

A Pedagogical Perspective of 'Rupture', 'Reverence' and 'Relevance' in the Reading of 'The Balcony' and Rhinoceros' as Modernist Texts

Every teacher has her own pedagogy for dealing with a text in class, for these two texts- 'The Balcony' and 'Rhinoceros' I found there were common grounds that could be engaged in. These texts could be better understood when looked at with the help of a theoretical framework in combination with close reading. This essay is divided into two sections. The first deals with defining and situating 'Modernism' and identifying a modernist text. In the latter half of the essay I have explained how the two modern plays 'Rhinoceros' and 'The Balcony' can be read by a class so as to understand its unique modernistic traits. The study is not exhaustive though.

Keywords: Modernism, discontentment, rupture, isolation, existentialism

Introduction

The challenges for teaching modernist text begin from defining the concept to situating it in its historical and theoretical framework. The challenge extends to dealing with the extreme forms of techniques characterizing modernism in terms of creative authorship to critical reading, leading the teacher-reader to take a call on her method of interpreting texts. Issues as -whether the text *per se* should be taken as the sacred word or if it should be situated in the world it has been created out of, is interpreted in, and ultimately belongs to, demand attention. From questioning the role of the author to establishing the magnified role of the reader into reader-turned-author of texts to the point where the existence of a text is totally reader dependent; or problematizing the idea and letting the student decide which perspective to take, equipping her with the alternatives and letting her choose what she feels fits her academic leanings best become the challenging task of a teacher dealing with a modernist text. I am with Hans Robert Jauss when he observes the literary work not being an object standing by itself, offering the same interpretation to readers belonging to different periods, but "more like an orchestration which strikes ever new chords among its readers and which frees the text from the substance of the words and makes it meaningful for the time: 'words which must, at the same time that they speak to him, create an interlocutor capable of listening' [sic]" (Eco 1990,70)

Defining Modernism

Since modernist writing does not encompass "all" writing of the modern period hence it needs to be defined as one of the schools/movements of writing of the twentieth century marked by discontentment leading to literary rebellion against the traditional forms of writing, implying a rupture. It is a historical discontinuity arising out of and emphasizing a feeling of alienation, dejection and despair rooted in the historical circumstances, aggravated due to a rejection of the prevalent modes of thought without an adequate substitute in its place. It will be beneficial to point to the class that in terms of literary composition, discontentment was equally widespread with intellectuals writing off the old in favor of the new.

It will also be beneficial to inform the class as to what "modernism" as a school/movement of literature is to begin with, that it is a term in literature marked by its distinctive characteristic of turning against the traditional forms and techniques of writing, self reflexive in nature, marked by a feeling of loss of faith, historical discontinuity, alienation and despair

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in quest for the new, reaching out to innermost consciousness or subjectivity of the individual as opposed to the outer societal forces, leading to a complex language of thought and perception informed by the philosophy of Freud, Jung. It is a literary phenomenon that "may have disappeared as a living cultural force, but [it] maintains its provocation for all who try to understand it." (Levenson 2011, 1)

Situating Modernism

Taken as a literary response, in the late nineteenth century, underlying the deep seated changes in the socio-cultural ethos, it will not be impertinent to assume that the rise of modernity was a result of industrialization and the resultant implications leading to a weakening of religious faith, the passing away of a way of existence that was deeply rooted in religion (read Christianity) and community; to be replaced by a society that was deeply riven by class distinctions due to the rise of capitalism, the emotional bankruptcy of the First World War further escalating the effects. Linda Hutcheon traces the "project of modernity" to Rene Descartes's phrase of *cogito ergo serum* placing the human reason as the central force driving the human existence which led 'to a higher, stratospheric plane, in which nature and ethics conform to abstract, timeless, general, and universal theories' (Toulmin as cited by Hutcheon 2006, 119) leading to more objective perception of the world: "On this plane, connections among our knowledge of Nature, of ourselves, and of history and society are said to be objectively determined. This then provides us with a foundation of ordering our understanding of our world and for progressing towards what is called 'Truth'.

Identifying a modernist text

The following characteristics of Modernist texts require discussion: Modernist texts critique the system through their formal structure; the dependable voice of the author/narrator substituted by an unreliable one through innovation of techniques as 'stream of consciousness', the ornamental use of language was replaced by crisp, blunt use of the same; emphasis upon technical innovation and rejection of the old method of literary models and established works; development of new forms of reading concentrating only on the words on the page, nullifying the societal forces in all forms. The conflict regarding the various stands taken by authors needs to be outlined with a focus on the rejection of the established knowledge or the inclusion of the old with novel techniques to form a new work of art moulded according to the dictates of time at once reflecting the workings of time, "The criterion for establishing such a canon and the ever necessary retelling of history is clearly set out by the aesthetics of reception. The step from the history of the reception of individual work to the history of literature has to lead us to see and in turn to present the historical sequence of works in the way in which they determine and clarify our present experience... [sic]" (Jauss 1990, 69)

Reading 'Rupture', 'Reverence' and 'Relevance' in 'The Balcony' and 'Rhinoceros':

'*The Balcony*' (1956) is a play that revolves around a brothel- its functioning, proprietor, employees and customers. Popularly known as the "House of Illusions", it justifies its nomenclature. Contrary to the usual brothels as 'sex shops', it caters to the whims and fancies of its customers with elaborate sets and costumes to give an illusion of authenticity. The customers mostly belong to the marginalized sections of the society and come to the brothel to satisfy not their lust (sex becomes secondary) but their desire for power. Employees of the "house of illusions" are not allowed to share their experiences by the proprietor, Madame Irma. They lead a double life of women donning on roles and costumes as per the demands of their customers. They have little contact with the outer world. Outside the brothel there is a revolution in progress. The revolution is seen as threatening not only by the establishment but also Madame Irma, who fears that the revolutionaries will force her shop to close down. One of the employees, Chantal, has escaped from the "house of illusions" and sings for the revolutionaries. Her hold on them is so strong that she is seen as the emblem of the revolution. The "house of illusions" justifies its name on several occasions, one of them being the last scene of the play, in the last scene it is seen that it is not only customers who witness and are a part of the role playing carried out in the "house of illusions" but the society at large. It so happens that due to the volatile political situation, Madame Irma along with her three male employees plays the role of the queen, the bishop, the general and the judge respectively. This grand and false spectacle is carried out at the behest of the envoy from court, orchestrated by the chief-of-police.

In 'Rhinoceros' we see a French town afflicted with a condition-'rhinocerotis'. The first scene of the play unravels the response of people on having sighted a rhinoceros running loose in the market place. The situation becomes more serious every moment as the transformation of the populace from humans to rhinoceroses takes on epidemic proportions. At the end of the play there is only one character remaining- Berenger- who is caught in an inner conflict of isolation vs. transformation. Berenger refuses to give in. The atmosphere of the play is surreal with almost all the people of the town turning into rhinoceroses.

Rupture:

Citing the Context: Historical Discontents/Social Critiquing in 'The Balcony' and 'Rhinoceros'

As discussed earlier, the discontent with the prevalent socio-economic, political trends and the traditional forms and methods of expression led to the rise of modernism, a rough sketch of events that led to the creation of 'The Balcony' and 'Rhinoceros' will help put the above ideas into a better frame of reference.

In the year 1938, Swiss writer, Denis de Rougemont was staying in the German city of Nuremberg when he had the first hand experience of attending a Nazi demonstration. He gives a disturbing account of the frenzy that set in amongst the crowd at the arrival of the Fuhrer, Hitler. The mad frenzy, the

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hysteria that set in on the crowd was overwhelming as it spread and advanced with Hitler like a tide, the writer himself felt swept off his feet by the delirious enthusiasm that also took possession of him, when he felt a conflicting feeling in him to resist the dominant feeling of the majority. De Rougement felt terribly alone in the crowd for the stand he had taken and then he was overtaken by a terrible fear that took hold of his being. And that is what can be read as the starting point of 'Rhinoceros'.¹ The epidemic that sweeps over the French town of the play- rhinocerotis, can be seen as a metaphor for Nazism and other social phenomena leading to mass hysteria defying all reason and logic. Ionesco was against all forms of totalitarianism and human domination against the exercise of reason and it is this concern of his arising from the period of post World War II that can be attributed for the creation of a text like '*Rhinoceros*'² In the case of '*The Balcony*' Jean Genet explores the idea of a revolution that fails, for it is based on the traditional pattern of revolutions drawing its energy from stereotypical images that lack the courage of conviction. The play is also subversive for it shows the deep rootedness of power structures in the social schema, of which the revolution also becomes a part, rather than an oppositional force. Chantal, the emblem of the revolution, also lacks commitment for she passes on information to her previous colleagues in the brothel. The brothel, a marginalized institution in any society, is seen as the centre of the play where a powerful government official comes to rejuvenate himself, besides those belonging to the marginalized status. From a metaphorical "power dispensing" institution (keeping in mind its customers whose lust is more for power than for sex which is provided through the illusory mode), "the hall of illusions" is actually transformed into such a structure for it is from here that the Queen, the Bishop and the General emerge, saving the day for the establishment and marking the failure of the revolutionaries. An illusion is created for the gullible masses who mistake it for reality, whereas only the reader turned audience understands the magnitude of the farce that is carried out at the expense of the revolutionaries, the common people.

Genet is seen here exploring the workings of a technocratic society where the power structures, by dint of their firm holding on people's consciousness and that of the administration, fail to yield to the revolutionaries. The play also reflects a society where these structures rule the roost and humans are diminished into role playing whether as customers or workers in the "societal brothel" (society presented as brothel) of which Madame Irma's "House of illusions" is a symbol.

The Changing Forms of Drama:

Modernism as a literary phenomenon marked a change in artistic creativity with the emphasis shifting from a realistic portrayal of the world and events into symbolic, reality as perceived was 'odious', too repulsive to be represented realistically, or in a straightforward manner, and the odious could not be mentioned or represented but "

indicated" through symbolic language so much so that it requires a different perspective in evaluation.:"...we should turn from viewing the arts in terms of experience to recognizing them as a practice ." (Levenson 2011, 8) French critic Antonin Artaud and American critic George Steiner were vociferous in their views, "As we enter the twentieth century, the old shadows and stale ideals again crowd upon us. The modern pursuit of tragedy is marred by a great failure of nerve. The tragic poets of our own time are grave robbers and conjurers of ghosts out of ancient glory" (Steiner 2002, 44). "Past masterpieces are fit for the past, they are no good to us." (Artaud 2002, 33) "Once a form is used it has no more use, bidding man find another form, and theatre is the only place in the world where a gesture, once made, is never repeated the same way. If the masses do not frequent literary masterpieces, this is because the masterpieces are literary...no longer answering the needs of the times." (Artaud 2002, 33-34) It was thus a rational outcome of this discontent that new forms of drama arose with novel techniques of representation; these were subgenres of the Avant garde Theatre: Theatre of the Absurd, Theatre of Cruelty, the Existential theatre *et al.*

'The Balcony' and 'Rhinoceros' as Avant- Garde Drama

The "avant- garde" (French for advance guard used in military context for an army team that moved ahead of others and decided its future course) was used first by Olinde Rodriguez for the artists- in the context of society as a whole- for the power they held as artists in bringing about the necessary reforms at all levels. The methods used by this group of artists were experimental and subversive to the extent of critiquing not only the society but the very medium of the artist's expression, drawing attention to material, method and form. The "rupture" as observed by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck in its temporality³ reflected in the literary/artistic creativity also. Modernism as a literary phenomenon, thus, marked a change in artistic creativity. The emphasis shifted from a realistic portrayal of the world and events into symbolic. Reality as perceived was 'odious', too repulsive to be represented realistically, or in a straightforward manner, and the 'odious' could not be mentioned or represented but 'indicated' through symbolic language so much so that it required a different perspective in evaluation. Appraising this shift in perspective Michael Levenson comments, "...we should turn from viewing the arts in terms of experience to recognizing them as a practice ." (2011, 8)

'The Balcony' as Theatre of Cruelty

Antonin Artaud explains what he means by 'Theater of Cruelty', "...a theatre that is difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And on a performing level, it has nothing to do with cruelty we practice on one another, hacking at each other's bodies, carving up our individual anatomies, or like, the ancient Assyrian Emperors, posting sackfuls of human ears, noses, or neatly dissected nostrils, but the far more terrible, essential cruelty objects can practice on us. We are

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not free, and the sky can still fall on our heads. And above all else, theatre is made to teach us this.” (2002,38) ‘*The Balcony*’ provides a perfect example of ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ for through its representation of the demands of the customers from living on the margins of society to controlling its mechanism, there is seen a lust for power, a need to feel important and to wield authority on authors to vindicate self worth. The first customer of the brothel in the play, role playing in the first scene, a bishop exemplifies the idea perfectly when conversing with Irma he affirms his desire of importance simultaneously laying bare the emptiness of social roles, “...But our holiness lies only in our being able to forgive you your sins. Even if they’re only make-believe” (Genet 2005, 7)

In scene two a customer plays a judge revelling in the authority that gives the privilege to reprimand and to punish, permitting the sadistic satisfaction of seeing a thief cry. Paradoxically the same customer crawls to the prostitute playing thief who is expected to ask him to lick her feet:

“THE JUDGE (*mealy mouthed*): Exactly, my child: and get beaten. You must first deny, then admit and repent. I want to see hot tears gush from your lovely eyes. Oh! I want you to be drenched in them. The power of tears!...Where’s my statute- book?
THE THIEF : I’ve already cried....

THE JUDGE (*he seems to be reading*): Under the blows. I want tears of repentance. When I see you wet as a meadow I’ll be utterly satisfied!

THE THIEF : It’s not easy. I tried to cry before....” (Genet 2005, 12)

‘Rhinoceros’ as an Example of the Theatre of the Absurd

The plays falling into the category of the ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ had a few features in common. The first one was primarily of ‘Rupture’. These plays were more of a reaction to the ones that were being written earlier than a literary endeavour as conventionally perceived. Theatre critic and scholar Martin Esslin writes:

A well-made play is expected to present characters that are well-observed and convincingly motivated: these plays often contain hardly any recognizable human beings and present completely unmotivated actions. A well-made play is expected to entertain by the ding-dong of witty and logically built-up dialogue: in some of these plays dialogue seems to have degenerated into meaningless babble. A well-made play is expected to have a beginning, a middle, and a neatly tied-up ending: these plays often start at an arbitrary point and seem to end just as arbitrarily. By all the traditional standards of critical appreciation of the drama, these plays are not only abominably bad, they do not even deserve the name drama.” (www.samuel-beckett.net/AbsurdEsslin.html as on 21/5/13)

In the play ‘*Rhinoceros*’ the idea comes to life as we see a whole French town affected by “rhinocerotitis” where unsuspecting people start transforming into rhinoceroses. In Act Two Scene One of ‘*Rhinoceros*’ the absurdness of the situation is particularly striking when Mrs. Boeuf finds that the

‘Rhinoceros’ which has been trying to catch their attention since sometime is none other than her dearly loved husband, and on realizing this she cannot hold herself back and jumping from the office landing with the missing stairs that have been destroyed by Mr. Boeuf, the rhinoceros, lands on his back.. Ionesco writes:

“DAISY: Oh look at the way it’s going round and round. It looks as if it was in pain...what can it want?

DUDARD: It seems to be looking for someone. [To BOTARD:] Can you see it now?” (2002, 46)

“MRS. BOEUF: It’s my husband. Oh Boeuf, my poor Boeuf, what’s happened to you?

DAISY: [to MRS. BOEUF] Are you positive?

MRS. BOEUF: I recognize him, I recognize him!

[*The rhinoceros replies with a violent but tender trumpeting*]

Papillon: Well! That’s the last straw. This time he’s fired for good!

Dudard: Is he insured?

..... [*Everyone with the exception of DAISY, who is still telephoning is near to MRS. BOEUF on the landing; she jumps; BERENGER who tries to restrain her, is left with her skirt in his hand.*] (2002, 48-50)

Pondering upon the new form of drama-the theatre of the absurd-Esslin reasons the literary artist’s lack of belief in what he calls, “the neatness of resolution” (Esslin *op cit.*) as they were confronted by a feeling of bewilderment followed by the feeling of incomprehension regarding a difficult world that they came across. It is this incomprehension/despair/bewilderment/ lack of meaning that found expression in the poetic rendition of images/ issues that these playwrights confronted and expressed in their plays, as in third act of ‘*Rhinoceros*’ Ionesco describes through Berenger the shock at the incomprehensibility of facing a world which refuses to make sense:

"Berenger If only it had happened somewhere else, in some other country, and we’d just read about it in the papers, one could discuss it quietly, examine the question from all points of view and come to an objective conclusion... But when you’re involved yourself, when you suddenly find yourself up against the brutal facts you can’t help feeling directly concerned- the shock is too violent for you to stay cool and detached. I’m frankly surprised, I’m very very surprised. I can’t get over it". (Ionesco 2002, 77)

The handling of the language by the absurdist playwrights also indicated their preoccupation with using language as a means of communication that they found sadly lacking, hence their “effort to disentangle language, as a genuine instrument for logic and the discovery of reality, from the welter of emotive, illogical usages” defying “the grammatical conventions that have, in the past, often been confused with genuine logical relationships.” (Esslin *op cit.*) The idea finds a beautiful exemplification when in the first act a rhinoceros is spotted for the first time. The reaction of people is the same and the effect as captured by Ionesco borders on the ridiculous.

‘Rhinoceros’ as Existentialist Drama

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Whenever the term "Tragedy" is mentioned, Aristotle's *Poetics* comes to mind with its stupendous statured tragic heroes and a mean fate, hamartia, with the idea of 'free will' thrown in to complete the aim of evoking pity and fear leading to catharsis. However, with the passage of time, the notion of tragedy has changed as that of the fall of the tragic hero holding a status of importance in society; from a lofty character the tragic hero has become a more commonplace person, the Everyman. It is clearly evident that tragedy as a genre has become closer, more intimate, with the life of common people; not necessarily leading to catharsis but replete with the ideology of bringing about social change, holding, through innovative methods, a mirror to reality.

Whereas in the earlier (classical, Shakespearean) tragedies, the presence of God was a given, in the modern world it was the Individual and the Socio-political, economic forces that determined the destiny of the protagonist. In such a world as critics argued, real tragedy was impossible because fall from a stupendous stature was denied, rather such a stature was denied to the tragic protagonist, he was a mere mortal fighting with the societal forces in overcoming ennui as in 'Rhinoceros', or satisfying his lust for power and desire for reverence as seen in 'The Balcony'. The feeling of alienation and isolation for the hero of 'Rhinoceros' is overwhelming and complete when at the end of the play he finds himself completely alone and deserted even by the one he loved, Daisy. The world around him had transformed from that of humans to that of animals, where he was the only nonconformist, unwilling, unprepared for change, given to vascillation, self doubt and anguish. Ionesco writes:

"Berenger: ...They're the good-looking ones. I was wrong! Oh, how I wish I was like them! I haven't got any horns, more's the pity! A smooth brow looks so ugly. I need one or two horns to give my sagging face a lift. Perhaps one will grow and I needn't be ashamed anymore-then I could join them...My skin is so slack. I can't stand this white, hairy body. Oh, I'd love to have a hard skin in that wonderful dull green colour-a skin that looks decent naked without any hair on it, like theirs! [He listens to their trumpeting.] Their song is charming.... I can't stand the sight of me. I'm too ashamed! ...[He suddenly snaps out of it.] Oh well, too bad! I'll take on the whole of them! I'll put up a fight against the lot of them, the whole lot of them, the whole lot of them! I'm the last man left, and I'm staying that way until the end. I'm not capitulating! (Ionesco 2002, 105) Explaining this existentialist predicament of responsibility, isolation, anguish and despair, Sartre writes: "The existentialist frankly states that man is in anguish. His meaning is as follows: When a man commits himself to anything, fully realising that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind – in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility. There are many, indeed, who show no such anxiety. But we affirm that they are merely disguising their anguish or are in flight from it."

(www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.html as on 26/4/13)

In *The Death of Tragedy*, George Steiner argued that the triumph of rationalism and a secular worldview has removed the metaphysical grounds for tragedy in the modern world. The ancients saw themselves as a small but significant part of a much larger Reality. In a seminal passage written early in his career in *The Death of Tragedy*, he described the plight of the modern artist who no longer had the advantage of the classical education that enriched both the creation and the reception of the pre-moderns. The reason for the crisis of tragedy in modern times was that where the artist was the creator of his own mythology, time was against him. He could not live long enough to impose his special vision and the symbols he had devised for it on the habits of language and the feelings of his society as its status was gained only having internalized the historical and social realities experienced by a civilization. (Steiner2002, 60) Steiner surmises cultural rhythms that are not easily put into context in a specific geographical area or in a limited period of time but, rather, follow much more the logic of *long duree*. The archaeological mind-set of this approach is crucial, and it presupposes an understanding of the manner in which historical accumulation takes place and is articulated or crystallized. The affirmation of human worth and potential, an essential element of the tragic vision, points to one more reason why the modern age has produced so few authentic tragedies.

Reverence:

The Language/Semiotics of Modern Theatre

Similar discontent manifested in the use of language too with writers complaining, "Our words seem tired and shopworn. They are no longer charged with their original innocence or with the power of revelation....And because they are weary, words no longer seem prepared to assume the burden of new meaning and plurality Which Dante, Montaigne, Shakespeare, and Luther placed upon them. We add to our technological vocabulary by joining together used scraps, like a reclamer of old metals. We no longer fuse the raw materials of speech into new glory as did the compilers of King James Bible." (Steiner2002, 53)

It is to be underscored that thus the focus of the modernist texts shifted from the outer world to the inner world of the individual and could be seen as individualism and humanism in its most exaggerated and extreme form reflected in the formal innovations and techniques. That the sense of alienation and despair was born out of the horror of the First World War, industrialization and an impersonal, capitalistic mode of society. The question- Whether Modernism is over or is it still alive in Postmodernism will also need attention.

It is imperative for the teacher to inform the students:

That the language of the theatre goes beyond the dialogues; it is in its totality that the message and the success of the play lies. The stage directions, the appearance of the actors are symbols of a reality that

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the playwright wants to convey to her readers. Martin Esslin delineates the three types of signs as identified by semioticians: index, icon and symbol and maintains that they should be taken together in making meaning of a dramatic performance. 'Icon' a Greek word for picture, plays an important function in a drama for all dramatic performance are basically iconic in their aim of representation of reality; index signs are a result of relationships (verbal/non-verbal) to the object depicted. The symbolic message is embedded in not only language, but nonverbal signs as gestures, costumes, lights, expressions and stage setting.⁴

In his essay "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance" Umberto Eco explicates the Soviet folklorist Bogatyrev's ideas as presented in his paper on signs in theatre. When Bogatyrev observed that signs in theatre are not signs of an object but signs of a sign of an object, according to Uco, "he meant that beyond their immediate denotation, all the objects, behaviors and words used in theatre have an additional *connotative* power" He illustrates the idea with the case of the a starving man eating bread on the stage. Uco maintains that as an actor playing a starving man can eat some bread. The act of eating bread connotes the idea of starvation. But under other circumstances the same act of the piece of bread being eaten by a starving man besides denoting the class of all possible pieces of bread also connotes the idea of poverty. (Uco 1990,135)

Similarly, the drunken man on the stage connotes more than drunkenness, according to Uco: "The drunken man stands for the cause of his physical devastation; he also realizes an antonomasia, since he, individually taken, stands for his whole category- he is the drunken man par excellence. But (according to the example of Peirce) he is also realizing an irony by antonymy. He, the drunk, the victim of alcoholism, stands ironically for his contrary; he celebrates the advantage of temperance. He implicitly says, 'I am so, but I should not be like this, and you should not become like me. 'Or, at another level, 'Do you see How Beautiful I am? Do you realize what a kind of glorious sample of humanity I am representing here?'[sic]" (Uco 1990,135)

The connotative power of the theatre is further enhanced with the 'icon' put in the right frame, "in this case, the standards of Salvation army surrounding him." (Uco 1990, 135)

Commitment/s of the Playwrights as in 'The Balcony' and 'Rhinoceros'

Finding a parallel between the realists and the symbolist commitments Levenson quotes Ibsen in defining and defending the Vanguardist minority commitment of leading the "van" and pushing "on to points the majority has not yet reached." (Levenson 2011, 13) with Shaw attacking the society in harsher terms, "If 'Man' means this majority, then 'Man' has made no progress; he has, on the contrary, resisted it...The majority of men at present in Europe have no business to be alive; and no serious progress will be made until we address ourselves earnestly and scientifically to the task of producing trustworthy

human material for society. In short, it is necessary to breed a race of men in whom the life-giving impulses predominate." (cited by Levenson 2011,13) By representing the power hungry and narcissistic attitude of people belonging to all walks of life, especially as embodied in the character of the chief of police, Genet is mirroring the prevalent attitudes of his time. Madame Irma victimizes her employees by keeping them away from the world outside the brothel and in turn is victimized by the chief of police for whom she does not matter much, though they were in love once. In Scene two of the first act when we see the judge crawling on the floor goaded by the female thief to lick her foot, the idea of subversion of power and corruption is clear. In the *mise en scene* and in the opening dialogue, Ionesco writes, "...A JUDGE, who, when he stands up, will seem larger than life...is crawling, on his stomach, towards the woman, who shrinks as he approaches.

The Thief: (*holding out her foot*): Not yet! Lick it! Lick it first...

(The JUDGE makes an effort to continue crawling. Then he stands up and, slowly and painfully, though apparently happy, goes and sits down on a stool. THE THIEF (the woman described above) drops her domineering attitude and becomes humble.)" (Ionesco 2002, 11)

Modernism as a literary phenomenon marked a change in artistic creativity with the emphasis shifting from a realistic portrayal of the world and events into the symbolic, reality was perceived as 'odious', too repulsive to be represented realistically, or in a straightforward manner, and the odious could not be mentioned or represented but "indicated" through symbolic language so much so that it requires a different perspective in evaluation. "...we should turn from viewing the arts in terms of experience to recognizing them as a practice ." (Levenson 2011, 8) In an interview answering the question if 'Rhinoceros' was based on a nightmare Ionesco replied: "Yes, it was partly a nightmare, a distant, assimilated nightmare... I simply meant to show how a mutation is possible in collective thought, to show how it comes about. I was quite simply, phenomenologically, describing the process of collective transformation. I was doing it in a completely lucid way, yet basing it upon my night mare image. But I was no longer inside the nightmare." (as cited by Basu 2002, xix)

In 'Rhinoceros' the idea of ennui -resulting from a capitalistic societal framework- is highlighted. That the human existence, as the Irish poet Louis Macneice suggested in his poem, ("I am not yet born; O fill me/ With strength against those who would freeze my/humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton/ would make me a cog in a machine- a thing with/ one face a thing" 'Prayer Before Birth') should not be transformed into a mechanistic one as registered in the protest of the main, protagonist Berenger in 'Rhinoceros'. The transformation of the people from humans to rhinoceroses is a comment on the 'herd mentality' of people, the mentality of

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following whatever is the trend irrespective of its goals or consequences.

'Self Reflexivity' of the text as seen in 'The Balcony'

In the classical drama the performances reduced the audience to the role of passive observers, so diminished was the role of the audience and same applied to the reader. Modern playwrights rebelled against the old formal techniques of dramatic convention and heralded new methods to portray the modern life and the new/ tragic visions they gave rise to. Language was altered methods were improvised, the old style of theatrical presentation replaced the new with the audience rather than being lulled into believing a reality were made to understand what they watched was only a performance and the truth represented was only so; this doing away with passivity of the audience, this rude awakening marking the difference between reality and illusion was a defining characteristic of the modern European theatre. An example regarding this can be seen when Madame Irma of Jean Genet's play 'The Balcony' addresses the audience. Genet writes:

Irma: (*alone, and continuing to extinguish lights*):... (*She calls out, facing the wings* :) Carmen? Carmen?... Bolt the doors, my dear, and put the furniture- covers on.... (*She continues extinguishing.*) In a little while, I'll have to start all over again...put all the lights on again ...dress up.... (*A cock crows.*) Dress up ... ah, the disguises! Distribute roles again ... assume my own.... (*She stops in the middle of the stage, facing the audience*) ... Prepare yours ...judges, generals, bishops, chamberlains, rebels who allow the revolt to congeal, I'm going to prepare my costumes and studios for tomorrow....You must now go home, where everything-you can be quite sure- will be falsier than here....You must go now. You'll leave by the right, through the alley... . (Ionesco 2002, 86)

The above passage is important for another reason, "*self reflexivity*" (Italics mine) as seen in modernist art, and the changes in the formal/technical aspect of drama as a form of art. As opposed to Realist drama we see the new form of drama drawing attention to its form, Patricia Waugh comments on this self reflexive role of modern art, "Kant showed truth could only be discovered through a self- reflexive awareness of the tools and methods of thought used in its investigation. So too, the formal properties of modernist art define the mode and nature of its autonomous aesthetic truth: content is form. (*Waugh 1992, 70*) and as Levenson maintains, "Modernism needs to be understood not an elite craft refined in secret but as a complex exchange between artists and audiences. Through the last half, and especially the last quarter, of the nineteenth century, a large literate public found itself entreated and defied, encouraged and repulsed. The revulsion of many prepared the pleasure of some." (Levenson 2011, 3)

Relevance of Modernist literature/Techniques Today:

As works of art, as a record of cultural development, as a record of socio-economic,

historical and political development, the self defeatist idea of art as insulated from history, for in keeping with Eliot's tradition and Individual Talent any work of art invariably forms a part of history, influences and is influenced by works of art and is objective to a great extent for in a good work of art the author produces an impersonality which dissociates him from the text. "To live within our own modernity is to be anxious about our place in time, the future of culture and the fate of the changes that the modernists sought to achieve." (Levenson 2011, 1)

Ramifications for Pedagogy:

The teacher of the modernist text has to make the class aware of the theoretical/historical/critical and formal concerns engaged by the text, it is then that the text will be understood and appreciated in its totality as a literary work that is both responsive to and responsible for the winds of change that affect the society at large. Michael Levenson comments, "In modernist studies, we need to engage the extension of the field; we need to be theoretically aware; and, we need a subtle understanding of relations between texts and contexts." (2011, 10) These concerns can be further explored by the class with the help of the necessary course material in the form of individual findings. Class engagement can be in the form of presentations or assignments. Teaching and understanding can be improved with the inclusion of relevant Background essays and topics.

Notes

1. See 'Preface to 'Rhinceros': For an American school edition with the French text', Eugene Ionesco, 'Rhinceros', Translated by Derek Prouse, edited by Dilip. K. Basu, Delhi: World view Publications, 2002:149. Print.
2. In *Present Past Present: A Personal Memoir* Ionesco writes, "In China there is Mao's paranoia, the mad folly of a bloody island[...] China proclaims that it prefers the destruction of the world to a European or an American peace. Let the whole world perish, China included, if China doesn't manage to dominate the whole world: this is what Hitler said of Germany." (as cited by Basu xxiv, *op. cit.*)
3. For further reading see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures past: On the Semantics of Historical time*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Penguin. !966. Print.
4. Genet writes in his essay 'My Reflections on Theatre', "In today's cities, the only place-unfortunately still on the outskirts- where a theatre could be built is in the cemetery. The choice will be useful for both cemetry and theatre alike. The architect of the theatre will be unable to bear the inane constructions wherein families bury their dead." (*The Balcony*. Ed.B. Mangalam. Delhi: Worldview Publications.2005:102. Print.)

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 12. --Steiner,George. 2002. "On Modern Tragedy" *Modern European Drama: Background Prose Readings*.Delhi: Worldview Publications. Rpt. of *The Death of Tragedy*. 1965.
 13. Williams, Raymond. *Modern Tragedy*. London: Redwood Burn Ltd. (Verso Editions). 1979. Print.