Waiting for Godot* where the characters are trying to get in the depth of our unconscious revealing to us our unseen, unfelt, and unbelievable obsessions. As Grillet has maintained, "we suddenly realize, as we look at them (Vladimir and Estragon) the main function of the theatre, which is to show what the fact of 'being there' consists in. A character in a play does no more than 'play a part', but in Beckett's plays it is as if the two tramps were on stage without a part to play"[7] except to act as mediators or reminders of our own consciousness.

The tramps' vague waiting in *Waiting for Godot* for someone in the name of Godot with an anonymous name, position, and purpose on the line of passing the time, waiting for rescue and survival, finding some sort of soothing for their existential problems, in part; knowing the fact that they maybe somehow aware of their own futile waiting, signifies the reality of many a people who are desperately looking forward to achieving their utopian yearning for the form of life, art, religion, government ,existence, identity, and reality nowadays. Due to the nature of human being who is always in the process of creating meaning for each aspect of his being, the two tramps bored with everything, fed up with their hesitancy to commit suicide, stuck in dilemma to retrieve and hesitate, again turn to waiting, but the end to this waiting like Nagg and Davies' begging appeal for their very needs never arrives. The positive hallucinations of Sisyphus no longer can be expected from Lucky, the vagrants, Stanley's hope of salvation, and Davies' ever-wondering condition. That is why the absurdity, in all its forms and tenets, is drastically different from what introduced as absurdity in the past. No longer stirring one's feelings, achieving an omniscient knowledge through magic, the help of a Wizard, the courageous bravery of certain type paves the way for coping with the absurdity created at the shadow of the violation of moral codes and disciplines, injustice, inequality, socio-psychological and political threats and forces. The

catastrophe occurred in Endgame has been of that much destructive power which has left no signs of life, no hope of reconstruction, no minute knowledge of the nature of catastrophe, and no single sign of hope except sheer melancholy and despair. The postmodern era characteristics have assigned the absurdity of man's existence and being a new and totally different meaning.

Hamm: Absent, always. It all happened without me. I don't know what's happened. (Pause) Do you know what's happened? (Pause) Clov!

Clov: (turning towards Hamm, exasperated): Do you want me to look at this much heap, yes or no?

Hamm: Answer me first.

Clov: What?

Hamm: Do you know what's happened?

Clov: What? Where?

Hamm (violently): When? What's happened? Use your head, can't you! What has happened?

Clov: What for Christ's sake does it matter? (He looks out of window.) (The Endgame, p.73)[17]

A cross comparison of the commonalities of the plays under discussion proves significantly promising on shedding light on the plight of modern man and his obsessions. Here, from a more psychological and political orientation with regard to Pinter's play, one can assert that Stanley's resurrection of identity and self at the command of Monty, the omniscient and authoritative system, totally against his will and wish; the seemingly registered name of Davies in the black list of the social system as a social derelict with no assistance from any social organization, has made the existence as much absurd as that of the absurd waiting in the *Waiting for Godot* and the widespread and annihilating catastrophe of *Endgame* has done to Vladimir, Estragon, Hamm, and Clov respectively.

The immediate need of characters to avoid seclusion which is in a sense one of the many politically oriented social constraints on the private lives of people drives them to the threshold of losing their sense of self and identity within this vortex. Davies, the jobless, homeless, selfless, and in the midst of endless wondering character, has been belittled to the degree of a wild animal from the view of the rest of society. No doubt, this nomadic and wondering condition has itself some reasons behind it such as his being distinguished by some social rules as unfit to live in the society, being the victim of some political change or ominous system like the many people who are robbed of their properties and position by the authority for the reasons of their own, his disability in getting sufficient training for finding his place in the society, his failure in keeping his family life, or finally a potential loser in the campaign to get along with the rest. Whatever

orientation these changes may be based on lead him face two big problems. First, he has some immediate needs to be fulfilled which are not achieved; second he needs to build an identity through which he can gain his human status in the society and tranquilize his inner sense of self and identity. Due to his failure in coping with these great obstacles, he deploys whatever tact he has to get rid of this seclusion and his self torture for his lack of a clear sense self. He lies, pretends to be professional, boasts over his vivid past, declares his hatred of Negros and the like for keeping themselves up, and many more tactics to conceal his lost self from both his own view point and that of the others. As he finds a temporary condition upon being offered a job, he tries to exploit the situation as much as he can to make up for his past and secure his future. In this way, Pinter highlights the covert layer of human relationship came into existence from the impact of diverse sources to reveal "the inevitable destruction that occurs when self-knowledge is absent, consciousness, unawake, and characters are driven by a need to supplant any inner identity with an exterior label constructed of illusion"[8]. Therefore, he continues to tell lies and tries to play the brothers against each other.

Mick: Well, I could see before, when you take out that knife, that you wouldn't let anyone mess you about.

Davies: No one messes me about, man.

Mick: I mean, you've been in the services, haven't you?

Davies: The what?

Mick: You been in the services. You can tell by your stance.

Davies: Oh...yes. Spent half my life there, man. Overseas...like...serving...I was. (The Caretaker, p.48)[16]

This act of lying to others or oneself as Almansi asserts may be on the line of hiding the truth or due to the characters' ignorance of the reality. When his lies are unraveled, he finds himself more susceptible to violation of his self, identity and society.

Mick: Every word you speak is open to a number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies. You're violent, you're erratic, and you're just completely unpredictable. (The Caretaker, p.71)[16]

He is again turned down, belittled, and disregarded by the society which can be inferred from this line of the play too.

Mick: I'm compelled to pay you off for your caretaking work. Here's half a dollar. (Caretaker, P.72) [16]

His detachment from any other source of help and salvation has thrown him into infinity of nothingness, suffering, and alienation. This is what staged in modern drama. "In modern drama, the

patriarchal relationship between God and the individual soul has been replaced by the adversarial relationship between man and his own psychology, his will to comprehend himself, even as the patriarchal relationship between ruler and subject has been replaced by the adversarial relationship between man and society, in the form of society's drive to marginalize all those that it cannot or will not homogenize"[9]. This kind of attitude harmonizes with that of Foucault's idea of power and its treatment in the past whose manifestation can be seen differently now. Regarding the purpose of power, Foucault states, "The classical age discovered the body, as object and target of power. It is easy enough to find signs of the attention then paid to the body-to-the-body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces"[10].

The surgery Aston received may have been on this line of purgation. Seemingly, Davies has been realized as unfit; accordingly, he is rejected everywhere and is treated as the doomed member of the society- or better to call it the power system. This power qualification as mentioned can be attributed to body and its features, required knowledge for specific purposes, or even behavior of certain status and style. Those who do not fulfill the expectations are automatically driven to the corner like many a modern people who are lagging far behind the social criteria. One justification may be deduced from what Esslin asserts with this regard to that underlying motif at the very private world of the plays and in the innermost feelings of yearnings of the characters that "there also lurk what are, after all, the basic political problems: the use and abuse of power, the fight for living-space, cruelty, and terror"[11].

Davies (slowly): All right then...you do that...you do it...if that's what you want...

Mick: That's What I What! He hurls the Buddha against the gas stove. It breaks. (Passionately) Anyone would think this house was all I got to worry about. I got plenty of other things. I've got plenty of other interests. (The Caretaker, p.72)[16]

So Mick himself is at the mercy of lots of other obsessions knowing the fact that they must have origins upon them whatever social, psychological, and political ones are attributable. What is clear is that these factors have turned the universe and his existence absurd and meaningless. He has a strong tendency to surpass the map routes, but he cannot. He wants to turn the house into a penthouse, but it is impossible for him. All that he has learned from the society is to defend his territory and his personal belongings from the intrusion of the others. Such a view has supported much his animal-like aspect of his being and this does not accompany his real human being nature. Davies in one sense and Mick in another way are both suffering from different

intensities, but their commonality is that they feel everything as absurd dominated especially their selves and identities which are dependent upon the achievement of the their very needs and yearnings. With this regard, they suffer from the same absurd waiting of the tramps in the *Waiting for Godot* in their own waiting for their yearnings to be fulfilled though the nature of waiting may have different orientations and has come into existence by other sources respectively.

Vladimir: But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us!

Vladimir: What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come. (*Waiting for Godot*, Pp.79-80) [18]

In other words, what can be concluded is this idea that whatever sense of purpose we may have invented and created for our act as our Godot, our sense of meaning in life is just as pointless and groundless as the two tramps' endless waiting for Godot; we fail to assign meaning to our being, and we will be in the same boat of despair and helplessness. If instead of diverting the haunting obsessions, we coagulate the obsessions of different types on our spirit and body, no doubt, we do exacerbate the situation for ourselves but this in the long run takes us out of ourselves, our being, and our ambiguous selves and may lead to a new meaning for these concepts. The panic stricken condition of Hamm and Clov in the midst of catastrophe will pave the way for losing their own consciousness of existence and succumbing to sheer state of negligence of their own selves and existence. Here instead of loving one another as vividly ordered in the Bible, the characters turn to negativity, pessimism, and absurdity.

Hamm: You weep, and weep, for nothing, so as not to laugh, and little by little ...you begin to grieve. (He folds the handkerchief, puts it back in his pocket, and raises his head.) All those I might have helped. (Pause) Helped (Pause) Saved (Pause) The place was crawling with them (pause. Violently) Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that! (Pause)

Hamm: Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbor as yourself! (Pause Calmer)[12].

CONCLUSION

Like Beckett in Pinter's plays such views as forming one's own social and ideal viewpoint, are more vivid. Through touching on our human feelings, penetrating into the depth of our human nature, and

projecting on our consciousness, Pinter more pedantically tries to "draw our attention to such inhuman oppressions inflicted upon other human beings; Pinter strives to reveal human evil as a common universal quality of man. Additionally, aiming at heightening moral values, Pinter focuses on human evil as linked to extreme power"[13]. This idea is consummated by other critics' views regarding Beckett's oeuvre. Blau, David Houston Jones, Anna Mc Mullan, and Mariko Hori Tanaka all highlight the concrete images reflecting Beckett's experiences in *World War II* and the *Holocaust* which earlier critics have attempted to "generalize or universalize: the barbed wire that encircles the Krapp apartment and the families indifference to it in *Eleutheria*; the corpses and skeletons in the 'charnel-house' of *Waiting for Godot*; the stink of death hovering over *Endgame*".

Accordingly, we can conclude and voice Pinter and more specifically Beckett's position in the eye of audience and critics as the major playwrights of this school of existential thought and assert that "Beckett's audiences, from the inmates at San Quentin and the children of Appalachia to Academia's more sophisticated theatre goers responded to his innovative 'tragicomedy' in new ways. Here, to be sure, the tragicomedy of humanity at the mercy of random, gratuitously kind or brutal inner or outer forces"[14] such as technological, existential, and social motives which have targeted man's sense of his self, identity, and his existence at post modern era.

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