

EUGENE IONESCO'S ABSURD VISION



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ABSTRACT:

- In this paper I have focused on the absurdist dramatist Eugene Ionesco's plays "The lesson" and "The chairs" and throws light on the main elements of both the absurd dramas, discussing themes like alienation, lack of contact, isolation, futility and repetition. And I have tried to show the bizarre of human life and society.



SCOPE

- I have given a brief introduction about absurd theatre and its key features and focused on the themes of alienation, violence, power domination and the other prevailing themes of the plays of Ionesco "the lesson" and "the chairs" and lastly discussed Ionesco's vision on absurdity.



METHODOLOGY:

- Close reading of the book
- Visual adaptation of the plays.



OBJECTIVES:

- To give a brief introduction about "the theatre of absurd" and to show its characteristic features.
- To show alienation and some other absurd features in Eugene Ionesco's plays "The lesson" and "The chairs".
- To analyze violence in the play "The lesson".
- Eugene Ionesco's vision about absurd philosophy.



ABSURD DRAMA AND IT'S FEATURES:

- The word Absurd means nonsense, unreasonable, illogical and something very silly.
- Theatre of absurd is also known as "new theatre", it is a term or particular movement started in late 1950's.
- The term was coined basically by Martin Esslin after his book "The theatre of absurd" was published in the year 1961.
- The term was emerged after world war II. And this absurd theatre rejected realism. The concept of absurd drama is that there is no sense in human life and its totally gibberish.
- 1950's and 60's dramatist agreed with existentialist philosopher Albert Camus's theory in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus", that the human situation is essentially absurd and devoid of any purpose.

- The term is coined by Martin Esslin but it was actually derived from an essay by the French philosopher Albert Camus. In his "Myth of Sisyphus" written in 1942.
- As Esslin presented there were four defining playwrights of the movement and they were Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet and in his editions, he has added a fifth playwright Harold Pinter. They all shared a pessimistic vision of humanity struggling fruitlessly to find a purpose and to control its fate.



THE CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLAY ARE AS FOLLOWS

- Confused characters
- Meaninglessness of life
- Lack of plot
- Nonsense language
- Existentialism
- Isolation amongst people

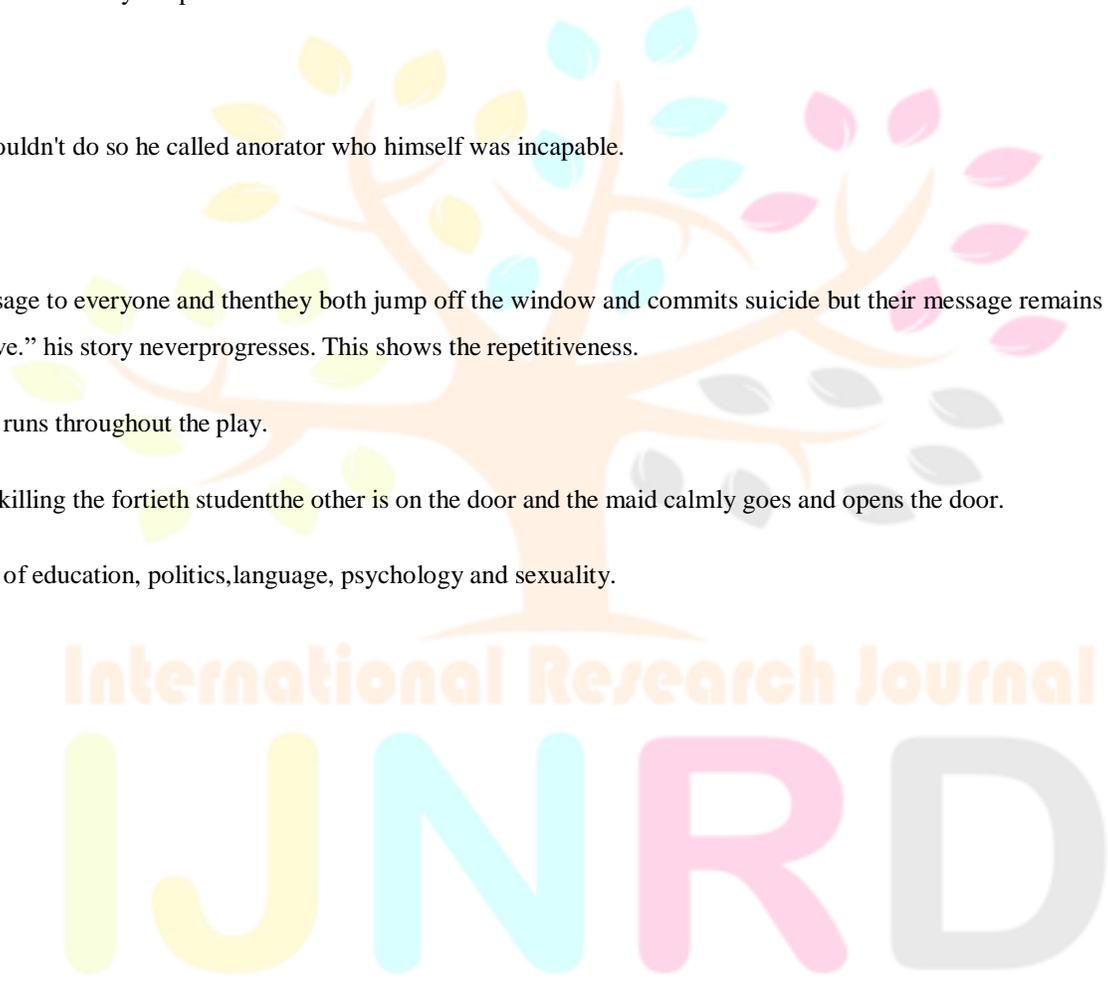


ALIENATION, FUTILITY, POWER AND DOMINATION:

- In the play "the chairs" there are three characters the old woman, the old man and the orator.
- The orator here is not capable to speak and he cannot communicate.
- In the play we can see various chairs but all of them were empty
- The guests that came were invisible to the audience.
- The empty chairs point towards alienation and even the invisible guests.
- The couple felt that they were conversing with their guests but literally there was no one.
- Invisible guests echo the loneliness and the alienation they were surrounded by.



- The orator in the play was also much more alienated than the elderly couple.
- It is more symbolic because of the fact that he is deaf.
- The old man wanted to convey his message which he couldn't do so he called an orator who himself was incapable.
- Here we can see the need of communication but it fails.
- The couple thinks that the orator would deliver his message to everyone and then they both jump off the window and commit suicide but their message remains undelivered. The old man continuously uses the phrase "then we arrive." his story never progresses. This shows the repetitiveness.
- In the other drama "the lesson" the theme of totalitarianism runs throughout the play.
- Repetition is also seen in the play as well because after killing the fortieth student the other is on the door and the maid calmly goes and opens the door.
- The lesson mocks totalitarianism (authoritarian) in case of education, politics, language, psychology and sexuality.



- Power and domination also reflects in the play.
- It's a story about a professor and pupil and it deals with the instruction given by an old professor to a young pupil regarding various topics. At first, he quizzes her and then they go to mathematics. She says that seven and one is nine and he praises her which is totally nonsense. He also wanted to teach her philology but she couldn't concentrate as she suffers with a toothache. The toothache keeps on increasing but the professor tells her to ignore the pain. The maid entered at between to calm him but couldn't and then she left. After she left, he picked up the knife and at the end when he was frustrated with the pupil, he stabs her mercilessly.
- The play finally ends with the murder of the young pupil in the hands of the professor. This shows the gradual increase of power. The professor dominated her as she was an easy target as the upper-class people, the government, or the academics does with the average students and the ones who are in less power.
- He even didn't give a second thought before killing his student and he was very normal after his vivacious act. This shows the futility of human life.
- At the same time the maid, Marie help's him after his act of murder and hints that she could be his lover. Her reaction was very cold to his murder because this was the fortieth one.
- In alienated societies often people become cruel to others and this cause crisis in the society.

- The pupil he killed in the play was the 40th one. State of alienation affects people both physically and mentally.
- He always thinks that he is the innocent one as he says to the maid “it’s not my fault! She was disobedient and she wouldn’t learn anything! She was a bad pupil....”

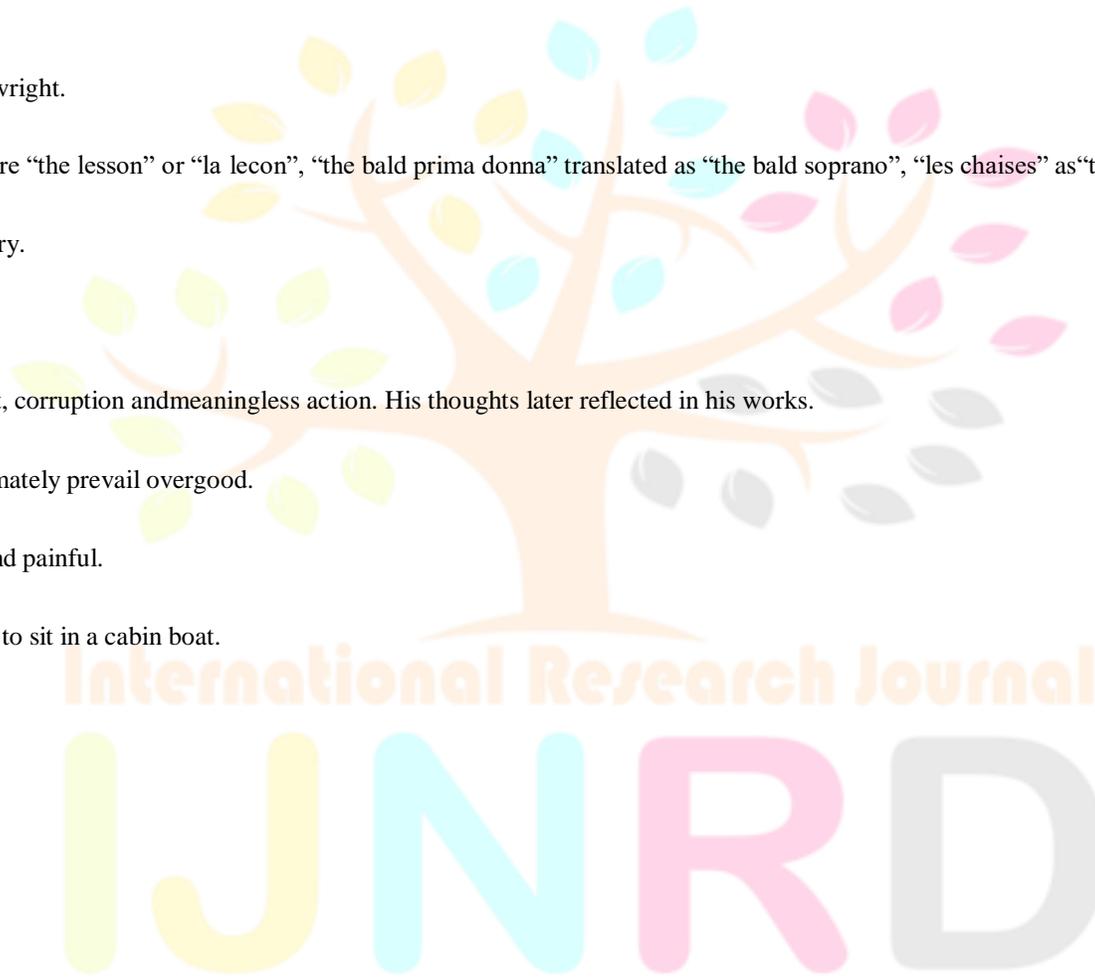


VIOLENCE IN THE PLAY “THE LESSON”:

- Ionesco focuses on violent instincts of people in his play "the lesson".
- Every people have this violent urge but they try to resist can keep it controlled because it's good to control your violent instincts.
- But in the play the lesson the professor freely murders his pupil without any kind of reconciliation making the situation completely absurd.
- Violence is definitely not logical and it's irrational.
- Just as happened in the play that the professor killed the young lady. The killer instinct is sustained in the play “the lesson”. This happened also because of lack of communication, an impression of loneliness and a gap that is not seen though.
- The professor and the young pupil were not able to communicate properly with the other. As the play progresses gradually he becomes more and more aggressive and dominating and he is pleased one he kills her with a knife. Though some dialogues are comedic but it turns out to be a grotesque play.
- His last lines before killing was “yes, yes... the knife an kill”..

IONESCO'S VISION ON ABSURDITY:

- Eugene Ionesco was a Romanian French playwright.
- Mostly he wrote in French. Some of his notable plays are “the lesson” or “la leçon”, “the bald prima donna” translated as “the bald soprano”, “les chaises” as “the chairs” and “rhinoceros”.
- He is one of the most important dramatists of 20th century.
- He spent most of his childhood in France.
- As a child also, he felt that he left in a world full of dust, corruption and meaningless action. His thoughts later reflected in his works.
- Ionesco is a pessimist and he believes that evil will ultimately prevail over good.
- To him the world seems grotesque, absurd, ridiculous and painful.
- He feels more alienated amongst people and so he used to sit in a cabin boat.



- He lived through two world wars and the threat of nuclear attack infused in him the possibilities of death from a very young stage.
- His childhood disrespect for his tyrannical father can be seen in the elements of the plays.
- He has witnessed the height of human violence for which he can go into the depth of human nature.
- His experiences of life shaped him as an artist.
- He enjoys solitude and he can hardly enjoy the company of others.
- In his memoir "present past" he acknowledged that most of his actions or writings are against his father.
- His vision or his point of view is that society itself creates barriers amongst people, no society can help in redeeming the pain of people's life.
- It's weird that he started writing dramas because he didn't like watching actors crying on stage and showing emotions.

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- But unlike others he liked puppet shows. He liked the punch and hit in the shows and he derived the idea of absurd.
- He realized that absurdity made sense to him as truths of the world and human existence. Our existence itself is absurd and it's tragic.
- Through his plays he always wanted to present the crucial human conditions and readers could actually note that after reading his plays. He was a prominent figure in French and even Romania celebrates his plays.



CONCLUSION

- In the concluding part I would like to say that both the drama shows the odds of human life.
- It's futile and there is nothingness everywhere. Life doesn't really make sense. Even Ionesco believes in futility of human life.
- In the chairs what we can see is that they wanted to escape from the horrors of life. Action is very less unlike other plays.
- These two anti- plays by one of the founders of absurd dramas are mixture of tragedy, humor, bleakness and farce.
- Boredom is another notable thing of the play. As the nonsensical lesson progresses, we can see futility of meaningful communication in the society.



- The professor here oppresses the pupil and at last killed the innocent soul and there were no regrets at all. People in absurd theatres doesn't think rationally.
- When the pupil says seven and one is nine "We can't be sure of anything, young lady, in this world". This line draws our attention to absurdity.
- The couple also at the end committed suicide as if they were waiting only to die.
- Death is inevitable as we all know and it is the fact.
- The fear of death is what makes life absurd.

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IMAGES “THE LESSON”



BALLET PERFORMANCE



“THECHAIRS”



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