CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This chapter centralizes the arguments made in the earlier chapters and arrives at certain conclusions with regard to the formal, linguistic and philosophical predilections of the selected Absurdist and their dramatic achievements. This study concludes that the contemporary theatre, for the most part, is nervous and neurotic and its aim is the destruction and reconstruction of art, or at least, the conventional art of the bourgeois era that had produced the horrors of war. Its characters, in extreme cases, live without a life of their own. They lack the pulse of life. The pioneers of this theatre are Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Eugene Ionesco and a number of other avant-garde writers, who represent the current movement that emerged after the horrors of World War II, as a rebellion against the essential beliefs and values of traditional culture and literature. They share the quest for new forms, concern for social problems, for moral indignation against a world gone wrong or mad.

The playwrights whose work is here discussed don’t form part of any self-proclaimed or self-conscious school or movement. On the contrary, each of them in question is an individual who regards himself as a lone outsider, cut off and isolated in his private world. Each has his own personal approach to both subject matter and form, his own roots, sources, and background. If they have a good deal in common, it is because their work most sensitively mirrors and reflects the preoccupations and anxieties, the emotions and thinking of many of their contemporaries in the western world.

The playwrights, chosen for the study, certainly share certain basic philosophical and generic tendencies. Each one of them, however, has a
unique way of reconciling himself with the absurdist style of creating linguistic modalities in terms of the dramatization of prevailing reality.

Beckett’s *stream-of-consciousness* technique is a fitting vehicle for the metaphysical concerns. In this respect, Beckett was obviously greatly influenced by James Joyce, with whom he became friends in Paris. The technique rejects the formal, structured dialogue of the traditional play, replacing it with what is essentially the monologue. Dialogue still appears, of course, but it appears firmly embedded in the interior, mental life of the narrator. Where the author is seeking to convey an impression of the incoherent richness of his character’s thoughts, the technique is a valuable tool. It does, of course, frequently mean that the work is difficult to understand. And that is characteristic of Beckett’s plays. However, Beckett has been more daring still, by applying the same technique to the dialogue of the theatre.

Different from Camus, Beckett dwells on *man’s limited consciousness*, which he regards as a factor enhancing man’s alienation – Moreover, Beckett handles the problem of *self-alienation* caused by the elusiveness of the self. Beckett’s characters are “*isolated existents*”, each of whom is “*immured in his consciousness*.” This limitation of human consciousness alienates man from the world and results in imperfect relationships. This is the predicament of the lucid man, which leads to his alienation from the world he has found difficulty in comprehending. Beckett’s characters are, “*degraded and mutated*” into consciousness representing the human condition. His creatures have a prodigious talent for forgetting even their names – Since his characters are unable to know each other, except as possibilities, fragmented and imperfect relationships and ambivalent fraternity emerge. Therefore, “*the limitation of human consciousness*” that Beckett portrays in his dramas appears “*as factor separating man from the universe,*” and from one another. His characters are in a more advanced state of despair than Camus’s “*absurd*” men. They are physically maimed as well as psychologically at disproportion with their
society. They run through a gamut of moods and attitudes toward their individual plight.

Beckett opens his world to comprehend different interpretations; his characters are a mixture of different tendencies; they are of two types: meditative and materialistic. For Beckett’s aim is not to create particular individuals but to depict generalized characters representing the human condition, and in this sense, his characters are prototypes. But on the other side, there are no solutions and resolutions but motives that defy definition and feeling that elude classification – it means that Beckett offers no brilliant analysis or prudent prescription for remedying the human condition.

With Beckett, there is no suggestion of revolt, as is there with Camus, because, due to, his skepticism, revolt would be no more value than stagnation, for revolt would not change man; in his opinion, man will never be able to overcome the meaninglessness of life, nor the absurdity of death, which is for Beckett a tragic destiny of man that nothing can redeem it, so he reflects the anguish of mortality as a general state in his characters.

Beckett, in his plays, has displayed not only the universe mess, but also man’s inability to cope with it, and with the fact of death, because of man’s finite nature and to the faultiness of his tools (method, language, memory… etc). There can be no consistent identity of man. Since there is no commonly accepted standard, there is not a single truth, but there are only fragments of truth. Looking for his elusive self, man sees it reflected in others and takes these reflections for the original.

Beckett’s plays are mono-dramas that take place inside human being and show the constituent parts of his ego, his emotional self and his rational self in conflict with each other. They deal with the difficulty of communication between human beings; the unending quest for reality in a world in which everything is uncertain and the border line between dream and waking is ever shifting.

Beckett is pessimistic and nihilistic due to the efficacy of fruitful fraternity in the struggle against the absurd. He is the prophet of negation and
sterility. He holds out no hope to humanity, only a picture of unrelieved black-
ness. He condemns life itself which is nothing, but a wait without interest,
without faith, without love for death. For him, existence is justified in short only
by its fatal ending: Nothingness, as Ben-zvi says in this regard, “Nothing is
more real than nothing” or, “where you are worth nothing, there you should
want nothing.” Embracing nothingness as the ground of reality ought to be the
response of anyone who concedes to the unavoidable fact of nothingness as
the foundation of Being. So his pessimistic and nihilistic worldview is the out-
growth of concern for problems which are not peculiar to him.

Beckett’s characters seem to negate all the realistic conventions. They
are drawn in their outlines, and reduced to their essentials, for their function is
to present every man. Beckett uses certain techniques to subvert the realistic
naming which suggests the existence of a fixed identity, and Beckett erodes
the sense of a fixed identity by giving his characters unrealistic names or
renaming them. Moreover, the actions of Beckett’s characters are not
differentiating but recurring. That means, all of them are involved in a failed
quest which symbolizes the futility of any attempt at meaning action. Besides,
they all feel an obligation to go on with their quests although they don’t know
why. Thus, their motives are unknown even to themselves. We have chara-
acters whose motives are hidden and whose actions we cannot understand.
Thus, they embody specially the modern man’s vacillation between his need
for a transcendental order and his recognition that such order does not exist.

Beckett achieves the depersonalization and dehumanization of his
characters by presenting them as bare and abstract figures bereft of any
speciality and humanity. Beckett’s technique of concealing the parts of body –
burying them in dustbin, heaps of sand, concealing the parts of body and face
through heavy make-up carries his plays very near to the puppet theatre. We
have no longer a life size view of the world, but incomplete world, because it
is inhabited by puppets rather than people with minds. And that is why
Beckett’s plays do not rise to the level of tragedy; they may be anti-theatre
tragedy.
Camus’s plays display a different presentation of absurdity and linguistic modality. Camus sees art as one of the ways of rebellion against the chaos and disorder of the outside world by providing order and clarity that the external world is devoid of. According to Camus, since reason is limited, it is unable to fulfil man’s never-ending desire to know the whole. For Camus, this is the point where art enters the scene since he believes that the function of art is to fulfil the human desire for order and clarity. To Camus, the most suitable form is the classical form, for it provides organization and discipline by imposing on the work certain constraints. In this scene, Camus may be regarded to be close to the realistic tradition because he uses the traditional dramatic devices in his plays, as observed in his characterization and the dramatic techniques he employs in his plays.

Albert Camus shows humanity as alienated and attempts to elucidate a strategy to overcome the absurd and arrive at meaning. Furthermore, even though the philosophic perspective, presented in his plays, is “revolutionary, his dramatic form is fairly conventional”. Albert Camus had a tendency to use typical philosophical reasoning which, ironically, he also held as absurd. However, Esslin points out that Camus, in spite of his belief in the absurdity of life, attempted to show in his plays how one could find meaning in life.

Unlike Beckett, Camus conforms to the tradition of giving his characters names that provide them with a social identity and place them in a contemporary social setting—that means they are at proportion with their society. Besides this, Camus’s characters are individualized through certain characteristics peculiar to them. They are depicted as credible individuals acting in predictable ways in certain situations, so the reader can name at least few qualities to describe them. Camus’s characters are also individualized through their speeches, revealing their characteristics. In other words, Kaliayev’s speech is indicative of his aloofness as his short sentences and his unwillingness to be involved in a dialogue suggests. His speech also reveals his sensual nature, for he frequently talks about his sensory experience whereas he remains silent about his emotions and feelings. His language also
indicates his inability to make sense of abstract concepts since they have no physical reality, which explains his failure to comprehend and conform to social conventions involving such abstract concepts. Kaliyev's language also reveals his personal qualities and thus individualizes him. For instance, his straightforward and plain language points out to his dislike of abstractions and his belief that one should use a plain language to achieve communication and fruitful and unanimous fraternity with others, for this is how men attain solidarity. To Camus, communication between men is attainable through a straightforward and plain language. This is exactly the opposite of Beckett's view of language because Beckett presents language as an inefficient tool to express one's thoughts, to comprehend the world, or to define one's self. On the contrary, Czech, in The Misunderstanding, uses language not to achieve communication but manipulate and ensnare others. Therefore, unlike Kaliyev, he uses a refined and sophisticated language, revealing his motives.

Unlike Beckett, Camus uses all the realistic conventions to draw his characters. He names his characters according to the rules of realistic naming, considering realistic naming suggests the existence of a fixed identity. So the realistic characters motivate their actions and become explicable all the time.

Camus differs from Beckett and Ionesco in an important respect: he presents his sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning, while Beckett and Ionesco strive to express their sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought.

It is seen that Camus employs techniques of conventional devices. All his plays are retrospective narratives with omniscient narrators who have complete knowledge of the past, display no difficulty in remembering even the smallest details, and recount past events in their proper order. While Beckett's narrators don't have complete knowledge of the past, so they
frequently fall into uncertainty about the order of the events, and admit doubt about the truthfulness of their narratives due to their defective memory.

In Camus’s plays, none of the protagonists have any doubt about the inexistence of God. They all clearly express that they don’t believe in God, and act accordingly. Thus, especially Caligula in *Caligula* and Kaliayev in *The Just Assassins* embody Camus’s absurd man in *The Myth of Sisyphus* who does not evade the absurd through transcendental hopes; they face their condition directly.

Camus deals with the man’s mortality which is one of the basic causes of the absurdity of human condition, for it makes all human endeavors meaningless and equally insignificant. To Camus, man should never ignore the fact that he is a mortal being, but this awareness should not lead to hope for another life. On the contrary, this recognition should intensify his passion for life, and knowing that there is no other life than the one he has, he should appreciate every minute of his life. For Camus this is how man rebels against his mortality. Thus, unlike Beckett, in Camus death is turned into a means of intensifying the passion for life, and consequently, the absurd man is determined to live his life as best as he can, and the only way of doing this is to live the present moment, knowing that life is short. While Beckett thinks that death is the tragic destiny of man, and that nothing can redeem it, so he reflects the anguish of mortality as a general state of humanity in his characters. Camus shows that since life is finite, man should live in the present moment without thinking about the future, for there is no future.

Through this study, it is seen that Camus believes that man has a free will and owns the traditional approach that he is a rational being who lives in an intelligible universe in which he owns heroism and dignity; he associates the idea that life is meaningless. Camus believes that man is capable of giving his life meaning. In this study, we have noted a source of optimism in Camus, who believes that such an attempt is a make – believe, giving the illusion that man is free to mould his life as he likes, but this makes him not free but “the slave of this liberty.” Thus, for Camus meaning is an illusion that
restricts man and prevents him from living life to the full. As he once says, “Not to believe in the profound meaning of thing belongs to the absurd man.”

Camus’s plays also deal with the concept of rebellion which held the explanation for the destructive political movement of the 20th century. He considers it as a form of protest to reveal a desire for order. He displays this protest to be evidence of the absurdity of existence, but rebellion also serves as evidence for the existence of values. Rebellion is a protest against the absurdity of death. Camus always insists that true rebellion must acknowledge its origins and establish limits that prevent it from contradicting these origins. Unlike Beckett, Camus concentrates on love, friendship, solidarity and compassion. Throughout his works, Camus reiterated the importance of specific and concrete friendship - a friendship that is about love and loyalty to the people with whom one shares this existence now.

Eugene Ionesco’s plays deal with suffering, fear, destruction and the emptiness of polite conversation. His plays depict, in a tangible way, the solitude of humans and the insignificance of one’s existence. They express Ionesco’s wonderment and anguish at the strangeness of reality. They present a picture of man’s confrontation with nothingness, with meaninglessness of life. They show a dramatization of man’s confrontation with emptiness and void, suffering and evil, fear and unbearable sadness and death. These are the horrors of modern man, because he ends in nothing; he is nothing. Ionesco is concerned with two things: the human condition, and how to present it through a particular kind of language.

Ionesco replaces customary plot, structure and language with fragmentary, contradictory, and often nonsensical dialogue and surreal images in order to present a world of chaos that mocks established institutions and conformity. He populates his stage with meaningless physical objects to emphasize the theme of unreason and convey a nightmarish sense of inanity. His plays show his use of proliferating objects to represent external forces that dominate the human spirit, of the irrational to liberate the imagination.
In most production of his plays, Ionesco has led a mechanical way of performing his characters not as real figures but as puppets. The characters are devoid of psychology and the myriad motives that determine behavior. Ionesco’s theatre is presented with a character that is a mere framework, which the actor must fill out. The fact that his characters are devoid of life and humanity prohibits the actor’s attempt to identify conventionally with the role. The characters, absent from themselves, become as interchangeable as the lines they speak. In other words, they are dying and language is the true protagonist. There is nothing personal to say, the absence of any inner life; man is totally absorbed in his social context and distinguishable from it. They belong to an impersonal world.

His characters are continually trapped in some situations, or the other which they are placed in a dramatic situation, and it remains the actors’ responsibility to show the human responses of the characters through their own responses to the situation of the play’s action. For Ionesco, the actor is forced into the skin of the character placed in an inescapable predicament and has no the recourse but to behave as the “person” caught in the character’s body. This is the principal reason why Ionesco says that the script is only a pretax for the play. He speaks of his characters as puppets because the human response is lacking and, consequently, it is the actor’s job to supply it. Again and again, the actor is asked to play the text, “since it contains everything required for the character.”

Ionesco’s characters seem like robots, often enslaved by the dictatorial will of unseen manipulator. From the beginning surrealism and Dadaism influenced his work, especially Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty concept and the black humor of Andre Breton, Robert Desnos, and Tristan Tzara. Also Kafka, Destoyevsky, and Beckett were important writers for him. Ionesco presents the real picture of man. Ionesco is concerned with deadly nature of bourgeois life, its mechanical quality and the loss of a sense of mystery, the loneliness of individuals and their difficulties in communicating in a language also deadened by habit. Ionesco’s dramatic language and action are a
metaphor for the human condition. This is why Ionesco sought to “destroy the usual, coherent, rational language, make of the text a pretext for a play.” Unlike the tramps and outcasts of Beckett and Adamov, Ionesco’s characters are lonely in what ought to be a community context; and unlike Beckett, Ionesco seems to have moved from the very absurd and dehumanized play to the more sympathetic and human kind of play.

Ionesco’s informing mode is metamorphosis-man into beasts, inanimate to animate. He portrays the corruption of energy in *Rhinoceros* or the transference of energy in *The Lesson*. He presented the grotesque and brutal view of the world which formed the basis of a philosophical concern in Ionesco’s play and had a great influence on his ideas for shaping views on acting and the theatre.

Ionesco’s plays purportedly deal with “nothingness” or “absence” or “silence”. He is revealing the true character of society, the character that we would rather hide. His reality was something radically new. His plays do indeed have a message, he made anthropological observations through the characters on stage. Anthropology is a valuable key to unlocking many of the mysteries of Ionesco’s works, since many of them are surrounded by religious themes. His plays are very funny plays; they are serious plays. They are also, if one insists, obscure and difficult plays. They are dreamlike images of the humanity’s primordial fears: the destruction of individuality, the inevitability of death, existential despair confronting the purposelessness of life, and so on, drawing upon the dream in a manner similar to the earlier surrealists, to whom Ionesco owes a debt. But Ionesco’s imagery possesses a concreteness of form that is more accessible, more formally organized.

Ionesco is dedicated to a theatre of the imagination, one in which the greater reality of the inner life takes precedence over the paltry realities of everyday living. His inner universe exists concomitantly with the outer reality of phenomena. To express this inner reality onstage makes it essential to employ the elements of the phenomenal word: objects.
For all the elements of surrealism in Ionesco’s work his plays are written in a high style not without echoes of the eighteenth-century theatre of Beaumarchais and Marivaux. There is elegance in the work of Ionesco which does not translate successfully, either into another language or into critical explication. There is great delight in the ramping wit which a stage fully employed—props, curtains, costumes, every sort of trivial business of the stage. And there is cruelty which is in Ionesco’s case at least something of a response to the appeal made in 1938 by the critic Antonin Artaud to precipitate in audience new and frightening dreams. Artaund calls for a revolution in the theatre of that cruelty is demonstrated by the plays of Ionesco.

To conclude this study in saying that these writers are similar in the following features:

Initially, it was argued that the themes that the playwrights explore are similar because they belong to the absurd tradition that flourished after the Second World War in the 20th century. Consequently, these authors portray man as an exile in an irrational universe, devoid of meaning and a transcendental order. These writers perceive their characters in terms of the roots of their existence, of their fundamental levels of life. Scared by the very reality of living, baffled by the awesome mystery of the universe; their characters desperately try to evolve a pattern, a form to hold on to, that might provide some semblance of order in the face of chaos and confusion. They are stage types representing a particular aspect of the social system. They are local as well a universal, modified by their ideas about life. They are inadequate, because they’re not realistic enough, because they’re especially made for the stage to serve a certain purpose.

These playwrights all agree that alienation is a part of the absurdity since the individual is an exile in the universe with which he cannot establish meaningful relationships. The bareness of scenery, the dialogue of the characters, the perception of time, and the specter of death play a role in establishing the characters’ alienation from society, others, nature and self.
These writers have used cliché-laden language; there is a similar mixture of the parody of the convention at theatre and the pure absurdity. They have used the language of gesture and movement to make inanimate things play their part in the action, and to relegate dialogue. They reduce language to a very subordinate role. It appears more and more as being in contradiction to reality. They are opposed to the novelistic use of language, which defines motives or causes for a character’s behavior.

These writers are remarkable for their witticisms as well as witty writing. They employ witticism to make their ideas and the problems they discussed more platable to their audiences. Thus, they are always functional. Words are used not only as weapons of domination and destruction, but also as tools of deception and misdirection.

All these writers share a world lacking in unity, clarity, rationality, hope, meaning and purpose. They all depict the human existence as strange, mysterious and ultimately beyond all rational explanation. So all these thinkers share the view that man is inhabiting a universe with which he is out of key. Its meaning is indecipherable and his place within it is without purpose. He is bewildered, troubled and obscurely threatened. Man thinks of the inevitability of death. He is like a lonely ship caught in a storm; he is as helpless as a gull caught in a snow; and his white feathers blown about in the wind. He has lost all his senses, all his energy, physical and spiritual. He is dead both spiritually and physically. His life is corrupt and bestial; man has lost his humanity. He feels a sense of utter emptiness and spiritual desolation.

Finally, this study makes a statement on the selected authors’ choice of this subject or raw material for their plays and corresponding linguistic modalities that very authentically accommodate and convincingly communicate the bizarre nature and texture of human life essentially governed by the forces beyond human control. The meaninglessness of the life is best expressed in the apparently meaningless language. The plays of the authors selected, therefore, are the most meaningful and multi-layered expressions of the precarious situation a man is placed in.