



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.3., 2017 (July-Sept.)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD SHOWS THE FAILURE OF MAN WITHOUT
RECOMMENDING A SOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

The aim and scope of this paper is highly objective and stark blend of subtle sense of modernism, dealing a notion of the concept of absurdism and absolutism. The absurd theatre, vehemently known as the common theatre, was coined first by Martin Julius Esslin (1918-2002) whose main aim, by creating this term, is to explicate the abnormalities of the human behaviors on the projected stage like world of meta-identity. Meta identity is redefined broadly through the mask of external identity, reinvigorating the one of the concepts of Post-Modern ideology of vast Humanity.

INTRODUCTION

The development in the field of drama whether in ancient Greece or ancient India, old Chinese tragic comedy or Kabuli or No drama of Japan was always in keeping with the mental makeup of the audience, the playwrights trying to leave on the spectators some intended effect which among other things would help them in knowing themselves and their surroundings. They had naturally to be made interested. The changing form of drama in different countries through ages reveal the experiments made to imitate life in its various aspects. By the time Aristotle made his searching analysis of the ingredients of a successful drama plot was taken to be a prime necessity character was deemed to be of secondary importance. Though Aristotle only mentioned "pleasure" at the end of art "instruction" religious, political or social was also an inherent purpose of the writers of tragedies comedies alike. Whether in classical or the Romantic stage, whether teaching a moral lesson or simply creating art for art's sake, the playwrights dealt with a world which they thought they understood. They had clear and comforting beliefs, "a stable scale of values", an ethical system which controlled the society; even an implicit belief in the goodness and perfectibility of man" as Martin Esslin has pointed out. The dramatist all the time presented a world in such a way as to make their tragic or comic vision clearly understood. The Greeks in their tragic vision had a major place for mysterious Fate, though they allowed some place for free choice in their conception of "tragic fault". This tragic fault in the Post-Renaissance Europe was modified into the conception of the responsibility of characters for their destiny. Since Ibsen, neither fate nor character but society often has been held as responsible for the suffering of the people. Even in such plays the dramatists have claimed to have understood the world and sometimes have suggested

remedies. But in the post world war a new trend has come in keeping with the bitter disillusionment and lack of faith in any logical expectation.

The Theatre of the Absurd is not a conscious organized theatrical movement. The play-wrights who have been classed under this brand don't belong to any school of thought. They express their personal opinions and visions of the world. However they the audience by their new modes of expression, new conventions which happen to be alike to some extent in their strong abandonment of the standards of the well made plays. They don't have consistency in their characterization, motivated actions, witty and logically build-up dialogues. These plays start at an arbitrary point and end arbitrarily. When these plays appeared they had spread an immediate influence on the audience. They expressed the play wrights' vision of the world in unconventional themes and techniques. They tried to achieve their purposes in their own ways, and it so happens that these playwrights evolved new frameworks, new standards of dramatic expression which are more or less related. Critics find basic similarities in approach and technique. These similarities spring from the spiritual climate of the age, the ethos of the time, the shared tradition and a common background of artistic influences. The label of the Theatre of the Absurd has been given to the particular conventions of the drama which are seen in some of the play-wrights. Ionesco's *Amedee* shows a middle-aged husband and wife in a situation which is clearly not taken from real life. The wife earns her bread by operating some sort of telephone switchboard; the husband is writing a play and in the bedroom is a dead body which has been there for years. It may be the dead body of the wife's lover whom the husband has killed, or that of a burglar or a stray visitor. It grows larger and larger, and in the course of the play it grows so large that eventually an enormous foot bursts from the bedroom into the living room, threatening to drive *Amedee* and his wife out of their home. All this is fantastic but all these we may have experienced in dreams. Dreams develop illogically, and they represent images. So they are ambiguous and carry a multitude of meanings. It is not certain what the growing corpse stands for – it may evoke the growing power of the past mistakes or past guilt –or it may mean the death of love or affection of some evil threatening the family. In the twentieth century the disillusionment has tended to become absolute. The religious faith has waned everywhere. At the end of the First World War the earlier faith in the inevitable social progress weakened, when the followers of Karl Marx ultimately created totalitarian states, not less tyrannical than the fascist states. Everywhere, instead of peace and progress, there was mass murder barbaric strangling of free spirit. After the Second World War, the sensitive intellectuals of all countries could probe into the glamorous societies of even outwardly prosperous states and find only spiritual emptiness. The old certainties disappeared in the middle of this century. The world of the sensitive artists is now full of nightmares. The Victorian complacency has been condemned by many, but that at least gave a comfortable feeling to people; complete disillusionment only brings spiritual agony. Long ago, Sir James Jeans speaking of the mysterious universe expressed one kind of disillusionment of the scientists, who felt the unimaginable magnitude of the universe and by contrast the insignificance of human life to which the Creator must be indifferent. That is one kind of nightmarish vision. In the post –world war there is another type of collapse of complacency. Men find the disappearance of the age-old foundations on which their predecessors once built up their castle of hope. As Martin Esslin has summed up: "Suddenly man sees himself faced with a universe that is both frightening and illogical... in a word, absurd. All assurances of hope, all explanations of ultimate meaning have suddenly been unmasked illusions, empty chatter, whistling in the dark. If we try to imagine such a situation in ordinary life, this might amount to our suddenly ceasing to understand the conversation in a room full of people; what made sense at one moment has, at the next, becomes an obscure babble of voices is a foreign language. At once the comforting, familiar scene would turn into one of nightmare and horror."

Discussion

The different plays which are now grouped together as belonging to the Theatre of the Absurd, express the shock of the playwrights at the loss of the older foundations and certainties. Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) has given his impression of man in a world of shattered beliefs, a world from which men should try to escape through suicide, as escape on "the wings of poesy" is no longer possible. It's a world which cannot be explained by reasoning, however faulty. Here man is deprived by all illusions and feels like a

stranger. He not only is deprived of memories of the familiar world surrounded by him but “lacks the hope of promised land to come”. Berenger in the *Rhinoceros* expresses Ionesco’s feeling when he says “it’s a sort of anguish difficult to describe. I feel out of place in life, among people and so I like to drink.” To him life is an abnormal business.....there are more dead people than living.....the living are getting rarer.” His friend Jean has faith in human will and advises him to put up a fight against with the help of patience, culture, the weapons of the mind. But he even ultimately surrenders. The Theatre of the Absurd does not however refer to the dictionary definition of the word “absurd”, that means something incongruous or illogical. At least a part of different old well-known plays have seemed to be illogical or too unrealistic not only to men of succeeding generations but also to many contemporaries. A typical example may be found in Ben Jonson’s oblique comments on Shakespeare’s chronicle plays.

According to Holman and Harmon, the term stands for "the kind of drama that presents a view of the absurdity of the human condition by the abandoning of usual or rational devices and by the use of nonrealistic form."

The “Theatre of the Absurd”, a term coined by Hungarian-born critic Martin Esslin in his 1962 book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, refers to a particular type of play which first became popular during the 1950s and 1960s and which presented on stage the philosophy articulated by French philosopher Albert Camus in his 1942 essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in which he defines the human condition as basically meaningless. Camus argued that humanity had to resign itself to recognizing that a fully satisfying rational explanation of the universe was beyond its reach; in that sense, the world must ultimately be seen as absurd. When writing a play in this style there are various factors that you must consider. First off, you must realize that these plays are written from an existential point of view and therefore have no apparent reason, true order or meaning. However, it can still be informative and should cause the audience to think about what is happening in a scene, the purpose is to provoke thought with laughter. There are always very intense moments, but it can never look like conventional theatre because it has no start, middle or ending. Moreover, a writer must be aware that the script cannot follow any specified form and that language is reduced to a game of bantering that usually leads to chaos to confuse the audience. A sense of the place is minimal and characters are forced to move in an incomprehensible void-like realm. It is however, usually motionless with the idea that there is no catharsis or document. In the end, an ‘absurd’ scriptwriter must realize that it should be about nothing, and end where it has started. Furthermore, the audience can relate to this type of play by abstractly thinking about the scene and determining what is happening. The audience is forced to really think about the issues presented to them in the play and are faced with a realistic scenario of life, as they watch the characters attempt to work it out.

Typically, there is not a series of events that tells a story, but rather a pattern of images which present people as bewildered beings in an incomprehensible universe. This is a pretty good description of what happens in “Waiting for Godot”. Nothing happens. They sit and talk about things--nothing in particular--and wait for Godot who never arrives. The reader who is careful and attentive will laugh hysterically as he reads the play since there is wild humor in not only the situation but also the ridiculousness of the conversation between the two who wait. The Theatre of the Absurd’ has become a catch-phrase, much used and much abused. What does it stand for? And how can such a label be justified? Perhaps it will be best to attempt to answer the second question first. There is no organised movement, no school of artists, who claim the label for themselves. A good many playwrights who have been classed under this label, when asked if they *belong* to the Theatre of the Absurd, will indignantly reply that they belong to no such movement - and quite rightly so. For each of the playwrights concerned seeks to express no more and no less his own personal vision of the world. Esslin regarded the term “Theatre of the Absurd” merely as a “device” by which he meant to bring attention to certain fundamental traits discernible in the works of a range of playwrights, who did not regard themselves as a school but who all seemed to share certain attitudes towards the predicament of the man in the universe. The playwrights loosely grouped under the label of the absurd attempt to convey their sense of bewilderment, anxiety, and wonder in the face of an inexplicable universe. According to Esslin, the five defining playwrights of the movement are Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, although these writers were not always comfortable with the label and sometimes preferred to use terms such

as "Anti-Theater" or "New Theater." The Theatre of the Absurd originated in France; Jean Genet from France, Arthur Adamov from Russia, Fernando Arrabal from Spanish Morocco, Samuel Beckett from Dublin and Eugene Ionesco from Rumania were the leading figures.

Yet critical concepts of this kind are useful when new modes of expression, new conventions of art arise. When the plays of Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, and Adamov first appeared on the stage they puzzled and outraged most critics as well as audiences. And no wonder. These plays flout all the standards by which drama has been judged for many centuries; they must therefore appear as a provocation to people who have come into the theatre expecting to find what they would recognize as a well-made play. A well-made play is expected to present characters that are well-observed and convincingly motivated: these plays often contain hardly any recognizable human beings and present completely unmotivated actions. A well-made play is expected to entertain by the ding-dong of witty and logically built-up dialogue: in some of these plays dialogue seems to have degenerated into meaningless babble. A well-made play is expected to have a beginning, a middle, and a neatly tied-up ending: these plays often start at an arbitrary point and seem to end just as arbitrarily. By all the traditional standards of critical appreciation of the drama, these plays are not only abominably bad, they do not even deserve the name drama. The absurdist dramatists believe that our existence is absurd because we are born without seeking to be born, we die without seeking death. We live between birth and death trapped within our body and our reason, unable to conceive of a time in which we were not or a time in which we will not be. Thrust into life, armed with our senses, will and reason, we feel ourselves to be potent beings. Yet our senses give the lie to our thought and our thought defies our senses. We never perceive anything completely. The absurd theatre openly rebelled against conventional theatre. It was, as Ionesco called it "anti-theatre." It was surreal, illogical, conflictless and plotless. The dialogue often seemed to be complete gibberish. And, not surprisingly, the public's first reaction to this new theatre was incomprehension and rejection.

One of the most important aspects of absurd drama is its distrust of language as a means of communication. Language, it seems to say, has become nothing but a vehicle for conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. Words fail 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 technical 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. A term like the Theatre of the Absurd must therefore be understood as a kind of intellectual shorthand for a complex pattern of similarities in approach, method, and convention, of shared philosophical and artistic premises, whether conscious or subconscious, and of influences from a common store of tradition. A label of this kind therefore is an aid to understanding, valid only in so far as it helps to gain insight into a work of art. It is not a binding classification; it is certainly not all-embracing or exclusive. A play may contain *some* elements that can best be understood in the light of such a label, while other elements in the same play derive from and can best be understood in the light of a different convention. Arthur Adamov, for example, has written a number of plays that are prime examples of the Theatre of the Absurd. He now quite openly and consciously rejects this style and writes in a different, realistic convention. Nevertheless even his latest plays, which are both realistic and socially committed, contain some aspects which can still be elucidated in terms of the Theatre of the Absurd (such as the use of symbolic interludes, *guignols*, in his play *Spring '71*). Moreover, once a term like Theatre of the Absurd is defined and understood, it acquires a certain value in throwing light on works of previous epochs. The Polish critic Jan Kott, for example, has written a brilliant study of *King Lear* in the light of Beckett's *Endgame*. And that this was no vain academic exercise but a genuine aid to understanding is shown by the fact that Peter Brook's great production of *King Lear* took many of its ideas from Kott's essay.

The action of the absurd plays is typically intended to demonstrate symbolically the ideas of the playwright and to create the dramatic temperature necessary to maintain the interest of the audience. At first

glance some of their plays appear to be utterly illogical until we realize that the logic of the author's thought is not directly expressed but rather symbolically stated in action. The absurdists are not afraid of obscurity in art since they employ it as a direct symbol of the obscurity they find in life. Ionesco has in fact put a dream situation onto the stage, and in a dream quite clearly the rules of realistic theatre no longer apply. Dreams do not develop logically; they develop by association. Dreams do not communicate ideas; they communicate images. And indeed the growing corpse in *Amédée* can best be understood as a poetic image. It is in the nature both of dreams and poetic imagery that they are ambiguous and carry a multitude of meanings at one and the same time, so that it is futile to ask what the image of the growing corpse stands for. On the other hand one can say that the corpse *might* evoke the growing power of past mistakes or past guilt, perhaps the waning of love or the death of affection - some evil in any case that festers and grows worse with time. The image can stand for any and all of these ideas, and its ability to embrace them all gives it the poetic power it undoubtedly possesses. Samuel Beckett, the pioneer of the absurd theatre, also contributed to the other fields of literature-poetry, Fiction and criticism. He wrote his major works in French language. Samuel Barclay Beckett was born on 13th April, 1906 at Foxrock, near Dublin. He was a brilliant student as well as an outstanding sportsman. He completed his Bachelor of Arts at the Trinity College in 1927. He stood first and won the gold medal. He was selected to represent Trinity College in an exchange programme with Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, where he met James Joyce and becoming part of his intimate circle; Joyce became a major influence on his literary style. Dublin, at the time of Samuel Beckett's birth in 1906, was the second city of the British Empire and largely in the business of administration and commerce. Those atop the social and economic pyramid wielded great influence within business, state and the church. Whereas once this class was dominated by the Protestant Ascendancy, Catholics now increasingly filled its ranks.

There can little doubt that such a sense of disillusionment, such a collapse of all previously held firm beliefs is a characteristic feature of our own times. The social and spiritual reasons for such a sense of loss of meaning are manifold and complex: the waning of religious faith that had started with the Enlightenment and led Nietzsche to speak of the 'death of God' by the eighteen-eighties; the breakdown of the liberal faith in inevitable social progress in the wake of the First World War; the disillusionment with the hopes of radical social revolution as predicted by Marx after Stalin had turned the Soviet Union into a totalitarian tyranny; the relapse into barbarism, mass murder, and genocide in the course of Hitler's brief rule over Europe during the Second World War; and, in the aftermath of that war, the spread of spiritual emptiness in the outwardly prosperous and affluent societies of Western Europe and the United States. There can be no doubt: for many intelligent and sensitive human beings the world of the mid twentieth century *has* lost its meaning and has simply ceased to make sense. Previously held certainties have dissolved, the firmest foundations for hope and optimism have collapsed. Suddenly man sees himself faced with a universe that is both frightening and illogical - in a word, absurd. All assurances of hope, all explanations of ultimate meaning have suddenly been unmasked as nonsensical illusions, empty chatter, whistling in the dark. If we try to imagine such a situation in ordinary life, this might amount to our suddenly ceasing to understand the conversation in a room full of people; what made sense at one moment has, at the next, become an obscure babble of voices in a foreign language. At once the comforting, familiar scene would turn into one of nightmare and horror. With the loss of the means of communication we should be compelled to view that world with the eyes of total outsiders as a succession of frightening images. Beckett is an iconoclast and an image-breaker. He has shattered conventions and pioneered a new kind of drama. His drama is above categories of tragedy and comedy, above classification of traditional divisions, above message and above entertainment. It does not teach lessons, it does not preach, it does not do any propaganda. His plays show the situations in which we all are; they expose us in our existential predicament.

In *Waiting for Godot* for example Beckett parodies and mocks the language of philosophy and science in Lucky's famous speech. Harold Pinter, whose uncanny accuracy in the reproduction of real conversation among English people has earned him the reputation of having a tape-recorder built into his memory, reveals that the bulk of everyday conversation is largely devoid of logic and sense, is in fact nonsensical. It is at this point that the Theatre of the Absurd can actually coincide with the highest degree of realism. For if the real

conversation of human beings is in fact absurd and nonsensical, then it is the well-made play with its polished logical dialogue that is unrealistic, while the absurdist play may well be a tape-recorded reproduction of reality. Or, in a world that has become absurd, the Theatre of the Absurd is the most realistic comment on, the most accurate reproduction of, reality. In *Waiting for Godot* for example Beckett parodies and mocks the language of philosophy and science in Lucky's famous speech. Harold Pinter, whose uncanny accuracy in the reproduction of real conversation among English people has earned him the reputation of having a tape-recorder built into his memory, reveals that the bulk of everyday conversation is largely devoid of logic and sense, is in fact nonsensical. It is at this point that the Theatre of the Absurd can actually coincide with the highest degree of realism. For if the real conversation of human beings is in fact absurd and nonsensical, then it is the well-made play with its polished logical dialogue that is unrealistic, while the absurdist play may well be a tape-recorded reproduction of reality. Or, in a world that has become absurd, the Theatre of the Absurd is the most realistic comment on, the most accurate reproduction of, reality.

In its critique of language the Theatre of the Absurd closely reflects the preoccupation of contemporary philosophy with language, its effort to disentangle language, as a genuine instrument for logic and the discovery of reality, from the welter of emotive, illogical usages, the grammatical conventions that have, in the past, often been confused with genuine logical relationships. And equally, in its emphasis on the basic absurdity of the human condition, on the bankruptcy of all closed systems of thought with claims to provide a total explanation of reality, the Theatre of the Absurd has much in common with the existential philosophy of Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus. Yet, however contemporary the Theatre of the Absurd may appear it is by no means the revolutionary novelty as which some of its champions, as well as some of its bitterest critics, tend to represent it. In fact the Theatre of the Absurd can best be understood as a new combination of a number of ancient, even archaic, traditions of literature and drama. It is surprising and shocking merely because of the unusual nature of the combination and the increased emphasis on aspects of drama that, while present in all plays, rarely emerge into the foreground. In Eugene Ionesco's theatre we are that abandoned man who cannot escape from a threatening universe. The new structures, which are disordered, chaotic - at least apparently -with a confusing discontinuity always unpredictable, always surprising in their development, creatively destroy the old structures of a world which dozes with contentment among the meanings which it thinks that it still has. Eugene Ionesco "revolutionizes" the theatre not by new themes- which could never renew literature radically-, but by a new language, because of which even the themes of the absurd become really new, that is for the first time they acquire a real, efficient, active presence. As he admits in several metatexts, Eugene Ionesco writes his plays in a way somehow similar to the one in which a modern poet, especially one who belongs to the surrealist modality, writes his poems." His most brilliant absurd plays are *The Chairs* and *The Lesson*. In *The Chairs*, the inanimate chairs crowd out the imaginary world of the too old people. He uses empty chairs to show man's empty existence.

Harold Pinter is also the leading English language playwright in the genre. Harold was born on 10 October 1930 in Hackney, a working-class suburb in East London. Despite his work as a poet, an actor, a director, and a writer for films, Pinter's reputation rests squarely on his full-length plays. The best known of these are probably *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, *No Man's Land*, and *Betrayal*. It is fashionable to talk of Pinter's works in terms of comedies of menace and social comedies. This division has arisen because of what can appear to be quite a marked division between an early play, such as *The Birthday Party*, and a later one such as *No Man's Land*. In the early plays, the audience are made to laugh, but at the same time are threatened by a violent, hostile presence that often destroys one or more of the central characters. In the later plays there is less violence, rather more subtle comic effects and much less obscurity. Pinter, who admitted that Beckett was a major influence on his writing, portrayed such absurdist themes as the sense of rootlessness, loneliness and isolation. In his plays, Pinter never finds it necessary to explain why things occur or who anyone is, the existence within the play itself is justification enough. In general, lack of explanation is what characterizes Pinter's work, that and the interruption of outside forces upon a stable environment. What seems to set him apart though is that unlike Beckett and Ionesco, Pinter's world within the drama seems to be at least somewhat realistic.

Jean Genet (born 1910) lacks Beckett's discipline, intellect and erudition, but he too is a poet, endowed with the wellnigh magic power of creating beauty from evil, corruption and excrement. If the evanescence of man in time and the mystery of human personality and identity are Beckett's main themes, Genet's chief concern is with the falseness of human pretensions in society, the contrast between appearance and reality, which itself must remain forever elusive. In *The Maids* we see the servants bound in a mixture of hatred and erotic dependence to their mistress, re-enacting this love-hate in an endless series of ritual games; in *The Balcony* society itself is symbolized in the image of a brothel providing its customers with the illusions of power; and in *The Blacks* we are back with the underdog acting out his hatred for his oppressor (which is also a form of love) in an endless ritual of mock-murder. Jean Genet (born 1910) lacks Beckett's discipline, intellect and erudition, but he too is a poet, endowed with the wellnigh magic power of creating beauty from evil, corruption and excrement. If the evanescence of man in time and the mystery of human personality and identity are Beckett's main themes, Genet's chief concern is with the falseness of human pretensions in society, the contrast between appearance and reality, which itself must remain for ever elusive. In *The Maids* we see the servants bound in a mixture of hatred and erotic dependence to their mistress, re-enacting this love-hate in an endless series of ritual games; in *The Balcony* society itself is symbolized in the image of a brothel providing its customers with the illusions of power; and in *The Blacks* we are back with the underdog acting out his hatred for his oppressor (which is also a form of love) in an endless ritual of mock-murder. Three of the playwrights represented in this volume are Parisian exiles. Eugène Ionesco is undoubtedly the most fertile and original of the dramatists of the Absurd, and also, in spite of a streak of clowning and fun for its own sake in his work, one of the most profound. He is moreover the most vocal of the dramatists of the Absurd, the only one who is prepared to discuss the theoretical foundations of his work and to reply to the attacks on it from committed left-wing realists. The critique of language and the haunting presence of death are Ionesco's chief themes in plays like *The Bald Primadonna*, *The Lesson*, *The Chairs*, *The Killer*, *Rhinoceros*, and *Exit The King. Amédée or How to Get Rid of It* (1953) is Ionesco's first full-length play and contains one of his most telling images. It is also characteristic in its alternation between states of depression and euphoria.

Jean Genet is, 'biographically, the most spectacular author of the twentieth century'.¹⁰ He was born in Paris in 1910. His plays are concerned with expressing his own feeling of helplessness and solitude when confronted with the despair and loneliness of man caught in the hall of mirrors of the human condition, inexorably trapped by an endless progression of images that are merely his own distorted reflection-lies covering lies, fantasies battenning upon fantasies, nightmares' nourished by nightmares within nightmares)? A Russian-born French playwright and translator, Adamov wrote absurdist, surrealist dramas until 1957 and epic, realistic dramas from 1957 to 1970. He is best known for *Ping-pong*, the finest example of his earlier plays. He came to Paris at the age of fifteen and has lived there ever since. In Paris Adamov met surrealists and edited the surrealist journal *Discontinuité*. In Arthur Adamov's career, creative dramatic composition was to begin just after the liberation of France when he was yet under forty. Fernando Arrabal (born 1932) is a Spaniard who has been living in France since 1954 and now writes in French. He is an admirer of Beckett, but sees his roots in the surrealist tradition of Spain, a country that has always been rich in fantasy and the grotesque (El Greco, Goya) and that in more recent times has produced such outstanding representatives of the modern movement as the painter Picasso (who has himself written two plays in an absurdist vein) and the writers Lorca and Valle Inclán. Arrabal's own contribution to the absurdist spectrum is a highly original one: his main preoccupation is with the absurdity of ethical and moral rules. He looks at the world with the incomprehension of a child that simply cannot understand the logic of conventional morality. Thus, in *The Automobile Graveyard* there is a prostitute who follows her profession simply because religion demands that one be kind to one's neighbours; how then could she refuse them the ultimate kindness of giving herself to them? And similarly in *The Two Executioners* the rebel son who objects to the tortures that his mother inflicts on his father is faced with the dilemma of several contradictory moral laws: obedience to one's father, the human goodness that prompts one to save the suffering victim from his torturers, and the need to honour and obey one's mother. These moral laws are here in obvious conflict, as it is the mother who has the father tortured.

Conclusion

It is true that basically the Theatre of the Absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodoxy. It aims to shock its audience out of complacency, to bring it face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation as these writers see it. But the challenge behind this message is anything but one of despair. It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, nobly, responsibly; precisely *because* there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence, because ultimately man is alone in a meaningless world. The shedding of easy solutions, of comforting illusions, may be painful, but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief. And that is why, in the last resort, the Theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation.

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