

Theatre of the absurd assignment

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**ASSIGN
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Theatre of the Absurd Term coined by Martin Esslin, who wrote *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Works in drama and prose fiction with the common theme: * human condition is essentially absurd and * this condition can be represented properly only by literature that is absurd in itself Movement emerged in France after WWII against the traditional beliefs and values of traditional lit and culture: * assumption that man is a rational creature, part of an ordered social structure, * inhabiting an intelligible universe and * capable of heroism and dignity even in defeat After 1940s, tendency to see man as * Isolated * Living in an alien universe which has no truth, value or meaning (no idea of divine retribution etc.) * Life meaningless moving from nothing to nothing??? no discernable reason for existence An existence anguished and absurd

Eugene Ionesco of the theatre for the absurd puts it: “ Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” In his *La Tentation de l’occident*, Andre Malraux remarked: “ at the centre of European man, dominating the great moments of his life, there lies an essential absurdity”. This theme is expounded in Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*: A vision of life essentially absurd * Without apparent purpose * Out of harmony with its surroundings * Sad to the point of anguish At the same time, in a laconic fashion, funny He emphasizes: * Destructive nature of time * Feeling of solitude in a hostile world * Sense of isolation from other human beings Methods: 1. Drama consciously does away with traditional plot structure 2. Shows human beings struggling with the irrationality of experience, in a state that has been described as ‘ metaphysical anguish’ 3. Leads the spectator into a

complicated situation which seems illogical and absurd 4. Complication does not lead to a climax, resolution or logical ending 5. Violates the expectation of the audience 6.

Lack of formal logic and conventional structure emphasize the difficulty of communicating 7. Thus, artistically portrays the general feeling of anxiety ??? the absurd predicament. Proponents: Samuel Beckett (Waiting for Godot), Albert Camus, Tom Stoppard (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead) The Myth of Sisyphus Central concern of The Myth of Sisyphus is what Camus calls “ the absurd”. * There is a fundamental conflict between what we want from the universe (whether it be meaning, order or reason) and what we find in the universe (formless chaos) * We will never find in life itself the meaning that we want to find. Either we discover meaning through a leap of faith, by placing our hopes in a God beyond this world, or we conclude that life is meaningless * Camus opens his essay by asking if this latter conclusion that life is meaningless necessarily leads one to suicide * If life has no meaning, does that mean life is not worth living * If that is the case, we would have no option but to make the leap of faith or commit suicide, says Camus * Camus is interested in pursuing a third possibility: that we can accept and live in a world devoid of meaning or purpose * The absurd is a contradiction that cannot be reconciled and any attempt to reconcile this contradiction is an attempt to escape from it * Struggling against the absurd will be by facing it * Living with the absurd is a matter of facing the fundamental contradiction and maintaining constant awareness of it * Facing the absurd does not entail suicide, but, on the contrary, allows us to live life to the fullest. * Camus claims that existentialists and phenomenologists like

Kierkegaard and Husserl all confront the contradiction of the absurd but then try to escape from it.

Existentialists find no meaning or order in this existence and then attempt to find some sort of transcendence or meaning in this meaninglessness. *

Camus identifies three characteristics of the absurd life: * Revolt ??? we must not accept any answer or reconciliation in our struggle * Freedom ??? we are absolutely free to think and behave as we choose * Passion ??? we must pursue a life of rich and diverse experience * He gives four examples of the absurd life: * The seducer who pursues the passion of the moment * The actor who compresses the passion of hundreds of lives into a stage career * The rebel whose struggle focuses his energy * The artist who creates entire worlds Absurd art does not try to explain experience but simply describes it. It presents a certain world view that deals with particular matters than aiming for universal themes. * The book ends with a discussion of the myth of Sisyphus, who, according to the Greek myth, was punished for all eternity to roll a rock up the mountain only to have it roll back down to the bottom when he reaches the top. Camus claims that Sisyphus is the ideal absurd hero and that his punishment is representative of the human condition: Sisyphus must struggle perpetually and without hope of success. So long as he accepts that there is no more to life than this absurd struggle, then he can find happiness in it.