

threatening experience in audience as well as readers. The killers, members of mysterious organizations, homeless disgusting tramps, and intruders are the agents of dehumanization in Pinter's plays. In *The Birthday Party* the two mysterious intruders named Goldberg and McCann behave like agents of a mafia or fascist organization. The absurd interrogation of Stanley, a person who is extremely reluctant to come face to face the outer world, by the two brutal intruders and breaking Stanley's glasses raised physical violence. The cross-examination of Stanley will prove the idea,

McCann: Chicken? Egg? Which came first?

Goldberg and McCann: which came first? Which came first? Which came first?

Goldberg: He doesn't know. Do you know your own face?

McCann: Wake him up. Stick a needle in his eye.

Goldberg: You're a plague, Webber. You're an overthrow.

McCann: You're what's left!

Goldberg: But we've got the answer to you. We can sterilize you. (Pinter, 65)

Further Stanley's birthday party proves to be violent as Goldberg drinks and seduces Lulu and McCann gives himself up to a mood of irrepressible violence. At the end of the play Stanley's speechlessness and sightlessness lead to his inner violence (mental anguish) making him unable to protest outside world. His frenzied behavior and breaking of the drum off, a birthday gift by Meg, shows his mental imbalance due to interruption by Goldberg and McCann in his peaceful life. Irving Wardle approaches Pinter's characters from the point of view of the animal instincts they represent and suggests that they should be analyzed from an ethological perspective. For him they are humanized animals fighting for territory: the room in *The Room*, *The Caretaker*, the basement; the boarding house in *The Birthday Party*; the old house of *The Homecoming*; the flat of *No Man's Land* rather than for sex, or power, or pleasure, or glory, or immorality. (Wardle, 79) In *'The Dumbwaiter'* the setting is shifted from the room upstairs to the dreaded basement where two killers Ben and Gus, are waiting for orders to kill. It creates an atmosphere of physical violence. The way Ben and Gus carry out the orders conveyed by the dumbwaiter from a mysterious boss shows their anxiety and helplessness. Gus's inferiority and victimization leads to his mental violence, his somewhat childlike interactive nature enhances the pathos of his situation. On the contrary, Ben evidently shows superiority and his callousness and dominant interactive behavior prove him as a villain. Many a time the silence in Pinter's plays governed with thought processing or dispute in the minds of the characters.

However, *'The Room'* also stands for both physical and mental violence disturbing the peace of Rose, a motherly figure. Bert, husband to Rose, behaves silent way and Rose tolerates Ben's silence in motherly way. She gets afraid of the basement and the outside world. When Bert kicks the Negro's head against the gas-stove Rose clutches her eyes and goes blind. Here Bert turns to be the source of violence making Rose's life full of darkness and disturbing calmness of the room. *'The Caretaker'*

prominently moves towards conflict between two brothers and an old tramp Davies who wishes to be in charge of the house owned by Mick and Aston. The conflict turns into physical violence when Mick throws the statue of Buddha to hit the old tramp. To one who is familiar with Buddha's life symbolizes world peace. Contrastingly, in the play the statue is kept on gas stove. Philosophically, peace is to burn to adopt absurdity and it is to break to accept violence in a junk filled world of Aston. In a general context, suggestion may be extrapolated that there is no place for faith in a world devoid of value, and inhabited by the sick (Aston), the old (Davies) and the afflicted (Mick). Again Davies threatens Aston with the knife. Aston is of an emotional nature and is mentally sick suffer from hallucinations. Aston reminds us of Stanley in *The Birthday Party*, Lamb in *The Hothouse*. Aston's anxiety is observed in the conversation with Davies. Psychologically, Davies's rootless past memories and sense of getting expelled from the house leads to dissatisfied life and anxiety though he claims he has seen better days, but this could simply be a fanciful game of wish-fulfillment. The bag snatching scene also refers to Davies as pathetic figure who can never regain his lost bag (possession).

**Complexity of life and Identity:** Pinter's characters in his early plays survive under the shadow of complexities of identity crisis which at the end meets to degraded life or life without harmony or peace. In existentialistic sense, they live a meaningless life and cut off from at most realities of the outer world. In *'The Birthday Party Stanley'* carries unrealistic identity meeting complexities of his dark world. Stanley's mental anguish steps towards predicament of his life. Goldberg and McCann also carry unauthentic identities in order to trap their victim Stanley, it is their behavior and violent communication from which can be sought that they work for some mysterious Monty. Memory also plays a disturbing and chaotic role in many circumstances. In the play *'The Room'* the Negro calls Rose by another name, Sal that creates complexity in the mind of Rose. It happens primarily because the past of the characters is kept hidden. Rose's obsession about basement increases her inner complexities. She apprehends and speculates the dispossession of the room every time someone knocks at her door. Similarly, the play *'The Dumbwaiter'* exposes to mysterious boss overpowering two professional murderers Ben and Gus. Both Ben and Gus are mere puppets in the hands of unknown power which makes weak their circle of identity. The conflict starts commanding over them when Ben receives order to kill his companion and the failure to recognize the workings of their organization leads to their frustration and the battle of superiority (Ben) and inferiority (Gus). In *'The Caretaker'* the old tramp also struggles to search for his identity and runs with fake name Jenkin. In the attempt to gain identity as caretaker meets frustration, chaos and expulsion from home. Aston and Mick meet anxieties for recalling their past memories and the question of appointing caretaker for the junk filled house which stands for complex and disillusioned world, remains unsolved ultimately.

**Conclusion:** Thus, Pinter has been more realistic throughout his early plays. Especially, at the level of human relationship is more shattered

than affectionate. There is no compassion seen among the characters ironically in 'The Birthday Party' Meg's close attachment towards Stanley proves more her sexual desire than motherly affection. In 'The Caretaker' brotherhood is absent as symbolically Aston stands for peace and Mick for violence. Similarly, Ben and Gus in 'The Dumbwaiter', though being colleague working together for same organization, stand for superiority and inferiority. No humanity for the world as they lead to a violent job of killing. In 'The Room' Rose and Bert does not prove to be an ideal couple, since Bert's violent behaviour makes her blind leading the world of darkness rather than happiness or peace. Pinter has been successful in furnishing post-war picture of disintegration and purposelessness in life through his multilayered characterization. The analysis of various situations and characters in his early plays exposes to two contradictory themes of peace and violence. More often they look for peace but unable to emanate in their meaningless life.

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## ***The Myth of Sisyphus:* A Philosophical Journey through the Realms of the Absurd**

**- Snehsata**

**Abstract:** Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* is an enormous endeavour in the pre-existing field of providing meaning to life. Like many philosophers, Camus's search also justifies the absurdity of life. The paper justifies Camus's answer to the exactitude of both the rationalism and the theistic existentialism, since both forget the absurd.

**Keywords:** Absurd, suicide, nihilism, existentialism.

Albert Camus is often described as the writer of the sensibility of the absurd, as he writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "The pages that follow deal with an absurd sensitivity that can be found widespread in the age – and not with an absurd philosophy which our time, properly speaking, has not known" (10). Hence, it would be a misjudgment to conceive Camus as the originator of the concept of the absurd. Peter Francev tries to trace the genealogy of the absurd and nihilism, and argues:

Turgenev was nihilism's proponent, and he was the first person to refer to the new word as a proper term. . . . Dostoevsky elaborates on nihilism in terms of the character in: *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. . . . Nietzsche discusses nihilism in the most negative of terms: one where "Everything lacks meaning" . . . [however] it was Camus who became the first philosopher to examine the Absurd as an independent extension of nihilism. (29-31)

In his prominent critique of Camus, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, John Cruickshank has also tried to give the historical context of the absurd as he writes:

The history of the word 'absurde', used in French in this metaphysical sense, is no doubt an interesting one. . . . However, what is so striking is its ubiquitousness in contemporary or very recent French writing. Malraux . . . speaks several times of a metaphysical absurdity dominating the western world in the twentieth century. . . . Sartre uses the term more sparingly, but he gives a full account of what he means by it in . . . *Nausea*. Various other writers have used the term, but its most recent and fullest investigation is that contained in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. (48-49)

The essence of the absurd is equally prominent in the existentialist philosophers like Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Jaspers. For Kierkegaard, the absurd is another quality of Christian faith, running counter to all that can be discerned through mundane human

experience. In his *Journals*, Kierkegaard asserts that “the absurd, or to act by virtue of the absurd, is to act upon faith, trusting in God” (291). However, Camus explicitly rejects this faith proposed by Kierkegaard. For Sartre, with whom the idea is perhaps most usually associated, the term absurd denotes the contingent nature of human existence, the realization of which brings, what he calls, 'nausea'. He defines the absurd as that “which is meaningless. Thus man's existence is absurd because his contingency finds no external justification” (*Being and Nothingness* 628). While for Sartre, absurd is the pertinent presence of meaninglessness, for Camus, absurd is nothing but the sudden realization, the awakening of a thoughtful mind that finds, on the basis of its own immediate experience, a chaos impervious to reason. Indicating the same difference between the attitude of these two philosophers towards the absurd, Svenja Schrahe comments, “Sartre's overall feeling is disgust; Camus's in contrast is absurdity” (44). Therefore, the absurd is a definite situation, an end-point for Sartre. But for Camus, absurd is not final point of life. He observes in the review of Sartre's *Nausea* in 1938: “The realization that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only a beginning. This is a truth nearly all great minds have taken as their starting point. It is not this discovery that is interesting, but the consequences and rules for action that can be drawn from it” (“On Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausee*” 201-02). The absurd is, for Camus, the first phase for his creative writings as well as for life in general. *The Myth of Sisyphus* is the philosophical essay where Camus has examined the absurd in all of its colours. Published in 1942, the essay determines the otherwise literary Camus as a philosopher. As is made clear in its Preface, the essay not only deals with the nature of the absurd, but also with its legitimate answer i.e. the revolt. Talking about its subject matter, Camus writes in its March 1955 Preface:

The fundamental subject of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is this: it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning: therefore it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face. The answer . . . is this: even if one does not believe in God suicide is not legitimate . . . [and] even within the limits of nihilism, it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism. . . . Although *The Myth of Sisyphus* poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live. . . . (*The Myth* 7)

Concentrating his focus on the most serious problem of suicide, Camus argues that no idea is worth dying for. However, people commit suicide as they get the idea that “life is not worth living” (*The Myth* 11). Suicide is a kind of confession which one does about his/her inability to cope with the absurd. Now, the question arises – what, after all, is it that seems to take all the juice of life from a living fellow and persuades him/ her to the path of suicide? The answer is – the absurd. It is the feeling of the absurd which suddenly transforms a familiar world into an exile. But the point, here, is whether or not suicide is a legitimate reply to the absurd. The view that suicide is the consequence of the absurd deeply pinches Camus and stimulates him to question further. And here lies the gist of this essay, the positivity of Camus, and the defeat of the absurd. Camus firmly states that the real effort lies not in committing suicide or in a hope for

other life, but in staying face to face with the absurd and overcoming it. Explaining the nature of the absurd, Camus writes:

It happens that the stage- sets collapse. Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm –this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. (*The Myth* 19)

Man is a rational creation whose deepest desire is to have clarity of this world, as Camus observes, “The mind’s deepest desire . . . is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity” (*The Myth* 23). But Camus, like Nietzsche, Sartre, and Jaspers, is aware of the limited sphere of reason, which becomes insufficient to clear the irrationality of the world. He observes that the world is fine and arranged till “the mind keeps silent in the motionless world of its hopes. . . . But with its first move this world cracks and tumbles: an infinite number of shimmering fragments is offered to the understanding” (*The Myth* 24). In such situations, what is reliable is one’s self. This uncertainty of the world in the desired clarity of mind is absurd. Camus finds the strongest evidence for this concept of the absurd in “what seems the unimpeachably empirical domain of the physical sciences” (Foley 7). Camus realizes that even Science, which boasts of rationality and empirical clarity, ultimately relies on poetry or metaphor or art to explain itself. Illustrating this point, he articulates in *The Myth*:

You describe it to me and you teach me to classify it. You enumerate its laws and in my thirst for knowledge I admit that they are true. . . . You explain this world to me with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry. . . . So that science that was to teach me everything ends up in a hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts? (25)

Therefore, even intelligence (and not blind reason) concludes that “this world is absurd . . . unintelligible and limited” (Camus, *The Myth* 26). However, it would be a mistake to see either the world or the human existence as absurd in itself. What is absurd is the realization of the conflict between the world and man’s desire for clarity. Camus clarifies:

I said that the world is absurd but I was too hasty. This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. (*The Myth* 26)

Camus believes in the “odd trinity” of the Man, the World, and the Absurd, which cannot be separated. Hence, he declares, “To destroy one of its terms is to destroy the whole. There can be no absurd outside the human mind. Thus, like everything else, the absurd ends with death. But there can be no absurd outside this world either” (*The Myth* 34). R. Kamber, in his critical entry, *On Camus*, emphasizes the same argument, “. . . we want the world to make sense, but it does not make sense. To see this conflict is to see the absurd” (52). Therefore, neither human

existence nor the world is absurd. David Carroll has tried to put this sense of absurdity and its resultant anguish in the following words:

[Absurdity], the *feeling* of radical diverse, of living in a once familiar but now suddenly radically alien homeland, of being adrift between past and future and unable to rely on either to give meaning to the present, of being a stranger to the world and to oneself, might appear to be cause for despair, especially since the exile from self, world and others is described as 'without remedy'. (56-57)

The strength of *The Myth* does not lie in the intellectual discovery of the absurd as many philosophers like Kierkegaard, Chestov, Jaspers, Dostoevsky etc. have already reached on this deserted plain. It lies in the apparent consequences of this discovery which have been dealt with in this essay. Camus examines that while the rationalists elude the nothing (absurd) by rejecting the existence of the absurd through eternal reason, the existentialists like Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Chestov, Dostoevsky etc. elude it through the irrational by denying even whatever little reason is in man. But he can't rely upon this partial vision. He recognizes the validity of reason, but equally accepts its limits. He believes, neither in the transcendental hope of the theistic existentialists, nor in the blind faith of reason of the rationalists. He believes in the absurd itself, in preserving the very thing that crushes him, in the "confrontation and the unceasing struggle" (*The Myth* 34). Camus exposes the forced hope of religion of the theistic existentialists and terms the attitude of the existentialists as "philosophical suicide" (*The Myth* 43). He examines that they have sacrificed the absurd for the sake of the irrational and declares: "I see that all of them without exception suggest escape. Through an odd reasoning, starting out from the absurd over the ruins of reason, in a closed universe limited to the human, they deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them" (*The Myth* 35). In contrast to the above said existentialists, Camus's absurd man "recognizes the struggle, doesn't absolutely scorn reason and admits the irrational. . . . He knows simply that in that alert awareness there is no further place for hope" (Camus, *The Myth* 39). Placing Camus within the tradition of French anti-rationalism, Patrick Henry observes:

Many anti-rationalists, Pascal, Rousseau, and Bergson for example, stressed the limits of reason but substituted another means of knowledge, like faith, sentiment or intuition, in its place. Camus, as well as Voltaire, stressed the limitations of reason, without substituting an alternative. Indeed . . . Voltaire repudiated both Pascal and Rousseau for having done so, just as Camus reproached the Existentialists for the same reason. (96)

In this way, it can be evaluated that Camus rejects the negation of the absurd and puts human sensibility and its limited reason above the irrational. He writes in the same tone:

I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone. I am told again that here the intelligence must sacrifice its pride and the reason bow down. But if I recognize the limits of reason, I do not therefore negate it, recognizing