The Absurd and Irony in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Eugene Ionesco’s *The Lesson*

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Defended in:
06/07/2019

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Academic year
2018/2019
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends who helped me along putting efforts and energy to fulfill this work by the most reasonable standards.
Acknowledgements

I thank God the greatest for His blessings and guidance, who give me the force, the courage and the will to fulfill this modest work.

Then I would like to show my gratitude towards Ms. Mordjana Haddad, my supervisor, who did not deprive me of her pertinent advice, remarks, reasonable and valuable suggestions and careful guidance during my work. Indeed, without her this work would have never been finished.
Abstract

This study tends to explore absurdity and irony in two plays written by the well known absurd playwrights Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. The study explores the tight relationship between irony and absurdism in two famous absurd plays Waiting for Godot and The Lesson. This work contains three chapters; the first chapter deals with theoretical backgrounds of the study such as: absurdism, existentialism, theatre of the absurd and irony. As for the second and the third chapter; it comes out as an analytical study. The second chapter is divided into two parts; the first part deals with patterns of absurdity in Waiting for Godot. This absurdity is found in the title, setting, structure, characters, action and dialogue. The second part tackles absurdity in The Lesson in terms of characters, setting and dialogue. Finally, the last chapter tries to answer the question of how irony is portrayed in the two absurd plays and its relation to meaninglessness or the absurd.

Key words: absurdity-irony-Waiting for Godot-The Lesson-existentialism.
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**General Introduction**

The Theatre of the Absurd is a movement made up of many various plays, most of them were written between 1940 and 1960. When first performed, these plays stunned their audiences all around the world as they were amazingly different than anything that had been seen before. In fact, many of them were given the term “anti-plays.” In an attempt to clarify and define this revolutionary movement, Martin Esslin coined the term “The Theatre of the Absurd” in his 1960 book of the same name. He defines it as such, because most all of the plays of that time insisted on the absurdity of the human life. Essentially, each play illustrates man’s existence as illogical, and moreover, meaningless. This idea was a reaction to the “collapse of moral, religious, political, and social structures” following the two World Wars of the Twentieth Century (Abbotson 1).

In fact many historical and social factors led to the emergence of absurdism. One of the main factors is the world wars which shook the whole world and this led people to question their existence. For this reason, the “Absurdist Theatre” has emerged and heavily influenced by Existential philosophy. It goes along best with the philosophy of Albert Camus in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). In this essay, Camus tries to present a logical answer as to why man should not commit suicide in face of a meaningless, absurd life and existence. To do so, he uses the Greek mythological figure, Sisyphus, who was destined to push a rock up a mountain, only to have it roll back down. He repeats this useless cycle for all of eternity. At the end of the essay, Camus concludes that, “One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (123). He means that we have to struggle in our life to have happiness. In other words, we can find meaning and happiness in life even without acknowledging why we exist.

Above all, the absurd dramatists sought to create harmony between man and the modern world. Martin Esslin states that “the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in
all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions—and to laugh at it” (429). The absurd dramatists were the first to introduce this idea of acceptance in the face of absurdity. In doing so, they stood against the preconceptions and conventions of what does and does not form theatre. Successfully, the absurd dramatists reshaped the art form and invented a space in which succeeding movements could rise.(Esslin 429)

Absurd dramatists use many literary techniques and figures of speech which help them reinforce absurdity and present it in a masterful way. One of these techniques is “irony”. In using irony, absurdists show great ability to play with words and to make the serious looks silly and this is what is called the ironic effects. One has to differentiate between irony and satire. As mentioned above irony is a literary technique or a figure of speech, whereas satire is a literary form or genre which uses many techniques, among these techniques irony and ridicule.

In the Theatre of the Absurd there are two main dramatists who really have shown great writing skills and outstanding abilities, Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco are considered fathers of this type of theatre. In their plays they demonstrate the absurdity of life in a humorous ironic way. There are two main plays by these writers that perfectly reflect every theme and component of the theatre of the absurd. Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett and The Lesson by Eugene Ionesco tell us exactly what ironic absurdity means. So this study deals with the concept of absurdism and irony in the two plays.

Despite the fact that this theme has largely been studied, I believe that existential questions are eternal and go beyond space and time. Moreover, the reason behind studying this field is personal; I find great pleasure in watching absurd plays, movies and reading absurd works. Moreover, this research aims to discover patterns of absurdity in Samuel
Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Eugene Ionesco’s “*The Lesson*”. This study also tries to find a link between absurdity and irony in absurd plays. This study raises the following questions:

- What are the patterns of absurdity in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Lesson*?
- What are the patterns of irony in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Lesson*?
- What is the link between irony and absurdism in those two plays?

This study mainly depends on absurdism as a literary movement, and as an existential theory and explains how it works in the two plays. It also deals with irony from an aesthetic point of view.

In this study many books, that tackle absurdism and irony, have been used. Among these books is Martin Esslin’s book *The Theatre of The Absurd* (1962). Actually this seminal book summarizes the whole movement and explains its main characteristics. In addition Michael Bennett’s *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd, Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter* is another important source that deals with absurdism and how each of these writers sees it. Bennett’s second book *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd* greatly introduces us to the absurdity in theatre. Furthermore, this research has also used Albert Camus’s essay “*The Myth of Sisyphus*”, and John Foley’s guide to Camus’s works *Albert Camus from The absurd To Revolt*. Furthermore, to deal with irony, this study has relied on William Storm’s *Irony and the Modern Theatre* and on Claire Colebrook’s *Irony*. These two books provide an overview about how irony is used in the modern theatre. This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter defines the notion of absurdism, Theatre of the Absurd and irony, and clarifies how absurdism and existentialism are related; it also deals with the relationship between irony and absurdism. The second chapter deals with the patterns of absurdity in the two plays. Finally, the last chapter investigates how irony is used in the two plays.
Chapter one: Absurdism and Irony in the Theatre of the Absurd

Introduction

1. Absurdism

1.2. Absurdism as part of Existentialism

1.3. Theatre of the Absurd

1.4. Characteristics of the Absurd Theater

1.4.1. Language in the Theatre of the Absurd

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1.4.3. Language in the Theatre of the Absurd

1.5. Major themes of The Theater of the Absurd

2. Irony

2.1. Irony in drama and theatre

2.2. The relation between absurdism and irony

Conclusion to chapter one
Introduction

The first thing that comes up to the mind when we first hear the word absurd is disorder and chaos. Absurdity is found everywhere and man’s attempts to erase it are ultimately useless. This absurdity existed since the creation of earth. Absurdity was not studied and dealt with as a philosophical movement until the 18th century. The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard was the first to introduce absurdism as a philosophy, but his investment in this term was not detailed.

By the coming of the 19th century, many writers interpreted absurdity and involved it in their works. The Franco-Algerian philosopher Albert Camus was the first to fully study absurdism. In his ground breaking essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he demonstrated how absurdity affects the human life. His works heavily influenced the new type of theatre The Theatre of the Absurd.

Absurd dramatists showed great skills. They amazingly depicted real life. In their way of doing so they used many figures of speech and literary techniques. Irony is the dominant literary style in absurd plays. Absurd dramatists masterfully used irony, they refer to it as ironic absurdity.

So, this chapter will try to provide a theoretical background of the absurd movement, its relation to existentialism and how it influenced modern writers like Camus. It will also try to define the Theatre of the Absurd and give its most important characteristics and themes. After that it will tackle irony, it starts by defining it, giving its types and how it can be used, and eventually how irony is portrayed in drama and theatre. In the last part it attempts to expose the relationship between irony and absurdity.
1. Absurdism

Humans always tend to crave meaning, look for it, and create it. They continuously make up stories out of their daily experiences to give them meaning. And they search for interpretations of the world in general. The first source of meaning for most people is religion; believing in a God or a spiritual power, a life after death, a religious ritual practicing, sacred verses or a holy book inspire meaning in people’s life. Religion is not the only possibility; meaning can also be found in arts and science, and many other beliefs and practices. However; not all people have the same way of seeing things. There are people who think that life is meaningless and is not worth living. In short these people are absurdists.

In fact, absurdists consider all these endeavors to make sense of life are ultimate futility. Absurdists do not think that doing anything is pointless, but they assume that whatever you do, you are unable to flee the absurdity of the world. Actually, absurdism is a difficult term to define, particularly when it is related to philosophy.

Primarily, Absurdism is a philosophy which is structured upon the belief that human beings exist in an illogical and meaningless universe. This meaninglessness is characterised by an alienation in personality and a fragmentation of mind. In an absurd world, minds seek to find meaning in life and struggle through a series of obstacles, only to be faced by the inevitable truth that there is not any value or meaning. The unsuccessful journey towards order is eventually beaten by the forces of nature, inescapably nature plays the role of the decision maker and the supreme law which predetermines man’s fate and failure in particular. Absurdly speaking, meaning does not exist and all the human attempts to dig it up ends by frustration and disappointment, so meaning is humanly impossible rather than logically impossible.
According to *The Oxford Concise Dictionary Of literary Terms*, the absurd means, “a term derived from the Existentialism of Albert Camus, and often applied to the modern sense of human purposelessness in a universe without meaning or value”. (1) This definition brings forth the philosophy of Existentialism that is strongly connected to the absurd. The French writer Albert Camus employed the term to describe the futility of human existence, which he compared to the story of Sisyphus, the figure in Greek mythology condemned for eternity to push a stone to the top of a mountain only to have it roll back down again. (Baldick 1)

Eugene Ionesco, a leading figure in The Theatre of the Absurd defines the term as follows, “Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose…Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all actions become senseless, absurd and useless.” (qtd.in Esslin 5). In other words, Ionesco sees the loss of the identity of the human being in the so called absurd world; all his religious tendencies and internal spiritual values are void. For Ionesco man is only an emotionless puppet, acting in a closed circle of permanent disorder.

It is clear that the idea of absurdism is not by no means new or modern. There has been an awareness of the importance of the absurdity in humans’ behaviors by many writers such as, Plautus, Chaucer, Swift, Pope, Butler, Balzac, Dickens, and many more have shown commitment to absurdity in their works, and a shrewd sense of man’s ridicule, (Abrams 154). The philosophy of absurdism was adopted by many writers and dramatists such as the French writer Albert Camus.

The French absurdist Albert Camus, defended absurdism in his seminal essay “The Myth of Sisyphus”. He thinks that the realization of life as absurd is only a beginning and not the end. He says that the absurd is everywhere and it can hit us at any time, just as a brilliant
idea can hit a thinker’s mind, a “ridiculous beginning” he calls it. (Camus 11). If there is any contradiction between reality and the thought, the absurd will be created, Camus elaborates,

“I am thus justified in saying that the feeling of absurdity does not spring from the mere scrutiny of a fact or an impression but that it bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it. The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation.” (Camus 28)

Thus the contradiction which happens between men’s pursue of clarity and the ambiguity of this world creates the absurd. Camus writes: “At this point of his effort man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.” (Camus 26). Later ,he says that neither the world nor humans are absurd, but it is the quarrel between them that is absurd. Camus explains more: “The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together. It binds them one to the other as only hatred can weld two creatures together.” (Camus 20) Martin Esslin follows Camus by saying that it is really the "divorce" between "the actor and his setting" that constitutes the absurd (Esslin 43). Esslin elaborates Camus’ view that neither the man, nor the world is absurd; the absurd is their union. The absurd derives from the fact that the world cannot offer man what he wants. Camus says, “I know what man wants, I know what the world offers him and I now can say that I know what links them.” (Camus 29)

Soren Kierkegaard and Fyodor Dostoevsky have studied absurdity of the human condition earlier than Camus. Influenced by them, Camus wrote “The Myth of Sisyphus”, in which he deals with the relationship between absurdity and suicide and looks at major
philosophical problems. One of these problems is the criterion which determines if suicide is an escape from absurdity or not. In general, Camus studies and gives solution to the different problems that humans encounter in their daily lives. Camus was also influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche. German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was an influential writer of the period between the 1870s and 1880s.

   Nietzsche became famous after criticizing the traditional religious morals of Europe as well as the church’s thoughts. His criticisms are based on psychoanalysis, he questions everything that is related to man’s consciousness and he questions man’s morals. He strongly opposed the overruling of the church and its teachings; he also used Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism in his rebellious ideas. In his famous declaration “God is dead, Nietzsche made clear that “the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable”, he further says that everything that was “built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it” is false and “the whole of our European morality”, is destined for “collapse” (Nietzsche 343). For Nietzsche the current human values and everything which is valuable in the human life is questionable and need to be reconsidered and investigated and put in another acceptable form. In his book On the Genealogy of Morality, Nietzsche extensively talks about his new ideas of morals and the major changes that need to happen to the current human’s morals.

   Nietzsche’s idea of the good and the evil is totally different than the actual one, but he believes that his own ideas are the adequate ones. In his book Thus Spake Zarathustra he mentions:

   What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness. What is happiness? The feeling that power is growing, that resistance is overcome. Not contentedness but more power; not peace but war; not virtue but fitness (Renaissance virtù, virtù, virtue that is morale-fre. (Nietzsche 2)
Nietzsche’s theory of good and evil is to extreme. For him power is everything and man’s only goal is power. He reminds us of Darwin’s survival of the fittest, and that power determines one’s status in society. Nietzsche thinks that evil resembles weakness and everything that was born out of it. Camus was inspired by the writings of Nietzsche, he even agreed on the concept of the dead god and the lost values of human beings and he demonstrated that on his works *The Stranger, The Plague and The Myth of Sisyphus*.

For Camus, truth in the absurd world is distorted, humans cannot reach any reality, and the only reality they can achieve is death. Throughout their life humans leave only in a web of lies and fantasies. Absurdism gravely menaces the human psyche; it throws the brain in vortex of incomplete ideas. The mind is secluded from its natural function, logic.

The major reason that led to this permanent state of absurdity is WWII. Millions of people are killed and millions are injured. The witnessing of this disaster led people to abandon hope, and also to cut their relationship with God. This religious distortion only emphasized the absurdity they lived in. The second reason is the social and economic systems that appeared after WWII and the beginning of the so called Cold War. This war affected people not on the physical side but on the mental one, the dictator regimes of Europe oppressed people and played mind games on them. These regimes’ totalitarianism and abusive acts reinforced absurdism. The French writer Albert Camus joined the French war of liberation against Germany and after the liberation he went back to Algeria, there he saw how the Algerian people is suffering from the French colonialism. The violence and the injustice he saw their heavily influenced his writings.

1.2. Absurdism as part of Existentialism

The emergence of Existentialsim as a movement goes back to post WWII. The invention of the term is credited to the French philosopher John Paul Sartre. Sartre wrote many books which discuss the human essence and existence; in his seminal *Being and
Nothingness he mentions that “existence precedes essence”. In this statement he opposes the traditional belief of existence which says that our lives are given their essence before we are born. Sartre says that destiny has nothing to do with our lives and it is not the one that determines our future. According to him once the human is born, he has his destiny in his hands and he shapes his life with it. Sartre insists on the individuality of humans and their ability to create meaning in life without the interference of God. In general, for Sartre our essence is a consequence to our existence and not the other way around.

Moreover, Existentialism can be divided into two types: the atheistic one, and that is of Sartre, and the monotheistic one, and that is of Kierkegaard. On one hand, Sartre’s existentialism states that there is no inherent meaning in the universe and that the construction of any type of meaning can happen. In addition the human’s resolution in this life is determined by him perusing and creating his own meaning. On the other hand, Kierkegaard’s existentialism says that the inherent meaning in life is possible only if it is associated with the knowledge of God which means that the human must be religious, and in a close relation with god in order to have an inherent meaning. Furthermore, man finds resolution in creating his own meaning in relation to God. Absurd dramatists based their works on the atheistic type of existentialism.

According to Jones College, the existentialist view illustrates that humans are thinking beings who are capable of living in independence. We shape our own lives. The individual is free to choose what to believe in and is solely responsible for every decision and action made. Existentialism puts forward the idea that man is an independent being who has the freedom to make his own interpretation of the purpose of existence. (Jones College magazine 56)

Leonora Cohen, explains that, in the existentialist view, the world does not have an inherent meaning. This is the reason why it is up to the individual to define its own purpose of
existence. There may be other philosophical beliefs from different people that may influence a person’s own perspective, but the individual is still accountable for the choices he makes. (Cohen 27)

Hereby, one can say asuridism and existentialism are closely related. Actually absurdism came out of existentialism. Both movements share the belief that denies any existence of inherit meaning in the universe. The difference between the two lies on the ability to create meaning. In absurdism meaning can be reached if only the absurd is accepted, the human can find joy and happiness as Camus said, but the resolution of the human can only be reached by death.

Existentialism philosophy influenced many absurd dramatists such as, Jenet, Ionesco and Beckett. Though they are absurdists, they employed the existential crisis in their works. The most notable works of drama that have a heavy existential tone inside them are Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Ionesco’s *The Chairs*. These two writers are leading figures in the so called New Theatre or The Theatre of the Absurd.

**1.3. Theatre of the absurd**

The Theatre of the Absurd or the new theatre was born out of WWII. This term was coined by Martin Esslin, who based his studies on the works of absurd dramatists such as Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. World War Two led to the killings of millions of innocent people and the destruction of the human morals and values. After the war people questioned the existence of God and the reason behind all this violence and bloodshed. This demonstration of violence did not only affect people physically but also psychologically. Even people who survived the war committed suicide once they realized that their life is useless and without meaning.

The horrors of World War Two led to the creation of a new type of theatre which perfectly resembles life after the war. Theatre of the Absurd came out as a reaction to war.
The alienation of the European man and his isolation from the world were the major themes that were dealt with in this type of theatre. Absurdistss also included the leap of faith or the separation of the human from the divine power.

With the New Theatre, absurdistss were able to revolt against old traditions and conventions of theatre. Because of the different artistic and aesthetic visions of the absurdistss, theatre has remarkably developed into a whole different stage. The traditional theatre with his Aristotelian concept was the only prominent type of theatre for thousands of years and no one dared to challenge and change the Greek conventions. By the emergence of the absurd drama in the fifties of the last century, old theatre was taken of his thrown. The ground breaking play Waiting for Godot written by the famous absurdist Samuel Beckett challenged everything that was traditional; the plot, the characters, the setting and the structure, it was all different and new to the viewers worldwide.

This innovative type of theatre did not only challenge the traditional theatre but it also set the playwright free. Old playwrights could not write about unfamiliar and taboo topics, they were restricted by the teachings of the church and the Greek principles of theatre, on the contrary absurdist dramatists wrote about everything and did not limit their visions; they set themselves free from the chains of religious and social supervision.

Theater of the Absurd was set upon many schools of thought and previous ideas, and many philosophical ideologies. Among these philosophies is the Nietzschean philosophy with the concept of the dead god as mentioned above. In addition the New Theatre was influenced by the ideology of individuality and Sigmund Fraud’s psychoanalysis.

Immediately after its establishment, the New Theatre was heavily criticized. Critics were shocked by the content of this kind of drama. But although it was not accepted by the critics, it gained global fame with its complicated plot and absurd charm. Esslin states that
most of these absurd plays are given the name “anti-plays” (Esslin 3), because they oppose the normal structure and plot of any other type of theatre.

1.4 Characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd

The purpose behind absurd plays is to shock the human being and get him out of his routine comfort life and secured zone, and literally makes him an alien in his attitude and his thoughts. So the Theatre of the Absurd is a new artistic form that has never been known before, it makes the spectacle astonished and feels the strangeness of the scene. And that’s why it is referred to as the rebellious or the revolutionary theatre.

Theatre of the Absurd is characterized for being unreasonable or illogic and for having a strange plot that has no meaning, with no sequential ideas.

1.4.1. Language in the Theatre of the Absurd

The New Theatre does not recognize language as a mean of communication, but only as a conventional tool that is of complete futility. Furthermore, words have failed to express the experience of the human being; it cannot go beyond the surface. Since its emergence the new theatre has launched a vicious war against language and portrays it as a useless tool and insufficient to be used as a way of communication. The language that is used in theatre of the absurd is too scrambled and contradictory. In the New Theatre, language completely fails to operate in its actual function which is communication.

The dialogue that happens between characters in the absurd plays is almost identical to the interior monologue. The linguistic interactions between the characters are subtle, ambiguous and lack subjectivity. (Esslin 4 487). There is no connection between the characters. In other words, we can say that the Theatre of the Absurd is the perfect illustration of language’s inability and failure to create connection between people. In the Theatre of the Absurd every character has its own world, and there is nothing in common which relates characters together, so man turned his mind into a small and isolated island, which
consequently limits his contact with others. And language which is supposed to bring social connection turned into a private interior monologue. The absurd dramatist Ionesco attacked language and stated that it is only a meaningless collection of sounds and clichés, and everything which the characters say is void and are words that are pronounced only for speaking and not for delivering meaning (Bloom 45).

What anyone can notice in the language of Theatre of the Absurd is repetition. This repetition is an important characteristic of absurd plays. The reason behind using repetition is to emphasize the absurdity of the play and to have a profound impact on the viewer. The intention behind repetition is to drive the spectacles to notice the detachment of the characters and their psychological struggle to communicate. When a character asks another character a question, there is no clear answer or there is no answer at all. The other character responds in a irrelevant manner, then the first character keeps repeating the question over and over again only to be faced by the same awkward answer. This intentional, monotonous repetition makes The Theatre of the Absurd unique in his language style, and opposes the traditional dialogues between the characters, and most importantly highlights how language becomes meaningless through repetition. Repetition is seen throughout the play, an example of that is the statement “nothing to be done” (Beckett 2-5-7-28) said by Vladimir. Another example is whenever Estragon wants to leave Vladimir, Vladimir reminds him that they have to wait for Godot, and Estragon responds by saying "Ah!" (Beckett 11-73-89-110). In addition, the idea of committing suicide is repeated many times in the play; Vladimir and Estragon always want to commit suicide by saying “hang ourselves” (18-162-164).

1.4.2. Plot in the Theatre of the Absurd

In the traditional theatre, the plot is simple and clear, there are no complications or confusion. It starts with an introduction of the characters, and then actions develop in an organized sequence until they reache the peak then a falling action, and a conclusion.
On the contrary, the plot in the Theatre of the Absurd is so complicated, at the beginning there is no introduction of the characters or the play, there is any gradual development in the events, no raising action and no falling action. Theater of the Absurd is almost without plot.

Theater of the Absurd is also known as the Black Humor. Black humor is also referred to as tragicomedy. Once you hear the word tragicomedy, it gets to your mind that there is going to be a mixture between tragedy and comedy and that’s what the theater of the absurd perfectly demonstrate. In Waiting for Godot the characters despite being in a tragic situation of despair and alienation, they are humorously and funny in their attitudes and their dialogues.

Absurd dramatists created this kind of a mixture plot for the sake of creating more absurdity in the play and confusion in the viewer’s mind. When watching a traditional play, the spectacle is aware of what is happening in the play and they follow the logical sequence of events, this creates an overview of the play in their mind and they can predict what might happen to the hero or the character in the end. Whereas in the absurd play the viewer is so confused and puzzled. He cannot link between the events because there is no link at all, he cannot make any predictions on how the play might end, it makes him ask dozens of questions but finds no answer, and most important, it drives his mind to sink in absurdity and questions within himself the reason behind his existence.

In the traditional theatre acts are not repeated, the flow of action and events takes us to the end of the play. In the theatre of the absurd and because it rebelled against everything which is conventional the structure of the play is circular, which means that the play has no end and no conclusion. In the contrary, In Waiting for Godot for example the first act is the same as the second nothing changes, even the dialogue is the same, and the only change that we see is in the characters Pozzo and Lucky in terms of their appearance and personality. We can add as many acts as we want and still the play does not have a resolution.
1.4.3. Character in the Theatre of the Absurd

In the traditional theatre characters are given their roles in the play, and they perform them roles in an organized way, each with his turn to speak and each with his characteristics. The characters in the traditional theatre are fully developed both physically and mentally. In the Theatre of the Absurd characters leave in a complete mess, there is no connection between them, they interrupt each other all the time, they have no idea what they are saying and what they are doing.

Theatre of the Absurd is a reflection on life after the Second World War, and the characters that we see in the plays are just like the people outside. Characters are alienated, pessimistic and hopeless. They fear everything, there is no trust between them, even the atmosphere with its gloominess affect them. The characters suffer from physical illnesses as well as mental disorders. An example of that is Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot; Vladimir suffer from his prostate, and Estragon suffer from Alzheimer he forgets everything easily.

In the traditional theatre, the audience can easily distinguish between the characters and analyze each character’s personality and give their impression about each one of them. This is not possible in the New Theatre. The audience cannot judge the characters. Character’s personality and mentality are in a permanent change, no one can determine whether the character is crazy or healthy, whether he is talking to himself or to other characters. An example of that is Vladimir in Waiting for Godot, he seems intelligent and always thinking about his life, but in the same time he talks to himself and murmurs all the time.

1.5. Major themes of the Theatre of the Absurd
The Theatre of the Absurd deals with many themes which are generally related to the war and its aftermath, among these themes there is:

- The loss of identity and self recognition: an example of that is the all the characters in Waiting for Godot, they lost themselves in the existential crisis

- The loss of trust and connection between the characters: characters are often portrayed like they are acting alone in the scene.

- The alienation and the isolation of the characters: characters are secluded in their own private words, introverted on themselves.

- Total absurdity of the human being: characters are absurd in everything they do and say, absurd dramatists mock the economic and social institutions by employing absurdity in everything.

- The feeling of fear and uncertainty which takes over the characters: characters in the new theatre are often afraid of everything, they are not certain what might happen to them the next moment, so they chose to isolate themselves.

- Ultimate futility in all actions and all speeches: characters don’t have any goal in their lives; they don’t do anything meaningful or say anything meaningful.

- The hidden dark side of characters: this theme is famous in Ionesco’s plays especially The Lesson, where The Professor who is supposed to be a model turns into a killer.

- No indication of time or space: absurd plays are timeless and have no particular space which creates more confusion in the reader.
- The use of comedy and tragedy in the same time: tragedy and comedy are inseparable; you can laugh and grieve in the same time. This tragicomedy makes the spectacle rethink who is he and why he exists.

These themes are summarised from Martin Esslin’s book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (39-443-849)

Absurd dramatists used many techniques and figures of speech in order to emphasize the absurdity in the play. Rhetorical devices or figures of speech were used in every work of the Theatre of the Absurd. These devices include paradox, satire, sarcasm and most importantly irony.

2. Irony

Although it is a very complex term to define, irony can be defined as follows: it is saying something which is contrary to what is meant. This definition is credited to the to the first century roman orator Quintilian. Quintilian based his definition by looking at the ancient philosophy of Aristotle. This broad definition of the term can be applied on the simple figures of speech and even historical epochs. Irony is seen more in post modernism because of the huge crisis that happened at this period of time (Quintilian 25). The loss of identity and the leap of faith that is seen is a fertile ground for irony.(Colebrook 45)

According to *The dictionary of literary and thematic terms*, Irony can be seen from different perspectives and among its common uses in literary study are 1) as a rhetorical and literary device, 2) as a mode of literature, 3) as a way of perceiving life itself.

1. Irony refers to the technique of implying something very different from what one is ostensibly saying. The intention of an ironic statement can range from the comically light: “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a young man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (Austen 1) to the ominously dark: “Someone must have been telling lies
about Joseph K. for without having done anything wrong, he was arrested one fine morning” (Kafka 1).

2. **Socratic irony** is a term used to describe the technique used by Socrates of fabling ignorance by proposing innocent questions which would lastly snare his contenders in a debate. Socrates uses an implicit irony of dissembling and claiming to be soothing one is not. This type of irony is also present in classical comedy and tragedy. An example of irony in classical tragedy is in Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex, in which the killer Oedipus sets out to reveal turns out to be himself.

3. In the 18th and 19th centuries, irony moved from being a rhetorical and literary device to broad-ranging idea. By the end of the romantic period irony became a grand concept and even synonyms to Romanticism; it is sometimes called Romantic or cosmic irony. It is taken from the belief that life is originally a blend of contradictions and the most adequate answer to its double-edged nature is to undertake the role of an independent, knowing observer. (Quinn 222-223)

According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary terms* “irony” means:

> A subtly humorous perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its* CONTEXT so as to give it a very different significance. In various forms, irony appears in many kinds of literature, from the *TRAGEDY of Sophocles to the novels of Jane Austen and Henry James, but is especially important in * SATIRE, as in Voltaire and Swift. (Baldick 141)

**2.1. Irony in drama and theatre**

Since the beginning of the romantic period, people started to see an exceptional
relation between irony and the theatre. The performance of irony in stage is unique and it
dates back to ancient times. The origins of the word irony go back to the antiquity particularly
in the Greek comedy. EIRON who is a famous character developed by the Greek philosopher
Aristotle in his famous work *Nicomachean Ethics*, represents the roots of irony in drama.
Hence both of irony’s history and theatre’s history are interconnected with each other. In
modern times there have been claims that even the nature of both irony and theatre are closely
attached and suits each other. (Aristotle 304 BC)

Many literary researchers observed the firm bound between irony and drama or the
theatre in particular. For example professor D.C.Muecke announced that ‘irony achieves its
most striking effects in the theatre’ (Muecke 45).In his book G.G.Sedgewick speaks about
irony and drama, he suggested that ‘the very theatre itself…is a sort o ironic convention’
(Sedgewick 37).Fundamentally it is out of the question to separate irony from theatre
according to modern criticism. Kenneth Burke’s *Grammar of Motives* has supposed that
‘drama and irony have a shared essence’ (517) which means the consisting units of both irony
and theatre are based on a common logic of reversal. (517)

The most known and recognized type of irony is dramatic irony, and a shared view
about irony and drama is that the connection between the audience, actor and character which
is deeply rooted to the spectacle of stage acting both call for and foster dramatic ironies. One
must distinguish between dramatic irony and irony in drama as it is confirmed by the writer of
the text book *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, Manfres Pfister ‘It would be wrong to
equate dramatic irony with irony in drama since the latter encompasses an extremely broad
spectrum of ironic structures’ (6-55). Pfister points out that it would be erroneous to claim
that the peculiar connection between irony and theatre ends at the dramatic irony; it is far
wider than that. (6-55)
Edwin Wilson assures the undeniable relationship of irony and drama as he wrote in his introductory textbook *The Theatre Experience* “…irony, a verbal expression whose intended implication is the opposite of its literal sense. Irony is a device particularly suited to theatre and found in virtually all drama”. (Wilson 364)

Theatre is the fertile setting for ironies to be performed and delivered, and there is something about irony which makes it exceptionally suitable for theatre. (Wilson 200)

The source of this strong connection between irony and theatre might be one or many. Numerous components of the theatrical prospect appear to contribute diversely to totally different forms of ironic effects. there is the feeling made by the reality that personas we observe being executed on the stage in some feeling do not ‘realize’ that they are ‘only’ being performed, which offers each staged performance a particular element of dramatic irony; spectators constantly recognize an important thing about those characters’ status that the characters do not know about themselves.(Muecke 41-42)

According to the Modern Language Notes published by the John Hopkins university press, ‘ dramatic irony’ has three stages, instillation, exploitation and resolution.

-Installation, the act of informing the spectators of something about the characters which the characters themselves do not know. Having this information about the characters does not mean that the plot of the play is exposed or given away. On the contrary it gives the audience an insight of the play and it encourages them to be mere involved and not get bored.

-Exploitation, this stage of irony adds emphasis and structure to the story. The audience at this stage grows a kind of curiosity and excitement in his mind. As well as imagination and expectation of what might happen to the characters.

-Resolution, it is here when dramatic irony attains its peak. Characters meet their fate and finally recognize what was going on. The audience has already made expectation of the story, so the last stage is strongly connected to the second one. (Modern Language Notes 397-399)
An example of the dramatic irony in the theatre of the absurd is in *Waiting for Godot*. In the second act every character in the play loses memory and cannot remember what happened in the previous except Vladimir. And because of that Vladimir starts to think that he is crazy, because he is the only one that knows what happened the day before, he thinks he is hallucinating, the audience on the other side know that Vladimir is not crazy, but the rest of the characters are.

2.2. The relation between absurdism and irony

In absurd plays language does not play its natural role which is creating communication channels between characters, thus absurdists use irony as a way of expression. In the Theatre of the Absurd irony is considered as the dominating rhetoric device, and absurd dramatists used it for the sake of revealing the true nature of the human being and to mock the systems and established institutions.

In the absurd play “*End Game*” written by Samuel Beckett, the hero of the play is called “Ham”, and this is pretty ironic, there is also a character whose name is” Null” which means nothing or has no value. Another example is the character “Lucky” in *Waiting for Godot*, his name does not have anything to do with his life, he is called Lucky and he lives a miserable life.

These names of characters show a great deal of contradiction, as it also shows the big gap between the human’s ambitions and his miserable life that he cannot change.

The absurd dramatist Ionesco wrote a play which is called” *Macbett*”, this play is a mockery of Shakespeare’s ”*Macbeth*”, Ionesco ironically changed the letters only to show his refusal and opposition of the traditional theatre. Irony is explicitly used in the works of absurdists most importantly Beckett, Ionesco and Adamaov.
Conclusion

Absurdism is a powerful state of disorder that menaced mankind after WWII. Absurdism was heavily influenced by the existential philosophy of Sartre. Albert was one of the novelists who talked explicitly about absurdism in his essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” and his novels. In the Theatre of the Absurd the most dominating theme is absurdity in addition to irony. They both operate extensively and limitlessly in the absurd plays. Irony is best suited for the theatre. Absurd dramatists used irony to emphasize the absurd in their plays. In absurd plays everything is strange, the plot, the characters, and the language.
Chapter 2: Patterns of Absurdity

Introduction to chapter two

1. Patterns of absurdity in *Waiting for Godot* (1952)

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2. Patterns of Absurdity in Eugene Ionesco’s *The Lesson* (1951)

2.1. Eugene Ionesco and the new theatre

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Conclusion
Introduction

Martin Esslin coined the term “Theatre of the Absurd” because of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. This play has set the overall characteristics of this type of theatre; it also introduced us to the absurd world and all its implications. This masterpiece is not considered a classic for nothing; to every other absurd writer it is considered a guide and a reference. Beckett had just perfected the concept of absurdism in his play. Not only Beckett was famous because of his drama, many other writers followed his steps and gained fame, one of them is Eugene Ionesco. Although he is an absurdist, Ionesco’s style of writing differs from Beckett’s and that’s the brilliant thing about the Absurd Theatre. Absurd writers are not joined under one canon, each one with his unique style. Ionesco entered the Theater of the Absurd with great imagination and literary style. In his play *The Lesson*, he applied the concept of absurdism in every line of the play.

In this chapter I will attempt to analyze both plays in terms of using absurdism. I will talk about absurdity in every component of both plays. I will start by giving brief biographies of both writers, then short summaries of the two plays. After that I will move to the analyses. In the first play I will cover patterns of absurdity in the title, the setting, the structure, the characters, the action and dialogue. In the second play after giving a short biography and a short summary of the play, I will start analyzing aspects of absurdity in the setting, the characters and the dialogue.
1. Patterns of absurdity in *Waiting for Godot*

1.1. Samuel Beckett and Absurdity

Samuel Beckett is one of the most famous modern playwrights. Beckett at first was a teacher, soon after he turned his attention to writing. He wrote many critical works, poems and two novels (Murphy and Watt) during the 1930s and 1940s his works were all written in English. He shifted from writing in English to writing in French in the late 1940s. One of the basic reasons of this shift is his refusal of Ireland as his home country. He could not leave with the strict laws of the different aspects of life, and especially the prohibition of publication of many works of literature by the Catholic Church. Furthermore the political oppression in Ireland created an anti intellectual movement. After becoming famous he refused to give permission to some of his plays to be performed in Ireland.

Many critics of Beckett’s works find it very difficult to classify his writings due to the fact that the majority of his dramas were written in French and presented in Paris. Critics cannot decide whether to consider him an Irish writer or a French one, also his famous characters Vladimir and Estragon in their characteristics seem to be Irish rather than French. Most importantly, it has to be an unsettled question because he translated his own works from French to English and vice versa, thus his works retain their originality even when it is translated, they are not affected by another translator’s tampering. Ultimately his plays are considered among the greatest of world literature. (Roberts 5)

After the first performance of his master play *Waiting for Godot* at the “Théâtre de Babylone” in Paris in 1953, the intellectual world was astonished by the appearance of another kind of drama which is so strange and intriguing in the same time. The term ‘theatre of the absurd’ was coined upon this play, and the whole works that were originated from this type of theatre are credited to the name of Samuel Beckett. He is a seen as a grand master or a father of this specific literary genre because of his great contributions. While other dramatist
like Ionesco, Pinter, made a name to themselves in this theatre, and contributed to it, Beckett remains its only eminent figure. (Robberts 5)

In order to fully grasp what these plays mean, one has to neglect the coherence and development of situations, one must neglect characterizations which are originated in the common reason and reaction, and one must overlook the realistic, genuine, or clear relationship to the drama as a whole. One must dismiss the employment of language as a device of reasonable communication; one has to overlook the cause-effect linkage that is found in traditional drama. Through the use of ambiguous, puzzling techniques and devices, these dramatists progressively accustomed spectators to a brand new relationship between presentation and theme. In these kind of bizarre and fantastic plays, the outer world is often portrayed as threatening, scattered and uncharted. The events and the surroundings make us ambiguously disturbed. The world looks scary and disconnected, but at the same time, it looks breathtaking.

Each absurd dramatist has his own writing style that sets him apart from the other absurd dramatists. Although absurdists differ in their style of writing, they share the theme of absurdity in their plays. In his book Esslin says that these dramatists share a “sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition.” (23)

1.2. The summary of Waiting for Godot

Waiting for Godot is an absurd play written by Samuel Beckett, it is a tragicomedy of two acts. Its main characters are, Vladimir (DiDi) and Estragon (GoGo), they wait endlessly for the coming of someone with the name Godot. The two acts are performed in the same set, on a road with one tree with no leaves in the first act and in the second five leaves are produced. This might be interpreted as if there are seasons passing by, although Beckett said that his play is timeless. The tree may also give us an impression that there is a kind of productivity, fertility and maybe hope in the play. Throughout the play Estragon and Vladimir
remain in one position. The attention is concentrated on the waiting of this man; they pass the whole time commenting on their miserable condition, and their possibilities of being rescued. They also experience briefly the idea of committing suicide; ironically there are no objects on the stage to be used.

The boredom of both characters is shortly interrupted by the appearance of two minor characters, Pozzo who is a landlord and Lucky who is the crazy yet wise slave of Pozzo. When Pozzo and Lucky depart, a young man comes and says that Godot is not coming today, and he will certainly arrive tomorrow. In the second act the actions are duplicated but set on the next day. The only exception is that Pozzo now appear blind and powerless, saying that he does not recall their previous gathering, in addition lucky appears to be mute. The young man comes back again with the same words of Pozzo that he never saw Vladimir and Estragon before, and that Godot is not coming today and he will be arriving tomorrow.

In the end of the play Vladimir and Estragon, after once again discussing the idea of suicide, they decide to leave; ironically they cannot go to any place because they are stuck forever in the play they are performing.

1.3. Absurdity in the title

The original title of Becket’s play in French is “En attendant Godot”. the French phrase has the literal meaning of Waiting for Godot, but far more than the English delivers the meaning” while Waiting for Godot”, with more concentration on what occurs while waiting than on Godo’s eventual appearance (or failure to appear). (Esslin 67)

While many English literary critics have noticed the phonic relationship between “Godot” and “God”, in the French text, this parallel doesn’t really apply, as the French world for god is “Dieu”, which does not carry any clear relation to “Godot”. But if we compare the characteristics of “Godot” to the characteristics of “God” there is a big likeness between the two. (Esslin 67)
As we all know waiting is the stage that precedes any action, and we always wait for something to happen. By employing the word “waiting” in his play, Beckett declares that the play separates itself from the tradition of drama as action, and rather gives us something totally different, a clear sight into the characters in a state of inactivity.

If we make a comparison between the title waiting for Godot with and absurdity, then it becomes clear that the title of the play shows the absurdity of the text. In other words, Waiting for Godot commutates absurdity in the sense that it too is full of dilemmas and crisis as human existence is. As the title of the play is “waiting for Godot”, but still no one knows who Godot is. More often the waiting is done for someone who we relate purpose and meaning with, but in this play both purpose and meaning are not associated, and thus creates the effect of meaninglessness in the title. This meaninglessness does not only make things unclear and ambiguous but also absurd.

The following extract shows characters’ determination to keep waiting for Godot:

Vladimir: *He didn’t say for sure he’d come.*

Estragon: *And if he doesn’t come?*

Vladimir: *We’ll come back tomorrow.*

Estragon: *And then the day after tomorrow.*

Vladimir: *Possibly.*

Estragon: *And so on.*

Vladimir: *The point is—*

Estragon: *Until he comes.* (Beckett 12-13). Italics in the original.

1.4. Absurdity in setting

The setting of the play is as odd and strange as the play itself. Once the curtain rises, a deserted and alien landscape is exposed. It resembles an exotic place in outer space with its gruesome and hunting sense of despondency. The main setting is a county road or a lonely
road in an abandoned city with an unanimous name, with one single tree. Estragon mentions that he slept the last night in a ditch, so there is a ditch on the other side although it doesn’t appear throughout the play. The tone of the play is determined by the isolation and lowliness of the setting. When someone says a road, the first things that gets to the mind is a journey, trip or a purpose in life to reach, but in the play there are two deserted, purposeless figures with no journey to take or a purpose to reach. The two characters wear some old rags and clothes which predetermines a foreboding comment before the play starts.

Beckett’s writes at the beginning of his play a statement that describes the play in two words ”A country road. A tree” (Beckett 2). The setting has no precise name of the country or the time, it could be anywhere at any country of the world and at any time. There is no visible horizon, no traces of any civilization. The only change happens between Act I and Act II, when the barren tree in the first act produces few leaves in the second.

Uncertainty is the dominating theme in the play, and the spectators experience it in the same way Vladimir and Estragon do. According to Beckett, the presence of the rock and the tree is somehow crucial. He says the setting is complete with, animal (Chicken), vegetable (Carrots) and thing (Rock). (Bennett 18). This adds a high sense of creativity to the play. Having all the natural elements of nature present, one can say that the setting is perfect; ironically the world is still empty.

The play is performed within two days, one of which is probably Saturday. One can notice that there is only one reference to the passing of time and that is in the end of Act II when the sun sets and the moon rises. The characters mention yesterday and the previous day as a verbal reference to time passing. In the theatre of the absurd abnormality becomes normality as Ionesco said “I personally would like to bring a tortoise onto the stage, turn it into a racehorse, then into a hat, a song, a dragon and a fountain of water. One can dare anything in the theatre and it is the place where one dares the least.” (Ionesco preface)
1.5. Absurdity in structure

*Waiting for Godot* is divided into two acts. The first act starts with the appearance of Vladimir and Estragon, then the appearance of Pozzo and Lucky. After Pozzo and Lucky leave the scene, the Messenger Boy comes then leaves. The first act ends as it starts with the two main characters Vladimir and Estragon. The second act is the same as the first one; there are only small changes like the leaves of the tree and the appearance and personality of Pozzo (blind) and Lucky (deaf).

This division shows how both acts are identical and how Beckett wants us to see and make judgment on the nature of the play it. The play has a circular structure all the dialogue and actions are repeated, it has an open end where you can add a third and even a fourth chapter and it will not end. Because of its novelty and because it is a new type of drama, *Waiting for Godot* created confusion in both readers and critics.

In contrast to the absurd play, the traditional play starts with an introduction of the characters and then the exposition; then, the statement of the conflict or the rising action in relation to its setting and characters. In *Waiting for Godot* we are never told where the play takes place. Moreover, characters develop gradually in the traditional play, and then we see the playwright’s world view, after that the play leads to a climax, and finally there is a conclusion. This type of structure is called linear structure and it’s the basic structure for drama. In *Waiting for Godot*, and Theatre of the Absurd in general there is no gradual development in the course of events.

1.6. Absurdity in characters

In any comedy duo, we find two characters, commonly known as the “straight man”
(often portrayed as reasonable and serious) and the “fall guy” (often portrayed as silly, funny, and less intelligent) (Higson 34). In *Waiting for Godot* Vladimir is the equivalent of the straight man. He is also the knowledgeable intellectual who is concerned with a variety of ideas. Vladimir is the one who recalls important aspects of their past, and makes the decisions. He is the one who always tells Estragon that they have to wait for Godot. Although it is not certain, all signs and gestures provoke that Vladimir has more information about Godot than does Estragon, who tells us that he has never even seen Godot and thus has no idea what Godot looks like.

When going through a discussion, Vladimir is the one, who constantly sees the philosophical and religious values, and he explains their actions in religious terms. For example, he is concerned about the religious implications in such stories as the two thieves (two tramps) who were crucified on either side of Jesus. He is worried about the fate of the tramp who wasn’t redeemed and is worried that “only one of the four evangelists” speaks of a tramp being rescued.

Vladimir relates some of their gestures and actions to the public apprehensions of mankind. In Act II, when Pozzo and Lucky break down and scream for help, Vladimir explains their screams for assistance as his and Estragon’s opportunity to be in a perfect situation for helping humanity. After all, Vladimir declares, “It is not every day that we are needed . . . but at this place, at this moment in time,”(Beckett 133) they are needed and should answer to the screams for help. Similarly, it is Vladimir who interrogates the other three characters, while Estragon remains, for most of the time, the mute listener. Basically, Vladimir must continuously remind Estragon of their fate, that is, they must wait for Godot.

The second main character in the play is Estragon. Estragon’s only concern is
surviving the day, he always asks Vladimir for food to eat and complains about it. At the beginning of the play he struggles with the taking of his boots in a funny way, his legs are in great pain and ask Vladimir as he always does to help him take them off.

Estragon’s personality is the more plain and simple. He does not do any thinking or questioning about his environment as he now that it will only give him headache. Once asked about the two thieves, he shows complete ignorance. He knows that he was beaten in a ditch last night, but he does not remember who hit him.

When Pozzo and Lucky appear in the play, Vladimir seems interested in knowing them and starts asking question. On the contrary Estragon does not pay them much attention. He spends most of his time either concerning about everything or sleeping. Estragon is the kind of guy who tries to keep himself out of people’s concerns, and does not give any advice to anyone. He is much dependent of Vladimir than himself, Vladimir is his guide and he always want to leave, but he knows if he leaves he won’t survive the day without Vladimir.

After Vladimir hears the sound of a whip, Lucky appears in the play and after him his master Pozzo. Pozzo tied himself to his slave because he feared the idea of Lucky running away and leave him alone. In the first act Pozzo is the most powerful character in the play. He displays his power on others and especially on his slave Lucky. He shows his dictatorship and authoritarian attitude whenever he speaks. Pozzo seems to know everything and does not need any guidance, he tells Vladimir that he knows where he is heading and how to get there.

Pozzo considers Lucky less than an animal he calls him with discriminatory names all the time. He thinks he is the only perfect human left in the world, and all other people are inferior to him. He possesses a great deal of narcissism, and self recognition. When he first meet Estragon and Vladimir his voice tone gives the impression that he is speaking to one of
his slaves, his sense of superiority and power has blinded him, he eats the chicken in a strange way and ruthlessly throws them to his slave Lucky.

In the second act Pozzo changes in his personality and appearance. He is now blind and helpless. All his power and greatness are lost. He shows no authority or dictatorship, even the sound of the whip disappears. Pozzo is stricken by life so bad that he can’t get up on his feet and moves without the help of his slave Lucky. Pozzo now does not call Lucky with any names, actually he depends on him, it’s like he turned him from a slave to a friend. He even starts to wonder about the meaning of life and why he should suffer, and that life is full of misery and pain. Pozzo is the powerful, firm guy who is been dragged by the wonders of life, and suddenly everything turns against him his strength position is changed to a weakness position. This extract shows the sufferance of Pozzo:

(suddenly furious.) Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (Calmer.) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (He jerks the rope) On! (Beckett 154-155) Italics in the original.

Lucky is the most controversial character in Waiting for Godot, no one can understand what he is saying or doing. In the first act Lucky shows complete
submission to his master Pozzo. Everything he does is for the sake of pleasing his master, and he even embraced the life of the slave and couldn’t do anything else if he is ever freed.

His name Lucky does not reflect anything in his life. Nothing is lucky when you are a slave, but for Lucky that is how life should be, and he has absolutely no problem for being a slave. All his goals is to obey and do what his dictator master asks him to.

In the first act, Lucky shows some violence to Estragon when he comes close to him. His actions seem unexpected. When he is asked to dance, he strangely moves his body in a funny way. In the second act Lucky is not portrayed as a slave anymore, he looks more like an assistant of Pozzo and he is completely mute, and even the incoherent words that he pronounced them in the first act disappear. Lucky resembles man after the Second World War, his life is only getting worse and tragic, there are no improvements and there is no hope.

1.7. Absurdity in the language and action

As I have mentioned in the first chapter language in the Theatre of the Absurd losses its significance it turns into meaningless sounds. Waiting for Godot is full with meaningless language and expressions in the beginning of the play:

VLADIMIR: When I think of it . . . all these years . . . but for me . . .

where

would you be . . . (Decisively.) You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.

ESTRAGON: And what of it?

VLADIMIR: (gloomily). It's too much for one man. (Pause.

Cheerfully.) On the other hand what's the good of losing heart now, that's what I say. We should have thought of it a million years ago, in
the nineties.

ESTRAGON: Ah stop blathering and help me off with this bloody thing.

VLADIMIR: Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first.

We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up. (Estragon tears at his boot.) What are you doing? (Beckett 4). Italics in the original.

In this section, Estragon is struggling with his boots and asks Vladimir for help, in the meanwhile Vladimir is thinking about life and saying illogical stuff. This proves that the connection between people is lost and every sign of communication is evaporated. Another example which illustrates the absurdity of the dialogue is when Vladimir starts asking about religious matter and Estragon responds in silly way showing no interest at all:

VLADIMIR: Did you ever read the Bible?

ESTRAGON: The Bible . . . (He reflects.) I must have taken a look at it.

VLADIMIR: Do you remember the Gospels?

ESTRAGON: I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.

VLADIMIR: You should have been a poet.

ESTRAGON: I was. (Gesture towards his rags.) Isn't that obvious?

Silence.

VLADIMIR: Where was I . . . How's your foot?

ESTRAGON: Swelling visibly.
VLADIMIR: Ah yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story?

ESTRAGON: No.

VLADIMIR: Shall I tell it to you?

ESTRAGON: No. (Beckett 8). Italics in the original.

Estragon and Vladimir are mixing words and topics together; they talk about the Bible, then the boots, then the gospels. In addition, when Lucky is given the order to give a speech, he speaks in incoherent absurd language which has no meaning:

LUCKY: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua ....... alas alas abandoned unfinished the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull alas the stones Cunard (mêlée, final vociferations) tennis . . . the stones . . . so calm . . . Cunard . . . unfinished . . . (Beckett 65-66). Italics in the original.

Lucky is the most complicated and ambiguous character in the play, everything he says is absurd and nonsense, maybe this is his own language and he is the only one who can understand himself. And again Lucky proves that language lost its significance in the play.

The actions of the characters are not less absurd than their language. Vladimir moves in a funny way with feet wide apart, and takes of his hat and stares at it many times in the play:

VLADIMIR: (advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart)

(Beckett 2). Italics in the original.

VLADIMIR: Sometimes I feel it coming all the same. Then I go all queer. (He takes off his hat, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes
it, puts it on again.) How shall I say? Relieved and at the same time . . .
(he searches for the word) . . . appalled. (With emphasis.)

AP-PALLED. (He takes off his hat again, peers inside it.) Funny. (He
knocks on the crown as though to dislodge a foreign body, peers into it
again, puts it on again.) (Beckett 5). Italics in the original.

No one knows why Vladimir takes off his hat many times, maybe his hair is itchy and maybe
there is something in the hat that he does not want to show.

When asked to dance, “Lucky” starts to dance in a weird way that is of
complete absurdity:

*Lucky puts down bag and basket, advances towards front,
turns to Pozzo. Lucky dances. He stops.*

ESTRAGON: Is that all?

POZZO: Encore!

*Lucky executes the same movements, stops.* (Beckett 59). Italics in the
original.

After the dance Pozoo tells Vladimir and Estragon that he calls this dance the net:

POZZO: *He used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig,
the fandango and even the hornpipe. He capered. For joy. Now
that's the best he can do. Do you know what he calls it?*

ESTRAGON: *The Scapegoat's Agony.*

VLADIMIR: *The Hard Stool.*

POZZO: *The Net. He thinks he's entangled in a net.* (Beckett 60). Italics
in the original.

**2-patterns of absurdity in The Lesson**

**2.1-Eugene Ionesco and the New Theatre**
Ionesco was born on November 26, 1909, in Slatina, Romania, to a Romanian father and a mother of French and Greek-Romanian heritage. Eugene’s father was of the Orthodox religion. Ionesco's grandmother was Greek-Orthodox but she converted to the religion of her husband, Protestantism, and Eugene’s mother was raised a Protestant. Eugene himself was baptized into the Romanian Orthodox religion. Many sources cite his birth date as 1912. He spent most of his childhood in France, but returned to Romania with his father in 1925 after his parents divorced. There he went to Saint Sava National College, after which he studied French Literature at the University of Bucharest from 1928 to 1933 and qualified as a teacher of French. While there he met Emil Cioran and Mircea Eliade, the three becoming lifelong friends. (Bennett 215)

In 1936 Ionesco married Rodica Burileanu. Together they had one daughter for whom he wrote a number of children's stories. He and his family returned to France in 1938 for him to complete his doctoral thesis. Caught by the lunch of World War II in 1939, he stayed there, living in Marseille during the war before moving with his family to Paris after its liberation in 1944. Eugene Ionesco died at age 84 on March 29, 1994, and is buried in Paris. Although Ionesco wrote almost entirely in French, he is one of Romania’s most celebrated artists. Ionesco’s The Chairs is his most tragicomic play.

Once his career moves into the 1960s and 1970s, most notably with The Killers (1959), Exit the King (1963), and Macbett (1972), unlike with Beckett plays where the language gets more and more experimental, sometimes barely even resembling language and/or theatre, Ionesco's language is more natural (than in the 1950s), and he observes more of an Aristotelian arc\(^1\) (than in the 1950s) in his later plays, showing how little he was

\(^1\) Aristotelian arc is the traditional dramatic structure that was made by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. It starts with an exposition, then a rising action, then a climax, then a falling action, then a denouncement.
beholden to any formula or ideal that organically first grew among absurd writers in the 1950s. (Bennett 152)

First performed in 1951, *The Lesson* is a one act play with three characters. There is the Professor, who is calm and becomes intimidating as the play progresses. There is the Pupil, a young girl who is studying to take her doctorate exams, and there is the Maid.

An eighteen year old girl arrives at the apartment of the Professor. She is welcomed in by the Maid. When she meets the Professor he seems gentle and warm-hearted. But as the lesson proceeds he loses his temper while the cheerful girl becomes gloomy. The dialogue is comical and very absurd.

The Maid comes in the stage at varying times. She tries to calm the Professor when he becomes anxious. But, after she leaves he finds a knife to demonstrate to the girl how to say the word ‘knife’ (Ionesco 211) and then stabs her with it. The Maid enters to help him dispose of the body and we learn this is the fortieth girl he has killed. Just as the body is taken care off the doorbell rings again and the Maid opens the door for another student.

### 2.2. Absurdity in setting

*The Lesson* opens in the office of the Professor. The office also is a dining room. On the left of the stage there is a door that leads upstairs to the rest of the apartment. The door on the right is to the hallway of the building. There is a window that leads outside and has small plants on the outer window step. From this window you can view the red roofs of small buildings, and also a gray-blue sky. In the center of the stage there is a table with three chairs. There is also a chair near each window. The walls are covered with a wallpaper of light color and there are a few book shelves. The chairs and the tables are not organized, and even the books are not placed in the shelves.

At first the stage is empty, and then we hear a doorbell and the maid coming to answer the door. She slams the door of the apartment behind her while she drives her hands
with her apron. Before she can reach the door it rings again. She opens the door to a cheerful young woman. The Young Pupil is about eighteen years old. She is dressed in a student uniform of a gray smock with white collar.

2.3. Absurdity in characters

The professor is man between fifty and sixty years old, he teaches individual pupils for their “total doctorate” exams. During a session with a young female student, he is gentle at first then he becomes more intense and dominative as the lesson progresses. Eventually, he becomes illogically, and absurdly, furious; refusing any interruptions of his course on philology, the old man gets increasingly agitated and excited. First, he attacks the student using language as a tool of control, deceit, power, and, in the end, violent brutality. Finally, he loses all patience and sinks into a state of despair and denial. He helps the maid in getting rid of the student’s corpse. The Professor is supposed to be a model, but he turned to be a serial killer. Even his course is absurd he brings irrelevant topics to the lesson and he screams in a scary way. His attitude changes from one second to another, his mind is absurdly blind.

The pupil is an eighteen-year-old young woman wearing a gray student’s coat with a small white necklace and carrying a book bag. As a new student of the professor, the young lady is hoping to pass a “total doctorate” (Ionesco 185) exam. As the lesson advances, she shows an absurd lack of basic knowledge, such as the capital of France and the seasons of the year; she cannot add and multiply. Faced with what seems to be a merciless personal attack, this pupil starts to have a toothache that eventually spreads over her whole body. In the middle of the lesson, she unexpectedly shows enough courage and enthusiasm to challenge the professor but without success. And finally after linguistically violated by the Professor, she is remorselessly killed. This example shown her struggle to tell the capital city of France:

PROFESSOR : Like ... er ... Bordeaux, you know, not exactly.

But if you will allow me, could you perhaps tell me ... Paris,
now, is the chief town of ... er ...?

[The PUPIL searches for a moment, then, pleased to know the answer]

PUPIL : Paris is the chief town of ... France?

PROFESSOR : But yes, of course, yes! Bravo! That's fine!

That's excellent! I congratulate you. You have the geography of your country at your finger-tips. Your chief towns.

PUPIL : Oh, I don't know them all yet, Sir. It's not so easy as that, it's quite difficult to learn them.(Ionesco 183)

Another example which shows that she does not know the seasons:

PUPIL : Snow falls in the winter. Winter is one of the four seasons. The other three are ... er ... sp ...

PROFESSOR : Yes, yes?

PUPIL : Spring ... and then summer ... and ... er ...

PROFESSOR : It begins like automobile, Mademoiselle.

PUPIL : Ah, yes! Autumn. ...

PROFESSOR : That's quite right, Mademoiselle. A very good answer. Excellent indeed. I am positive you will prove a very good pupil. You will make good progress. You are intelligent, you seem well-informed, good memory.

PUPIL : I really do know my seasons, don't I, Sir?

PROFESSOR : You do indeed, Mademoiselle ... or should I say almost. But it will come in time. And anyway, it's really not at all bad now. You'll come to know them all one day, all your seasons, with your eyes shut. Like me.
PUPIL: It's very difficult. (Ionesco 184)

This last example shows that she does not know how to multiply:

PROFESSOR: Seven and one?

PUPIL: Eight.

PROFESSOR: Seven and one?

PUPIL: Still eight.

PROFESSOR: Very good answer. Seven and one?

PUPIL: Eight again.

PROFESSOR: Excellent. Perfect. Seven and one?

PUPIL: Eight for the fourth time. And sometimes nine. (Ionesco 188)

In the three examples The Pupil shows a great deal of hesitation and confusion when answering basic question that a primary school pupil can answer!

Marie is The Professor’s maid The Maid. She is a powerful lady between forty and fifty years old. She is concerned about the professor’s health. She is a joyful character who greets new students and assures them that the professor is waiting for them. She tries to watch out for the professor’s outrage during courses and keeps checking on and reminds him to minimize the killings!

After killing the innocent pupil Marie enters the scene and Marie “takes out an armband with an insignia, perhaps the Nazi swastika.” (Ionesco 216) She tells the Professor that if he is afraid, “wear this, then you won’t have anything more to be afraid of” (Ionesco 216).

2.4. Absurdity in dialogue

Ionesco uses a language that is strange and bizarre. His language looks like Beckett’s. And just like Beckett he applies repetition, an example of that is when the professor asks the pupil to calculate seven plus one, the Pupil responds “eight” (Ionesco 188) each time, and
eventually carries, “and sometimes nine” (Ionesco 188). The climax of repetition happens in the last moments of the pair’s scene, in which the Pupil’s every single line becomes “I’ve got a toothache” (Ionesco 209-208-207).

When the professor decides to move to philology, his maid interrupts him “Of all things, not philology, Monsieur, philology is the worst of all.... “ (Ionesco 197). Knowing that he will get angry and stressed when teaching philology, she tries to stop him and warns him about the consequences, but he just dismisses her concerns, “Very well, Monsieur, very well. But you won't say I didn't warn you! Philology is the worst of all!” (Ionesco 197).

The professor starts the course of philology by mentioning an anecdote about a friend of his who mispronounced the letter ‘f’ (Ionesco 202). In contrast to what the professor is saying about his old friend, his friend’s pronunciation is flawless, but he keeps going,” He managed to conceal his fault so effectively that, thanks to the hats he wore, no one ever noticed it” (Ionesco 202).

The Professor continues his instruction to the pupil with a huge amount of misinformation, and as she keeps complaining about her tooth, he threatens to pull her tooth off. After that the Professor decides to teach her” all translations of the word ‘knife’.” Then, “He goes quickly to the drawer where he finds a big knife”(Ionesco 211). After asking the student to say the word ‘knife’, she starts complaining about a pain in all her body, and the professor is still violently insisting on her. With two strikes by the knife, he kills the pupil and goes through a state of denial and asks the dead pupil to get off the floor,” Come now, young lady . . . the lesson is over . . . you may go . . . you can pay another time”(Ionesco 213).

After the crime the Maid enters and asks sarcastically if the pupil has benefited from the lesson, and then she blames the professor,” And today makes it the fortieth time! . . . And every day it’s the same thing. Every day! You should be ashamed at your age . . . and you’re going to make yourself sick”. (Ionesco 214)
Conclusion

In *Waiting for Godot*, patterns of absurdity are in everywhere. First, with the title of the play and its weird significance, then the absurd setting with the empty road and the tree and the gloomy sky, then the circular structure of the play that is divided into two identical acts with slight difference, then the four characters with their funny appearances and sufferance and finally with the dialogue with the absurd speech of Lucky and the perpetual murmuring of Vladimir and the complains of Estragon and his careless attitude and finally the actions with the dance of Lucky and the hat game of Vladimir. *The Lesson* is not less absurd than *Waiting for Godot*. The setting with multiple rooms and the numerous windows and thrown chairs, the characters with the stupidity of The Pupil and the confusion of The Professor and the cold blood of The Maid, and the dialogue with the mistakes made by The Pupil and The Professor’s responses, all are full with absurdity.
Chapter 3: Irony and meaninglessness

Introduction

1. Irony and meaninglessness in *Waiting for Godot*

2. Ionesco’s use of irony in *The Lesson*
**Introduction**

The beauty of works of literature is mainly because of the different types of figurative forms of speech that are used by many of the literary writers. Irony is one of the most popular figurative forms of speeches. This is primarily because of its use in contemporary forms of literature, and even in performance arts, most importantly theatre.

Ironic, as mentioned earlier, is a figure of speech. According to the Greek mythology the word irony stands for hypocrisy and deception. Irony is commonly used as a literary technique in order to bring emphasis to a particular truth. This is commonly done through the deliberate use of language that is contrary to the truth. By doing this, irony exposes certain truths, to which the general public has remained ignorant.

Absurd dramatists employed irony as a major theme in their works. They were able to expose the sanity of the world, and its effects on people. Through irony absurdists revealed the defects and disorders of human beings in a humorous way. Absurdist used irony to mock old conventions and how they operated in the theatre.

In this chapter I will try to analyze the use of irony in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Ionesco’s *The Lesson*. I will start by talking about irony and meaninglessness in *Waiting for Godot* and what is the relation between them. Then I will explore how Ionesco uses irony in his play *The Lesson* in terms of characters and dialogue.

The charm of literary works is that through the correct use of words, literary writers are able to convey certain emotions and feelings with regards to certain situations and events.

In many instances, what you see is not necessarily exactly what the author wishes to convey, and as such, one would really need to take some time to carefully analyze the work, in order to really get into the heart of the message of the entire literary masterpiece.
Irony, as mentioned earlier, is a figure of speech. According to the Greek mythology the word irony stands for hypocrisy and deception. Irony is commonly used as a literary technique in order to bring emphasis to a particular truth. This is commonly done through the deliberate use of language that is contrary to the truth. By doing this, irony exposes certain truths, to which the general public has remained ignorant.
1. Irony and meaninglessness in *Waiting for Godot*.

The subtitle of the play is "A tragic-comedy in two acts." (Beckett 1) Hence this is one of the points that tell us that the play will show pieces of happiness and sadness in one same plot. Moreover, the characters in *Waiting for Godot* do show a sense of irony for common situations. There is plenty of black humor² to support the argument that it could very well be an existentialist way to mock life. The black humor comes from the fact that the play’s aim to make jokes of moments of grave pain.

Irony has become a major tool not only in the hands of novelists and poets but also the dramatists. The Theater of Absurd, which is founded by Beckett, is ironical when it criticizes a society that is trivial and deceitful. In this society man is “stripped of the accidental circumstances of social position of historical context, confronted with basic choices, the basic situation of his existence” (Esslin 391).

*Waiting for Godot* is full of irony. Irony is not in one dialogue or two but it is everywhere in the play. It can be seen in the title, situations, dialogue, characterization, motif of the play, and in the meaning of the play. The play shows the irony of human destiny. although man is an intellectual with the ability to think and decide amongst all the creatures of the world, yet is the most miserable of all creatures. He was born not to enjoy life but to suffer various kinds of misery and pain.

The two tramps in the play, with their monotony, their fear and pain, their feelings of love and hate, are the perfect imitation of the whole human condition, a condition for which

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²**black comedy**, a kind of drama (or, by extension, a non-dramatic work) in which disturbing or sinister subjects like death, disease, or warfare, are treated with bitter amusement, usually in a manner calculated to offend and shock. Prominent in the Theatre of the Absurd. (Baldick 28)
action has no meaning, chiefly because there is no purposeful action to be taken, nothing to be done.

One good example of irony in the play is the name of the character” Lucky”. If we compare his name to his life we will find no similarities or indications that he is really lucky. The relation between the slave and his owner is also ironic, there is a rope which joins the two and this shows the tyrannical domination of the powerful over the poor.

In Waiting for Godot all the characters are suffering, there is no joy in life and no happiness. This is an ironic representation of reality. Estragon suffers from a severe pain in his legs and he is a stupid lad, Vladimir has prostate and kidney problems and he over thinks everything, Pozzo suffers from overweight and though he looks like an aristocrat or a land owner, he still empty of happiness, and finally Lucky who suffers the most. In traditional theatre, we only find one or two miserable people, but in the Theatre of the Absurd and especially Waiting for Godot ironically everybody is suffering in a very absurd way. As if Beckett brings some of man’s conditions like (stupidity, obesity…) to make the audience laugh, however, at the same time to remind them of their trivial daily life.

Another ironic example is when Vladimir decides not to hear Estragon’s nightmare. Estragon begs him in vain to hear him, saying that there is no one else to whom he may narrate his nightmares. It is also quite humorous to see Estragon repeatedly removing and putting on his boots and Vladimir’s hat game seems like they are in a circus show. Much of what the two men do is quite farcical, such as when Estragon starts eating the bones that were thrown by Pozzo.

The play also features many moments of pain and despair. Estragon, for example, is beaten daily by bandits in a ditch. They both suffer from malnutrition; ironically they survive the days with only eating carrots, radishes, and turnips. Their lives are essentially miserable and they are comfortable with doing nothing in their lives and think it’s safer to stay like that.
As Estragon says “do not let us do anything, it's safer”, (Beckett 20 as) if you work it is dangerous and if you do not you are safe. This is contradictory because if you do not work you will not eat and you cannot survive and that's the dangerous thing.

This misery is not only illustrated by the fact that the two men think of suicide, but also by the air of hopelessness which surrounds them. This hopelessness further demonstrates the ironic tragedy. For example, Estragon mentions “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful” (Beckett 62). Negativity and pessimism controls Etragon’s and Vladimir’s heads, they have no good intentions about the future.

The impression created by the play is one of helplessness and the boredom which human beings have to experience in life. Beckett effectively depicts the purposelessness of human life in their times. Because of this, the play is dominated by a feeling of despair, and this is in itself tragic even though ironical situations are used. Beckett with his great creative writing skills was able to combine between irony and absurdity. Although the topic that he is dealing with is quite serious, he tried to involve humour through the use of irony.

In addition to verbal irony, Beckett uses the dramatic irony, which is an important characteristic of dramatic works and theatre in specific. An example of dramatic irony is found in the Second Act:

Boy: Mister . . . (Vladimir turns.) Mister Albert . . .

Vladimir: Off we go again. (Pause.) Do you not recognize me?

Boy: No Sir.

Vladimir: It wasn't you came yesterday.

Boy: No Sir.
Vladimir: *This is your first time.*

Boy: *Yes Sir.* (Beckett 78).

In the Second Act, Vladimir feels that he is crazy. No one of the other characters recalls the events of the previous day, not Pozzo, not Estragon, and not even the messenger boy, who is supposed to have a reliable good memory. Can it be only his imagination? If it is then how would he have known what the boy was going to say? How would he know about the coming of Pozzo and Lucky? This can’t be only a creation of his imagination. No matter how terrible one’s memory is, it’s not possible not to remember people. These thoughts aren’t only crossing Vladimir’s head, but also the audience. It can be said that dramatic irony is directly related to the audience. Here they get this contact with the imaginative world and projects it on theirs. Then, dramatic irony establishes a channel between the stage and real life, and here, the audience experiences more the notion of absurdity.

We were so sure that the two friends would go to sleep and the next day Godot would appear, and then the two characters would finally be put out of their misery and wouldn’t have to wait anymore. This disappointment provokes the audience to ask millions of questions in one time. Because the audience is convinced that the events of the previous day are true, they are conflicted between believing Vladimir or supporting the other characters’ opinion in that Vladimir is making everything up.

2. The use of irony in Ionesco’s *The Lesson*

Like any other work of Ionesco, there is a purpose that is sought to be made. If we consider the traditional teacher/ student relationship, we can say that the teacher is supposed to guide and teach the student. The student follows his teacher’s instructions to better understand aspects of himself and his reality. The teacher guides based on the needs of the student and enables him to achieve his maximum capacity for knowledge. This is totally
reversed in Ionesco's play. The teacher starts out meek and gentle, yet as the play progresses; education becomes a form of manipulation and domination.

The education process is one of suppression, as the teacher's authoritarian treatment seeks to crush the will of the pupil. In this play The Pupil looks for ways to defend herself and seeks to explore areas of doubt and uncertainty in The Professor but all her attempts fail. By picturing the relationship between the student and the teacher in this way, Ionesco reflects how social values are degrading and how much the change is needed. It is ironical to see the teacher act in such an abusive and violent way.

In using this relationship to bring to light the dangers of a setting where there is suppression instead of guidance, Ionesco highlights a situation that is present in our society and that is needed to be changed.

Most of the dialogues in The Lesson are ironical; Ionesco emphasizes the idea that irony is a way of expression, and delivering hidden messages to the audience in a comic way. An example of this irony is seen in the character of the professor. First, professors are meant to teach and not to manipulate or commit crimes, ironically, The Professor is a psychological manipulator, and an experienced torturer and killer. The Professor seems to be completely lost in his way of teaching, it seems like he doesn’t know how teach or maybe he doesn’t know anything at all. This gets obvious when he mentions his military friend’s wrong pronunciation, ironically, his friend’s pronunciation turns to be correct, but he insists that it is wrong. The Professor moves from the course of mathematics to philology although he knows that philology would make him more angry and mad.

The Professor’s method of teaching is unbelievable, while The Pupil is trying to tell him that she has a toothache, he ignores her and carries his lesson. He grabs a knife from the kitchen and madly starts waving with it. He finishes his crime in an ironical way, he speaks to
the dead pupil and asks it to get up and leave and come back the next time because the session has ended.

Furthermore, The Pupil’s behavior and speech are as well ironic. When she first speaks to The Professor, she tells him that she is preparing for her doctorate and she needs him to teach her. When entering the door she shows great interest in studying and achieving her goal. As the session progresses The Pupil starts losing her enthusiasm. Everyone was expecting her to answer the simple question asked on her by the Professor; they were simple questions of capitals and seasons. Ironically, her answers were catastrophic; she was hesitating and mixing things up. A doctorate student who doesn’t know simple answers to simple questions is strange and ironic. What illustrates this irony more is when she is asked to do basic mathematical equations, eventually she makes errors. Also, she was saying ’yes’ to the Professor even if it is clear that what he was saying was wrong.

Moreover, The Professor’s maid Jane seems to be as ironic as The Professor himself. She is a stout woman, when she addresses The Professor she uses a serious tone as she is the owner of the house and not the housekeeper. She constantly interrupts The Professor and reminds him of his temper and threatens him not to teach philology.

The maid knows that The Professor is crazy and that he is going to commit a homicide though she opens the door for new pupils to come in and face their inevitable death. After the killing is done, she ironically addresses The Professor that he is going to run out of students if he kept doing that, and that it’s the fourteenth murder. She is so cruel in the way that she doesn’t even feel pity for the murdered pupil; she is only worried about the health of The Professor.

As the dead body lies on the floor, she is trying to calm The Professor down telling him that it is okay and everything is going to be fine, he just needs to e more careful next time. She pulls a bandage from her pocket and gives it to The Professor telling him not to be
afraid. After that, she helps The Professor to dispose of the body. As the door bell rings, she opens the door and welcomes another pupil as nothing has happened. This takes us back to Beckett’s circular structure. As in Waiting for Godot, The Lesson is well circular structured. Although Ionesco differs in his style of writing from Beckett, but he employs irony as a major dramatic device just as Beckett and any other absurd writer.

This play, by Ionesco is a drama that satirizes totalitarianism in education, politics, language, and psychology through the use of irony, as Esslin says” Weapons of mass destruction, totalitarianism” (Esslin 6). The Lesson, if we see this play in the context of contemporary times, hints at the rigid system of education. The play presents the idea that in this fast changing world, the weak, powerless and ignorant are knocked down and smashed by the mighty, illogical controllers of the society. The crime of the privileged class is not a crime; rather it is just an attitude or method of dealing with other people.
Conclusion

Irony is seen everywhere in *Waiting for Godot*. The most obvious example is the name of Lucky. His name is contrary to his life. Irony can also be seen in Estragon’s behaviors, especially when he takes off his boots. In *Waiting for Godot* everyone is suffering, ironically one can laugh at what these characters are doing or saying. In The lesson, irony is seen in the three characters and their dialogues. The Professor’s way of teaching and violence, The Pupil’s stupid answers, and The Maid’s ignorance of the murder and cold blood.
General Conclusion

After analyzing the two works of Beckett and Ionesco, one can make a general conclusion that irony and absurdity are two inseparable entities in the Theatre of the Absurd. These two writers explicitly use irony as a literary device in their works; they were able to combine the two elements in a creative way. Although both plays are somehow tragic, irony is expressed in almost every dialogue in the plays. If the two absurdists excluded the use of irony in their works, the quality of the literary text would not be as good as with irony.

Absurdists got rid of everything which is conventional, plot, structure, setting and characters. In their way of forming the so called “Theatre of the Absurd” they used many literary techniques and figures of speech such as irony, satire, sarcasm, and paradox. For these dramatists, theatre is the place where problems must be expressed and hinted at in an ironical way. Despite the fact that each one of the absurdist writers developed independently his own ideas and writing style, they all involved irony in their works with all its types.

Among the themes that absurdists tried to deal with is: loss of identity and self recognition, the loss of trust and connection between the characters, the alienation and the isolation of the characters, total absurdity of the human being. These are the main themes that the theatre of the absurd contains. They are the representation of our time as Esslin says, “The Theatre of the Absurd is the true theatre of our time.” (Esslin 6). Despite the extreme seriousness of these dilemas, absurd dramatists had to involve irony for more illustration of the absurd.

After the collapse of the Theatre of the Absurd, there haven’t been any attempts to revive it or to reset it as a movement. Some writers tried to write in the absurd canon, but only in separate works. These writers didn’t deal with absurdism as the original absurdists deal; they only took some themes and involved them in their works. “Theatre of the Absurd”
collapsed shortly because it was not a solid movement, it did not have strong basics or strong structure. Moreover, absurd writers weren’t as the writers of any other movement, they didn’t meet or make conferences or collaborations; this led to tremendous weakness and thus its downfall.

Although, *Waiting for Godot* was a prominent work and a fundamental unit in the consistency of the Theatre of the Absurd, it was not worldly accepted and enjoyed. Many theatre lovers were shocked and disappointed by the content of this play. *Waiting for Godot* didn’t receive positive criticism either from viewers or from critics mainly because of its over monotony and its complicated plot. Beckett intended to write his play in such a strange way knowing that it would not be accepted by all the community.

Theatre of the Absurd made a glorious move in the course of theatrical history, no one has ever attempted to challenge the old conventions, but absurdists did. They brought something new and different to the theatre; they broke the chain of the rules and wrote extraordinary plays that are enjoyed even today. No one could deny the fact that this type of theatre was as good or maybe better than traditional theatre.

This study attempted to relate absurdism to irony and to investigate how they operate together in the two plays, *Waiting for Godot* and *The Lesson*. This study also found that absurdism uses irony as a way to mock characters and their actions.
Résumé

Cette étude tend a explores l’absurdité et l’ironie dans deux pièces écrites par les célèbres dramaturges absurdes Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. L’étude explore la relation forte entre l’ironie et l’absurdisme dans les deux célèbres pièces absurdes *En Attend Godot* et *La Leçon*. Cette étude contient trois chapitres ; le premier chapitre traite des bases théorique de l’étude telle que : absurdisme, existentialisme, théâtre de l’absurde et l’ironie. Le deuxième chapitre est divisé en deux parties ; la première partie traite des schémas d’absurdité dans *En Attend Godot*. Cette absurdité se retrouve dans le titre, la structure, le décor, les personnages, l’action et le dialogue. La deuxième partie traite l’absurdité dans *La Leçon* en termes de personnages, de décor et de dialogues. Enfin, le dernier chapitre tente de répondre à la question de savoir comment l’ironie est décrites dans les deux pièces absurdes et sa relation avec le non-sens ou l’absurde.

الخلاصة

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تجري العبثية وأسلوب المخبربية في جبهر بينين لتبديهما الجانبان الإبهاريان المغرومان

صاغت بيلبيت و بوررن يتيرتيت. تقوم هذه الدراسة باستكشاف العبثية (الغرومان) في بورن و المخبربية في جبهر بينين،

في البداية نقول كما كتبت مقالة "العبثية ولسولية نصيحة، "ني انتظار غودو " و " الدرس، "نستحسن هذه الدراسة من ثالث نصوص بالفأ

الدروس الأول الخلفية النظرية للدراسة مثل: "العبثية، نظرية الوجود، جبهر الريث وأسلوب المخبربية. أما الفصل الثاني و

الثالث نقول كما كتبت مقالة "العبثية ولسولية نصيحة، "ني انتظار غودو " و " الدرس، "نستحسن هذه الدراسة من ثالث نصوص بالفأ

في "ني انتظار غودو "، "العبثية ولسولية نصيحة، "ني انتظار غودو " و " الدرس، "نستحسن هذه الدراسة من ثالث نصوص بالفأ

الدروس الأول الخلفية النظرية للدراسة مثل: "العبثية. نظرية الوجود، جبهر الريث وأسلوب المخبربية. أما الفصل الثاني و

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