

The Influence of Existential Philosophy on Strindberg and Becket

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Abstract

This study tries to investigate the influence of one of the most famous philosophical schools that is the existential trend on drama. Figures like Kierkegaard , Nietzsche , Sartre and Heddigger surely made great impact on the development of human intellectual heritage and discovering the way they influence playwrights and how they create characters , form plots, construct structures of their plays and the themes been discussed are the main objectives of the study.

Two famous and influential dramatists are chosen to be discussed in the study : August Strindberg and Samuel Becket. They are chosen because they belong to different eras and the way they presented their works is also different. The first part of the study is a general introduction that reveals the fundamental notions and concepts that existentialists had explored in their books that were influential on the literary production of Strindberg and Becket.

The next part offers a general survey to the first dramatist with emphasis on how he had transformed from being a naturalist into one of the most prominent existential figures at that age by discussing some parts of his prominent works. *Endgame* and *Happy Days* would be studied to represent the literary production of the latter , attempting to explore how the playwright tries to reflect his existential convictions throughout the use of language , themes and the setting of the plays mentioned previously. The last part will be a brief conclusion that sums up the findings of the study.

Keywords: Existentialism , Existential philosophers, Naturalism , August Strindberg , Samuel Becket.

تأثير الفلسفة الوجودية على سترندبرغ و بكت

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تحاول هذه الدراسة التحقق من تأثير المدرسة الفلسفية الوجودية و التي تعد من اشهر المدارس على سترندبرغ و بكت. شخصيات عظيمة مثل كيركيغارد و نيتشه و سارتر و هيدغر تؤكد ان لها اثرا كبيرا في اثراء الفكر الانساني عموما و هدف هذه الدراسة هو اكتشاف هل انهم اثروا في كتاب المسرح و رجالاته و طريقة خلقهم لاعمالهم الادبية بتفاصيلها التقنية.

لقد تم اختيار كاتبين مسرحيين اثنين لجعلهم موضوع للدراسة و هما اوكست سترندبرغ و صامويل بكت. وقع الاختيار عليهما لانهما يمثلان فترتين مختلفتين كما انهما مختلفان في اسلوب الكتابة ايضا. الجزء الاول من الدراسة سيخصص لمناقشة الافكار العامة التي تركز عليها الفلسفة الوجودية مع التركيز على تلك التي قد تكون ذات تأثير على النتاج الادبي لسترندبرغ و بكت.

سيعرض الجزء الذي بعده موجزا عن الكاتب سترندبرغ مع التركيز على عملية تحوله من الطبيعية الى الوجودية من خلال تفحص بعض اعماله المشهورة. فيما يخص صامويل بكت ، فانه سيتم دراسة مسرحيتين هما ايام سعيدة ونهاية اللعبة لاكتشاف كيف حاول الكاتب تمثيل افكار الفلسفة الوجودية من خلال النثيمات و استخدام اللغة وغيرها من الامور التقنية. تختتم الدراسة بعرض موجز للاستنتاجات التي توصل اليها الباحث.

كلمات مفتاحية : الوجودية ، الفلاسفة الوجوديون ، الطبيعية ، اوكست سترندبرغ ، صامويل بكت

Introduction

This brief introduction would be devoted to explore the meaning of existentialism and some of the major contributions of famous existentialists which are significant in the literary works that would be tackled later in the study. Existentialism is a movement in philosophy that refuses the notion that the universe provides clues for how humans could live and focus on their own existence , choice and freewill. It emerges as rejection to the age of reason ; philosophers as Hume , Spinoza , Hobbes , Leibniz, Bacon and Voltaire and others regarded reason as the only faculty to solve all problems and to present the perfect knowledge. Nevertheless, physics , biology and modern psychology were not able to confirm an absolute reality as it was predicted to show the power of reason.

Human beings should not be understood neither as atomic subject that interact with other subjects nor as a substance that have fixed properties. Thus , Sartre suggested a definition for this movement as follows : “existentialism in our sense of the word is a doctrine that does render human life possible ; a doctrine , also which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity”¹ . In other words; humans, “ through their consciousness from their principles , values and ideas , they verify the meaning of their life.”²

Before Sartre was even born , Soren Kierkegaard had written “ his critique of contemporary Christianity that attacked the German idealist George Friedrich Hegel’s notion of an objective science of human spirit for obscuring the nature and place of Christian faith”³ and therefore , he is considered the father of Existentialism for his critique of rationalism from an individual standpoint. For Kierkegaard , “all interpretations of existence take their rank in relation to the qualification of individual’s dialectical inward deepening”⁴. It is simply, as Kaufman puts it, “without risk there is no faith ; the greater risk the greater faith , the more objective security the less inwardness.”⁵

According to the Danish philosopher , there are truths only for us and others have no reason to approve. He focused on the importance of the subjective search for truth :

If initially , my human nature is merely an abstract something; it is at any rate the task which life sets me to become subjective , the uncertainty of death comes more and more to interpenetrate my subjectivity dialectically. It thus becomes more and more important for me to think it in connection with every factor and phase of my life ; for since the uncertainty is there in every moment , it can be overcome only by overcoming it in every moment ... an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth.⁶

And therefore , “ the ethical must remain at the level of individual choice and cannot be objective and universal.”⁷ In this sense , Kierkegaardian existentialism is the “rejection of all purely abstract thinking of a purely logical or scientific philosophy ; in short , a rejection of absolute reason.”⁸

The rejection of absolute reason lead the existential philosophers to believe in the relativism of truth , a belief that became radical with Nietzsche.⁹ It means that there are no objective truths and truths are surely relative to every human being. This notion may correlate with Kierkegaard’s concentration on subjective search for truth. For this reason , Nietzsche emphasized the importance of art ; encouraging artists to express their ideas , passions and drives freely. For him , human quest for truth is a manifestation of the will to power.

All our actions are determined by the will of power according to Nietzsche. It means that we can change our fate because it is us who choose the path. Will to power as Nietzsche put it “ is our needs to interpret the world ; our world and theirs for and against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule.”¹⁰ This concept is an attempt from the part of Nietzsche to replace the death of God for the German philosopher and many other Europeans :

“Nietzsche recognizes that Christianity has lost its hold over the majority of Europeans, ...for , as European Civilization had been based on the Christian concept of God, the disappearance of faith must necessarily leave a void at the very heart of our civilization ; instead of God there is nothing”.¹¹

This sense of nothingness casted a deep shadow over our next philosopher , Martin Heidegger. He said “My questioning of nothing , which arises from concerning the truth of

being , has nothing at all in common with all of that. The nothing is neither something negative nor is it a goal rather it is the essential enquiring of being itself and therefore is more being than any beings.”¹² The feeling of nothingness is often correlated with anguish which is dread of nothing in specific. Martin Heidegger searched for “a particular mood that would disclose something essential about Man’s existence as a whole.”¹³ Human beings found it “in anxiety ... a malaise at once less identifiable and more oppressive”¹⁴ He added “ in anxiety , I realize that I have been thrown into the world and ... in anxiety , Dasein finds himself face to face with the nothing of the possible impossibility of its own existence.”¹⁵

The question of being and its relation to choice took the full attention of the most famous existentialist philosopher in the previous century that is Jean Paul Sartre. He said “man first exists , encounter himself , surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards... he will not be anything until later , and then he will be what he makes of himself.”¹⁶ And he added , “what we choose is always better”¹⁷ because he highly appreciated the value of freewill no matter the result or the consequences. In brief , and to sum up all what is said above about existentialism ; it might be a good idea to read the following words of Lavin who tried to summarize everything about existentialism :

“Existentialism is the philosophical standpoint which gives priority to existence over essence. What is meant by this is that existentialism gives priority in significance to existence in the sense of my existence as a conscious subject rather than to any essence which may be assigned to me , Existentialism affirms the ultimate significance , the primacy of my existence as this flickering point of consciousness of myself and of objects of which I am aware , my existence as this conscious being against all effort to define me , to reduce me to a platonic essence , or to a Cartesian mental substance , or to a Hegelian carrier of the spirit of my culture or to a scientific neurological mechanism or to a social security number. Whereas classical and modern rationalism have regarded rational essences or self-evident ideas as having primacy over individual existence. Whereas rationalism claims that the individual existence can be comprehended by the concept or essence or by any conceptual system.”¹⁸

Strindberg : From Naturalism to Existentialism

Strindberg was one of the most prominent literary figures in the nineteenth century. His literary career is often divided by critics into two phases : the first is when he was a famous representative of the naturalist school of drama in which Strindberg experimented the Darwinian determinism . In the second phase , he focused more on existential probe. Sartre mentioned the difference between Naturalism and existentialism , affirming that for the existentialists ; “ it is only reality that counts not dreams ... unlike Zola’s characters that are shown to be the products of heredity or environment ,” he continued “ you cannot say of ours. The existentialists portray a coward by his actions as one who makes himself a coward by his actions , a hero who makes himself heroic.”¹⁹

Strindberg’s transformation is well summarized by Evert Sprinchorn , he states , “ the bedrock of Strindberg’s philosophy lays in the conviction that life was to be viewed less as a struggle against heredity and environment , as the naturalists insisted , than a struggle of minds , each seeking to impose its will on other minds.”²⁰ In fact , Done George Brandes was one of the most famous critics in Scandinavia and through him , Strindberg became familiar with the writings of Nietzsche whose ideas , especially his rejection of all ultimate traditional established values, Nietzsche’s death of God announcement had a tremendous influence on Strindberg and lead him to his inferno crisis but eventually , he returned to the church.

It is argued that in *Miss Julie* , Strindberg reflected on some philosophical concepts that belonged to Nietzsche’s example philosopher , Schopenhauer. David Krasner said “ all that drives Miss Julie and Jean is , that Schopenhauerien will, which is little more than a feedback loop of lust and disgust , sadomasochism , and magnets of tracking and repelling.”²¹ The play depicts inflexible concepts of “ rising and falling , of higher and lower , better or worse , man or woman”²²It is a battle of power that occurs in this play and the conflict is a manifestation of the will to power. “ Ultimately , Strindberg determined to have his own plays deal with fundamental truths , like those of sexual relationship , the psychological conflict of wills and the bearing of the past on the present.”²³The battle of sexes and the strive for will are also

portrayed in *The Father* , another naturalistic play written by Strindberg. What is significant about this play is that it “seems to be an early experiment of the self and its subjective prospective becoming , through what is spoken , understandable as the linking moment of unity instead of a plot oriented or chronological text.”²⁴

After being influenced heavily by Nietzsche and being engaged in scientific experiments , Strindberg experienced what is called the inferno crisis and there was a pause in his literary production for five years. However , he returned to believe in God after that by the help of a Swedish mystic who was his spiritual guide. In his post inferno period , he produced his religious and chamber plays as well as his expressionistic plays which described by critics as subjective and experimental dramas as Szondi points out “in his post inferno crisis , Strindberg becomes most concerned with the isolation and elevation of a central figure.”²⁵

Strindberg’s literary production then was deeply influenced by Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer. For the latter , the world is “a gruesome place where if humans succeed in relieving pain , it is merely temporary ; it will appear as the sex drive , passionate love, jealousy , envy , hatred , anxiety , ambition , miserliness , sickness , etc.”²⁶ Kierkegaard’s impact is found in many of Strindberg’s works that are known as chamber plays. They emphasized the individual journey throughout life where dead corpses, ghost like figures haunting empty homes , stand as a metaphor for human life. “The presence of death and despair and the power of faith; that comes from accepting it , is relevant to Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy and underlies Strindberg’s themes.”²⁷

The theme of alienated self is an essential theme in existential philosophy heritage and its influence over Strindberg could be found in many of his works. The concept of repetition is also introduced in Strindberg’s plays because of the influence of the major works of Kierkegaard on him. Both concepts are presented in Strindberg’s *The Dance of Death*. The Captain and Alice ; the main characters in the play are :

inevitably frozen in their existential imprisonment , and too inured by
their life’s disappointments ... the romantic notion of the play is
juxtaposed with the game of torment which takes on metaphysical as
well as natural reality , the circular , repetitive structure of the play
mimics the round shape of the tower , and both suggest the rings of hell.²⁸

It is not a physical hell but a psychological one as Spivak asserts “the living hell endured by the main characters in *Dance of Death* is basically an existential concept.”²⁹

The dreadful existence of humans and their suffering are recurrent existential themes that Strindberg explored thoroughly in his work *A Dream Play*. The main character in this play is the daughter of Indra , a goddess in ancient Hinduism who comes down earth to understand human suffering. The other main characters are named after their social roles ; the lawyer , the officer , the doorkeeper , the poet and so on. This clearly signifies the idea of losing the sense being as Rollo May affirmed “ the loss of sense of being is related to our tendency to subordinate existence to function. A man knows himself not as a man or self but as a token seller in the subway , a grocer , a professor , a vice president or by whatever his economic function may be.”³⁰

Throughout the play , the notion of nothingness plays a significant role in building the thematic background of the play ; and for existentialists it “ is source of not only absolute freedom but existential anguish.”³¹ The Daughter said that life in general is a dream image , an allusion. Jean Paul Sartre had discussed the view of life as nothing :

“In life , man commits himself and draws his own portrait , outside of
which there is nothing. No doubt this thought may seem harsh to someone
who has not made a success in his life. ... , it helps
people to understand that reality alone counts , and that dreams ,
expectations and hopes only serve to define a man as a broken dream ,
aborted hopes and futile expectations.”³²

Waiting and repetition are significant themes in this play and this surely made great influence on the drama of Samuel Becket ; the play would set the stage to Becket’s *Waiting for Godot*. The similarities between the two plays could be found in techniques and scenery in addition to the thematic correspondence. Strindberg once described the play by saying “everything can happen , everything is possible and probable. Time and place do not exist , on insignificant basis of reality , the imagination spins , weaving new patterns ; a mixture of memories , experiences , free fancies , incongruities and improvisations”³³

Thunder in the Air is another play written by Strindberg that reflects the theme of isolation and loneliness. It embodies anguish, resentment and anxiety. Once again, there is the Kierkegaardian concept of repetition. The man, a character in this play said; "I only hope they won't come back. Repetition, repetition, forever repetitions."³⁴ He also said "and nothing will change until you come here with the cake for my funeral. When you get past a certain age, nothing really changes, everything around you stops, but you move on all the same like a toboggan down a steep slope."³⁵

The Ghost Sonata is three acts play that depicts deception, crime, lack of change and stagnation. "The famous scene of the ghost supper is Strindberg's metaphor for a life wasted in meaningless activity. People look like ghosts and vampires, they gather together to drink their teas and nibble their biscuits all of them at the same time."³⁶ The idea of comparing life with hell is also presented in this play; people are "trapped on earth which is depicted as an existential hell madhouse, prison..."³⁷ Eventually, it could be said that this play represented a significant stage in Strindberg's evolution as a dramatist; Styran confirmed that when he said "The Ghost Sonata is a play about confrontation of the subjective and the objective and the meeting between the isolated and the alien world. *The Ghost Sonata* is the most frequently reviewed of Strindberg's chamber plays because it is consistently dreamlike, and more rigorously expressionistic than others. It is also rich in sensational images that smack of grotesque surrealism"³⁸

Samuel Becket: Pure Existentialism

As existentialism has evolved as a rejection to traditional philosophies, Becket's literary production was a converse to mainstream drama of his age because it rejected realistic situations, characters, settings, and logical flow of events and offer instead isolation, meaningless and language break down. His drama was haunted by meaning absence. The characters struggle desperately to find meaning for their existence "all of Becket's works comprises a unity in which certain attitudes are expressed in different ways ... life is cruel and painful is no worse than success because neither matters; what is important is to avoid giving pain to others and to share misfortune."³⁹

Among the most current themes in Becket's plays are loneliness in a world without God, lack of communication because of the media. These themes are functioned to reflect the absurdity of human existence; an elaboration on this topic with further discussion would be offered in this section of the paper that will concentrate on two of Becket's plays: *Endgame* and *Happy days*.

In *Endgame*, Becket focused on the significance of introducing existence with less words in an age when the significance of existence is defied by a recognition of human's life that can end at any time. That means lives of humans are insignificant nothingness. Despite the play presents some comic relief, Becket tries to reflect to his audience that the play is parody to remaining quest for purpose and meaning in this life "with glimpses of nothingness beyond the property of surface"⁴⁰

Some critics have claimed that there are many similar aspects between *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* like characters and the waiting activity for Godot in the latter and ending in the first. Repetition is also another similar factor as "the characters take refuge in repetition, repeating their own actions and words and often those of others in order to pass the time."⁴¹ Characters are thrown onto stage to live in what critics consider as hell created by Becket:

We are all in a hell a la Becket creature suffering from physical disabilities, cripples whose locomotion is either unbelievably difficult or non-exist, whose life is limited to involuntary as well as voluntary memory, or a fantastic ratiocination as the impulse to live or not to live burns into thought in a wretched remnant of brain"⁴²

Understanding the concepts of place and time in *Endgame* has great importance to receive Becket's message in the play. The play is said to be suggesting an interpretation to a corpse world:

"After the second world war, ... a resurrected culture has been destroyed without realizing it; humankind continues to vegetate, creeping along after events that even the survivors cannot really survive, on

a rubbish heap that has made even reflection on one's own damaged state useless"⁴³

Clove, one of the main characters in the play is supposed to tell other characters of what he sees outside a dim room, but he sees nothing, or maybe he is not telling what he sees" *Endgame* appears to be taking place after some times of apocalyptic event, the stage is empty because the world it represents has been emptied."⁴⁴

The concept of time is dealt with by Becket, similar to the corpsed world. He even goes further to consider time not existed because" the nature of the course that is taking place in *Endgame* remains undefined..⁴⁵ The best description for the concept of time might be that " time can be lost because time would contain hope. "⁴⁶ The play significantly begins by the word " finished" and is repeated many times in the plays to illustrate that "ending is process, at every level of action might be thought to contradict all the known elements of traditional drama "⁴⁷

Four characters have been introduced; the blind master Hamm and his parents Nagg and Nell in addition to his servant Clov. They are similar in the sense that:

“Each of his characters is deteriorated and damaged figure whose image suggests a present immobility Instead of witnessing the image of a person actively engaged in life, we watch the remnant of an individual whose consciousness reviews a narrative that may relate to past .seeing himself and the objects that surround him as the residue of an earlier time.”⁴⁸

Hamm had authority over his servant Clove and both of them perceive freedom as a breakdown from the chains of their relationship and this was the main reason they cannot separate, "each has difficulty in moving towards the dissolution of their unequal relationship."⁴⁹ Becket tries to transform their relationship into a father-son relationship as Lyons states "Becket complicates the basic image of Hamm and Clov as master and servant with suggestions that their relationship also functions as that of father and son"⁵⁰

The matter is different between Hamm and his parents Nagg and Nell as he thinks that they are guilty to bring him to this life and they are responsible for his suffering and existential pain; therefore, he blames them and treats them with anger. Kern describes Hamm's blameful statements by saying; "all these blameful statements of Hamm stem from the existentialist fact that he is, like all other men, thrown into desolate isolation"⁵¹

In addition to the characters, the use of language is also functioned to serve the playwright's existential tendencies in this play. It is peculiar and looks purposeless, immobile, paralyzed and full of repetition. Nevertheless, and since the play lacks action , dialogues have been intensified. Raymond T. Riva said: "Beckett seems to be communicating in an essentially symbolic language, one which is quite capable of communication while seeming to say nothing and of going nowhere."⁵²

The expressions are formed in a cyclic repetitive pattern to represent a zero point, that seemed to be frozen or stopped or progressed into nowhere, nothingness. Repetition provides a ground for dark comic characters created by Beckett; "*Endgame* articulates itself as a series of repetitions."⁵³

However, there is no logical relationship between speeches and characters; words are said one after another, but they are not comprehensible and connected. "The independence of Language is proof that the characters are intent upon neither expression nor communication. Since all purpose is absent from their conducts, they really do not need Language, which thereupon begins to free itself from them."⁵⁴

Phrases are very short and condensed. When a character asks a question, it is normally a single sentence form; and answers are shorter. Speeches are economic in words as there is economy in the objects placed on stage, and this signifies a deprivation of existing purpose. Moreover, Language is being broken by many pauses in the play, and the "effect may well enhance the painfulness of waiting, the emptiness of existence, the expectancy of collapse, of a manifestation of total despair."⁵⁵

Happy Days is another play written by Becket and it was first published in 1961. In this work, Becket tried to continue his sustained quest for meaning of existence. There are only two characters in this play; Winnie and Willie, a woman in her fifties and a man in his sixties respectively. They are probably husband and wife. Winnie is buried up partially in the earth and she speaks to her husband who is barely visible and present on the stage. The atmosphere is different from that one that invades *Endgame* ."*Happy Days* can be interpreted as a

mockery of happiness."⁵⁶ What Becket achieves in this play is that "he never lets the reader forget for a moment that a man is isolated , decaying, self-deluding, un self-knowing, death sentenced, rutting."⁵⁷

The setting is so strange , Winnie is being inhumed to her waist in earth. The stage is unlike that of *Endgame* as Kennedy states that "the stage is offered to be open to infinite place in *Happy Days*, which is in contrast with the setting of *Endgame* ,in which the space is a closed prison-cell-like place and the open expanses of space may point only to infinite emptiness."⁵⁸

The words are employed in the repetitive, ritualistic way, and there is continuous flow through the play. Nevertheless "all these voices, memories, objects are loose; they intermingle haphazardly, to no purpose like necessary and unnecessary trifles crammed together in a big plastic bag."⁵⁹

In short, it could be said that the " strangeness of the world is presented on the stage."⁶⁰

As far as time is concerned, the background of temporal clues is unclear and fuzzy . There are only a bell and an unchanging light with some phrases of past memories uttered by Winnie; therefore, the audience could not recognize the temporal background clearly. Winnie tries to ignore the sound of the bell because it hurts as a knife, as she said. She is "allocating her activities in such a way that they are distributed throughout the day so that she is not left with hours still to run , before the bell for sleep, and nothing more to say, nothing more to do."⁶¹ In brief , time is uncontrollable , cyclical, anxiety eraser, and deteriorative; for the playwright, time is a necessary mean to provide ground to question the meaning of the existence.

Characters in the world of Becket are suffering people and are powered the burden of existence. Winnie is the heroin, and She is almost "Becket's most extended dramatic image of a character."⁶² While Willie's presence "serves Winnie as one of the poles of her address and distant source of her sorrow and joy."⁶³ Despite his role is extremely reduced but still , " the role of Willie despite is brevity, is strategic."⁶⁴ To sum up everything said by critics about Winnie and Willie, It could be said that they are on the stage to reflect the futility of human existence.

One of the distinctive features that reflects Becket's use of language in *Happy Days* is his use of lengthy and through stage directions, monologues of one character with quotations from classical works, memories, and stories unexploited shifts from one subject to another, short sentence and recurrent pauses. The stage directions have a special role in changing the rhythm of the play as Worth states; "This means that the rhythm is being controlled as if it were a piece of music Becket were writing."⁶⁵

The little exchange between Winnie and Willie is intended by Becket as he "uses a mechanism to expose the comicality and poverty of dialogue that accompanies the decay of the flesh , mind, and words."⁶⁶ In addition to this, there is a cyclic pattern of repletion especially in Winnie's speech that is characterized by some phrases like " I always find and the old-style."⁶⁷

As far as the thematic side of Becket's drama, it could be said that most men, after the Second World War, have been experienced the existential themes that Becket had presented in his works. The most famous idea then was that "the world is utterly without absolute meaning, and man is left to invent his own personal meaning for his existence."⁶⁸ And thus "Becket's characters create their world."⁶⁹ They have not predetermined meaning or purpose rather than they pursue their beings in a form of a response to the challenges they face because of their existence in this world.

The idea that "man is condemned to be free"⁷⁰ is well reflected throughout the characters in the plays in a form of existential pain as they are left alone to decide for themselves. Hamm was very angry from his father because he has given him existence. Not only Hamm , the other characters feel tired because the world is incomprehensible for them. The puzzle of human existence is so complicated and this causes suffering in turn; an endless suffering like that of Sisyphus rolling a stone up and down endlessly. The same kind of suffering is seen in the case of Winnie who tried to pretend that she is happy , but as Kennedy asserts that Becket has "a concern for modes of being and suffering"⁷¹ He simply lets "the audience permeate with the atmosphere about numbing the pain of existence with words."⁷²

Anguish and anxiety are also two important themes in the two plays. Nothingness is the source of anguish and anxiety of human beings. Despite Man is free ; "Anguish is the manifestation of freedom."⁷³ The characters realize that their choices not only affect their selves , but also affect everyone and this arouses the sense of anguish even more. The lack of the presence of supreme being that checks the validity of human deeds left human beings with anxiety ; therefore , they try their best to get rid of it. "Modern Man is living in a state of

anxiety which at times is close to be intolerable : non-being , a return to an earlier tensionless state is therefore devoutly to be wished”⁷⁴ Thus , the characters in the two plays try to end their suffering but they couldn’t. Tillich ; one of the famous existential writers , presented us the reality that most people including Becket’s characters are afraid to face :

Most of our life continues on the surface , we are enslaved by the routine of daily lives... We are more often driven than driving. We do not stop to look at the height above us , or to the depth below us. We are always moving forward although usually in a circle., which finally brings us back to the place from which we first move. We are in constant motion and never stop to plunge into the depth. We talk and talk and never listen to the voices speaking our depth and from our depth. We accept ourselves as we appear to ourselves and do not care what we really are.⁷⁵

The previous description is perfectly fit with Becket’s characters who “are trapped in a meaningless spiral of mechanized routine ferociously guarding against those voices from the depth.”⁷⁶

For existential philosophers , non-being or nothingness is quiet necessary in order to have the courage to be. The true being must be preceded by confrontation with nothingness; “no actual negation can be without an implicit affirmation ... the negative lives from the positive it negates”⁷⁷ This notion is well reflected by Becket in the two plays as he was “stripping away all external encumbrances and laying bare the essential self , the positive zero , the ground of being for which there are more names or conceptualizations.”⁷⁸

The ending sense and decreasing everything to non-existence is overwhelming in *End Game* ; “the end of the body and the end of nature are accompanied , as well they might be , by the end of all existential and metaphysical comforts: the end of meaning , the death of God , end of time.”⁷⁹ In *Happy_Days*, despite there is no an endeavor to finish anything to non-existence , still the play shows Winnie’s tenderness , discomfort and anxiety because of the sense of the nothingness that she was living with and “in the long run , then , Winnie awaits annihilation and regards the day of its coming as a happy day.”⁸⁰

Conclusion

Existential philosophers worked hard so that Man realizes that he is a forlorn , a person who knows that “God does not exist and he has to face the consequences of this”⁸¹ as Sartre affirmed. Those consequences had been anticipated by Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* when he prophesized that humanity is heading inevitably towards Nihilism , absurdity and nothingness if they keep moving in the same course. Existentialists were clearly aware that they were demolishing the whole old central system of values that the society had by convincing people that God is dead. They put their trust in Man , the free man in fact to create a better system throughout his anguish and his devastating feeling of suffering. They suggest many ways to do that ; for example , Nietzsche preached us to return 2000 years and to have the ethics and values of the old Greek , in an attempt for man to evolve to a superman state of being. However , it is not the duty of this study to judge the epistemological or the ethical outcome of what the existentialists had done , rather than to discover their influence on modern drama , the drama of Strindberg and Becket in specific.

It is found that the recurrent existential themes are well portrayed in the works of the two playwrights. “ Strindberg’s plays took in existential matters such as birth , love , loss, emotional turmoil , the search for one’s identity and the inevitable decline into death,”⁸² Krasner affirmed. His beliefs were anticipated and influenced predominantly by existential philosophers , particularly ; Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Moreover , Strindberg’s works had great influence on the next generation of dramatists like Becket , Sarah Kane and Ionesco , who continue to realize the importance of the subjects that Strindberg dealt with like the battle of the sexes.

In the same realm , man is portrayed by Becket attempting to invent a grand meaning for his existence. Becket believed ; as Heidegger did , that man is thrown and left alone in this world and ; therefore , the characters in *End Game* and *Happy days* are thrown onto the stage and abandoned there. He ; like Sartre , seemed very concerned in reflecting “modes of being and suffering.”⁸³ The pain of existing and the existential anguish and anxiety haunt the

characters. Also , the existential themes are well reflected throughout setting , language , and the structure of Becket's plays in general. It seems little bit dangerous here to claim that Existentialism had a negative effect on these aspects of drama and its traditional artistic principles such as the well-designed plots , smooth tempo of actions and nevertheless , the well-phrased dialogues and monologues. However , it is totally different drama that reflects the decay and the meaninglessness of human life and for this reason , dramatists abandoned those artistic ornaments and we are left alone with all the ugliness and the suffering of humanity reflected viciously on the stage.

Notes

¹ Jean Paul Sartre , *Existentialism and Humanism* ,trans and introd. Philip Mairet (London : Methuen,1948) p.24.

² Rollo May , *The Discovery of Being Writings in Existential Psychology* (New york : Norton and company , 1983) p. 50

³J.O, Urmson and Janathan Ree ,*The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers*, (London : Unwin Brothers Ltd, 1960) p. 164.

⁴ Soren Kierkegaard , *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts to Philosophical Fragments*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong eds. (Princeton : Princeton university press, 1992) p. 571.

⁵ Walter Kaufman *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, (New york : Meridian, 1956) p.117.

⁶ Soren Kierkegaard , 1992 , p. 183.

⁷ J. Teichman , White G. ed. *An Introduction to Modern European philosophy* , 2nd edition (London :Macmillan Education, 1998) p. 58.

⁸ Paul Roubiczek , *Existentialism For and Against* , (Cambridge : Cambridge university press, 1956) p.12.

⁹D.A. Crosby , *The Specter of the Absurd : Sources and Criticism of Modern Nihilism*, (New York : State university of New York press, 1988) p. 18.

¹⁰F. Nietzsche , *Will to Power* , W. Kaufmann and R. Hollingdale, tr. (NY : vintage ,1967) p. 267.

¹¹ Paul Roubiczek , *Existentialism For and Against* , (Cambridge : Cambridge university press, 1956) p. 39.

¹²Martin Heidegger , *Contributions to Philosophy* , Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly , eds. (Indiana Polis : Indiana university press , 1999) p. 187-188.

¹³ Martin Heidegger , *Basic Writings : From Being and Time* ,David Farrell Krell (San Francisco : Harper San Francisco , 1993) p.90.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ J. P. Sartre , *Existentialism and Humanism* , Trans. And introd. Philip Mairet (London : Methuen , 1948) p.28.

¹⁷ Ibid . p.29.

¹⁸ T. Z. Lavin , *From Socrates to Sartre : the Philosophical Quest*, (Toronto : Bantam books , 1984) p. 328.

¹⁹ J. P. Sartre , *Existentialism is Humanism* , The text is taken from Arizona university website on 1/2/2020.

²⁰ Evert Sprinchorn , *Strindberg as a Dramatist* ,(Oxford : Willey-Blackwell , 2012) p. 26.

²¹David Krasner , *A History of Modern Drama* , Volume I ,(Oxford : Willey-Blackwell , 2012) p.30.

²² A. Strindberg , *Preface to Miss Julie* , in *Theater Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology* , D. Krasner , ed. (Oxford : Blackwell , 2008) p. 42.

²³ J. L. Styan , *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice* ,Volume I (Cambridge : Cambridge university press , 1983) p. 38.

²⁴ H. Lunin , *Dramen* (Oxford : Blackwell, 1962) p. 44.

- ²⁵ P. Sznodi and M. Hayes , *Theory of Modern Drama* p. 191 from jstor.org/stable/303010 accessed on 4-1-2020.
- ²⁶ A. Schopenhauer , *The World as Will* , from Krasner (2012) *A history of Modern Drama* (Oxford : Willey-Blackwell) p. 369.
- ²⁷ David Krasner , *A History of Modern Drama* , Volume I ,(Oxford : Willey-Blackwell , 2012) p.97.
- ²⁸ J. Wallace , *The Cambridge introduction to Tragedy* , (Cambridge : Cambridge university press , 2007) p. 71-72.
- ²⁹ C. K. Spivak , *The Many Hells of August Strindberg : Twentieth Century Literature* , p. 12 from jstor.org/stable/440978 accessed on 7-1-2020
- ³⁰ Rollo May , *The Discovery of Being Writings in Existential Psychology* (New york : Norton and company , 1983) p.95.
- ³¹ B. Katz , *The Fifth Narrative : The Wiser Scent of Icarus* (Indiana : Bloomington press, 2004) p.72.
- ³² J. P. Sartre , *Existentialism is Humanism* , The text is taken from Arizona university website on 1/2/2020.
- ³³ A. Strindberg , *Selected Essays : The Battle of Brains reference* , ed. Michael Robinson (Cambridge : Cambridge university press , 1996) p.175.
- ³⁴ A. Strindberg, *Thunder in the Air* (Cambridge : Cambridge university press , 1996) p.56.
- ³⁵ Ibid , p.34.
- ³⁶ A. Strindberg , *The Ghost Sonata*, ed. A Meyer (Massachusetts : Methuen) p265
- ³⁷ A. Strindberg , *Selected Essays : The Battle of Brains reference* , ed. Michael Robinson (Cambridge : Cambridge university press , 1996) p.285.
- ³⁸ J. L. Styan , *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice* , Volume I (Cambridge : Cambridge university press , 1983) p.32.
- ³⁹ Colin Chambers , *playwrights' Progress :Patterns of Postwar British Drama*, (Oxford : Amber Lane , 1987) p. 78.
- ⁴⁰ Andrew Kennedy , *Samuel Becket* ,(Cambridge : Cambridge university press, 1989) p. 47.
- ⁴¹ Michael Worton , *Waiting for Godot and Endgame :Theatre as Text* , ed. John Pilling (New York : Cambridge university press, 1994) p. 69.
- ⁴² The Dublin magazine , *Reflection on Samuel Beckett's New Work for the French Theatre*, April-June : 18-22, 1957.
- ⁴³ Theodor W. Adorno , *Trying to Understand Endgame : Becket and Philosophy*, ed., Richard Lane (New York : Palgrave, 2002) p.43.
- ⁴⁴ Maurice Buning , *Becket versus Becket* ,(Amsterdam: Rodopi , 1998) p.305.
- ⁴⁵ R. Charles Lyons , *Macmillan Modern Dramatists: Samuel Becket* , (London : Macmillan press , 1983) p. 69
- ⁴⁶ Theodor W. Adorno , *Trying to Understand Endgame : Becket and Philosophy*, ed., Richard Lane (New York : Palgrave, 2002) p.46.
- ⁴⁷ Andrew Kennedy , *Samuel Becket* ,(Cambridge : Cambridge university press, 1989) p. 48.
- ⁴⁸ R. Charles Lyons , *Macmillan Modern Dramatists: Samuel Becket* , (London : Macmillan press , 1983) p. 58.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 60.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid, p.56
- ⁵¹ Edith Kern , *Existential Thought and Fictional Technique* , (New Haven & London : Yale University Press, 1970) p. 169.
- ⁵² Raymond T. Riva, 'Beckett and Freud' Lance Butler, ed. *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*,(Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1993) p.160.
- ⁵³ Jennifer M. Jeffers, *Samuel Beckett: A Casebook*,(New York: Garland Publishing,1998) p.44.
- ⁵⁴ Wolfgang Iser, 'Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Language' in *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*, ed. Lance Butler,(Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1993)p.149.
- ⁵⁵ Wallace Fowlie, *Dionysus in Paris*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1960) p. 214.
- ⁵⁶ Wolfgang Iser, 'The Art of Failure: The Stifled Laugh in Beckett's Theater' in *Samuel Beckett*, Jennifer Birkett and Kate Ince, eds, (London and New York: Longman, 2000) p. 222.
- ⁵⁷ Stephen Spender, 'Lifelong Suffocation' in *Critical Essays on Samuel Becket*, ed. Lance Butler, (t. Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1993) p.5.
- ⁵⁸ Andrew Kennedy , *Samuel Becket* ,(Cambridge : Cambridge university press, 1989) p. 76.

⁵⁹ Jan Kott, 'A Note on Beckett's Realism' in Lance Butler, *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*, ed Jan (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1993) p.158.

⁶⁰ Dong-Ho Sohn, *The Concept of Time and Space in Beckett's Dramas Happy Days and Waiting for Godot*, (July 08, 2007) accessed in 12/1/2019.

⁶¹ R. Charles Lyons, *Macmillan Modern Dramatists: Samuel Beckett*, (London : Macmillan press, 1983) p.119.

⁶² Ibid, p.125.

⁶³ Richard Gilman, 'The Stage: Beckett's Happy Days' in *The Critical Response to Samuel Beckett*, ed. Cathleen Culotta, (London: Greenwood Press, 1998)p.237.

⁶⁴ Charles Marowitz, 'A View from the Gods' in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p.121.

⁶⁵ Katherine Worth, *Waiting for Godot and Happy Days*, (London: MacMillan, 1990) p.37.

⁶⁶ Andrew Kennedy, *Samuel Beckett*, (Cambridge : Cambridge university press, 1989) p. 88.

⁶⁷ Katherine Worth, *Waiting for Godot and Happy Days*, (London: MacMillan, 1990) p.41.

⁶⁸ Otto Bohlmann, *Conrad's Existentialism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991) p.14

⁶⁹ Lance St. John Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984) p. 94.

⁷⁰ Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, Trans. and introd. Philip Mairet., (London: Methuen, 1948) p.34.

⁷¹ Andrew Kennedy, *Samuel Beckett*, (Cambridge : Cambridge university press, 1989) p. 12.

⁷² Deborah B. Gaensbauer, 'The French Theater of the Absurd' in *The French Review*, Vol. 66, No.5 (Apr., 1993) p. 32.

⁷³ Robert R. Ellis, *The Tragic Pursuit of Being: Unamuno and Sartre*, (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1988) p.15.

⁷⁴ Lance St. John Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984) p. 164.

⁷⁵ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) p. 39.

⁷⁶ David McCandless, 'Beckett and Tillich: Courage and Existence in Waiting for Godot' in *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*, ed. Lance Butler, (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1993) p. 346.

⁷⁷ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) p. 42.

⁷⁸ David McCandless, 'Beckett and Tillich: Courage and Existence in Waiting for Godot' in *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*, ed. Lance Butler, (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1993) p. 350.

⁷⁹ Andrew Kennedy, *Samuel Beckett*, (Cambridge : Cambridge university press, 1989) p. 52.

⁸⁰ Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett: The Classic Study of a Modern Genius*, (London: Souvenir Press Ltd, 1990) p.176.

⁸¹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1957) p.21.

⁸² David Krasner, *A History of Modern Drama*, Volume I, (Oxford : Willey-Blackwell, 2012) p.110.

⁸³ Andrew Kennedy, *Samuel Beckett*, (Cambridge : Cambridge university press, 1989) p. 12.

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