



The Survey of Minimalism as the Global Trend of Existential Revelation in Post Modern Drama

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

At post modern era in which man is stuck and at the mercy of ever increasing technology many things have been abridged for the sake of saving time, energy, and budget. In the realm of literature, too, the dramatic art has turned to be as minimal as possible to convey the appropriate meaning of specific purpose. This minimalism can be detected in different aspects of drama including characterization, setting, and language specifically to be in complete harmony with the way the intended theme is purported to be revealed and conveyed to the reader or the audience. Hence, some of the major playwrights and some of their prominent works are discussed to illustrate this modern trend in the realm of dramatic theater as the dominant mode of presenting the existential obsession themes such as self and identity in drama in this paper.

Keywords: Drama; minimalism; theme; post modernism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

At post modern era, the years after the Second World War, there has been a drastic change in the way the world has witnessed alterations in the way people view diverse things differently. One of the major alterations concerns the way we recollect on our being, self and identity. On the surface, it may be taken as the most taken-for-granted concept in reality; it turns out as one of the most passives of all the postmodern concepts as far as post modern man's existential obsessions are concerned. Dramatic art has proved to be one of the most successful forms of art in revealing man's obsessions due to its penetrating nature. The way this literary genre carries out its great purpose has proved to be one the most delicate functions of art and science. Meanwhile, it has been far less remote from the attention of researchers to exercise scientific practices on abstract arts dealing with the most sophisticated and intangible existential obsessions which haunt the very deep layers of man's view of his self, identity and existence. Such upside down view of modern man manifested in dramatic art can be justified in the shadow of changes in science, religion, and art and its traces can be detected in many other fields though it may lend to diverse justifications. This study is going to shed light on revealing the greatest modern man's obsession, his view of his self, identity, and his existence, via the channel of post modern dramatic art specifically in the greatest works of the most impressive postmodern playwrights hinging on the minimalism trend in theatre.

2. DISCUSSION

Among the many themes and concepts running through the researches, less has been done in the realm of existential obsessions of post modern man in dramatic art of postmodernism. No specific research has been directly carried out on the theme of the ambiguity of self, identity, and existence through the lenses of minimalism in art and drama specifically. It would open up new horizons for making these inaccessible and unfathomable concepts totally tangible and well structured on line of manifesting these obsessions.

As Thorley has asserted one of the attempts in the realm of dramatic art at twenties century has been staging the daily lives of ordinary people in realistic way that often contains social and political criticism but this one is not something

new and has been exercised throughout the history of drama and literature. One major purpose this idiosyncratic post modern theatre has got, concerns the individual's search for identity, the real nature of a person, in a hostile outer world and the arduous obstacle and threat of communicating with other individuals. The researcher is going to penetrate into the deepest layer of this existential obsession through the lenses of minimalism in drama. It would be promising on the line of manifesting the theme under the discussion through such new and novel look at the dramatic art.

These obsessions are well manifested in 20th century writers of prose fiction including Franz Kafka whose novels and stories' characters also face alarmingly incomprehensible predicaments which have highlighted this modern sense of human purposelessness in a universe without meaning or value as the absurd nature of human existence; and philosophers like Sartre [1] and Shariatti [2] who have stipulated the point as follows: From the ancient times to the renaissance and even to 17th and 18th century, human being has had the same clear -cut definition as other natural phenomena have had. Human being as a creature on the globe has had a taken- for- granted meaning, but with the advent of 20th century and its idiosyncrasies, the already taken-for-granted defined creature turns to the most passive of all, bewildered, disillusioned, dislocated, and purposeless. Philosophers, intellectuals, and even ordinary people all encounter the bewilderment of simple questions: Who am I? What am I? Why am I here? What will be the be-all and the be-end of me? This attitude is also reflected in the works of the dramatists of the 1950 including Edward Albee, Vaclav Havel, Jean Genet, and Ionesco just to name some. Such a drama enjoyed labels ranging from minimalism to reductionist, existentialist, nihilist, and absurdist which "were applied in the description of a dominant trend in the twentieth-century theoretical canon that is commonly associated with dramatists like Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Aderno, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, and a number of avant-garde writers in France, Britain, Italy, Spain, the United States, and elsewhere" [3]. The theatre emerged from this trend of theoretical production has been known as 'the Theater of Absurd' [4]. On the line of handling these ambiguities, drama again has proved to be promising. This research has a tendency to highlight the way these modes of existential thinking and above of all the great obsession of

modern man, his existential problems such as the ambiguity of self and identity, is introduced, manipulated, and manifested in the major works of these great dramatists at twentieth century. The revelation of their own dramatic status from the view of critics gives rise to the greatness of the theme under discussion. Metman asserts that, "by far the most profound and daring writer associated with this development in drama reflecting the man condition in twentieth century is Samuel Beckett, who has gone considerably further than any of his contemporaries" [5]. It would be manifested why Beckett has been introduced as the linking chain of past and future of this trend. This is, in a sense, because of merely showing human existence in its unadorned nakedness. He strips his figures so thoroughly of all those qualities in which the audience might recognize itself that, to start with, an alienation effect is created that leaves the audience mystified. That is to say, the vacuum between what is shown on the stage and the onlooker has become so unbearable that the latter has no alternative but either to reject and turn away or to be drawn into the enigma of plays in which nothing reminds him of any of his purposes in and reactions to the world around him. The world which to the post modern man has become elusive, unfathomable, uncontrollable, meaningless, and in a harrowing turmoil which may be the impact of the previous world wars, the imminent threat of a new international war, and the ever increasing impact of technology on the life of post modern man in any way imaginable.

Another dramatist who through theater of menace has captured the same notion and voices Beckett in 20th literature is the noble-prize winner, Harold Pinter. As Gussow puts it in more than 30 plays – written between 1957 and 2000 and including masterworks like "The birthday party", "The caretaker", "The home coming" and "Betrayal", Mr. Pinter has "captured the anxiety and ambiguity of life in the second half of the 20th century with terse, hypnotic dialogue filled with gaping pauses and the prospect of imminent violence" [6]. With regard to their works for example, Hoffman has asserted "Beckett's works are not empty intellectual exercises, but profound explorations of human intellectual dislocation" [7]. In the very essence of all the works, as Pinter has stated, there is an immediate need for holding of a primary fact of existence. What lies at the deepest level of all these is the question of the quest for self, a reality which has been overshadowed by the

subsequent gaping horror and claustrophobia of the neurotic's world within which we exist. The views deployed by other playwrights will do and serve the same purpose. What John Osborn has illustrated in *Look Back in Anger*, What Ionesco has staged in *Exit the King*, What Sheppard, and Stoppard have all tried to show in sense follow the same mode of minimalism as way of expressing their themes.

This fact that all works of art reveal some aspects of man's internal fears and external limitations has been a great driving force behind the zest for research in the field of literature and drama. The way these works manifest man's incomplete knowledge of his existence and his vulnerability which haunt his consciousness and blur the valor in him, leave drastic impression on his behavior and life has ignited the zest for this research. The researcher in field of drama as one of the main genre of literature has tried to manifest the tact of these great contemporary dramatists in handling one of the great obsessions of modern man at this post modern era, that is to say, the ambiguity of self and identity as the dominant existential obsession of man in their major plays via the theatre of the absurd and at the shadow of the minimalism trend.

Why is this self not clear? Why is it ambiguous? What are the underlying origins of this ambiguity of self? And above all how this theme is manifested in their works? How minimalism can serve the same function alongside the techniques justifiable on the basis of chaos principles in delineating these obsessions? What is Minimalism?

The assertion of the intended meaning in the fewer words is known as minimalism. At the contemporary time, at the age of the media of different times, and the age of shortage of time for the many tasks ahead to be tackled, there is an immediate need for many things to be shortened and abridged. In the realm of literature, this trend has got its clear status. The texts are turning to less words and messages. They try to reveal what they have in mind in less words and space. They turn to symbols, silence and the like for the revelation of what they want to convey.

The trace and justification of minimalism in the theatre is illustrated to show how the theatre of the absurd hinging on this technique can be promising in revelation of existential problems

which would be impossible in any other way available. This research, more delicately in some parts, has endeavored to put forward cross comparison of the way the playwrights have dealt with these themes hinging on the minimal features in their theatre in every tenet. References to the philosophical, historical, and social backgrounds of the plays and authors, the special characterization in their behavior and mode of acting, the analysis of the themes and phenomena deployed by them, and all the techniques through which specifically the manipulation of language as the top minimized feature of this theatre are put forward to help one out come up with a comprehensive and birds' eye view of these great playwrights works and the dominant minimal trend in their approach.

One of the main purposes of literature and drama in particular has been reflection of the problems of time and place of the writers or their predictions. One of the main obsessions of modern man at the postmodern era, no doubt, has been handling the question of self and identity the postmodern man holds. The delineation of this theme would appease the modern man's quest for disambiguating his identity and attaining his true self upon which meaning restores to his existence and this, in turn, would pave the way for his salvation. If post modern theatre is going to highlight critical obsessions like these at this era, it has got to "attach and deconstruct a number of the core ideas often presented in modernist theoretical productions" [8]. To pave the way for the clarification of such views it turns to minimalistic approaches in a sense that it creates an atmosphere like what goes on in CLL teaching method in which the teacher leaves the burden of learning to the learner, stops sidetracking the learner's learning, and helps him out towards autonomy. This method of teaching simplifies and minimizes the role of teacher at the cost of learners' own pace of learning. The postmodern theatre turns to minimalism as one of handling intangible and inaccessible constructs like existential obsessions, ambiguity of self, absurdity of being and existence. In this way, the minimal features of this theatre create an atmosphere for enabling the reader or the spectator to find a way of getting to the appropriate solution for his own turmoil of feelings and thinking. This theater "does not view the world as an absurd, meaning place of existence teetering to the edge of absolute destruction, but rather as a place where meaning and truth are relative and subject to different

understandings and interpretations" [8] via the framework of minimalism the question of existence is manipulated and suggested differently. From this new viewpoint, "existence can only be properly conceptualized by living and thinking outside the standard dynamics of human relations and perceptions of space and time" [8]. The theatre which is supposed to shoulder the responsibility of clarifying such unfathomable concepts need to be revolutionized itself. In this way different exercise have been done on the theatre style to make it congruent for the revelation of the intended meaning and purpose. Samuel Beckett has turned to seemingly non drama. Pinter has turned to isolated rooms and the imminent and unavoidable danger. Sheppard has deployed pastiches of "different literary and historical sources in order to provide a new perspective on seemingly disparate ideas" [8]. The transition of changing and diverting the theatre from the normal structure towards its minimalistic format, for sure, has been a smooth one in mode and tone to make the audience and the postmodern generation for its acceptance. The figure who proved to start this turning point from the majority of critics' view point is applied to Becket and his followers specially Pinter. Beckett has paved the way for the establishment of this new theater. In his theatre the "reduction and denuding of things are ordinary and strange, and appear out of proportion to their surroundings, as in a surrealist painting" [9]. As examples, we can see that the characters in his theatre occupy far less space. The theatre is "free of any character-in-setting pattern, and independent of social and historical time and place indicators" [9]. Language in his theatre has given its place to silence; characters have turned to no characters and the whole atmosphere has slipped in a kind of indivisible mood. Even the characters have been belittled to unpredictable sounds of indefinite source. This on the line of minimalism goes even into a kind of ritualism which "progressively rids them of the contingent aspect of the physical world." [9] the identity and self of the characters have smashed and divided into different parts. These are in a sense alongside the certain characteristics of postmodern literature which "rely (heavily, for example, on fragmentation, paradox, questionable narrators, etc.) and a reaction against enlightenment ideas implicit in modernist literature." [10] this method of approaching the existential problems of man hinging on the minimalistic features has originated from the era's idiosyncrasies. It is because "there were human souls in the spiritual world during the

1933-1945 events that were approaching a new birth. Born just after the war, this generation began to reach maturity around 1966-68." [11] the borders limiting human thinking scope, his status in the world, and the way they are supposed to define their being which has been detached from the already established norms and taken-for-for granted concepts tend to minimal way of presentation and justification. These are carried out via the theatre of the absurd which incorporate the appropriate mode of presentation of abstract concepts in its scope and purpose. This mode of presentation has not been done merely in the realm of literature. It has been a mode of thinking penetrating into different fields of science, art, and finally theater. As to the point example "minimalist sculptures were pre-planned and prefabricated (or arranged from prefabricated materials), minimal artists avoided the improvisational process of creation associated with expressionism" [11]. The post modern playwrights have turned to the creation of theatre which has minimal approach in its scope and exercise. The prominent feature of this theatre which is promising in revelation of the intended themes and minimal in nature has been turning even to monologue. It has been time and again confirmed that from "Samuel Beckett's minimalist theatre of integrity, to Philippe Minyana's "inventories "of everyday speech, to Karen Finley's provocative and political solo performance pieces, these qualities are laced through radically different types of theatrical monologue" [12]. A brief introduction of what writers have done on this line paves the way for a better understanding of the concept we are dealing with."What connects the writers who depict the interior lives of characters rhetorically (Gustave Flaubert, George Elliot, or D.H. Lawrence) and those who do so psychologically (Virginia Woolf, James Joyce or William Faulkner) is that they all have "faced the problem...of the limitation of verbal patterns as conveyors of thought and characterization through thought". Here one of the major factors of postmodern playwrights for turning to minimalism shows up is the inadequacy of language for the revelation of identity, abstract concepts, and "subjectivity" [13].

This theoretical trend of minimalism in drama with the orientation of language is consummated by some works of the postmodern playwrights. "With the production of Krapp's Last Tape which was originally written as a monologue for the actor Patrick Magee who performed a part of Molloy on a BBC production, the minimalist

drama showed its true face more significantly than before. In most of other plays of Beckett produced before and after Krapp there is a tendency toward minimalism" [14]. The reason why Beckett has been selected as the hallmark of this trend in theatre is because he has been introduced as the linking point of modernism and post modernism to give birth to the theatre of the absurd. As everything has been minimized in this theatre from characters, themes, setting, language, and on the whole all aspects of this new theatre to become known as a new form for a new purpose, it becomes clear that beyond this sheer seemingly nonsense lays the deepest meaning for new mode of understanding and revelation. As Sharma puts it "one of the most important figures to be characterized as both absurdist and postmodern is Samuel Beckett. The work of Samuel Beckett is often seen as marking the shift from modernism to post modernism in literature" [15]. Beckett in his minimalist approach to illustrate the harrowing condition of post modern man, exercises his tact in his plays. He focuses on "the poverty of language and man as a failure". He has tried to feature "characters stuck in inescapable situations attempting impotently to communicate whose only recourse is to play, to make the best of what they have." [15] As Sharma has indicated more in this regard he has consummated what the others have tried to reveal. What William S. Burroughs has done in *Naked Lunch* which is fragmentary in every aspect. What Brian Gysin has done in his "cut-up" technique in which "(similar to Tzara's "Dadaist Poem") [...] words and phrases are cut from a newspaper or other publication and rearranged to form a new message" [15]. This method of creating a new minimal language in the theatre is on the line of making the character ready to project on the audience or the spectator to help him out come up with a solution for his own existential problems. This is because in "every encounter with a theoretical character the ontological dimensions attributed to it by the public are reflected through the concepts and images projected on stage" [16]. This may be in total agreement with postmodernists who "accept the limitations of multiple views, fragmentation, and indeterminacy" [17]. To present a better example of how Beckett has tried to stipulate the minimal approach in his works alongside all other tact, one which can be international in scope is his tact is character selection. Beckett does not reflect on certain individual of a certain nationality in a certain country. As an absurdist playwright, Beckett shows man as a human being with

fantasies, dreams, hallucinations and suffering [18]. When he is trying to minimize the nationality and culture of the individual, one can come up with this idea that he may be in search of eliminating one single language. Hence, he creates a minimal and seemingly non language which sounds nonsense on the surface but in the long terms it turns out to be the language of all humanity everywhere on the globe. When his works have been translated into different languages taking the same minimal features into account, the theatre goes or the readers get to a common feeling regarding their own existential problems. Seemingly, such a minimal approach creates an international language for the postmodern man to get to the intended themes in his plays. When he paralyzes the characters in the Endgame, where he spits the characters psychologically in *The Waiting for Godot*, where he splits different phases of one person's life in *Krapp's Last Tape*, or many more examples paves the way for Pinter to create selfless and ambiguous characters of certain identity in search of meaning for their identity (*The Caretaker*) or panicked to death through an unknown power (*the Birthday party*) who in turn stabilizes this minimal mode of presentation alongside the modern life requirement for the scarcity and minimalism act as landmark for other playwrights elsewhere in the world.

3. CONCLUSION

The way post modern theatre has tried to put forward solutions for the existential obsessions of postmodern man, for sure, has got to be grounded on special bases and frameworks which are in accordance with the time and era characteristics. In this regard, post modern theatre has turned to the theatre of the absurd and the dominant minimalism trend in its scope for the revelations of themes of these types. The playwrights of this era have tried to exercise minimalism on all aspects of the theatre of the absurd from setting, theme, image, characterization, to the most dominant one, language. Language in the works of the great practitioner on minimalism in the theatre of the absurd, Samuel Beckett, even has turned towards sheer nonsense and silence as the minimal form of expression. This minimal form of expression though seemingly non language would prove to be one of the best mode of presentation of the existential obsessions of post modernism.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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