

ABSURDIST RESONANCES in *NO EXIT* and *ENDGAME*
WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK of EXISTENTIALISM and ABSURDISM

Varoluşçuluk ve Absürdizm Çerçevesinde
No Exit ve *Endgame*'de Absürdist Yankılar

Zafer ŞAFAK*

Abstract

Absurdism and Existentialism are two landmark literary and philosophical movements influential in the second half of the 20th century, which are represented successively by Samuel Beckett and Jean Paul Sartre. While Absurdism posits futility of human existence, isolation and failure of individuals in communicating with one another, Existentialism suggests the freedom and responsibility of individual action against an uncaring world which seems to be governed by any external force and offers no clues how people should lead their lives. Differences can also be observed in the way the thinkers and playwrights belonging to two respective traditions produce their works. In the context of the Existential thought, thinkers like Sartre prefers a linear plot, and conventional way of writing in the boundaries of prose and in the mainstream of Absurdism, playwrights such as Beckett opts for rejecting theatrical conventions with a nonlinear plot whose events lack rational motivation in an undetermined time and place. In the intersection of both movements, their endeavor head towards searching meaning in life even if in

Öz

Absürdizm ve Varoluşçuluk Samuel Beckett ve Jean Paul Sartre tarafından temsil edilen ve 20. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında etkili olmuş iki önemli edebi ve felsefi akımdır. Absürdizm insan varoluşunun anlamsızlığını, tecrit edilişi, bireylerin birbirleriyle iletişim kurmadaki başarısızlığını konu edinirken, Varoluşçuluk, bireye nasıl yaşaması gerektiği hususunda hiç kanıt sunmayan ve herhangi bir dış güç tarafından yönetilmemiş gibi görünen umursamaz dünyaya karşı bireyin özgürlüğünü ve sorumlu davranışını öne sürer. Farklılıklar bu iki akıma mensup olan düşünürlerin ve oyun yazarlarının eserlerinin içyapısı ve eserlerini nasıl ürettikleri hususunda da gözlenebilir. Varoluşçu düşünce bağlamında değerlendirildiğinde, Sartre gibi düşünürler düz yazı çerçevesinde geleneksel yazımla çizgisel olay örgüsünü tercih ederken, Beckett gibi Absürd akıma dâhil olanlar, mantıklı sebeplerden yoksun olan, belirsiz bir zamanı ve mekanı olan ve olayların birbirini takip etmediği, çizgisel olmayan olay örgüsü ile geleneksel tiyatroyu reddeder. Absürdizm'de üstü daha kapalı olmakla beraber, iki akımın da kesiştikleri yere hayata yönelik anlam arayışıdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Beckett'in

* Arş. Gör. İğdır Üniversitesi Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü.
zafersafak61@hotmail.com

Absurdism it is somewhat latent. The objective of this study is to pinpoint the common features of Absurdism and Existentialism and demonstrate how they surface in Beckett's *Endgame* and Sartre's *No Exit*.

Key Words: Jean Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett, *No Exit*, *Endgame*, Existentialism, Absurdism

Endgame ve Sartre'in *No Exit* adlı oyunları aracılığıyla Absürdizm ve Varoluşçuluğun ortak noktalarını belirleyip ve iki oyunda bu özelliklerin nasıl ortaya çıktığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jean Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett, *No Exit*, *Endgame*, Varoluşçuluk, Absürdizm

1. Introduction

Endgame (1957), which is written by Samuel Beckett after his masterpiece *Waiting for Godot*, is another example of the Theatre of the Absurd. Dealing with such themes as interdependence, life and death, the meaning of life, generational conflict and the place of old people in the society within the mainstream of absurd tradition, *Endgame* depicts the anguish of four characters and the dire conditions in which they live. *Endgame* is richly embellished with absurdist elements, which is the indication of the trends of the time it was written.

As for *No Exit* (1944), which is written by Jean Paul Sartre, gives significant clues about his existential philosophy. The play portrays three insidious characters who are condemned to hell where there is not any kind of overt instrument of torture. *No Exit* shares common themes with Beckett's *Endgame* such as death, and permanence, self-definition and interpersonal relationship. Apart from the shared themes, *No Exit* also investigates such themes as appearance and reality and choices and consequences, which have a fundamental significance in existential thought. Although the two plays differ in terms of the underlying philosophy that affect Beckett and Sartre to form their works, it can be asserted that existentialism, which becomes dominant right after the Second World War, heralds absurdism in theatre. The objective of this paper is to point out absurdist elements in *Endgame* and uncover absurdism in Sartre's *No Exit*.

2.1 The Theatre of the Absurd

It is beneficial to elaborate on the emergence and the development of The Theatre of the Absurd, its qualities and its impact on the art of drama, before the introduction and explanation of *Endgame* and *No Exit* in terms of the movement.

Absurdism or the term *The Theatre of the Absurd* refers to the works of Western European and American playwrights who were active during the 1950s and 1960s. The term *The Theatre of the Absurd* was coined by Martin Esslin who drew a frame for the works of those playwrights ignoring the theatrical conventions established over the centuries. In *The Theatre of the Absurd*, which is also named with such epithets as “cosmological theatre, ontological theatre, metaphysical farce, theological theatre” (Wegener, 1967: 151), there is a departure from the portrayal of realistic characters and situations and there is not a clear concept of time and place. Characters are not identified with names and even if they are assigned with names, they represent everyone. Characters on the stage seem to have no intrinsic, rational motivation which conveys audience a nightmarish quality. For this reason, audience who watches an absurd play may feel disoriented. Dialogues and incidents are nonsensical and farcical on the surface level, however the plays written in tune with this movement, explore such themes as absurdity of life and death, insecurity, loneliness, isolation, failure of individuals to communicate their basic needs and anxieties to one another. Cruelty, violence and domination are the subject matters mostly dealt with beneath the surface level.

The Theatre of the Absurd does not investigate and solve the problems confronting humanity. Through somber and violent depiction of man’s condition, The Theatre of the Absurd reveals man’s precarious position in the world. Man is portrayed to be surrounded by insurmountable darkness. As for the primary representative playwrights of the movement such names as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter and Edward Albee can be given (Milne, 2009: 1-10).

The Theatre of the Absurd discards the traditional plot, character and action. The result is that the audience feels a disoriented experience. Characters engage in a so-called meaningless dialogues and activities. Those who adopt this movement regard that it was a kind of response to the post World War II and

the decline of belief in an ordered universe. Major themes can be summed up as alienation and loneliness, appearance and reality, death, doubt and ambiguity, true meaning of life and search for self (Galens and Spampinato, 1998: 269).

Absurd drama is not an entirely new phenomenon and its roots date back to ancient times and ancient plays. Martin Esslin claims that “Avant-garde movements are hardly entirely novel and unprecedented; The Theatre of the Absurd is a return to old, even archaic traditions” (Esslin, 1961: 108). In this respect, Esslin regards the mime plays of antiquity as the precursor of the absurd tradition in which clowns are depicted to be unable to understand the simple connections of meaning. Esslin also finds some common points between depiction of court jesters and clowns of the Shakespearean plays and the portrayal of characters of the absurd theatre. Esslin refers to such Shakespeare’s plays as *Two Gentleman of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; for characters, he exemplifies Ophelia and Falstaff. Esslin also argues that “There is in Shakespeare, a very strong sense of futility and absurdity of human condition. This is particularly apparent in the tragicomic plays like *Troilus and Cressida* (Esslin, 1961: 109). Later on, Esslin refers to another type of drama known as *Commedia dell’arte* flourished in Italy and its verbal aspect of comedy (*Lazzi*) and Esslin contends that this type also bears great similarities with the absurd theatre and maybe it is one of the predecessors of The Theatre of the Absurd.

Here again we have the stupid simpleton who cannot understand the meaning of the most common terms and becomes entangled in endless semantic speculations and misunderstandings. The recurring types of the sly and the lecherous servant, the braggart [...] project the basic urges of the human subconscious on the stage in images as powerful as they are coarse. (Esslin, 1961:109)

The role of the language in this type of drama has changed as language is not instrumental in conveying the levels of meaning. Esslin highlights that “[...] communication between human beings is so often shown in a state of breakdown in The Theatre of the Absurd. It is merely a satirical magnification of the existing state affairs. Language has run riot in an age of mass communication” (Esslin, 1961:132).

Apart from tracing the origin of the absurd drama in ancient times, in Italy and in the plays of Shakespeare, Esslin also points out that certain

innovations of the early decades of the 20th century, such as silent movies, paved the way for absurd drama. “The silent comedy is without doubt is one of the decisive influences on the Theatre of the Absurd. It has the dream-like strangeness of a world seen from outside with the uncomprehending eyes of one cut off reality (Esslin, 1961:110). In addition to the foreshadowing effect of the silent movies of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton whom Esslin exemplifies, he also maintains his argument that the nonsense qualities of literature and poetry have fostered The Theatre of the Absurd for centuries. His examples vary from French scholastics’ nonsense poetry to the nonsense prose of Laurence Sterne to Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce (Esslin, 1961: 110-113). In view of modern writers, Esslin draws parallels between their works and absurd theatre and he stresses that through their works, these writers have contributed to the development of The Theatre of the Absurd.

Writers like Dostoyevsky, Strindberg, and Joyce, by delving into their own subconscious, discovered the universal, collective significance of their own private obsessions. This is also true of Franz Kafka, whose impact on the Theatre of the Absurd has been as powerful and direct as that of Strindberg and Joyce. (Esslin, 1961:115)

According to Martin Esslin, the movements were also influential in the evolution of the absurd theatre. Expressionism as well as Dadaism can be held as the precursor of The Theatre of the Absurd.

The dramatic products of the Expressionistic movement were on the whole too idealistic and politically conscious to rank as forerunners of the Theatre of the Absurd with which, however they share the tendency to project the inner realities and objective thoughts and feelings. (Esslin, 1961:119)

Esslin maintains his argument in addition to Dadaism and Expressionism; other literary movements share common features with absurd theatre since we can no longer find “objectively valid characters” in this type of drama as the playwright relates his subjective reality to the audience. Esslin draws attention to the fact that the playwright does not tell a story but presents images much like the images that can be found in a Symbolist or Imagist poem (Esslin, 1961: 131). Moreover, Martin Esslin is not contented with only by pointing out the movements and worldwide known artists are instrumental in the emergence of the absurd theatre, he also goes on to claim that Bertolt Brecht, the founder of

the epic theatre, also foreshadows the advent of the theatre of the absurd as one of his plays (*In the Jungle of Cities*) rejects a deliberate motivation (Esslin, 1961:121). In dramatic conventions other than epic theatre and absurd theatre, audience may ask what is going to happen next and may find absolute answers. But in The Theatre of the Absurd as in epic theatre the questions change. Esslin points out that “The relevant question here is not so much what is going to happen next but what is happening? What does the action of the play represent?” (Esslin, 1961: 134). While in absurd theatre questions change as a result of lack of rules of probability, in epic theatre, there is a shift of attention as well as the change of questions since Brecht thwarts any possible dramatic suspense and audience’s blind pursuit of the plot by means of the devices of alienation effect, such as *gestus* and *historicization* which are also commonly known as the features of *Verfremdungseffekt* (Brecht, 1947: 191-192).

Beyond the movements, genres of literature and other types of drama, Esslin claims that human mind is apt to express dreamlike forms of thought and inclined to pursuit the collective dreams of humanity. This is most apparent after the impact of the World Wars and totalitarian regimes ravaging the world. The Theatre of the Absurd endeavors to express the longings of the humanity in employing its seemingly weird stylistic features (Esslin, 1961: 114). Esslin bridges the dream-like quality of the absurd theatre with allegorical elements and aligns the works and artists such as *Piers Plowman*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

For Albert Camus, who is another important name producing works under the influence of absurdism, accepts that it “is a complex notion of man’s relationship to the world [...], a tragic paradox of man’s fate” (Hall, 1960: 26). Absurdism is alleged to be an instrumental force through which man faces the contradiction between his will and the hostile surrounding. By referring to Camus, Hall briefly crystalizes the ultimate destination of absurdism as: “The final conclusion of the absurd is, in fact, the rejection of suicide and the maintenance of that desperate confrontation of human interrogation and the silence of the world” (Hall, 1960: 31).

As for Existentialism, which is heralded by such thinkers as Heidegger and Kierkegaard and particularly represented by Jean Paul Sartre in the 20th century, concerns itself with freedom, individual choice and responsibility. According to these thinkers:

"[...] man finds himself "thrown" into existence, just like that; he does not know why, nor can he ever know why. He is de trop. He finds himself in the middle of a fool's journey, travelling without pilot or compass. He will never find any meaning in life except what he himself is able to put into it." (Coates, 1953: 231)

Sartre describes his philosophy that one forms his nature, fate by his actions and he is responsible from his morality as external values are subjective and there is no valid prescription to define his ways.

Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. And this is what people call its subjectivity [...] Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life instead of being a kind of moss or cauliflower. [...] man will only attain existence when he is what he purposes to be. (Sartre, 1966:28)

Existentialism and Absurdism are both concerned with the futility of human effort and condition but the way they express and convey their ideas to audience and readers are different. Those who write in the philosophical tract of existentialism such as Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus opt for writing their ideas, their views on the irrational nature of human existence with traditional way of writing that is often found in philosophical treaties. Nevertheless, absurd playwrights choose to communicate their ideas with non-linear plots which include abandonment of a temporal, sound setting and character development in order to relate the absurdity both in content and form. Two movements differ in terms of the conclusions they draw from the absurdity of human existence as well. While absurd plays seem to convey that all human endeavor is pointless, the existentialists with their works and plays relate the idea that even if life lacks transcendental meaning, this may serve as a springboard to action. Meaning can be attributed to life only through individual action, commitment and responsibility (Milne, 2009: 10).

2.2 Absurdist Echos in *No Exit*

Originally known as *Huis Clos* (Behind the Closed Doors), *No Exit* depicts the grave condition of three doomed protagonists that are confined to a drawing room, which is "embellished" with Second Empire furniture, as a punishment in hell. Scarce and claustrophobic setting, which is reminiscent of the "arrangement" of The Theatre of the Absurd, strikes the attention of an attentive

playgoer. The idea of death and more painfully hell reminds the somber and bitter outlook of absurd tradition on human existence. *No Exit* takes a further step in making its characters descend into hell so that its characters confront the utmost despair.

The play opens with Valet, who takes first Garcin then Inez and Estella into a drawing room. All of them died some time before they were taken into the room and for their ill-deeds they committed while they were alive, they know that where they are occupying is hell in the disguise of a room. After some time of humanly concerns such as Garcin's so-called need for a toothbrush and Estella's aesthetic concerns particularly when she wants her clothes should suit the color of the sofa she is sitting on and denial that they should be somewhere else instead of there, they come to terms with that they indeed feign honesty. All of them are guilty and sinful: Garcin admits that he was abusive to his wife and escaped military service. Inez accepts she had an illicit affair with a woman named Florence, which led her to kill herself and Inez. Estella acknowledges that she had a baby from a lover and murdered the infant. The play dwells on choices and consequences which determine one's life. Inez and Estella are cruel and Garcin is abusive and a coward, which account for why they are condemned to "live" together forever in hell.

The play starts when Valet brings Garcin into the room. After some time, Valet mocks Garcin when he demonstrates his preconceived notion of hell and human inclinations which reflects the humorous quality of the absurd theatre:

VALET: Really, sir, how could you believe such cock-and-bull stories? Told by people who'd never set foot here. For, of course, if they had-

GARCIN: Quite so. [Both laugh. Abruptly the laugh dies from GARCIN'S face.] But, I say, where are the instruments of torture?

VALET: That's good! So you haven't yet got over your—what-do-you-call-it?—sense of human dignity? Excuse me smiling. (Sartre, 1989:3-4)

The fact that Garcin, Estella and Inez are depicted in hell both prevents the portrayal of the objectively valid characters and hinders the identification of audience with these characters.

The interdependence of characters in *No Exit* recalls the inseparable pseudo couples of the absurd theatre. Although Garcin, Estella, and Inez are not

a pretty trio, they are forced to define themselves through their macabre relationship. Estella needs to be fondled by Garcin, Garcin needs the trust of Inez who is not attracted by men, Inez wants Estella but Estella finds Inez repulsive. Since their desires for one another remain unfulfilled, their interdependence- though it is one of hate- ensures an eternity of torture. Through its characters and the theme of interdependence, *No Exit* can be interpreted as a strange triangle of love which remains unconsummated. As it is reflected in *No Exit*, the idea of impossibility of happiness and frustration are the recurring motifs commonly found in the works written under the effect of The Theatre of the Absurd.

In *No Exit*, the bell which works only intermittently and paperknife with no books have strong symbolic value in the perception of life peculiar to absurdism:

GARCIN: No, never mind. [He goes to the mantelpiece and picks up a paper-knife.] What's this?

VALET: Can't you see? An ordinary paper-knife.

GARCIN: Are there books here?

VALET: No.

GARCIN: Then what's the use of this? [VALET shrugs his shoulders.] Very well. You can go. (Sartre, 1989:7)

It is possibly hinted that there are lots of artifacts surrounding man only to fail him in need of help by not working properly and making the environment crowded by leaving a little space for peace and rest. The artifacts which deny their functions to serve to facilitate man's business seem nothing but absurd.

One of the most employed qualities of The Theatre of the Absurd is the contradiction of expressions and ironic approach to semantic speculations: "GARCIN: So one has to live with one's eyes open all the time? VALET: To live, did you say? GARCIN: Don't let's quibble over words." (Sartre, 1989: 6).

In *No Exit*, bizarre inclinations and preferences of people are mocked through Estella's somewhat absurd obsession with her appearance, her searching for mirror and finally the mismatch of the colors of her dress and the sofa. She even rejects sitting on the sofa because of this misfit: "But you can't expect me

to sit on that one. It would be too horrible for words. I'm in pale blue and it's vivid green." (Sartre, 1989: 10). Only in an absurd play, characters who occupy hell can think of such oddities.

Although *No Exit* does not have stylistic features introduced and applied by the theatre of the absurd, which is briefly outlined above, Sartre's play thematically resembles the way absurd plays perceive life. Garcin first reacts against the conditions of the room in which he will never sleep as there is no blinking in hell and the lights are constantly on. The idea of incessant torture and one's inability to find peace and rest in life, which are common messages found in absurd plays, are related to the audience through Garcin's protestation and uneasiness.

Inez's song narrating the destructive power of death, which inevitably sweeps humanity to grave no matter who they are and what their ranks are, parallels the perception of life as suffering, toil and frustration within The Theatre of the Absurd:

INEZ [singing]: What a crowd in Whitefriars Lane! [...] With a scaffold and the knife, Come, good folks, to Whitefriars Lane, Come to see the merry show! The headsman rose at crack of dawn [...] Chopping heads off generals, Priests and peers and admirals, All the highest in the land, What a crowd in Whitefriars Lane! See them standing in a line, Ladies all dressed up so fine. But their heads have got to go, Heads and hats roll down below. Come, good folks, to Whitefriars Lane, Come to see the merry show! (Sartre, 1989:18)

By "The merry show", Inez refers to the execution of people by the symbolic guillotine of the death. Inez's song demonstrates the bleak vision of all humanity which must be encountered after facing the tribulations of being alive.

The theatre of The Absurd depicts characters who attempt to define their identities and existence in relation to entities around themselves. Expressions of Garcin and Inez correspond with this reality. "GARCIN: [...] When I chose the hardest path, I made my choice deliberately. A man is what he wills himself to be [...] INEZ: One's whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it, ready for the summing up. You are—your life, and nothing else." (Sartre, 1989: 25). Garcin and Inez are at the peak of defining their roles and identities, which is termed as search for self; it is one of the significant

themes of the absurd theatre and it is where The Theatre of the Absurd intersects with existentialism.

Characters in absurd plays demonstrate an inherent contemplative quality and they are devoid of genuine action even when there is an opportunity for action. At one point in *No Exit*, Estella refers to Garcin's contemplative nature: ESTELLA: You think too much, that's your trouble (Sartre, 1989: 39). Hesitation and excessive thinking become the second nature for Garcin. This becomes particularly evident when Garcin finds the door of the chamber open. Although Garcin is very eager to leave the room before the door opens, he becomes hesitant and ultimately he cannot leave: INEZ: Well, Garcin? You're free to go. GARCIN [meditatively]: Now I wonder why that door opened. INEZ: What are you waiting for? Hurry up and go. GARCIN: I shall not go." (Sartre, 1989: 42).

Just as any absurd play does not offer solutions and solve the problems of conducts and morals, in *No Exit*, characters are left to their own devices; they are forced to accept the lot in their lives. Garcin's last expression "Well, well, let's get on with it." (Sartre, 1989: 46) is evidence that he will endure - with other characters - rather than resist what befalls his lot.

What differentiates *No Exit* from other absurd plays is the fact that it is not much interwoven with slapstick elements such as pratfalls and similar actions prevalent in absurd plays. Although *No Exit* - in some sense - includes pseudo couples of absurd plays, its characters are not as ironic as in their speech and as funny as in their actions, the qualities of which are prevalent in *Endgame* and other absurd plays. Moreover, though the characters of *No Exit* sometimes come to be grotesque, they are not fully as humorous as the average characters of a true absurd play.

2.3 Absurdism in *Endgame*

Endgame is the story of four characters who live in a world that seems to be coming to an end. As in *No Exit*, the setting is sparse and claustrophobic in *Endgame* too.

Hamm and Clov are the pseudo couples of *Endgame*; the quality is almost an inseparable feature of the absurd plays. Hamm and Clov fulfill the role of the master- servant relationship or oppressor and the oppressed successively in *Endgame* and Hamm's father and mother live in ashbins and occasionally emerge only to be cursed by their insensitive son. Master-servant relationship arises

from the need or the mutual relationship between the characters. In the play, Hamm is confined to wheelchair and he is totally dependent on Clov for move, likewise Clov reluctantly tries to do what Hamm orders him as there is a shortage of food outside of their shelter and Hamm is the only one who knows the combination of the locked cupboard. Hamm, who is selfish and blind, takes satisfaction that sooner or later everything comes to an end. Apart from these discontented pseudo couples, whose existence are bound to one another, the play includes Hamm's parents Nagg and Nell who are bound to live in ashbins as they lost their legs due to a bicycle accident once they had. Although they are not at ease because of the reprimands of their ungrateful son, they do not seem as discontented as Hamm and Clov; they are pleased by the reminiscence of their joyful memoirs. The play demonstrates the characters' fake scholasticism, so-called Aristotelian reasoning, lack of character development and a quite few genuine actions taking place on the stage, which are general the general characteristics of The Theatre of the Absurd.

The theme of interdependence among the four characters is conveyed to the audience by the relationship between them. Clov, Nell and Nagg depend on Hamm for food and Hamm depends on Clov for movement and vision. The absurd quality of *Endgame* runs throughout the play. *Endgame* opens up with Clov expressions: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." (Beckett, 1964: 1). The expression is diametrically opposed to the beginning of a traditional play. The expression is more suitable to the denouement of a play that is outside the domain of the theatre of the absurd.

Beckett combines the elements of tragedy and comedy in *Endgame* as it is required for an absurd play. Life is depicted to be a vicious circle in which man live only to suffer: "HAMM: I'll give you nothing more to eat. CLOV: Then we'll die. HAMM: I'll give you just enough to keep you from dying. You'll be hungry all the time." (Beckett, 1964:4). Through this dialogue with Clov, Hamm embodies the life in general which firstly fosters and then forces man to keep going on and not to die to face hardships and endure the toil of living. Death is perceived as an easy way out and an escape, hence death is not easily allowed by life by means of the circumstances and the people surrounding the individual. Hamm's pleas to Clov to put an end to his life is rejected by Clov possibly on the grounds that this time Clov himself comes to embody life which rejects easy

way outs. "HAMM: Why don't you finish us? (Pause) I'll tell you the combination of the cupboard if you promise to finish me. CLOV: I couldn't finish you." (Beckett, 1964:27). Hamm, who stands for humanity, should not die but endure.

In *Endgame*, characters are fed up with being alive and hardly bear their wearisome existence. Awareness of their anguish of life is reflected through the expressions of the characters: "HAMM: Will this never finish? [...] CLOV: Why this farce, day after day? [...] CLOV: There are so many terrible things. [...] HAMM: Do you not think this has gone on long enough?" (Beckett, 1964: 17,23, 32).

The cross examinations of the characters, which they direct to each other, are quests for a central meaning of life, which seems to have lost its intrinsic value. Their interrogations usually end up with the answers they supply for the questions asked again by themselves. The question "Why this farce day after day?" (Beckett, 1964: 11), is counterbalanced with a grim answer, which is proper to existentialism, and it reminds the term "*Dase in*" meaning being there: "You're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (Beckett, 1964: 38).

Characters are aware of the somber situation they are in and they mock the conditions they are "thrown in". Nell's farcical expression "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that." (Beckett, 1964:14), is the ironic acknowledgement of the anguish of life and giving up hope for a happy existence. Unhappiness is embraced as a normal state of human existence.

The dustbins, which Nagg and Nell inhabit, symbolize a coffin, death and the grave thus the inevitable end of the human beings to be swept to grave by death like wasted products thrown into garbage cans.

Endgame presents the contradiction of verbal speech and conduct which are the indispensable features of The Theatre of the Absurd. Dialogue between Nell and Nagg indicates the contradiction between what is said and how one behaves and reacts inconsistently to the utterance that has just gone before: "NAGG: Can you hear me? NELL: Yes. And you? NAGG: Yes. (Pause.) Our hearing hasn't failed. NELL: Our what? (Beckett, 1964:12).

The fact that The Theatre of the Absurd demonstrates the anxiety and frustration of man is related to the audience with the tailor's tale. The tailor fails to prepare a pair of trousers in a short time for his customer and he

usually puts off his customer's demand for a usual cloth. Angered by the postponement, the customer protests: "NAGG: God damn you to hell, Sir, no, it's indecent, there are limits! In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world. Yes Sir, no less Sir, the World! And you are not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months!" (Beckett, 1964: 17). In the story, God and the tailor are juxtaposed and God is reduced to human capabilities. Beckett seems to condemn life - a creation of God's six-day-effort - as not being perfect or at least "ready" for human happiness. The Englishman in the story, who waits for the preparation of a pair of simple trousers, is delayed on the grounds that it is not ready and similarly man in this world is constantly delayed in his attempt to reach ultimate and perpetual happiness.

No matter how much characters are plunged in mess and confusion in *The Theatre of the Absurd*, they long for order; it is a sort of the same extension of the endeavor to give meaning to their life. Clov's expression indicates this reality:

HAMM: What are you doing?

CLOV: Putting things in order [...]

HAMM: Order!

CLOV: I love order. It's my dream [...]

HAMM: What in God's name do you think you're doing? [...]

CLOV: I'm doing my best to create a little order. (Beckett, 1964:41)

Clov's obsession with order resembles Garcin's effort for the same goal. Garcin even encourages his "roommates" to emulate his endeavor to regulate their own lives: "GARCIN: I was setting my life in order. [INEZ starts laughing.] You may laugh, but you'd do better to follow my example." (Sartre, 1989: 16). Moreover, two plays resemble in terms of Hamm's unceasing pleas for painkiller and Garcin's frequent insistence for silence (Sartre, 1989: 17, 36, 39,49).

The struggle for catching and killing the flea both by Hamm and by Clov is another absurdist element in *Endgame*. Hamm and Clov fear that this small insect may give way to a kind of evolution from which a potential humanity, civilization can restart:

CLOV: (anguished, scratching himself): I have a flea!

HAMM: A flea! Are there still fleas?

CLOV: On me there's one. (Scratching.) Unless it's a crab louse.

HAMM: (very perturbed): But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God! (Beckett, 1989:24)

Hamm and Clov's attempts to prevent the emergence of humanity may either arise from the assumption that humanity will again be subject to suffering or once humanity emerge, human beings will treat one another inhumanly and oppress each other hence they will put another layer on to the unbearable side of the world.

In The Theatre of the Absurd, there is either no concept of time and place or they are indeterminate and faintly reminded to the reader and audience. Since life is assumed to be a constant meaningless cycle of grief and intermittent happiness, it is illogical to be precise in terms of time and place. Clov, who is aware of the absurdity of close inspection of time, gets angry with Hamm that insists Clov to pinpoint the time he oiled the castors of Hamm's wheelchair:

HAMM: Go and get the oilcan.

CLOV: What for?

HAMM: To oil the castors.

CLOV: I oiled them yesterday.

HAMM: Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!

CLOV: (Violently) That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent. (Beckett, 1964: 31, 32)

Clov philosophizes on the nature of time and the meaning of words; consequently he hints that if life has no meaning, Hamm –his benefactor or stepfather in this case- or somebody (may be a transcendental entity that is responsible for the mess and absurdity) must teach human beings the meaning of life and put everything into order from the beginning. In the same way, Hamm's interrogation of his father about his birth "Scoundrel! Why did you

engender me?" (Beckett, 1964:35) is a kind of questioning God about the genesis of life.

As it is emphasized, there is a search for meaning but this search does not diverge any path of divinity or consult a divine wisdom. Hamm mocks Clov and those who have hope for heaven and ultimate bliss and order: "That there's manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you? (Beckett, 1964: 38).

Religion and God are only mentioned for sarcasm as *The Theatre of the Absurd* blossomed in an age of decreasing faith. Hamm's expression "Lick your neighbor as yourself!" (Beckett, 1964: 49), which sounds like a Biblical commandment, seems to be mocking religious advices. This becomes particularly apparent when one thinks of the sardonic word "lick" which would have been in the original context as love or embrace. Although Hamm counsels Clov to show affection for his neighbors, the awful conditions in which Hamm's own father and mother live and Hamm's insincerity and vulgarity to his parents point out that there is no room for even elderly fathers and mothers in society let alone "licking" the close relatives and neighbors.

Hope for finding an explanation for the existential enigma of man in relation to religion is rejected once again when Hamm tries to pray God with other characters but later he fails for he is interrupted several times. Ultimately, Hamm ends up rejecting and insulting God.

By aligning significant things with unimportant details (attempts for praying to God and Nagg's insistence for sugar-plum to satisfy his hunger, Clov's intervention to prayer because of an unimportant creature like a rat), Beckett seems to say within an absurd vortex that prayer to a transcendental being equals to any other mundane speeches interrupted by trivial actions.

HAMM: Let us pray to God.

NAGG: Me sugar-plum!

CLOV: There's a rat in the kitchen!

HAMM: You'll finish him later. Let us pray to God.

CLOV: Again!

NAGG: Me sugar-plum!

HAMM: God first! (Pause.) Are you right?

CLOV (resigned): Off we go. (Beckett, 1964:38,39)

Hamm's final rejection of God's existence indicates the trivialization and failure of his prayer that would redeem them from the absurdity of their existence.

The dialogues between Hamm and Clov about the nature of life and accepting it as a game points out the fact that they are indeed the tragicomic characters whose roles in advance have been reserved in a play which is limited to entering, enacting and exiting. Self-reflexive nature of the play, which means even the characters are aware of the fact that they are the players of a play like life and they usually hint it with the words proper to theatre such as aside, soliloquy, is obvious. This kind of self-reflexivity, with which characters are stripped from genuine action and speech and become the puppets of "the playwright", abounds in *Endgame*. Realizing this fact, characters usually refer to themselves and their situation as the instruments of a play:

HAMM: After the audition [...] Enough of that, it's story time where was I [...] CLOV All kinds of fantasies! That I'm being watched [...] HAMM: Me to play [...] CLOV: Let's stop playing! [...] HAMM: Then let it end! CLOV: This is what we call making an exit [...] HAMM: Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing. [...] HAMM: Since that's the way we're playing it [...]let's play it that way. [...] (Beckett, 1964: 36,48,50,52, 54, 55,57,58,59)

Endgame, which is one of the prime examples of The Theatre of the Absurd, seems to be mocking theatrical devices of traditional drama. Hamm insults Clov by including conventional theatrical terms and condemns Clov as he does not know them. "HAMM: An aside, ape! Did you never hear an aside before? (Pause.) I'm warming up for my last soliloquy." (Beckett, 1964:55). Hamm's response and despise can reversely be interpreted as a kind of reaction against the precepts of the conventional theatre as if everyone had to be familiar with them.

Although Clov is oppressed and verbally abused by Hamm, he cannot leave Hamm till the last minute. "HAMM: I'm obliged to you, CLOV: For your services. CLOV: (turning sharply) Ah pardon, it's I am obliged to you." (Beckett, 1964:57). Clov's obsession to leave Hamm resembles Garcin's inability to desert the torture chamber and his roommates when the door opens. Garcin's expression, which closes the play, "Well, well, let's get on with it ..." (Sartre, 1989:50) is similar to Hamm's last expressions: "Since that's the way we're

playing it... let's play it that way..." (Beckett.1964: 59). Both of the expressions indicate that the characters of the two plays opt for enduring their suffering instead of changing it, which is in tune with the ultimate message of The Theatre of the Absurd:

It [The Theatre of the Absurd] attempts to make him [man] face up to the human condition as it really is to free him from illusions that are bound to cause constant maladjustment and disappointment [...] the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions - and to laugh at it. (Esslin, 1961:137)

3. Conclusion: "You're on earth, there's no cure for that!"

What Esslin points out above for the theatre of the absurd is realized by Beckett who achieved to blend the elements of comedy and horror in *Endgame* and drew the audience/readers' attention both to the farcical and macabre condition of man. Sartre, who laid the foundations of existentialism, did not have in mind to produce an absurd play in stylistic manner but what he wanted to do is to expound his philosophy by means of a theatrical production. Nevertheless, there are ample cross sections where the paths of the two plays intersect. While *No Exit* relates "Hell is—other people!" (Sartre, 1989: 49), meaning interpersonal relationships are inevitably hellish and it prompts individual commitment within existential thought, *Endgame* counsels "You're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (Beckett, 1964: 38), to accept ones lot and suffering in life. While two movements set forth the futility of the human effort on the surface level, both of them indeed urge its addressees into drawing meaning and having a stance against the humdrum nature of life beneath the surface plane. Although Absurdism insists on abandonment of temporal setting and non-linear plots which diverge from Existentialism whose exponents prefer traditional mode of writing with linear plots, the philosophical tract of Existentialism and the literary path of Absurdism intersect in the thematic sphere with search for self, the interdependence of the pseudo couples of *No Exit* and those of *Endgame* and the absence of character development. Although *No Exit* and *Endgame*, which were written respectively under the effect of Existentialism and Absurdism, seem to counsel withdrawal from the joy and perseverance of life, Clov of *No Exit*, who states "I love order. It's my dream" (Beckett, 1964: 41), and *Endgame*'s Garcin who hints his obsession with organization for his life by expressing "I was

setting my life in order" (Sartre, 1989: 16) concisely sums the longings of individuals for an organized and better life in a disorganized world. Both movements with Sartre's and Beckett's archetypical works counsel individual not resistance but acceptance and endurance to life.

Works Cited

- Beckett, Samuel. *Endgame*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Trans. John Willet. London: Methuen, 1947.
- Coates, J.B. *Existentialism*. Cambridge University Press, 1953.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. New York: Vintage Books, 1961.
- Galens, David and Lynn M. Spampinato. *Drama for Students*. Detroit: Gale. Vol. II. 1998.
- Hall, H. Gaston. *Aspect of the Absurd*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960.
- Milne, Mark Ira. *Literary Movements for Students*. Detroit: Gale. Second Edition. 2009.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *Existentialism and Humanism*. Trans. Philip Mairet. London: Methuen, 1966.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *No Exit and Three Other Plays*. New York: Vintage International Editions/A Division of Random House, 1989.
- Wegener, H. Adolph. *The Absurd in Modern Literature*. Vol. 41. No. 2. Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1967.