

The Connection between Absurdity, Isolation and Suicide in Ionesco's Play The Chairs

العلاقة بين العبث والعزلة والانتحار في مسرحية ايونسكو الكراسي

Asst. Prof. Sanaa Mohammed Mahdi (Ph.D.)

Mustansiriyah University- College of Arts

ا.م. د. سناء محمد مهدي

الجامعة المستنصرية- كلية الآداب

e-mail: dr.sanaa_mohammed@yahoo.com

المستخلص :

العزلة هي مشكلة حقيقية يعاني منها العديد من الذكور والإناث في هذا العالم المعاصر والتي تشجع على الأعمال الانتحارية بسبب أشكال مختلفة من العزلة - الجسدية والاجتماعية والعقلية والعاطفية والروحية في الإعاقات الاجتماعية والإدراكية والذاتية السليمة؛ ترتبط في الغالب بعلامات الاكتئاب التي تعد عوامل مهمة للأشخاص الذين يفضلون الموت على الحياة الحديثة. في هذا السيناريو بالذات، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إيجاد الروابط الموضوعية بين العبثية والعزلة والانتحار في مسرحية يوجين ايونسكو الكراسي (1952)، كاتب مسرحي روماني (1909-1994) كتبت مسرحياته باللغة الفرنسية. تعد مسرحية Ionesco مهزلة تراجيدية عبثية مهمة تُرجمت إلى أكثر من لغة لأنها تقدم وجهة نظر نموذجية لعالم بلا معنى وعبثي. يجادل الباحث بأن العزلة في المسرحية ليست هروباً ولكنها حالة إشكالية لوجودك في قلب القضايا الاجتماعية والسياسية لهذا العالم المعاصر وعملية إعادة كتابة الانتماء الجماعي. باستخدام نظرية التحليل النفسي، يعمل التحليل على الرؤى الفنية والموضوعية والنفسية للشخصيات المنفصلة أثناء التحدث إلى مسائل جماعية. في الواقع، تركز الدراما الحديثة بشكل كبير على التحليل النفسي من خلال استخدام المحاكاة وسوء فهم الشخصية وحتى الحلم الموازي لتعكس

التأثير الرهيب للعزلة وعبثية الحياة على الفرد التي تسبب اكتئابه الذي قد يؤدي إلى الانتحار بسبب الجهود اليائسة لإيجاد معنى في الحياة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مسرح العبثية، الاكتئاب، العزلة، الانتحار، الدراما الحديثة.

1. Introduction:

The very nature of modern drama makes its relationship to psychoanalysis via mimesis, character / actor delusion, catharsis and the dream analogy. As the play is written to be performed on the stage, it often gives many allusions to real existence where psycho-criticism is likely to play a great role due to the gestures acted and the verbal actions performed. Secondly, there is also the polarity between the acted parts and the actors who claim it. Then, there is the audience mechanism via their expectancy and reactions of the allegorized actions of the play. Operating these aspects of psychoanalysis, this paper attempts at revealing the contradictory absurdity of modern life through portraying man's tendency to find pleasures in life that causes his/her depression, isolation and finally tragic death. In other words, there is a conflict between man's propensity to find meaning in life and the inability to find it.

The Theater of the Absurd, a literary form revealed the futility of human existence is the French dramatic movement of the 1940s and 1960s. As a philosophy method, absurdism refers to the essential nature of conflict in man's tendency to find meaning and value in life and failure in a meaningless existence in an absurd world. In other words, the conflict is between man's seeking meaning, purpose and the meaninglessness associated with life (Esslin, 1968, p. 15). In fact, absurdity is associated with confrontation or opposition or conflict between two ideals; man's conflict to find meaning on the one hand, and a silent, cold, and purposeless world on the other. Since man's living conditions are completely absurd, the desire for death

begins to develop. Man's isolation, having no friends, communication and relations with others make him lost the desire to live as he feels like dead living; having nothing, his life will be completely worthless (Esslin, 1968, p. 17).

Absurdism is often connected to the philosophical and existentialism movements. Both movements are concerned with the senselessness of man's condition and the meaningless life. The feeling of living a marginalized life affects man psychologically and increases his desire to end his life. Hence, the idea of committing a suicide begins to develop due to the sense of hopelessness and despair that are associated with suicidal behavior (Baumeister, 1990).

In fact, the feeling of absurdity is closely related to the Second World War and its destructive effects upon the people who live meaningless life, "human beings as moving from the nothingness from which they came, to the nothingness in which they will end through an existence marked by anguish and absurdity" as Harmon and Holman state (Harmon & Holman, 1995, p. 31). Therefore, many Western European and American dramatists established the theatre of the absurd which is the French postwar theatrical movement concentrates on the concept of man's absurdity in modern world. The works of those dramatists focus on the meaning and mystery of life. They share many ideas with the existentialist philosophers like Jean- Paul Sartre and Albert Camus who see that man's condition and life in this world are absurd, useless, worthless and irrational. Moreover, their main concern is to reveal man's condition and the reality of his position in the world. For them, the theater is a representation of life, an attempt to face man with in order to make him aware of his reality. So, if man is not existed, his life will be just an abstraction as Banarjee Coward remarks (Coward, 1961, p. 12).

The absurd world means no longer makes sense to its people and in which every rational decision and actions become futile. In their works, those dramatists condemn the modern world for becoming more dehumanized, purposeless, disorderly and absurd. The worse is that man unaware of this as he used to live a monotonous life since he is lost and uncertain of many things. His mechanical existence increases his isolations and loneliness. To express and reveal the problems of meaninglessness living, they not only opposed traditional theatrical models but developed and changed the art of writing itself (Brater & Cohn, 1990, p. 22). Most of those writers concentrate of the concept of isolation, loneliness, the failure to communicate with others in any meaningful means and the life's futility. They demonstrate the isolation of man causing from the nature of modern life and the impossibility of effective communication between people (Trout, 1980, p. 3).

Suicide, a critical issue and a theory dominates the intellectual field to reveal man's situation in modern world. Suicide results from the mixture of pain typically psychological pain and hopelessness which regard as a key protective against increasing this horrible act. Suicidal thoughts and behaviors are associated with social isolation and loneliness that affect man's life greatly. When man feels that he is alienated from others, having no relations or communication with his family or friends, his psych will be disturbed clearly. Being alone and feeling worthless push man to commit this scary and painful act. Edmund Berger's idea about the crucial factor in suicide is the "diffusion of instincts leaving death instinct no longer attenuated by the life one" (Bergler, 1946, p. 10).

In current time, suicide is an important cause of death worldwide. The spread of suicide encourages many writers to shed light on its reasons. Modern dramatists, like Albert Camus, Edward Albee, Elmer Rice, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Eugène Ionesco, and others find that irresistible pain especially psych-ache, social isolation,

hopelessness, mental disorder, family conflict, unemployment, and physical illness, stressful and absurdity of life are all important reasons of suicide.

2. Literature Review: Literary Theory and Psycho-Analysis

Psychoanalytic theories have influenced the studies of suicide over many years ago. Freud (1856-1939)'s theory of suicide concluded that excessive enmeshment and/or disinterest frequently causes a feeling of isolation and increases suicide risk. His first annotations of self-objectification in melancholic depression highlight foremost the role of self-absorbed rage and structural vulnerability. In his paper "Mourning and melancholia" (1917), Freud formulates the dynamics of melancholic depression of suicide through his clinical remarkable; stating that:

If one listens patiently to the melancholic's many and various self-accusations, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, someone whom the patient loves or has loved or should love. Every time one examines the facts this conjecture is confirmed. (Freud, 1917, p. 51)

From these lines, we notice that suicide depend each viewpoint one examines it, on the ability to be aside from oneself, to portray oneself and to act upon oneself as though one becomes someone else. As a matter of fact, depression and hopelessness play an essential role in suicidal act as it arouses the feeling of being isolated from others, since isolation is a stressful experience that has a passive effect upon man's psych for increasing the sense of negligence from others. Being a common phenomenon, isolation may cause many problems as it affects man personally and socially as well (Haines, Scalise, & Ginter, 1993, p. 10).

Like Freud, Emile Durkheim believes that "once social determinants have been isolated, man's suicide may be placed in its proper etiological setting" (Durkheim, 1951). This means that lack of combination into society, living in complete isolation increases the tendency toward suicide. Therefore, social communication is so important.

3. Aims

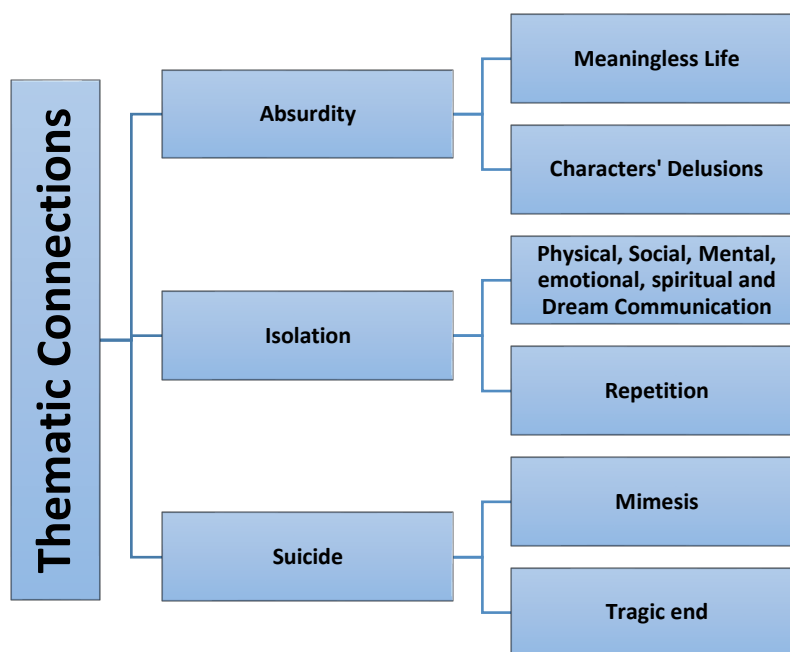
The study aims at finding answers to the following questions:

- What does the play suggest about the psychological conditions of the characters in Ionesco's Play, *The Chairs*?
- What particular themes in the play reveal the psychological conditions of absurdity, isolation and suicide?

4. Methodology

There are a few reasons for the selection of this play for investigational purposes. First of all, the researcher had been teaching English literature in Mustansiriyah University for the last fifteen years. Therefore, it was appropriate for her to select such a new dramatic work where most of her undergraduates had been working on for such long time in their graduation papers. For the Iraqi students often complain about their need for analyzing new works in English drama. Moreover, the researcher wanted to examine the impact of English literature on the emotions of the Muslim readers. Besides, Eugène Ionesco's play, *The chairs*, was often the part of the home readings in the courses offered by the Department of Languages and Literature, College of Arts, Mustansiriyah university, where the researcher is a faculty member and has taught many new plays several times.

For its theoretical framework, as shown below, the article focuses on psychoanalysis. It considers the links among absurdity, isolation and suicide in Ionesco's Play, *The Chairs* using literature and psychoanalytic theory. It identifies the affinities between the two main themes on which the play focuses- the meaninglessness of life and the illusion of reality. It is a study of the human mental aspects of literature and speech. It is primarily concerned with the ways in which a literary language is represented and processed in the writer's brain. It is also concerned with the combination of human mind and literature, as it examines the process that arisen in human brain while producing a dramatic discourse.



5. Analysis

5.1 Ionesco and Man's Existence

Eugène Ionesco's literary works focus on human existence and nonsense of everyday life. As a modern dramatist, he has deeper vision of life and being one of the main dramatists in modern new drama for his advanced techniques in his plays that

stressing the absurdity of life, humans' ever-present awareness of death, the impossibility of communication, isolation and the destructive forces of modern society (Lane, 1994, p. 21). For him "life is essentially meaningless, progress an illusion and the totality of our experience nothing but a piece of incomprehensible gobbledygook" as Lane states (Lane, 1994, p. 24), thus his aim is to understand the dirt of world which envired by corrupt and worthless people who involved in vain purposes. Their attempts to adjust themselves in the society are vain. It is obvious that society and its surroundings make him believes that everything is meaningless and useless; meaning that absurdity spread everywhere. Therefore, he tries to awaken man of his own existence (Hayman, 1976, p. 4); focusing on "the sense of deadness, ... leaden heaviness and hopelessness, that is experienced in states of deep depression" (Esslin, 1968, p. 23).

Ionesco used semicircular stage design to show that the present is circular and repetitive. In addition, he used to portray the image of man and his modern society in which he is confused for doing things he just has to do it without any aim, need or profit. Richard Coe states that by using the trivial language, Ionesco's intention is to show "the failure of communication and to provoke the spectator, discover his real existence" (Coe, 1970, p. 16). For that, Ionesco is considered as one of the major figures of the absurd theater that stressed the absurdity of the modern condition, meaningless life, isolation, illogic and the failure of communication. According to Esslin, Ionesco "is a leading writer in the Theater of the Absurd and his plays present on the stage the absurd in its purest form, more true to life if less realistic by the mere fact of its apparent gratuity" (Esslin, 1968, p. 33). Also, C.J. Greshoff says that Ionesco is "a revolutionary for what he is doing on the stage and for what he is doing to dramatic dialogue. is undoubtedly the more inventive and skillful playwright" (Greshoff, 1981, p. 8). We find that through his plays, Ionesco questions the meaning

and reality of existence. His views and feelings show the relationship between the exterior and the interior worlds confirming that; "no society has been able to abolish human sadness, no political system can deliver us from the pain of living, from our fear of death, our thirst for the absolute; it is the human condition that directs the social condition, not vice versa" (Lamont, 1973, p. 44).

In most of his plays, he concentrates on loneliness and isolation showing the non-control over man's fate. This is revealed clearly through his well-known one act play, *The Chairs* (1952), in which he portrays the two main characters all alone in small house on an island, The Old Man and the Old Woman who keep bringing out chairs to seat an invisible multitude of guests in order to show the human needs to something even against impossible chances (Tolpin, 1968, p. 3). It is clear that his plays have significant values due to their awareness of man's condition in a senseless, ruthless and dreadful world. He has the ability to move away from presenting realism to expressing a deeper sense of the unspeakable reality attempting to face man's condition as it exists. He wants to free man from his illusion and social pressures in order to make him accept his senselessness existence (Pounders, 1996). Through presenting the actual awareness about the absurdity of man's condition, Ionesco seeks to make man faces his awful position in the world that is devoid of values, morals, and rational methods. All good things become devalued; hence, man is left alone to face his bad and depressed condition. In other words, his purpose is to present a concrete realization concerning the absurdity of man's life. Therefore, his plays are considered a mirror that reflects the true horrible of man's condition; revealing that the whole system of morals deteriorates into the futility and absurdity of life where the rational attitude and methods are no longer existed. Living in a world devoid of purpose, values and aims, man has no choice but to face his bleak condition and losing the ability to it

makes him think of getting rid from it through committing suicide (Hobson, 1957, p. 13).

It is evident that the role of societal factors and its ways to interact with others play a major role in increasing the sense of becoming socially isolated. Hence, isolation should not be seen as an inevitable consequence of man's suffering in his life, on the contrary it is necessary to know the factors of life that have negative impact on man as socially disconnected definitely develop the sense of isolation which in turn cause deleterious effects on man's life.

5.2 Social Isolation and its Effects:

In his play *The Chairs* which is regarded as a tragic farce for the distortion, a metaphor makes the audience laugh and at the same time it is considered a tragic because through its ironies and opposites it sheds light on the main meaning of existence. In reality, man laughs at himself and at his bad condition. In fact, man after Second World War becomes so frustrated and hopeless from his monotonous and boring life forgetting to be once an energetic one. So, Ionesco's *The Chairs* is about the futility of man's existence in modern world. It presents the old couple who live inside a tower on an island all alone and their final moments as the Old Man prepares to leave his message for all humanity. But he finds himself not well qualified to deliver it by himself. Hence, he hired an Orator to do it on his behalf (Eastman, 1961, p. 43).

The Old Man and the Old Woman, his wife, after seventy-five years of marriage, live on an island surrounded by motionless water. They hysterically arrange chairs for many invisible guests who come to listen to the Old Man's discovery that will be said by the mysterious Orator. They set up chairs for unseen guests arriving to hear an important message the Old Man has written it to be delivered to the world (Ionesco,

1958, p. 51). Here, the hopelessness and aimlessness of the two-couple revealed due to the boring and repetition in their lives. The isolation from the outside world leads to destroyed connections from the Old Man's and the Old Woman's life as it is obvious at several places, they both attempt to recollect the past memories that are forgotten to some extent. Both, the Old Man and the Old Woman are stuck in a repetitive existence, used to retell the same story and perform the same imitations day after day, having no ability to advance any story. She has been told the same story every night for seventy-five years, but forgets and starts again each evening with a new mind. The Old Man and Old Woman are trapped in a repetitive existence, retelling the same story and performing the same imitations every day and even the water around their island is motionless. The repetition is considered a conflation of an ending and a beginning that circles around itself; meaning they are not sure about everything.

The couple's arrival at the island "Then at last we arrived" (Ionesco, 1958, p. 85) shows an ending and a beginning that circle around itself and reveals their uncertainty about the next coming. When the Old Man remembers that they are in Paris, he starts to tell a story by saying "at the end of the end of the city of Paris, there was, there was, was what? Pushing to the end of the end but the end of the road is covered in mystery" (Ionesco, 1958, p. 61). This exposes that the end of the road is shrouded in mystery. From this speech, we notice that they are hopeless, having no motivation to continue their life. Moreover, when he sees the darker sky, he says "the further one goes, the deeper one sinks. It's because the earth keeps turning around, around, around, around....." (Ionesco, 1958, p. 66), the darker sky makes him express his depressed feeling and illustrates the monotonous and boring existence of the couple who live a routine life that pushes them into deathly routines and pessimistic acts. They become so close to death for they need means to have some excitement in their lives.

Ionesco makes his characters "not fully conscious of their spiritual rootlessness, but they feel it instinctively and emotionally" (Lamont, 1973, p. 26). They feel that their end is close because of their old age. The Old Man's reference to darkness symbolizes the image of death, telling his wife; it's six o'clock in the evening... it's dark already. It wasn't like this before. Surely you remember, there was still daylight at nine o'clock in the evening, at ten o'clock, at midnight" (Ionesco, 1958). The couple is absurdly old over 90 years and they live on an island completely isolated from the rest of the world; forgetting the outside world; "Paris never existed, my little one The city must have existed because it collapsed Nothing remains of it today, except a song" (Ionesco, 1958, p. 71). The routine and repetition make the Old Man feels in prison; both become prisoners of repetition. He is confused whether he is a child or an old man as sometimes calls his wife mother and father. His confusion is over the beginning and ending. In fact, both of them are trapped in the repetitive prison with their past beautiful days that either behind them or forgotten in order to emphasize the confusion over life itself.

The Old Man believes that life of suffering gives meaning once he transfers his message and saves humanity. But when the Orator lastly tries to convey the message, it becomes distorted, senseless, illogical in other words, absurd. The failure of conveying the message is due to their escape from their real world by creating an illusionary one. Therefore, escape plays an important role in man's life; meaning their suicide is another escape.

Karen Lee Ott shows that Ionesco makes his main character; the Old Man spends his long life with his wife for more than seventy-five years doing the same thing, telling the same story and imitating the same actions in order to confirm the meaningless life of man in modern world. Hence, his living on the island, the Old Man devotes himself on conveying his message in order to awaken and save humanity. On

the other hand, the Old Woman spends her time by listening to her husband's stories and imitations. She repeatedly reminds him of the job he could have and sometimes she plays the role of his mother. From this, we notice that even their present is worthless (Ott, 2006). By making the Old Woman wife / mother and husband old man / baby, Ionesco wants to create a living form of reality, sufficiently broad to involve rational and irrational at the same time.

Now, after long time of marriage, they feel tired of repetition for have nothing new to do:

Old Man: Tell me the story, you know the story: Then at last we arrived

Old Man: Again?... I' m sick of it ... Then at last we arrived” That again ... you always ask for the same thing!... “Then at last we arrived But it' s monotonous ... For all of the seventy-fiveYears that we have been married, every single evening, absolutely every Blessed evening you have made me tell the same story, you've made me imitate the same people, the same months ... always the same... let's talk about something else (Ionesco, 1958, p. 77).

Living on island carries the further meaning of the two characters' lives that is motionless, isolated and repetitive; even the water around the island is quiet. Moreover, the lack of words refers to the lack of communication that separate man from his outer world:

Old Man: Let me pass, please let me pass. [Desperate:]

Ah! I ever be able to reach him?

Old Woman [echo]: Reach him ... reach him

.....

Old Man: All my enemies have been rewarded and my friends have betrayed me ...

Old Woman [echo]: Friends ... betrayed betrayed
..... (Ionesco, 1958, p. 80).

Through their conversation with one of the invisible guest Belle and her husband, we notice that the couple lives in complete delusion. Once, the Old Woman tells Belle's husband that she has a son who abandoned them, while the Old Man said that they have no children. When the Old Man tells Belle that he killed his mother, the Old Woman tells the opposite, and she insists that he takes care of his family. Each believes what he/ she wants as there is no truth. Just the Orator's appearance is truth; the Old Man said "He exists. It's really, he. This is not a dream" (Ionesco, 1958, p. 82). For him, the actual truth is that his message will be heard and his life has not been in vain. So, he committed a suicide when he thinks wrongly that the Orator will deliver his message to the world. 11 The Old Woman also has her own delusions; when the Old Man acts like a child, she does too.

Both, the Old Man and the Old Woman struggle to remember their past life in Paris. This indicates the separation of worlds and memories with the present acts. So, talking about their past despite of its vague sometimes give them an opportunity to pass their time:

Old Woman: No, my darling, I' ve forgotten.

Old Man: How did we reach it? Where is the road? This place was called Paris, I think ...

Old Woman: Paris never existed, my little one.

Old Man: That city must have existed because it collapsed ... it was the city of light, but it has been extinguished, extinguished for four hundred years nothing remains of it today, except a song (Ionesco, 1958, p. 60).

This emphasizes Ionesco main concern that is nothingness or the ontological void as revealed in the last moment of the play:

The chairs remain empty because there's no one there. And at the end, the curtain falls to the accompanying noises of a crowd, while all there is on the stage is empty chairs, curtains fluttering in the wind, etc... and there's nothing. The world doesn't really exist. The subject of the play was nothingness, not failure. It was total absence, chairs without people. The world does not exist because in the future it will stop being, everything dies, you know. (Greshoff, 1981, p. 9)

Greshoff adds that for Ionesco, the couple is:

the world itself, it's man and woman, Adam and Eve, the two halves of humanity who love one another, find one another, who are sick and tired of loving one another; who, in spite of everything, cannot

not love one another, who cannot exist except together. (Greshoff, 1981, p. 11)

This shows that despite of their bound together for many years, still refuse the simple facts such as whether they had children and whether the Old Man loved his mother. Here Ionesco asks "If we cannot agree about our experience, what hope we have of understanding the world beyond us?" (Greshoff, 1981, p. 16) One thing they share is the memory of arriving to Paris. Yet the couple is isolated where they have no right to be in a social situation; trapped and death is the only escape way.

The Chairs widely dramatizes the emptiness of life and metaphorically, the game of distribution the empty chairs indicates nothingness of man's existence and the absence of the guests is used to approve the concept of the presence in that absence. Using the unreal guests is to confirm the idea of emptiness but the conversation with the absent guests gives the two-couple opportunity to tell their sad stories:

Old Man [to Belle]: I am very touched ... You're still the same, in spite of everything ... I've loved you, a hundred years ago ... But there's been such a change ... No, you haven't changed a bit ... I loved you, I love you

Old Woman [to the photo-engraver]: Oh no, Oh! no, Oh! la la, you give me the shivers. You too, are you ticklish? To tickle or to be tickled? I'm a little embarrassed ... [She laughs]. Do you like my petticoat? Or do you like this skirt better? (Ionesco, 1958, p. 84)

Here, Ionesco states that man himself creates barriers between him and society, and just a narrator is simply portraying man's conditions through his way of using language. By increasing the number of empty chairs for unseen guests, and once the Orator is seen, the Old Man feels that his message is about to be delivered. At this moment, he and his wife throw themselves from the tower window. The Irony is that The Orator is deaf, confirming that the message is impossible to be delivered (Joiner, 2005, p. 11). The chairs symbolize the couple's isolation from the world, from the realities of being old and isolation into an imaginative world of illusions "we all live in illusion" as Ionesco avers.

Trying to find meaning from his existence, the Old Man decides to convey a message to the world therefore; he hires an Orator to deliver it. Before committing the suicide, they feel happy as believe that the Orator will transfer the message of existence. But suddenly the horrible reality is that the Orator deaf/ mute. He tries several times to convey the message but futile as one can hear only meaningless sounds. Then, he tries to convey the message through writing on the blackboard but useless as whatever he writes is of senseless meaning and impossible to be understood; "ANGELFOOD NNAA NNM NWNWNW V Mmm, Mmm, Gueue, Gou; Gu. Mmm, Mmm, Mmm, Mmm" (Ionesco, 1958, p. 33). It is obvious that all the Orator's efforts to convey the message are in vain then he has gone. The Old couple also suffers from the same problem. They desperately try to put syllables together to express themselves:

Old Man and Old Woman [laughing together]: At last, we laughed. Ah! ... laughed ... arrived ... arrived ... Ah! ...Ah! ... rived ... arrived ... arrived ... the idiotic bare belly... arrived with face ... arrived with the rice ...At last ... bare-bellied ... arrived ... the trunk ...We lau ...

Ah! ... aughed ... Ah! ... arrived... Ah! ... arrived ...
 aughed ... aughed.” (Ionesco, 1958, p. 90)

By making the Orator deaf / mute who cannot produce anything except rough sounds, Ionesco confirms his idea that language and communication are only illusion. Obviously, his usages of fragmentary, contradictory, and often nonsensical dialogue are to present a world of chaos and absurd.

The Old Man hopes that guests come to hear his scientific message: women and men of all classes; old friends; and important people like colonels and the emperor. Since the guests are invisible, the conversation is one-sided. Unfortunately, the process of communication has broken down in an absurd world devoid of hope. Even the old couple has difficulty communicating anything but the same old stories they have been shared for many years ago.

After the departure of the Orator, "we hear for the first time the human noises of the invisible crowd; these are bursts of laughter, murmurs, ironical coughs; weak at the beginning, these noises grow louder, then again, progressively they become weaker" (Ionesco, 1958, p. 87). This proves that from the beginning the guests are there. Moreover, it emphasizes that language is nothing but a barrier in man's social life. Since man lives in a horrible condition, he has no ability to produce language through which he can communicate with others; therefore, his communication is lost. Man tries to find the possibilities of making his social communication through language but useless. This emphasizes Ionesco's idea that there is a gap between language and communication.

Ionesco used space to create an invisible reality and through concentrating on seen and unseen concept he gives impression of an overflowing room of invisible,

visible and mute people. The invisible guests have come to hear the Old Man's final message to the world as they create a microcosm of society. At the end of the play, the empty chairs symbolize the emptiness of the Old Man and the Old Woman's frustrated dreams and ambitions; and the jumping out their window to the sound of water splashing up from the depths below gives one meaning that they return to the primitive origin of life, to their past in order to connect with it for making the circle of time complete. Their committing suicide is regarded as the only way or option of escaping such a life.

The Chairs revolves around the transmission the Old Man's important message via an Orator as he believes that the world will never be the same after the message is delivered. But the reality the Orator is mute and does not have the ability to write down understandable ideas; "just as the invisible people must be as real as possible, the Orator must appear unreal" (Laver, 1989, p. 35). The irony is that the visitors may or may not be unreal because they cannot be seen and the Orator is also unreal despite being clearly visible to the audience. The most ironical thing is that the invisible visitors attending the meeting and waiting patiently in their chairs to hear the important message that the Old Man has to deliver. Despite the room is filled with people, the Old Man failed to deliver his message which makes the audience disappointed to understand what the dramatist wants to say (Laver, 1989, p. 38).

Since they have nothing to talk about and live in complete isolation, the couple lives out an illusion. They pretend telling each other stories and perform absurd imitations. They cannot differentiate the reality from fantasy. After ninety five years of failure to achieve meaningful things, the Old Man makes a last endeavor to defend his existence by claiming of having a message to the world; saying "I am not myself... I am one in the other" (Ionesco, 1958). This reveals that he does not know even himself. Hence, he contracts with an Orator to speak on his behalf. While waiting the guests'

coming, they continue their conversation which is completely fragmented, meaningless and illogical, mostly devoid of reality "the buildings, the penholders, and the chromosomes among the guests they are expecting" (Ionesco, 1958, p. 121). Breakdown the language is used to reveal the emptiness and meaningless not only of the couple's life but of man's life in general. It is clear through the Old Woman's consoling her husband-child by saying; "my pet, my orphan, dworfan, worfan, morphan, orphan... Orphan-ly, orphan-lay, orphan-Io, orphan loo... Li Ion laia, li Ion Ia lay, orphan-ly, orphan-lay, relee relay, orphan-li-relee-reIa....." (Ionesco, 1958, p. 125).

Through the mechanical exchange of empty chairs, Ionesco attacks the weakness and hypocrisy of modern society; in addition to the emptiness and futility of middle-class conversations. The empty but lively chairs are very real and visible. The presence of empty visible chairs refers to the absence of the empty invisible guests. To express the concept of absence, Ionesco uses visible characters like the old man, his wife and the Orator; at the same time used invisible characters, the guests. By using this technique, he makes man realize the empty presence of his society.

Man is aware of the inevitability death, yet, he cannot avoid the anguish of facing death convincingly. He needs to believe that he will continue his existence eternally after the death of the flesh, never be forgotten "will leave some traces, be a child, a message, or even a street bearing his name" (Ionesco, 1958, p. 127). The Old Man's message, however is that there is no message. The deaf/dumb Orator is not the only main cause for the message not to be delivered but for the conversion of identity which cannot be accomplished. As a matter of fact, no one can ever speak for someone else; especially when the one involved has done nothing meaningful for himself like the Old Man. Therefore, his message is no message since he has not lived as a real man. The Orator makes only sense word written on the blackboard that is

"Angel food" standing for something that devoid of taste, color or weight. In fact, it stands for nothing and for lacking reliability.

For Ionesco, using the empty chairs means the absence, emptiness and nothingness in man's life. This means the world does not really exist. Through fighting with the harmful facets of man and his society, Ionesco can diagnose the essential problems of man's condition in modern world. This play reflects the fearful power of illusion that man may find meaning in his life and in the world as well but futile. Therefore, Ionesco's works not only reflect despair but present man as a victim to make him face his real condition and senseless existence; freeing himself from all illusions. Through his pessimistic vision about the emptiness and absurdity of man's life that devoid of meaning and purpose, Ionesco highlights the painful reality of man who has no choice except death. The painful reality of life makes the characters seek death as a means of escaping from all the sufferings.

6. Conclusion

In his play, *The Chairs*, Ionesco *exposes* the futility of human existence and his isolation which cause his tragic end by committing a suicide better than living a dreadful life. He portrays the couple's life, the Old Man and the Old Woman as a meaningless repetition of no communication. using empty chairs and invisible guests to show the emptiness and nothingness in modern man' life who live aimlessly and hopelessly.

Man's isolation from other people affects his psyche and increases his/her pains that make him /her lose hope in life. This develops the idea of ending his worthless life since all his efforts to find meaning in life are in vain. Therefore, death is the only option man finds to end his sufferings and the meaningless and dreary life. Therefore,

committing suicide is the only solution he used to get rid of the illusions that one day he might have found meaning in life. Ionesco makes his characters as a vehicle to show how man in society can be detached from his existence. Man's suffering from isolation makes him feel nothingness and hopelessness that increase his depression in time he must accept the senselessness of his reality. However, his psychological pain and disturbance develop the idea of suicidal act as life is a trap and as death is the only escape.

Since living away on an island, the Old Man and his wife are isolated from each other and from other people and the invisible guests they finally have confirmed their isolation. The irony is that the Orator is more isolated than the couple as he must face the guests alone in time he is a deaf- mute which symbolically enhance his isolation as he only can speak in guttural noises and write a nonsensical words. It is obvious, that every character tries to communicate with others to overcome his isolation but tragically the others are invisible. Even the sound of waves reminds of the island's isolation. As a matter of fact, this play is about people's deceived communication with themselves that echoes their essential isolation

Many events in this play are absurd emphasizing the isolation of man's existence and the lack of communication. This is revealed through the old man's act like a child and calling his mother. In addition, the couple talks to the invisible guests as if they are real. These absurdities emphasize the nature of man's life. Also, the invisible guests confirm the depressing of isolation when the same room is regarded as an empty space. The absence of meaningful life, real communication, hope instead living an absurd and dreary life in complete isolation affect man negatively and leads to his tragic end. Thus, as soon as the Orator comes, the couple committed a suicide for preferring death to living with their illusion shattered by reality. At the end, the chairs remain empty to symbolize the Old Man's hope and dream.

Though many researchers have been tackled the problem of suicide that escalates now days; yet no solutions can be found to end this horrible phenomenon which has been widespread in modern world. Despite regarding suicidal act a dangerous problem; unfortunately, it has received quite little concentration, in time it must be marked as a serious and a hazardous problem. In this regard, Ionesco is considered a leading writer for the Theatre of the Absurd as his plays break the theatrical standards of plot and structure; explore mortality, and introduce existential challenges while using imaginative, unrealistic and absurdity. By focusing on man's struggling with his society, Ionesco has succeeded in revealing the crucial problems of man's condition in modern world that causes his tragic end.

References:

1. Baumeister, R. F. (1990). *Suicide as escape from self. Psychological Review*. New York: Harper & Row.
2. Bergler, E. (1946). *Psychiatric Quarterly Supplement*.
3. Brater, E., & Cohn, R. (1990). *Around the Absurd: Essays on Modern and Postmodern Drama*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
4. Coe, R. N. (1970). *Ionesco: A Study of his Plays*. London: Methuen.
5. Coward, B. R. (1961). *The Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialism in The Literary Criterion*. Sydney: Sydney University Press.
6. Durkheim, E. S. (1951). *Originally published in 1897*. (J. A. Simpson, Ed.) Glencoe: The Free Pres.
7. Eastman, R. M. (1961). *The Experiment and Vision in Ionesco's Plays, Modern Drama*. New York: Random House.
8. Esslin, M. (1968). *The Theater of the Absurd*. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc.
9. Freud, S. (1917). Mourning and melancholia. (I. J. Strachey, Ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*.
10. Greshoff, C. (1981). *Reflections on some plays of Ionesco*. New York: Grove Press, Inc.

11. Haines, D., Scalise, J., & Ginter, E. (1993). *Relationship of loneliness and its affective elements to self-esteem*. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1993.73.2.479>.
12. Harmon, M., & Holman, M. (1995). *Beckett's Endgame*. London: John Calder.
13. Hayman, R. (1976). *Eugene Ionesco*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.
14. Hobson, H. (Ed.). (1957). *The World of Ionesco, in International Theatre*. London: John Calder.
15. Ionesco, E. (1958). *The Chairs*. (D. M. Allen, Ed.) New York: Grove Press, Inc.
16. Joiner, T. E. (2005). *Why people die by suicide*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
17. Lamont, R. (Ed.). (1973). *Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
18. Lane, N. (1994). *Understanding Eugène Ionesco*. South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press.
19. Laver, E. (1989). *The Play of Language in Ionesco's Play of Chairs: Modern Drama*. Toronto: University of Toronto, Print Winter.
20. Ott, K. L. (Ed.). (2006). *Eugene Ionesco: Man of the Theatre/Theatrical Man*. New York: Grove print.
21. Pounders, S. (1996). *Eugene Ionesco and the Theatre of the Absurd*. New York: Grove Press, Inc.
22. Tolpin, M. (1968). *Eugene Ionesco's The Chairs and the theater of the Absurd*. New York: Whiston.
23. Trout, D. L. (1980). *The Role of Social Isolation in Suicide". Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*. New York: Grove Press.