

Contemporary Literature

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Good morning. So, we begin with Tom Stoppard and what are the plays we are doing? Dogs, Hamlet and Cahoots, Macbeth. So, they are two short plays, but according to Stoppard they are quite interconnected and one cannot do without the other, that is the idea. Now, a bit about Tom Stoppard, he was born in 1937 and he was born in Czechoslovakia, his actual name is Thomas Strostler. You can look at the typical eastern European kind of name and when the Jews were being persecuted in Europe, the family moved from Czechoslovakia to Singapore, where they stayed for a while. And shortly before the invasion of the Japanese in 1941, young Tom fled to Darjeeling, India along with his mother.

However, his father stayed back and he was killed during the invasion. In 1946, the family Tom and his mother, they moved to Britain, where the Tom's mother remarried. She married an Englishman, Cahoots Stoppard and therefore, Thomas is Strosler, that is how Thomas is Strosler became Tom Stoppard. His major success came with an extremely famous play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead, 1966 which catapulted him to the front ranks of the modern playwrights, international playwrights.

And do you know who are Rosencrantz, who is Rosencrantz, who is Guildenstern? What do they do? They are from Shakespeare. Are you familiar with the names Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? They are two minor characters from Shakespeare's Hamlet and what role do they play? Who are they? A very German sounding names, right. What are they doing in this play? What are these two people about? You know Hamlet's story, he is the prince of Denmark, his father has been killed, his mother marries the murderer of a father, his father sorry, that is king Claudius, who now becomes, who now assumes the throne of Denmark. So, Hamlet has lost his mother, his father as well as his right to the throne. Now, Hamlet's father's ghost starts visiting Hamlet and he tells him the entire story, how he was murdered by his own brother while he was asleep in a garden and how his mother has been tricked into marriage with this treacherous brother of his and the spirit demands revenge.

He urges his son to have revenge. Now, you remember the play within play act we did, you know Hamlet stages a small play where he brings in a troop of players and they say something similar to what has happened between the elder Hamlet, the first king and the queen and on seeing this the entire scene enacted on stage, king Claudius is extremely perturbed and he walks off in agitation. So, that is the, but now after this once Hamlet is convinced that his uncle is indeed the killer of his father, he is more determined to have his revenge and at the same time king Claudius is more determined to stop Hamlet. So, it is a typical revenge play now from here onwards and he brings in two friends of Hamlet from his university, Hamlet has been attending a university abroad. So, he brings Claudius summons two of his best friends, one is Rosencrantz, other is Guildenstern, they are supposed to aid king Claudius in murdering Hamlet.

However, Hamlet you know because the play is not yet over and it is right this episode occurs right in the middle of the play. So, Hamlet discovers that his friends are planning, they are in league with the king and somehow he turns the tables on them and it so happens that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are assassinated and Hamlet comes out unscathed. So, that is the idea. So, however Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, they both of these guys they appear for a very brief while, they have nothing much to do in the play. However, Tom Stoppard found the story I mean this version quite interesting that what actually happened to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, how did they meet their death, what exactly did Hamlet do to them because Shakespeare is quite vague about these things in the play because it is not their story right.

In Tom Stoppard's play, Hamlet becomes a minor character, he does make an appearance, but he is a minor character. The play is all about these two characters who from Hamlet they graduate to becoming the leading characters in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. The play was enormously successful and it has even been translated into a movie with Tim Roth and Gary Oldman Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It won several major awards, it you know it even beat Scorsese's Goodfellas, I mean it was one of those European awards, so very successful film. So, over the next ten years Stoppard came up with several successful plays and major among those are jumpers, travesties, on the razzle, the real thing, the real inspector hound, Arcadia and so on and then he also translated a number of plays by the by Polish and Zek writers.

His origins are Zekoslawakian, so perhaps that explains and he has written this dogs Hamlet and Kahoot! smack back which we are going to do and along with squaring the circle another play by Stoppard. So, they are a scathing attack on the iron curtain regime of the eastern Europe of the 80s and he is also extremely friendly with actors and playwrights Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel from Poland and Zekoslawakian respectively. Both these were actually Lech Walesa has acted in several movies as well, perhaps you

are not aware of this and Vaclav Havel apart from being the president of Czechoslovakia, he is also celebrated playwright. Stoppard has also written a couple of celebrated screen plays, one is *Despair* based on Vladimir Nabokov's novel, same Nabokov who wrote *Lolita* and *The Human Factor* is based on Graham Greene's novel by the same name. *The Russia House* with Sean Connery and Michelle Pfeiffer based on John le Carré's novel and then *Shakespeare in Love* of course, I am sure you are familiar with this multiple Oscar award winning movie *Shakespeare in Love*.

And he also did some you know tweaking's in *Schindler's List* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. His uncredited screen play is *Sleepy Hollow* with Tim Burton and Johnny Depp and then he wrote a screen play for *Battle* directed by Roland Joffe and then also *Enigma* which had Kate Winslet in it. His influences are many, the major and the most prominent influences are one Shakespeare, you can see it you know dogs *Hamlet* by the titles of the plays you know dogs *Hamlet*, *Cahoots*, *Macbeth*, *Shakespeare in Love* and *Gros and Crenson*, *Guillemot* are dead you know. So, you will find plenty of references to Shakespeare in most of his plays, we are going to look at that also. Then Shakespeare apart from Shakespeare the linguist and philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, we are going to deal with that also how Wittgenstein influences Toppert.

Samuel Beckett, the name I mean I am sure you are no stranger to this name waiting for Godot, we have seen Pinter and then of course, he is also influenced tremendously by Kafka's work Pinter as well as Pirandello. Now, on Shakespeare Toppert says that we always get back to Shakespeare and he calls him the world champ, you know it is like you know he is the heavy weight champion, if all of us are in athletic then he is the champ because everybody goes keeps coming back to Shakespeare, there is no running away or there is no avoiding Shakespeare he is miles and miles ahead of everyone that is what Toppert says and therefore, he is indebtedness to him. References to Shakespeare are made in most of his plays including *Jumpers* and *Travesties*, the real thing, the real inspector hound, the invention of love and *Arcadia* as well as of course, *Rosencranz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Then Samuel Beckett the playwright of *Waiting for Godot* this is what he says, he says at the time when *Godot* was first done it liberated something for anybody writing plays, it redefined the minima of theatrical validity, he got away it is only too obvious that there is a sort of a Godotesque element in *Rosencranz and Guildenstern are Dead* and when we do the play you will find that indeed the references I mean the indebtedness is too obvious to be ignored. Are you familiar by any chance with Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations? Yes Aditi.

Language as a game and people as players. Anyone can elaborate on that, language as a game and people as players. We will talk about language part of it. So, Wittgenstein in his philosophical investigation this is what he says that there is plenty of conceptual

confusion on the way language is used because every word is used to suggest some meaning right. This is a table the word for this object is table and when I say table we look at it we do not look at that.

So, as you know and language is extremely arbitrary how do you know that this is the table and that is and that is not that is the question he raises and what happens if we start suddenly because the entire system is so arbitrary what happens if we start calling this thing a table and this a board quite possible which is a plane which begins with his acknowledgement of Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations. So, he says that Wittgenstein says that there are plenty of assumptions about language being a set of codes which is used to suggest some meaning, but why? It need not be that it may not necessarily be that. So, according to Wittgenstein an essentialist account of the nature of language is simply too narrow to be able to account for the variety of things we do with language. We do so many things with language and the way we understand and describe language is extremely limited. What we do is to provide a reductionist account of language this is this that is it, but why not something else and this is the idea that is explored in dogs amlet.

Wittgenstein says the individual words in language name objects and sentences are combinations of such names every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word right this meaning is correlated with a word. So, the table means something a flat surface with four legs or three legs something like that so it suggests a meaning and it is the object for which the word stands. Wittgenstein demonstrates the limitations of this concept. He says we do much more with language than just mean a set of you know just use it to define a set of objects.

The traditional concept of language is not sufficient to explain plenty of ideas. So, there is language presents a limited picture. So, within the Anglo American tradition Wittgenstein's philosophical investigation is considered by many as the most important philosophical work of the twentieth century and then he also talks about language games in the same book where he says famously gives the example of the builders language. Perhaps you are familiar with builders language where he says I will read it out to you. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B.

Just imagine a builder A and an assistant he has an assistant B. A is building with building stones they are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones in the order in which A needs them. So, what will the builder do now? He will just call out beam and the object will be passed down. He can say slab something can be passed down stone likewise, but then what happens if they decide to substitute these stones.

Words with alphabets or numerals 1, 2, 3, 4 and still the job is done. So, instead of saying beams they just say A instead of saying slab B you know just to save time and for their own convenience they can device their own set of codes and that is and in spite of that communication is taking place. What happens then? It may work for these two, but not for others not for the onlookers, but if the function of language is to encourage communication is taking place for these two. If you remember even when we were doing Pinter we touched upon this idea that language the way we understand language is extremely limited it does not cover what we actually do with language. So, he says that you know A, B, C, D these letters can be used to denote objects an example of its use builder A says D and it may stand for slab there and points and builder B counts four slabs A, B, C, D and moves them to the place pointed to by A.

The language does becomes a game for these two, others may not be a privy to this language game and this idea has been elaborated by John Leo Thorne in his book the post modern condition. We will touch upon that while we are doing Stoppard in detail. Now, I would like to invite Aditi and Krishna and we are looking at one you know an exchange from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead and just observe the way language game is at work here. We could play a question what good would that do practice statement one love cheating how I had not started yet statement two love are you counting that what are you counting that foul no repetitions three love first game I am not going to play if you are going to be like that who serve foul no grunts love one whose go why not what for foul no synonyms one all what in god's name is going on foul no rhetoric two one what does it all add up to can't you guess were you addressing me is there anyone else who how would I know why do you ask are you serious was that rhetoric no statement two all game point what's the matter with you today when what are you deaf am I dead yes or no is there a choice is there a god foul no non sequiturs three two one game all what's your name what's yours I asked you first statement one love what's your name when you are at home what's yours when I am at home is it different at home what home haven't you got one why do you ask what are you driving at what's your name repetition two love match point to me who do you think you are rhetoric game and match where is it going to end that's the question it's all questions do you think it matters does it matter to you why should it matter why does it matter why what does it matter why does not it matter why it matters what's the matter with you it does not matter what's the game what are the rules now here we find a very good example of language game perhaps some of you might be familiar with this linguist david crystal have you heard of him david crystal and he he is the he is the author of a Cambridge encyclopaedia of a English language and he is extremely fond of this particular exchange he was recently in china not very recently just five years back he was in china and he enacted the entire scene and he always gives this as an example you know whether in

person or in his books you know this as an extremely extremely fine example of language games now so what are the games how is language being used here rosenkranz and gildenstern they are somewhere in a in a place you know they are the people who were supposed to aid king claudius in killing hamlet they are just at the beginning of the play we are told that you know two elizabethans passing the time in a place without any visible character they are well dressed hats cloaks sticks and all so this is their description description so these two people they are in some place they are waiting for somebody perhaps you know they want they are just bidding their time when they can kill hamlet in the meantime they have nothing else to do so they are just passing time and how do they pass time by playing a language game just now we were just talking about influence of beckett does it remind you are there any echoes of beckett you find here rihan it is very reminiscent of the exchange in say endgame between the main character who can't stand and the character who can't sit they have these sharp they have these questions and it is up to them if they want to answer it or not and most of the time even if they want to answer it they will get anywhere with those questions and it is very repetitive also these short meaningless questions true so what happens is language becomes a set of repetitions meaninglessness of reputation meaninglessness of a language and the employment of non sequiturs any idea can you I mean I think we did talk about non sequiturs in pinter what does it mean it does not follow the exchange does not quite follow one sentence does not quite follow the other so here he actually gives he says so at one place right is there a choice is there a god no non sequiturs here so do not you think that stopper is also a good doing a little bit of self referencing here because by the time the play was written in 1966 waiting for godot was a kind of a bible for the all these emerging young playwrights now when and samuel beckett of course, when waiting for godot and endgame they have plenty of non sequiturs and when they say when stopper actually pointedly uses a word like no non sequiturs here no rhetorics here no questions no repetitions here actually he is making a very obvious reference to beckett and his ilk so this is a this is one good example of self referentiality and also we have also seen meta theatre where and where the writer or an author he is extremely self conscious of what he is writing so this is what the entire theatre of the absurd was all about self conscious self referential and also and quite meta so now I am going to invite Abhay for his version of the book which is called the theatre of the absurd. So, I will be carrying on from where Ronak left off last week I shall be speaking in very brief detail about the theatre of the absurd so do you people know what the theatre of the absurd is I will answer that question for you it is a designation of particular plays of absurdist fiction written by primarily European playwrights in the 1940s 50s and 60s their work expressed a belief that in a godless universe human existence is a reality and that the world is a reality and that the world is a reality and that the world is a reality and that the world is a reality and that the world has no meaning or no purpose therefore all communication between human beings are basically pointless and

all communication breaks down.

Logical construction and argument generally give way I mean in the theatre of the absurd to irrational speech and illogical acts leading to the final conclusion silence and non communication in the conventional sense. So, absurdism is frequently compared to Sarrailh's predecessor that is Dadaism. Do you people know what Dadaism is Aditya? You knew something about it. It is more of a precursor to Sarrailhism. The aim was basically the destruction of art or the conventional art of the bourgeois era that produced the first world war.

So, basically they were against anything that they saw as bourgeois because they thought that it would lead to violence and the end of humanity as we know it. And they thought that humanity as we know it to start off with was not a very good thing anyhow. An example of Dadaist playwright is Tristan Tzara whose plays were performed in the cabaret Voltaire in Zurich and he was the first prominent Dadaist author. However, the Dadaist movement never produced a visible impact on stage as they were essentially destructive and radical in their nihilism. So, basically when a Dadaist play was being screened all you could see was destruction, violence, non communication.

It was very hard to keep up with what was exactly happening in any of those plays. So, obviously they were not huge successes. Therefore, could not be successful in an art form that depends on constructive cooperation between the audience and the people performing on the stage because I mean in every play I mean implicitly there is some sort of cooperation between the audience and the people on stage because the audience are supposed to understand what is happening on stage right, but that was not really happening in Dadaist theatre. You could say that they are essentially nonsense poems in dialogue form and they are accompanied by equally nonsensical business and decorated with bizarre masks and costumes. So, at the end of the First World War Dadaism moved out from Switzerland and split into you can say two branches.

One went to Paris and some of the members of the Zurich circle went back to Germany and the German stream so to speak merged and co-existed with German expressionism and one prominent expressionist of this time is Bertolt Brecht who belongs to the antecedents of the theatre of the absurd. He was impressed by the possibilities of cinema and you can say that he was one of the first people who coined the term art cinema and he made this movie or conceptualized this movie rather called D. Caligula where there is a picture of Charlie Chaplin and this picture steps out and expresses the farcical nature of the bourgeois era. I mean it is extremely absurd and trying to explain it would confuse me and you. He felt that the theatre must not just be a means to make the bourgeois comfortable rather it must frighten him and how we were supposed to do this I mean

how he purported that he would do this is by evoking the grotesque without inciting laughter and this would frighten the bourgeois into being a child again and he felt that only children see the world as something you know real and not as something seen through a filter.

The person who came closest to Goel was Brecht. In the course of his development from an anarchic poetic drama to the austerity of Marxist didacticism in his later phase he wrote a number of plays that came extremely close to the theatre of the absurd both in the case of clowning and knock about humor and in the preoccupation in the problem of identity of the self and fluidity. In his one act fast the oxide which means the wedding the collapse of pieces of furniture basically symbolizes the rottenness of the family in which the wedding is taking place in exactly the same way that objects express inner realities in the plays of Adamoff and Ionesco as Ronak was mentioning last week and also Brecht's plays include humor in gags which many of these plays did not so they were slightly more entertaining to watch on stage. A slightly more serious play he wrote was *Im dich ist der Stade* which is a serious play and it means in the jungles of the cities. Basically it starts off with an extremely trivial disagreement between two characters.

The first character is having a fight with another character because he does not like a book that he has written and he goes and tries to pay this character some money to say nice things about his book and finally the fight escalates to such a level that they end up killing each other. So it deals with the impossibility of knowing the motivation of human beings in their actions and this anticipated Pinter and also the problem of communication between human beings and this question occupies Brecht, Adamoff and Ionesco. Brecht's personality contained a strong element of anarchy and despair therefore even in his politically conscious era we saw him project the capitalist world as something negative and absurd not just as I mean how the USSR projected America as evil people but he said that capitalism was governed by unfair gods who liked seeing people grow in despair and these were extremely bizarre in that sense. However Nazism ended up killing the movement in Germany totally but it continued existing in France and Dadaism transformed into surrealism. Whereas Dadaism was purely negative, surrealism believed in the great positive healing force of the subconscious.

Brecht who was one of the founders of the surrealist movement had a belief that if you tapped into your subconscious mind and let that sense of automation play and you gave in and surrendered to your subconscious you could actually have prophetic powers and the powers of clairvoyance would come to you and he claimed that he predicted the second world war through such powers. It must be noted that surrealism was just not a movement in theatre but it was a revolutionary movement which took on its shape not in this theatre but in art, in literature, in most of the most things. One of the original

surrealist Antonin Artois rejected a majority of western theatre as a perversion of its intent, of surrealist intent which he felt must be a mystical metaphysical experience. Now most western theatre generally still kept up with this you know that sense of cooperation between the stage and the audience whereas these people felt that cooperation was not necessary and while western theatre consisted of rational discourse Artois believed that rational discourse comprised falsehood and illusion. So there were also other forms of surrealism that have been discussed in Esslin's essay such as the art work of Picasso and the general I mean lots of these playwrights also had Picasso designed their sets and these sets were extremely grotesque and bizarre and yeah it was slightly less you know heavy than Dadaism but still eventually towards the 60s it started fizzling out.

Now surrealism also manifested in other countries such as Poland and Spain and one Polish playwright who must be noted is Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, I am not sure if I am pronouncing his name right, whose grotesque nightmares merge into visions of madmen and his political parables suddenly turn into hilarious parodies of Polish stories. So yeah his plays are extremely bizarre and you must all be wondering whether there were any playwrights who wrote in English I mean in the theatre of the absurd, the answer is that there aren't any. I mean there is Gertrude Stein and she thought that she writes absurdist theatre but most people in Europe considered her work to just be one act plays that were actually poetry and nonsense poetry and her work was not very seriously considered by people in Europe where Dadaism and surrealism existed. However the Western world thinks that she belongs to the theatre of the absurd and there is some dispute there. Yeah any question? So, after that, yeah after that very succinct introduction to theatre of the absurd, I am I would just raise one question.

For example, you remember existentialist philosophy which is quite connected with absurdism. However, there is one major distinction between existentialist absurdism and the kind of absurdist theatre which people like Pinter and Stoppard and Pinter and Stoppard wrote. For example, this existentialist absurdism as popularized by philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre and Kierkegaard etcetera. What did they I mean they talked about absence of god, irrationality of universe yes but in the middle of all these things human being however helpless he was still tragic and heroic. However, in the works of people like Pinter and starting from Beckett onwards you know Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard human beings are no longer represented as tragic and heroic.

What do they become? When you look at conversation like this is it tragic, is it heroic, what you just heard? One love, two love you know language becomes a game of tennis. What do they become? What is the position of human being in this situation? There is no position, it is quite meaningless. Illogical, meaningless of course, inconsequential but

comic and pathetic, comic and pathetic who has no meaning to his life which is big departure from the existentialist absurdist who in spite of all their shortcomings projected human beings as tragic and heroic. So, that is the major difference between the two kinds of writings here.

I will just begin with the introduction. I hope you have the play *Dogs Hamlet*. Now, what Stoppard says about the play is that *Dogs Hamlet* is a conflation of two pieces. Two pieces one is called *Dogs Troop Fifteen Minute Hamlet* and the other play is called *Dogs are Pet, Dogs are Pet and One Fifteen Minutes Hamlet*. So, it is a collision of two plays and which he developed into one. So, he says that *Dogs Hamlet* derives from a section of Wittgenstein's philosophical investigation.

We have just looked at into that. Consider the following scene. A man is building a platform using pieces of wood of different shapes and pieces. These are thrown to him by a second man one at a time as they are called for. An observer notes that each time the first man shouts plank, he is thrown a long flat piece then he calls slab and is thrown a piece of different shape.

This happens a few times. There is a call for block and a third shape is thrown. Finally, a call for cube produces a fourth type of piece. An observer would probably conclude that the different words describe different shapes and sizes of the material, but this is not the only possible interpretation. Suppose for example, the thrower knows in advance which pieces the builder needs and in what order. In such a case, there would be no need for the builder to name the pieces he requires, but only to indicate what he is ready for the next one.

So, the calls might translate this ready next. Thank you. So, instead of saying plank, slab, block and cube, he may use an entirely different set of words to a casual onlooker. These words do not make any meaning. However, to the builder and his assistant they do. So, this is just an extension of Wittgenstein's philosophical investigation, the description of language he gives and this is the premise for *Dogs Hamlet*.

So, we are going to look at into it in the next class. Thank you.