

Absurdism in Modern Drama: Examining the Role of Setting in Revealing the Theme with Reference to Samuel Beckett's Play *Endgame*

Ghassan Mohammed Abdulrazzaq & Prof. Dr. Eiman Abbas Elnour²

¹General Directorate of Education in Alanbar, Iraq

²Department of English, University of Alneelain, College of Art, Iraq

Abstract

Throughout the researcher's observations, it has been realized that previous studies in the field of the absurd drama have not profoundly dealt in significant detail with all the manifestations of setting in the absurd drama, and therefore this subject matter needs to be studied in detail in order to remove the gap made in this respect. This study is mainly concerned with the analysis of a select of Samuel Beckett's plays as far as the relationship between the themes they expose and the setting in which their actions figure out. Moreover, the study sheds light on the significance of the setting in the absurd drama and its function in drama in general and in the absurd drama in particular. The plays chosen for this study are End Game. The choice of these two plays is made in accordance with fact that these two plays in particular have not been widely studied and analyzed from the setting perspective. In a word, they have not got the kind of popularity Beckett's masterpiece Waiting for Godot has got.

Therefore, this kind of study adds significant analysis of those two plays as far as the theme and the setting of them are concerned.

Keywords:- Absurdism, Nature, Time, Symbols.

1- Introduction

Any action in actual life should occur in a certain place and at a certain time: that is, it is a must that there should be a place and time for any action, which is always seen in our daily happenings.

Place and time are to comprise the setting of any event. In drama, the setting of a scene, for

instance, is the time and place of the action embedded in it. The significance of setting in drama lies in the fact that it affects the behavior of characters due to the kind of environment in which they are supposed to live, the characters' way of thinking and of speaking—both the form and content of their speech and dialogue. The setting, the time and the place with its theatrical props can be an indication of events predictions and the psychological reactions to the stimuli to which they are exposed, and it is set in Carol Benedict's wording (2010):

Setting is the time and place where a scene occurs. It can help set the mood, influence the way characters behave, affect the dialog, foreshadow events, invoke an emotional response, reflect the society in which the characters live, and sometimes even plays a part in the story. It can also be a critical element in nonfiction as the setting provides the framework for what is being discussed.

An alive setting is very important inasmuch as it consists of important details. This does not mean that every minute detail of the setting should be visualized. That is, comprehensive documentation of everything a character sees, and at the same time little details about the setting can be a shortcoming conducive to creating gaps in the action of the play and is an obstacle deterring the story from moving forward.

There are many ways of expressing the setting apart from the use of long descriptive passages. As such, the kind of words within the dialogue can propose where the action takes place, for the choice of certain words can indicate where these words are commonly used; cheap vegetables are sold in vulgar and poor places; expensive fruits are sold in refined

places, for instance. Besides, the kind of weather characters witness during the course of the development of the action can point to the time of the action which occurs in a scene. Thus, the reference to ice and snow points to the time of winter. Likewise, to mention hurricanes can give the readers hints as to where and when the action of the scene occurs: “The fragrance of a certain flower wafting on a gentle breeze suggests a different setting than the smell of asphalt permeating the air” (Carol Benedict, 2010). In the dialogue, the dramatist may describe the place as gloomy, dark, or shadowy to give hints that supernatural happenings are to occur or something horrible is to take place. A romantic setting may be set by means of describing a kandle or a scene of beautiful natural objects, and as it is put in Benedict’s wording of the idea: “An exotic location can be a backdrop for a steamy romance or a wild adventure. A mountainous terrain can be a source of danger and add suspense. A hospital waiting room can suggest trauma and pain, adding tension to the story” (Carol Benedict, 2010).

2- The Significance of Time and Place in *Endgame*

The setting of any drama has its own special effects on all the dramatic ingredients. The time and the place tremendously affect the plot in all its ramifications—character, themes, motifs and action whether rising or falling, and the denouement. At the same time, the mood and atmosphere in a certain scene are accomplished by means of setting. As a one-act play, *Endgame* is about the futility of existence and the absurdity of life that is accompanied by the inevitability of death. It is a drama in which the audiences watch characters that have no control over their lives. It is a drama which shows that it is an attempt to outwit death which finally no character can attain.

Endgame starts with an action that occurs in a grey-lit room that is bare in appearance. The room consists of two high

windows in only one wall and a door. Trash containers are cited near the wall. In the center of the room sits a blind character that is called Hamm. Another character figures out in the room that is called Clov that is moving forwards and backwards in the room, gazing at the trash containers, dragging the curtains and finally removing the white piece of cloth which has been covering Hamm. The Gray-lit interior is an indication of its bareness. Besides, two ashbins covered by an old sheet appear in the same place.

3. Beckett’s Treatment of Time and Place in *Endgame*

All the characters in *Endgame* are entrapped by calamities beyond their control. They are calamities from which there is no escape. Hamm, the disabled has kept his parents in ashbins to get rid of them. They are helpless very old husband and wife. As part of the setting, the ashbins are symbolic of the restrictions imposed by the son upon his parents. They are also symbolic of their helplessness, whose lives are meaningless and they seem as if they were waiting for their death. As two human beings kept in two ashbins, they symbolize that useless ashes or leftovers which one should get rid of. Even their son Hamm cannot help seeing them in front of him. Moreover, the ashbins represents the environment, the home or the country in which they have to spend the rest of their lives. They are representative of those countries and societies in which individuals are entrapped by the institutions that govern their fate—social, political, religious, military, not to mention the traditional and conventional representations which impose on them certain restrictions related to human relationships, for instance, which they may abhor. Their stay in ashbins and their having not revolted against their fate in them may show their wish to isolate and alienate themselves from the outside world. From the conventional and traditional point of view, it is something irrational that parents are made to live in ashbins, or that one like Hamm

keeps one's parents in them. It can be suggested that such an action cannot be accepted by the traditional theater; yet, this fact has been gradually accepted by the critics and audience in so far as the theater of the absurd tries to abstract rationality out of irrationality. Esslin has his word in this regard. He believes that at the beginning of the appearance of those dramatists who follow what he calls to be the theater of the absurd have produced plays that actually the audiences 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, p. 30). Esslin proceeds to say some words on behalf of the theater of the absurd, declaring that conventional meanings can be inferred from this type of drama that is expressive of some significant causes related to problems of contemporary society. 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, p. 31).

Endgame exposes modern man as restricted by the shackles imposed upon him by various factors, so that he turns to be the most passive creature on earth. This notion can be explicated by the action of characters like Hamm, his parents Nagg and Nell and his servant Clov. All characters in this drama are shown to be bewildered by endless questions which they ask in an environment from which there is no way out. Being put out of place, the characters feel disillusioned, purposeless and depressed. Their existence is threatened by place and time—the place that is like a prison, and the time through which they have to go though suffering from endless misery and waiting for death. Their disabilities indicate that they are near-death human beings for whom death is a better solution for their problems.

They are coerced to live isolated in their dislocation for the specified period of time which they are supposed to spend for the rest of their lives.

4. Beckett's Treatment of Human Nature

As a matter of fact, the treatment of human nature in a play is inferred from the treatment of character. The dramatist unfolds those aspects of Man which shows and various aspects of human nature throughout what a character says and does on the stage. In the Absurdist plays, it should be noted that there is no human criterion to unfold a character's nature inasmuch as it does not show consistency as far as its individuality is concerned. Sometimes, a character is presented on the stage without a name, and even though it shows certain traits, it changes them from time to time, and at the same time a character may assume the role of another as shown in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: "halfway through the action they tend to change their nature completely. Pozzo and Lucky in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, for example, appear as master and slave at one moment only to return after a while with their respective positions mysteriously reversed" (Martin Esslin, 1956: 30).

5. Beckett's Treatment of Nature

Part of the setting is nature that encompasses the stage on which the action takes place and in which characters speak and behave and which is looked at by Clov through the two windows whenever he is asked by Hamm to examine the outside world.

6. The Importance of Human Nature and Nature to Themes

As the title implies, there is an end for the game which has to be done through a limited time, which has a beginning and an end. As the play is confined by a certain period of time, all the characters in *Endgame* are entrapped in so far as they are confined by restrictions such as the world around them, the state of their position in society and what they are able to do according to their potentialities. What they desire and wish, what they dream

and fancy and what their yearnings for their past are illustrative of the harsh realities from which they are bitterly suffering and show how much they endure in order to continue keeping their desires, hopes and wishes to do something. So, they develop a feeling of sympathy and sadness, especially they are suffering too much from the miserable life they are living, which “establish a kind of self-condolence by which they would gain mental stamina” due to the harsh conditions, aspirations, limitations and futility which are all uncontrollable. (AkramShalghin, 2014, p. 102) .

Endgame presents man as a mortal being struggling for an end which he/she does not know anything. The routine actions repeated everyday are indications of human nature. Habitual deeds are done everyday, which is an indication of man’s sufferings, so that time during that routine actions are done becomes a central problem for the characters. Hamm declares “it’s time it ended.,and yet i hesitate to [he yawns] to end.” This is an indication of one significant feature of human nature which is hesitation. Clov declares that as time passes and everything stays as it is as far as the general atmosphere is concerned; yet, there is a change in the physical shape of the characters’ bodies. Old age has its severe impacts on humans—the disabilities, blindness, mutilation, and even the dog-toy is disabled for it represents a three-legged dog.

It can be noted that literature, generally speaking, can be allegorically interpreted and explained as is the case with great literatures. It has been generally agreed upon that the world Beckett creates on the stage cannot be understood without hard venturing on the part of readers. It is a complicated risk for audiences and readers

to hold clear-cut assumptions on Samuel Beckett’s world and introduce thoughts in a way that dares to claim a better understanding of his literature than previous or current ones. Nor would it go without controversy to maintain that Beckett’s plays could be better

approached on the basis that literature, generally speaking, is allegory, therefore these plays are essentially comprehensible within that literary frame, hence one tackles them and deciphers the philosophical implications in, or highlights the ideology intended by, that allegory. (AkramShalghin, 2014, p. 102)

Moreover, this kind of drama is one restricted to show any particular philosophy inasmuch as it is prone to various interpretations. Due to the irrationality of exposing action and character, it is conducive to interdisciplinary issues, questions and causes related to the life of man that is even exposed in an irrational manner. Beckett rejects the idea of interpreting his plays in terms of a limited experience, though he has not said much about their meanings, backgrounds and shaping factors. According to Shalghin (2014, p. 102), Beckett adds more oddness to the answers to the questions posed in this respect. He seems to give more confusion than giving an exact and satisfactory answers. He replies to Alan Schneider, the first American director of *Waiting for Godot*, when asking him the most nagging question about who Godot that he would have mentioned the meaning of Godot had he known him (AkramShalghin, 2014, p. 102) . Likewise, many critics have been disappointed by his answers to their questions concerning his play *Endgame* as he has been, as Shalghin declares (p. 102),

disappointing many critics who assumed a clear insight of what he intended his stage in *Endgame* to be, he rejected ‘the idea completely’ that ‘the stage in *Endgame* is a skull’ and the action ‘takes place in the mind of one man.’ Therefore, critics’ imaginations or readings go to different directions from those at which Beckett has aimed.

It may be suggested that Beckett’s plays can be analyzed in such away that the apparent actions, dialogues and movements may give

meanings other than what they really are. Besides, critics may go beyond the actual experience and suggest more meanings to the intended ones.

As to the presence of Beckett's characters on the stage, it can be seen that the spectators find it difficult to decide whether they act freely or they are restricted by uncontrollable factors. In a word, the environment in which the characters move is said to have been "problematic" as pointed out by Shalghin (p. 103) who declares that the environments or the large or usually flat spaces in Beckett's plays *Happy Days*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* do not seem to be what they eyes may guess about them, for they are unfolded as a "kind of entrapment where it is difficult, almost impossible, for the characters involved to decide which choice is viable for them" (Shalghin, (p. 103), and at the same time it is not indicated whether the characters are obliged or free to choose the place in which they figure out on the stage. For instance, the setting in *Waiting for Godot* points to a country road in which there is only one tree, and it is the evening time. This setting may be subject to various interpretations inasmuch as it is characterized by the poetic feature of suggestiveness. It is this variety of meanings which may give a tinge of universality to the play which "stimulates multiple observations and consequent interpretations, there is just one tree standing on the stage, empty of leaves, void of green" (Shalghin, (p. 103). It should be noted that it has been the choice of the dramatist to present the road with a tree without leaves to excite the meanings whatever they may be. Nakedness and bareness are suggestive of a situation in which helplessness prevails. It is the helplessness of contemporary society that has been deliberately entrapped by the institutions, be whatever they may, that govern it in a certain place and at a certain time.

Due to the metaphorical connotations which can be inferred from the stage setting of *Endgame* which can be considered a shelter, the play causes a great deal of discussions. The

stage setting is not only metaphorical, but it is also significantly symbolic. The spectators get the impression that they can see a bare shelter in whose center there is a wheelchair and two ashbins that are off-centered. In this shelter are two high windows that can be reached by Clove only by means of a ladder, so that he can see the outside world. Hamm can see the world through Clove's eyes. There is a door that leads to an off-stage kitchen to which Clove can go when necessary, which he describes by the expression "ten feet by ten feet by ten feet," so that he can express how his movement is limited to that number of steps when going to it, and at the same time the steps leading to it can be symbolic of the impression that Clove is constrained by dimensions within which he is restricted to move. This is not to deny the fact that Hamm, Nagg and Nell are also restricted by particular dimensions within which they can act; yet their situation is made more painful and worse due to their physical disabilities and the factors that are determined by time. It is a complicated yet ambiguous setting. Shalghin believes that the stage is partly controlled, which encompasses a territory of the framework of the theatricality that shows the

limitations that coerce the characters to be in places that are hardly perceptible, thus their endless suffering, continuous disappointment and consecutive distress, or even compulsion, are encircled specifically within those tiny places. By that, the characters are very much controlled and helpless in their ability not only when attempting to do something against the harsh realities amidst which they find themselves but also, and perhaps more drastic, to succeed in making their cries of frustration and suffering heard outside those specified locations. (Shalghin, (p. 103).

Thus, this kind of setting provides certain conditions having particular functions that direct the characters to keep on assuming their part in a world that shows an endless state of misery, disillusionment and misery. The

shelter in which the disabled characters act seem to be as if it were a prison, for it gives the impression of homelessness, alienation and isolation. Though not lonely, the characters do not show any intimate social relationships due to the fact that they show the same desires, hopes and aspiration, and at the same time all of them suffer from torment in one way or another. Their relationship turn to be “a sort of homely place” (Shalghin, (p. 103).

Naggis seen in his bin with biscuit in mouth, and listens. Hamm tells Clov to leave, which Clov says he's "trying" to do and then does. Nagg knocks on the other bin, and Nell appears. Nagg asks her to kiss him; they try but cannot reach, and Nell asks why they go through the "farce" every day, which points to the futility and hopelessness of their lives. Hamm tells them to quiet down, and thinks about what he would dream of if only he could sleep. Nell reproaches Nagg for laughing at Hamm's misery. Nagg tells her a story about a tailor that has often made her laugh, especially the first time he told it to the day after they had engaged: a tailor keeps fouling up and delaying a customer's orders for trousers until the customer explodes and points out that God created the world in six days, while the tailor has taken three months for the trousers. The tailor tells him to compare the world with his beautiful trousers. This indicates that the world is less significant than the trousers. Nagg disappears, and Hamm whistles for Clov and tells him to throw the bins into the sea. Clov checks Nell's pulse and says she has none. They discuss Hamm's painkiller medicine and Hamm's deceased former doctor. Hamm asks Clov to move him around on his chair and, as he cannot see for himself, to hug the walls. Hamm directs Clov to return him back to his spot in the exact center.

Hamm tells Clov to check outside with the telescope. Clov's report is “Zero.” Clov asks why they go through the farce every day, and Hamm answers that it is routine. Hamm wonders if he and Clov are beginning to "mean

something”; Clov shows his contempt at this notion. Clov scratches a flea on his body. Hamm is astonished that there are still fleas, and asks Clov to kill it, as “humanity might start from there all over again!” Clov gets some insecticide and sprinkles it inside his pants. Hamm proposes that he and Clov leave for the South. Clov declines, and Hamm says he will do it alone and tells Clov to build some means out of timber to carry them at sea. Clov says that he will start, but Hamm stops him and asks if it is time for his painkiller—it is not—and inquires about Clov's ailing body. Hamm asks why Clov does not "finish" them, but Clov says he could not do it, and will leave.

Hamm asks him if he remembers when he came here, but Clov says he was too small. Hamm asks if Clov remembers his father—he does not—and says that he was a father to Clov. As a result, it seems that time and place are two interwoven factors that play a great role in the life of man, especially that miserable man suffering from the many and various calamities in a world characterized by cruelty, wars, sadness, darkness and all aspects of ugliness. It is time that is to determine the birth of man. It is time that determines when an ailing man should take his painkillers, and so on and so forth. Beckett depicts “the suffering of the individual of a world in which everything is uncertain even time, man in such a world is in a perpetual struggle with time to assert himself” (M. A. Majeed, 2013, p. 251). Endgame projects time as a problem because many unwanted happenings should occur at a certain time and in a certain place.

Before Clov can leave, Hamm asks Clov if his dog is ready. Clov returns with a three-legged toy dog, which he gives to Hamm. Hamm tells Clov to get him his gaff, and Clov wonders out loud why he never refuses his orders. He gets it for Hamm, who unsuccessfully tries to move his chair around with it. Hamm recollects a madman painter-engraver friend of his who thought the end of the world had come, seeing ashes instead of nature. Hamm asks how he will know if Clov

has left. Clov decides he will set an alarm clock, and if it does not ring, it means he is dead. Hamm says it is time for his story, but Clov does not want to hear it. Hamm tells him to wake his father, and Clov looks into the ashbin of the sleeping Nagg.

The characters, the theatrical props and the stage as a homely place show that man is thrown into a state of waiting. The place has its own impacts of character and action. For instance, the room in which the action takes place consists of two high windows which are the only means to let them look at the outside world. Because they are high, it requires Clove to use a ladder each time he is ordered by Hamm to explore the world. Each time he sees it he replies to Hamm's question about its howness that it is still as the same as it was before. The high windows and the ladder cause too much torment to Clove's calamity since he is crippled in one of his legs. The little room, the ashbins and the ladder are structural in so far as they play a great role in this drama. Whose functions is to direct the characters to certain actions: Hamm is to give orders to Clove to look through the windows to learn about the outside world; Clove has to use the ladder so that he can attain the glass of the window and see the surrounding environment; he has also to uncover the ashbins whenever Hamm wants to talk to his crippled parents, and to cover them when required. It is a place in which particular human beings are living a miserable life. The play can be subject to many interpretations. The main one is that human sufferings are endless in this world that projects the life of m and as being futile. According to Shalghin, critics give many interpretations to Beckett's plays which may stand counter to one another. He says (Shalghin, p. 103):

paradoxically, those opinions stood sometimes in diametrically opposed directions to each other; for some critics tried to find biblical origins in them while many others were speaking of scepticism and uncertainty in this world; others referred the plays to

individual experiences, and some others maintained that these plays, actually, express the "endless suffering" of all "human kind", its particular moments represented by the various scenes of the plays.

On the other hand, it can be noted that Beckett's plays are characterized by a sad tone and a feeling of the meaninglessness of life, together with a sense of the idea that futility pervades every aspect of life "born from the disillusionment of old age and chronic helplessness" (Esslin, p. 31). Furthermore, the stage of the Theater of the Absurd is representative of a place that could hardly be understood. This is the reason why it is prone to so many interpretations. Esslin believes that the audience understand things from the outside without having full understanding of the meanings aimed at by the dramatist who presents odd patterns of events, and at the same time they can be likened to "newly arrived visitors [who] might watch life in a country of which they have not mastered the language" (Esslin, p. 32). As a result, the audiences could hardly share the aspirations, and emotions exposed during the course of the development of the action of the play, for they are exposed to characters and happenings that could hardly be understood due to their oddness. Thus, The Theater of the Absurd is ultimately regarded as a satire exposing the irrationality of the conditions of human life and the "illusion of what we thought was its apparent logical structure" (Esslin, p. 32).

Throughout the entire play, *Endgame*, it appears that the blind yet crippled Hamm is the one that often stimulates the actions of other characters; now he asks Clove to look through the windows, now he orders him to uncover the ashbins, now he asks him to cover them, now he asks him to look through the windows once more and so on. When considering those repeated actions, one may realize that they are monotonous actions that could be symbolic of

the futility of human life and of a world in which repeated actions are made for the sake of exploiting mankind in one way or another. Esslin declares that the degeneration and the deterioration of the spiritual faith and the disbelief in the progress of society and the sense of irrationality and unconsciousness as to those forces within the human psyche, the loss of control over the rational development of the human soul in an age of savagery, and as Esslin (p. 33-34) puts it in the following passage

Totalitarianism and weapons of mass destruction have all contributed to the erosion of the basis for a dramatic convention in which the action proceeds within a fixed and self-evident framework of generally accepted values, faced with the vacuum left by the destruction of a universally accepted and unified set of beliefs, most serving playwrights have felt the need to fit their work into the frame of values and objectives expressed in one of the contemporary ideologies: Marxism, psychoanalysis, aestheticism, or nature worship.

The most significant feature of the supposed humans in Beckett's *Endgame* is "waiting." Hamm is waiting his servant to awaken him so that he can wait until he sleeps again. Clov, in turn is waiting his master's orders so that he can fulfill them. The parents are enclosed in the ashbins, waiting for the cover to be left so that they can express their emotions, and aspirations. Generally speaking, their waiting is futile, being unproductive to a meaningful experience. Shalghin (p. 103) asserts that "There is no shortage of criticism on this considering it as aimless, endless, hopeless, meaningless absurd waiting," which seem to be of pessimistic coloring. They are waiting in a place from which there is no escape at all. Now Hamm dismisses Clov, now he restores him, now Clov decides to leave Hamm, now he finds himself unable to leave the place, so they are forced by powers beyond their control to remain in the same place and to do the routine

actions everyday, actions that seem futile and unable to promote them either physically or spiritually. Shalghin (p. 103) examines the idea of the place from which there is no escape when considering Beckett's three plays, *In Happiness, Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, saying that the three generations exposed in them are acting like instruments "working towards the play's paradoxical opening word, 'Finished.'

They are in a threshold-situation from which there is no quite apparent escape, for each step can only lead further into the ambiguous world" (Shalghin, p. 103). Such a place as the one in which they are living makes them try to cope with frustration, despair and depression by means of imagining another world contrary to the one in which they are living. In a word they they try to find a reality alternative to theirs. For instance Hamm is depicted as if he were "King" to Clov who is depicted as if he were serving a king. The dark, or grey-lighted room is referred to as "my house," "my service," or "kingdom," and in one instance he uses the royal plural to Clov: "you can't leave us."

Hate-love relationship develops between Hamm and Clov in an ambience that obliges them to both hate and love, which is one that shows the elements of loneliness, isolation and futility. Moreover, it seems that time is endless for the characters that speak and tell stories such as the one told by Nagg over and over again about the Englishman and the trousers. Hamm is ready to away a sugarplum after having finished his story. Nell appears to be longing for the past of which the spectators know nothing. They all suffer from the harsh realities crystalized in their past sketched by their memories, the presents that is very painful and the future which will never fulfill the aspirations they dream of, and as it is put set by Shalghin (p. 106) as follows:

characters in *Endgame* are, psychologically and physically, encircled with the harsh realities embodied in a long painful present,

remote past of which only sketches of memories are left, and nostalgia for a future that will never happen the way they want. This can be unmistakably understood as their cry for self-assertion amidst the brutal element of time and physical limitations, their stories become their proof of their existence.

Nagg and Nell are continually hidden in ashbins on the stage, which can be symbolic of tombs. In a scene they are depicted to be unsuccessfully trying to kiss each other: “their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again.” They represent the image of impotence in so far as they are mutilated and paralyzed in the ashbins; they are neither alive nor dead. They are given little food to remain alive.

Clov is frightened from time to time by the outside world of which he does not know anything except those representations which he watches when ordered by Hamm to do so. Thus, he sorely remains with Hamm and the inside of the shelter which can be symbolic of a place where everything is “finished” which may indicate that it represents death, and as it is highlighted by Shalghin (p. 112):

darkness with weak grey light are universal, and nothing is pleasant in this melancholic gloomy atmosphere, really a place where life is desirable? The danger lying in the outside world is one thing and the futility inside the shelter is another, they are, by no means, equal. Nevertheless, the battling to escape one leads to experiencing the bitterness of the other and to effortful attempts to cope with a situation as an accomplished fact.

The sense of loneliness, isolation, despair and depression may be reminiscent, as Shalghin points out (p. 112) of Sartre’s living room located in hell from which there is no escape at all, or it is reminiscent of Pinter’s rooms as shelters that neither provide safety needed for the existence of humans nor an end

for the psychic torment practiced in them. The characters are puzzled and tortured that are disabled in a place from which there is no way out. The merit that is found among them is cooperation perhaps because they are all facing the same fate. Clove responsibility indicates that he is a mediator between the disabled Hamm and the outer world of which the latter is always trying to know what is going in it. Clove does not add anything new concerning his impressions about the outer world, for it seems to him the same each time he looks at it through the two windows on both sides of the room. This indicates that he looks at the world from two different angles which can be taken as two contrastive poles representative of the world of misery, depression, conflicts and war. Clov’s answer to the question about the weather is always the same “the same as usual.” But in fact he means the weather of the shelter is the same as usual. Of course, the weather outside the shelter changes from time to time, for it “might be relatively true and valid for inside the shelter, is an observation that sees things in isolation from each other; for the weather, unlike what is being uttered by Clov, is certainly not the same outside” Shalghin, p. 115).

At the end of the play, Clov begins to prepare himself to leave Hamm and explore the outside world where he wishes to find “order.” It is the time when Clov decides to make a certain change in his life despite his state of depression and despair. During the time when Hamm thinks of taking his pain-killer for which he has been calling he has been shocked by the news that there is no more pain-killer and therefore his chronic sufferings will not be sedated any more. It is time that has consumed his hidden doses of the pain-killer which he used to have to comfort his pains. The shelter in which the characters live and act seems to be near the sea. It is a location that is symbolic of the perils of the sea, a location surrounded by all sorts of danger, death and decay. Had the other aspect of the sea—the merits—been focused on by the

dramatist, they would have shown their reflections on character and action. Nevertheless, the dialogue of the characters does not concentrate on such representations as these: ““there’s no more nature, in which nature is destroyed and after which nothing grows any longer” (Ruby Colon, 1969, p. 40).

Although the theatrical props are few in number, they are of great significance due to the roles they play—the step ladder, the whistle, the telescope, the toy dog, the gaff and the alarm clock, which are all part of the place in which they figure out:

The connection between these objects to themselves and to the characters on the stage suggests aspiration for moving above and beyond the place. However, the idea of moving remains latent and the characters stick to watching the outside world, and the whistle is believed to be the means of a hard effort to compensate for the frustration resulted from the failure to achieve the aim.(Shalghin, p. 116)

It appears therefore that the whistle is a symbol of the dominion of Hamm over Clov, and the alert of the clock strikes heavily to stand as a symbol of time. It is also a reminder of time. It is the period of time through which the characters remain perplexed and puzzled. It also indicates the element of waiting, and as it is pointed out by Shalghin (p. 116):

problematization is certainly a major characteristic of Beckett's plays; besides the main problem which is the characters' preoccupation in a long waiting, their lives remain puzzled and inscrutable. All of the characters in the above-discussed three plays are longing for something to come, to change a situation, to answer some of the puzzling questions they have about themselves and the world around, but this desire remains unrealized.

Hamm and clov depend on each other in every aspect of their lives. They have been suffering for a long period of time, waiting

across time for practicing their daily activities which seem to be routine acts done every day in a place from which they cannot go out. Clov always declares that he should leave but he finds himself unable to do so. The play ends in the same manner of its beginning in a shelter where Hamm sits in his armchair motionless and covered by a handkerchief. It can be suggested that the characters are imprisoned by the course of time they have to spend for the rest of their lives. At the very beginning of the play, Clov says that it is “finished.”

The characters seem to confront a conflict with time that seems to be personified as a great creature governing dwarfs unable to move, act, or speak without its presence in a certain place. The only humans to feel the presence of time are those characters trapped in the shelter surrounded by the sea. They are waiting for an end with hope of learning where time will take them to.

7. Conclusion

Literary works, especially those ones in which actions occur, cannot at all overlook the use of setting, for an event should have a place and time at which it occurs. Since the action in dramatic works of the absurd theater are limited, setting plays a greater role in it and is regarded as a significant aspect of them. Modern drama, especially the absurd plays makes use of the room as its setting in so far as it is a limited place that can be representative of the world as an imprisonment, which is reflected in many works by the absurdist dramatists such as Beckett, Genet, Ionesco and Pinter, for the many and various symbolic implications a room can provide for the dramatist. Besides, the element of setting in any drama, absurd and otherwise, adds a new factor to it—the factor of realism—in that the spectators see on the stage an environment and props similar to what they have used to see in actual life. For instance, the room in *End Game* that consists of the two windows, the ladder and the chair are realistic elements besides their being symbolic. An atmosphere in a setting may

hint at positive or negative connotations. The absurdist dramatists are looked upon as angry ones due to the fact that they consider the stage representative of the world corrupted, which they think is void of anything that is called humane.

It has been made clear that the setting in the plays concerned affect the kind of themes the dramatist wants to expose. The room with two windows in *End Game* are made to expose the theme of life as an imprisonment which will have an end sooner or later that is made by either death or the destruction of the world as it was destroyed by two great wars.

The appearance of the absurd theater comes as a result of the desperate man living during the great wars and during their aftermaths, which have made him hopeless, desperate and fearful of future events as is the case with the main characters of *End Game*. The action of the play has been greatly affected by their setting which limits the movements of characters, their way of thinking and finally the end of the action of the plays in which they appear.

It has been pointed out that the setting of the absurd drama is very significant because it directs character and action, and at the same time it is regarded as a significant structural element. The setting of the absurd drama is not only reflecting the traditional place and time in which the action occurs, but it is also symbolic of many and various connotations. The two windows in *End Game* are representative of the two eyes of man through which he looks at the world, and the room is representative of the human brain and head. Such symbols cannot be crystalized in any other traditional plays. Therefore, the setting of the absurd drama is more significant than the one in the traditional theater.

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