

Existential Dualism and Absurdity: Modernist Theatricality in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*

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*Wole Soyinka and Samuel Beckett apparently occupy distinct places in the literary space, in all ramifications. Specifically, while the former's dramaturgy is definable within the context of the traditional convention of playwriting, otherwise known as well-made plays, the latter is inherently non-conformist in this regard. Hence, the effort in this paper was to locate a nexus in their writings, using two of their plays, *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Endgame*, respectively. *Theatre of the Absurd*, as an offshoot of existentialism, provided the ground for the critical intersection of philosophical and ideological geometry of the two plays. The critical paradigm essentially relied on the interconnectivity of absurdist writings and existentialist thoughts, as the holistic context which fundamentally defines modernism, to assess what is conceived as modernist theatricality in the two plays. Building on the modernists' interrogation of man's existence and essence in the world in which existential meaning is presumably lost, the paper concluded that the two texts are largely intoned with modernist thoughts, regardless of their formal or structural distinction. It arrived at this by placing particular emphasis on the playwrights' attempts, in these works, at demanding a more spontaneous response to the question of the essence of the individual and his/her place in the universe in which meaning in existence, in the modernist sense, is believed to have been lost.*

Keywords

Wole Soyinka; Samuel Beckett; Existential Dualism; Absurdity; Modernism.

Introduction

It is conceivable that every rational being journeys through life with a certain philosophical and/or ideological configuration which, in turn, shapes his/her perception and construction of life or the world. This could be associated with the individual's keen observation of cosmic realities, by which the human mind is constantly being shaped. Hence, in an attempt to establish connections; to make sense out of the heterogeneity of everyday events, man is presumably caught in a state of deep thoughts and the mental response, thus, consequently shapes the expression of such thoughts in specific media.

To a considerable extent, among other phenomenal contexts, the advent of modernism in dramatic literature could be viewed along the foregoing conception. Indeed, the movement was heralded by an aggressive and relatively sustained dramatisation of historical discontinuity and ideological and structural decentralisation of the existing patterns in the conception of man vis-à-vis his relationship with his universe, consequent upon the observed irrationality of the two World Wars. It was a complex and pronounced period in the history of drama. Largely radically-inclined, the playwrights "sought to break down the hierarchies of politics and theorised about how abandoning traditional aesthetics could imbue theatre with new meanings" (Krasner 137), hence new perceptions of man and the world.

In the foregoing avant-gardist manner, thus, for Samuel Beckett, especially, it is a definitive attempt at the complexity of existence using absurdist theatricality as a tool. Although Soyinka can rarely be categorised or considered as belonging to the group of modernist playwrights, especially given the conventional formal structures of his plays, his ideology and construction of life; as reflected in his specific plays, equally offers an attempt to demystify the complexity of human existence. Hence, to a large extent, the latter's artistic world, like the former, is also explorable within the framework of modernist theatricality with regards to ideological and philosophical conceptions of "being" in the universe.

Existential dualism, absurdity and modernity

One of the figures associated with existentialism, Viktor Frakl, speaks of the term "existential" in referential terms. According to him, it refers to "(1) *existence* itself, i.e., the specifically human mode of being; (2) the *meaning* of

existence; and (3) the striving to find concrete meaning in personal existence, that is to say, the *will* to meaning” (106). Though conceived differently, the tri-dimensional reference, in all ramifications, points to a specific phenomenon – man’s being or existence in the universe and his pursuance of essence, that is, meaning in his existence. In view of this, for Freud, as acknowledged by Terry Eagleton, the human subject, i.e., his existence, is a split subject, torn between the conscious and the unconscious (136). One unambiguous interpretation to this is that the human mind works at two levels, namely the “conscious” and the “unconscious”, bearing in mind that the mind constitutes the central subject of human existence. Therefore, because it operates on two levels, human existence can be correspondingly seen from “dual” perspectives, hence coming to terms with the dualism surrounding such an existence.

In the philosophy of mind, the human figure has long been idiosyncratically revealed as a “‘self with a body’, rather than as a holistic ‘self-body unity’” (Firman 19). The “self with a body” apparently points to the duality in the human person. That is, the human person is a mental subject that is distinguishable experientially “not only from the outer world of the physical body, observable behavior, and social roles; but also from the inner world of sensations, images, feelings, and thoughts” (Firman 19). Dualism, therefore, holds that “mental phenomena are, in some respects, non-physical, or that the mind and body are not identical” (Crane and Patterson 5). The direction to which this points is the two-way status of the human mind: the conscious or self-awareness and the unconscious.

Over time, in theory and practice, “drama has been situated between ideology and philosophy” (Garuba 60). Among others is the ideology of the absurdist in literature, the principles of which are believed to have been derived from existentialism (Al Sayed Ali 5). It is a theory that questions and accounts for the essence of what it is to be a human being. In other words, the philosophy raises fundamental questions on human existence, particularly in relation to time, purpose of existence or creation, and fate. The existentialists’ view of human life is interpretively dramatic, wherein every individual is considered an actor. In this way, thus, existence entails personal involvement in the drama of life (Kaufmann 53). This existential philosophy is, therefore, fundamental to the artistic practice known as theatre of the absurd.

Meanwhile, critics have argued that the realities of two horrendous moments in human history – the two World Wars – significantly provided the basis for existentialist thought, which absurdist ideology has been claimed to be an offshoot of. This means, therefore, that the circumstances of those wars shaped

a new but shocking reality of our existence. It is shocking in the sense that man has invented for himself what, ironically, is self-destructive (the atomic bombs and the other sophisticated weapons deployed during those wars), amounting to massive destruction of lives and properties. It is in this light of man's cruelty and invention of self-destructive armaments that Martin Esslin observed that:

There can be no doubt: for many intelligent and sensitive human beings the world of the mid twentieth century has lost its meaning and has simply ceased to make sense. Previously held certainties have dissolved, the firmest foundations for hope and optimism have collapsed. Suddenly man sees himself faced with a universe that is both frightening and illogical – in a word, absurd.

(<http://www.samuel-beckett.net/AbsurdEsslin.html>)

At the literary level, a reflection on this social reality paved the way for the new evolving literary writings that would later be tagged absurdist writings, which, in other words, “grew as a response to what critics saw as the collapse of moral, religious, political, and social structures in the twentieth century” (Abbottson 1). Logically, this would suggest that since our existential experience has changed from what it used to be, with the reality of the wars, then, on a deep reflection by the absurdist writers, the tradition at the literary level has to undergo a shift from what was hitherto known. This is deliberate, and it is simply to reflect the illogicality surrounding that social context. To this end, to a considerable degree, drama and theatre provided them with a more fertile ground for the experimentation of this new ideology, which, in turn, constitutes one of the significant shifts in dramatic practice in the twentieth century that critics have termed modernity or modernism.

Indeed, modernism is acknowledged to have thrived primarily on the rejection of established notions of art and repudiation of accepted values (Skulj 147). It is largely comprehended as “a revulsion against the limits set by rationalism” (Collier and Davies xiii). Hence, peculiar to the modernist writer, the reader is plunged “into a confusing and difficult mental landscape which cannot be immediately understood but which must be moved through and mapped by the reader in order to understand its limits and meanings” (Childs 4). The playwrights concerned are primarily preoccupied with expressing senses of wonder and incomprehension, over the lack of cohesion and meaning in the realities that they are confronted with in the world. Hence, series of

varying, but objectively unified, attempts are made to offer critical insights into the complexity of the cosmic realities. On this note, a novel form of theatrical practice is institutionalised, with both form and content defying heavily the known tradition of playwriting in a complex manner. Therefore, in order to come to terms with it, it must be comprehended as a form of intellectual shorthand for a complex pattern of similarities in method, approach and convention, of shared artistic and philosophical premises, whether conscious or unconscious, and of influences from a common store of tradition.

Existential dualism and absurdity in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*

It is axiomatic that Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* occupies an exceptional place in his oeuvre, particularly given the fact that the play is presumed to have broken the boundary between traditional and modern tragedies. The play depicts the traditionally mysterious transition of man from the world of the living, to the dead and to the unborn. It juxtaposes the element of death, and the choice between it and life, with an existentialist view of the world. The central character, Elesin, is the only personality who comprehends an ontological angst. While he staunchly resists the transition, it is eventually realised that his resistance is simply an unconscious affirmation. It shares a conceptual similarity with Brian Lightbody's existentialist view of man in his assertion that human beings "are merely concrete manifestations of the epic and eternal battle continually being waged between Eros (the love instinct) and Thanatos (the death drive)" (192). Hence, within this interpretive context, the play assumes a work that denounces totalitarianism and conformism to a specific dramatic mode via the exposition of ideology and the representation of the absurdity surrounding the life of the protagonist.

The tradition that establishes the office of the King's Horseman (Elesin) has ab initio exposed the bearer of the highly revered title to, and confronted with, his looming end time. This tradition has it that the life of every occupant of the office in question is to be self-terminated through a ritual process regarded as "rite of passage", shortly after the king passes on. It is believed that it has a far-reaching implication on the entire community. In a typical Yoruba setting, the phenomenon of death is always ritualised "so that the spirit of the dead may be contented in the world beyond and will not return as a dissatisfied ghost to plague his/her family or society" (Mekunda 819). Indeed, in the context

of the play, the King's Horseman (Elesin) is traditionally condemned to this ritual at the expense of the dead king and society at large. That is, performing this ritual via the symbol of this individual is the only way tragedy can be averted and communal harmony restored, subsequent to the demise of their king. Thus, having this title is translatable to an implicit confrontation of the personality concerned with death.

By extension, the process could also be regarded as a predetermination and/or definition of the person's existence, taking into cognizance the psychological implication this could have on him. This somewhat portends that there is an inherent psychological drive that, if investigated, would reveal the preparedness and/or unpreparedness of the human figure towards his imminent end time, which his assumption of the title in question has unequivocally heralded. Hence, the nagging questions are: (i) what do Elesin's actions psychologically symbolise?; (ii) to what extent can it be said that Elesin's rite of passage, that is underway, is a demonstration of his psychological preparedness or unpreparedness for his death?; (iii) and, in a holistic view, in what way can Elesin's actions be regarded as conscious or unconscious moves?

The awareness of Elesin that the moment is ripe for him to exercise his communal rite – the rite of passage – indeed, informs his entrance into a passage along the market square, accompanied by his drummers and praise-singer. He enters the passage with fervour, explicitly pointing to his unalloyed readiness to perform the profound and heroic communal rite – the rite of transition into the world of the dead, which the tradition demands of him, following the demise of the king. His actions have not only revealed this, it has also been heavily conveyed in his speeches as he reacts to his praise-singer:

ELESIN: You're like a jealous wife. Stay close to me, but only on this side. My fame, my honour are legacies to the living; stay behind and let the word sip its honey from your lips. (Soyinka 10)

ELESIN: This night I'll lay my head upon their tap and go to sleep. This night I'll touch their feet in a dance that is no longer of this earth. But the smell of their flesh, their sweat, the smell of indigo on their cloth, this is the last air I wish to breath as I go to meet my great forebears. (Soyinka 10)

The foregoing is largely a unique event in an existentialist cum absurdist paradigm. Indeed, the theatre of the absurd is located within a modernist understanding of the world and of the human condition. As Albert Camus points out in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. He is in an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of the memories of a homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. (18)

Within such realm of the theatre of the absurd, life is evidently stripped down to its barest and all moorings merely emphasise the inexplicability of life itself. The meaninglessness of the human condition is presented as ontological. Life and death both take place within a void and are interchangeable in an accidental, futile existence.

The above understanding of existence as a phenomenon which entails the simultaneous play of life and death, beginning and end, is implicitly demonstrated by Elesin in his poetic rendition of the story of the Not-I bird's visits to a farmer, a hunter and other categories of individuals, at the market place where the process of his traditional rite of passage is expected to have begun in earnest, following the death of their king:

(ELESIN executes a brief, half dance. The drummer moves in and draws a rhythm out of his steps, ELESIN dances towards the market place as he chants the story of the Not-I bird, his voice changing dexterously to mimic his character. He performs like a born raconteur, infecting his retinue with his humour and energy. More women arrive during his rental, including IYALOKA)

Death came calling.

Who does not know his rasp of reeds?

A twilight whisper in the leaves before

The great araba fails? Did you hear it? Not

I! swears the farmer. He snaps his fingers

round his head, abandons A hard-worn

harvest and begins

A rapid dialogue with his legs.

'Not I', shouts the fearless hunter, 'but-

It's getting dark, and this night-lamp

Has leaked out all its oil. I think

It's to go home and resume my hunt

Another day'. But now he pauses, suddenly

lets out a wail: ‘Oh foolish mouth, calling
Down a curse on your own head! Your lamp
Has leaked out all its oil, has it?’
Forwards or backwards now he dare not move.
To search for leaves and make *etutu*
On that spot? Or race home to the safety
Of his hearth? Ten market-days have passed
My friends, and still he’s rooted there
Rigid as the plinth of Orayan, ... (Soyinka 11-12)

In this context, Not-I bird is conceivable as an imaginary bird whose behaviour is equatable with that of man when relating with issues of, or confronted with, death. This means that, at such moments when death calls, a typical human being would look for an escape route, to flee like the symbolic Not-I bird, rather than to think of a way to embrace such ontological reality as an inevitable phenomenon that is essentially time-bound. This act of fleeing, in the existentialist conception, invariably translates to a way of further constructing a definite circumstance that would occasion one’s death, one’s eventual exit from the universe.

The foregoing is the closed or cyclic world in which man is said to be entrapped, as is the proverbial hunter, which is often realised later in life. Following several days of activities in the jungle, an implicit macrocosm of the hunter’s entire existence from “being” to “non-being”, the hunter initially assumes he can flee from the call of death but realises, shortly after, the futility of such act in the face of a number of options he could opt for, all of which are apparently pathways to the unknown. He, therefore, cautions himself from taking further actions, consequent of the fear of a possible encounter with death on any of the routes. Ultimately, he wails loudly. This act of wailing, from the existentialist purview, is greatly symbolic of the ontological doom lying beneath man’s existence but which he often unconsciously demonstrates oblivion of in his engagements in life.

Through the poetic rendition, alongside his act of willingness to embark on the ritual passage rite, it is establishable that Elesin apparently demonstrates an understanding of this existential truth. Hence, when reality beckons, the expectation is that he should be caught not unawares, and therefore, be less doomed to this effect. This is further contextualisable in his response to Iyaloja’s (head of the market women) comment at the close of the Not-I bird’s story:

- IYALOJA: But you, husband of multitudes?
 ELESIN: I, when that Not-I bird perched upon my roof,
 bade him seek his nest again, safe, without care or
 fear. I unrolled my welcome mat for him to seat.
 Not-I flew happily away, you'll hear his voice no
 more in this lifetime – you all know what I am. (Soyinka
 14)

Indeed, Elesin's response evidently demonstrates his fearless preparedness to confront such reality clouding his destiny as the king's horseman. However, owing to his human nature, he is also pictured, eventually, to have fallen into a similar sudden existential doom, like the hunter in his narrative chant, following his failure to eventually perform the ritual, as a result of unwarranted delay he causes in the process. This is because the reader would have expected him to be quick to action, upon his demonstration of the knowledge of the process and understanding of the huge communal implication. Instead of ensuring a rapid process, Elesin rather causes some delay in it with the excessive ceremony and raconteuring in which he is engaged till the ritual is abruptly stalled by Pilkings, the British Colonial Administrator.

The circumstance of the delay is, therefore, conceivable as an unconscious (human) act in the personality of Elesin to evade the imminent death, thereby reflecting his existential dualism. That is, he is torn between his conscious and unconscious wills. On the one hand, consciously, he understands the significance of the ritual rite to his society and is prepared to undergo it. Unconsciously, on the other hand, his human tendency to avoid death is equally at play on his psyche, which is particularly evident in his request to still mate, while the ritual process is underway, with a maiden prior to his transition to the world beyond. Hence, the traditional (natural) condemnation of his being to death and the avoidance of that which is apparently inevitable, because that social configuration would not allow him to, is heavily reflective of his existential meaninglessness, in the existentialist view.

The forgoing conception holds because, regardless of the choice or choices made in the process, they are usually tantamount to cogs in the wheel towards death. Thus, "the-will-to-live" equally translates to "the-will-to-die", just as Elesin's eventual unceremonial death reflects, even after it seems he has escaped the ritual transition upon the Colonial Administrator's intervention. The construction of the human figure of Elesin in the play is, therefore, significantly considerable as an artistic way in which the playwright has been able to

interrogate philosophically the human essence in a world where time and its attendant circumstances are evidently unstoppable by man.

Beckett's *Endgame* and the absurd world

In practical terms, unlike Soyinka, Beckett is considered a significant figure in the history of absurdist playwrights. Thus, in his examination of his dramaturgy, Michael Worton reveals that:

Instead of following the tradition which demands that a play have an exposition, a climax and a denouement, Beckett's plays have a cyclical structure which might indeed be better as a diminishing spiral. They present images of entropy in which the world and the people in it are slowly but inexorably running down. (69)

Moreover, critical investigations have revealed that, among many other possible critical frameworks, Beckett's plays can be, to a large extent, construed within this framework of what has been regarded as the theatre of the absurd.

A critical observation of the underlining ideology, that is, the philosophical insight that shapes the dramatic enactment; the fact that there is no well-developed and comprehensible storyline, will not be surprising. It is typical of the absurdist theatricality. Indeed, any writer who "attempts to define the nature of man and proceed reasonably and empirically will take an existential posture that in some way expresses man's confrontation with absurdity" (Oliver 7). Although, observed Kenneth Pickering, it would amount to an extreme danger to assign a playwright to a category with the expectation that his work should conform to certain characteristics (3); nevertheless, Esslin's identification of a movement in the theatre that "appeared to respond to a view that any belief in a rational universe is an illusion and that humanity is out of harmony with his surroundings in such a way as to suggest a lack of meaning" (3) would justify the categorisation of Beckett's *Endgame* into the absurdist drama avant-garde.

Having acknowledged the possibility of critically seeing it from different lights, equally central to this paper is an examination of the play as a philosophical interrogation of the essence of man, as noted in *Death and the King's Horseman*, in a world where time, with which he works or operates,

is unstoppable by man. More precisely, the paper sees the doctrine behind the play as an attempt to assert that the universe that we strive very hard to make sense or order out of is indeed an empty, temporal space where every human action (perfect or imperfect, good or ugly), which is believed to be geared towards endowing it with meaning, is, in actual fact, man's ironical making of his inevitable exit from this world. The reality of the World Wars and the role of man in the horrible drama mentioned earlier on is a pointer to this.

A holistic examination of the play will reveal that the audience has been presented with an almost unintelligible human situation, in such a manner that the characters are portrayed as individuals who are striving to make, what in the end proved futile, efforts in order to come to terms with their situation; their immediate surroundings. This is a similar sense with which the reader is also confronted, trying to strike a logical balance in the dramatisation and his/her, say, social environment. But, because the reader can see beyond the characters, certain ideological infusions, emanating from the observed construction of the dramatic piece on a philosophical geometry, are extractable from the characterisation.

One of the instances in which the foregoing can be foregrounded is observable where Clov begins to pick up the objects lying on the ground and Hamm demands an explanation from him in justification of the act:

CLOV: Putting things in order

(He straightens up fervently.)

I'm going to clear everything away!

(He starts picking up again.)

HAMM: Order!

CLOV: *(Straightening up.)* I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust. (Beckett 754)

The above conversation between Clov and Hamm is a symbolic representation of man's ironic preoccupation with the "ending". The processes of putting things in order, which is interpretive of man's dream for a world in which there is orderliness, silence and stillness, are indeed, man's oblivious preparations for the last place, under the last dust. The disillusionment and ennui highlighted here are to a great extent modern existence personified.

Another more explicit instance in which the foregoing conception is further

reinforced is observable in the opening of the play where the character, Clov, expresses a sense of existential doom over the imminent and inescapable consequence of man's strivings to order his existence:

CLOV: (*Fixed gaze, tonelessly*) Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.

(*Pause.*)

Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible. (Beckett 741)

The significance of the "heap", as this paper upholds, is that it is symbolic of the nature of human existence. That is, "grain upon grain" is translatable to human activity upon activity, with their attendant time, and one day, suddenly, there would be a heap – the totality of the activities, as the impossible outcome. This essentially amounts to the admission of the inevitable end and the realisation that time is always "the same as usual", hence has no essence other than that it strategically calculates our gradual process of moving towards that "end". Moreover, the play seems to have announced from the beginning its preoccupation with the cosmic emptiness or nihilism in Clov's statement: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished".

At another highly significant level, the formal structure of the play could be critically perceived as an interrogative theatrical structure aimed at philosophically questioning the essence of man in a world where he begins but, indeed, the process translates to a preoccupation with ending. Hamm and Clov are the major characters who are involved in the pseudo development of the play. While the two other characters, Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, are seen to be almost dumbfounded, and each remains in a garbage can throughout the play. Hamm, who is blind, is being accompanied by a visiting friend, Clov. The scattered, unhealthy and uncertain atmosphere of the stage is a powerful symbolic statement which is locatable within the perfect correlation between the ambiance of the stage and the entire Hamm-Clov conversation as well as their dispositions and movements. A similar sense is reflected in Beckett's most popular and generally acclaimed play in the school of absurd drama, *Waiting for Godot*, where the sense of "time" is allowed to embody certain powerful symbolic ideological statements.

Meanwhile, what the reader is confronted with in *Endgame* could be seen from two perspectives; on the one hand, it is either the dramatic enactment

is portraying man as being aware of that “end” and, therefore, all he is doing is simply whiling away that long and boring period of his existence. In other words, his actions are intended to fill that temporal space, indeed as the cogs in the wheel that would ensure the inevitable passage of time towards the last moment. On the other hand, the characterisation could also be seen as a portrayal of man who, though aware of his end to come, engages in certain activities which are intended to enrich his lifetime but with a failure to realise the fact that all those activities only constitute, ironically, his preparations for that inevitable “end”. It is, thus, a theatrical construction of the “image of how we come and go on this earth, briefly filling a void with our bodies and voices, and then disappear into darkness” (Pickering 85).

Furthermore, the perceived powerful symbolic elements in the play calls into play a meditative critical mind. Nagg and Nell’s habitation of ashbins in a silent and functionless manner is symbolic of the “dust” man shall be eventually covered with, silent and functionless. Ironically, Hamm refers to both of them derisively as “the old folks at home! No decency left! Guzzle, guzzle, that is all they think of” (Beckett 743). However, the characterisation of Hamm as blind and, therefore, requiring the company of Clov to making his moments, as well as doing certain things for him, is also symbolic of man’s existence in the absurdist perception. That is, man is blind and oblivious to the real implication of his engagement in some of his actions that he wrongly believes are life-enriching. His portrayal as blind is a pointer to this, because he is unaware of his real surroundings, hence he attempts in vain to come to terms with it. Every now and then, he asks Clov what time it is and Clov’s response is the same on all the occasions – time is always as usual, and that is how they continue till the curtain draws.

The characterisation is seen to portray Hamm as believing that he is occupying those moments with meaningful activities but, in actual fact, what the audience sees is nothing but a gradual process of transition from where he is to ending up to where his parents Nagg and Nell are; the symbolic cans that reflect the sense of the silent last abode – the grave. The reason being that, arguably, it can be said that both had also once been in Hamm’s position before ending up in their present state, which is as functionless as being dead. The implication of these, on the whole, is summed up in Michael Worton’s existentialist conception of human life that “our lives are a series of passive repetitions and that we are mere cogs in a machine that is slowly running down” (79).

Conclusion

This paper has constructed the two plays on similar philosophical (existential) and ideological (absurdist) configurations in spite of their apparent diverse structures and dramatisations. That is, while Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* conforms to the traditional convention of playwriting, Beckett's *Endgame* essentially violates this theatrical convention, thereby already giving itself definitively to the category of plays labelled as absurdist writings. What is differentially noteworthy here, as Esslin would have us believe, is that in the former, the "sense of the irrationality of the human condition" is presented in the form of a "highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning" (xix), as evident in the logical storyline. However, in the latter, "the sense of the senselessness of the human condition" is approached via an "open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought" (xix-xx), given the apparent narrative and structural illogicality in the play.

Indeed, within the context of the modernist reflection over human existence and essence in a world that is believed to be essentially absurd, particularly man's manifestation of conscious and unconscious eternal battle between "the-will-to-live" and "the-will-to-die", the paper locates a considerable nexus in the philosophical ideologies of the two playwrights in the selected texts. This largely borders on the schematic construction of man as a being whose existence is naturally configured as to be filled with a series of engagements (conscious or unconscious, beautiful or ugly, ordinate or inordinate) that are only instrumental to his gradual transition towards the inevitable end, death. Hence, the artistic craft of the two plays, regardless of their formal, structural differences, are greatly definable within the context of what is regarded in the paper as modernist theatricality.

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