Introduction
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The topic of research “A Study of Language Dramaturgy in the Major Plays of Samuel Beckett” aims to explore the drama of Samuel Beckett’s language. This thesis is a close analysis in understanding language techniques employed in his major plays. Language becomes an instrument and vehicle for the execution of drama. Beckett defies traditions and conventions of stagecraft inventing his own personal, private and individualistic manner of manipulating and reorganising language patterns to shape drama. The plays selected for textual analysis of Beckett’s language are *Waiting for Godot, Endgame, Krapp’s Last Tape, Rockaby, That Time and Not I* and the study is divided into seven chapters, the opening chapter gives an insight into Modern Drama with its development whereas the remaining chapters explore the variation of language in the individual plays. In each of his plays, language is used to convey a different kind of dramaturgic presence in the proscenium. The incommunicable is communicated in his plays with language creatively “communicating its collapse” (Kennedy 2). This generated collapse of language situates the meaningless and irrational human condition in an oblique, concrete, intense and compelling manner.

Language is used by Beckett as an equipment to create novel meaning transpired by his plays as also an essential foundation enveloping the requirement of plot, setting and diction. The power to make and break that he imparts to language in almost all the plays demolishes the need of the mandatory pre-requisites of a regular play on stage. Language rules, governs and helps in configuring their contours. The irrational content also ratifies the Absurd form adopted by the playwright. In *New English Dramatist*, Irving Wardle views the Theatre of Absurd as:

Its characteristics are: the substitution of an inner landscape for the outer works; the lack of any clear division between fantasy and fact; a free attitude towards time, which can expand or contract according to subjective requirements; a fluid environment which projects mental conditions in the form of visual metaphors; and an iron precision of language and construction as the writers only defence against the chaos of living experience. (Hinchliffe 6)
There was a marked resurgence in the material offered to the theatre-goers of post-war period. The content offered for the stage consisted of display of fractured and disjuncted personalities, diseased psyche and an eerie meaninglessness of an irrational existential bind. The dramas were a post-war statement which reflect modern condition of humankind burdened with the non-belief of futility of religion. Beckett was of the same view as Nietzsche that God was dead and modern man was distressed because the edifice of human values and beliefs has collapsed. Darwin’s *Origin of Species* had robbed religion of its validity. Saddled with this content the theatre was in search for a construct which could deal with the seriousness of life through dramatic and psychological motifs. The aforesaid content led drama to experiment with a variety of forms in order to probe the multiple depersonalized abstractions and the severed psyches. Therefore Beckett offers ready subject to his readers/spectators who are themselves disillusioned, embittered and lonely. In dealing with such serious subjects, he experiments with novel techniques in his plays. Beckett’s theatre was not dependent on conventions of drama. He shaped a new stage for his readers who were startled and shocked to witness their own reflections on stage.

The uniqueness of Beckettian language lies in the selection of an apparently simple vocabulary which was made to convey deep levels of anguish and irrationality. The zenith of ‘grotesque’ in language is attained through the ambit of this commonplace usage. Language depicts the ‘irrational’ remaining rational during the course of the play. The paradox leaves an unfathomable gap between the purpose of the play and its perception. For instance the utterances of A, B and C in the play *That Time*, appear inconsequential due to the arrangement and configuration of ideas, reasons, designs in compact patterns. The last dialogue of the play uttered by C sounds false, lacks argument with no cohesion between tones and tropes. The game of illusion and reality continues and distinction between them appears inconspicuous yet it succeeded in shaping a meaningful drama on the proscenium.

_C: not a sound only the old breath and the leaves turning and then suddenly this dust whose place suddenly full of dust when... gone in no time gone in no time* (Beckett 395)

The entire thread of drama is conducted through the ‘voices’. The language of these voices puts forth a celebration of those (exploitation of Irish labours that came to
England for employment) that are ignored by the world. The study of *That Time* traces the language dramaturgy through close analysis of structures and sub-structures which exist within dialogues.

The idea of ‘waiting’ in *Waiting for Godot* is apparently proposed as a character, where the inexplicable waiting has taken the place of action. The function of action is to evoke emotions in readers as the “the world at large believes, and rightly that, as a rule, “actions speak louder than words” (Baker 21), but this belief is altered as *Waiting for Godot* offers action through words only specially through a non-entity word ‘waiting’ which is an absent action. The play abounds in anxieties and uncertainties, which are intrinsic in its language. The questions are synonymous with the purpose of life (which itself is an unanswerable question) and remain unanswered.

The use of language in the Absurd Theatre is supplementary to the elements which form the real core of modern drama. Taking this tradition of language in Beckett’s plays, the force of asymmetrical construction of language heightens and supplements the concept of drama and fulfils the technical aspect of expression in its own peculiar style which is paradoxical. Beckett’s other plays *Endgame, Krapp’s Last Tape, Rockaby and Not I* also deal with this aspect of language but with a different approach and perspective. The dramaturgy of the tape as a prop is used in *Krapp’s Last Tape* when technology of recording is considered as a novelty and Krapp’s life emerges as a denial through his spools. Thus, the use of language and its application interweaves and intermingles with the idea and expression. The successful exercise gives birth to an absolutely novel drama.

Beckett made a conscious attempt to write plays through extensive language mechanics. At the surface level, the argument appears recondite and complex, but in actuality provides adequacy to the demand of moment. Assessing Beckett, from the perspective of language his instrument for stagecraft, his drama seem chaotic, absurd, and incomprehensible with an abundance of pauses, ellipses, parenthesis and clichés. But all these usages reinforce the drama within the dramatic boundaries of grammar, punctuation and metrical units. Though Beckett deliberately makes it inane, incongruous and farcical his drama lies in this very instability and senselessness of language. The key lies in the meticulous handling by the playwright. His language has a reputation for obscurity and ambiguity but despite that it creates drama. Language is
‘multimedial’ in the sense that it functions both as an auditory as well as a visual tool, therefore it gives a definite sense of completion to its dramas.

To sum up, this thesis is an attempt to explore Samuel Beckett’s language dramaturgy through a close textual exegesis. The analysis is conducted at the level of repetition, pause, sub-text, silence and existence of structure within structural language units, words, and sudden shift of thought, fragmented and broken sentences. The aforesaid are introduced in his plays in order to underline his dramatic language as an expression which is against conventional understanding of drama. Dina Sherzer views him as,

a great manipulator of, exploiter of, and performer with the manifold resources and possibilities of language. For are not the passages borrowed from other literary texts, the use of banal, everyday conversations mixed with literary language, the slang, puns, and modified clichés, the importance granted to talking (to torment the other or to make time pass), and the careful creation of rhythms and use of repetitions all ways of demonstrating the exuberance of language and Beckett’s ability to play with it and to manipulate it resulting in a new and powerful dramatic expressiveness? (Fletcher 19)
Work Cited


Chapter 1

Ethos of Modern Drama
ETHOS OF MODERN DRAMA

Modern drama is an interplay of contradictory styles. It is a drama of shock and horrific effects depicting brutality, vice, filth, squalor and the metaphysical anguish of man. It is concerned with the exhibition of the realities of everyday life for ordinary people, but with a clear note of social criticism. The essence of modern literature lies in the atypical presentation of its content. Modern literature specifically ‘Modern Drama’ projects this ‘contrariety’ of thought, action, mood and theatrical singularity which shocks the audience by its irrational and absurd presentation of life. The modern disposition is entangled in a complex state of mind which is a sequel to persistent upheavals in the form of world wars and cerebral development in human thought. Modern plays portray an image of a bewildered ‘man’ who has lost his epicentre and displaced from the focal point of life. This man is a result of philosophical and scientific development on the one hand and literary and cultural genocide on the other. He has become an assortment of various ideologies and thought processes. This man is aptly portrayed through modern drama which is a direct reaction against the well-made plays.

The well-made play was first codified by Eugene Scribe, a French playwright featuring skilfully crafted plays with tight and formulaic plot retaining the shape of Greek Tragedy as outlined in *Poetics*. The stature of grand heroes was diminished and plays are endowed with actors in group. In technique and content Scribe was followed by Sardou, Pinero, Dumas, and Augier. Like him, they also shaped drama as a mere representation of romanticised melodrama with established sterile formulas that have “reduce drama to an art of facile moralizing and superficial entertainment” (Block and Shedd 03). Their plays are ‘outworn and outmoded’ but had a profound effect on the development of modern European theatre as they were traditional models of play construction. Modern drama was a synergetic reaction against these well-made plays. They registered a marked change in their choice of content and form by depicting suffering, intellectual disdain, grotesqueries of human corporeality and existential trap through adlib and impromptu performances in the proscenium. Alexandre Dumas expresses in his criticism of Scribe that,
he sought merely to write for the theatre; he had no wish to instruct, to moralize, or to correct people; he wanted simply to give them amusement. He did not ask for that glory which immortalizes the dead; he was contented with the success which brings popularity to the living and with the fecundity which brings riches. He was a first-class prestidigitator- a wonderful juggler. (Nicoll 66)

Modern stagecraft was born with a purpose to subvert these stereotyped, banal and hackneyed ideologies which were deeply rooted in theatre culture and in its convictions. Martin Esslin defines,

If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings. (Esslin 21-22)

The modern theatre and drama came into being with a resolution to undermine the stereotyped and orthodox social, political, ethical issues of a dormant culture. Hence it incorporated important dramatic movements namely Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Symbolism and Epic Theatre. The variations among them helped to express the fine filigree of patterns of thought and mood, which presented the silhouette of the present man undergoing a struggle or a tug of war between the inner and the outer self. An urge and desire is always found in modern man who was trying to break the ‘image of being modern’ but failed at the end because of being gagged and bound by the intangible shackles of duties and responsibilities. Unsuccessful at releasing himself from the burdensome fetters of societal pressures and roles ascribed to him, he was reduced to a corporeal disjunct or a fractured personality.
Drama of a new dimension, perspective and priorities emerged through the work of Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov. These dramatists provided multiple possibilities for theatrical expression in terms of new drama. This trend continued in the works of Beckett, Brecht, Pirandello, Ionesco, Genet and Weiss, who provided vitality to the new theatre where drama ‘came from words’. Drama was viewed as an art but not as an ‘art of fact’. The complete dimension of man’s thinking changing by switching the line of thought from joy to inner joy, it opened the doors of human thinking to newer and wider horizons. The definition of society, alliances friendship and feelings like love, hatred, happiness, sorrow, respect, faith, fidelity, sincerity and many more emotional ideals were reoriented, altered, redefined, and redesigned. It led man to appreciate the essence and purpose of reality and the necessity to nurture values of truth. Through this novel dramatic exercise man was dragged mercilessly, out of his secure haven of illusions, into a stark, bare reality with startling experiences of truth.

With the beginning of twentieth century many different forms evolved in the theatre around the globe where playwrights of the era experimented with different forms and novel theatre strategies. The decades witnessed playwrights from England, Russia, and Spain who joined the league of change and produced works such as Galsworthy’s *Strife* and *Justice*, Harley Granville-Barker’s *Water* and *The Madras House*, Maxim Gorki’s *The Lower Depth* and many more. Anton Chekhov the Russian playwright produced masterpieces like *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya* and *The Three Sisters*. These plays dealt with realism, about dreams for better life while his other masterpiece *The Cherry Orchard* portrayed inner hollowness in characters. Many writers flourished and produced monumental plays like Pirandello’s *Right You Are If You Think You Are* and *Six Characters in Search of an Author* which highlighted appearance and reality and explored many possible levels of reality. Movements like Expressionism also flourished and O’Casey’s *The Shadow of a Gunman* appeared. Realism still prevailed in other forms of drama which were social, poetic, surreal, comic, and historical. Bernard Shaw’s much appreciated works *Candida* and *Man and Superwoman* followed this trend. He opted for a philosophical approach highlighting morals and social truths. However the content of drama suffered a great loss during the world wars. In America though good plays like O’Neil’s *Desire Under the Elms*, *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Hairy Ape* were
path breaking. Excellent surrealistic drama was also written focusing on psychoanalysis. Few of these were also religious dramas. W.B. Yeats, Sean O’Casey, Synge brought about the revival of poetic drama through Abbey Theatre with mysticism, insurrection, patriotism and Irish mythology as their themes.

The restlessness in modern life with its stress is reflected in the works of modern playwrights. The decline of religious faith was masked until the Second World War and people tried to find substitute faith like Progress, Nationalism and Marxism, but the Second World War shattered all beliefs. It was the culmination of man’s mental breakdown. But soon after World War II, Paris again became the capital of dramatic art and become associated with a short lived renaissance of Surrealistic drama, which came to be known as Theatre of Absurd.

Theatre of the Absurd brings major transformation in dramatic practice, creating a milestone in the history of drama. The term ‘Absurd’ is meant to describe the violation and distortion of “logic” rules, it literally means ‘out of harmony or rhythm’. Absurd defines the nothingness and insufficiency of faith and tradition in satisfying the emotions of man. This theatre professes certain discreet beliefs related to society and religion. The first philosopher who got his work marked as ‘The Absurd’ was Soren Kierkegaard, who chose Christianity as a phenomenon to discard and disseminate the Hegelian ideology. This was a bold expression of thought and it remained a characteristic of the theatre of Absurd. The Absurd theatre enabled philosophers to explore new beliefs and social conditions of man with another ‘ism’ called Existentialism. The founder Jean Paul Sartre shared his existential views rendering human existence purposeless and pointless. He made use of terms like “non-being”, showing reluctance to bear any purpose in human life. Albert Camus purported the view that man’s intention and reality are counterparts, whereas Gabriel Marcel on the other hand refers to Absurd as a sign of mystery in human existence. Albert Camus in his essay The Myth of Sisyphus discusses man’s life and its pointlessness. The reason behind this pointlessness is the lack of synchronization or harmony between ‘man’ and his surroundings. This lack of harmony is expected to create a state of metaphysical anguish, as well as a void, dark abysmal vacuum which became the central theme of the writers of this school of thought. Apparently illogical this theatre is but highly appreciated for its rational approach though in the guise of
seemingly nonsensical and absurd ideas. The theatre of Absurd is timeless, universal and speculative.

Some famous names associated with the theatre of Absurd are that of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter. The most distinct definitions of Absurd have been provided by Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. The theatre of Absurd seems to bridge the void between the subject and its expression by differentiating itself from existentialist ideals making evident this sense of contradistinction. Harold Pinter, Luigi Pirandello, N.F. Simpson, Tom Stoppard are also associated with the Absurd theatre.

The literary output of Beckett is filled with the absurd and tragic emptiness of human condition. His plays offer an absence of meaning and within this domain of meaninglessness, Beckett’s creations desperately struggle to find meaning through the only available medium of language. The plays of Beckett offer meaninglessness. Therefore rejection of realistic settings, characters, situations and conventional flow of logic is apparent. These plays are portrayals of isolation enveloped in language dramaturgy. Beckett attempts to explore language in intellectual and logical terms within the realm of absurdity, his attempt stands as a prima facie of language construction and deconstruction, language flows in chain of travesty of leaps and bounds, the profundity of ideas get profounder and as a result like Macbeth’s horror, horror, horror, Happy Days chants absurdity, absurdity and mere absurdity.

Language becomes a vehicle for conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. Words express the essence of human experience by penetrating into the theme. One of the most important aspects of Absurd drama was its distrust of language as a means of communication, but this ‘distrust in language’ is the bolster for modern drama’s existence, as drama lies in language only. It assessed from the perspective of language, Beckett’s language seems chaotic, absurd, a chequerboard like phenomenon with abundance of pauses, ellipsis and parenthesis. The mechanism of the drama all together seems distanced from action and time but permeated with language. Language adopted by most of the playwrights though misleading is connected to the contemporary problem. For example, the speech of Caligula in Act I of Camus’ Caligula deals with the existential queries of modern man and his yearnings.
...This world of ours, the scheme of things as they call it, is quite intolerable. That’s why I want the moon, or happiness or eternal life- something in fact, that may sound crazy, but which isn’t of this world. (Camus 13)

It is evident from the aforesaid lines that logic and reasoning is coherently shaping the theme of the play. Language is frivolous, facetious and flippant at surface level while at deeper level it transcends the most serious absurdity of the time by convoluted arguments and word play. Similar is the case with Beckett, his language is not rooted in banalities, clichés and platitudes of everyday speech. He uses language to show man isolated in the world and unable to communicate. His characters are tied together by a fear of being left entirely alone, and they therefore cling to one last hope of establishing some kind of communication. His plays are a critique of modern society as they display the total collapse and breakdown of beliefs and values. His plays posit themes which show the inability of attaining certainty. Godot’s promises are vague and uncertain. Similarly in Endgame an unspecified something is taking its course. However, the language of Beckett’s play successfully reveals the helplessness, futility and meaninglessness of the world and existence. Experimenting with the play of language he manages to communicate the experience of this integration.

Samuel Beckett’s plays take away the surface detail from the situations they present and show their true substance putting forward the essence of the human condition. Beckett is interested in those characters that reject the idea of love and relationship; they are lost and unhappy, with pleasure only in the experience of a meaningful use of language. The plays of Beckett are concerned with stating the difficulty in deciphering the meaning of a world which is subject to incessant change and his use of language probes the limitations of language both as a means of communication and as a vehicle for the expression of valid statements and an instrument of thought.

Beckett’s language and its complexities define human communication. The same sentence gets redefined – when spoken with a different nuance. But the very notion of language and contextual communication is transformed by the absurdist playwrights, Beckett in particular. For the theatre of the Absurd, language itself is made redundant, serving not as the conveyor or concealer of meaning but as an effective instrument. Language, in the Absurdist theatre, is turned into a metaphor of
sorts for the sterility of modernity, for the gaping void in the creation of meaning in our lives. Post-war Absurdist plays showcase the effect of widespread gloom, with people questioning their faith and the very purpose of their lives. While social interaction finds language at its very foundation, enabling the creation of communities through facilitating understanding, for Beckett, language is intensely private, akin to the thoughts within the mind. It is created within the precincts of the conscious and subconscious mind, but Beckett takes it apart and distances the words from the thoughts they are meant to convey. A meaningless existence is represented by apparently meaningless conversation. But through that overt meaninglessness, Beckett attempts to portray the bewilderment in hearts and minds, an evocative power that does not owe itself to the direct words pronounced.

Beckett makes use of overused clichés in phrases or sentences. Such meaningless language helps to “link” the characters without exchange of thoughts or emotions. Pratfalls are also used for comic effect and to avoid sentimentality. Silence another very important device in Beckett is used to separate dialogues, to isolate words and to isolate characters from each other. Silence undermines language but cannot exist without it. Silence also expresses internal (spiritual) emptiness, the characters’ awareness of this emptiness, and the urge to counteract the emptiness through speech.

To sum up, in each of Beckett’s play, there is a new form of language exercise conducted with diverse experiments with repetitions, pauses, ellipsis, rhythm and beat. His plays epitomise and echo the theme of absurdity with the profound impact of language phenomenon. Language has its very own system and structure which leads the play. As rightly stated by Gilman Richard in The Stage: Beckett’s Happy Days, that “the language and the anti-language do most of the work” (Gilman 236) in the execution of drama with its hieroglyphic pattern and it is proven through the close study of his text that

language has drama in it; there is suspense, hint, suggestion, implication, innuendo and even non-sequitur. It has thrust in it, and, attack, parry and withdrawal. It has feeling, emotion, passion, and, is full of ideas. (Ahmed 60)
Work Cited


