

Language in Waiting for Godot

اللغة في إنتظار غودت

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المخلص

اللغة هي التي تحدد شكل العالم المنظم، وأهميتها أنها تشكل أساس ثقافتنا ونشاطاتنا وعلاقاتنا وتحدد هويتنا من اجل الطمأنة، ولا تتعامل مع عدم معرفة العوامل المحفزة للبشر فحسب بل مع مشكلة التواصل بينهم. فالكلام ، وبدون شك، هو إثبات الوجود، وهو الأسلوب الذي يصارع الصمت والعزلة والموت. لذا فان اللغة تعتبر ميراث الإنسان الفذ.

استعمل المسرحيون العبثيون اللغة مبرزين عجزها لتحقيق التواصل أو كونها أداة من ادوات الفكر بعد تجريدها من معناها وذلك لان عالمها خال من القيم والمبادئ والفضائل. كما عمل العبثيون على تجريدها من المحتوى كي تكون خير تمثيل لحياة راكدة فبرزوها كأداة عاجزة عن التعبير عن فكرة الفرد وتمييز هويته ومعرفة عالمه. حيث قام الكاتب بكت بتجسيد عبثية الحياة البشرية في مسرحيته.

Abstract

Language is what determines the regulated world, the signification of which provides the foundation of our culture, our activities and our relations. It defines our identity as a form of reassurance. It deals not only with the impossibilities of knowing the motivation of human beings, but also presents the problem of communication between human beings. Speech is, undoubtedly, the proof of existence as well as a manner of contending silence, solitude and death, and it is man's unique heritage.

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Absurd dramatists' use of language probes the limitations of language both as a means of communication and as an instrument of thought as there can be no definite meanings in a world deprived of values, principles and virtues. They have chosen to write in a language devoid of content to become the adequate representation of stagnant life; they present language as an inefficient tool to express one's thought, to comprehend the world, or to define one's self. So, Becket materialized the absurdity of modern life and human condition in his play.

1. Introduction

The postwar generation throughout Europe and America experienced the terrible shock of disillusion. The world was in a state of chaos and disintegration. It is in such a stifling atmosphere that many labels in the sphere of drama came into being, e.g. the theatre of the grotesque, existentialism, the theatre of the absurd the theatre of cruelty and others. Initially most of these experiments were received with suspension and ironical grin. The breakdown of economic system has much to do with the breakdown of social and moral values. The pessimism, frustration and essence of alienation pervade everywhere.

The dramatists of the twentieth century epitomize the suffering of the modern age- sufferings which have a universal application. Harman Hesse rightly points out that the mode of our present-day life has become far more cruel and horrible than ever before. Literature is the transcript of that horror. Pirandello, an Italian poet, believes that everything is transitory. Bertolt Brecht once said that even gods are not immune from evils and corruption. Fredrick Lumley says that the spiritual is rejected and nothing remains but animal motivations.

Ionesco insists upon the nothingness and absurdity of life. So does Samuel Becket. Becket and all of the playwrights feel that life is full of decoys. Fail, fortune, success, youth and love are mere words, full of sound and fury signifying nothing. We are all alone. We are alienated. We have lost all communication with the rest of

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mankind. There is hardly any action, and the dialogue is repetitive and contradictory – language like everything else, is incapable of giving meaning to an absurd world. In short, language has substantially lost communicability.

2. The Essence of Language in Waiting for Godot

Samuel Beckett has chosen to write in a language that always points out that the world is absurd and chaotic, that man is alone and in despair. He demonstrates that language is the fundamental means of deception. But his language is used as a system devoid of content which moves only with itself.

Beckett’s language is a mixture of elements rarely found together in the same narrative. It is “murky, baffling, circular, contradictory, full of offensive details, furious violence and sardonic, terrifying insights into the meaninglessness of human life.”⁽¹⁾ His language is difficult to interpret for its general verbosity by the difficulty of the words and phrases. It is serious because it, mainly, deals with complex and oddly tragic characters who cannot reconcile the unreality of the seen world with the reality of the unseen.

Language is reduced by Beckett making it nothing more than a deserted castle whose gaping cracks let in the wind and rain. He, however, uses it just like the body and the mind of his characters, considers it as a faulty and inadequate tool. Speech, another mark of man’s finitude, breaks down within the individual. Moreover, it sometimes leads to deterioration and often to total failure of communication with others.⁽²⁾

Since Beckett uses language to show the function of language in human existence, the speech patterns of the characters: recurrent vocabulary, pronoun shifts, sound effects, etc., re-enforce the major themes and the mixed tone of the play. In other words, the comic effects of language used by characters grimly underline the themes of tedium and absurdity that dominate the plays. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir is the character who gropes for meaning, but the

meaning does not appear. His attempts are reduced to incoherence and, finally, silence by his partner, Estragon.

3. Labyrinth of Language

The dialogue, between the characters, is studded with words that have no meaning for normal ears. They (words) reconcile themselves with reason that makes the dialogue often baffling. Beckett makes it difficult to demonstrate which comes first, memory deterioration or language disintegration, one clearly accompanies the other. Thus, in Lucky's case a traumatized memory is combined with "partial a phasia and ultimately total silence."⁽³⁾ This situation manifests itself in stuttering (acacacacademie; anthropometric; qua-quaqua⁽⁴⁾ in stammering (etabli tabli tabli, ce qui suit qui... etc.⁽⁵⁾

In addition to the aphasia and stuttering there is some evidence of a certain amount of speech disintegration that are ellipsis and stammering which are observable in Pozzo's speech from the stress of Vladimir's criticism:

I can't bear it...any longer...the way he goes on...you've no idea...it's terrible...he must go...(he waves his arm)...I'm going mad (He collapses his head in his hands)...I can't bear it...any longer...⁽⁶⁾

Hesitancy in speech is observable in both Estragon and Vladimir in the former this fumbling for words appears to emanate from embarrassment: "That's to say...you understand...the dusk...the strain...waiting...I confess...I imagined...for a second..."⁽⁷⁾ Language disintegration such as these on the individual level is the sign of the general inadequacy of speech to cope with a variety of situations and of the in coordination between speech and memory or thought.

One of the major causes of misunderstanding among the characters proceeds from faulty communication due to types of imprecision such as ambiguity, misconstruing a question, confusion of sounds, etc. Waiting for Godot opens on an ambiguous note, "Nothing to be done," that does not lead into a dialogue but into

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monologues- Estragon discussing his shoes, Vladimir their tedious existence and their inability to alter it. Again misunderstanding arises from ambiguous syntax when Pozzo asks “Are you friends?” Estragon interprets, this is to mean “Are you and Vladimir friends?”, and Vladimir has to explain that Pozzo is asking whether Vladimir and Estragon are friends of his.⁽⁸⁾

Beckett, in his use of language, reveals the fallibility of language as a medium for the discovery and communication of metaphysical truth. He ensures that his writing remains a constant struggle, a painful wrestling with the spirit of language itself. The themes of *Waiting for Godot* and other plays persist the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to incessant change, his use of language probes the limitations of language both as a vehicle for the expression of valid statement- an instrument of thoughts or truths.⁽⁹⁾

As a result of lack of communication, each man follows his own thoughts, while the silence and pauses isolate words and phrases and the repetitions remind us how monotonous, repetitive and tedious life is. The play is fully replete with repetition; without variety or novelty, and paradoxes with no resolution. Moreover, apart from mirroring the repetitious circle of life, So many repetitions in the play well serve the characters to busy themselves and pass the painful time less consciously. So Beckett uses language not as a divine instrument but as mere senseless buzzing. It is used “in a world that has lost its meaning, language also becomes a meaningless buzzing.”⁽¹⁰⁾ Language is used like difficult music heard for the first time as Niklaus Gessner in his *The Inadequacy of Language*, has tabulated ten different modes of disintegration of language; they range from simple misunderstanding and double-entenders to monologues (as signs of inability to communicate), clichés, repetitions of synonyms, inability to find the right words, and telegraphic style (loss of grammatical structure, communication by shouted commands) to the farrago (medley, hotch-potch, indiscriminate mixture of

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different elements) of chaotic nonsense and the dropping of punctuation marks, such as question marks⁽¹¹⁾ as indication that language has lost its function as a means for communication, that questions have turned into statements not really requiring an answer. This harmonious sense is manifested in the illogical, and reasonable and incongruous actions of the characters or their reactions to the utterances. Throughout the play there are several instances of a kind of discord between what a character says and what he does. In fact, what they say is, in a meaningless way, in conflict with what they do afterwards or what they have already done. So the uniqueness of Beckett's plays lies in his peculiar way of using common man's language. Ordinary conversation is quite evident in his effective use of tautology, malapropism, spurious logic, verbal inconsistencies, incorrect grammar, which are so peculiar with common-place conversation. So language is used in an empty and meaningless manner with no real desire to communicate. Consequently, we find in Beckett's plays hollow sound effects that support the themes of horror and conversational emptiness. Staccato sound repetitions occur in such phrases as "Dis, Didi"⁽¹²⁾ and in Vladimir's lullaby which is comprised of words "Do do do" and "Bye bye bye bye,"⁽¹³⁾ repeated over and over. Therefore, the characters fail to communicate, and their use of language seems to become more and more trivial. Beckett appears to be saying that communication through silence and gesture as in the pantomime is just as effective and perhaps more so than communication through the spoken word. Knowlson has a very apt remark to make in this regard. He points out: "we are left with an image of two creatures, seeking to communicate in a world where real communication is virtually impossible"⁽¹⁴⁾

Language (notably in the form of clichés) is a form of reassurance, but not real connection occurs, instead language is a noise to fill the void created by the absence of meaningful human contact.⁽¹⁵⁾ Hence the presence of clichés in the discourse of the characters points toward the fact that in real life most verbal

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exchanges are equally devoid of real communication.⁽¹⁶⁾ Repeated phrases, lines, words and the fact that the second act repeats the first act are used to signify the senseless repetition and relentless flow of time inherent to human existence. Right from the beginning, the characters repeat what they themselves have already said or each other's utterances and actions in quite a circular way. They keep on repeating things for many deadly times as if to signify that man's life does not exceed anywhere beyond a certain number of endlessly-repeated habitual deeds. The very phrase "Nothing to be done" is repeated four times, noticeably in the First Act (37, 41, 42, 58). Instances are numerous in the play. "The dialogue has the peculiar repetitive quality of the cross-talk comedians' patter".⁽¹⁷⁾

Language deals not only with the impossibility of knowing the motivation of human beings in their actions, it also presents the problem of communication between human beings, which preoccupies Beckett, Adamov and Ionesco. Like waiting, talking is part of their habitual life. Without them, they cannot live. They talk in order to be able to live. Their talking, in fact, alleviates the agonizing waiting which in turn is used as a painkiller to comfort the impossible life they live. The conversations between the characters of these writers are essentially an attempt to achieve contact. At the end they recognize the impossibility of such contact, even through the conflict.

If you crammed a ship full of human bodies till it burst, the loneliness inside it would be so great that they would turn to ice – so great is our isolation that even conflict is impossible".⁽¹⁸⁾

Beckett uses a language based on patterns of concrete images rather than argument and discursive speech. And since language is trying to present a sense of being, it can neither investigate nor solve problems of conduct or morals or communication. From the general devaluation of language in the flood of mass communication, the growing specialization of life has made the exchange of ideas on an increasing number of subjects impossible

between members of different spheres of life which have each developed their own specialized jargons. That is why communication between human beings is often shown in a state of breakdown. Esslin says in this regard "language has run riot in an age of mass communication. It must be reduced to its function – the expression of authentic content, rather than its concealment".⁽¹⁹⁾

4. Inefficacy of language for conveying thought

Since Beckett's characters are deliberately drawn as generalized characters, their speeches have the function of not individualizing, but generalizing them by means of recurring words and phrases in their speeches which portray the same puzzled frustrated but determined men in speech of comprehending the world and themselves through their narratives. All the characters vacillate between hope and despair concerning the completion of their quest. Robinovitz asserts that "these characters can be linked when they set out with the same naïve belief, that with a little more effort their quest will be ended"⁽²⁰⁾ All of them express their belief in progress and hope to move forward in their quest, just to contradict themselves by sinking into despair, but they are late to rekindle their hope afterwards. For them, language becomes a "buzzing" sound, empty and meaningless. In the narrative prose Malone Dies Malone says:

All I heard was one vast continuous buzzing. The volume of Sound perceived remained no doubt the same, I had simply lost the faculty of decomposing it. The noise of nature of mankind and even my own, were all jumbled together in one and the same unbridled gibberish.⁽²¹⁾

In Unnamable the Unnamable agrees, with Malone that he sees no difference between man's language and the sound of beats; "the sounds of beats, the sound of men, sounds in the daytime and sounds at night... all sounds, there is only one, continuous, day and night"⁽²²⁾

The conversation between the characters seems to be void of meaning. There is no apparent meaning in it, because their life is

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meaningless and also their world has no apparent meaning. Beckett's language is totally separate from knowledge or truth. This meaninglessness can be expanded to all Beckett's language. His characters engage in ridiculous language to pass the time and to give them the impression that they exist. But Beckett's language reveals that man is essentially bewildered, disoriented and lost. In spite man longs for knowledge, he has only the words of his speech to use, and these are inadequate. Words are little suited to knowledge since each word is surrounded by the undertones of its own history. Words are inadequate for piercing the essence of reality.

Beckett's use of language is designed to devalue language as a vehicle of conceptual thought of ready-made answers to the problem of the human condition. His works are drained of meaningful dialogue.

The dialogue is studded with words that have no meaning for normal ears; repeatedly it announces that it has come to a stop, and will have to start again; never does it reconcile itself with reason⁽²³⁾

Speech is the basis of existence. But it, like the body and the mind, is used as a faulty and inadequate tool. Speech, although it is another mark of man's finitude, breaks down within the individual – moreover, it sometimes leads to deterioration and often to total failure of communication with others⁽²⁴⁾

Ellipsis and stammering are observable in the character's speech, for example, Pozzo's speech from the stress of Vladimir's criticism : "I cannot bear it... any longer... the way he goes on... you've no idea... it's terrible"⁽²⁵⁾ A certain character talks as a baby talk causing a lack of comprehension on the part of his listener. Moreover, hesitancy in speech is observable in the character's speech. Estragon speaks with Vladimir: "Er... you've finished with the... er... you don't need the... er bones, sir?"⁽²⁶⁾ Consequently, language disintegration such as this on the individual level is a sign of the general inadequacy of speech to cope with a variety of situations and of the incoordination between speech and thought.

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Language, with which Beckett wrestles, is his medium and it is its inadequacy haunts him. He makes his task more difficult by occupying himself with suffering creatures. They suffer from partial aphasia which manifests itself in their stuttering "quaquaqua".⁽²⁷⁾ Waiting for Godot is perhaps more lurid than the rest of his plays. There is hardly any action, and the dialogue is repetitive and contradictory; language like everything else being incapable of giving meaning to an absurd world.

The speeches of the characters subvert the conventional function of speech to individualize characters because their language contributes to their anonymity, and because their speeches, like their actions, are similar to each other, giving the sense that the same puzzled and frustrated voice. Beckett presents language as an inefficient tool to express one's thoughts to comprehend the world, or to define one's self. Hence, the efforts of the characters to comprehend the whole or to comprehend the thought or to define the self are doomed to failure. Their attempt to comprehend the world fails because if the world is unreadable and its sense unattainable, human effort to create it is doomed to failure.⁽²⁸⁾

This never-ending conflict also makes the lucid man suffer, for he recognizes the futility, but his need for order and system does not let him give up the struggle. Thus, Esslin points out, "Conscious being inevitably entails suffering."⁽²⁹⁾ There are different modes of disintegration of language observable in Waiting for Godot. They range from simple misunderstanding to dropping of punctuation marks. This indicates that language has lost its function as a means of conveying thoughts because no truly dialectical exchange of thoughts occurs in it. In a purposeless world that has lost its ultimate objectives, dialogue, like all actions, becomes a mere game not to convey the thought but to pass time. Beckett's characters are "isolated existence", each of whom is "immured in his own consciousness".⁽³⁰⁾ On the other hand, Beckett dwells on the limitation of consciousness, which makes the possibility of knowing others completely impossible. Since his

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characters are “unable to know each other except as possibilities”⁽³¹⁾ fragmented and imperfect relationships emerge. Therefore, “the limitation of human consciousness” that Beckett portrays, in *Waiting for Godot* appears “as a factor separating [man] from universe”⁽³²⁾ and from one another.

5. Inefficacy of Language for Passing Time

Time is another recurring theme in the works of Samuel Beckett who regards it as an enemy that ruins people and carries them to their ultimate end, that is death. So time and death are closely interrelated for him. He calls time “the double-headed monster of damnation and salvation”⁽³³⁾ Consequently time figures as a destructive power in his works. Time is also treated as a void which needs to be filled up in verbal or non-verbal ways. Time is an infinite emptiness that stretches without any beginning or end; therefore, characters cannot differentiate yesterday from today, and memory fails them since time is composed of days almost identical with each other. Beckett also elaborates on memory in relation to time; memory is unreliable since it is impossible to remember past events as they happened. What one remembers is just distorted pictures of past events because “people deform the days by altering the pictures of past actions which reside in the memories stored in the mind”⁽³⁴⁾ Therefore, it is impossible to be sure about past events.

In *Waiting for Godot*, the two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, who represent all humanity, utter remarks that any one of us can utter. These two men speak to each other without understanding. They do this to keep busy. To pass time, they talk and talk about Godot, whom they really don't know much about.

Words are intrinsically inadequate for thinking and communicating; they are nothing but words, without representational content. Winnie in *Happy Days* says, “...I look and I see pictures, creatures, emitting sounds that are a kind of language I no longer understand or even register”⁽³⁵⁾

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In *Waiting for Godot* the subject of the play becomes an example of how to pass the time in a situation which offers no hope. Thus the theme of the play is set by the beginning:

Estragon: Nothing to be done.

Vladimir: I'm beginning to come round to that opinion.⁽³⁶⁾

Although the phrase is used in connection to Estragon's boots here, it is also later used by Vladimir with respect to his hat. Essentially it describes the hopelessness of their lives.

Vladimir: That passed the time.

Estragon: It would have passed in any case. And later when Estragon finds his boots again;

Vladimir: What about trying them.

Estragon: I've tried everything.

Vladimir: No, I mean the boots.

Estragon: Would that be a good thing?

Vladimir: It'd pass the time. I assure you, it'd be an occupation.⁽³⁷⁾

Since passing the time is their mutual occupation, Estragon struggles to find games to help them accomplish their goal. Thus, they engage in insulting one another and in asking each other questions. They talk and talk about Godot, whom they really don't know much about. On a road, beneath a tree ravaged by winter, in a barren, desolate place, they are waiting for Godot, but this gentleman will never come. Their dialogue is studded with words that have no meaning for normal ears. The upshot of *Waiting for Godot* is that the two tramps are always waiting for the future, their ruinous consolation being that there is always tomorrow, they never realize that today is today. In this says Mr. Beckett,

They are like humanity, which dawdles and drivels away its life, postponing action, eschewing enjoyment, waiting only for some far-off divine event, the millennium, the Day of judgment.⁽³⁸⁾

Of course, virtually all conversation between Vladimir and Estragon arises out of desire to pass time.

In order to make time pass, requires precisely a kind of freedom which Vladimir and Estragon, paralyzed by the passivity of their

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life, have already forfeited. They are bored and anxious to kill time. They are talking not for conveying their thoughts or ideas but simply to kill time. To kill time, they babble incessantly, but they arrive at no conclusion. They speak about radishes and carrots; they play at Pozzo and Lucky; they do the tree; they have recourse to exercise, and yet time is static.

6. Self-Alienation and Language

Beckett has written in the absurdist tradition as he is one of the Absurdists. The first common theme observed in his works is the theme of alienation, isolation, and loneliness. According to the absurdists in general, man was doomed to alienation since the illusion that there existed common values or rights and wrongs forming a consensus in society was irreparably broken. Many people agreed with Nietzsche that God was dead, which made them feel utterly alone as if in a desert, and each man has his own desert. Recognizing that God didn't exist and he was ultimately alone in this indifferent Godless universe was traumatic for man.

Man was doomed to isolation in such a universe, for there was not a common and firm ground on which human beings stood together safely. This ground which had seemed firm and safe was broken into pieces and each one had to stand on his ground alienated from his or her fellowmen. Hence lack of sympathy and love, and man's sense of solitude were reflected in the works of absurd writers.

Beckett also deals with the problem of identity leading to a sense of alienation in *Waiting for Godot*. He emphasizes in *Waiting for Godot* and others man is fated for failure in his search for his self since self is not fixed but fluid and indefinable. As Esslin argues

In Beckett's work, the problem is one of ever-changing identity of the self through time... so the self at one moment in time is confronted with its earlier incarnation only to find it utterly strange⁽³⁹⁾

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In *Waiting for Godot* Beckett deals with the problem of the elusiveness of the self, starting with the loss of his touch with his familiar self, and with the world, which was once familiar to him, and this causes him to feel greatly anxious. “The colour and weight of the world were changing already, soon I would have to admit I was anxious”⁽⁴⁰⁾ He feels a great confusion coming over him.

In Beckett’s play, each protagonist is involved in a quest, the quest for the central self, but in the final stage, he fails in all his quest; he has nothing to do except completely withdraw within his mind and look for his central self in his consciousness, therefore he has no contact with the outside world.

All outside is zero, man cannot help his fellowmen even to his death, consciousness lacks external reference; one looks inward like Hamm thrice, blinded to find an impossible end.⁽⁴¹⁾

Thus, man becomes as a tottering statue, eroded by the wind of anguish, despair, and misery ... alone in his misery, enclosed and in the narrow limits of his ego without any hope of escape other than death – expected, accepted and at times deliberately sought out as the final refuge.⁽⁴²⁾

Beckett’s characters, in their extreme and elemental environment or universe, start their long speech by asking questions, but they don’t know the answers to their questions either. So they have to use language which is the only available weapon in their hand to search for their self, but “neither self nor world... is knowledge through words, and yet we have only words with which to know”⁽⁴³⁾ It is impossible for man to comprehend everything about the world, but it is against man’s nature to accept it and yield to the irrationality surrounding him. However, words are adequate neither for the comprehension of the world nor for the attainment of

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a unified self. For them, language becomes a 'buzzing' sound, empty and meaningless. Man's language is as incomprehensible as the language of bees. Beckett sees no difference between man's language and the sound of beats.

Beckett presents language as an inefficient tool. Man is alienated from others and the irrational universe which they fail to comprehend simply because of the deficiency of language.

4. Conclusion

Disintegration of language is achieved through various methods in Absurd drama: The use of meaningless words uttered mechanically with no logical links or grammatical structure occurs in absurdists' plays. These dramatists make little use of language as a means of influence. Language which seeks to present a meaning, characterization is hardly achieved. Furthermore, the absurdists usually show their disbelief in language as an instrument of communication in the employment of purely theatrical effects.

Beckett occupied with the failure of language to communicate the menaces of life and its meaninglessness. Consequently he uses language as an atmosphere of entrapment. His endless, futile speech is the history of the human spirit. He replaces customary plot, structure and language with fragmentary, contradictory and often nonsensical dialogue in order to present a world of chaos that mocks established institution and conformity.

Beckett used the language of gesture and movements to make inanimate things play their action, and to relegate dialogue. He reduced language to a very subordinate role. His language becomes the adequate representation of stagnant life and meaninglessness – it relates to life without action, describes man deprived of history.

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The circular structure of the play together with the paradoxical symmetries, which pervade the whole play, clearly prove that all the characters' yesterdays have been the same as today and that tomorrow will be no different from that. Therefore, the play in which the true meaning and the best formal representation of the absurd life of modern men are masterfully depicted.

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