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## **LANGUAGE IN EXPERIMENTAL PLAYS**

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# Language in Experimental Plays

Dr. Shiraz Khan

Assistant Professor, Govt. Girls Degree College, Jhansi

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When we speak of the modern plays, we find that the response of the writers to their own time has also moulded their approach, not only in theme, but also in objective presentation. Dramatic language, as employed in all Absurdistic plays has undergone a definite qualitative sea change. In a conventional drama language too is conventionally comfortable and is never at cross purpose to the action. The Absurdist, on the other hand, recognize the centrality of language in an unconventional way. In fact, language has been devalued by these writers perhaps because they feel that it hides more things than it reveals. Language, therefore, is used as a convenient Camouflage to get behind. The audience plays a guessing-game as regards what is being either implied or suppressed. The dramatists are interested with a new sense in probing the reality lying behind the expressed language. At the advanced period of Twentieth century men and women are passing through an age of rapid transition, when the very expressive machinery, of our thought and emotions, is being dismantled. The dramatists are contributing their mite in this ritual of debunking the language, besides putting in a gesture of positivistic communication. Language alone is no more considered to be effectively sufficient for the purpose of precise communication. By several maneuvers the Absurdist dramatists satirize the debased quality of cliches and the Vacuity of smooth, oily conversation.

John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (which opened at the Royal Court Theatre, London in May 1956) relates itself to the stagnant and unexciting nature of the English theatre around the middle of this century.. John Barber of *The Daily Express*, London reported that *The play's hero Jimmy Porter poured out a "Vitriolic tirade" against the world "in wild and whirling words"*.

There had been very little fundamental objective change in the style of the plays which the public witnessed since 1930s. Terrence Rattigan (1911-77) had his first major success as a playwright in 1936. At this time there had been an attempt at the innovation in the work of the verse dramatists, notably, Christopher Fry (1907- ), and T. S. Eliot (1888- 1965). These authors, especially T.S. Eliot, sought to revitalize drama by bringing it back to poetry. However,

there was a lacuna in their drama because though the language they employed was poetic, yet it was essentially non-dramatic. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, however, was a largely successful attempt. Language used by Eliot in this poetic play tried to verbalize events rather than to create actions on the stage.

J.L. Styan aptly comments that "in modern times the great European prose dramatists Ibsen and Chekov: Strindberg and Pirandello or Casey and Brecht: have all broken through the barriers of realism, which a belittling prose dialogue seems to set up. It is not the words alone which make the play, but the vivid dramatic impressions which the words can create".

It has been critically observed that T.S. Eliot strove to wrench the precise lingual idiom in order to give vent to the mood of utter disillusionment and spiritual sterility of the twentieth century world around him. W.H. Auden complimented Eliot that "when things began to happen / It was you who, not speechless with shock but finding the right / Language for thirst and fear, did most to / prevent a panic". It was indeed the panic of inexpressible agony of the soul" "Eliot considered contemporary history as a panorama of futility and anarchy, and felt the demand for a life mark implementation of a lingual agent"<sup>4</sup>. What was needed was a lingual medium capable enough to carry forward the crucial thought process of the contemporary times. "Eliot expresses his concern over our verbal communication -- its inadequacy and ineffectiveness in the following words:

Words strain

crack and sometimes break,

Under the burden

Under the tension, slip

slide, perish,

Decay with imprecision,

will not stay in place,

will not stay still".

It may be pointed out about the use of poetry in the theatre, that the poetic plays lacked the physical quality of the poetry of the Elizabethan plays, and finally remained poetry in the theatre, rather than to be poetry of the theatre.

The Symbolists also sought to explore the negative aspects of language, seeking to reach for a higher reality. They declared that the so-called medium of communication no longer communicates but impairs true communication. Hence, as Andrew Kennedy rightly puts, "first music, and then silence, which have affinities with the mystic's discipline in attempting to reach communication beyond the noise or destruction of words, become ultimate analogies for verbal expression".

Hence creative writers such as Charles Baudelaire (1821-67) with his remarkable sense of the evocative power of language, Stephne Mallarme (1842-98), Paul Verlaine (1844-76), Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), and Paul Valery (1871-1945) seriously called in question the utility and effectiveness of conventional language. W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and Hart Crane (1899-1932) were also deeply influenced by the symbolist poetic culture.

The Theatre of the Absurd is concerned with a serious critique of language. It attacks, above all, the fossilized forms of language which have become devoid of meaning. The conversation at a social gathering at one moment seem to be an exchange of information about weather, new books or health-conditions etc., should in actuality be construed as futile exchange of mere meaningless banalities. From its being a noble instrument of genuine communication, language has dwindled to become a kind of ballast only to fill empty spaces. According to Martin Esslin in some of the Absurd plays "dialogue seems to have degenerated into meaningless babble". Brecht's Waiting for Godot, is considered to be the denial of all human values-- social, individual, physical and spiritual. Whatever is chosen by man in his Existential agony: whatever waiting he may have for some great thing to happen or for God to arrive: whatever forward movement he may undertake as activity -- are all shown as utterly meaningless or Absurd. In the play, Beckett parodies and mocks at the language of philosophy and science as shown in Lucky's famous speech:

"Given'the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions".

Lucky illustrates the process of social decay and moral degradation. Harold Pinter followed Beckett's footsteps

and took the line from Antonin Artaud's message that "it is essential ..... to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought".

Even the writers of fiction such as Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) spoke in her novel *The Waves*, of her tiredness with common language: "How tired I am of phrases that come down with all their feet on the ground ... I begin to long for some little language ... broken words are grown so false, I am loath to prove reason with them". Absurd playwrights choose those devices that allow them to express their ideas indirectly. Beckett's preoccupation with the problem of language is also manifested in his play *All That Fall* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), and it consumes more and more space in the plays like *Happy Days* (London, Faber and Faber, 1962), where Winnie's only activity is talking, and trying to express herself however trivial thoughts may be. Winnie's stand refers us to human compulsion to speak. Winnie seems to be striving with language in the play, as does old Mrs. Rooney of *All That Fall*, having a similar preoccupation with language. She too has to make efforts to express herself, efforts that make her husband Mr. Rooney feel that she strives with a dead language. She herself is conscious that there is something bizarre about her way of speaking:

Mrs. Rooney..... mean the words .....

I use none but the simplest words, I

hope, and yet I sometimes find my way

of speaking very ..... bizarre".

This concern with language is present in varying degrees almost in all of Beckett's plays. His dramatic dialogue are carried on in broken Syntax, as his characters struggle with words to demonstrate what Beckett derives from the sense of an inadequacy of language. Not only in his plays but even in his novels Beckett has continually tried to express that language does not fulfill its responsibility and necessity to convey the inner thought. In his novels such as *Watt* (London, John Calder, 1963), and also in *Molloy*, *Murphy*, and *Malone Dies* (Three Novel by Samuel Beckett. London: John Calder, 1963),

Beckett has shown the excruciating agony of man's inexpressibility. *Molloy* says "I mean this trouble I had in understanding not only what others said to me, but also what I said to them. It is true that in the end we made ourselves understood, but understood with regard to what I ask of you, and to what purpose?" (p. 50). Therefore, Esslin is right to point out that, "in a meaningless universe, it is always foolhardy to make a positive statement". Beckett in his plays, nonetheless in his novels, have tried to concern himself with the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subjected to incessant change. Beckett's "use of language probes the limitations of language, both as a means of communication and as a vehicle for the expression of

valid statements as an instrument of thought"12. So in Beckett, language serve the purpose of expressing the breakdown, and also the disintegration of language -- with no certainty and no definite meaning. : ' of the main themes of Beckett's drama is the impossibility of ever attaining any certainty, or ever finding meaning. Beckett shows that in a world which no longer has any ultimate objective, all over endeavors to converse, like other activities, become a game to pass one's time, till one is finally washed out of existence, when one's physical frame is finally disintegrated into dust particles. In End Game (1958) Hamm points out: "Babble, Babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together and whisper together in the dark ... moment upon moment, pattering do "

Andre Breton (1896-1966) is considered to be one of the major modern thinkers who came up with the idea that language is a major force in the creation of thought and in defining reality. According to his interpretation experiment in language is an inevitable part of the Surrealist movement. For Surrealism asks for the liberation of the mind from logic. It also argues that art should grow out of an encounter with the conscious or the subconscious mind. Breton tried to expose the world of the subconscious by using such a language which could be able to record subconscious thought and ideas.

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