

Entropy in Beckett's Plays - A Review

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Abstract

This paper looks at power of paradox in Samuel Beck x in Samuel Beckett's plays and entropy and ambiguity of human life. His creation of extreme entropy, possible only in an open system drama, has paved the way for the man to settle down his existential problems. The idea of entropy first appeared in Socratic philosophy. It was mainly interpreted with regard to the philosophy of creation. As Mckirahan1 has narrated Anaximander developed the idea that the world turns back to its first chaos. These thoughts gradually showed up in the dramatic works of Greek playwrights as a dominating major theme of drama which introduced the subjects of tragedy as a kind of entropy or the second rule of Thermodynamics. Alongside these George Steiner has asserted "Greek tragedy interpreted the concept of entropy and death of time in terms of determinism and fatalism". The belief in the idea that time takes us towards destruction known as increasing entropy and that we can not stop in any way this increasing entropy has been traced in the works of ancient Greece up to the 17th century. The concept of time and its connection with entropy received drastic changes with the works of Newton, kepler, Descartes and many more intellectuals. They viewed the world as a mechanical system. Man was viewed as a machine. Efforts to bring back increasing entropy and defence against the death of the individual or society can be seen in the concepts like Mary Shelly's Frankenstein, literary utopia, Huxley's Brave New World, Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and Max Plank's Quantum Theory. With the world's advances, entropy too made drastic progress and entered the realm of information.

Keywords: Ambiguity of Self, Beckett, Entropy, tragedy

Introduction

Theatre of Absurd has done some modifications such as destruction of the concept of drama as no more than a literary form, reemphasis of the setting, its close relationship with ballet, acrobatics, and etc. which in a sense have contributed a lot to a devaluation of language which, in turn, has been in congruence with the trend of the time and its immediate needs. Subsequently, what Beckett is supposed to do in his works is to communicate the incommunicable. All he is to do is to talk; silence has no place in his works because one can only be silent only when he has attained his true self and his own identity. "To talk means to stand outside oneself, he who does not possess himself and remains concealed from himself is compelled to talk, Only he who has attained his own identity can be silent".

Objective:

This paper intends to explore concept of the theatre of the Absurdism , ambiguity and Entropy is, technically at least, quite distinct from that of the playwrights who have featured. The most outstandingly origin of their plays of Beckett

The chaotic state of time at once demanding and unbearable and at times elusive and destructive has been one of the basis upon which the two dramatists' characterization and setting creation hinge upon. The two playwrights, specifically Beckett, have been aware of the concept of time and its connection with entropy that received drastic changes with the works of Newton, Kepler, Descartes and many more intellectuals who viewed the world as a mechanical system within which man was viewed as a machine. Efforts to bring back increasing entropy and defense against the death of the individual or society can be seen in the concepts like Mary Shelly's Frankenstein, literary utopia, Huxley's Brave New World, Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and Max Plank's Quantum Theory.

Samuel Beckett: Age, Impairment, and the Drama

Upon the observation of some negative effects of technology such as Atomic Bomb, time revealed its devastating effect whose manifestation can be seen in the devastating catastrophe hovering over the characters and their setting in the Endgame, the existentially wondering vagrants of Waiting for Godot, the ever on the move condition of Davies in the Caretaker reminding one of the case of many people after world war II and other civil wars. The world they stage is the one which has turned into a kind of resurrection in all philosophical, physical, and existential aspects driving the writers bored with everything to write about a time that was approaching, suppressing everything on its way, turning all the established social and philosophical doctrines upside down, and revolving humanity in its waves. Amidst these alterations, for sure, literature is no exception. This is the time that in the realm of literature, as Holton has asserted, theatre of chaos and entropy emerges, a time when all absolutes changed into indefinites and all perfect premises turned into incomplete ones. We can detect that Beckett delicately has manifested this aspect of time from the philosophical view of the shattered doctrines of postmodernism and Pinter has revealed through highlighting the postmodernism psychological threat of different types crystallized in the language and atmosphere of his theater. What the two have done has been the deployment of the dynamic adaptation principles harmonizing smoothly the other tenets and devices of the theater to put their message across the viewer/ reader. Such view, initially, could be seen in Beckett's article on Proust in which his statement about time properly reveals the increasing entropy targeting humanity, his existence, and his self. No doubt, he has understood time and maximum entropy better than anybody else as can be detected in his works and his subsequent impact on the

works of his disciples like Pinter in the themes they stage in the theatre; he has detected the existence of increasing entropy in almost everything and tells (Israel Shenker, 1997) that I see no discipline anywhere (147) even in prose believing that time not only has changed physical things but also has affected written elements and that this entropy would lead to the full destruction of everything like what he has staged in the skull like setting of *Endgame*. Within this entropy incorporating menace of different types, man and his view of his identity and self have been left at the mercy of entropy and menace staged in the form of a boarding house in a remote shore and its only in tumult guest, Stanley Webber. Beckett's employment of physical entropy as the dominant theme of his introduced two major plays smoothly paves the way for the communicative entropy upon which he bases the building blocks of enabling the viewer and the reader to challenge himself and deal with his existential problems like what Pinter has similarly staged via the chaotic social norms threatening the identity of characters forcing them pursue their selves and identities desperately. Where Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* turns Pozzo blind, motivates Vladimir and Estragon to commit suicide in their anguish of absurdity of existence and being, kills Nell and mistreats Nagg as a father figure, haunts Hamm by the blackness and imminent danger waiting outside, and assigns Clov the drudgery of endless, meaningless servitude, and obedience to Hamm in the *Endgame* as well as the whole absurdity of life in both plays, his selection of setting, that is, a deserted place with no sign of life and modernity in *Waiting for Godot* and a far remote Skull-like room in *Endgame* enable him to project in the reader/viewer mind his intended theme.

Entropy in Beckett's Plays.

Having turned all other aspects of the theater chaos-stricken, to penetrate into the sheer core of the theme, Beckett deploys his most impressive technique, namely, his annihilation of the structure of language in every aspect violating its syntax, semantics, etc for the sake of utmost communicative entropy creation whose best exemplification can be detected in Lucky's supposedly meaningless and uncontrollable stream of words. He talks seriously and delivers a long, gabled monologue about the fate of man caught between an indifferent God and an inhospitable nature (Pattie, 2000: 76) highlighting the exact dilemma of modern man and the dangling philosophical paradoxes, that is, his speech is in fact "carefully structured so as to address in turn the nature of the divine, the human and the mineral, and to suggest a movement towards complete entropy (Sass, 1992:367). Through Lucky's speech, Beckett places "emphasis on new moves and even new rules for language games, having exceeded and subverted the old rules and limits (Afroghe, 2010: 177) enabling him to convey meaning through nonsense and pave the way for the better reflection of the absurdity and misery of post modern era; what has been staged through the creation of utmost imminent threat of different types and nature by his disciple, Harold Pinter. Harold Pinter, with this regard from his own view point, at times turns to the menacing role of language and at other times deploys silences which are more penetrative and more menacing than the language itself.

He incorporates such delicate nuances of maneuver over the use of language and characters in the framework which lends itself to chaos. To shed light on the plight of modern man within his really ordinary setting and routine jobs, he, essentially, remains on the firm ground of everyday reality (Esslin 36) a bit different from the chaotically created characters and settings of Samuel Beckett to approach the reader/viewer's view of his self and identity right through the horizon of his/her thinking mode and status. The very rudiment of each ordinary setting and activity may give rise to a kind of unpredictable menace which gives way to themes of ambiguity, mystery, and terror in his plays in the very core of the social and personal life of the characters implicating the idea that the whole existence is chaos-governed and at the initiative of chaos. He creates an atmosphere of chaotic menace hovering over the characters in which nothing is predictable; neither the characters nor their motives can be easily detected. The outside forces as well as the individuals either within or between them-selves can act as the source of menace enabling Pinter to employ the possibilities of the kind of situation giving rise to these types of menaces in his plays in which both the characters and the audience face an atmosphere, apparently funny but actually having suggestiveness of some impending threat from outside (Poonam, 2009: 87).

Such a chaotic psychological status is only captured through the characters' speech created by the playwright maneuvering over the chaos principles. In a more close scrutiny, we see that as (Dukore, 1988) asserts most of "Pinter's plays begin comically but turn to physical, psychological or potential violence-sometimes, in varying sequences, to all three (24). In *The Birthday Party* the very name as mentioned is suggestive; the danger of "the weasel under the cocktail cabinet" is imminent. Birth, the harbinger of a new life, a new identity and self, here, turns out to be a new form of resurrection. Stanley's strong denial of attendance in his own birthday party climaxes the drama as if he knew it would result in his reluctant death. If he knew, then why should he have attended the party? As it seems, the key point to the question lies in the emergence of menace, inevitable, and unpredictable in nature threatening every aspect of man's existence. Stanley is seemingly entrapped in remote lodging house. What kind of menace may have given rise to his imprisonment?

To him fear of menace may indicate the universal trauma of man in the world. In the *Birthday party*, Stanley's real entrapment, his biggest mental menace and obsession is his own sense of self and identity hovering over his existence. Stanley, the protagonist, and other minor characters of the play in their own idiosyncratic behavior and way of living just like Davies in *Caretaker* are in a constant power struggle to Rahimipoor and Edoyan 15 maintain their identity and live their lives amidst the oncoming problems of different types. This manifests the fact that in Pinter's plays dominance assertion (Abolfateh and Khalid, 2006:52), another chaotic motive, over another servers as the primary means characters not only establish identity but survive in a world where to allow oneself to assume a subservient position, for even a moment, can result in annihilation-physical, psychological, or both (Prentice, 2000: 28). In *The Caretaker*, Pinter's second major work, the three

characters are actively involved in the process of revising their condition and mind their identities. The room is cluttered with so many appliances of suburb bourgeois life style. But the majorities are out of functions.

This chaos-stricken room per se is in need of redecorating which is indeed adopting the identity of a modern house. Its current condition is a reflection of the values and order symptomatic of a modern home. This dilapidated house which is on the way of achieving a new identity shelters characters who are in pursuit of their selves and identities, too.

Narrative Entropy in the Plays of Samuel Beckett

Davies, the major character, lives under an assumed name and claims to have left his certificates in Sidcup clings to this opportunity to make the best out of it. On the line of enjoying a secure identity, both Davies and Stanley turn to their past; Davies as mentioned time and again refers to and wishes to go to Sidcup to fetch his documents which he has left with somebody fifteen years ago. The chaotic state of time, weather, and low self-esteem of the characters can be seen as the evidence of the presence of chaos theory principles in Pinter's staging. His assumed name, his identity should be verified by who! But just like Stanley Webber is stuck in his past identity. They are both attempting to find a way of getting rid of present distracted and dispossessed sense of self. Stanley turns to his past identity, his having a job as a great pianist to soothe himself; an insurance company confirms Davies Card to stabilize his assumed identity; Vladimir and Estragon need Godot confirmation of their existence. To all their dismay there is one way to salvation just like this idea, for example, that Stanley's socially chaotic status as a respected pianist should be revised and crystallized in order to gain his already identity. Davies' assertions about his past, his own comparison with those who are inferior to him like the Blacks, Greeks, Poles, and other aliens like the scotch git and the Irish hooligan are endeavors on the way of attracting Aston's attention, gaining his favor, and defining his shattered, baseless identity on that relationship. Waster has nicely summed up this idea that: Pinter's characters are at the mercy of each other on the periphery of life. The chaos theory which was developed and introduced in the field of physics can now be seen and traced in almost in any other field. The characteristics of this theory can be easily traced and detected in the works of art literature. Dramatic literature has delicately staged and illustrated the same mode of signification the theory has followed in its texts and performances.

At postmodern era, (Samuel Beckett, 2007) and Harold Pinter through the lenses of the Theater of Absurd and the Comedy of Menace have tried to depict and highlight post modern characteristics and "these contemporary conflicts [which] all deal with a re-demarcation of our identity. They are rejection of those ideas, of economic and ideological governmental violence, which disregard who we are individually. They are also a rejection of a scientific or administrative questioning which establishes one's identity (Afroghe 2010: 22) in a linear manner. In this post-modern society, which to modernists had come to the point of savagery, chaos, absolute entropy and disorder, people who have lost all their hope and belief in a

metaphysical, trans-historical, absolute basis for their existence, whose dream of a philosophy for this existence justification has smashed, try to legitimate their existence, forge their identities based on their fabricated values; hence, People get involved either in an endless game like that of Beckett's Endgame or fall in the reverie of the game of waiting like that of Waiting for Godot, take refuge in the seclusion like Stanley in the Birthday Party, or end up everlasting wondering under an assumed name like Davies in the Caretaker. In their own idiosyncratic styles they have touched upon the existential problems of the modern man who has been driven to the corner, dislocated, alienated, disillusioned, and left with a blurred view of his self and being. Within the framework of chaos theory justification, in the theater Rahimipoor and Edoyan of absurd what the two dramatists are following is bringing back stability and order regarding the audience view of self and identity through the creation of-based on the butterfly principle of chaos theory- chaotic and turbulent view of self and identity in the characters in their theater. This is alongside this idea that one person's chaos and turbulence can culminate in another's order and stability which is the gist of the butterfly effect of the chaos theory.

Conclusion

Beckett has changed drama from closed system to that of an open one. He has tried to create chaos of self awareness in his viewer and reader which can help him out come up with solutions for his existential problems whose prominent one is the ambiguity of self. As literary critic Raymond Federman notes, "[Beckett] simply allows his storyless creations to define themselves on the basis of their own substance – words, empty words"³⁰. Being inspired by the physical entropy, he has deployed many techniques to go towards communicative entropy. This kind of entropy is reflected in Beckett's works in the form of chaotic message signs which in turn gives rise to the creation of chaotic self awareness which acts as the driving force for the man to put forward a vivid definition of his self.

As David Berlo has asserted meaning does not exist in message, meaning can not be discovered, meaning exists in people. Therefore, man learns the meaning, adds some meaning to that, changes it, annihilates it and make it a part of his own possession. All he does with the language resembles what Krapp does with his self and identity. By reducing his life to a "series of retrospects on discarded selves and relationships"³⁴ that he has the ability to edit, Krapp shirks the burden of continuity. His tact of utilizing different forms of language and different other techniques in creating physical entropy has enabled him provide extreme communicative entropy within which enables the tramps approach their real selves. In the end, he hopes the viewer and the reader in that of entropy of different types and mainly through the communicative entropy of language can settle down his existential problems and get to a stabilized sense of his true self.

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