

Living in Felicity or in the Shadow of Death: A Kierkegaardian Existentialistic Reading of Ionesco's *The Killer*

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Abstract

Eugène Ionesco in his play, *The killer* (1960) depicts a true reflection of the human condition; he depicts the images of life and death, being and non-being, and the reality of man's reduction into the cypher of non-being. He wants man to come to grips with his true situation; hence, man's existence is fundamentally a conflict between the infinite extensions of the human urge as opposed to the necessary and limited state of being. The aim of this paper is to examine Ionesco's ideas on the loneliness of man in this alienated universe, his hidden anxieties and his struggle for survival within an Existential framework of Søren Kierkegaard; examples are drawn from *The killer* (1960) in order to fully examine Ionesco's particular vision of life. Such a study aims at bringing about a realization and understanding of the conditions man is exposed to in the universe. It is too hard for Bérenger to believe that nothingness precedes, envelops, and conditions all being. He faces the two coexistent side of living: in felicity and in the shadow of death.

Keywords: Existence, Survival, Anxiety, Being unto Death, Reason, Subjectivity.

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Introduction

This paper is to conduct an inquiry into what Ionesco tries to depict through his works, which attempts to get underneath the generalizations about some existential concepts and to present essential rather than general qualities of Ionesco with equally fundamental qualities of the concepts of Kierkegaard in existentialism. The aim of the present paper is to examine whether we can find traces of the apparent influence of some concepts of Kierkegaard in Existentialism like anxiety, alienation, identity, responsibility, existence and survival in Ionesco's *The Killer*. Wellwarth, concerning the avant-garde theatre, announces:

The purpose of all of the plays of the dramatic avant-garde in general and of Ionesco's plays in particular is protest against the social order and the human condition.... Ionesco and the other avant-garde dramatists always show their truths by presenting their audience with situations that conflict so strongly with commonly held ideas of the reasonable... (1962:6).

Existentialism is mainly about human beings' aspects of life, life and its meaning, man and its position, nature and his power in the universe, and his positive or negative relation to the metaphysics. In this philosophy, existence precedes essence; in other words, man first exists, and then makes his essence or human essence. He is free to choose or to reject and deny, so in this way gives an especial essence to his existence. Although the philosophy of existentialism dates back to the time of Søren Kierkegaard, but the common acceptance and pervasion of this philosophy in literature is during 40s and 50s; therefore, existentialism more than a philosophy became a way to consider and answer to the problems of life in the 20th century.

The most important forerunner of existentialism is the Danish literary and philosophical writer Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard holds that Existentialism is a philosophy searching for the meaning of life, which is based on

a system of ethics created by the individual through his choices. Scruton believes,

Kierkegaard's interest lies not in the properties of the individual, nor in the knowledge of the world that might be derived from them, but in the sheer fact of individual existence, conceived independently of all our attempts to bring it under concepts" (1995:182)

Likewise, understanding the essence of man's existence, for Ionesco, is a necessity, so he tries to "isolate this one element which he regards as the one that constitutes the theatre's supreme achievement... and to restore an entirely theatrical" (1980:161). The reality of man's existence became a great source of inspiration in Eugene Ionesco's theatre.

Ionesco and the Representation of Man's Life

Ionesco's drama is something new, dissimilar to what is known as classic drama. His drama is the representation of man's life in the universe but in a way different from what is accepted by all. In an elaboration on the concept of death, which is prevalent in the current play *The Killer*, Parsell asserts:

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a more effective illustration of dehumanizing habit than is to be found among Ionesco's peculiarly automated characters, whose aspirations (if any) have long since been separated from their lives. When death threatens (as it often does in the later plays), Ionesco's habit-conditioned characters will often proceed as lambs to the slaughter in a manner even more credible than the "philosophical suicide" described by Camus in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*... (2005:505).

Ionesco is a "serious artist dedicated to the arduous exploration of the realities of the human situation...." (Esslin, 2001:128). Esslin asserts that Ionesco doesn't accept his plays are 'Absurd' and "this sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is... the theme of the plays of

Becket, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet..." (ibid, 19); Ionesco states "an English critic declared that 'this is the absurd drama; the word 'Absurd' was rampant in those days" and others called his drama so (Kamyabi Mask, 1382: 68-69). Parsell in his essay on *Eugene Ionesco* writes:

Martin Esslin hailed Ionesco's theater as a far more effective illustration of Albert Camus's concept of the absurd than Camus himself had ever written for the stage... Ionesco -in Esslin's view- presents on the stage the absurd in its purest form, more true to life (if less "realistic") by the mere fact of its apparent gratuity (2005:504-5).

Moreover, concerning repetition as the dominant theme of Ionesco, Parsell states that it is:

A witness to the apparent futility of all human endeavors. Beneath it all, however, the viewer can perceive a strong nostalgia for lost innocence or at least for things as they ought to be. In each of his plays, Ionesco seems to be exhorting his audience to "rehumanize" the world before matters get worse than they already are (2005:506).

A Plot Summary of Ionesco's *The Killer*

In *The Killer* (1960), Ionesco's second three act play, Bérenger is the main character. He happens to come to an enormous new housing project that is very green. He starts talking with the municipal architect. The architect states that the other part of the city is rain, but in this part, sun always shines, and the city is full of light, so it is like a never-ending spring. But people of the city hide themselves in their houses. There is a killer in the city whom Bérenger faces at the end of a play. Bérenger tries to talk to him and to dissuade him from his murderous action. He even wants to kill the killer but is unable to shoot his gun.

Kierkegaardian Definition of Existence

In Kierkegaard's existentialism, existence is something mutable, always in flux or continual change; this process as Kierkegaard calls it is "the constant process of becoming, within which the negative is constantly and everywhere present" (1846/1941:75); in other words nothing is predestined or determined so everything is to be decided by the individual; the constant process of becoming, Kierkegaard asserts, is not a striving towards a goal in a finite sense, which means "that he would be finished when he had reached this goal" but the striving is in itself the thinker's own struggle for survival (*ibid*, 84). Existence as Kierkegaard states is "the child who is begotten by the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal and is therefore continually striving" (1846/1941:92).

Bérenger's struggle through the course of the play to find the killer to stop his killing can be thought of as a subjective thinker who is hardly striving for a goal that is either saving people of the city or himself from the shadow of death. Bérenger is satisfied with the radiant city and its serenity but the uncertainty of earthly life is an existential truth demonstrated in *The Killer*; Bérenger learns that life and death are intermingled and inseparable. His manner through the course of drama is in the process of change; despite his being persistent to cajole the killer through convincing, justification, insulting and even threatening to death by gun, Bérenger finally gives up to the power of death; in other words, death is unavoidable. He knows that if he evades death here by shooting the killer, the puissant power of death will take hold of him somewhere else, so he kneels down to the shadow of nothingness as the final destination of man in this alienated universe. Existence according to Kierkegaard is not abstract and:

To think existence in this way is to disregard the difficulty, namely that of thinking the eternal in becoming.... Thinking abstractly is therefore easier than existing if this is not to be

understood as what people usually call existing, just as with being a subject of sorts.... However, truly to exist, that is, to permeate one's existence with consciousness... in the course of becoming- that is truly difficult" (1846/2009:257-8)

Bérenger's goal was once living in a calm and quiet place but it changes to finding the killer to guarantee his existence, although he finally gives up to the silence of the killer as the shadow of death. Bérenger lives his existence concretely through struggling for survival and daring to visit the killer from whom all the people of the city take refuge in their houses. Kierkegaard used the idea of Lessing in searching for truth:

If God held the truth enclosed in his right hand, and in his left the one and only ever- striving drive for truth, even with the corollary of erring forever and ever, and if he were to say to me: Choose! - I humbly fall down to him at his left hand and say: Father, give! Pure truth is indeed only for you alone (ibid, 90).

Bérenger is decisive to find the truth of the killer while even the residences of the city do not dare to do so or maybe do not care about it. Based on Kierkegaard's belief (taken from Lessing) concerning searching for truth at any cost, Bérenger is the embodiment of an individual with restless striving for the truth of the presence of the killer in surface and the omnipotent shadow of death in depth.

Bérenger (to the killer): you're a human being, we're the same species, we've got to understand each other, it's our duty... (Act III, 103)

Kierkegaard's 'Being unto Death' and Bérenger's Chaotic Vacuum Inside

The Killer by Ionesco can be said to be written in a European point of view concerning death, that life can be satisfactory and genuine if only it is pointed toward death; this view is in direct contradiction to the American one that as Gray points out,

We rejoine, why not devote yourself wholeheartedly to social ideals? This means ... getting ourselves involved in important and urgent projects to the extent that our yearning for love and devotion is effectively satisfied. We realize our true selves by submerging them in such supra-personal goals as world-peace, racial equality ... and the like. Personal life can be rescued from emptiness and futility, we think, only by recourse to the social or the political (1951:124).

Bérenger (to the Architect): once upon a time there was a blazing fire inside me. The cold could do nothing against it, a youthfulness, a spring no autumn could touch... there was enormous energy there... and then it grew weaker and all died away! (Act I, 20)

Bérenger: the old gossips came out of their courtyards and split my eardrums with their screeching voices, the dogs barked, and I felt lost among all those people, all those things... (Act I, 25)

In this alienated universe with its foreignness there would be no way to avoid the other side of existence, namely death. *Being unto death* is a phrase by Kierkegaard that shows the two sided way of life; the concept first used by Kierkegaard and then borrowed by Heidegger; it refers to a kind of life by the individual who is aware of his final destination, so takes it as an intimate part of his life and lives with it; Gray explains, *Being unto death* “isolates man, it throws him back upon himself, it offers him the possibility of becoming a personality. ... that life is delivered up to death at every instant” (1951:123); in other words as soon as man is born he is ready to die because death has nothing to do with age. Bérenger’s life is also delivered up to death at the instance of entering the radiant city; he stakes his life to awaken conscience in the ruthless killer.

Entering the city, Bérenger feels he is born again, but every birth coexists with the shadow of death which in this play is represented in the form of a killer as the embodiment and

harbinger of an omnipotent death lurking everywhere. The individual must accept the reality of the existence of death, admitting that existence must be given meaning by the individual, as it does not possess it in itself. Bérenger is the individual who is trying to give meaning to his life instead of waiting, like the residents of the city, for death.

The question that arises is that ‘can we really conduct our lives in such fashion that an untimely death, like the one which happens to Bérenger in *The Killer*, will not destroy the meaning and the purpose we have built into our existence?’ In *The Killer*, the premonition that death in the form of a killer has darkened the felicity over the luminous and radiant city forces Bérenger to find that object of anxiety to avoid the only reason that may destroy his new hope; Bérenger is anxious of being bereft of the serenity of the radiant city. The possible untimely death which is threatening Bérenger’s existence in the city is everywhere as he saw the closed doors and windows of the houses with men and women behind them, hiding themselves from death.

It is too hard for Bérenger to believe that nothingness precedes and conditions all being; he faces the two coexistent side of living: in felicity and in the shadow of death. The news of the covert killer proves Bérenger that the end of all our attempts is falling into the abyss of nonbeing. He tries to face the killer, as the embodiment of death, to cajole him or even kill him; at the end, on the contrary, Bérenger surrenders not to the killer but to the omnipotent presence of death. He must accept that there is no ultimate consolation, that the end of all striving is shipwreck, the abyss of nonbeing:

Bérenger: And since then, it's been perpetual November, perpetual twilight, twilight in the morning, twilight at midnight, twilight at noon. The light of dawn has gone! (Act I, 25)

Bérenger: and suddenly, or rather gradually... no, it was all at once, I don't know, I only know that everything went grey

and pale and neutral again... (Act I, 24)

Bérenger (to the killer): how weak my strength is against your cold determination, your ruthlessness! And what good are bullets even, against the resistance of an infinitely stubborn will... oh God! There's nothing we can do. What can we do... what can we do?... (Act III, 108-9)

Bérenger is not afraid of death, though; because as Kierkegaard claims, "let us be honest about it. we are more afraid of the truth than of death" (1967, Vol iv:503). In our moral lives, we all instinctively struggle to achieve perfection but we must also be aware of the truth that "we must of necessity fail to achieve that perfection" (O'Meara, 2013:5). Bérenger is probably the honest fighter who is not going to surrender to life's most disastrous destiny of which he is aware, but to encounter it and does his best to struggle for his survival, persuading the killer and deterring him although in vain; he is to change a fate predestined for him as an individual casted away from heaven to bear the troubles of living in a desolate loneliness; Bérenger never doubts either his being in that radiant city or finding the killer; while entering the city, Bérenger's 'immediate consciousness' at first does not judge about things, but tries "register impressions- of heat and cold, colour and light" anxiety and fear, but later he has an immediate experience of facing a killer (Rudd, 1998:75). According to Kierkegaard 'In immediacy there is no relation, for as soon as there is a relation, immediacy is cancelled' (ibid). In other words, the self-supporting Bérenger does not hold back; he acts as an honest fighter in his experience and makes judgments about it while persuading the killer in disparate ways to get away. Bérenger has a sensory experience about the radiant city and by making judgments makes his experience meaningful about it.

Bérenger cannot internalize the reality he sees, that the killer kills unreasonably; he cannot comprehend the presence of an

instinct killer in his early finding of a heaven-like place on earth. Rudd, in his article on Kierkegaard about *reality* and *ideality*, writes, "Things in themselves are neither true nor false, they just are ..." and Concepts are equally the same (1998:76). We might have the concepts of a killer or a utopia, like the one Bérenger encounters upon his entrance to the city, and relate them to other concepts or analyze them but the results of my findings is what I have in my mind as ideality and not what actually exists in reality. Kierkegaard announces, "in ideality, everything is just as perfectly true as in reality ... not until the moment that ideality is brought into relation with reality does possibility appear" (ibid). Bérenger faces death while trying to find a solution to the problem of making a relation between reality and ideality; at the end he surrenders himself to the killer, to show an incompatible contradiction of living both in felicity and under the shadow of death. Runde claims, "Bérenger is defeated not by death, but by his inability to go beyond a perceived contradiction surrounding the nature of his own existence" (2007).

Eva Metman maintains, "in contemporary drama, a new third orientation is crystallized in which man is shown not in a world into which the divine or demonic powers are projected, but alone with them" (Esslin, 2001:400). Bérenger has nothing to say, and all of what he says is meaningless sounds divulging his true nature. But under this absurd situation lays a terrible truth concerning the inability of Bérenger in knowing his own self and the reflection of that in his language. This verbiage or long, nonsense conversation is in fact representative of man's deep requirement for human relations and avoiding loneliness; this language, however, is not capable of reaching the goal and the language that must enhance human relations, and becomes a serious barrier leading to depravity and annihilation. Ionesco invades and ridicules the common and trivial facts. The absurd language in The Killer is an embodiment of the absurd society into which Bérenger enters; Bérenger feels alienated and alone

but also feels security in finding the radiant city:

Bérenger: there was a kind of chaotic vacuum inside me, I was overcome with the immense sadness you feel at a moment of tragic and intolerable separation . . . and I felt lost among all those people, all those things . . . (Act I, 24)

Bérenger comes to the understanding that he can find no hold or support in nature or society until he is cognizant of the presence of a killer behind the appealing appearance of the astonishing scenery of the city, lurking in the darkness, trapping the residence. Bérenger is aware of the hideous shadow of death clouding the city; he cannot find a rational answer to why human being cannot live forever. Berenger's joy that attaches his present to the time when he was young, is an inexhaustible light that empowers him; he tells the Architect:

Bérenger: The cold could do nothing against it, a youthfulness, a spring no autumn could touch; a source of light, glowing wells of joy that seemed inexhaustible...When I was in a gloomy mood, the memory of that dazzling radiance, that glowing feeling, gave fresh life to the force within me, to those reasonless reasons for living and loving...loving what?... Loving everything whole heartedly (Act I, 20-1).

Bérenger's Existential Problem vs. Kierkegaard's Rejection of Reason

Kierkegaard defines his position against reason; O'Hara states that Kierkegaard reacted to what the problems created by the Enlightenment:

The Enlightenment movement in the 17th and 18th centuries sought to combine the prevailing concepts of God, nature, knowledge, and man into a cohesive worldview. Enlightenment thinkers emphasized reason and its use to understand and better life (2004:9).

Concerning the death of Socrates and its connection to

rationality and what is mentioned by Kierkegaard as 'truth is subjectivity', Flynn states, "life does not follow the continuous flow of logical argument and that one often has to risk moving beyond the limits of the rational in order to live life to the fullest" (2006:3). Truth as subjectivity, as Flynn explains it and connects it to the death of Socrates, refers to the inability of logic to solve the problems concerning life and death. A truth for which one stakes his life, like the one Socrates risks his life as a personal conviction to prove the immortality of the soul just with a possibility in mind, is called subjective truth by Kierkegaard. Bérenger is risking his life as a personal conviction while other people of the city abandon the streets and take refuge in their houses. However, in utter amazement he abandons himself to the truth and risks his life to face the real fact; Kierkegaard declares, "the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die" (1923/1951:15). Bérenger's long speech to the killer at the end of the play, first starts with focusing on passion, sentimentality, humanity and then on reason and conscience to stop the killer; Bérenger implores through passion and reason, two weapons of human being, to control his environment and also to get into the truth for which he risks his life:

Bérenger (to the killer): you don't like animals either? You don't love anything that's alive? Not even the plants?... what about stones and stars, the sun and the blue sky... do you believe society's rotten... Or do you believe the existence of the universe is a mistake? (Act III, 102-3)

Bérenger (to the killer): do you want the whole world to destroy itself to give you a moment of happiness, to make you smile just once? That's possible too! I'm ready myself to embrace you, to be one of your comforters; I'll dress your wounds, because you are wounded, aren't you? You are suffered, haven't you? You are still suffering? I'll take pity on you... you loath sloppy sentimentality. Yes, I can see it's no

good trying to touch your feelings. You don't want to be trapped by tenderness! You're afraid it will make a fool of you... (Act III, 104)

But later Bérenger recognizes that his long speech to the killer is all in vain; he changes his language from passion to reason but again in vain:

Bérenger (to the killer): we can speak the language of reason. It's the language that suits you best. You're a scientific man, aren't you... (Act III, 105)

Rationality for Kierkegaard is a mechanism by which man can counter his existential anxiety, or the fear of being in the world; Kierkegaard asserts, "If I can believe that I am rational and everyone else is rational then I have nothing to fear and no reason to feel anxious about being free" (1978, vol5:5) However, rationality for him is a means to interact with the objective world, but in existential problems, "Human reason has boundaries" (1978, vol11:5).

Bérenger is not sure about the rationality of the killer because if the killer was rational then there must be no anxiety about his unexpected manner; Bérenger's focus on rationality in his speech with the killer is one way to avoid his hidden anxiety. According to what Kierkegaard mentioned above, Bérenger's long speech to the killer is on the problems of existence and depriving others of surviving; while physical reality proves to be stronger than that of the mind when the play comes to end, it proves the insufficiency of reason in overcoming existential problems mentioned by Kierkegaard; In spite of using language in disparate ways, whether through passion or reason, in an act of physical subjection, Bérenger yields to the killer.

Bérenger and Kierkegaard's Concept of 'Truth Is Subjectivity'

Kierkegaard believes, "it is one thing to introduce a new

doctrine into the world, it is something else to live it" (1967, vol II:420-22). Bérenger is an existential man who is following the concept of subjectivity of existentialism. He is trying to know the killer and discover truth for himself. Kierkegaard differentiates objective and subjective truth and for him *Truth is subjectivity* which means "a personal conviction on which one is willing to risk his life" (1846/1941). He states subjectivity means "turning away from the objective realm of facts... and immersing oneself in the subjective inward activity of discovering truth for oneself" (Moore, 2002: xxv).

Bérenger: . . . the projection, the continuation of the universe inside you. Only, to project this universe within, some outside help is needed: some kind of material, physical light, a world that is objectively new (Act I, 19).

Subjective truth is related to man's experience, which affects a person and motivates his actions and decisions (O'Hara, 2004:67). Kierkegaard refers to "subjective reflection, and 'truth as subjectivity'; 'When subjectivity is truth, subjectivity's definition, must include an expression for an opposition to objectivity'" (1968:181). Concerning the concept of subjectivity and rejection of reason by Kierkegaard, O'Hara declares:

The existentialist rejection of the mindset that knowledge must be grounded in reason or rationality. The reader sees a shift of concern or emphasis away from "knowing" to "being". To Kierkegaard, reason is useless and provides no knowledge of Christianity (or any kind of subjective experience). His approach doesn't dismiss empirical data, but suggests a different way to evaluate subjective experience (2004:73).

The Radiant City and the Profound Anxiety Within

The killer opens with the purest image of light created by Ionesco; by using nothing but bright white light at the opening of the play, Ionesco tries to show the light inside Bérenger whose coming into this area freed him from a burden:

Bérenger: a song of triumph rose from the depth of my being: I was, I realized I had always been, that I was no longer going to die (Act I, 23)

Bérenger's transformation of essence starts when the city light renews him, makes him feel younger to fall in love. Kierkegaard concerning unforgettable moments in the life of the individual claim, "what really counts in life is that at some time you have seen somethings, felt somethings which is so great, so matchless, that everything else is nothing by comparison, that even if you forgot everything you would never forget this" (1967, vol I:467).

The lush radiant city is a symbol of the a world where all problems are solved by man, but even there, the haunt of death makes life futile. Ionesco said of the killer, "It's the fall, it's original sin... a slackening of attention, of the strength with which one looks at things; or again in other words, it's losing the faculty of wonderment; oblivion; the paralysis bred by habit" (1964:54).

The city's supposed peace amazes Bérenger; His accidental discovery of the neighborhood "answer some profound need inside" (Act I, 19) him by functioning as "the projection, the continuation of the universe within" (Act I, 19) that would fill the gap he feels between himself and the world outside:

Bérenger: it's quite wrong to talk of a world within and a world without, separate worlds" (Act I, 19).

With the appearance of the killer, the radiant city is haunted by dark shadow and Bérenger evades light as a symbol to escape the killer; Ionesco's atmosphere of darkness is the expression of anxiety of being caught by the killer as well as fear of dying and of separation. Although he fears death but Ionesco wish to die:

Since the death instinct exists in the heart of everything that lives, since we suffer from trying to repress it, since everything

that lives longs for rest, let us unfasten the ties that bind us to life, let us cultivate our death wish, let us develop it, water it like a plant, let it grow unhindered. Suffering and fear are born from the repression of the death wish (1967/1968:56).

Ionesco suffers from his anxiety of death. Concerning the anxiety of death he writes: "I have always been obsessed by death. Since the age of four ... this anguish has never left me" (1964:235). Ionesco thinks of the anxiety of death as separating him from others:

The dread, the panic that seizes me at nightfall; I long for solitude and yet I cannot stand it. A matter of habit, perhaps... Night falls, it falls on my back, or rather I sink into it. Boundless night pervades me; a black ocean in which I'm drowning. I'm afraid of never seeing them again, I'm afraid of dying without ever seeing them again (1967/1968:55)

Bérenger is the embodiment of a homeless man wandering unconsciously to find a place of comfort; he knows that the world into which we were thrown as human creatures is radically insufficient to the claims and the requirements of our spirit; Bérenger is aware of the insufficiency of the world to satisfy his feeling of emptiness, of the anxiety and doubt of living in loneliness. We also have anxiety over being alone and alienated in the world and forgotten by everyone. We often respond to anxiety either consciously or unconsciously, to turn aside the anxiety that takes hold of us. Kierkegaard denotes, "there is a hunger that all the treasures of the world cannot satisfy, and yet this hunger is for them. There is a thirst that all the streams of overabundance cannot quench, and yet this thirst is for them. I know very well that there is an anxiety, a secret, private anxiety, about losing" (1990:428-9).

Bérenger knows that killer's presence deprives him of the radiant city as it deprived him of his beloved, Dany; He is anxious as Kierkegaard denotes about losing the haven he happened to come into and that reminds him of the heaven of

Adam from which he was excluded. He is hungry and thirsty in his soul because he came from a city devoid of the beauty and brightness of the so called ‘radiant city’; as Kierkegaard mentioned above, Bérenger has a secret and private anxiety about losing. He cannot forget this paradise just because of the shadow of death or a sign of it in the form of a killer instinct.

Kierkegaard states that anxiety none the less is the opening to an “infinite *pelagos* of possibilities, where certainty, the state of peace and repose preceding the Fall, is almost violently removed and the possibility of possibility emerges” (1844/1980:41). There lies freedom which means facing possibilities without the act of reason as it omits alternatives, remaining only one choice. Bérenger’s freedom in facing the killer put him in front of some possibilities like persuading the killer to stop his dirty job, killing the killer, fleeing the ominous city or even being murdered by the killer, but in his monologue debate with the killer, he finally clings to reason to stop his murderous job; as it was mentioned above, reason omits possibilities and remains only one choice, that is succumbing to the killer. On the other hand, anxiety is compared with dizziness that represents a feeling of powerlessness; likewise, powerlessness of Bérenger at the final scene and his kneeling down before the killer can be related to Bérenger’s latent anxiety propagating his dizziness; under duress of the inexorable killer’s laughing and strident voice, dizziness gets hold of Bérenger and makes him powerless.

Bérenger’s certainty in his entrance to the radiant city about the peacefulness of that place and his long conversation with the architect in a state of bliss, dramatizes the equanimity of Bérenger and the surface serenity of the city; but later when he is informed of the presence of a ruthless killer, he did not falter in coming across the stated acute catastrophe; his certainty about the serenity of the city removed, violently removed by the premonition of death, and possibilities, concerning the nature of

the killer, emerged. It is not Bérenger's duty, but it would be remiss of him if he overlooked the presence of the instinct killer. He is neither indifferent nor lethargic about himself and his environment. No matter who takes the first step to initiate a conflict, the possibility exists that the conflagration will spread and envelop the city. Bérenger takes the first step to face the killer, perhaps to make him rue his deeds.

On the other hand, "anxiety is best conceptualized when considered in the context of the interplay between non-being and being" (Tsakiri, 2006: 35). Bérenger's final encounter, even chimerical, with the killer is an interplay between non-being and being, between Bérenger's lugubrious fighting for survival and the timorous and latent imminence of death represented in the form of a killer; the killer becomes anathema to Bérenger as the schism between his present utopia and his former once murky life in retrospect. Bérenger is filled just with a tinge of hope to mend the rift between his past and present; what is started in earnest ended up in Bérenger's surrender to the killer. It seems there is no escape from the plight for which Bérenger stakes his life.

Ambiguity is the main part of anxiety, so Kierkegaard defines anxiety as "sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy" (1844/1980:42). Bérenger both loves to find and know the killer and is afraid of him. In one of his journals, Kierkegaard states:

The nature of original sin has often been considered, and yet the principal category is missing. it is dread, that is what really determines it; for dread is a desire for what one fears, a sympathetic antipathy; dread is an alien power which takes hold of an individual, and yet one cannot extricate oneself from it, does not wish to, because one is afraid, but what one fears attracts one (1967, vol III:105).

The definition of anxiety by Kierkegaard can be applied to Bérenger who is under the pressure of dread whose power

haunts Bérenger, forcing him to face the killer; Bérenger is also afraid of the killer, like the other people of the city, but as Kierkegaard mentioned above, he cannot extricate himself from it because he is afraid of the killer; but according to Kierkegaard, what Bérenger fears, attracts him as well.

Bérenger's Anxiety and the Battle of Mind Within

Kierkegaard states that "the easiest thing of all is to die; the difficult thing is to live" (1967, vol II:164); he adds, "When a person struggles with the future, he learns that, however strong he is, otherwise, there is one enemy that is stronger, namely himself. There is one enemy he cannot conquer by himself, and that is himself" (1990:18). In the last scene of the play we cannot see the killer but a sound of it; it may prove to us that the killer can be anyone, even Bérenger talking to him. Kierkegaard believes that it is the individual who produces anxiety, so he is responsible for it. Anxiety is not from something external or out of man but it is created by the individual himself. In the last scene, if the sound of the killer is just the resonance of Bérenger's internal voice so to our utter amazement, Bérenger faces himself to conquer him-self; finally, he reaches the point where he becomes sure that neither passion nor logic can conquer that him-self, because it is stronger, unconquerable as Kierkegaard professes.

There is a possibility that there is no killer and Bérenger is talking to his own anxiety; he may talk to himself in the shadow to reduce the anxiety filling his mind, like somebody whistling to himself. This implies that maybe the killer is his hallucination; an internal illusion he must kill within to free himself: his internal struggle with the anxiety lurking passively in the abyss of his mind that urges him to encounter the killer and free himself of the anxiety of the possibility of possibility, of fear of death. Kierkegaard clarifies, "In the experience of dread we are confronted with the hidden truth that there is no ultimate consolation, that the end of all striving is shipwreck,

the abyss of nonbeing. It is hard to discuss this truth, harder to face it and live by it" (Gray, 1951:117); Kierkegaard insists that weak natures never know this kind of truth. Bérenger, otherwise, has a strong nature and essence to face the killer. He wants to know the truth by himself, to find a possible consolation and strive to put an end to the anxiety of losing the lush radiant city in which he feels far from alienated. The end of his endeavor is, nevertheless, Kierkegaard's proposed shipwreck, the abyss of nonbeing. Finding a place of serenity, he is trying to struggle for his survival in the environment already feeling alienated from, due to the presence of the killer; he is no longer able of living with the truth of the presence of the killer.

Bérenger is afraid of the truth of his own self that is stronger than him, and anxiety never leaves him alone. He is not afraid of death because he faces it and instead of begging the killer not to kill him, instead of lamenting and shivering, he strongly stands to fight it. It is the truth of loneliness that is unbearable for him. When facing with something unknown, a killer or the own unknown self, something man does not even dare to make relation with, he will be filled with the anxiety of a possibility. Kierkegaard writes,

it is one thing to let ideas strive with ideas, to battle and be victorious in a dispute; it is something else entirely to be victorious over your own mind in the battle of life; for, however close one battling idea comes to another in life, however close one combatant comes to the other in an argument, all this strife is still at a distance and like shadow-boxing (1847/1962:88).

Esslin states that Ionesco discloses in a note the aim of the final scene between Bérenger and the killer,

the gradual breaking down of Bérenger, his falling apart and the vacuity of his own rather commonplace morality which collapses like a leaking balloon. In fact, Bérenger finds within himself, in spite of himself and against his own will, arguments

in favor of the killer. The killer represents the inevitability of death and the absurdity of human existence itself (2001, 167-8).

Man must accept that death is a part of life, a segment necessary to existence without which life and struggle for survival would not have any meaning.

Unlike other philosophers, Kierkegaard takes anxiety as different from fear; for fear has an object and it is about something definite. On the other hand the object of anxiety is nothingness (Tsakiri, 2006:35). The object of fear in this play is the briefcase, which is a dark one. Bérenger may think that it would protect him from death; so by losing the briefcase his object of fear already gone, changes his fear to anxiety whose object is nothingness. The briefcase only puts off, mitigate or diminish his anxiety of the possible dark and dreadful future devoid of any comfort. Bérenger dreams of returning to the radiant city, but it would be in vain unless he conquers his anxiety of a possible and inevitable death.

According to Kierkegaard ‘In the world of spirit, to change place is to be changed yourself... we believe our happiness lies outside ourselves... We make our happiness dependent on situations outside ourselves and blame others in the process if things don’t turn out well’ (Moore, 2002: xxviii). Despite his anxiety of facing the killer, Bérenger finally decides to lead a solitary life; He is searching for something about which he doesn’t have any information. On the one hand, he does not know the killer and is trying to end his anxiety by finding him; on the other hand, he is lost, physically in the city and mentally in the time, and is searching for his lost identity to end the anxiety of being unknown. Kierkegaard asserts, “One cannot seek for what he knows, and it seems equally impossible for him to seek for what he does not know. For what a man knows he cannot seek, since he knows it; and what he does not know he cannot seek, since he does not even know for what to seek” (1844/2007:7). Bérenger is searching both for what he knows

that is the killer, although he doesn't know who he or she is, and what he doesn't know that is his lost identity; his balderdash statements to the killer at the end proves his confusion on both what he lost and what he is searching for. He cannot find what he wants and this can justify his surrender to the killer or even his own self.

Anxiety, as Kierkegaard states, is related or tied to the future; future is something yet to come and it is possible for it not to be real or actual. Since future is yet to come, anxiety is about nothing. Future is to be made by each person internally; therefore our choices will bring us responsibilities that at last define our life; for as long as future is tied with possibility, anxiety is related to possibility as well. Marino purports, "in as much as the future is fraught with possibility, our relationship to the future is fraught with anxiety" (1998:319). Kierkegaard makes a connection between anxiety and our past and future life:

If I am anxious about a past misfortune, then this is not because it is in the past but because it may be repeated, i.e., becomes future. If I am anxious because of a past offense, it is because I have not placed it an essential relation to myself as past and have in some deceitful way or other prevented it from being past. If indeed it is actually past, then I cannot be anxious but only repentant. If I do not repent, I have allowed myself to make my relation to the offense dialectical, and by this the offense itself has become a possibility and not something past (1844/1980).

Bérenger has been in despair his whole life, even when he thought that he was living a good life. He thinks that a life worth living is now literally impossible because he is in anxiety of losing his ideality that is the ideal, platonic life he has always been wishing to have.

Bérenger: I believe in it, without believing, I knew without knowing! I was afraid to hope (Act I, 11).

Bérenger: ... I was overcome with the immense sadness you feel at a moment of tragic and intolerable separation (Act I, 24).

Even when Bérenger thinks that things go well, he is right in despair because there still exists the anxiety of the possibility of facing the killer unwillingly.

Édouard [to Bérenger]: . . . you look so sad, you look worn out and anxious...

Bérenger: [to himself] if that was all (Act II, 59).

Bérenger and the Existential Freedom to Choose

Kierkegaard states concerning decisions, “and how many ways there are to choose in the hour of decision. And yet there is only one true way; the others are deviations” (Croxall, 1955:31). Bérenger chooses the only way leading him toward freedom, toward evading death; he is aware of his existential freedom to choose from among different ways or possibilities about which nobody can force him to opt for and finally death came over and took his life. He is also aware of the final destination of life that is death and annihilation. According to Kierkegaard it can be said that Bérenger chooses the best way or the truest one, because that is the only way and all the other ways are mere illusions or ways to escape reality, that is may be facing death; He is a true and authentic existential man who chooses to encounter death to defeat it, although he is aware that this is a false encounter. He struggles for his survival for making the truest meaning of his being, his existential being.

Bérenger already made his decision; he decides to face the killer to discover the truth and not just believing what others told him about the essence of the killer. While Eduard shows him some tools of the killer in a briefcase, the objects play an existential role of converting anxiety and anxiety of Bérenger to fear. The existential anxiety of the many possibilities awaiting Bérenger still exists. Here there is a mixture of anxiety and fear. In Kierkegaard’s existentialism anxiety does not have any

object while fear has an object. Ionesco's dramatic power to picture the fear of the objects and anxiety of the future is really astonishing.

Freedom puts man among many possibilities, and reason cannot act or interfere, because it omits alternatives, remaining only one choice. Bérenger's attempt to persuade the killer, ends in nothingness. Due to the responsibility that his actions will bear on him, Bérenger is afraid of what he may do:

Bérenger: I walked and ran and cried: I am, I am, everything is, everything is!... oh, I'm sure I could have flown away, I'd lost so much weight, I was lighter than the blue sky I was breathing ... the slightest effort, the tiniest little leap would have been enough...(ActI,24)

Bérenger's Identity and the Object of Commitment

Bérenger is trying to base his lost identity on someone whether the killer, himself or even someone else with which he falls in love, namely Dany; if the individual relates itself to his self, he will find his true self or identity; He who relates himself to himself by something else, like Bérenger who falls in love with Dany, becomes an individual only in his relation to that object of commitment. Bérenger's relation to that object of commitment namely Dany, shapes his identity; without that thing Bérenger has no identity or reality by which he could live but to die. Hearing the news of the death of Dany, Bérenger loses his identity for the second time.

Dreyfus states that the unconditional commitment for Kierkegaard is "an infinite passion for something finite" (2006:146). In this kind of relation, the more one manifests himself, the more he reveals that object. This passion according to Kierkegaard is a 'new creation'. Bérenger's 'new creation' already occurred with his entrance into the radiant city though inadvertently; Love can be considered as Bérenger's second

'new creation'. Guignon & Pereboom assert that for Kierkegaard, "the meaning we find in life is not something that simply comes to us, but is something we attain through struggle... choices and commitments" (Cooper, 2003, 47). Bérenger dares to face the killer through his own choice and commitment, to struggle even by staking his all to give meaning to his life; He believes that he can find something in common between them—Bérenger and the killer—that is the language of logic:

Bérenger (to the killer): You're a scientific man, aren't you, a man of the modern era, I've guessed it now, haven't I, a cerebral man? (Act III, 105)

The killer, can no longer talk because he can no longer think. Esslin states, the characters of absurdist plays "can no longer think because they can no longer be moved, can no longer feel passions. They can no longer be; they can 'become' anybody, anything, for, having lost their identity, they assume the identity of others . . ." (2001:137). The killer is devoid of any essence; he lost his identity and subjectivity so he is devoid of an existential being.

Kierkegaard's Approaches to Life: The Aesthetic or Ethical Bérenger

Kierkegaard in *Either/or*, introduces two styles of life: aesthetic and ethical; the former as someone for whom possibility is more important than actuality, whose aim in life is running away from boredom; he is interested in literature and music... the latter, on the other hand is a responsible man who feels duty to God and the people. In making choices and decisions, he ponders over the consequences to choose the correct ethical one. For him moral rules are a priority (O'Hara, 2004:12-13). In Kierkegaard's thought a person can change his lifestyle from aesthetic to the ethical if he is motivated by the avoidance of despair; a dormant person in aesthetic lifestyle

who let others decide for him would feel despair and the avoidance of it makes the above mentioned change.

For Kierkegaard, in spite of being finite and bounded by restrictions, man is a unique being. So he is incomplete and is not able to live in certainty; this is also obvious about Bérenger, as a human being who is in doubt about the killer and his real identity; he tries to surpass his limitations to get to certainty and even stakes his life on this. Kierkegaard believes that despite being confined, we are to choose among different possibilities even though it makes us anxious; In other words, we always choose in anxiety because of the responsibility that our choice puts on our shoulder.

In Kierkegaard's idea the stages of life viz the aesthetic, ethical and religious are opposing and there is no way for man except to choose among them. He believes that the aesthetic is based on sensory experience and man is more than just a sensory being; so this stage ends in anxiety because it would never satisfy man. For Kierkegaard the ethical life is better but not in all instances; this stage is not sensory but based on man's morality. Kierkegaard, however, reveals the inadequacy of the ethical life to attain the good; in other words, the good is an absolute perfection and is impossible to get to so it makes us guilty for failing to attain this perfection.

Ionesco presents in *The Killer*, through the portrayal of Bérenger, man's metamorphosis or movement from the aesthetic to ethical life: at the end of the play Bérenger feels duty to humanity, doing his best to persuade the killer by means of either reason or emotion to stop his killing humanity. Bérenger is motivated both by the radiant city and by the presence of Dany, as mentioned above, to flee despair. Bérenger reconciles himself to the new dark and gloomy condition, risking his life to withstand his faith.

Bérenger confronts the killer as the embodiment of death. At first he adulates the killer in fulsome remarks without even

thinking of absconding, trying to cajole him to stop killing but it's all in vain. Rudd asserts that "once one has started to doubt, there is no way of halting that doubt in intellectual terms" (1998:74). According to Kierkegaard "a skepticism which attacks thought itself cannot be vanquished by thinking it through, since the very instrument by which this would have to be done is in revolt" (ibid). Bérenger's decision which was started in earnest, ends in abortive attempts, as doubt, the most puissant anti-will, draws him to succumbing to the killer.

Bérenger (to the killer): often I have my doubts about everything too. But don't tell anyone. I doubt the points of living, the meaning of life, doubt my own values and every kind of rational argument. I no longer know what to hang on to, perhaps there is no more truth or charity. ... (Act III, 106)

Conclusion

Through what is mentioned above in the comparative study of Ionesco's works and Kierkegaard's concepts in existentialism as well as the text-analysis of Ionesco's *The Killer*, it is concluded that different critics and authors have previously proved through various ways the impact of existentialism on Ionesco's works in general; this paper however, is deplored to prove the existence of the concepts of Kierkegaard in Ionesco's drama that is to some extent unprecedented. Ionesco is a "humanist, a lover of the world, and deplores the existence of suffering; he stands for tolerance, moderation, an end to violence, and finally a moralist" (Dobrez, 2013:178). Fischer-Lichte in his book *History of European Drama and Theatre* concerning the postwar dramatists of the 1950s states that dramatists such as

Jean Genet and Eugene Ionesco in France... performed the play of the impossibility of the individual. Some blamed historical-social conditions, others found existential-anthropological causes; others simply drew attention to it, while

yet others made vehement protest and expressed their longing for a return to individuality... They were unanimous, however, in diagnosing the evil of the times as a condition in which the individual cannot exist – for whatever reason. A ‘remedy’ for Western culture seemed unlikely, if not impossible... the dissolution and dismemberment of the individual is not only to be understood as the end of the Western culture, but at the same time as a standstill, as a perpetual end condition. The future is usurped by empty time.... (1990/2002: 333)

Existential philosophy seeks to begin with the subject as existing that is as it is exactly involved in a particular situation; Consequently, a number of existential thinkers emphasize that if philosophy addresses the man of feeling and action as well as the one who contemplates and reasons, it must take the form of a literary philosophy. Kierkegaard, whose work anticipates central features of twentieth-century existential approaches, wrote treatises whose form is nearer to literature than to philosophy (Dobrez, 2013:1-2). In Kierkegaard’s existentialism the world is chaotic and man’s nature and destiny is not fixed but it is in his own hand; we as human beings choose our final destination and whatever our destiny, the consequent responsibility lies with you. Man lives by chance not certainty, in a state of either/or, always in flux, forever in doubt; An existential individual is cognizant of his true existence, his present day, apprehensive of the next day, as something unknown may threaten the security of the current situation.

Ionesco’s hero is in search of solitude and hungers less for order and clarity than for the experience of something obscure, mysterious and wonderful, less for human reason than for its ravishment and abolition in the moment of vision. Parsell declares, “Ionesco’s theater had already projected a profound sensitivity to human suffering, beyond politics in its defense of dignity and its aversion to posturing of any kind” (2005:504). Concerning Ionesco’s art or drama Parsell points out that:

Eugène Ionesco is rivaled only by Samuel Beckett as the world's best-known and most influential exponent of experimental drama, and he is credited with the development of new conventions according to which serious drama would henceforth have to be written and judged (*ibid*, 501).

In Ionesco's world, however, we do not find that breadth of reference which allows us to consider for example Pinter in relation to an entire philosophical tradition; Moreover, Ionesco is not that philosophic as it is mentioned by some critics:

Strictly speaking, he is a visionary moralist, more absorbed in Good than in the True. There can, once again, be no question of arguing for the 'influence' of modern existential thought, except in the most general sense. Ionesco does not pretend ignorance of the philosophers, as Becket is wont to do, but he dissociates himself firmly from any school (Dobrez, 2013:313-4).

Ionesco claims society formed a barrier between human beings, nothing can extricate us from the pain of living and the fear of death surrounding us. Our condition is already defined and social conditions has no effect on it. We all want to know what is our problem and our fear. By finding an answer to these questions we will find the road into our internal darkness into which all desire to bring light. This exploration of our internal anxieties will lead to subjectivism. Ionesco uses objects as the embodiment of characters internal anxiety. He tries to depict man's existence which cannot be easily depicted through plot and characterization. He wants us to feel the meaninglessness of life, our inability to pierce into the silence besieging us (Esslin, 2001:124-6).

Tynan criticizing Ionesco and his new drama as the messiah of the enemies of realism asserts, "Here was a writer ready to declare that words were meaningless and that all communication between human beings was impossible" (Esslin, 2001:123). Ionesco in the first program note for the

production of one of his plays writes:

At times the world seems to me to be void of meaning, reality to be unreal. It is the feeling of unreality, the search for an essential reality, forgotten, unnamed that I am trying to express through my characters who wander aimlessly, having nothing to call their own apart from their worries, their failures, and the emptiness of their lives. People drowning in meaninglessness can only be grotesque; their suffering can only appear tragic by derision.' And he adds: 'Since I am unable to understand the world, how could I understand my own play? I hope someone will explain it to me (Coyle, Garside, Kelsall & Peck, 1993:470).

For modern man, however, the awareness of anxiety of alienation and death becomes a tangible event. Alienation and death are aggressive, accidental and unavoidable, and must be battled by human struggle for the continuance of survival. Analytical thought and emotional associations seem insufficient and inappropriate because they diminish in the face of alienation and death. We come to realize that as a human being, man must deal directly with the realization of alienation and anxiety of death, just as directly as he must deal with life and existence. The fact of annihilation and death or the apparent death of Bérenger at the end of *The Killer* is common to all humanity because it is the one emotion that dominates man's existence. Ionesco himself realized that alienation and anxiety of death are the total annihilation of life. Ionesco purports, "death is really the end, the goal of all existence" (1964:162).

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