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Critical Realism in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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Abstract

The paper attempts to find traces of critical realism in *Waiting for Godot*. The play is an absurd play; hence, curiosity forces us to find if there is communication of the play with real life or not. If yes, what kind of realism it depicts. To reframe the play in terms of critical realism lays emphasis on examining the "structureality" of life after WW II. All realism theories have been re-examined in the paper to present review of the play from a lens of critical realism has ever been skipped by the researchers.

Keyword

Realism, Surrealism, Absurd Theatre, Function of Literature, Deconstruction

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Figure 2: Image of all four characters of *Waiting for Godot*

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INTRODUCTION: REALISM AND CRITICAL REALISM

The definition of realism can be both subjective and objective, depending on the way in which the world, our belief systems, and social reformations are constantly evolving, and it is defined by many philosophers, politicians, psychologist, pastors and researchers within the context of their believe, studies and findings. Thus, realism can be characterized as the unconscious reflection that expresses the significance of what is real and what is already there for us to feel, touch, and see. Although the word "realism" has been associated with objects since the middle of the 15th century, its etymological history extends back to the 14th century and is strongly tied to physical existence. The word "realism" derives from the Old French "reel," which means "real," the Late Latin "realis," which means "actual," and the Medieval Latin "res," which refers to property, products, matters, and affairs. "Rayim" is a Sanskrit word that signifies "wealth," "property," or "goods." (Online Etymology Dictionary)." So, from etymological point of view in accordance to various definition from different rooted narratives, we can interpret realism as a living beings ability to perceive, evaluate, and interpret things through their senses with anything they engage with within the physical world and how that affects and effects their various spheres of life activities can literally be referred to as realism(Carter).

Though the word "realism" has been used in literature since Plato's time, the mass realistic movement did not begin until the 19th century, when romanticism was at its height. Plato defends realism as a form or an idea that is both physically non-existent and beyond human



Figure 1: A scene from *Waiting for Godot*

reason. Because everything made by an omniscient creature is merely an imitation of an idea, he concludes that it is not real. Art is further distant from reality since it is an imitation of an imitated object (Truitt) . The ramifications of his philosophy, which views "realism" as a form produced by a creator, deny its reality and regard it as an unfounded assumption. It is possible to argue that the distinction between fact and belief is that belief is the construction of one's own consciousness, which is very subjective and a sham for its existence, whereas truth is anything that can be attained within the sensory range and improves creation.

METHODOLOGY: CRITICAL REALISM

It is a research review paper based on qualitative studies of research papers published 1970-2022. Deconstruction, as literary theory, is being applied on comprehension of realism in absurd play Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

DEVELOPMENT OF THERETICAL CONCEPT

Any version of realism's ultimate conviction is the independent existence of the real world. Critical realism divides knowledge of existence into two types: transitive knowledge and intransitive knowledge, often known as object-knowledge. The knowledge that is found in theories, practises, discourses, and texts is referred to as transitive knowledge. That knowledge comes from history, ideologies, and society, according to critical realism. But critical realism also contends that there is an intransitive world that exists outside of texts or other forms of knowledge. These insights are the information that science tries to investigate, and they are actual realities like the structures and other worldly possibilities. So, critical realism asserts that there are more sources of information besides those found in the text. Thus, critical realism asserts that there are other ways to learn things that are not contained in texts and that there are other sources of knowledge outside texts. Based on our individual perspective or perception, we construct the reality we understand for ourselves. According to critical realists, people can only fully understand the social reality through an awareness of the unobservable structures that give rise to observable happenings.(Joseph and Roberts). Aristotle, on the other hand, believes that realism as it appears in poetry and other imitations of works of art is the result of imaginative creativity. A designer makes an object by incorporating universal elements, and because art also contains the universal truth and has universal elements, it leads to wisdom. Aristotle thought that poetry, painting, sculpture, and imitation were all current types of learning that give pleasures. He asserts that musicians use their music to express emotions like anger, bravery, sentiment, and joy. As a result, imitation comes naturally to humans from an early age, giving us an edge over lower animals because we are the most imitative creatures in the entire universe (Villanueva).

The setting in the play *Waiting for Godot*, the area covered with a profusion of boulders and stones, and a strange tree with a lonesome neck stands there by itself, pondering its own existence all day while gazing up at the starless sky. The setting was chosen to accurately depict our own ephemeral existences as well as the emptiness or impermanence of life, which is a significant indicator of the terrible truth of human life(Beckett, "Waiting for Godot"). *Waiting for Godot* is a realistic play because its characters experience all aspects of life with all their realities and because it typifies the historical, moral, and desire of the moment.

Critical Realism in *Waiting for Godot*

Estragon and Vladimir, who are enduring all of life's hardships while waiting for the mysterious Godot, represent the superstitious faith and belief in the unknown that is comparable to the transcendental version of realism.

VLADIMIR:

We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. (Pause.) Unless Godot comes.

ESTRAGON:

And if he comes?

VLADIMIR:

We'll be saved.

Vladimir takes off his hat (Lucky's), peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, knocks on the crown, puts it on again (Beckett, "Waiting for Godot").

CRITICAL REALISM IN LITERATURE

Literary theorists associate realism with literary movements that had their origins with conventional and postmodern literary thinkers. The basic goal of realism is to give a true, accurate, and unique picture of the real world, which encompasses both the outside environment and human interaction with it. Balzac is regarded as one of the literary realists who is recognized for using specifics to represent human reality. The characters' correspondence with objective reality, the existence of an object free from conscious subjective description, and the characters' interactions with materialism and how it affects their lives are all traits of realism fiction. His idea of realism also considers how the characters' mediocre and petty lives have been sympathized with. His writing goes on to discuss the social implications that the characters' lives have as a result of substantial changes over the course of time, (E . Preston Dargan). Though his concept of *Particular* views the world more realistically than most, it is obvious that every aspect of his ideology was shaped by the economic, social, and political circumstances of the day, and he related how those conditions had affected or made things worse for the lives of those in those times(E . Preston Dargan).

By mid of 19th century and continuing to the end of World War II, is the modern movement in literary history. It is also known as the Anti-Victorian era due to its denial of many of the beliefs, moralism, its belief of diligent self-renunciation, its imperialism, and the forms of their family life. It is also anti-romanticism since it downplays the importance of romanticism's emphasis on imagination, feelings, subject matter, writing style, and diction. A break from the sequential, cause-and-effect presentation of the "truth" in realist fiction is a distinctive feature of modernist writing (Sharma). Henry James as one of the prominent literary realist states that, in a practical sense, good and human interest are linked since good has a connection to human interest. Realistic representations of life are true to life, because a universe without the human intellect has no value. His notion of realism in fiction states that it must be unconstrained and accurately depict the facts of life. It must be practical and give individuals a chance to consider and consider the reality of their lives. It must value truth and diligently pursue truth and truth is the display of the fact of human life (Todd).

Howells created the critical realistic fiction, according to which a work of fiction must depict human impulse and prominently draw attention to the suffering that has submerged men in a sea of the helpless. *Art for art's sake is no longer true* (Carter), because the best art is created for people's sake. The need must be embraced by the art, and it must speak of the men and women who toil tirelessly to better the world. He goes on to explain that realistic literature must achieve its goal to accurately reflect society's genuine nature and promote social welfare, but not in an emotional romance-style. However, since realism has achieved the highest goal of romance, it shows these victims as they really are and implores people to view them not for their beauty and virtue but for their ugliness and viciousness, cruelty, and filth, which is only slightly less abhorrent because the divine cannot truly depart from the human (Carter).

Realism, in the words of George Eliot, is the creative search of a truth that is closely related to reality. He offers three alternative definitions of realism, the first of which states that truth is hard to get by and easy to obtain lie. Eliot claims that it would be simpler for the writer to embellish the idyllic existence in the fiction than it would be to accurately depict the life in its unpolished original form. second principle of realism stresses the value of experience, which is complicated and should not be put in the predetermined category. The third principle of realism is about moral principle, where people must be welcomed in their true form rather than being held up to unrealistic standards (McGowan).

The Master and Slave Dialectic of Hegel can also be used to analyze the play. According to new research, Hegel states that as consciousness grows into a sense of self and a sense of knowing, it assumes various forms. We cannot develop self-consciousness without encountering another being because for consciousness to evolve into self-consciousness, it must be confronted with another consciousness or another being. The higher consciousness assumes the role of master, and the lower awareness that of slave. Since it must complete all tasks for the master, the servant has a direct connection to the material world, and the master has an indirect relationship through the slave or due to his desire. The goal of the slave is to fulfil the master's active awareness, which includes enjoying nice meals, attractive objects, and travelling from place to place. As a result, the slave takes the independent items for survival while the master enjoys the dependent things the slave produces. The master also wants the slave to acknowledge him, and he gets it by dominating the servant and forcing the slave to fulfil his needs (Donaldson).

Marxist theory also claims that material circumstances impact our consciousness and that those who share a consciousness will have similar thoughts, which will result in the formation of a class. Marxism then developed the concept of classicism that is known as Capitalists, or bourgeoisie, who are the masters or the ruling class, and the Workers, or proletariat, who are thought of as the working class or the lowest class of people. The overall social group is then divided into the "Base and superstructure" hierarchy (Lukes), which places the dominating group of people at the top and the working class or lesser classes of people at the bottom (Lukes). According to this view, Pozzo can be considered as the superstructure, because he is the master of lucky, while characters like "Estragon, Vladimir, and Lucky represent the working class or the foundation of the hierarchy. With

their roles and difficult lifestyles, the characters' division into groups is vividly shown throughout the drama.

POZZO: (with magnanimous gesture). Let's say no more about it. (He jerks the rope.) Up pig! (Pause.) Every time he drops, he falls asleep. (Jerks the rope.) Up hog! (Noise of Lucky getting up and picking up his baggage. Pozzo jerks the rope.) Back! (Enter Lucky backwards.) Stop! (Lucky stops.) Turn! (Lucky turns. To Vladimir and Estragon, affably.)”(Beckett, “Waiting for Godot”).

And, he continued commanding Lucky in abusive manner.

“Coat! (Lucky puts down the bag, advances, gives the coat, goes back to his place, takes up the bag.) Hold that! (Pozzo holds out the whip. Lucky advances and, both his hands being occupied, takes the whip in his mouth, then goes back to his place. Pozzo begins to put on his coat, stops.) Coat! (Lucky puts down the bag, basket and stool, helps Pozzo on with his coat, goes back to his place and takes up bag, basket and stool.)”(Beckett, “Waiting for Godot” 25)

ESTRAGON: *What ails him?*

VLADIMIR: *He looks tired.*(Beckett, “Waiting for Godot”)

These lines from the play represent how inferior class individuals are treated, by the upper class dominates society, and how even though we are members of the same race, humans are inherently unfair to one another.

A play is incomplete if one or more of the required elements are lacking. Samuel Becket's play *Waiting for Godot*, ignores all of these structural principles, and traditional view of theatrical play is questioned(Halliwell).

ESTRAGON: *(having tried in vain to work it out). I'm tired! (Pause.) Let's go.*

VLADIMIR: *We can't.*

ESTRAGON: *Why not?*

VLADIMIR: *We're waiting for Godot.*

ESTRAGON: *Ah! (Pause. Despairing.) What'll we do, what'll we do!*

VLADIMIR: *There's nothing we can do.*(Beckett, “Waiting for Godot”)

Because the play is allegorical in its portrayal and doesn't propose any essence of metaphysics of presence, one may argue that the play is self-deconstructive. The characters' existence in the play is indefinable because they arise out of thin air without any established identity, but they nonetheless introduce themselves by name and demonstrate that they are human. Is it possible that the two major characters don't exist? Are they real humans? They spend their entire time in the deserted location waiting for Godot, whose identity is unknown. The dialogues taken from the play poses doubts of their existence until when Pozzo compares himself with them as human of same species.

I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever. May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?

In a ditch!(Beckett, p3).

POZZO: *(halting). You are human beings none the less. (He puts on his glasses.) As far as one can see. (He takes off his glasses.) Of the same species as myself. (He bursts into an enormous laugh.) Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image!*(Beckett,p24)

The play may also be viewed from a variety of perspectives, such as a comparison of the mind and body. One character keeps reflecting, recalling the incidents, and exploring the strange scenic area. The other person has trouble remembering anything, and all of his worries are about his comfort. He gripes about his clothes, his shoes, his hunger, his cold, sleeping in the ditch, and hanging himself. Godot is comparable to a spiritual belief in a higher power that each person professes for their personal well-being and prosperity. However, it is only a belief that God exists and is a supernatural presence with the ability to lessen human suffering. Godot can be compared to a worshipped deity whose existence is unclear because he does not appear during the entire scene. Pozzo and Lucky play the

roles of a master and a slave in the play, with the slave going through all the suffering and the master reaping the rewards. Pozzo can be compared to the mind, and Lucky to the body; the body serves the mind by bearing all its suffering. Lucky in Paly carries everything and acts in accordance with his master Pozzo's instructions. Pozzo is content to eat and drink, dress in warm clothing, and sit on a cosy seat. This is the ideal representation of comfort the mind desire. All these behaviors show how our mind and body function; therefore, we may assume that one of these characters represents the mind and the other represents the body. Buddhism holds that the body is the recipient of all sorrows, and the mind is the cause of the body's suffering. A cause of misery for our bodies is the binary, such as comfort vs. discomfort, hunger vs. satiation, cold vs. warm, and happy vs. sad. The drama illustrates such dichotomies since hunger is suffering, yet eating more itself causes suffering, seeking comfort is pain, yet comfort itself is suffering(Sangay). So, such action depicts the absurdity and meaninglessness in the human life. As a result, the characters represent the dissonance of soul and body in the form of two human beings performing different task.

The drama is separated into two distinct acts that are wholly unrelated to one another and lacks any sense of connection. While they wait for Godot in the first act of the play, the characters are animated, expressive, and engage in lively conversation. They talk, interact, and act more animatedly when they are with one another. The play's second act opens with the characters unaware of or unable to recall what transpired during their previous encounter and begins entirely fresh. Pozzo and Lucky are both deaf and blind, therefore they are unable to recognise Vladimir and Estragon. The boy who seems to offer the same massage that Godot cannot come, but he, too, is unaware that he previously entered the or that he saw them. This play's distortion illustrates its ridiculousness and concludes with meaninglessness or nothingness, which is how life is portrayed.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

When we examine the term "realism" in depth, we find that different philosophers have different interpretations of what it means. The term's theoretical, epistemological, and literal meanings have also been fractured, varying from one to another and to another meaning. Realism can be interpreted in a variety of ways, each leading to a new interpretation and so on. Therefore, the meaning of the term "realism" is not set in one central location but rather has evolved over time to include a variety of sub-meanings.

According to Jacques Derrida, understanding the structurality of structure is important to avoid fixing or stagnating the essence of any concept's meaning. Any concept's meaning will be constrained by the fixed centre, and any alterations to that meaning will only be permitted within the bounds of the fixed centre's underlying meaning. Therefore, the centre must be destroyed, which is known as a rapture of the centre, for the notion to be further explored and to have another new concept and to another new concept. A new concept emerges once the centre is ruptured, and this new concept can then be broken further to give rise to yet another new concept. Nothing has a set meaning; it constantly shifts(Derrida).

These realistic concepts can also be used to derive from and explain Samuel Becket's play Waiting for Godot, and a different theoretical derivation results in a fresh description of

the play. As a result, the play incorporates numerous ideas from all of these newly emerging philosophies under the umbrella of realism. Accordingly, all intellectuals have addressed the term "realism" from various historical contexts and contemporary events up until the postmodern era, and they have defined it from various social, emotional, and spiritual perspectives depending on their degree of interpretation. Each philosopher gave a definition based on the circumstances of their day and made predictions about the future of the term realism based on their research or personal opinions. Etymologically, the term "realism" denotes "wealth," "property," or "goods." Plato argues realism as non-existent since it is a replica of the notion, while Aristotle compares realism to mimeses of actuality.

Aristotle argues that it is a true depiction of reality, not just a mimetic idea(Halliwell).

Philosophical realism defines realism as everything we meet through our senses or the tangible, such as people, animals, plants, and everything else. On the other hand, transcendental realism defines reality as being outside of the things we can directly experience, such as our senses, beliefs, and ideas of what is real(Ferraris).

CONCLUSION

Modernist authors consider realism to be a portrayal of truth, the reality of everyday working-class people's lives, and the raw or direct language to describe those lives, not poetry or other forms of expression that conceal the true sentiments of the populace(Todd). Realism, according to postmodernists, are autonomous or free to investigate and express reality in their own ways(Rahaman). According to experimental realism, realism is defined as the lower person's dedication to the superior person because of the superior person's tyranny. Existentialists hold that reality is all about the individual and the decisions we make for our own lives. Absurdist view of reality as finding significance in everything we do daily like a ritual until we eventually lose faith in life and think it to be pointless. Impressionist realism likens life to a work of art that is bluer, like seeing through a reading glass without being able to fully appreciate what life is in its truest form. Looking at all these definitions, the term "realism" has been defined by numerous knowledgeable people throughout history, connecting it to various instances of human growth. However, each definition is connected to the others and all these explanations presented by various thinkers are interconnected. Every new concept described sprouts from an earlier concept, and no definition stands alone.

Even though some studies have attempted to demonstrate that the play "Waiting for Godot" is spiritually realistic, it can be demonstrated that it is not a Theo-existentialist drama, nor does it possess the essence of such beliefs. The play does a great job of portraying the history of the working class's suffering because of the change to capitalism, when the poor were worse off, and the rich got richer.

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