Abstract

The question of self and identity has become a great existential problem for the modern man. Many an intellectuals, in their endless search for true selves for presenting a vivid vision of self have tried different procedures. On the line of disambiguating self, Samuel Beckett, a prominent playwright in the Theatre of the Absurd, via violating the already established rules of drama and creating entropy has tried to deal with this issue. In this research, Samuel Beckett's techniques in his major works Waiting for Godot and Endgame have been demonstrated to show how he has endeavoured to help man deal with his ambiguity of self through the creation of utmost communicative entropy within which man would be left alone to come up with answers for his existential problems. 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.

Keywords: Ambiguity of Self, Beckett, Entropy;

Introduction

1. A HISTORICAL VIEW OF ENTROPY AND DRAMATIC CHAOS

The idea of entropy first appeared in Socratic philosophy. It was mainly interpreted with regard to the philosophy of creation. As Mckirahan 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. After the observation of some negative effects of technology such as Atomic Bomb, time revealed its devastating effect. The world turned into a kind of resurrection. The writers bored with everything wrote about a time that was approaching itself. This is the time that in the realm
of literature, as Holtan has asserted theatre of chaos and entropy emerges. At this time, all absolutes changed into indefinites, all perfect premises turned into incomplete ones. Such claims could be seen in Beckett's article on Proust. His statement about tome properly reveals the increasing entropy. He has understood time and maximum entropy better than anybody else as can be detected in his works. He has detected the existence of increasing entropy in almost everything and tells Israel Shenker that "I see no discipline anywhere". He even saw no discipline 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. Within this entropy man and his view of his identity and self have been left at the mercy of entropy. But Beckett has tried to assign humanity a perfect view of his self through techniques he has deployed in his theatre. Hence, I deal with the techniques Samuel Beckett has deployed in his major works *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* which are concerned with the theme of creating entropy as the pavement for getting to that true self.

1.3 ANALYSIS

The beginning discussion can be the name of Godot whose meaning is not clear. No single meaning can be assigned to it. Alen Schnider has asked Beckett what he meant by Godot, he answers if he had known he would have told us. With this Beckett leaves us in the climax of uncertainty, indefiniteness and maximum communicative entropy exposing us to indefinite number of interpretations.

His employment of physical entropy as the dominant theme of these two great works 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. As an example, in *Waiting for Godot*, Pozzo, the landlord goes blind. Vladimir and Estragon try to commit suicide. In *Endgame*, Nell dies and Nagg is mistreated as a father figure. Hamm is obsessed by the blackness and imminent danger waiting outside. Clov is bored with the endless, meaningless servitude and obedience to Hamm and the whole absurdity of life. This is well manifested in his selection of setting, a deserted place with no sign of life and modernity in *Waiting for Godot* and a far remote Skull-like room in *Endgame*. On the line of creating entropy, these types of settings per se have blocked the passage of time and this in turn challenges man's sense of his self and his existence in this world. This blockage of time in these plays has prolonged the distance from birth to death. Hope, salvation, and discipline have been melted at the core of an endless, unlimited waiting whose manifestations are Lucky's white hair, Pozzo's blindness, Nagg and Nell's negligence of their present and their refuge to the reverie of past reminiscent, Vladimir and Estragon's obsession with absurdity, and Ham and Clov's everlasting quarrel. They are all at the mercy of these time hindering settings. This idea is repeated many times in the play.

Beckett's character selection has also been a complementing feature to the setting and its purpose as well as Beckett's intentions. The character's idiosyncrasies have been selectively chosen to give rise to the expected revelation of meaning in the plays. Their obsession with absurdity and ultimate entropy is something which can clearly be seen in the characters' behaviour. According to Shields "In *Endgame*, characters subject their bodies and their language to a minor treatment, discovering modes of existence that conflict with majoritarian organizations and institutions". The characters are well aware of the inescapability of their situations and therefore are not reluctant to succumb to euthanasia.

"The anguish of the individual faced with an alienating society may be heard in Godot’s question and in the answer provided by Beckett: “Godot: Ils t’ont frappé? / Beckett: Non, ils m’ont plutôt sali”. The characters are persecuted by an anonymous and hostile “ils”. Violence, in all its forms, physical and psychological, is everywhere”.

Besides physical entropy, Beckett's writings are full of inter textual references to others from other dramatists' speech, quotations of other philosophers like Aristotle and Socrates to religious allusions about resurrection and Christ. This procedure is one of his other techniques which culminate in creating communicative entropy. To remind us of Descartes' statement *I think, so I am* we can refer to

Clov: He's crying. (He closes lid, straightens up.)
Hamm. Then he is living (*Endgame, p.41*)
Allusions to the holy Bible can also be seen.
Hamm: Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbour as yourself. (*Endgame, p.67*)
Or the crucifixion of two thieves with the holy Christ and that only one of them was saved.
VLADIMIR: One out of four. Of the other three two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him.
ESTRAGON: WhO?
VLADIMIR: What?
ESTRAGON: What's all this about? Abused who?
VLADIMIR: The Saviour.
ESTRAGON: Why?
VLADIMIR: Because he wouldn't save them.
ESTRAGON: From hell?
VLADIMIR: Imbecile! From death. \textit{(WFG, p.12)}
ESTRAGON: I thought you said hell.

One other account for this negative entropy can be traced in the absurdity and absence of discipline within which he has placed the characters and in reality the viewer and the reader.

Hamm (\textit{gloomily}): Then it is a day like any other day.
Clov: As long as it lasts \textit{(pause)}. All life long the same inanities. \textit{(Endgame, p.33)}
Hamm (\textit{angrily}): Keep going, can't you, keep going! \textit{(same, p.67)}

Or in his sheer disappointment and phobia
Hamm: Outside of here is death \textit{(pause)} \textit{(same. P.69)}

Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before.
Enter Vladimir.

ESTRAGON: (\textit{giving up again}). Nothing to be done. \textit{(WFG, P.5)}

Beckett has asserted that "he is dealing with a kind of art which gives the impression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, no desire to express, with the obligation to express"\textsuperscript{10}. This vision may have given rise to the creation of specific characteristics crystallized in the theatre of Absurd school of thought on the line of handling themes of diverse ilk. The Theatre of absurd through its absurdity features attained the ability "to make his audience accept happenings on the stage as expressions of internal psychic reality"\textsuperscript{11}, something which can not be achieved in any other way round. Moreover, as Esslin has recapitulated "the Absurdist has further demonstrated the theatre's ability to deal not only with external reality in providing a concrete and photographically correct reconstruction of real life but also, with the vast field of internal reality-the fantasies, dramas, the hallucinations, secret longings, and fear of mankind"\textsuperscript{12}. To achieve these objectives the 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"\textsuperscript{13}. The way of talking on the way of achieving a prominent existential concept like disambiguating one's self, no doubt, will have its own idiosyncratic characteristics and the dramatist's tact is called into question with regard to his deployment of language for the purpose. He has tried to place the excitement of self awareness in the skeleton of language. He has intentionally violated signs, the meaning bearing elements. Meaning disappears in his texts. We are left with smashed signs which lead to communicative entropy. This violated self awareness created by the communicative entropy in the reader or viewer has been delicately and tactfully manipulated to ultimately create meaning. As Berlo asserts meaning can not be detected in the message, meaning is not something to be discovered, it exists in people.\textsuperscript{14} For Beckett words form the impenetrable barrier of language which for ever keeps us from knowing who we are and what we are\textsuperscript{n}. As the
words are rational, they are time bound, and con not account for the self that exists outside time and place. Therefore, "if one can destroy the rationality of words, pour them out in a massive and torrential jumble defying time and structure, detach them from their contents, there is a chance that he may get close to his true self". This is exactly what Beckett does with language in his works. He tries to develop a new language of timelessness and spacelessness, a language as "a system of sounds devoid of content which moves only within itself". Such a language in Beckett's plays serves, to express the breakdown, the disintegration of language. Our mind can regulate our inner violated senses and feelings, assign them rules and disciplines from which meaning can be cajoled. Beckett, well aware of this privilege, has violated the structure of sentences and created indefinite number of meanings and interpretations out of limited number of words and sentences. The way he has arranged the words and the sentences that come one after the other, from meaning viewpoint, can not be predicted. In this way, extreme communicative entropy emerges. The characters use everyday words but the words serve different purpose. As Grillet puts it, "the two tramps are on the stage. They have to explain themselves but it seems that they don't have a text prepared before hand and scrupulously learned by heart to support them what they have to invent. But just as they have nothing to recite, they have nothing to invent as well and their conversation reduces to fragments". Disintegration captures the language and the dialogue fades in sheer minimalism. Hence, pauses and silences stabilize themselves as the crying concepts for communication in the play to enable the characters experience the wordless reality of self.

3. 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". 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. In this way, thousands of implicative meaning in the viewer's mind arises hoping that, on the line of the topic of this research get to a definite definition of his true self. A self which has had a taken-for-granted meaning has been called into question at the contemporary time leaving man in the realm of identity crisis. In an essay on Proust, Beckett expresses his anti-naturalistic trust of language. "Proust does not share the superstition that form is nothing and .....for Proust the quality of language is more important than any system of ethics or aesthetics". Totally equipped with these views, he has tried to approach the real nature of self by developing language in various forms and structures from repetition, nonsense, disintegration, decentralization, monologue to the total annihilation of syntax and semantics to enable the tramps in Waiting for Godot to succeed in their waiting to come up with the answer to the questions of self, being, and waiting. But, in reality, the two tramps are well aware of their impotency and inability to gain insights of the world through the words they use. This is because of the fact that the inner self as Manthner puts it "has no way of articulation, it can not be verbalized and thus can never be known". Therefore, we can sense Beckett "metaphysical anguish" and his feeling that all language is to suffer". All he does with the language resembles what Krapp does with his self and identity. By reducing his life to a "series of retrospe cts on discarded selves and relationships" 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.
References