



Theatre of the Absurd-SAMUEL BECKETT

Background: Non-realistic genre of the twentieth century. The chaos in the post-war world – loss of faith in God and the alienation of man- is reflected on the stage. Man is lost in the world, and all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless and meaningless.

Absurd: originally means ‘out of harmony’ with reason or propriety, unreasonable, illogical. **Ionesco defines** his understanding of the ‘Absurd’ as something “devoid of purpose”, man - cut off from his religion, metaphysical, and transcendental roots- is lost and thus, all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless.

The sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is -broadly speaking- the theme of the plays of by Beckett, Adamov, Ionezco, Genet etc.,

Martin Esslin coined the term in his 1960 essay "Theatre of the Absurd." He related these plays based on a broad theme of the Absurd, similar to the way Albert Camus uses the term in his 1942 essay, “The Myth of Sisyphus”.

In *“The Myth of Sisyphus”*, Camus introduces his philosophy of the absurd: man's futile search for meaning, unity, and clarity in the face of an unintelligible world devoid of God and eternal truths or values. Does the realization of the absurd require suicide? Camus answers: "No. It requires revolt." He then outlines several approaches to the absurd life. The final chapter compares the absurdity of man's life with the situation of Sisyphus, a figure of Greek mythology who was condemned to repeat forever the same meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again. The essay concludes, "The struggle itself [...] is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

Playwrights commonly associated with the Theatre of the Absurd include Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Fernando Arrabal, Václav Havel and Edward Albee.

The ‘Absurd’ in these such plays takes the form of man’s reaction to a world apparently without meaning, and/or man as a puppet controlled or menaced by invisible outside forces. Though the term is applied to a wide range of plays, some characteristics coincide in many of the plays: broad comedy mixed with horrific or tragic images; characters caught in hopeless situations forced to do repetitive or meaningless actions; dialogue full of clichés, wordplay, and nonsense; plots that are cyclical or absurdly expansive; either a parody or dismissal of realism and the concept of the "well-made play”.

Work considered to be part of the **Theatre of the Absurd** expressed what happens when human existence has no meaning or purpose and therefore all communication breaks down, alerting their audiences to pursue the opposite. Logical construction and argument gives way to irrational and illogical speech and to its ultimate conclusion, silence.