

REPUBLIC OF TURKIYE
YUZUNCU YIL UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

**THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ABSURD THEATRE IN
EDWARD ALBEE'S THE ZOO STORY, EUGENE IONESCO'S AMEDEE
AND ARTHUR KOPIT'S OH DAD, POOR DAD, MAMMA'S HUNG YOU IN
THE CLOSET AND I'M FEELIN' SO SAD**

M.A. THESIS

ÜMMAHAN KAHRAMAN GÜNEŞ

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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE

Bu çalışma jürimiz tarafından İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI **ANABİLİM DALI**, İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI **BİLİM DALI**'nda YÜKSEK LİSANS YETERLİK TEZİ olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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PREFACE

Absurd Drama was one of the most striking movements in the 20th century, which was born as a result of the trauma experienced after the Second World War and the change in social life due to industrial development. In this study, I have tried to hold mirror to the main characteristics of it in three different absurd works respectively: The Zoo Story by Edward Albee, Amédée by Ionesco and Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad.

The war created a precarious atmosphere and this led to isolation, alienation, self-estrangement, indifference, communication problems. The playwrights of this movement gave voice to these problems in a very different way, which is far away from being classical. Unfortunately this atmosphere still exists. Numerous studies have been done on the subject and it so seems that further studies would not be futile since its current effects are being felt in almost every aspect of life. Mine is a little contribution to the previous studies and a sort of refreshing the minds by introducing several concepts and terms related to absurd drama.

INTRODUCTION

There are numerous criticism books and articles about the birth and development of the Theatre of Absurd. Therefore this brief introduction aims at reminding and renewing the reader's knowledge of the movement, its basic premises and highlights. As it is usually known, the term absurd was first used by Hungarian-born critic Martin Esslin to identify the works of some playwrights written mostly in 1950s and 1960s. The term is borrowed from an essay by the French philosopher Albert Camus. In 1942, he wrote an essay titled as "Myth of Sisyphus" in which he defined the human situation as meaningless and absurd:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurd. (Esslin 16).

Some contemporary playwrights like Samuel Beckett, Arthur Kopit, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter and Edward Albee gave voice to this idea in their plays. The common point in most of the plays by these playwrights was, to use the term by Esslin, meaninglessness. Other features of the movements are somewhat related to this term.

In fact the origins of the Theatre of the Absurd are rooted in the avant-garde experiments in the art of 1920s and 1930s; yet it is doubtless that the Second World War was the most important phenomenon that gave way to its birth. That great traumatic experience left behind not only many losses, economic crisis, shattered lands but also paralyzed minds. As a result of this massacre a great number of people died; yet at the same time the world lost its innocence, its meaning and its hope. The people who survived were in a great shock since they saw the collapse of all the values and all the beliefs they trusted. The world suffered from a deep

disillusionment. Every kind of belief, strategy, philosophy, religion, thought and value failed. All these concepts were far away from being convincing

The war created a hostile, chaotic and indifferent world. Living under the threat of nuclear annihilation showed the precariousness of human life and at this point the thinkers like Albert Camus and Jean Poul Sartre used the term “absurd” to express their difficulty in finding any reasonable explanation for human existence; because within seconds, hundreds of lives could be destroyed by an atomic bomb without any rational reason. Both life and death lost their meaning. This pitiful atmosphere strongly influenced literature and gave rise to some crucial changes especially in the field of drama. As the world lost its order and turned into a chaotic and precarious place; moreover all the rules, rights of the individuals and all the values were shattered, at the theatre, the traditional forms and standards disappeared and the stage became as startling as the world itself. And absurd drama was a result of all these changes and developments;

Inevitably, plays written in this new convention will when judged by the standards and criteria of another be regarded as impertinent and outrageous impostures. If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanic puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play has to hold the mirror up to the nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings (15).

Esslin thus sums up the main characteristics of the absurd drama; The traditional plot is lost. It is almost impossible to trace a coherent happening or story. Generally they have a circular structure so the end does not offer any change, any solution or catharsis. To offer a solution the play should present a problem or a

problematic situation to the audience; yet as Esslin states, there is no coherent plot and theme. It is a theatre of situation not sequential events.

In fact it was greatly influenced by the age it was born in yet it is hardly impossible to see the playwrights mention about the age and the war. They write as if the concept of time is lost completely and they do not belong to any time. Esslin states this shift of attitude as follows: “It does not present its audience with sets of social facts and examples of political behaviour. It presents the audience with a picture of a disintegrating world that has lost its unifying principle, its meaning, and its purpose – an absurd universe” (300). So they do not reflect the age they lived in; the plays seem usually to be the “reflections of dreams and nightmares” (Esslin 15). Traditional theatre tries to create a photographic representation of life as we see it but the Theatre of the Absurd presents us a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams. And these dreams are often about man’s bewilderment and confusion concerning the basic existential questions.

Another important aspect of the absurd is its characterization. The attitude of the playwrights is quite different from that of the conventional one. First of all, it is nearly impossible to see more than two or three people on the stage. Similar to the attitude in plot, the playwrights economize on character and use less characters than the conventional drama. What is more striking than the number of the characters is their general characteristics. Of course they cannot be regarded as heroes in the conventional sense; because they do not have remarkable features, strong wills, majestic physical appearances or any other superior feature. On the contrary, they are quite ordinary and weak. Therefore it is not possible to see God or Goddess-like figures, Romeo and Juliet-like lovers or intrepid fighters. They are usually puppet-like, weak and lost characters and this aspect of the absurd drama is one of the most novelistic elements that shocks the audience.

The language is also totally different as Esslin explains at the end of his description of the absurd. The dialogues are far from being witty, meaningful or eloquent; moreover they cannot be called as dialogues but just meaningless or incoherent babblings because as Dr. Culik puts it:

Words failed to express the essence of human experience, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. The Theatre of the Absurd constituted first and foremost an onslaught on language, showing it as a very unreliable and insufficient tool of communication. Absurd drama uses conventionalised speech, clichés, slogans and mechanical jargon, which it distorts, parodies and breaks down. By ridiculing conventionalised and stereotyped speech patterns, the Theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically (http://www.theatredatabase.com/20th_century/theatre_of_the_absurd.html).

This aspect of the Absurd is the most distinctive one. A theater goer may have to have some knowledge of drama to appreciate, understand and follow the changes in the structure of the play but anyone, educated or not, can easily notice the different use of the language. The language is a startling element; it shocks the audience and usually it is hard to understand what's going on. In fact, as Dr. Culik remarked above, conventionalized speech, clichés, slogans are used and they are quite familiar, yet in the absurd plays they seem meaningless, absurd, and strange. Thus the Absurd playwrights simply make the familiar alien and unfamiliar.

If language served well wars would not have taken place and many lives would not have been lost. This shows that language is not, on its own a sufficient way to communicate. It is not the words, expressions or sentences in the grammatical sense that provide the communication and make the meaning accessible by the hearer; what matters here is how the speech is perceived. And this has been emphasized by these playwrights in almost every play.

The most prominent absurdist playwright was/is Samuel Beckett and there is no doubt that the most criticized and applauded absurd play was the Waiting for Godot. This play brought Beckett international fame and established him as one of the leading names of the theater of the absurd. His plays are mainly concerned with human suffering and survival, and his characters with the meaningless world. Waiting For Godot is a perfect example in this sense, which is regarded as the masterpiece of the theatre of the absurd. Waiting for Godot is a two-act-tragicomedy and tells a story of waiting. It begins on a country road with a sickly looking tree and the conversation between two tramps called Estragon and Vladimir. They wait for another man or a thing who never comes. They call this man or the thing "Godot". The play evolves around this waiting. The act of waiting may sound hopeful; yet, just the contrary, the play is desperately hopeless. The characters are looking for meaning in an absurd world and a way out. Thus it is regarded as the perfect example of the absurd by its use of language, absurd characters, the strange plot and the emphasize on the meaninglessness of life.

The Theatre of the Absurd also affected American Drama and dramatists like Edward Albee who is considered to be the father of the Absurd in America. After the war the famous promise, *American Dream*, has been put into question. America was a promise yet soon turned out to be a false one because what was offered did not satisfy people at all, it was just an illusion; whoever touched it, it disappeared. Albee wrote in this atmosphere. He was born in Washington, D.C.1928 and adopted when he was only two weeks old by Reed and Frances Albee. Reed Albee was the millionaire owner of a chain of theatres and Frances Albee was a former mannequin and twenty-three years older than her husband. Edward Albee was brought up in an atmosphere of great affluence yet was no in good terms with his parents. He was fired from various boarding schools and finally left his family at the age of twenty and for a decade worked as office boy, salesman and Western Union messenger. During this period he wrote poems and stories yet these were not as impressive as his first play The Zoo Story, which he wrote at thirty as a birthday present for himself. Then he wrote Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, which brought

great fame to him. By these works he was hailed as the leader of a new theatrical movement and won Pulitzer Prize three times with three plays respectively, A Delicate Balance, Seascape and Three Tall Women.

As Tekinay remarks, “Albee’s drama is basically centered on how people lie to themselves and to each other and how they try to live without the cleansing consciousness of death. In order to experience the cleansing effects of such self-awareness, Albee’s heroes question the nature of their values, predicament, and relationships” (11). Albee realizes the fact that all kinds of values and beliefs are not valid any more and people live in an illusion. Due to this fact, he tries to awaken his audience and change his/her worldview in a way. His first play, The Zoo Story is really a great example in this sense. The play is constructed upon an encounter of two different men, Jerry and Peter, from different social status. Jerry acts the failed man who can not manage to adapt to modern life. Albee tries to get Peter out of the illusion and thereby the audience, and says, “I suspect that he can’t return to being the same person after that experience with Jerry. I can’t imagine he does” (Bigsby, 259). This is valid for the audience, as well. They cannot remain unchanged according to Albee. They question their lives and confront death, which lies in the hidden parts of their mind.

He achieves this aim and gives life to his theatre through language. One of his most distinguishing characteristics is his fascination with language. He has said that language, “is imprecise but, if you ask people to pay more attention to it, it helps... language is both disguise and the nakedness...we communicate and fail to communicate and make clear basically by language” (Bigsby, 328). In his plays he repeatedly implies this *and* reminds us that we talk to each other yet cannot communicate at all.

Another important figure of the Absurd drama is Eugène Ionesco, who was applauded and awarded a lot. He, too, rejected the logical plot, conventional character development, and the thought of traditional drama as the other absurdist playwrights and created his own style to convey the meaninglessness of modern man's existence in a universe ruled by chance.

He was born in Slatina, Romania in 1909, yet grew up in France. In 1925, he returned to Romania with his father after his parents divorced. He studied French Literature at the University of Bucharest from 1928 to 1933. He lived in Bucharest teaching French and writing poetry and literary criticism. In 1936 he married Rodica Burileano, a student of law and philosophy. Two years later he received a scholarship in France and returned there. He did not write his first play until 1950. He decided to learn English at the age of 40 and got an English text and began to study. As the lessons became more complex, two characters were introduced, Mr. And Mrs. Smith. He was surprised because at the dialogues between the couple Mrs. Smith informed her husband that they had several children, their name was Smith, he was a clerk. This dialogues transforms him:

A strange phenomenon took place. I don't know how –the text began imperceptibly to change before my eyes. The very simple, luminously clear statements I had copied so diligently into my notebook, left to themselves, fermented after a while, lost their original identity, expanded and overflowed. The clichés and truism of the conversation primer, which had once made sense ...gave way to pseudo-clichés and pseudo-truisms; these disintegrated into wild caricature and parody, and in the end language disintegrated into disjointed fragments of words

www.imagination.com/moonstruck/clsc19.html).

He expressed this experience in his first play The Bald Soprano, which was staged in 1950. The play tells the story of two couples whose conversation eventually turns into babblings. The play did not attract much attention after the first performance yet the writers Jean Anouilh and Raymond Queneau campaigned for him and then the play drew attention.

In rapid succession Ionesco wrote a number of dramas, including *LA LEÇON* (1951), a picture of the erotic thrust of tyrannical power, *LES CHAISES* (1952), in which the real and the imaginary coincide in a single semicircle of chairs, and *VICTIMES DU DEVOIR* (1954), a detective-story parody, in which his characters search for "Mallot with a t." *AMÉDÉE* (1954) portrayed a couple who share their apartment with a slowly growing corpse. Bérenger, a little Everyman, was featured first in *TUEUR SANS GAGS* (1958). By 1955 Ionesco's reputation was established in France. Gradually he was acclaimed as one of the leading exponents of the theatre of absurd (www.kirjasto.sci.fi/ionesco.html).

After these plays he was internationally known and became a remarkable face of the Theatre of the Absurd. His other famous plays are *Le Roi Se Meurt* and *Rhinocéros*. All these successful plays brought him lots of awards such as the Tours Festival Prize for film, 1959; Prix Italia, 1963; Society of Authors Theatre prize, 1966; Grand Prix National for theatre, 1969; Monaco Grand Prix, 1969; Austrian State Prize for European Literature, 1970; Jerusalem Prize, 1973; and honorary doctorates from New York University and the universities of Louvain (France), Warwick (England), and Tel Aviv (Israel). He was elected into the Académie Française in 1970. His seventieth birthday was celebrated in 1982 worldwide. In his last years Ionesco abandoned writing and devoted himself to painting and exhibiting his works. He died in Paris leaving behind many plays, numerous awards and a worldwide fame on March 28, 1994.

Arthur Lee Kopit has been a rebellious figure in American Drama. It is hard to categorize him yet his most famous play *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad* is regarded as a brilliant absurd work. Apart from it, he has not written any absurd plays. On that matter Martin Esslin remarks that "‘Oh Dad, Poor Dad’, written while its author was still an undergraduate at Harvard, showed considerable promise, which was not quite fulfilled by some of his later plays..." (Esslin 271).

He was born in New York City in 1937. He grew up in Lawrence, where his father worked as a jewelry sales manager. After he graduated high school, he entered Harvard University. He studied engineering but was also interested in arts and in his second year he joined in Harvard's Dunster House Drama Workshop. He produced seven plays there and directed six of them himself and won two playwrighting prizes.

CHAPTER I

The Zoo Story

Insufficiency of Language

The one-act The Zoo Story is Edward Albee's first play and being rejected by New York City producers, it was first staged in Europe at the Shiller Theater Werkstatt in 1959. Its first American staging took place in 1960 by the Provincetown Playhouse. Its impact on the audience was great then. It shocked and irritated the audience. Later on it was not applauded as much as Waiting for Godot yet it started a new period in American Drama.

The Zoo Story is a play mainly based on failure of contact, which is one of the most common themes in absurd drama. Apart from failure of contact and in relation to it, Albee deals with deficiency of language to communicate, general atmosphere of indifference collapsed upon the world after the World War II, selfish American way of life, alienation, love and hate relationship and finally God as an indifferent figure. These themes are main concerns of the absurdist playwrights, who could not comprehend the atrocity experienced at the time of the war. Everything was falling apart and these playwrights could not remain indifferent to these tragedies. The tragedy reminds us the verses of Yeat's in "The Second Coming":

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned... (Finneran 187).

In the play, Jerry and Peter try to contact yet they fail. As a result of this failure violence shows up and animates these lines in a way.

The play opens in Central Park in New York on a nice Sunday afternoon. Peter, a prosperous young man in the publishing business, is reading on a bench. He lives on the East side of the city. He is an upper-middle class family man and looks comfortable and highly contented. In complete contrast to Jerry, his world is well-ordered. Jerry leads a vagrant life in the West side of the city. The play is not a traditional sequential one so it turns around the conversation between these two opposite characters. Only at the end of the play a violent action takes place. Apart from this event, nothing happens; therefore it can be said that it is a play based on a dialogue yet it is really a tiring one.

Jerry starts the dialogue in a weird way:

JERRY: I've been to the zoo. (Peter doesn't notice) I said, I've been to the zoo.

MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!

PETER: Hm?... What? ...I'm sorry, were you talking to me? (12).

Jerry's first words are so bizarre to start a dialogue that Peter pays no attention to what he has said, because normally people start a conversation with certain clichés. Yet as said before this is an absurd play and the odd starting is the very first absurd element in the play. The language Jerry uses is far from clichés so Peter cannot adapt to his style immediately and to the end of the play he does not get what Jerry tries to say properly.

As the conversation between Jerry and Peter is going on, Jerry again does an absurd thing by asking whether Peter has a wife or not. Peter cannot comprehend the question because he has told that he is married. The question sounds too irrational to Peter. In this way, Albee attacks on language through Jerry's use of it. Peter is a quite ordinary and typical upper-middle class man. He is married and has two daughters, two cats and two parakeets. He works as an executive in the publishing business; yet Jerry is exactly the opposite and as his life is different from him the language he uses is also quite different.

Albee tries to show the insufficiency of language as a means of communication. Bigsby remarks that “It is a play which combines a critique of American values with an acknowledgement of the fragility of language, but which does so in the context of that drive for communication which Albee sees as central to a reconstruction of the moral world” (259). The conversation between Jerry and Peter supports this idea. Peter and Jerry talk but cannot communicate and understand each other properly. He tries to pull the audience out of the conventionalized everyday language and make them think upon it a bit. The insufficiency of language is the most common theme among the absurdist playwrights and Albee successfully holds mirror to the language problem in the play.

Another issue Albee deals with is lack of communication. At this point Jerry shows up as a suffering man because of this problem:

JERRY: I'll tell you why I do it; I don't talk to many people-except to say like: give me a beer, or where's the john, or what time does the feature go on, or keep your hands to yourself, buddy. You know-things like that.

PETER: I must say I don't...

JERRY: But every once in a while I like to talk to somebody, really *talk*; like to get to know somebody, know all about him. (13).

In fact most people are not different from Jerry because they talk to meet their basic needs. They use very short and stereotyped sentences to do shopping or to ask where to go. Apart from these small dialogues they talk little or when they talk to someone whom they know before the conversation is quite superficial. In other words, they do not talk to each other but they pretend to do so. Jerry dispenses with this superficial kind of speech. He does not give the expected answer, use the cliché words or follow a logical sequence in their dialogue. This unfamiliar type of conversation often startles Peter:

JERRY: Birds.

PETER: My daughters keep them in a cage in their room.

JERRY: Do they carry disease? The birds?

PETER: I don't believe so.

JERRY: That's too bad. If they did you could set them loose in the house and the cats could eat them and die, maybe. (PETER *looks blank for a moment, then laughs*) And what else? What do you do to support your enormous household? (14).

As it can be understood easily, Peter here does not expect any answer or comment on birds. This unexpected, unfamiliar and in a way cruel suggestion about birds surprises the audience, too. It shows the fact that people hear what they expect in their daily life and it means that they have a conventionalized, stereotyped kind of conversation among themselves.

From the very beginning of the play, the reader already knows something about Peter. He is the familiar one; yet s/he does not know much about Jerry. He first introduces the place where he lives:

JERRY: ... I live in a four-story brownstone rooming-house on the upper West Side between Columbus Avenue and Central Park West. I live in on the top floor; rear; west. It's a laughably small room, and one of my walls is made of beaverboard; this beaverboard separates my room from another laughably small room, so I assume that the two rooms were once one room, a small room, but not necessarily laughable. The room beyond my beaverboard wall is occupied by a colored queen who always keeps his door open; well, not always but *always* when he's plucking his eyebrows, which he does with Buddhist concentration. This colored queen has rotten teeth, which is rare, and he has a Japanese kimono, which is also pretty rare; and he wears this kimono to and from the john in the hall, which is pretty frequent. I mean he goes to the john a lot. He never bothers me, and he never brings anyone up to his room. All he does is pluck his eyebrows, wear his kimono and go to the john. Now, the two front rooms on my floor are a little larger, I guess; but they're pretty small, too. There's a Puerto Rican family in one of them, a husband, a wife, and some kids; I don't know how many. These people entertain a lot. And in the other front room, there's somebody living there, but I don't know who it is. I've never seen who it is. Never! Never ever! (25).

Peter is so naïve that he cannot understand why Jerry lives there. He knows nothing about the other side of the coin, different pace of life in the West side of the city. This reminds us both the metaphor of the zoo Albee uses and the alienation. Albee draws a parallel between the zoo and the world, between America in particular. Modern men, too self-indulged, have separated from each so much so that they are not aware of others and their sufferings.

At this point Albee displays a Miller-like attitude towards the American way of life, and his zoo metaphor echoes Chris's speech in All My Sons:

Chris: This is the land of the great big dogs, you don't love a man here, you eat him! That's the principle; the only one we live by. It just happened to kill a few people this time, that's all. The world's that way, how can I take it out on him? What sense does it make? This is a zoo, a zoo (Modern American Drama 321).

The quotation displays a materialistic view of the world, in which people live regardless of others and can do anything to achieve what they wish for. Self-worshipping led to this pernicious terrible situation. The world is like a zoo rather than a place for human beings to live in. Man has become a machine-like being, senseless and merciless. Ruby Cohn supports this view in his work called Edward Albee "... Albee's *Zoo Story* generalizes that men are animals; beneath the illusion of civilization, they may use words and knives instead of fangs and claws, but they still can kill" (9).

In such a world as described above everybody lives only for his/her comfort and interests, the natural result is that the people who live in the same flat do not know each other at all. Jerry mentions a Puerto Rican family, a colored queen and someone whom he has not seen at all. As Peter does not know the other side of the city, Jerry does not know his neighbors. Everybody is separated from each other by walls, which is similar to the situation in the zoos. And Jerry,

Awakened himself to the desperate isolation of people-as typified by his own rooming-house in which people suffer their private anguish in separate rooms, like animals in a zoo denied access to other animals and hence denied both self-definition and consolation – he has come to realize that such ‘solitary free passage’ as they and he have won for themselves is not gain but loss. Their privatism is not the result of the absurdity of their position; it is the essence of it. He does try to bring this message to Peter; to ease, or, if necessary, to shock him out of his isolation. But Peter resists a truth that will lay obligations upon him and shake him out of a tranquil but banal existence. And since language has been drained of its real meaning, infiltrated by clichés and conventionalized to the point where it loses its ability to express truth, Jerry is forced to adopt a more oblique approach: ‘sometimes’, he explains, ‘a person has to go a long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly’ (10). This is equally a description of Jerry’s method and Albee’s strategy – that resort to metaphor which he sees as fundamental to art (Bigsby 258).

For this purpose Jerry talks to Peter and asks him absurd questions, uses the zoo metaphor and talks about his life and belongings. He has not a wife, children or pets but only typical household stuff; however he talks about two picture frames, both empty. Among all the goods, these frames sound weird; yet it is not hard to guess that Jerry has no close friends and nothing he loves a lot. He is all alone and does not even have a picture of someone to put into the frame. Peter cannot grasp the point why the frames are empty. Jerry explains why it is so. He does not have a family, and he does not need to keep their pictures. In fact Jerry tries to awaken Peter out of his safe, calm life into the harsh reality of isolation and harshness of being alive. Yet Peter is so naïve in this sense that Jerry becomes more and more aggressive, more rude and cruel. What is even bitter lies in the conversation between Jerry and Peter about the empty frames;

JERRY: (*Nods his hello*) And let’s see now: what’s the point of having a girl’s picture, especially in two frames? I have two picture frames, you remember. I never see the pretty little ladies more than once, and most of them wouldn’t be caught in the same room with a camera. It’s odd, and I wonder if it’s sad.

PETER: The girls?

JERRY: No. I wonder if it's sad that I never see the little ladies more than once. I've never been able to have sex with, or, how is it put? ...make love to anybody more than once. Once; that's it... Oh, wait; for a week and a half, when I was fifteen... and I hang my head in shame that puberty was late... I was a h-o-m-o-s-e-x-u-a-l. I mean, I was queer... (*Very fast*) ...queer,queer,queer... with bells ringing, banners snapping in the wind. And for those eleven days, I met at least twice a day with the park superintendent's son ... a Greek boy, whose birthday was the same as mine, except he was a year older. I think I was very much in love... maybe just with sex. But that was the jazz of a very special hotel, wasn't it? And now, do I love the ladies; really, **I love them. For about an hour** (29).

His longest and deepest relationship was with a guy in his teenage years. Later on he tells that he meets a girl just to make love and then he does not see the same girl again. "I love them. For about an hour" says he (29). It can be clearly seen that he has no one special in his life; he does not love anybody as if he lost the very human feelings. However a family, a girlfriend, a neighbor, a cat or a bird, all these sound quite ordinary and basic in one's life that it is really hard to imagine someone who does not have any of these; because even the thought of this deprivation can scare one to death. Being so alone, living so isolated sounds desperate, and what Jerry tries to show is the fact that people are all alone and alien to each other even though they have all the things that he has not. This is more tragic than the situation Jerry is in.

Jerry talks without interruption; he talks about his life, his belongings, rather than his deprivations to make himself understood yet Peter resists. Thus Jerry attempts to find out a new way, and he resorts to parable, telling the story of his relationship with his landlady's dog, a relationship which parallels that between Peter and himself.

Jerry at first tries to befriend the dog by giving him hamburgers; yet the dog does not change his attitude towards him. So Jerry changes his strategy and decides

to kill him with a poisonous hamburger; yet this attempt fails, too. Jerry first tries to love the dog but he fails and immediately he moves from love to hate. Those two opposite emotions are side by side in his life. As it is in the parable, Jerry attempts to give his message to Peter in a friendly way; yet Peter does not want to understand it. Therefore Jerry goes mad and tries a harsh method to make himself understood.

There is a very significant point in Jerry's relationship with the dog: indifference. As a result of the attempt of killing, the dog becomes indifferent to him. This indifference indeed makes Jerry sorry more than his attacks, because it is the most terrible emotional state and according to Jerry, indeed Albee, this is the situation the world is in now. As a result of lots of bombs and massacres, the world has become more and more indifferent everyday. It is like a damn reigning on the world. Its inhabitants are so numb and so indifferent to others' anguish and tears that violence has become an ordinary part of our life and everyday various kinds of violent acts, tragic events are taking place; yet we do not even get stunned.

Albee is quite sensitive and sorry about this matter of indifference and he regards it as a highly deep question which goes far to God: "JERRY: ...with God who, I'm told turned his back on the whole thing some time ago..." (42).

Albee accuses God of turning his back onto the world. People die, cry and suffer; yet he does not interfere in. In a way he holds God responsible for the situation the world is in now. This is also one of the outcomes of the war. As said before, by the war all kinds of beliefs, values and virtues have been deeply shaken and shattered. Religions and belief in God are questioned harshly and God loses lots of believers as a result, because good, merciful and almighty God should have interfered in and stopped the genocide. Albee gives voice to this thought in the following quotation. Throughout their dialogue Jerry tries to awaken Peter to the tragedy of being alive and all the absurd happenings around. Yet,

Unable to convince Peter by argument or through the oblique lessons of parable, Jerry now provokes him into defending his bench. He throws Peter a knife and then deliberately impales himself on it. The Christian overtones are clear. Like Christ, whose name his own is clearly designed to recall, his message of love has finally to be reinforced through his own sacrifice. As he dies, so he wipes the knife clean of fingerprints, as Christ had absolved those who killed him. And Peter, like the disciple who had thrice denied Christ, offers a triple affirmation as that disciple had done: 'Oh my God, my God, my God.'⁽⁴⁵⁾ he is now tied to Jerry by guilt. He can never return to his isolated bench (Bigsby 259).

As a result, Peter experiences a great trauma and it is impossible for him to go back to his former life as Albee says:

I suspect that he can't return to being the same person after that experience with Jerry. I can't imagine that he does. Not that he is going to become Jerry himself, but I suspect that he has been altered considerably by it. I think that he has certainly been jarred. And he is a bright enough man not to be able to retreat (Bigsby 259).

Thus the transition Jerry wishes takes place. Peter cannot be the same Peter again.

To sum up, except the ending, the play has very typical characteristics of the absurd theatre. First of all, if it is examined as a whole, it is seen that it is not made up of sequential events but based on a dialogue. The protagonist Jerry is an anti-hero. He does not have great traits in the conventional sense. He is not from a noble family nor is he a successful, strong and brave man. In contrast to all these marvelous characteristics, he is a vagabond, a failed figure.

As for the dialogue, it is technically the most significant element in absurd plays because failure of contact is generally the central theme. In The Zoo Story, the situation is not any different. The dialogue between Jerry and Peter is at the heart of the play. It is really an absurd dialogue which involves irrational, startling and incomplete sentences, that's, it does not follow a conventional and logical path. They talk; however they cannot communicate.

Another absurd element that draws attention is the aggression and violence on stage. In absurd tradition, all the absurd actions, funny things or violent acts take place on stage. They are not implied as it is in the conventional drama. In the play Jerry acts in a hysterical and aggressive way and at the end of the play he impales himself on the knife and commits suicide in a way.

The most absurd elements in the play are the themes like the lack of communication, failure of contact, language as a cliché, selfish American life, alienation, love and hate relationship, indifference of God. Only the ending is not absurd. In absurd plays generally the ending does not offer anything positive or negative nor does it reach any climax; rather they have a circular structure that the play ends as it begins and does not offer any change. But in The Zoo Story, the play reaches to a climax in the end. Jerry dies and Peter undergoes a traumatic transition from ignorance to awareness. In Albee's own words, "the play is neither nihilistic nor pessimistic... My hero is not a beatnick and he is not insane. He is over-sane. Though he dies, he passes on an awareness of life to the other character in the play; the play, therefore is not a denial of 'life'" (Rutenberg, 37). Thus, The Zoo Story employs many absurd theatrical devices and techniques of the absurd; but ends rejecting the absurdist vision of the universe, which defends the fact that there is no meaning in living.

CHAPTER II

Absurdity of Marriage as an Institution

Amédée is regarded as one of the most successful plays of Eugene Ionesco. It depicts a marriage in which love is dead. Ionesco questions the institution of marriage and in a way implies that as every institution, it has lost its meaning and credibility. The damn of the age, alienation, has penetrated into the most intimate relationship between two people.

Amédée is a three-act play which tells the story of a couple who lost their love long ago. The play as a whole is a sad commentary on marriage and displays the failure of married couples to keep their love alive. Amédée and Madeleine present a perfect example in this sense. They cannot keep their love alive and they try to get rid of the feeling of guilt throughout the play.

Amédée is a playwright who tries to write a play yet cannot go beyond a few lines throughout the play. Madeleine earns her living by operating some sort of telephone switchboard. They have opposite characters; Amédée is romantic, artistic and imaginative whereas Madeleine is materialistic, hard and pessimistic. In Act II, Amédée states her harsh nature perfectly well: “Amédée: If only you wished... Nature would be so bountiful... wings on our feet, our limbs like wings... our shoulders wings... gravity abolished... no more weariness...” (75). He voices his feelings so sincerely that we cannot help sympathizing with him. He believes that if Madeleine had managed to look in a different way everything around them would be better. However they are significantly different from each other and fail to meet at a common point like many other couples around.

What strikes the reader first as an absurd element at the beginning of the play is the choice of the characters. As said before, in absurd plays it is almost

impossible to see characters in classical sense who are strong-willed, far from being ordinary and distinguished with something special to them. Amédée does not startle us in this sense; so the main two characters are quite ordinary ones. They have nothing special and do not undergo a crucial transformation or change anything in their lives or solve their problems at all. They lead a monotonous life and in the end the situation becomes worse.

Absurd characters are generally ordinary people; however their most characteristic feature is their inability to adapt to the world around them the perfect example of whom is Amédée. As if from another planet, he talks to himself:

Amédée: ...Oh! I'm really no good at anything. Whatever I try! I can never make a go of it.

Madeleine [*emerging from the lumber and combing her hair in front of the mirror*]: I've been telling you that for ages...

Amédée [*with a sigh*]: Yes, Madeleine, you're right. Anyone else could manage better than I do. I'm like a helpless child, I'm defenceless. **I'm a misfit.** I wasn't made to live in twentieth century (56).

This adaptation problem is not something peculiar to Amédée. In absurd plays, most of the characters are misfits. They are the people who cannot adapt to the modern world and cannot be successful in modern sense; so they feel failed and defeated. Amédée is not alone, Jerry has also been a misfit like many other absurd characters. According to George E. Craddock these failed figures are products of Eugène Ionesco's general view of human condition:

Ionesco's major concern about the human condition revolves around his belief that the important goals of life are lost in the maze of routine daily actions. Social living channels the individual's physical and mental activities to such an extent that he becomes a kind of conditioned human being. By giving most of his attention to the exterior world, the individual fails to give sufficient attention to his inner life. Thus he starves his higher self of artistic or creative activity, and he loses an important dimension of his identity (Craddock 15).

As Craddock remarks, there are so many things to do in our lives that we lose “self” and cannot do everything demanded thus misfits like Amédée come out, who neither adapts to the exterior world nor turns to his/her inner life. Here Amédée is a good example because he really cannot keep up with the daily routine and not able to create anything artistically; so he suffers deeply and seems as a lost man.

Apart from characters, one of the distinguishing features of Eugène Ionesco’s theatre is his choice of place: living room. Mary Ann Witt explains the reasons of this deliberate choice as follows:

If imprisonment is both a personal experience and a universal situation, it is particularly suited for representation on stage. In Ionesco’s plays there are no dungeons or cells with iron bars: these have been replaced by the pretty bourgeois living room. It is primarily in this, his most prevalent décor, that Ionesco works out ‘his archetypes’ (Witt, 313).

In Amédée, the married couple leads an imprisoned life in the living room as Witt stated above. Modern man is imprisoned in his daily duties, his job, precariousness of his life and in, fear of death. Ionesco does not convey this imprisonment with bars or cells but with a desperately boring life at home, in other words living room.

There is no doubt that the most striking absurd element and the metaphor is the corpse. At the very beginning of the play the audience meets him and then on he remains on the stage, in other words, at the heart of the play.

The corpse has been at their home for fifteen years and it grows slowly: “He’s grown again” says Amédée “Soon the divan won’t be big enough for him. His feet are over the end already. I seem to remember fifteen years ago he was rather short” (38). At first, as Amédée and Madeleine, the audience too cannot comprehend the case. They do not know whose corpse it has been or where it has come from.

Amédée and Madeleine state different alternatives on the matter. Madeleine claims that he was killed by Amédée because of jealousy; whereas Amédée claims that it is the baby of their neighbor left for a few hours but has been there from that day on. Throughout the play they produce different ideas on the matter yet the audience understands what has been going on soon.

This growing corpse is Amédée and Madeleine's feeling of guilt and remorse. According to Ionesco, the marriage has been one of the institutions bankrupted and lost its meaning. People cannot love each other to the end of their lives. This couple is just an example and needless to say the corpse is a metaphor of their lost love. Since they fail to keep their love alive, they suffer to death and feel guilty. The corpse can be said to be the outcome of this feeling.

Nevertheless some critics do not share the view that the corpse and its proliferation is only the symbol of dead love. According to Nancy Lane it means more than this:

The proliferation of objects, for example, has been interpreted as a metaphor translating Ionesco's metaphysical anguish when confronted by the 'trop plein' of the material world and the ontological "vide" of human existence. Rosette Lamont compares the proliferation of matter in Ionesco's plays to Sartrean nausea, summing up a private nightmare of all men, of man in fact, when he becomes aware of his human situation in the oppressive, heavy world of material presences (Lane, 245).

Modern man is so much occupied with the material world that sensitive people like Ionesco rebels against this attitude. In Nausea, the reader experiences this anguish severely. The protagonist cannot stand anything around him. He desperately suffers from this oppressive world of material presence. Yet Ionesco presents this atmosphere indirectly. The audience gets bored to death but cannot grasp the reason immediately. Firstly s/he cannot comprehend the static atmosphere and cancerous, irrational multiplication of material things in the play but later on when s/he ponders

upon it s/he begins to feel a Sartrean nausea deep in his/her heart. Ionesco explains this feeling in his article impressively:

Matter fills everything, takes up all space, annihilates all liberty under its weight; the horizon shrinks, and the world becomes a stifling dungeon. Speech crumbles, but in another way, words fall like stones, like corpses; I feel myself overcome by heavy forces against which I wage a losing battle (10).

This is a faithful description of the feelings of Amédée. The corpse grows every day filling up the flat gradually. They can do nothing to stop it; thus he feels trapped and helpless in this battle.

The place where he is kept is also highly symbolic. They keep him in their most intimate part of their house, bedroom. This implies the fact that their sexual life has also been damaged and do not share anything in this sense. They all the time quarrel and tell nothing nice to each other. Moreover they assault one another verbally and the audience feels that they live through a great frustration; because marriages have been damaged as many institutions and far from being satisfying the couples.

As said before, the corpse does not lie down in the room without any change. He grows slowly and gets older. And they believe that it would stop growing when he forgives them:

Amédée [sitting down next to Madeleine, but facing the audience]
He may have forgiven us. I believe he has. [A long heavy silence; they are eating their plums.] Ah, if only we could be sure he'd forgiven us!

[Another silence]

Madeleine: If he'd forgiven us, he'd have stopped growing. As he's still growing, he must still be feeling spiteful. He still has a grudge against us. The dead are terribly vindictive. The living forget much sooner (43).

What Madeleine says is quite significant. If their love had been still alive they could have coped with their problems, would have forgiven each other and forgotten their hard moments.

Another fantastic image in the play is the mushrooms. The corpse grows larger when they quarrel and in addition, mushrooms burst out in their flat. This is also an irritating happening for them. They get more worried when they come across a new mushroom. In fact, the mushrooms also grow immediately after they fight like the corpse yet they cannot comprehend the situation. However Amédée sometimes approaches to the truth:

Amédée [to *Madeleine*]: Poor Madeleine! What a terrible time you've had. [*Looking as though he wishes to approach her*] Do you know, Madeleine, if we loved each other, if we really loved each other, none of this would be important. [*clasping his hands*] Why don't we try to love each other, please Madeleine? Love puts everything right, you know, it changes life. Do you believe me, can you understand? (77).

In the quotation Amédée expresses the gist of the play. If they had loved each other there would not have been any mushrooms, no corpse and hence no problem. This is true also for the outer world. There would not be so many absurd things around if we managed to love each other. People would not suffer from self-estrangement and alienation so much. Man has lost the ability of loving; thus human life like many things lost its meaning and due to this loss the world we live in is not much different from the absurd stage.

Marriage is one of the conceptions that has deteriorated and has become a suffocating institution. Madeleine and Amédée present the reasons of this change to the audience. First of all, all married couples cannot see each other as different individuals and worse than this, they want to be the same completely. Thus the first years of marriages turn into a battle field because the partners try to create the person they love. This unfortunately means that they do not love their husband/wife indeed

but the image they create in their mind. They try hard to change their partner into the person they dream of; thereby it is hard to mention love. When love abandons the place it belongs to, marriages turn into hell as it has happened in the case of Amédée and Madeleine.

Couples leave no room to each other to breathe. For each spouse there are roles defined and specified and unfortunately any attempt to change these roles fails immediately or leads to harsh quarrels. As a result of this restrictive attitude, after a while partners regard one another as slaves. Madeleine and Amédée often refer to this strict and restricted role playing. “ Madeleine: So now you are timing me! Now I’m supposed to make my lord and master recital of everything I do, account for every second of my life, I don’t belong to myself anymore, I’m not myself anymore, I’m a slave... ” (29). As Madeleine remarks, couples display such a possessive approach to one another that they lose **self**, thus marriage creates machine-like characters who experience self-estrangement.

Another factor that makes marriages unbearable is doubtlessly expectations. Sometimes people expect superhuman things and surely it is hard for an ordinary man to meet these extraordinary expectations. When they aren’t met, couples suffer from a great frustration so they begin to blame each other as Madeleine and Amédée: “Amédée [still in the doorway]: I was doing my best... You’re never satisfied... ”(50). Unsatisfied partners go on accusing one another of unhappiness:

Amédée [*weakly*]: No. It’s not only my fault.

Madeleine: It is, it is! (59).

The situation in the quotation is not unfamiliar indeed. Because generally in marriages today people consume love fast and end up in the same fight, which Amédée and Madeleine experience. Each part charges the other with destroying love and this goes on to the end without finding the guilty one.

Their crippled love deeply affects them and in addition to the fantastic results such as the growing corpse or the mushrooms, this loss of love gives birth to another result: ultimate isolation which reaches at an unbelievable degree. They have been at home for fifteen years and have not met anyone, have lost all the connections with people.

Isolation and alienation are the themes frequently dealt with by the absurdist playwrights, and Ionesco, in this play, makes the audience become aware of these themes. The atmosphere of the play is dead-calm and isolated. Amédée is a playwright yet writes only two lines in fifteen years and Madeleine works on the switchboard. They have been at home for fifteen years and nothing important happens during two acts. They just quarrel and the audience gets bored to death. Their isolated life, alienation to each other have been so much underlined and emphasized that the audience feels obliged to think over his/her own loneliness and isolation.

Because of the growing corpse, it so seems, they become totally isolated and keep away from contact with other people. This is a great secret of them and they do not want anyone to learn it. Most of the critics state that the corpse stands for their dead love and in the play there are some statements supporting this view. However it may also stand for more than death of love. Above all, it represents "death" itself. Thus it is possible to tell that the corpse refers to real death. The concept of death is a great handicap for the absurdist playwrights because of its unforeseen nature. Man is too helpless and weak before it and the thought of it gnaws at man. Under the shadow of this thought, s/he cannot enjoy life and becomes alien to both himself/herself and other people. Thus it can be said that what imprisoned Amédée and Madeleine was the tormenting reality of death. They feel helpless against it; it approaches more each day and gives no room to breathe. They cannot concentrate on anything but only suffer.

Ionesco is one of the absurdists who cannot find any reasonable explanation for death and he supports this helplessness in the following quotation:

I cannot understand how it should be that from hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years men have accepted life and death in these intolerable conditions: have accepted an existence haunted by the fear of death, amid war and pain, without showing any real, open decisive reaction against it. ... We are caught in a sort of collective trap and we don't even rebel seriously against it (Kott, 5).

As understood from these remarks he is obsessed with the idea and cannot cope with it; thereby Amédée and Madeleine display how this obsessive thought turns people's lives into a torture and forces them to isolation.

In Act III, we enter a different atmosphere; different but again an absurd one. In this act, the couple finally decides to get rid of the corpse. Amédée takes it out of the house one night and leave it to a river and never see it again. So they set to work immediately and with a great effort Amédée manages to take it out of house. He is on the streets with an oversize corpse.

The corpse, the death of love or the thought of death itself, makes it impossible for them to go on in the same way. The corpse grows so much that there is little space left for them. The corpse grows physically and it means that the idea or the situation which suffocates them grows, too and does not let them think anything else. They cannot cope with this suffering and try to get rid of it by throwing it away. However this attempt turns into a fantastic one and once more the audience realizes that it is an absurd play.

The corpse which has imprisoned him for fifteen years, suddenly transforms into a parachute and becomes the instrument of his deliverance. He begins to fly upwards on the corpse and apologize to Madeleine in his own way: “Amédée: Madeleine, I promise you, you can really believe me... I didn’t want to run away from my responsibilities... It’s the wind, I didn’t do anything!... It’s not on purpose!... Not of my own free will ” (102). Indeed he wants to free himself from all the responsibilities and the thoughts that imprison him. The ending is escapist and surrealist and these contribute to the absurdity of the play.

At the very end of the play a pitiful dialogue passes between a couple who witnesses flying of Amédée from the window of their house: “Woman [to man]: We’ll close the shutters, the show’s over!” (116). People suffer outside or shed tears or die; the tragedy of others seems as only a sort of show to watch. This indifference reminds us the painting of Brueghel, which depicts the story of Icarus. Icarus’ wings made up of wax melt and he disappears in deep water. While dying, a farmer ploughs his farm and does not even look at this sight. Tragedy of others might seem as just a show and life goes on despite every dreadful thing. This is also one of the illnesses of modern times: indifference. And in the quotation, the woman states it in a very short sentence; thus Ionesco ends his play underlining one of the things which absurd playwrights protest a lot: indifference.

CHAPTER III

Possessive Attitude in Relationships

Arthur Kopit wrote Oh Dad Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad while he was studying European theatre at Harvard. He entered in a school playwriting contest, yet he never expected that it would bring him a worldwide fame at the age of twenty-three. The play written as a parody “a pseudo-classical tragifarce in a bastard French tradition...” won both the contest and an undergraduate production at Harvard. It drew so much attention that firstly it moved into a Cambridge, Massachusetts, commercial house, the Agassiz Theater; then it was staged at the Phoenix Theatre in New York. The play opened there in 1962 and ran for 454 performances, which is an extraordinary achievement for an unknown playwright. The work also won both the Vernon Rice and the Outer Circle Awards. At the time Kopit was labeled as an absurdist playwright, apart from Oh Dad Poor Dad he did not write any play in this genre.

Oh Dad Poor Dad is a three-act play which tells the story of an overbearing and domineering mother and her fragile son. They do not have a settled life in the classical sense. Madame Rosepettle constantly travels with her son to tell people her worldview and hatred of men. In this weird picture, Jonathan usually seems like a suitcase in his mother's hand or a painting on the wall. Through these opposite characters and absurd atmosphere in the play. Kopit emphasizes themes like man-hatred, communication problems, possessiveness in relationships, and escape from reality.

The first Act opens in a luxurious hotel suite in the Caribbean Port Royale Hotel. The audience firstly meets a squad of bellboys, then Madame Rosepettle and her son, Jonathan and finally their exotic and absurd belongings like Venus flytraps, a piranha, a coffin, a dictaphone, black drapes to block the sunlight and Jonathan's collections of stamps, coins and books. Apart from these interesting goods, the first

thing that strikes the audience is the attitude Madame Rosepettle displays towards the bellboys. She demands their things to be settled; yet she is such a supercilious and domineering woman that she only gives orders and directions around. No matter whom she talks to, she is the superior one in the conversation. Thus it can be said that even the language is in her command. Due to this fact, again communication problem shows up.

Madam Rosepettle cannot have a proper conversation with anyone because she wants to be the superior one all the time and listens not to the person she talks to. Thus it is impossible to mention a proper dialogue when she is one of the parts in a conversation. Her domineering feature firstly paralyzes her son's ability to talk and communicate. He does stutter especially when he talks to his mother:

MADAME ROSEPETTLE: Your fabulous coin collection, Edward. Where should they put it?
 JONATHAN: Uh . . . uh . . . I . . . I . . . I tha . . . tha . . . tha-think-
 MADAME ROSEPETTLE: What is wrong with your tongues?
 Can't you talk like a normal human being without showering this room with your inarticulate spit!?! (20).

Her exaggerated domineering attitude paralyzes him and he shivers at the sight of her so he cannot talk or react properly. Consequently his life becomes so isolated that he fails to establish any connection with the world outside. So the communication problem in this play is more profound than the two plays examined before. Here the victim of this problem can be regarded as a neurotic one, full of abnormal fears and incapable of talking like a normal person.

It maybe wrong to regard him as a helpless man; since he silently rebels against his mother as Friday does in Coetzee's novel Foe, which is a parody of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. Friday is mute and by his indifference and silence he rebels against the idea of colonization in a silent way. In the play, Jonathan exhibits a similar defiance against his mother. Her mother uses his son as a secretary of her own and continuously tells him to make a note about various things:

“MADAME ROSEPETTLE: [To Jonathan:] Remind me, Robinson darling, to have this man fired first thing in the morning. He’ll never do. [Jonathan *scratches a large “X” on his pad...*]” (21). It is the only thing that Jonathan does not carry out as his mother wishes. So this trivial disobedience gives hope to the audience.

In fact he is aware of his desperate situation yet he tries to avoid the reality like Laura in The Glass Menagerie. As Arthur Ballet states: “Instead of a unicorn to keep him from truly experiencing life, Jonathan has his stamps, his plants to feed, his coins to examine, and above all his spying on Rosalie, the baby-sitter across the street. He will do almost anything to avoid facing the facts of his closed world” (567). His bitter situation is an exaggerated one but it is from real life. Actually most of people are not much different from Jonathan. They think that they have a lot to do and become slaves of these things to be done and estrange themselves from real life like Jonathan.

In the Second Act, Madame Rosepettle sends Rosalie to Jonathan’s room; because she notices that he has been watching her through a telescope for a while. Madame Rosepettle regards her as a slut and wants Jonathan to see her real character; thereby he will never think about her again. However this time she cannot control the events. In her visit, Rosalie invites Jonathan to her room but Jonathan does not accept this invitation because he cannot go outside but answers as follows:

JONATHAN: ... I’ve got so much to do. I mean, all my ssssstamps and . . . coins and books. The pa-pa-plane might fffffly overhead while I was going downstairs. And then thhhhere are . . . the plants ta-to feeeeed. And I enjoy vvery much wa . . . watching you and all yyyyyour children. I’ve . . . really got so many things . . . to . . . do (40).

He believes or tries to believe that he has lots of things to do and his works sound frivolous to us. Yet maybe our works are not much different from him and we

are trapped in our works like him as a result of modern sense of life. This notion is one of the things that the absurdist playwrights generally highlight in their works

The bitterest sentence in the quotation is “The pa-pa-plane might fffffly overhead while I was going downstairs” (40). This statement shows the audience the position of Jonathan in life: unfortunately he is only an onlooker, not inside of but just watching it while it is passing by. At the very end of the play again a plane flies away and he waves to it in the hope of being noticed but no one notices his existence. Thus the expectations about his change or in other words his salvation do not come true and remains in the same pitiful situation.

Jonathan is also the greatest victim in the play. Madame Rosepettle is a control freak and she has really psychological problems to be discussed later on. Jonathan is the person whom she damages most. It can be clearly seen that she has reduced him to a terribly insecure, frightened, and emotionally arrested young man incapable of functioning without her. He does not and cannot go out at all; worse than that he cannot even think of the possibility of it:

ROSALIE: Why can't you go out, Jonathan? I want to know.

...

JONATHAN: I . . . I don't . . . know. I don't know why. I mean, I've . . . nnnnnnever really thought . . . about going out. I . . . guess it's . . . just natural for me to stay inside (40).

He is very much alike the weird plants and pets of Madame Rosepettle. He cannot do anything without her permission; that's to say, he is not an individual but a part of Madame Rosepettle.

Apart from Madame Rosepettle, Rosalie enters his life in the Second Act, in which the theme of sexuality comes to light. She is a babysitter, looking after ten

children of a family and yearns for a family of her own. At this point Jonathan becomes important in her eyes and attempts to seduce him. Jonathan watches her through a telescope and this displays his budding sexual awareness, which Madame Rosepettle does her best to avoid. She is firmly against sexuality and tries to keep her son away from it. But Rosalie ruins her plans.

Madame Rosepettle has a peculiar parental attitude and the following quotation sums up her view clearly:

MADAME ROSEPETTLE. *I don't let him out because he is my son. I don't let him out because his skin is as white as fresh snow and he would burn if the sun struck him. I don't let him out because outside there are trees with birds sitting on their branches waiting for him to walk beneath. I don't let him out because you're there, waiting behind the bushes with your skirt up. I don't let him out he is susceptible. That's why. Because he is susceptible. Susceptible to trees and to sluts and to sunstroke (45).*

Through this character, Kopit also criticizes parental overcontrol. Madame Rosepettle tries to protect her son from every kind of people, every kind of idea; in other words she protects him against life, the world outside their room. Yet she fails in this exaggerated attempt and Jonathan goes mad in the end.

Jonathan is really very unlucky because the second person and the second woman at the same time who enters his life is not much different from the first one. She wants to have him completely for her own like Madame Rosepettle. Jonathan is a perfect husband-to-be since he has no one in his life except for his mother and a very lonely figure. So if she liberated him from his mother, he would be wholly her own:

ROSALIE: I love you, Jonathan, and I won't give you up. I want you . . . **all for myself**. Not to share with your mother, but for me, alone . . . to love, to live with, to have children by. I want you, Jonathan. You, whose skin is softer and whiter than anyone's I've ever known; whose voice is quiet and whose love is in every look of his eye. I want you, Jonathan, and I won't give you up (84).

This quotation echoes Madame Rosepettle's words about her husband and her view of marriage when she explains the thoughts about her husband to the Commodore:

MADAME ROSEPETTLE: ... Perhaps it's ... yes, perhaps it's because one look at Albert's round, sad face and I knew he could be mine... that no matter where he went, or whom he saw, or what he did, Albert would be mine, all mine-mine to love, mine to live with, mine to kill; my husband, my lover, my own ... *my very own* (67).

Both of them regard their spouses as their personal commodity and marriage is the institution which ensures it. So both of them fail and cannot be happy in the end: one of them kills her husband and carries him in a coffin everywhere and the other one is killed by the man she wants to have. In the last Act, Rosalie tries her best to seduce Jonathan; yet when she admits that she is not innocent as Madame Rosepettle claims, Jonathan smothers her with her skirt.

Jonathan covers her dead body with his highly precious books, coins and stamps. It is really a great progress in his part; since they mean a lot for him. However after he hears the dialogue between his mother and the Commodore, he changes a great deal and firstly he does away with Madame Rosepettle's omnivorous pets and plants. This scene looks promising for him and the audience expect that he will manage to liberate himself from the bars around him; yet the final picture frustrates the audience: he kills not only the plants and pets but also Rosalie. He becomes as merciless as Madame Rosepettle and Rosalie, then goes mad. Finally he returns to his weak, miserable and incapable mood again and he remains in minds waving to a plane passing by.

There is no doubt that the most extraordinary character and the reason of almost all the absurd happenings in the play is Madame Rosepettle. Her belongings

are as peculiar as herself: she has Venus flytraps which can eat anything and a silver piranha which devours living things especially Siamese cats. Both the flytraps and Rosalinda, the piranha display an omnivorous character very similar to that of Madame Rosepettle. However the most absurd and interesting of all is the coffin. Here again there is a dead body. In *Amédée*, there was a dead body in the bedroom of the couple. Death is something suffocating and a serious issue waiting to be solved. This atmosphere in the play exhibits the absurdist playwrights' problem with death. They cannot find meaning in a universe where death exists. Thus, death issue remains a great problem to be solved.

In *Amédée*, the characters are not able to cope with this problem; however in *Oh Dad Poor Dad*, there is a different approach to the phenomena of death. The most prevalent attitude is indifference: the characters do not react to death or dead people as expected. Kopit here tries to cope with this issue by ignoring and mostly making fun of it. Madame Rosepettle keeps the corpse of her husband in the coffin and wherever she stays, she hangs it in the closet as a casual piece of cloth and this does not impress anyone much. Rosalie is a good example in this sense. When trying to seduce Jonathan, the dead body falls upon them and Jonathan panics but she says: "Forget about your father. Drop your pants on top of him, then you won't see his face" (87). She reacts to this weird event as if keeping a dead body in the closet is quite normal. Her reaction is both comic and absurd. The comic aspect gives the audience Kopit's attitude towards death: he tries to cope with it by ignoring and sometimes making fun of it.

The coffin conveys not only the view of death in the play but also the possessive attitude in relationships. Madame Rosepettle possesses her husband by killing him and carries him everywhere in a coffin. This can be seen an exaggerated example; yet it displays and underlines the strong motive to control and possess the other in relationships. Madame Rosepettle firstly wants to possess her husband, Albert Edward Robinson Rosepettle III, then her son. After their first night, they do

not sleep together anymore and do not share anything intimate. She becomes more and more dissatisfied with her husband and the marriage so she kills him to possess him completely.

Her excessive desire to possess goes on with Jonathan, who is a part of her husband. She sometimes calls him “Albert”, sometimes “Robinson” or “Edward”. This shows the fact that she does not see him as a different individual but just a part of her and their relationship. She keeps her husband in a coffin but she keeps her son in a room and does not let him go outside. Thus she expects to prevent him from experiencing a mature, sexual relationship with a member of the opposite sex. As Fiero states in his article written for Drama For Students:

Kopit rolls two stereotypes into the single figure of the Madame Rosepettle, however, for she is also a frigid, castrating bitch goddess, incapable of any normal kind of love. Her favorite pastime, besides measuring yachts (a blatant symbol for the male genitalia she wishes to destroy), is to patrol resort beaches with a large flashlight to find lovers to annoy by kicking sand on them. She despises sex as something dirty and unwholesome, and, if she could, she would rid the world of its blight. Her strategy in Jonathan’s case is to frustrate his pro-creative instincts by keeping the nasty world of sex beyond locked doors and filling his mind with her poisonous ideas (6).

Madame Rosepettle seems really problematic and due to her exaggerated behaviors she also looks comic. She extremely hates men and a control freak in her relationships; yet as Tekinay remarks “Behind the seemingly insane, mad woman, there lies a broken, vulnerable person” (23). Her story begins with her marriage. She tells her story to the Commodore: she got married to an ugly, poor, repulsive man because “one look at Albert’s round, sad face and I knew he could be mine... that no matter where he went, or whom he saw, or what he did, Albert would be mine, all mine –mine to love, mine to live with, mine to kill; my husband, my lover, my own... my very own (67). However her extreme desire to possess him fails at first night and she infers that even in the most intimate moments of love and sex, there can be no genuine communication. He sleeps immediately after their sexual intercourse and she

explains her feelings in such a sad mood that the audience cannot help but pity her: “Oh, how easily is Man satisfied. How easily is his porous body saturated with ‘fun’. All he asks is a little sex and a little food and there he is, asleep with a smile and snoring. Never the slightest regard for you, lying in bed next to him, your eyes wide open” (67). After that night on she becomes a man-hater and does not believe in love. Thus she becomes extremely aggressive towards the people around her, especially towards men; yet this aggressiveness can be regarded as a defence mechanism, because she does not want to be exploited by men again.

Madame Rosepettle is full of man-hatred as said before; yet the play may also give the impression of woman-hatred. Since the female characters are monster-like figures who try to hold the men in their life captive and both of the male characters, the Commodore and Jonathan, are passive victims of these crazy women. Thus it is possible to observe both man-hatred and woman-hatred in the play.

Another interesting point in the play is the choice of the names. The word “rose” is incorporated into all of the characters’ names apart from Jonathan. Rose is generally associated with love and purity; however none of the characters are connected to such concepts. Rosalie pretends to be pure and innocent, but actually is a slut. Commodore Roseabove continuously talks about love, yet he is after sex. Rosalinda, the piranha, eats kittens and the main character Madame Rosepettle, whose name most explicitly evokes the flower, displays behaviours completely in contrast to the common features associated with the rose. She is a beautiful woman but full of thorns. It is possible to infer that Kopit used the name of this flower on purpose to increase the degree of sarcasm and irony.

The action has a cartoon-like illogicality. There is generally no plausible explanation for the things happen. For example, the body of Mr Rosepettle falls from the closet many times and briefly comes to life and gets the leg of Jonathan in the last

act. Coffin handles and door knobs come off and a chair moves without touching it while Madame Rosepettle talking to Commodore Roseabove as if some invisible person exists and interferes in when it necessary. In addition to these absurdities, non-human entities become animated: the Venus flytraps, Rosalinda the piranha, a cuckoo clock, and even the window frames. They all exhibit human traits. For example in the last scene in an inexplicable way, the plants grows and expands and try to snatch and devour Jonathan. All these contribute to the absurdity of the play.

Kopit has only one absurd play, Oh Dad Poor Dad, there is no doubt that it is really a successful absurd play and is applauded a lot. First of all, as many absurdist playwrights, he emphasizes the fact that language is not a sufficient way of communication. He uses Jonathan, who stammers and stutters throughout the play. Madame Rosepettle highlights another aspect of this failure in the communication: even the most intimate relationship between two people does not provide a complete communication. Secondly, the characters are dysfunctional and exaggerated types. Madame Rosepettle is usually called as a “monster”, and Jonathan is her victim, who is full of fears. Logic is subverted. Lots of absurd things happen in the play as it stated before. There is a cartoon-like atmosphere; all the non-human entities can come to life momentarily and behave as a human being. Most of all, the irreverent treatment of serious matters, especially love and death, makes the play a perfect absurd one. In the end, the play does not offer any hope: the plants and pets and Rosalie die; Jonathan, who is the killer of all, cannot go out of his pitiful situation. He remains in minds waving hands to a plane passing by, which does not notice him at all. The Commodore runs away from Madame Rosepettle as soon as possible and Madame Rosepettle asks the meaning of the situation when she sees all the things in a mess. Thus it can be said that the very last line of the play is also a mockery, which parodies the notion of meaninglessness. All the characters have seen their share of death and lost their abilities to react properly and function in society and this inability to function in society and the concept of frivolous death and non-reaction to corpses form the essence of the absurd theatre. So Kopit ends his play showing the audience that there is no meaning in the universe and no meaning to life.

CONCLUSION

The plays discussed in this thesis are important works in the absurd genre and each of them holds mirror to absurd drama's vision of universe in their own way. In absurd drama, the universe is a desolate and senseless one, in other words, it is not worth living. Many institutions and values have been damaged after the World War II and these plays display different examples of this damage. The first one presents the audience the failure of contact between two people from different social status, in *Amédée* it has been shown that this failure of contact penetrated into the institution of marriage, and the last play, *Oh Dad Poor Dad*, the audience comprehends the fact that the senseless power struggle in modern world has also damaged the relationship between mother and child. According to Fiero,

In this world, humanity seems like it is being herded towards the mass grave of an extermination camp, where naked bodies are dumped to tumble over each other like discarded manikins. It is a world in which life or death become indifferent choices, for it is less a world than a spiritual void one in which, as in Ionesco's *The Lesson* (1950), authority has devolved into a mere exercise of brutal, dehumanizing, and meaningless power exercised over and over (4).

These three plays support Fiero's view with various pictures from life. Communication problem is the common theme of all three plays. In *The Zoo Story*, it is the central theme; so Albee emphasizes insufficiency of language throughout the play. Jerry and Peter talks from the very beginning to the end of the play, but they do not understand each other at all. This failure of contact underlines both the insufficiency of language and the gap between the different social status, which is a product of modern sense of world. The use of language seems exaggerated and absurd to the audience but Albee tries to show that the world outside is not much different from it; because there are lots of problems around stemming from problems in communication. Thus he displays it in an exaggerated way in his play. Secondly in *Amédée*, again there is an emphasis on the same problem yet Ionesco's style is different from Albee. The conversation between Amédée and Madeleine has a circular

mood, it ends in the way it begins. It is really suffocating; they all the time tell the same things to each other and do not reach a common point, that's to say, language is not always an efficient way to convey our feelings and thoughts; if it were so, Amédée and Madeleine would understand each other. As for Oh Dad Poor Dad, it can be clearly seen that there is a great emphasis on the problem; yet it is underlined in a different way again. Kopit displays the problem symbolically through stuttering Jonathan. Jonathan cannot talk properly but stutters mostly. He stands for the insufficiency of language as a way of communication and stuttering symbolically refers to this insufficiency.

Death is also one of the main themes focused upon in the absurd tradition, and in these plays it can be clearly seen that it has an important place. Death is the concept that makes life meaningless, and three different playwrights treat the subject in different ways. In The Zoo Story, Albee uses it as a way of illumination. Jerry is a suffering figure because he knows that life has no meaning and living is senseless; but Peter is not aware of this harsh fact and has a typical happy American family life. Jerry tries to awaken him but language does not help Jerry much, so he tries a different way, which is death. Jerry sacrifices himself for the sake of this illumination and kills himself in front of Peter and this unexpected act influences him deeply. As a result, he undergoes a radical transformation and because of this death he cannot be the same Peter again. He begins to suffer in the senseless world like Jerry. Thus Albee reaches his goal through this violent act. Ionesco regards this concept as a thing to be get rid of. His characters in the play cannot lead a normal life due to the existence of death. throughout the play they try to cope with it but fail and display an escapist attitude, that's to say, death is presented as something that prevents people from getting pleasure in this meaningless world. In the last play discussed, Oh Dad Poor Dad, the playwright approaches the concept sarcastically. The characters either ignore it or treat it as unimportant. Death is a serious matter for Kopit as Albee and Ionesco but he chooses to make fun of it to cope with it. Death is something which cannot be prevented or eliminated completely, thereby it is a horrible nightmare for the absurdist playwrights, who regard it as an arbitrary phenomenon in the twentieth

century. thus they all fight against it in their own way, and Kopit joins this struggle by making light of it.

As a result of the World War II, precarious atmosphere spreads over all over the world, and this leads to isolation and alienation. People escape from each other and worse than this, from themselves; thus people like Jerry, Amédée and Madeleine, Madame Rosepettle, and Jonathan begin to begin to appear. Jerry experiences both isolation and alienation, yet differently from the other characters he suffers at the utmost degree and he is aware of the situation. Although the other characters also live in a highly isolated world of their own, they display it in different ways and mostly they are not aware of their pitiful situation. Jerry tries to show the fact that isolation and alienation are the great problems which put bars between people. Peter and Jerry cannot reach a common point due to these bars. In the end, his efforts cost him his life. In Amédée, the couple does not come in contact with anyone for fifteen years. It really sounds incredible but it is true. This highly isolated life creates a negative atmosphere which bores the audience to death. As for Oh Dad Poor Dad, the most pitiful victim of these concepts is Jonathan. He cannot go out of his room because of his overprotective and selfish mother. As a result of this isolation, he becomes firstly alien to himself, then to the the world outside his room and he is too far from showing normal behaviours. All these absurd examples are a product of the atrocities people suffered from in the war period, and the characters mentioned here are exaggerated ones but they all hold mirror to our own lives.

The plays also display another distorted concept but this time it is hard to sense it immediately; because the playwrights prefer an implicit way. In fact, all the absurdities seen in the plays stem from this crippled concept: love. As if man lost his ability to love or misunderstood it and loved to devastate someone or something mostly unaware of it. This word cannot involve any deed which damages someone or something; however the scenes in the plays do not verify it and love in the plays generally harms, injures the characters. Jerry is not able to love someone even the

women. He loves them for about an hour. He has no one or nothing precious to him. He is not able to love, which is really tragic and pitiful. Amédée and Madeleine is a couple who could not keep their love alive. Their greatest problem is this loss. Yet Madame Rosepette displays the most dangerous and damaging form of love. Her love to her son is so exaggerated that Jonathan cannot be a normal human being owing to it. He cannot do anything without permission of her mother. He is far from being an ordinary individual but just a part of his mother. She loves him excessively and this leads to overprotection, which harms him much. Thus the audience can come to a conclusion that the real problem lying beneath all the absurdities is the inability to love. Some people cannot love anything or anyone at all like Jerry, some people cannot manage to keep their love alive as it is so in Amédée, maybe the most tragic condition is loving excessively. It is tragic, because this kind of love generally gives harm to someone as it happens in the case of Jonathan and worse than this at wars. People kill others due to their excessive love of their homeland or their own folk or anything they desire strongly in battles. However, killing is against the nature of love, but for many years it has become a valid justification to kill someone.

When the plays are examined technically, they show basic features of the absurd theatre. What distinguishes the absurd genre from the traditional one is to a great extent its subversion of logic. It enjoys the unexpected and the logically impossible and this feature can be easily seen in all the plays discussed. Secondly, they do not have a conventional plot but a circular one, which does not reach any meaningful point. There is usually a dull atmosphere; sequential events do not happen. Thus it can be said that absurd theatre is a theatre of situation. In the conventional plays, playwrights present great conflicts; yet in the absurd, it is hard to see any conflicts. In the three plays, there are not great conflicts which change the end. Instead, the audience is left with a problem given explicitly or implicitly and throughout the play it is underlined in an exaggerated way. Another distinguishing feature of the absurd theatre is its choice of characters: it is almost impossible to see a hero or heroine in the classical sense. They are all quite ordinary people who do not have any special traits. Worse than this, the characters of the absurd are generally

failed ones, or as Amédée remarks **misfits**; thereby it is really hard to meet god or goddess-like strong willed characters. The absurd theatre uses abstract scenic effects similar to the ones used in mime, ballet, acrobatics and music-hall clowning. These elements and objects are more important than the language: what happens transcends what is being said about it. So it emphasizes the importance of objects and visual experience; that's to say, the role of language is relatively secondary. Perhaps this is the most evident feature in all the plays. In conclusion, all these characteristics make a play absurd and three plays examined here are perfect examples for it. They hold mirror to various disintegrated concepts and attempt to show meaninglessness of life with different pictures from life.

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmada 20. Yüzyılın en çok ilgi uyandıran ve tartışılan akımı Absürd Tiyatro'nun temel özellikleri yazarları da farklı olan üç ayrı eserde incelenmiştir. Çok eleştirilen bir akım olmasının temel nedeni klasik tiyatro anlayışından her bakımdan farklı olmasıdır ki bu özelliği nedeniyle karşı-tiyatro da denmiştir.

II. Dünya Savaşı'nın darmadağın ettiği zihinlerin bir ürünüdür Absürd Tiyatro. Savaş inançları, kuralları, güven duygusunu yok etmiştir. Bunların yerini huzursuz bir ruh hali ve boşunalık duygusu almıştır. Bu ruhsal çöküntü de tiyatrodaki alışlagelmiş tüm kuralları yıkmıştır. Absürd de bu başkaldırının ürünüdür.

Absürd Tiyatro'da konu bütünlüğü yoktur. Olaylar sırayla ve bir düzen içinde verilmez. Klasik anlayışa göre karakterlerin hem sayıları hem de nitelikleri değişmiştir: Absürd eserlerde kişi sayısı azalmıştır ve bu kişiler de oldukça sıradan özellikler taşırlar. Sahnenin somut görüntü dili daha ön plandadır. Mesaj verme kaygısı taşımaz. Değindiği ana konular ise iletişimsizlik, yabancılaşma ve hayatın anlamsızlığıdır. Bu temel özellikler sırasıyla Edward Albee'nin The Zoo Story, Eugène Ionesco'nun Amédée ve Arthur Kopit'in Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm feelin' So Sad adlı eserlerinde incelenmiştir.