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## Realistic and Absurd Dramatic Setting: A Comparative Study

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### Abstract

Dramatic setting in any work of art assumes its significance, especially in drama and all other forms of narrative, telling of the occurrence of an action in relation to themes and characters. The importance of setting lies in the fact that it is always to accompany actions: no setting means no action. Setting is the sole dramatic ingredient among all others which cannot be overlooked by any dramatist or a story teller. For any action or any event—realistic, absurd and otherwise—there must be representations of a place and time—setting—so that full understanding can be attained by the reader or the listener or the audience when exposed to a dramatic experience. This research paper consists of a study dealing with the realistic and absurd dramatic setting in an attempt to make a comparison between them both. It sheds light on significant examples taken from the dramas pertaining to both genres to highlight the significance of each kind of setting set in the dramas concerned, and at the same time it sheds light on the dramatic resources, implications and connotations which each genre's setting may make available to the dramatists in question.

**Keywords:** Absurd, Realistic, Drama, Comparative, Setting

### الزمان الواقعى والعبثى : دراسة مقارنة

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### الملخص

تقترب خلفيتي الزمان والمكان في أي عمل أدبي أهميتهما لاسيما في الدراما واي شكل آخر من الاشكال الادبية واللتان تحدثنا عن زمن ومكان وقوع الحدث فيما يخص الثيمات وشخوص المسرحية. تكمن أهمية الزمان والمكان في إنهم دائما يرافقان الحدث: عدم وجود زمان ومكان يقتضي عدم وجود حدث إذ ان خلفيتي الزمان والمكان تعداد العامل الدرامي الوحيد من بين العوامل الأخرى التي لا يمكن بآي حال من الاحوال التغاضي عنها من قبل اي من الكتاب المسرحيين او الكتاب الروائيين. فبالنسبة لأى حدث او حادثة ما إذا كانت واقعية او عبثية او مخالف ذلك يجب ان تكون هناك تجليات الزمان والمكان بحيث يتم التوصل إلى فهم تام من قبل القاريء او من قبل الجمهور عندما يراقبون التجربة الدرامية. يتضمن هذا البحث دراسة تتعلق بخلفيتي الزمان والمكان بالنسبة للدراما الواقعية والعبثية ويقدم مقارنة بينهما. وكذلك يسلط البحث الضوء على أهمية الامثلة المأخوذة من المسرحيات لهذين النوعين لبيان المصادر الدرامية والمصادر الواقعية والابحاث التي يوفرها كل من هذين النوعين الدراميين من المكان والزمان للكاتب المسرحي. ويبين البحث ان الزمان والمكان في اي نوع من انواع الدراما سواء كانت واقعية او عبثية يكون معبرا عن العصر الذي كتبت فيه، وان اختيار نوع الزمان والمكان من قبل الكاتب المسرحي يتتوافق مع المعنى الذي يريد ان يقدمه، فعلى سبيل المثال عندما تكون خبطة المسح عبارة عن فندق في الدراما الواقعية فإنه من المؤكد انه قد يتعارف فيه الغرباء الى بعضهم البعض. وكذلك عندما نقدم لنا الدراما العبثية غرفة مغلقة او صفيحة القمامنة فان الكاتب المسرحي يقدم معنا عبثيا للحياة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** عبثي، واقعي، مسرح، مقارن، زمكاني

## The Objective of the Study and Methodology

This study is so significant because it deals with an important dramatic ingredient—setting—without which a drama, and even novel, novella, short story, or any other form of narrative such as tales that figure out in the literary media, would have been lacking in an artistic quality. The plays to be considered in this study are Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Widowers' Houses*, being representatives of the realistic drama, and Samuel Beckett's plays *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*, being representative of the Absurd drama. Some touches will be made upon Henrik Ibsen's realistic drama.

The paper is divided into three sections preceded by a general introduction, and followed by a conclusion. Section one deals with the study of setting in realistic drama. Section two tackles the study of setting in the absurd drama. The study is ended with section three in which discussion concerning the two types of setting—the realistic and the Absurd—is projected. The study ends with a conclusion which consists of the main findings attained by the researcher.

### General Introduction

Dramatic setting is regarded as a significant ingredient of drama. It points to the time and place in which an action occurs. As long as the Absurd drama is analyzed in terms of existentialism, setting seems to be of paramount importance insofar as it deals with the essence of existence and existence cannot be fulfilled without time and place. This notion can also be applied to the realistic drama as far as setting is concerned. Concerning any event or any action, the first question to be asked about them is when and where it happens. Therefore the meaningful existence of any action should be characterized by time and place.

### Setting in the Realistic Drama

Realism in literary media indicates a movement in arts that started in France, Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century and found its representations in the second half of the nineteenth century and the second half of the twentieth century. Realistic dramatists found it necessary to respond to the taste of the time that graves for the familiar experiences of characters representing ones in actual life, a trend that has been approved by the majority of the spectators, especially when they watch and apprehend the kind of problems facing contemporary man that has already faced a bitter reality because of the problems ignited by the industrial revolutions and the Great Wars.

It may be noted that realism started as a movement in the second half of the nineteenth century and extended through much of the twentieth century. The dramatic and theatrical conventions advocated by this movement are intended to depict a great deal of fidelity in relation to both texts and performances. These conventions comprise place of action in relation to time, lighting, sound and costume, style, design of performance and the structure of the narrative. Realism

aims at recreating a likeness of actual life on the stage. Habitual ordinary scenarios are designed and employed.

The confrontations of the pungent realities have averted the taste of people from the romanticized presentations because they realized that romanticism did not avail modern man in solving his problems. Realism is a literary term first used in France at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century. It advocates the representation

of the world as it is rather than as it ought to be. Realism observes and documents contemporary life and everyday scenes as objectively as possible in low-key, unrhetorical prose and reproduces the flavour of colloquial speech in its dialogue. Though realist writers may portray characters from all social levels, they often look to the lowest social classes and take cruelty or suffering as their subject.

(Ian Ousby, 1996, p. 322)

Realistic drama aims at shedding light on the people of the middle-class societies, pointing out the main factors having serious impact upon them and criticizing the political system that has given rise to their problems. This kind of drama often assumes the form of critical and descriptive realism. Besides, one of the main aims of realism is to point out how the victim has been victimized by victimizers. Hence, the action of realistic drama should take place in a realistic setting to add a tinge of realism, so that what the spectators watch on the stage should be believed to be of real representations, and thus realistic drama refers generally to any artistic or literary portrayal of life in a faithful, accurate manner, unclouded by false ideals, literary conventions, or misplaced aesthetic glorification and beautification of the world. It is a theory or tendency in writing to depict events in human life in a matter-of-fact, straightforward manner. It is an attempt to reflect life as it actually is. (R. Santos et. al., 2020)

It has been generally accepted that Henrik Ibsen is the most prominent exponent of realism in dramatic works which advocate particular theatrical conventions including the presence of real life within the dramatic texts and performances on the stage. The realistic theater tries as far as possible to approach reality in almost everything, so that a great deal of fidelity and facsimile of reality can be attained.

When performed on the stage, a realistic play is meant to provide a live setting, the time and place at which and in which characters are realistically speaking and behaving so as to present the narrative in a natural manner. Most importantly, visual representations exert a great deal of faithfulness and reliability on the part of the audiences. However, it has been acknowledged that Ibsen's mastery of the stage lies in his use of the "physical and off-stage settings, architectural details, props,

and space as symbol" (Julie Lorraine Thompson, 1986). Hence, the study of Ibsen's symbolic representations of setting leads to a better understanding and appreciation of his drama, for his settings contributes to forming the unity of the play. They become interpretive and expressive of themes along with the characters' psyches:

Areas on and off the stage, props, furniture, and architectural details may be a stage projection of the protagonist's mind, intention, motivation, or suppression. Since the essential nature of drama is conflict, Ibsen often uses his settings as symbols of conflict. Varied settings, architectural details, placement of the furniture, and the characters' positions and movement on the stage provide a visual symbolism for his themes.

(Julie Lorraine Thompson, 1986)

As seen in Shaw's plays, the dramatist heavily relies on elaborate stage directions and prefaces for the reason that he endeavors to create a real atmosphere, and at the same time he wants to explain to the reader many points in relation to the action, for his plays are intended to be read in the first place. These representations allow him to grasp the opportunity to

argue at length certain matters which were of interest to him. By means of his elaborate stage-directions he aimed at creating the atmosphere of the stage in the study of his plays. They combine the function of the novel and the drama. They create the necessary atmosphere, comment upon stage-settings and interpret characters rightly.

(Ardhenda De, 2014)

Unlike other dramatists who stick to the use of the three unities of time, place and action due to the French influence, Shaw, like Shakespeare before him, rejects them inasmuch as they are restraints which he has violated in favor of constructing his plays.

There is a picture showing young Shaw in one of the British Museum's room where he gets his self-education while reading and longing for the beautiful landscapes of his homeland—Ireland, which points to his love of realistic scenes. It does not happen by chance that libraries and gardens are often used for the scenes of his plays. This is a fact that has scarcely referred to by critics (Tony J. Stafford, 2013). According to Stafford (2013), landscapes and libraries crystallize a significant pattern for his plays' settings. They do not only form a place for the background of the action, but they also stand as allegorical representations, expectations and perception of the conflicting characters: "By examining Shaw's use of the garden and the library in *Widowers' Houses* in meticulous detail, one gains an appreciation of the complexity, subtlety, and mastery that Shaw therein reveals, as well as an insight into the play's deeper textual implications" (Stafford, 2013).

Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* exhibits a setting within whose domain is a manageable dramatic work of drama in which critics recognize a variety of themes ranging from assaults against society, ill treatment of the poor, the landlords' hypocrisy and greed and their callousness towards the destitute. This state of life shows that nothing can alter society—the poor remain as they are, and the rich grow more affluent. Social ills continue to exist as long as they are supported by hypocritical members of society yearning to ascend into a higher class, so that they could enjoy high esteem, respectability and acceptance among others:

Thus Shaw uses the settings of gardens and libraries as a means to develop and dramatize in a subtle and powerful way a major theme involving hypocrisy and pretense. Although the garden and library are merely stage settings, much of Shaw's intent is contained in his stage directions, and his descriptions support and eventually merge with the action and characters.

(Stafford, 2013)

As to Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, the dramatist endeavors to represent realistic setting on the stage throughout the stage directions that illustrate the time and place of the action that is to occur. The place may be a garden and the time is the afternoon, or the place may be a normal apartment. It may be suggested that Shaw's stage directions are more expressive than the speech of his characters in that they illustrate tremendous meanings needless to be inserted in the dialogues. Stage directions in Shaw's drama are significant inasmuch as they tell of the setting, the characters' actions and expressions. His physical illustrations are important down to every minute detail "such as his use of gardens and libraries" (Stafford, 2013).

Shaw and other dramatists such as Ibsen and Tolstoy have been able to look at life with a photographic eye; they are realistic dramatists who seek frank representations of their dramas. Shaw, in particular, shows his interest in humanity and arts, which enables him to see life's manifestations clearly from which he has drawn his philosophy of the life force and the elements of realism. In his letter to Shaw, Oscar Wilde unfolds his appreciation of Shaw's certitude to depict realities based on real life. Wilde further admires Shaw's confidence in creating life-like characters. He says that he admires the flesh and blood of his creatures (Hammon, 1976: 59). Interestingly enough, Shaw illustrates his word in this regard, saying that

In my plays, you will not be irritated or bored with happiness, kindness, virtue, crime, romanticism, or any other foolish trifles. My plays have only one subject—life—and only one quality—interest in life; but the amateur seems to have lost all sense of the unreality and sincerity of the romantic stage. He takes what is represented on the stage as real human nature, whilst it is a most bitter satire. The result is, that when I stage human nature, he believes I am making

fun of him....In reality, I am only very carefully and simply writing his natural history.

(Shaw, in Hamon, 1976: 27)

Due to his realistic representations, Shaw attacks the landlords' exploitation of the poor showing that the former live in luxurious houses and the latter live in small dirty houses that are the source of the landlords' income. Shaw says that *Widowers' Houses* shows "a picture of "the suburban villa standing on the rents of the foul rookery" (Shaw, 1955: 49). The stage direction of the play shows that the action starts in a hotel on the river Rhine in the 1880s where two English tourists figure out on the scene, which points to the realistic setting of the play. They are Dr. Harry Trench and his friend Mr. William de Burgh Cokane, who are here as tourists. To add to the realistic representations, Trench sings noisily: "pour out the Rhine wine; let it flow/like a free and bounding river" (Ibid: 32). As the stage direction of the play reveals, Act I starts in a hotel on the Rhine in the 1880s. They are waiting for something to drink in the garden restaurant.

Trench becomes on good terms with Cokane until Cokane mentions the word "father" to refer to the latter's father Sartorius who has been a distinguished gentleman who arrives at the hotel with his daughter Blanche who is said to be beautiful and full of energy. Here, Trench and Blanche fall in love, which is an event that often occurs in real life. Cokane and Sartorius suggest that they go to visit one of the churches. It has been unfolded that Trench and Blanche know each other on the boat, and their meeting here has not been an accident. Another realistic setting shows that Act 2 starts in a library in a villa in Surbiton, England, where Sartorius and his daughter sit, whereas Act 3 has been set in Blanche's reading room in the winter home in Bedford Square.

To substantiate his realistic approach as far as setting is concerned, Shaw relies on realistic documentations of events. In his "Preface" to *Widowers' Houses*, Shaw comments that the play can be regarded as both a work of art and a document. It is a document insofar as depicts realistic actions that are documented. He says that the play is "justifiable mainly as a document" (Shaw, 1965, 709). For instance, the staircase' account related by one of Sartorius' servants finds its similarity in a nineteenth-century journal published in England. Hence, Shaw depends on facts published in newspapers, especially facts about the aftermaths caused by slum landlordism. In the following example taken from *The Star*, a newspaper issued on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1893. Shaw says:

A dangerous staircase was proved fatal to Elizabeth H\_\_\_\_\_, aged 40, a charwoman, of X Buildings. The evidence at St. Gile's Coroner's Court on Saturday showed that the deceased was found lying at the bottom of the stairs at her lodgings on Tuesday morning, at half-past twelve, in an insensible condition. She was carried upstairs and put to bed, but died the same day.

(Shaw, 1965, 714)

Furthermore, Shaw quotes significant evidence pertaining to his support of realism in his "Preface" to *Widowers' Houses*, which he takes from the Coroner's Officer;

he says, "The stairs are very dangerous at night. They are insufficiently lighted. Dr. Brennan deposed that death was due to extensive fracture of the skull. He said he found the stairs dark and slippery. A handrail was needed" (Shaw, 1965, 714). Shaw further mentions some facts taken from the Coroner's Officer's report: Over a hundred families live at those buildings. The jury, in returning a verdict of accidental death, added the subjoined rider: The Jurors, having heard in evidence that the staircases leading to X building are insufficiently lighted, and that there are no handrails, would call the attention of the landlord to his condition of things, to a view to their immediate improvement.

(Ibid.)

The above mentioned documents can be regarded as part of the setting of the play which demonstrates Shaw's reliance on realistic happenings related to slum landlordism, being taken from actual life. This tendency is supposed to be one of the essentials of realism. The episode of the staircase symbolizes nothing but a realistic representation of setting,

Not only is setting significant to the realistic and absurd drama, but it is also significant to historical drama or historical stories which may have an important setting without which the work of art would have been of no importance. Thus, setting of a historical drama should be part and parcel of it; the dramatist needs to fix the time and place of the historical events referred to in his drama, otherwise, his drama would be of no meaning. Hence, any story dealing with historical events is having a setting of a particular effect on its plot and is part of its structure: a story dealing with a historical setting will have a direct impact on the plot. A story that happens in the 1800s will not have technology, so the characters will have to write a letter, ride a horse or take a carriage to visit each other; they cannot travel long distances in one day as we do now with cars, buses, and planes. This will have a direct impact on the events of the story, especially if there is distance involved.

(<https://literaryterms.net/setting/>)

### **Setting in the Absurd Drama**

Absurdism is ever associated with the term "The Theater of the Absurd" whose implications point to the kind of drama written in a new form by European and American dramatists. They wrote drama during two decades comprising the 1950's and the 1960's, and who do not learn the classification of their genre. It was the critic Martin Esslin who identified their works with the common untraditional yet unprecedented characteristic features of a new method of writing drama presented on the stage of theater which he then called The Theater of the Absurd. The literal meaning of the term is "out of harmony" (Ian Ousby, 1996: p. 1). It can be inferred then that the setting of this genre is untraditional accordingly.

The new trend described by Esslin was not in concord with the prevailing theatrical traditions, and at the same time it did not meet the expectations of the spectators. He applied the term "Absurd" to those dramatists who employed the

theater to present man's absurdity in a dramatic way. This type of drama presents man as a creature with no hope that lives a meaningless life. Ian Ousby says that it is "Albert Camus's designation for the dilemma of modern man, [who becomes] a stranger in inhuman universe" (Ian Ousby, 1996, p. 1). The Theater of the Absurd embraces the philosophy pertaining to the belief that the "universe is irrational and meaningless and that the search for order brings the individual into conflict with the universe" (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

Since the Absurd drama reflects the philosophy of existentialism; that is, it is the kind of philosophy that concentrates on doctrines related to man's existence in the unmeasured universe, setting is to assume the essence of this kind of drama, for the drama of the absurd urgently needs this significant element, for it is mainly concerned with the nature of existence the dramatist wants to depict. In order to exist, there is the need for time and place. Therefore, any study related to the Absurd drama should address the kind of setting employed by the dramatist in order to attain a valid interpretation.

Literary media have scarcely referred to a comparison between the representations of setting in both realistic and absurd drama. At least there is not a profound study in this respect. Therefore, it is an eligible attempt to unfold the differences and similarities between both types of drama as far as the dramatic setting is concerned. Hence, this section is mainly concerned with the analysis of setting in Beckett's plays *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* in relation to their action that figures out in a particular place and at a certain time. Besides, this section infers the significance of setting to themes and its function in the absurd drama in particular and drama in general. Moreover, character and action are affected by the kind of setting the dramatist adopts, so that he can unfold some existentialist maxims related to the themes of anxiety, despair and alienation that have afflicted modern man.

It can be suggested then that the understanding of the setting representations in the absurd drama contributes to full understanding of it, for in this kind of drama, the depiction of characters depart from the traditional yet familiar way of presenting them in a realistic setting. Besides, in it, there is no clear-cut vision of the time and place surrounding the action, and approximately all moves are often outside the domain of rationality and seem to be nightmarish and surrealistic. Furthermore, the dialogues and events seem to the audience senseless and illogical.

On the other hand, there must be an exploration of the significant themes behind the curtain that are related to the problems of modern man such as solitude, isolation, alienation and cruelty in a world which is supposed to be unlivable. The communication among characters seems to be characterized by senselessness, absurdity and all sorts of naivety. Most important is the fact that Becket's plays under consideration are characterized by the concept of oppositeness in that one can find eyesight stands in contrary to blindness; life, death; past, present; body, mind, etc. Hence, Beckett used to present his characters in twos.

As to Beckett's treatment of setting in *Endgame*, it is noticeable that all the characters have already been afflicted by certain calamities from which they could not find way out. The disabled Hamm has kept his parents in ashbins in an attempt

to get rid of them. This action is symbolic of the notion that the parents are helpless and living a meaningless yet trivial life; they remain here for the end of their lives. Besides, they are symbolic of ashes that are of no importance.

Interestingly enough, the ashbins are symbolic of the environment in which human beings live. The ashbins are to represent the home in which Hamm's parents are to stay for the rest of their lives. This meaning can be extended to the environments in which nations live as entrapped human beings living according to what the political system dictates. The fate of man is governed by forces beyond his control, so he is helpless and whose life is meaningless.

The ashbins may further be representative of those institutions that restrict man's will and destiny, such as the religious, social, political and military ones. Their residence, apart from the outside world, in the ashbins shows that they do not even revolt neither against the miserable life they live nor against their oppressor. This may also show the parents' wish to alienate and isolate themselves from a society with which they cannot cope. Hence, they escape from the traditions and conventions of the modern world. The experience of entrapping one's parents in ashbins is irrational; it is an experience that can by no means be accepted by the traditional theater. But, it can be accepted in the theater of the Absurd insofar the latter tries to distance itself from rationality. In this regard, it is important to quote Esslin who believes that at the inception of the Absurd Theater, the audiences find themselves in front of a stage that has shocked them with a bewildering experience, a veritable barrage of wildly irrational often nonsensical going-on that seem to go counter to all accepted standards of stage conventions... some of which are labeled 'anti-plays,' [for] neither the time nor the place of the action are ever clearly stated.

(Esslin, 1960, p. 30)

It must be noted that conventional meanings in the Theater of the Absurd can be inferred from unconventional ones expressive of some representations related to the problems of contemporary society. Esslin sees that the dramas of the Theater of the Absurd "give expression to some of the basic issues and problems of our age, in a uniquely efficient and meaningful manner, so that they meet some of the deepest needs and unexpressed yearnings of their audience" (Esslin, 1960, p. 31).

The enclosure of Hamm and his servant in a little room and the enclosure of Hamm's parents in the ashbins—enclosures from which they cannot escape—are indicative of the notion that the modern man is restricted by powers beyond their control. All the characters of *Endgame* are living in an environment that is like a perpetual prison. Hence, the characters feel bewildered, disillusioned, purposeless and depressed, being put out of place. Thus, their existence is endangered by time and place, and they have to confront endless misery, for they are just waiting for their death. Their stay in a place that seems to be timeless indicates that they are near-to-death creatures for whom death is the most suitable solution for their problem.

Vladimir and Estragon, on the other hand, figure out on a barren road on a leafless tree in the evening as two miserable tramps. In addition to the tramps' trivial and good for nothing characters, the setting is symbolic of something useless. The life experience presented on the stage is symbolic of the notion that life for those two tramps is useless yet meaningless. Those two characters are waiting for Godot and they are not even sure whether they are waiting or not. The place is empty pointing to a world having no significance, in which they act their trivial actions such as useless conversations on suicide and the Bible or putting on and off a boot. The scene presents tremendous absurdity to the audience throughout the entire play. The play is capable of introducing many and various interpretations:

these settings provide unique conditions that play significant roles in making the characters continue coping with what seems an endless state of misery, waiting, and frustration. The bare open stage in Waiting for Godot9 provides a strong image of sad homelessness and isolation. This atmosphere of isolation and loneliness is, perhaps, what furnishes for a special relationship between Vladimir and Estragon. Being in the same boat where there is no apparent rivalry, no competition, living within the same territories and experiencing the same conditions of torment, having similar desires, hopes and aspirations.

(Akram Shalghin, 2014, p. 103)

Nevertheless, a valid interpretation can be attained when one considers the historical background—the time in which it was written. In this play, Beckett attempts to depict the state of life and the conditions of people after World War II: hopeless people waiting for a mysterious savior—Godot.

## Discussion

The great gap between absurdity and realism can be eliminated by the fact that there are frequent affinities between the two genres. On the one hand, an absurd drama addresses realistic elements such as the use of realistic names embedded in realistic characters the like of which can be representative of actual ones, manners and some representations of setting like a room, a road or even windows. Furthermore, Beckett's play *Endgame* that has been classified as an absurd one exposes realistic characters—a disabled blind old man with a waiter serving him. Hence, Beckett seems to mix the realistic with the absurd. To find realistic streaks in an absurd drama can by no means be regarded as a shortcoming. The characters in *Endgame* endeavor to attain the state of survival throughout their caution and conscious mind that make them alert in every moment they are living, though powerless towards the dangers of what surround them.

On the other hand, elements of absurdity can be found in Shaw's realistic drama such as *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in that it exposes the helplessness of

Mrs. Warren and her sister, when both of them are young, to confront the outside world with nothing to feed on except their body and soul. This argument is valid when considering that The Absurd Theater was initiated in the 1950s-1960s insofar as it “illustrates the fundamental helplessness of humanity.” (T. Rajeshwar. 2012, p. 212). This mixture of realism and absurdity can be recognized by virtue of the notion that one of the significant shaping factors of the absurd drama is World War II due to the fact that the latter’s aftermaths are conducive to the destruction of body and soul of man to the extent that the poor could by no means afford for their living, not to mention the horror, panic and pressures that have inflicted them. Therefore, the dramatists of the time undoubtedly find it their moral responsibility to dramatize this state of affair because their point of view concerning life has been already altered. The new status quo obliges them to “picture man as a helpless alien with the pitiable situation in this abominable world” (Fariba Sadat Sadreddini, 2014: 79).

It is no wonder that one can recognize realistic characters acting in the Absurd Theatre. Beckett’s and Pinter’s characters, for instance, can represent real ones in real life though they are incarnated within the mould of the Absurd Theatre and are symbolic of those who suffer from the absurdity, futility, uncertainty and meaninglessness of life. It has been pointed out by Pi Binyan (2007) that Pinter’s characterization is amalgamated by both realistic and absurd characteristic simultaneously. He comments that in spite of the fact that Pinter’s play *The Dumb Waiter* does consist of absurd representations underneath the realistic covering, “the play is one of uncertainty and absurdity” (Pi Binyan, 2007).

As part of the setting in modern drama, the room is considered a structural component in which characters move and behave, so it is an important ingredient contributing to the action of the drama concerned. However, Shaw and Ibsen belittle the importance of the room on the stage as it is regarded as a symbol of prison. Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* shows how the protagonist has run away from this kind of imprisonment. She has managed to get rid of restrictions, whereas in *Hedda Gabler* the protagonist commits suicide, being unable to escape from what is supposed to be a prison—the room. Hence, the action of those two plays considers the room as its setting from which the protagonists have been prompted to escape.

It is worth mentioning that the costume in both kinds of drama plays an important role because it is an indication of the time in which one action of a drama takes place; hence the theater depends on “costumes and masks for they add so many expressions in addition to music, dancing and gestures” (Aseel Laith Ahmed, 2021). There are other tools such as lighting and various kinds of props which pertain to the dramatic setting and which contribute to showing hidden meanings to the spectators in all kinds of theaters. They, at the same time, cut short the narration to be put in the mouth of the actors as is the case with the realistic drama of modern dramatists and the Absurdist dramas:

The language of theatre is made by a number of physical tools and moral elements. So as the actors, costumes,

lightings and accessories represent the physical aspects of the show, they also represent its moral aspect too. When they transform from plastic words in the space of the visual show to become signs carrying its indications that give the meaning through the link, overlap and arrangement of its movements so as to finally look like as wording in a sentence carries the meaning and represent the language of theatre speech. The show usually sends the recipient continuous signs that go beyond the limits of expressions that are conveyed by these tools.

(Ryadh Mosa Sakran, 2015)

It is important to notice that the room as a setting in the Absurd drama postulates more significance insofar as it is regarded as the image of the prison of man in general. Hence, in this kind of drama the room is of profound importance inasmuch as it determines the fate of character. Therefore, in this regard, the dramatist such as Pinter has attached a great importance to the room as an imprisonment (Pearl Gross, 1971: 2). He has utilized the idea of the room as a symbol and has linked the symbolism that the room provides to his character's lives [sic] and to their society. He has been influenced in part by such writers as Beckett, Genet and Ionesco, and his influence has been felt by such writers as Stimpson in England and Albee in America.

(Pearl Gross, 1971: 2)

On the other hand, in The Absurd Theater, the world in which human beings live and which they are depicted appears to be enigmatic. It points to vague representations and a shocking experience on the part of the audience that become uncomfortable about what they watch as they are transferred from one situation to another. In other words the audience of the Absurd Theater must entirely turn away from traditional characterization and happenings depicted according to the stimulus-and-response principle, and above all the audience should sometimes forget the kind of setting that is related to realistic representations. Furthermore, logical communication should be discarded from the domain of the Absurd Theater. Thus, the audience and the critics OF The teater of the Absurd, should in the first place look for other means of explanation irrelevant to logic and traditions.

## Conclusion

The dramatic experience has so far witnessed many and various development due to the changes that occur in the world and the changes that are conducive to changes in the dramatic genres. No matter how the dramatic genre changes from time to time, the dramatic setting is expressive of the age in which that dramatic genre figures out; yet both kinds of setting—realistic and Absurd—are expressive of the dramatic representations the dramatist wants to express. Form and content are inseparable in literature; hence, the choice of setting appears to be in

accordance to the meaning the dramatist wants to convey; that is to say, a realistic drama addresses realistic settings with props indicative of the age in which this type of drama is written—the stage may be a garden or a room or a parlour, and the time may be any time chosen by the dramatist that should be compatible with the event concerned. That is, the realistic dramatist endeavors to employ any setting expressive of reality in a way that is near to a photographic representation. The Absurd setting is also expressive of the dramatist's point of view and contributes to forming the general meaning the dramatist wants to express. This meaning should be attained throughout using an Absurd setting such as a cellar or an enclosed room or a road and a tree or a barren stage or any place from which there is no way out such as the ashbins, so that the dramatist succeeds in presenting an Absurd meaning of life that is meaningless.

Interestingly enough, the Absurd setting is often interpreted on the symbolic level, for a barren stage of an enclosed room may symbolize infertility and hopelessness which are abstractions the Absurd dramatist endeavors to express. The Absurd setting can also be expressive of symbols pointing to the kind of reality the audience is going through. But, the realistic setting aims at presenting life as it is. Though the Absurd setting is limited to little varieties of props, it can be expressive of many and various meanings, connotations and representations, whereas the realistic setting reflects just the sense of reality. Hence, it can be suggested that there may be certain familiarities among both types of setting insofar as they both contribute to the unity of the drama in which they are figure out. Thus, realistic props are used in the Absurd dramas that are symbolic of particular meanings pertaining to the philosophy of existentialism. Nevertheless, some of the themes of the Absurd drama can be found in a realistic play, such as the themes of hopelessness and meaninglessness of life. Therefore, realistic drama overruns the absurd one in that it shares both features—realistic and absurdist.

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