



Facing the Absurd “without Hope”: The Sisyphean Absurdity in Harold Pinter’s *The Dumb Waiter*

“Umutsuzca” Absürtle Yüzleşmek: Harold Pinter’in
Git-Gel Dolap Oyununda Sisifosçu Absürdite

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Abstract

Harold Pinter’s (1930-2008) *The Dumb Waiter* (1957) focuses on the tensions experienced by two hitmen, Ben and Gus, as they wait for their next order in a closed basement. The complex interactions of these characters represent the existential anxieties emerging in an indifferent, and absurd universe of human existence. In this work, Pinter emphasizes lack of communication and alienation through the dialogues and silences between the characters. This theme is also explored in Albert Camus’s (1913-1960) *the Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), where, after explaining concepts such as absurdity, suicide, and the absurd man, the story of Sisyphus endlessly rolling a rock up a hill, only to see it roll back down, is described. Camus uses this myth as a metaphor for the existential struggle of humanity. Both works serve as metaphors for the relentless human effort in an absurd universe filled with indifferent, repetitive actions, exemplified by waiting for an unknown task

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and pushing the rock. This in mind, this article argues that Pinter's *the Dumb Waiter* aligns with and parallels Camus's principles of absurdism, as Pinter's play is examined as an interpretation of Camus's philosophy. This article also explores how Ben and Gus resonate with the concept of 'absurd man' defined by Camus. The analysis emphasizes that both works, through their parallels and themes of searching for meaning in human existence represent the place of humanity and search for meaning in an absurd universe.

Keywords: *Harold Pinter, the Dumb Waiter, Albert Camus, Sisyphus, existentialism*

Öz

Harold Pinter'in (1930-2008) *the Dumb Waiter* (Git-Gel Dolap: 1957) adlı oyunu, iki tetikçi Ben ve Gus'ın etrafında, kapalı bir bodrumda bir sonraki emirlerini beklerken yaşadıkları gerilimleri ana odağa alır. Oyun, bu kapalı alanın getirdiği baskı ve bekleyişin psikolojik etkisini ele alır. Bu karakterlerin karmaşık etkileşimleri, insan varlığının kayıtsız, absürt bir evrende ortaya çıkan varoluş kaygılarını temsil eder. Pinter, bu eserinde karakterler arasındaki diyalog ve sessizlikleri kullanarak, iletişim eksikliğini ve yabancılaşmayı vurgular. Bu tema, Albert Camus'nün (1913-1960) *the Myth of Sisyphus* (Sisifos Söyleni: 1942) adlı eserinde de işlenir, burada absürdite, intihar ve absürt adam gibi kavramlar açıklandıktan sonra Sisifos'un sonsuz bir döngüde bir kayayı tepeye itip, tekrar aşağı yuvarlanmasını izlemesi anlatılır. Camus, bu miti, insanın varoluşsal mücadelesinin bir metaforu olarak kullanır. Her iki eser de bilinmeyen bir görevi beklemenin ve kayayı itmenin, kayıtsız, tekrarlayan eylemlerle dolu absürt bir evrende insanlığın durmaksızın çabası için bir metafor olarak işlev görür. Bu bağlamda, makale Pinter'in *the Dumb Waiter* oyununun, Camus'nün absürdizm ilkelerine uygun ve paralel olduğunu ve Pinter'in oyununun Camus'nün felsefesinin bir temsil yorumu olduğunu savunur. Ayrıca, bu makale Camus tarafından tanımlanan 'absürt adam' kavramı ile Ben ve Gus karakterlerinin nasıl uyumlu olduğunu da incelemektedir. Makale karakterlerin eylemleri ve diyalogları üzerinden bu uyumu detaylandırır. Bu inceleme, her iki eserin paralelliklerini ve insan varoluşunun anlam arayışı temalarını detaylı bir şekilde ele alarak, Pinter ve Camus'nün eserlerinin, insanın absürt evrende yerini ve anlam arayışını betimleyen güçlü örnekler olduğunu vurgular.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Harold Pinter, Git-Gel Dolap, Albert Camus, Sisifos, varoluşçuluk*

Introduction

Harold Pinter's *the Dumb Waiter* (1957) represents the human condition within ambiguities, and the futile repetitive pursuits through the absurdity of life. In a parallel manner to Sisyphus' unending struggle of rolling a rock uphill in Albert Camus's *the Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Ben and Gus find themselves entangled in a mysterious, repetitive, and seemingly purposeless situation, as they wait for instructions of an unknown task. While waiting for it, Ben and Gus' actions parallel with that of Sisyphus, who similarly achieves nothing (O'Donohoe, 2007: 123). The analogy,

however, serves to emphasize the underlying existential problem of humanity's encounter with an indifferent universe. Gus' continual questioning regarding their work may be considered a revolt of the human desire to comprehend, and attribute significance to existence. Such a questioning resonates the existential nothingness suggested by Camus. The absurd is the unease that lingers in the gap between our quest for meaning and the emptiness that ridicules this quest (Berthold, 2013: 138). The cyclical nature of the hitmen's tasks, comparable to the repetitive labour of Sisyphus, illustrates the recurring, and potentially fruitless essence of human pursuits. It, therefore, emphasizes the repetitive cycle of existence devoid of significance. Furthermore, although Camus proposes that Sisyphus would find happiness in his never-ending work, Pinter's play raises the idea that people might reveal moments of happiness even in the most repetitive and/or pointless circumstances. Keeping this in mind, the article examines *The Dumb Waiter* from a Camussian viewpoint with the aim to present the idea that both Camus' and Pinter's works symbolize a parallel quest for purpose in an indifferent world within an absurd existence.

1. Camus's absurd reasoning, and suicide

For Camus, suicide is a "serious philosophical problem", as "judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy" (1979: 11). He illustrates the contrast between existential action, and philosophical reasoning, as he points out that decisions reflect the depth of one's beliefs. For Camus, suicide is an action that is conceived in "the silence of the heart", just as a masterpiece is crafted (1979: 12). For Camus, the choice of suicide was linked to the existential inquiry into our existence. He viewed this choice as "more than a right"; in his perspective, it epitomized the essence of our existence (Leenaars, 2003: 140). Camus stresses the cause behind such a decision by noting that the worm resides within the heart, as it is the place where it must be searched for (1979: 12). For him, while humans seek ways to manage with the absurdity of life, their urges often precede existential reflections (1979: 13-14).

When one thinks of Ben and Gus' circumstances, and routine tasks that make them Camusian absurd men, their depicted world is "not so clean or well- lighted", and it is often chaotic and many of us continue to persevere, even when overwhelmed by gloom (Brosio, 2000: 161). Camus clarifies the tendency of individuals to rely on "hope" as a means of avoiding a realization of the absurdity of existence (1979: 17). He offers an analysis of the notion that a life lacking meaning is devoid of value to emphasize that the recognition of the absurd might occur suddenly. Related to that, Camus says that "at any street corner", the sense of absurdity can suddenly confront anyone (1979: 17). Camus integrates the absurdity of existence with unexpected incidents, as he posits that while the intentions of an individual may remain hidden, they express themselves in apparent actions. Within the hidden intentions under the unknown task in *the Dumb Waiter*, Ben and Gus seem to be "stranger[s] in a strange land of Existence" (Jodar, 2006: 45). For Camus, through an exploration of the complex nature of meaning, or potential absence of existence, one questions whether human beings are compelled towards optimism or suicide (1979: 18). For Camus, an authentic response to the absurd requires a determined struggle to stay within the limits of reason. Therefore, within such a struggle, an existential thought may limit the capacity of an individual to understand life and its purpose (1979: 18-19).

Like Beauvoir and Sartre, Camus regards the contemporary crisis of judgment as a crisis within human consciousness or as an issue affecting the human condition (Mrovlje, 2019: 83). For him, the universe is full of “denseness and strangeness” which leads him to feel that “the world is the absurd” (1979: 20). This feeling brings forth an existential anguish, as he asserts that between the firm belief in his own existence and the meaning he attempts to assign to that conviction, the void will always remain unfilled (Camus, 1979: 24). This gap may lead the absurd man to feel nausea, anguish, and despair (Laskar, 2004: 409). Camus identifies an absurdity of the universe by drawing a contrast between intellectual capacity and absurd reasoning. This contrast brings forth the feeling and idea of absurdity regarding which he says that “what is absurd is the” clash between the irrational and the intense desire for clarity that resounds “in the human heart” (Camus, 1979: 26). This confrontation puts forth a difficulty of reconciling human comprehension with the mysterious nature of the universe (1979: 27-28).

Camus, related to the existential problem of human existence, remarks that the absurd arises from this conflict “between the human need” for understanding and the irrational “silence of the world” (1979: 32). As Camus puts emphasis on the difference between the feeling, and the idea of the absurd, he writes on the contradiction within the concept of the absurd through acknowledging that “The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation” (1979: 33). Therefore, the concept of the absurd arises from the clash between the hopes of human beings and the indifferent, and repetitive structure of the universe, as he remarks, “The absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to” (1979: 35). Thus, Camus argues that: “If there is an absurd, it is in man’s universe” (p. 38) to suggest that a rejection of rationality in favour of “irrationality” distorts the authentic essence of the absurd (1979: 37-38). Camus, therefore, examines the interaction between reason and irrationality as their combination leads to the emergence of the absurd. He emphasizes the significance of acknowledging the coexistence of both areas within the human experience, related to which he asserts, “the absurd man ... knows simply that in that alert awareness there is no further place for hope” (1979: 39).

2. Camus’s absurd freedom, and absurd man

Theatre of the absurd, with only minor differences, shares similarities with the existentialist philosophy of Sartre and Camus (Duran, 2009: 982). Camus examines existential struggles of human beings who seek purpose in the chaotic nature of universe, to which the idea of suicide may be a reaction. Yet, he claims that facing the absurd directly rather than turning to suicide as a means of escape is a confrontation with the meaninglessness of life: “living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is above all contemplating it” (1979: 53). The act of revolt is a factor that demands both accepting and opposing the concept of the absurd, as he remarks, “One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt” (1979: 53). Suicide, for him, is an “acceptance at its extreme” (1979: 54) that evades the tension of human existence. Instead, Camus believes in the pursuit of knowledge despite the ambiguous existence, as he writes, “To a man devoid of blinkers, there is no finer sight than that of the intelligence at grips with a reality that transcends it” (1979: 54).

Camus examines the complex relationships among freedom, revolt, and consciousness within the absurdity of life. The absurd man, however, comes to the realization that despite his perceived sense of freedom, he is not truly free (Santoni, 2008: 796). At this point, the understanding of the absurdity of existence acts as a catalyst for resistance as opposed to submission. Related to that view, Camus notes, “The absurd is his extreme tension which he maintains constantly by solitary effort” (1979: 55). Such a tension may deepen in case one recognizes the hopelessness within life, as “death is there as the only reality...I am ...a slave, and above all a slave without hope...” (Camus, 1979: 56). By the time the absurd man realizes that everything collapses into nothingness in this “limited universe”, he gains endurance from the endless, indifferent universe through experiences. Yet, this takes place on condition that the absurd man realizes freedom in embracing the uncertainties of life without illusions (1979: 58).

For Camus, the meaning of life is not derived from subjective judgments but rather from the experiences, as they may challenge the established value systems depending on the value of existence. On this Camus comments: “what counts is not the best living but the most living” (1979: 59). As one accepts the absurd, s/he participates in all the experiences of life through ignoring the social judgments and going beyond the accepted restrictions. This is what Camus expects of the absurd man to pursue a life full of experiences, even if they may not have any existential significance (1979: 59-60). However, realizing the absurd requires a continuous need to rebel against the chaotic meaninglessness that pervades human existence (Dern, 2004: 94).

Living through wisdom requires an active resistance to lack of meaning within life. The absurd emerges when our quest of significance clashes with the indifference of the universe (Mikics and Zaretsky, 2013: 203). Therefore, emerging from his analysis of the concept of absurdity, Camus outlines three distinct consequences: “revolt, freedom, and passion” (1979: 62), and rejects the idea of “suicide” (1979: 62). Camus embraces the absurd to confirm the nature of existence, as opposed to viewing it as an end. Drawing on Nietzsche’s concerns, he praises the value of “art, music, the dance, [and] reason” (1979: 62) which give life a varied complexity. Thus, both agree that life is to be embraced with “passion” and meaningful commitment even though it does not have a unique meaning (1979: 62).

Camus places the absurd man beyond the sphere of unending desires and inside the realm of temporal life. He claims that the idea of the absurd man involves a lack of need for and reliance on other points of view. The central idea of this philosophical viewpoint is his interpretation of ethics. He asserts that the ethical system of the absurd man is formed not from codified and established norms but rather from a feeling of integrity, as “integrity has no need of rules” (1979: 64). Thus, one who embraces the absurd finds himself drawn to “illustrations and the breath of human lives” showing an inclination to the knowledge within lived experiences (1979: 65).

3. The myth of Sisyphus

The Myth of Sisyphus presents the human condition within a struggle against the challenges and hardships of existence. Sisyphus is represented as a figure that presents both wisdom and recklessness, as evidenced by his historical endeavours to challenge the gods and thus limit the power of death because of “his hatred of death” (1979: 108). However,

such acts of resistance result in his eternal punishment, as he is condemned to endlessly push the rock. In addition to this effort, Sisyphus becomes “the absurd hero”, as “He is, as much through his passions as through his torture” (1979: 108). However, Sisyphus becomes apparent during his decline, in which he is neither actively involved in his effort nor observing its subsequent rejection.

Camus, however, examines the impact of consciousness on Sisyphus’ repetitive and endless struggle. His understanding of the absurdity in his struggle functions as both a cause of suffering and a mechanism for overcoming the physical obstacles he faces. He remarks, “Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition; it is what he thinks of during his descent” (1979: 109). Therefore, Sisyphus exhibits a state of powerlessness and rebellion, possessing an understanding of his condition. Camus, therefore, relates happiness and absurdity to one another to emphasize their connection within the human condition. Through examining Sophocles’ *Oedipus, the King*, Camus states that anguish may lead to a paradoxical achievement, as demonstrated by Oedipus’ confession: “Despite so many ordeals, my advanced age and the nobility of my soul make me conclude that all is well” (1979: 109). He confesses this “from the moment he knows” his fate, and “his tragedy begins” there (1979: 109).

Based on this exemplary examination, Camus remarks that the individuals experience a notion of freedom when they confront the absurd in its whole. Such an experience leads to satisfaction or an acceptance of their predetermined destiny. Such an acceptance is embodied in the realization that “His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing” (1979: 110). Therefore, the concept of the absurd man involves recognizing the value of the contradictions of life and maintaining a determination within an endless nothingness (1979: 109-110). That is why, for Camus, “happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth” since “the feeling of the absurd springs from happiness” (1979: 109). The outcome lies in Camus’s conclusion: “One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (1979: 111) which refers to the idea that among the difficulties and lack of progress within a repetitive world, there exists a source of happiness and contentment (1979: 111). Thus, one might attain a distinct kind of freedom and happiness, even in the presence of unavoidable death although Camus attributes part of the absurdity of human existence to death (Plant, 2009: 116).

4. A Sisyphian Dumb Waiter

The Dumb Waiter was first staged at the Hampstead Theatre, and then at the Royal Court Theatre in 1960. The play represents various dichotomies, including but not limited to life and death, rationality and absurdity, authority, and “the abuse of authority” (Prentice, 2000: xxi). Pinter’s plays illustrate power dynamics by exploring themes of “dominance, control, exploitation”, subjection, and victimization (Adamowicz-Pospiech, 2018: 83). However, the play conveys elements of tension and absurdity using pauses, silences, and the dialogues between Ben and Gus. *The Dumb Waiter* serves as an example to the Theatre of the Absurd, linking everyday activities with absurdity. That kind of link goes parallel with Albert Camus’s concept of the absurd as represented through Sisyphus’ action. For the Theatre of the Absurd,

Greenfield and Carlo remark that “Martin Esslin more or less inducted Pinter into the Theatre of the Absurd, initially in 1961 as one of a dozen emerging “proselytes” and subsequently as England’s premiere absurdist” (2017: 150). Therefore, Pinter, just like Camus, is aware of the absurd existence. Camus celebrates facing the absurdity of existence with significance, despite the void that ultimately meets one in death (Wong, 2013: 6). Such an absurd existence in search of meaning is represented through the dialogue in the beginning between Ben and Gus that captures such a trivial, yet significant interaction to illustrate the absurdity, repetition, and disjointedness in human communication, and actions as a central theme within the Theatre of the Absurd. And this absurdity “can strike any man in the face” (Camus, 1979: 17). Camus’ observation is reflected by Gus’s efforts to engage in meaningful dialogue through questioning the situation they are in. Yet, it is continually deferred by Ben’s focus on trivial and unrelated matters. For example, Ben’s reading the news about a child killing a cat or the malfunctioning of the water tank exemplifies how the mundane may eclipse meaningful communication, which parallels with the absurdity of existence Camus describes. When Gus asks about the tank, Ben dismissively replies, “It’s got a deficient ballcock, that’s all” (Pinter, 1996: 55), a reply which parallels with the endless, repetitive toil of Sisyphus. His reply emphasizes the pointlessness of their conversation within a larger existential predicament.

Furthermore, the discussion about the desirability of a window, with Ben questioning, “What do you want a window for?” (Pinter, 1996: 55) stresses their physical and psychological confinement which strengthens the exploration of isolation and the human struggle to find meaning in an indifferent world. This aspect of the play is parallel with Camus’ statement: “The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation” (1979: 33). This notion of the absurd as a ‘divorce’ or a clash between different elements is evident in the characters’ interaction. Gus tells Ben that a window “whiles away the time” (Pinter, 1996: 56), a reply that not only presents their different perspectives on life and coping mechanisms but also reflects the theme of seeking purpose or distraction in an absurd and confined existence.

Ben’s involvement in hobbies such as woodworking and model boat building, along with his statement, “I’m never idle. I know how to occupy my time, to its best advantage”, demonstrates his ability to find a sense of purpose within an absurd existence (Pinter, 1996: 56). This utterance contrasts with Gus, whose lack of direction and preoccupation within their current situation seem to embody the essence of Camus’s thought: “A man devoid of hope and conscious of being so has ceased to belong to the future” (1979: 56). In Camussian terms, despite the absurdity of their situation, Ben tries to find a way to assert his existence and generate a sense of purpose. On the other hand, Gus’ lack of engagement and hopelessness reflect another existential crisis in which, from a Camussian perspective, the future no longer holds meaning or relevance.

The abrupt shift in the dialogue when Gus questions why Ben stopped the car earlier, brings to the fore the underlying tensions between them and a lack of clear communication. This point in the play not only emphasizes the difference in their ways of dealing with the absurdity of life but also emphasizes the fragmented character of human communication

within an existential context. Their differing reactions to the same circumstances echo Camus's existential philosophy, especially regarding the search for personal methods to navigate through an absurd life. Therefore, this contrast in their dialogue emphasizes the varied approaches individuals can take in confronting the absurdity of existence. Ben's ambiguous reply, "We were too early", and Gus's puzzled response, "Too early for what?" (Pinter, 1996: 56) emphasize the play's exploration of miscommunication and the struggle to find meaning and purpose in their directionless existence. The confusion and lack of understanding between Ben and Gus reflect another existential disharmony, as rightly framed by Camus's statement: "It is essential to consider as a constant point of reference in this essay the regular hiatus between what we fancy we know and what we really know..." (1979: 23). This gap between perception and reality, what is supposed to be known and what is actually known, is a central theme in both Camus' philosophy and Pinter's *the Dumb Waiter*. Therefore, the ambiguous dialogue between Ben and Gus serves as a microcosm of the human condition as described by Camus, for whom the search for meaning often leads to more questions than answers.

Once again, however, the dialogues are interrupted by pauses and silences, related to which Marrouchi notes that they "seem... to introduce another form of resistance; another way of refusing the brutality of the other: the power of the other" (2019: 123). Therefore, the play is "structured around pauses, short silences, and long silences" leading to characters "hopelessly entrapped in their relationships and [to be] gradually submerged in it" (Ghasemi and Tavassoli, 2011: 43-44). Absorbed in reading the paper, Ben exclaims, "Listen to this!...a man of eighty-seven...crawled under a lorry" to which Gus responds, "It's unbelievable... Incredible..." (Pinter, 1996: 54). The dialogue represents the absurdity within the ordinary, a theme that resonates with Camus' perspective, as he observes, "There can be no question of holding forth on ethics. I have seen people behave badly with great morality and I note every day that integrity has no need of rules" (1979: 35). Camus puts emphasis on the paradoxical nature of human behaviour and morality, as such scenes set the tone for the representation of the absurdity of human existence and communication (1979: 54-56). Camus's statement, "But it is just as natural that he should strive to escape the universe of which he is the creator" (1979: 35), suggests a human tendency to both create and seek escape from their own absurd realities. Therefore, as Camus put it, "one does not separate consciousness from the absurd" (1979: 29). This view is relevant within the context of Ben and Gus's dialogues. The absurdity they encounter is not an external force; rather, it is a part of their existence and consciousness which emphasizes how the absurd is mixed with the fabric of their daily lives and dialogues.

However, the absurdity increases with the arrival of unusual food orders through the dumb waiter (p. 61), which "increas[es] the absurd humour" (Paschen, 2012: 78). This absurdity is related to the plot, and the dumb waiter through its disruption of the plot exemplifies a key aspect of the Theatre of the Absurd, as many of the "Absurd plays lack conventional plots" (Wong, 2013: 5). The represented disjointedness in the play, where characters engage in meaningless dialogues, puts forth the absurdity described by Camus. And it reflects the typical structure of Absurd plays where "time and chronology are often disjointed" (Wong, 2013: 5). The "conventional plot", therefore, lacks through such orders, among others, as "Two braised

steak and chips. Two sago puddings. Two teas without sugar” (Pinter, 1996: 61), that stress the surreal humour, and the unpredictability of life. However, pauses and silences keep going on any time the dumb waiter comes and goes. Camus, in *the Myth of Sisyphus*, related to such silences remarks, “there are absurd...silences” (1979: 33). Therefore, the tension rises each time through absurd dialogues, as if they were reasonable. To such situations, Camus says, “the feeling of absurdity ... bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality” (1979: 33). However, Pinter’s depiction of reality and fact in his plays is critical, as Pinter “simply did not believe there was anything definite to say about the world”, therefore he was careful “not to pretend he knew more than what transpires from his plays” (Hevesi, 2011: 59). Thus, the juxtaposition of presence and absence, and consequently, the theme of isolation, are primarily illustrated in Pinter’s works (Kingery, 2010: 48).

The ambiguity throughout the play is “often left unresolved” (Alkan, 2022: 9). Furthermore, this is also illustrated in the characters’ confusion about where they are with what purpose. For instance, when Gus inquires, “What town are we in?” and Ben replies, “I’ve told you. Birmingham” (Pinter, 1996: 57), it illustrates their detachment from reality and the effective yet ambiguous use of language. In absurdist plays, language generally suggests an absence of self-identity, and in Pinter’s play, communication reflects “a conditioned involuntary reflex ...” (Crawford, 2003: 138). Such a disorientation may be one of the reasons why communication between the two is disrupted by silences and pauses within the play. Through this form of problematic communication, “the impossibility of communication” is presented (Wong, 2013: 2).

Ben and Gus’ discussion about lighting ‘the kettle’ also represents the disconnect and frustration within their communication. The represented lack of communication and/or miscommunication reflects Camus’s concept of the absurd because of the clash between the human quest for meaning and the unresponsiveness of the universe. Camus’ statement, “The absurd enlightens me on this point: there is no future” (1979: 57), brings forth the futile repetitiveness and existential dread in their interactions. Furthermore, Gus’s statement, “I wonder who it’ll be tonight” followed by a silence and his attempt to ask Ben something, only to be met with irritation, “Oh, for Christ’s sake” exemplifies their state of uncertainty and anticipation which is akin to Sisyphus’ struggle, and the existential questioning that defines human existence (Pinter, 1996: 59). The miscommunication about lighting the kettle characterizes this situation, where Ben’s instruction, “Go and light the kettle” leads to an unsolved exchange that emphasizes the breakdown in communication, and the absurdity of language (59). This aspect aligns with Camus’ statement: “What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening” (1979: 19) which suggests a cyclical, repetitive nature of their actions and dialogues. They present a constant return to the starting point, much like the absurd cycle in Camus’s philosophy, and ‘absurd man’. Additionally, as an example of the theatre of the absurd, Pinter’s use of language may be associated with the characteristics of such plays, as Pinter’s skill is “celebrated and performed all over the world with notable frequency, [as] Harold Pinter is a master technician in the use of language” (Yerebakan, 2014: 156). That kind of use of language reflects the thematic elements of absurdism, as emphasized in Camus’s philosophy, where language and communication often deepen the sense of absurdity in human existence.

Pinter's characters, however, tend to suffer from self-delusion and exhibit a significant detachment from reality. Through such representations of unreliability, distancing from the reality, and absurdity, the play has similarities with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (Roy, 2007: 336). Furthermore, the waiting for Wilson, as expressed in the lines "You'll have to wait. What for? For Wilson. He might not come. He might just send a message. He doesn't always come" parallels the process of waiting in Beckett's play (1979: 60). In both, the characters are caught in a repetitive state of waiting for someone who may never arrive. This uncertain waiting reflects the Sisyphean task of seeking purpose, and comprehension in a world where such actions often seem fruitless (1979: 60). Both plays represent characters in a constant sense of waiting, participating in repetitive behaviours and routines similar to Sisyphus, as they obediently follow instructions without fully comprehending their purpose. This situation reflects the absurdity and futility that Camus associates with the existence of Sisyphus. Wilson in *the Dumb Waiter*, like Godot in Beckett's play, never appears onstage. Therefore, both Pinter's and Beckett's plays "...display many absurdist features" (İzmir, 2017: 79). This feature is further supported by Dyer's comment on the similarities of the two plays: "many critics at the time noted [Pinter's] admiration for Beckett" (2015: 149).

As realized, the relationships among incidents, place, time, and character are absurdly intertwined on an irrational basis because, in an unknown waiting period as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the characters' perceptions of time, and space seem to be lost and are represented as such. Pinter encapsulates the themes of disorientation, and the surreal nature of time and space, which are central to the Theatre of the Absurd. Therefore, the dynamics within the play are continually driven by the failure to reconcile past and present self-perceptions, as well as the inability to resolve internal conflicts, and subjective divisions in the present (Owens, 2010: 65). Thus, the above-quoted dialogues represent a sense of dislocation, and confusion about their environment which is compounded by Gus's remark about the day of the week, and place indicating a loss of connection within the passage of time.

The sudden appearance of an envelope sliding under the door, however, introduces an element of the unexpected and unexplained, adding more to the surreal atmosphere of the play. Ben's query, "Where did it come from?" (Pinter, 1996: 57) stresses their state of uncertainty, and the mysterious nature of the circumstances with its abrupt, and unexplained occurrence that exemplifies the absurdist notion that life is filled with inexplicable events and that human existence is often governed by forces beyond comprehension or control. The following pause allows the weight of this absurdity to settle, emphasizing the characters' and, by extension, the audience's/reader's, confrontation with the inexplicable (Pinter, 1996: 57). For example, as Ben says, "You never used to ask me so many damn questions. What's come over you?" Gus replies, "No, I was just wondering" and Ben's curt "Stop wondering" (Pinter, 1996: 60) presents a sense of existential angst, and the futility of seeking answers in an indifferent, and repetitive world. This echoes Camus' portrayal of the human condition as a constant search for meaning in a universe that offers no clear answers, representing Sisyphus' ceaseless, meaningless, and repetitive task which is also similar to that of Ben and Gus' repetitive actions to kill someone within each task.

Suggesting a disconnection from the perception of time and space, as if drifting in a meaningless void, Gus utters: “All these menus coming down and nothing going up. It might have been going on like this for years” (Pinter, 1996: 63). It is unclear how long and where they have been waiting, and as can be discerned from Gus’ questions, both characters seem to be lost and trapped within a time and space they do not truly understand. This is again evident in Gus’ utterance: “Why doesn’t he get in touch? I feel like I’ve been here years” (Pinter, 1996: 63). Apart from the dumb-waiter, they encounter a “speaking-tube” whose origin is also unknown: “GUS. How long has that been there? / BEN. Just the job. We should have used it before, instead of shouting up there. / GUS. Funny I never noticed it before” (Pinter, 1996: 63). Ben begins to speak to an unknown someone on the tube, and the sense of meaning deteriorates even further. He conveys to Gus what he hears, and understands: “No, all we had we sent up.... The chocolate was melted.... The biscuits were mouldy....” (Pinter, 1996: 64). Ben’s directive, “Let me give you your instructions. When we get the call, you go over and stand behind the door. If there’s a knock on the door you don’t answer it” and Gus’ repetition of these instructions, “Stand behind the door. If there’s a knock on the door I don’t answer it” (Pinter, 1996: 64) while listening to the unseen instructor, echoes the existential theme in both the play and Camus’ philosophy. This repetitive action where Gus is simply repeating and following orders without understanding the purpose or the source, reflects the human condition as depicted by Camus - endlessly striving for meaning and direction in an indifferent and obscure universe.

Ben’s actions and answers, as he listens and responds to the unknown voice in the speaking tube – “Yes... Understood. Repeat. He has arrived and will be coming in straight away. The normal method to be employed. Understood...” (Pinter, 1996: 68) - reflect the obedience to the unknowable authority. This adherence to orders without understanding the reason echoes Camus’ concept of the absurd, where individuals seek meaning and structure in a world that offers little explanation or purpose. The moment Gus re-enters, “stripped of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster and revolver” (Pinter, 1996: 68) and the long silence and stare shared between the two, intensifies the existential themes. Gus’ tangled appearance and the suspenseful standoff with Ben evoke the existential shock and the confrontation with an absurd reality, much like the revelation experienced by Sisyphus in Camus’ philosophy. This scene can also be paralleled with the themes in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* in which the characters wait for a moment of revelation or resolution that never truly materializes. The ending with Ben pointing his revolver at Gus, and their mutual stare, leaves the audience in a state of unresolved tension, emphasizing the exploration of the futile repetitiveness, and absurdity of human existence, a condition where clear answers and resolutions are often elusive (Pinter, 1996: 68). Gus confronts himself as the target, an action to which he can only react through pause, and silence. As he faces the bare fact of being the target himself, Gus does nothing but feels the absurdity within that reality. This curtain scene where Ben points a gun at Gus (Pinter, 1996: 67-68) reveals the betrayal and power dynamics within the play. There, Ben becomes the dominant one, as internal anxieties illustrate the dismal condition of a helpless individual surrounded by a threatening environment (Zeeshan Ali, 2020: 89; Çelik, 2013: 120). Furthermore, the recurring theme centres around a battle for control, dominance, exploitation, and oppression, as the atmosphere is similarly engulfed by a sense of fear and intimidation (Doğan, 2012: 406). As in the example of Ben, through such represented power dynamics in Pinter’s plays,

there seems to be a character who exerts control over the room and those within it (Nyuszta, 2015: 158). Ben's pointing his gun at Gus also symbolizes the absurdity of their situation which aligns with Camus's view of the absurd "particularly at the level of the individual" (Illing, 2015, p. 219). However, the entire plot of *the Dumb Waiter* revolves around the dynamic between two characters tasked with assassinating whoever next enters through the door (Quigley, 2001: 15). Such an action emphasizes the fragile nature of trust, as the play ends in an ambiguous way.

Conclusion

The Dumb Waiter, through its portrayal of trivial activities, absurd dialogues, and the theme of ambiguity, reflects the themes of the Theatre of the Absurd. The play also exemplifies Camus's philosophy, in which individuals are confronted with a universe that ignores rational comprehension, characterized by difficulties in communication and power dynamics. Pinter's play resonates with Camus's existential philosophy by exploring themes of uncertainty, the quest for significance, the repetitive, and ambiguous nature of life. It illustrates the essence of human struggle within a senseless, and irrational universe. These themes emphasize the absurdity of the human situation, and the continuous struggle to find significance in an indifferent universe.

Therefore, the play serves as a representation of the human condition, capturing the nature of the Theatre of the Absurd by presenting routine events, and complex dialogues marked by ambiguity. The characters in Pinter's plays, who are trapped in a confined environment, represent existential conflicts. Their dialogues exemplify the challenges of conveying messages in an environment marked by concealed power dynamics, and existential unease. Hence, *the Dumb Waiter* not only embodies the concepts of the theatre of the absurd, but also functions as an examination of the quest for meaning and comprehension in a purposeless environment, a theme also explored in Camus's *the Myth of Sisyphus*. The structure of the play encourages the audience/reader to consider his/her personal experiences with absurdities of life within the immense and mysterious condition of the universe.

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