



Act Without Words: An Example of Absurd Theatre and Silence Theatre

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Absurd Theatre

The Theatre of the Absurd is a kind of experimental drama that emerged in the aftermath of World War II. It depicts the absurdity of human condition and presents conflicts characterized by existential despair, linguistic innovation, and absurd situations. The term "the Theatre of the Absurd" was coined by Martin Esslin in his book of the same name. In addition, French philosopher Albert Camus famously articulated the concept of the absurd in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus," arguing that human existence is inherently devoid of meaning in a universe that is indifferent to his agony. The playwrights most often associated with the theatre of the absurd are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Harold Pinter.

Absurd theatre entails certain characteristics such as:

- 1- A well-structured plot is replaced by fragmented situations that are repeated again and again to indicate the chaos and absurdity of man's life. Furthermore, it is labeled as cyclical in a sense that it ends where it begins.
- 2- Simple but illogical and fragmented language which is also marked by long pauses and repetition. As such language is no more a means of communication, but rather a tool for expressing lack of communication and alienation.
- 3- Flat characters with nonsensical action
- 4- Minimalist settings that usually depict barren landscape or nondescript environments so as to depict emptiness of the man's life. Moreover, such settings blur the line between past, present, and future.
- 5- Dark humor and satire so as to add depth and complexity to the absurd experience of modern man.

Silence Théâtre

It is an actor-centered theatre. The actor acts by means of using body language rather than the verbal one. Silence theatre also entails lighting, music, sound, costume, and makeup. Though theorized by Jean-Jacques Bernard in the 1920ies, silence theatre is as old as theatre itself. With its roots in ancient Greece and the Renaissance Commedia dell'Arte, it has developed in modern times into a highly-skilled actor's art that requires extensive study of its physical techniques and dramatic principles.

Silence may serve as a means to express internal conflict or intense emotional distress. An individual who is grappling with a challenging dilemma or coping with a personal tragedy may have difficulties in articulating their thoughts effectively. During such times, silence might serve as a means to convey the depth of their suffering and the importance of their thoughts.

Act Without Words as an Absurd Drama

The play is a silent depiction of futility and eternal punishment. The central character of Beckett's play is positioned on a stage and is prevented from attaining a carafe of water regardless being motivated to perform various actions by whistles. The sole character is restricted inside a "desert" due to a mysterious force denying him access. The man is flung back and forth, right and left by an unknown force. When he is on the ground, he "dusts" himself and hears whistles. To reflect on the way the character is positioned in unknown desert that almost symbolizes absurd life, Beckett uses the language of passive voice to indicate the powerless and restriction of the sole and silent character of the play. The character, in other words, is not a subject with a free will but rather a passive object who is othered by his destiny:

"The man is flung backwards on stage from right wing." The act of being flung into the stage can be compared to man's birth which he has no hand in it but he is forced to confront its consequences. The life man is forced to live is marked by certain guiding signals. The whistle in the play, for example, represents an external guiding force.

The play is marked by a cyclical structure in a sense that the character repeats again and again the same action that may enable him to get out of the desert or get the carafe. However, every attempt is marked by a failure after which the character **"gets up immediately, dust himself, turns aside, reflects."** Moreover, the character's constant failure depicts an existentialist notion in a sense that it underscores the absurdity of life and emphasizes the inherent challenges of finding purpose in an indifferent world.

This existential conflict is presented and satirized by means of

- 1- simple but highly condensed and thorough language.
- 2- Flat character which is uncomplicated in terms of personality, emotion, and conflict.
- 3- A bare "desert" where man feels an alien, stranger, and powerless. This particular setting is used in the absurd drama as a vision of life and of man's trapped in a hostile universe, without any chance of happiness and hope for the future.
- 4- Symbolic elements which are part of uneventful plot. These elements include: dazzling light, carafe, tree, cubes, scissors, robe, and hand. Each symbolic element has its intended meaning which meets the main themes of the play that are absurdity of life and man's futile struggle in a universe that does not recognize him. The meaning of each symbol is :
 - Carafe: life's objectives
 - Desert: life
 - Dazzling life: sun by which man can recognize what he is surrounded by. It can be, according to this, man's comprehensiveness.
 - The tree and its shadow: a source of physical comfort and help as it functions as a shelter from the heat.
 - Cube, scissors, rope: they are used as supportive tools. However, they can be seen, because of their shapes, as symbols of man's rationality.
 - The hand: a symbol of physical existence.

Act without Words I is a return into the antechamber of language, where gestures, and not words, implicitly convey the message of the play. The play can be treated as metaphoric statement about human life – its beginning stands for the birth of a human being and the middle for man's life; its end, however, does not bring a solution, but rather death: **"He does not move, Whistle from above, He does not move"** This quote gives the gist of the whole play. When man reached the end of his life, nothing happened and nothing achieved.