

**The Literary Impact of the Absurd Movement on Cormac
McCarthy's
"The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form
A Research Paper
Submitted By
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Introduction:

This paper is prominently an analytic demonstration of the influential impact of the Absurd on McCarthy's play *The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form*. In order to accomplish this task, the following section involves an analytic comparison between McCarthy's play and two prominent plays of the absurd drama. These two plays, namely, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, and Edward Albee's *The Zoo story* are recognized as leading representatives of two different modes of the "Theatre of the Absurd". Nonetheless, this comparison is basically concerned with an observation of the allegorical, structural and technical perspectives of these two plays as reflected in McCarthy's *The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form*.

Cormac McCarthy's single act and two character play *The Sunset Limited: A novel in a Dramatic Form* was premiered on May 18 through June 25, 2006, at Steppenwolf's Garage Theatre in Chicago. The play was also published by Vintage international in January 2007 which might explain the apparent subtitle "A Novel in Dramatic Form". The play was adopted in 2010 as a movie with the same title starring Tommy Lee Jones and Samuel Jackson.

Austin Pendleton, who first played the role of the professor, comments on the play as he says "'you'd think it was his 16th play, at least. The dramatic sense in it is at once traditional and righteningly original. . . . [I]t's a mountain I'm very excited to have been asked to try to climb cormac McCarthy is just a gorgeous writer, that's all" (12). And Jason Zinoman of the New York Times calls the play "a poem in celebration of death" (2010). Moreover, Dianne C. Luce remarks on McCarthy's play as she writes that the play is "dynamic, human, often humorous, but with ultimate dramatic questions at its core" (13).

The play opens with two characters sitting round a table in a subway tenement apartment in the black ghettos of New York. The first character is a large African American ex-convict who turned into a street preacher and the other character is a middle aged White college professor. Even though the stage directions refer to these characters as "The professor" and "the black man", when designating the speakers of the lines they are referred to as "White" and "Black". The audiences learn from the dialogue that earlier on White had tried to commit suicide attempting to jump in front of a subway train. Nevertheless, Black subsequently saves him and takes him back to his apartment as a sort of virtual prisoner in order to find out the

reasons behind his attempt and to convince him to drop the idea of suicide and value his own life.

Eventually, both characters are engaged in a deep and intensive philosophical debate about God, human existence and human suffering. During this stark debate, they talk of general issues, drink coffee, eat, and every once and a while White gets up insisting on leaving, however, Black convinces him to stay a little longer then they are once again participate in their conversation. As the dialogue goes on it becomes more intense till the degree that at the end of the play white, not convinced by Black's words, burst out in anger claiming his incredibly deviated and decimating beliefs then leaves the apartment still insists on committing suicide. Eventually, Black collapses on his knees in tears calling out to God in a state of doubt in his own faith.

Metaphors and Allegorical Representations:

The phrase "Sunset Limited" is originally the name of a southern transcontinental Amtrak train running from Orlando to Los Angeles through New Orleans, El Paso, and other points south such as Louisiana. One of the train's major lines ran through Knoxville at the time McCarthy himself grew up. Dianne C. Luce relates that "The name "Sunset" goes back to the Sunset Route of the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio Railway and was used as early as 1874. Thus the Sunset Limited has figured for decades in the popular culture of the region" (CMJ 14). Nevertheless, at the present time the "Sunset Limited" is a subway train running through Brooklyn, New York. It was in front of this particular train that White had attempted to throw himself before being rescued by Black. Susan J. Tybvriski observes that "The Sunset Limited" is a "metaphor for his [White's] suicidal impulse in the face of the meaninglessness of human existence" (CMJ 121). The professor chooses to leap in front of the Sunset Limited sending him to the west of everything where he can endure nothingness and total darkness.

However, the allegorical usage of the title is repeatedly uttered by both characters throughout the play as they relate the phrase with White's attempted suicide and yearning for death. Dianne C. Luce remarks "The title of the play is metaphorical: to ride the Sunset Limited is to take the final journey, to die, to ride the west of everything" (CMJ 14).

Early in the play, as White relates that after his realization of the futility of his existence he reached to the conclusion of suicide and Black responds expressing this allegory as he relates "all this culture stuff is all they ever was tween you and the Sunset Limited" (TSL 22). He imposes the imagery of the Subway train "Sunset Limited" as an allegory of death. Black goes on asking White "What is the use of such notions such as them if it won't keep you glued down to the platform when the Sunset Limited comes through at eighty mile a hour" (TSL 22). Susan J. Tybvriski writes "Embodied in this dialogue is the question what "notions" can keep suicidal despair at bay? What can keep us reliably grounded in the world of the living?"

(CMJ 122). However, White confirms that “I believe in the Sunset Limited” (TSL 22) and that the only exit is to leap in front of the train. Similar assumptions and references to the “Sunset Limited” are repeated several times throughout the play with the same metaphorical meaning of death.

Moreover, as the “Sunset Limited” presents death it is implicated that the subway itself and the platform represent the world or even the universe, and the travelers represent all mankind. Dianne J. Luce Writes “The subway, of course, is the world” (CMJ 18). Black emphasizes this point as he attempts to sum up White’s overall status as he claims:

The simplest things has got more to em than you can ever understand. Bunch of people standin around on a train platform of a morning. Waitin to go to work...but they might be one commuter waitin there on the edge of that platform that for him is something else. It might be even the edge of the world. The edge of the universe....So he’s a different kind of commuter. He’s world’s away from them everyday travelers (TSL 73).

Black metaphorically explains that the ordinary individual living in society repeatedly experiences his average everyday activities with a feeling of complete contentedness to the life he lives. Nevertheless, there comes a different kind of individual who understands life differently from all those surrounding him. He becomes “worlds away” from everybody else waiting on the edge of the world for the opportunity to end the meaninglessness of his existence. This is the positive description of White’s conceptual status. Intelligibly, Cormac McCarthy proposes these notions in his metaphorical usage of the play’s title *The Sunset Limited*.

The metaphorical usage of the play’s title is found to be significantly parallel to the allegorical quality represented by the other two plays of the absurd. While the title *The Sunset Limited* refers to death and nothingness, Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* refers to the notion of human anticipation and hope for some entity that would eventually give meaning to existence. In regard of *The Zoo Story*, Edward Albee intentionally selects “The Zoo” in his title as a metaphorical portray of the modern American society. Albee visions the individuals living in modern society as animals living in the zoo. Rose A. Zimberado relates:

The world is a zoo “with everyone separated by bars from everyone else, the animals for the most part from each other, and always the people from the animals” (49); that is, men are not only separated from each other, but from their own basic animal natures (as Peter, one of “the people” is, until the end of the play, separated from his own animal nature). (10).

Every individual has imprisoned himself in a virtual cage that separates him from the surrounding community till he is completely isolated in his own world.

Consequently, it could be legitimately declared that Cormac McCarthy utilized his play's title in the same perspective as the two preceding playwrights of the absurd. The central implication here is that from the very beginning of McCarthy's play, the blueprints of the "Theatre of the Absurd" are already present within *The Sunset Limited*.

Furthermore, another usage of allegory is relevantly exercised within McCarthy's "The Sunset Limited", specifically, the metaphorical implications of the characters of the play. Cormac McCarthy managed both of his characters, Black and White, as key instruments to convey a more subtle concept to his audiences. Dianne C. Luce observes the metaphorical presentation of White as she emphasizes that "Although the professor exhibits an exaggerated sense of his own exceptionalism, White is every lost man; but as a spokesman for the spirit, Black's allegorical significance is richer and more ambiguous" (CMJ 16). White, with his aesthetic beliefs and his depression, clearly resembles every lost individual in society who managed to discover the truth and could no longer mingle along with the meaningless and emptiness of his existence.

Nevertheless, as Black introduces a most profound heretical concept, asserting that "there aint no way for Jesus to ever be man without ever man bein Jesus" (TSL 80), Black comprehends that if Christ could resemble every man then every man resembles Christ. Eventually, this inclination clearly includes himself. William Quirk remarks that "Black is God, but he is so just as everyone else in the world is" (43). McCarthy depicts Black as Jesus with his Christian message and his everlasting life of service to all mankind attempting to save them from destruction. Dianne J. Luce illustrates this notion as she announces:

He [Black] is a human avatar of Jesus, Jesus in his everyman manifestation; he is a seeker— not a "doubter" but a "questioner," as he tells White (67); he is the "big black angel" (23) who seeks to deliver White from destruction but whose blessing is rejected; he is the gnostic messenger from the alien good God (CMJ 16).

"Black" was at a certain point "White" before he became a representative of Jesus, and precisely from his near death experience. Then God spoke to him and with God's speech, Black was converted entirely to a spiritual messenger making him parallel to Jesus. Similar to Christ, Black now leads a life where he ministers those lost and in need for guidance to ensure their salvation and that are, such as White, seeking death as their only available asylum.

Relevantly, the allegorical application of characters as figurative representatives of all humanity and Christ is also observed in the other two plays of the absurd. In regard of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Raymond Cowell remarks "Pozzo represents mankind, and Lucky Christ, if this view is accepted, what takes place before Vladimir and Estragon is the re-acting of the redemption" (114). Pozzo is viably interpreted as the selfish common man with his dominating instincts as George Watson, in his "Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" A Reappraisal", affirms

“Pozzo represents the total belief in self alone and the resulting self-importance. He owns the land, he is responsible to no one, he is masterful and assured” (27).

Nevertheless, interpreting the character of Lucky, it is found that he is an equivalent to Christ as he suffers to redeem mankind. Even though Christ has been tortured and crucified by the very hands of those he seeks to redeem, he bears the pain and the suffering, and even the humiliation, in order to bestow God’s forgiveness upon them. Theoretically parallel to Christ, Beckett’s “Lucky” sacrificed himself for the pleasure of mankind, which is represented by the dominating Pozzo. George Watson asserts:

In his[Lucky] total submission to his master, in his acceptance of humiliation without a murmur.... Lucky may be seen in his relationship to Pozzo as an embodied reduction and absurdum of Christ's words (Matthew, xi, 28-29): “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (30).

Lucky willingly accepts the humiliation imposed upon him not only by Pozzo but also by all the other characters of the play. Beckett deliberately proposes Lucky’s acceptance as Pozzo points out that “Why he doesn’t make himself comfortable...it follows that he doesn’t want to” (20). And this image is parallel to Christ’s acceptance of the humiliation he himself experienced.

In further regard of the issue of symbolism related to the Christian experience, on Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story* Rose A. Zimbardo reflects:

The symbols are large and are..... traditional Christian symbols. There is Jerry, or Jesus, a thirty-year-old outcast whose purpose is to establish contact “with God ... “And there is Peter, St. Peter, an average worldling who is stripped by the irresistible Jerry or his material goods and led toward a revelation of truth (14).

There is “Peter”, the character that represents the everyday ordinary individual who, equivalent to “White”, is isolated and alienated from the surrounding society. Moreover, according to Zimbardo, Peter represents St. Peter who was rescued and led to the truth by the guidance of Jesus. Then there is Jerry who consciously sacrifices himself to awaken Peter to the reality of his social status and realize the alienated and selfish existence by which he lives. Peter like the other isolated individuals has imprisoned himself within a virtual cage of steel that separates him from everyone else. Eventually, Jerry, by an act of suicide, attempts to free Peter from his cage in the social Zoo. Albee, by this sacrificial act, pictures Jerry playing the role of Christ as he has sacrificed himself to redeem the damned. Anita M. Stenz relates that “because the play is resonant with allusions to classical mythology. Biblical locutions and the atmosphere of a heroic quest, it is tempting to romanticize or glorify the character of Jerry. It has been suggested...that he is a Christ figure or a prophet” (6) and that “on a symbolic level Jerry may be identified as Christ” (6).

Even more, at the end of the play as Peter, holding the knife that Jerry has thrown at his feet, threatens Jerry telling him "I'll give you one last chance to get out of here and leave me alone" (59) Jerry then "(Sighs heavily)" and says "So be it" (59). Charles Thomas Samuels asserts:

Giving Peter his knife... Jerry submits to a violation with Christ-like equanimity... "So be it," he intones, and smilingly dies. But not before he sends Peter back to the parakeets with a benediction (189).

Here, Jerry decides to accept death to secure Peter's salvation as to insure his recognition of the reality of his apparent existence.

From this survey of the metaphorical presentations within McCarthy's *The Sunset Limited*, it is found that McCarthy is submitted to the similar technique of dealing with allegory as that found in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Albee's *The Zoo Story*.

Polarity and the characters of the play:

It has been mentioned earlier that McCarthy's characters White and Black resemble a polarized relation. McCarthy introduces White as a White colored atheist College professor with a high leveled intellectual supremacy. Black, on the other hand, is a dark colored African-American ex-convict who has converted, and is presently a street preacher living in a subway tenement apartment. However, McCarthy's actual intention behind this polarized relation is entirely stripped from the issues of racism and social class. It seems quite clear that McCarthy deliberately chose Black to represent light and White to represent darkness for the avoidance of any false interpretation of the play as one merely discussing the issue of racism.

Nevertheless, McCarthy emphasizes the adequacy of this paradoxical reality on variously differential levels. They both represent not only different life styles, but also opposite beliefs and theories of their overall existence and imposingly different psychological responses to these beliefs. Black depicts a subjective belief in God who offers hope for an everlasting life as a consequential outcome of the individual's social unity with the surrounding individuals. In response to this vision, he unites himself with the surrounding community with a beneficial relation of advisory and preaching. On a different level, White visions an atheistic theology of an isolated, pessimistic, and contemptible human existence that is destined for absolute destruction. Again White reacts to this view with a devoted supplication to death.

However, with this specific contradictory layout, McCarthy's true intention is what Luce relates as "reverse conventional light-versus-dark associations" (CMJ 15). Luce asserts that McCarthy portrays a philosophical debate between darkness and light and leaves the audiences to conclude their own theoretical outcomes. Eventually, references to darkness have been repeatedly visible

throughout the play exclusively with relevance to White. Moreover, White openly asserts that “I’m a professor of darkness. The night in day’s clothing” (TSL 116). And that “I yearn for the darkness. I pray for death. Real death” (TSL 112). He apprehends his vision of darkness to be the true overall reality of human existence as he relates that “The darker picture is always the correct one” (TSL 93). The result of this prevailing darkness is that “we will not be here much longer” (TSL 94). Black invokes a contradictory view that assumes the revelation of light over darkness. He explains to White that “The light is all around you. ‘cept you don’t see nothin but shadow. And the shadow is you” (TSL 98). Black believes in the persistency of light but the individual himself is responsible for enshrouding it with the darkness of his own soul.

Furthermore, another reference to the opposition between darkness and light is present as White asserts to Black that “You see everything in black and White” (TSL 88). Black goes on affirming this accusation as he replies “It is black and white” (TSL 88). Here Black explicitly explains that, in the human existence it is either you believe in God and live in an eternal life of light, or you are in eternal darkness. This view, as White points out, “makes the world easier to understand” (TSL 88) in the view of Black. Apparently, McCarthy aims to reflect the idea that the world is actually not primarily black or white. Through this disputation McCarthy aims to announce that there is a certain point between darkness and light, or in other words Black and White, which is the intended objective of human existence. Furthermore, this outcome represents the core concept of the play as Susan declares that “These opposing modes of apprehending reality inform the debate at the core of this play” (CMJ 121).

In Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* the exact technique of polarized characterization is proposed. James L. Roberts concedes that “One of Samuel Beckett’s main concerns is the polarity of existence. In *Waiting for Godot* we have such characteristic polarities as sight versus blindness, life–death, time present–time past, body–intellect, waiting–not waiting, going–not going, and dozens more” (6). Samuel Beckett deliberately introduces his four characters in the play in pairs; every pair is consistent of two totally opposing individuals.

Considering the relation of the first pair of characters, Vladimir and Estragon, Martin Esslin explains:

In eating his carrot, Estragon finds that the more he eats of it, the less he likes it, while Vladimir reacts the opposite way — he likes things as he gets used to them. Estragon is volatile, Vladimir persistent. Estragon dreams, Vladimir can not stand hearing about dreams. Vladimir has stinking breath, Estragon has stinking feet. Vladimir remembers past events, Estragon tends to forget them as soon as they have happened (2001 48).

Vladimir and Estragon are the first characters that appear on stage and they strongly represent two contradictory characteristics even though they share a certain lack of

independence. From the proposed dialogue it seems clear that, even though each character is the opposite of the other, they seem to depend on each other and are totally unwilling to depart. Edith Kern comprehends this sort of characterization as Beckett's aim that both characters "fundamentally, they represent all mankind" (43).

A rather similar method of polarization is explicitly found in regard of the second pair of characters, namely, Pozzo and Lucky. While Pozzo represents the dominating tyrant high class masters, Lucky is found to be his master's servant that follows his every footstep and is completely, and willingly reliant on his master. These awkward contradictory characteristics represent one angle of Beckett's methodology in reflecting his view of human existence.

Relatively, In Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, he also represents his two characters of the play, Peter and Jerry, as total opposites. Anita M. Stenz writes that "The two characters, which in conventional society represent extremes in the social spectrum, illustrates the consequences of apathy and human indifference and reveal the self-destruction and cruelty implicit in an education for conformity" (5). As it was mentioned earlier, Peter is introduced as a married, successful and respectable American Citizen.

Jerry, on the other hand, is a single, lower class, and unsuccessful member of society, as Peter Wolfe in his "The Social Theater of Edward Albee" relates that "Jerry, the other character, personifies the drifter, the lonely, who finds himself living without prospects in a rooming house on New York's upper west side (249). Both characters represent completely different qualities based on specific social standards. Furthermore, Anita M. Stanz comments that "For the author the polarization of Jerry and Peter represent Man's alienation from himself" (8). Consequently, the aim behind this polarized relation is a typical experimentation of the value of human relations in society. Albee confronted his characters with one another in order to explore the sort of outcome that would be produced combining these two representatives of opposite social classes. Nevertheless, the results were devastating concluding the social alienation of the individuals in modern society.

In the three presented plays, the technique of polarization functions as the core concept and reflects the general aim of these plays.

Repetition and Circular Action:

The mode of repetition and the cyclic conception of time and action which distinguishes the "Theatre of the Absurd" could be also detected in McCarthy's *The Sunset Limited*. William Quirk sustains that "The Sunset Limited reveals that it operates in terms of a cyclical conception of time, not the conventional understanding of linear time, the "clock time" that is an infinite succession of new moments" (41). Early in the play as White elusively asks Black "Do you really think that Jesus is in this room" (TSL 7) which is rather peculiar because Black had not even made any sort of references to the mere suggestion that implies Jesus being in

the room. Even though Black had spoken of God before White's question he never referred to Jesus or the idea that he believes him to be in the room. In other words, the mode of the conversation does not fit to be the proper elaboration for such a suggestion. Quirk explains that it could merely be a matter of "anticipating" (41), nonetheless, he goes on asserting that the idea of anticipation is rather "Too specific" (41). In response, Quirk proposes a different theory concerning this matter as he suggests:

we can venture another hypothesis: Black has indeed already claimed that Jesus is in the room with them, but he has not made the claim here and now. Rather, he made the claim in an earlier encounter with White, an earlier encounter that is nothing other than an earlier "performance," an earlier occurrence of this conversation (41).

Quirk theoretically suggests that the play carries out a continual cycling repetition of itself. That is, White already knows that Black believes that Jesus is in the room. That is, the two characters have previously had this conversation at an earlier time and this is a mere repetition of this cycling dialogue.

However, further expressions are found that support this theoretical concept of repetition. One explicit expression is visible within White's response to Black's enquiry about "Cecil", who is just an imaginative figure proposed by White for the reason of clarification. As Black asks "Who's Cecil?"(TSL 8) White surprisingly replies "We're not going to get into this again are we? ... The fact that I made Cecil up" (TSL 8). White clearly points out that they had previously talked about "Cecil" and that he is just an imaginative figure. And because there is no other reference to Cecil throughout the play, then they must have had this conversation within an earlier encounter or "performance". Again, White's assumption leads to the idea of an endless cycling mode within the play.

Furthermore, at the very end of the play and as White leaves the apartment apparently returning to the subway to commit suicide, Black call's him aloud and says "Professor? I'm goin to be there in the mornin. I'll be there. You hea? I'll be there in the morning... I'll be there" (TSL 117). McCarthy elaborates that the whole play is due for repetition and that the next morning White will attempt to jump in front of the Sunset Limited and again Black will save him and they will both have a somewhat similar conversation in Black's apartment.

In an attempt to understand McCarthy's motivation behind his usage of this cyclic mode, a consideration of Black's notion of an everlasting life must be accounted for. Black presents the idea of "everlasting life" as he emphasizes:

He [Jesus] said you could have life everlasting.... And you can have it. Now. Today.... To get it you got to let you brother off the hook. You got to actually take him and hold him in your arms and it don't make no difference what color he is or what he smells like or even if he don't want to be held (TSL 78).

Black explains that by helping another troubled individual, the activity of which he is presently practicing in helping White, one gains an everlasting life. And McCarthy gives a hint that he is assumingly referring to Black's situation, as Black asserts that "it don't make no difference what color he is....or even if he don't want to be held" (TSL 78). It is clear that White is different in color than Black and, moreover, he insists that he doesn't want to be saved and he pleads for death. Consequently, by Black's efforts in order to save White, he has already gained a "Life everlastin'" and he has it "Now. Today" explaining the continuity of the play.

In relation to the play's duplication of the repetitive cyclic mode inhibited in the Absurd drama, William Quirk notes that "the play follows the mode of repetition that *Waiting for Godot* suggests of itself. Vladimir's third line to Estragon is, "So there you are again" (3), a statement that plays with the repetition (and general repeatability) of stage performance" (41). Quirk goes on explaining this view in a more detailed manner as he writes:

What comes to light here is that White and Black, much like Beckett's bums in *Waiting for Godot*, seem to be caught up in repetitions of their own story. Black will save White again and again, they will have some version of this conversation again and again, and White will leave Black's apartment to go end his life again and again. The repetitions might not be absolute, point-for-point repetitions, but the play nevertheless suggests that a certain cyclicity characterizes its structure (42).

White and Black are trapped in the same sort of cyclic existence as Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon. In Beckett's two act play "*Waiting for Godot*" he introduces the two acts as typically exact duplicates of each other. James L. Roberts relates that *Waiting for Godot* is circular in structure, and a third act (or even a fourth or fifth act, etc.) could be added, having the exact same structure" (17). Not only both acts open with the presence of Estragon and the entrance of Vladimir and finish with both characters alone, but they also encounter the characters Pozzo, Lucky and the Boy in both acts.

Eventually, the repetitive structure of Beckett's play implicates a seemingly parallel concept of that in *The Sunset Limited*. As McCarthy proposes the notion of the value of human communication and mutual support, Beckett reflects the concept of hope and human reliance on one another as they share the hope of something better. Baber Gascoigne explains that Beckett's "*Waiting for Godot*":

is, above all, about mankind's attempts to fiddle its way through life, setting up a wall of hopes and pretences between itself and despair. The greatest of these hopes-that there is some point to existence, that we are keeping some mysterious appointment on earth and therefore not random scraps of life-is symbolized by Godot (188).

That is, every individual is in a state of “waiting” anticipating the arrival of a certain entity that will be the reason for his salvation. In the case of Vladimir and Estragon, they are both endlessly and continuously “waiting” for “Godot” whom, they believe, will save them and fulfill all their desires.

Furthermore, Ruby Cohn emphasizing the circular methodology and indirection regarding Albee’s *The Zoo Story*, writes “The Zoo Story already announces the suggestive indirection of subsequent works. Significantly, the method of indirection is explained by an outsider who has suffered at the hands of the establishment” (6). Cohn goes on specifying the element of circularity in the play as he concedes:

Early in the Zoo Story, Jerry informs Peter “I took the subway down to the village so I could walk all the way up Fifth Avenue to the zoo... sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly” Through Jerry’s explanation, indirection and animality enter at Albee’s play (6).

It seems as if Edward Albee deliberately mentioned the issue of Jerry taking a longer circular route instead of the proper one to convey the whole facility of indirection intended within the play. The play is based on the notion of practicing certain indirect activities that could be comprehended by the audiences in numerous directions and meanings. As suggested by Anita M. Stanz that “From the very beginning of his career Albee has made it clear that he has no intention of tying everything up for an audience. He wants them to have something to think about when they go out of the theater” (12). Albee, like the majority of the absurd playwrights, provides actions that hold a deeper interpretation than what is merely observed on stage and this is apparently what Jerry aims to explain by his circular route to the zoo.

A different structural mode of repetition is also noticed within McCarthy’s *The Sunset Limited*. This mode could be described as a verbal repetition of a “catchphrase” that is repeatedly uttered by one or more of the characters throughout the play. Moreover, this “catchphrase” holds specific references relevant to the general meaning of the play. Shortly after Black takes the professor to his apartment and starts their conversation, White tells Black “I should go” (3) and henceforth it recurs several times throughout the play. It is precisely within the moments where the dialogue becomes more intense that White utters this phrase as if he is implicating that he is still not convinced and its time to head for the Sunset Limited, or death.

Furthermore, Black too has his own phrase which he repeats in moments of silence and thought. In the opening line of the play Black looks at the professor and says “So what am I supposed to do with you. Professor?” (TSL 1). This phrase reflects Black’s continues devotion to the idea of saving White and convincing him to let go of the idea of suicide by expressing his attempt to figure a way of doing so.

Nevertheless, at the end of the play and as Black is running out of ideas, he utters the phrase but in a more desperate manner as he says "What can I do?" (TSL 111). Here, the phrase expresses a sense of need and desperation. That is, Black not only wants to convince White but he is also in demand to save him for purposes of his own. These two phrases work together as an implication to the overall aim of the play. They both stand for two opposite trends of the individual's reactions towards life. While the phrase "I've got to go" resembles death, the phrase "What we goin to do with you. Professor?" refers to the idea of unity and support of the individuals of a community towards one another.

Likewise this verbal repetition is visibly experienced in the earlier plays of the absurd. Comments like "Nothing to be done" (1) and "We're waiting for Godot" (84) are repeated by the leading characters of Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" throughout the play. In fact, the phrase "Nothing to be done" is actually the opening line of the play uttered by Estragon as he tries to put on his boots but repeatedly fails. Moreover, James L. Roberts comments that "Estragon's words are repeated two more times by Vladimir in the next moments of the play, and variations of this phrase become one of the central statements of the drama" (18). Even though the phrase was first uttered by Estragon to describe his immediate physical situation, that is, his inability to remove his boots, Vladimir repeats the phrase in regard of his metaphysical state.

However, the general implication of this phrase is to emphasize the futility of human existence and his need for guidance and support in order to survive this meaningless existence. As Dan O. Via, JR proclaims "They agree that nothing is left to be done; all of the possibilities have been exhausted" (32). Beckett makes it clear that to Estragon and Vladimir, their survival is dependent on the arrival of Godot and there is "nothing to be done" except for endlessly waiting for his arrival.

Furthermore, Edward Albee presents an equally dominant catchphrase repeated throughout his play "The Zoo Story". As Jerry approaches Peter for while he is sitting on the bench in central park, Jerry says "I've been to the Zoo" (12) as to draw Peter's attention and start the conversation. From this point forth, Jerry repeatedly utters the phrase "the Zoo story". And as this has been mentioned before, this phrase is of a strict metaphoric intuition.

Nonetheless, derived from the circulation of action and repetition within these plays, another structural element is adequately produced, namely, the plays unsettled ending. As James L. Roberts recognizes one of the distinguishing characteristics of the theatre of the absurd as he asserts that "Nothing is ever settled; there are no positive statements. No conclusions are ever reached, and what few actions there are have no meaning, particularly in relation to the action. This is, one action carries no more significance than does its opposite action" (14), this is relevantly the case in the studied plays. In the Theatre of the Absurd there is no dominant conclusion that could be observed by the audiences and they are left to figure their own conclusions of the proposed endings.

In the final scene of McCarthy's *The Sunset Limited* White insists that Black opens the apartment door and he leaves while Black drops on his knees in desperation and doubt. This ending provides no absolute resolution to the play. Both characters part without any definite impact of the whole debate of which the play is centered on. White leaves the apartment still not convinced with Black's religious perspectives and still insisting on committing suicide. On the other hand, Black falls on his knees shaken by doubt and weariness as he has failed to convert White and has yet not received any help or word from God. Dianne C. Luce depicts the plays end as she writes "The play ends...with the mysterious silence of God" (CMJ 20). God has not spoken to Black leaving him in the tormenting feeling of weariness and doubt. That is, nothing actually changed and there is no alteration that could be positively stated as both characters leave the stage the exact same way they entered, holding on to the same religious and philosophical perspectives.

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* ends with Vladimir and Estragon standing alone still practicing the activity of waiting, as Vladimir utters "Yes, Lets go" yet they do not move. This ending suggests further numerous acts that manifest the same concluding words and the exact same circumstances. However, this negative proportion of the plays ending serves to Beckett's aims of the whole play as Raymond Cowell proclaims "Beckett's great achievement in the play is to suggest the universality of the state represented by Vladimir and Estragon" (109). Consequently, the negativity of the plays conclusion in addition to the absurd state of Vladimir and Estragon, suggest the universal concept of the absurdness of human existence and the futility of hope.

Nevertheless, Albee's *The Zoo Story* ends with a rather different proposition, as it provides a sort of resolution to the course of the play. At the end of the play, Jerry kills himself as he throws himself onto the knife in Peter's hand, and Peter runs away before getting caught. Gilbert Debusscher, in his "Tradition and Renewal", reflects on Jerry's mode of death as he announces:

Jerry's death (is) an escape from the unbearable world and a hellish life, a capitulation to the interior contradictions which tear him apart. His last words do not express the jubilation of a victor but the humble thanks of a wounded animal put out of his misery at last (10).

Peter experiencing such a situation would most definitely leave a trace in his life and he will no longer be able to live in the same state of isolation as before. Anita M. Stanz relates that "At the end of the play the implication is that Peter will no longer be able to continue the death-in-life role he was playing before he met Jerry" (12). This ending could not by any means be observed as a victorious ending for either one of the two characters. Jerry is found to arrive at the conclusion that the only way to resolve his problems is by death and this of course could never be accounted for as a resolution. Peter, on the other hand, had to face such a harsh experience which involves death to come to the awareness of his social state. Each character has

relatively witnessed a most dreadful experience that ended with the death of one of them and the eternal turmoil of the next.

CONCLUSION

Concluding this comparative analysis, it is remarkably clear that McCarthy is deeply influenced by the Philosophical and literal characteristics of the Absurd. This fact is reflected in the parallel relation between his analyzed play *The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form* and two of the plays that resemble the "Theatre of the Absurd".

From this analytic survey of the literary structures of these three plays it could be claimed that Cormac McCarthy's play *The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form* strikingly possesses similar philosophical, conceptual, and structural elements with the most controversial play's of the absurd theatre, namely, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*. However, it could also be declared that McCarthy's play displays an elevated amount of a realistic quality than proposed by both Beckett and Albee. This elevated quality is also found in Albee's *The Zoo Story* compared with Beckett's play. In other words, the shift in time and location between the performances of these plays could be responsible for this realistic transition.

That is, even though McCarthy's play is performed in the same location as Albee's play it is still separated from it by a heavy span of forty-eight years. At the same time it is relatively separated from Beckett's play not only by an even ten years more, but also by location. Therefore, if Albee's *The Zoo Story* is regarded as one of the absurd drama, even though it comprehends more realistic features than Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*, then McCarthy's "The Sunset Limited" could legibly be declared as one of the "Theatre of the Absurd".

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