

## MANIFESTATIONS OF ABSURDISM IN CONTEMPORARY DRAMA: A CAMUSIAN ANALYSIS OF ANNIE BAKER'S *THE FLICK*

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### Abstract

*This article explores the manifestation of absurdity in the play The Flick by Annie Baker according to the perspective of Albert Camus' theory of the absurdism. Annie Baker's play The Flick is set in a run-down cinema that offers a microcosm for contemporary society, portrayal upon the repetitiveness, loneliness, and existential inquiring in its characters. It deals with problems such as hyper-consciousness of time and space in characters, felt imprisonment into mold of repetition, disappointment in social relationships and honest opinion, as ways to inform the tale of the expression of absurdity. It attempts to slim down on this ridiculous issue, by highlighting how Baker describes this tale as an exposure of modern employment and people's hunt for significance through this depression of an existential order in current society.*

**Key Words:** Absurdism, contemporary, existentialism, absurdity, revolt

### Introduction

Bizarre, unreal, meaningless, strange, irrational, odd, ridiculous, skeptic, Purposeless, illogical and stupidity are the words which come to mind when it comes to absurdism. Absurdism is the literary belief that is modified from an ideological thought that states that search of human for the sake of meaning of life is useless. All the literary works that portrays concept of absurdism shows oddly funny characteristics. The writers construct the jokes by using nonsensical words and situations based on juxtaposing concepts that actually has no relevance to each other. They imply that the universe we are living in is devoid of logic and order and has no inherit meaning. There is no synchronization between human and its nature so; we can say there is a gap. Human always try to learn about his identity in this world. Human is not fuse into nature like an animal.

Albert Camus was one of the well-known personalities who support revolt as a procedure that aims to defeat the absurd. Some of Camus works that are related to absurdism includes The Myth of Sisyphus, The stranger, Caligula and the plague. According to Camus "absurd is the pointlessness in trying to find purpose in an unravel meaning that is devoid of God." That we can comprehend all the efforts that we used to do to find meaning is pointlessness because there is no such meaning exist. But it doesn't mean we encourage suicide like it's a better option, we need to embrace all these absurd conditions in our life because our life must go on. Camus ( Foley, 2014, p.9) argued that human doesn't need to restrain his absurd condition by doing suicide despite he needs to keep his absurd state alive. So, from this we can understand that Camus reject the idea of suicide and was not in the favor of escape from the life. He said humans need to keep growing and should accept the absurd life.

### Literature review

This study illustrates certain notions and Johnson (2013) critically examines it and states that *The Flick* from the time of its first staging always supplies troublesome reactions like play is extremely slow. There is a connection between play setting that is of a movie theatre and plays temporal affect. The researcher carries out this work on slow-cinema

learning and theatrical exhibition to know more about modern discourse about slowness and cinema. The writer contextualizes his work within more general, interdisciplinary discussions concerning the culture of speed and slowness, ahead of thinking about its unique slowness and how it evokes the theatre experience.

This study pay focus on the themes of separation in Annie bakers play *The Flick* and explains ‘Six degrees of separation’ Hoelscher (2017), A phenomenon which states that humans are connected to each other by six communal connections. This researcher in this study argues that baker is not much inclined towards societal scale but towards individuals on mental and personal level with respect to degrees of separation. The pollster highlighted the characters and how they are disconnected with each other how they are unaware of their true selves; the interactions of characters are shallow that are only related to their on stage roles rather than their actual acquaintances. The researcher also gives references and provides metaphors related to acting the game "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon," and film projection, which show up the struggles of characters to unite significantly with others and themselves. The study also touches Judith Kleinfeld’s analysis of the six degrees theory that how modern technology intensify these disconnections. The researcher concludes *The Flick* makes audience questioning the nature of correlation and disconnection in their lives while testing the belief world is interconnected as the as the six degrees theory suggests

Turina (2021) in his study named as ‘‘Intimations of Precarit in Twenty-First-Century U.S. Drama’’ *Faltering Voices of the Precarity in Annie Baker's The Flick*. In this study he talks about how dramas in America and Europe and British theaters received critical attention from scholars. This article studies how American drama began to become increasingly concerned with economic suffering in the second decade of 2021 century. This play *The Flick* serves as a visual appeal of precarity and that explores the paradoxes of precarious scenarios as both troubling and enabling conversion and potential.

The earlier findings show that there are certain similarities and differences between these researches that are of their common and basic theme that is absurdity and the theory that is Camus theory of absurdism and difference is the item of the research that is ‘‘Annie Baker’s *The Flick*’’ and no one looks at this play with the lens of absurdism before. There is no work on this play before related to this area of research that is absurdism.

## Research Question

- How does *The Flick* depict the absurdity of human existence, as per Albert Camus' theory of the absurdism?

## Research Methodology

The study employs descriptive qualitative method for this research. Descriptive qualitative method is a method that is related to the description of the character or any specific group or individual situation (Khotari, 2005:37). This method is appropriate for this study because the researcher explored the data and evaluate the absurdity to assemble the data that is used to complete this research by reading the novel *The Flick* by Annie Baker.

## Theoretical framework:

The present study follows the theory of Absurdism by Albert Camus as the framework for the study of the play ‘*The Flick*’ by Annie Bakers. The researcher uses this theory because it serves as a great theoretical framework particularly in literature as it offers a convincing perspective on human condition. According to Camus life is always meaningless yet humans are forever looking for some purpose and meaning. Camus’ point of

view is that if life is without purpose and devoid of meaning we all must know how to cope with it and how to create our own meaning by accepting the absurdity life and existence.

### Analysis

The main source is taken by the text of play written 'by Annie Baker's *The Flick*'. It aims to address how absurdity of human existence is measured through the lens of Albert Camus theory of Absurdism in the play *The Flick*. main focus of this study is to find out the absurdist features that are depicted in the play '*The Flick*' by using the concepts like awareness of time, space, imprisonment and curiousness. In addition, it relates with certain absurdities that are present in the play with the contemporary absurdities.

Following elements are correlated to the feelings of absurdity that appear in the play '*The Flick*':

### Awareness of Time

The subjective sense or experience of time, which is determined by an individual's perception of the length of an indefinite sequence of occurrences, is referred to as time perception in the fields of psychology, cognitive linguistics, and neuroscience. Even though it is not possible to directly experience or realize another person's wisdom of time, numerous scientific studies can be used to objectively study and infer this perspective (Brown, 1990). Our mind changes the maintenance of our physical events into the moments that we spent in our daily life (the absolute now). "*SAM. 8.25 an hour is not enough to live on.*" (Baker 2013, p. 13). This line depicts the reality of the work hard and boredom associated with such struggle. The sense about time being dragged and dawdled reflects immediately on the concept of productivity and the result this bears upon happiness. The constant feature about time was an expression of hopelessness in search of meaning or happiness in something that has no meaning itself.

For Sam time acts as a reminder to insistent effort of his work and survival but at the end the reward for this is little. He knows that he is working hard but his entire struggle is of no use time passes but his situation remains same, the boredom of his life and senseless labor gives existential catastrophe. According to Camus view of absurdity this frustration of Sam about his circumstances and time act as confrontation with absurd. The recognition for meaning in life such as work and pay is meaningless itself. So, persons are left with a pattern of frustration and acceptance.

**"AVERY. What if people are still here?"... SAM. Sometimes people stay until the end of the credits. But then they go.**" (Baker, 2013, p.10) This describes about the doubtfulness of life and how one stay when he or she is not acknowledged to. It suggests that when masses hang around in a place or a situation, they sooner or later move out, for time has it moving them forward. This echoes the slowness of time because the character is feeling bored and is conscious of the transition of time as portrayed by the ticking clock.

In view of Camus absurdism, it is the time when a person feels ridiculousness in his life; he continues with his situation in a habit or even in a inactive way, yet he cannot control the passage of time. Time is such a powerful unit that hits him all over: his skillfulness, ability, and happiness get harmful effect. According to Camus' theory, in these little experiences, there lies no expectation of uncovering content in them. The characters, who keep repeating the said lives with no variance, reflect in themselves the absurd hero trying to find significance in life in a hollow world of creation. Even time changes on but nothing can get anyone out of the abysses of the absurd life. **"Avery: And then it was like 4:05, and then it was 4:10, and I was like that's it, I just lost my first job, I give up."** (Baker, 2014, p .67). This statement reflects the concept of absurdity of time and life in the lives of characters. Here Avery is becoming anxious and he starts to carry his time by the constant

look at the clock. Instead the seconds are counted and it seems more like a failure than a chance, as well as showed his immobility and powerlessness. This Absurdism of Camus depicts the fight to live essence in a meaningless universe. The theme of this particular statement is on how this particular given character has to deal with this kind of existential hopelessness. This is a time element to explain temporality of life and agency into life and being. Absence of opportunity and redeeming value of the character implies absence of time. Surely, the researcher links this well to Camus' myth of Sisyphus, the pain of continually pushing a rock up a slope for all eternity. In the same way, the character is hopeless and suffocated, as Avery cannot lend purpose to his work.

According to Camus, knowing about an absurdity of life is liberation. It is absolutely can be seen that the character gives in to despair in order to make a point such as the admittance of desiring means is incongruent with Reality. Great evaluation of literature elements used and philosophical idea that goes into the story. They talk as well about the fact, which is obvious; it shows the complexity of existence in terms of the ticking off the clock which, in fact, is not very complicated.

For instance, the major theme of the play is time as for the characters and their survival struggles are the introduction of existentialism and subjective approach in life, resonating with both psychological time perception and Camus' absurdist philosophy. The characters linked behavior in the play shows that in the tie of life time plays a vital role. Characters emotional instability and uncertainty represents the real moral of the play which is the depiction of absurd life.

By pointing out some of the visible themes and aspects of the play which pertain to time, existentialism, and absurdism, and afflictions of the characters, it can be inferred that this is existentialist about choices we make when we have this time on Earth. The characters don't deal with a totality of meaninglessness, but instead with an uncaring, meaningless world that doesn't appear to exist for any reasonable purpose. It is aptly connected to Camus' absurdist philosophy. The characters in the play are emotionally unstable and uncertain. The characters linked behavior in the play with the tie of life, time plays a vital role as it relates to the actions the characters carry out might be more clearly linked with the theme of the play. The characters represent an absurd life forms the perfect note end of the existentialism and absurdism which is uncovered and have highlighted throughout the script. It preserves the general concept regarding people's presence on Earth.

### Awareness of Space

The places one frequents on daily basis, such as home, work, school, shopping centers, entertainment venues, etc., make up their activity space. Nodes are another name for these private locations. Personal paths are the paths or routes a person uses to go to and from these nodes. A perimeter is shaped when personal paths connect to different nodes. This boundary is an individual's awareness domain (Kennewell, 2013).

In the play *The Flick*, the setting is of the run-down movie theater that becomes an important factor in expressing the characters' awareness of space. The characters activities take place within the boundaries of the theater, which works and manipulated as their entire space that limits their private life and ways. These points out the ways where the characters tend to move and communicate form their space awareness that interoperates their soliloquy and the uncertainty of their existence.

**“Sam: Steve will never spend a dime on anything. Steve would rather this place burn down than he like spend a little money to make it safe or have a nacho machine at concessions” (Baker, 2014, p.49).** In this statement of Sam shows how Steve has been so insensitive to issues concerning the theatre from safety to audience usage and experience. The



phrase “rather this place burn down” underlines the apathy relating to Steve's behavior towards his colleagues as he prioritizes money over the working condition of his co-workers. This creates a contrast between people's necessities just like a nacho machine is hardly a complex demand for them to manage their duties which is allowing for what may be a hazardous environment at there.

This statement also reflects an awareness of space however, though the theatre must be one of the most creative and entertaining places, it is potentially dangerous because of abandonment. That public desired in the theatre and envisaged as potential and active participant is reduced to an object of ‘entertainment’ as the theatre is a space for freedom of creativity and performance, is turned into a hostile arena. With this getting so passionate about explaining that this space is for dancing, but the condition the two had left it in, Sam is able to express the absurdity of this world.

From the view point of Camus this kind of absurdity stems from the opposition of the human hope and the hopelessness of their existence. Camus make us focus that one should try to understand the meaninglessness of life and accept it with a big heart without getting hopeless and depressed. When Sam agrees to the indictment of Steve's negligence, it also equals an acceptance of the realities of the two's surreal world such as the inability to come to terms with a world where there is no home and the outside world is just as dangerous. Therefore, instead of offering sanctuary of creative and social spirit, that is, a stage, the theater reflects the contradictory state of affairs inherent in the concept of the human condition. **“Rose: And this is our like this isn't like a job we have while we go to college. This is what we like-feed ourselves with” (Baker, 2014, p. 104).** Rose's space consciousness is similarly attached to the theater, and her disillusionment with it speaks to the existential trap of the absurd. She expected charm from working in an entertainment area, but instead, the theater is a strict and tight knot that made his life more tough and bounded. The fact that “we – feed ourselves” reinforces the idea that the characters' knowledge about their space is digital and meaningless, like they are working here forcefully for the sake of earning as like much like the universe in Camus' absurdism, where humans seek meaning in the worldly things and desires as she talks about the college thing and gets sad. The theater, as a work place fails to provide them the peace of living or worth of life, making it a space where absurdity reigns.” **(The theater is dark and empty, The film projector is on. We hear it whirring. Then it flashes green, then white, then goes off.)” (Baker, 2014, P. 107).** Here is a very good breakdown of the initial setting's description mentioned in the scene, and how it links to absurdism. The link between the practicalities of the room and the situation, such as darkness and a spinning projector to more existential concerns is depicted vividly. This is how, it highlights on the light and dark moments to clarify what hope and happiness looks like, in this nihilistically and despairingly setting. It prevents relativity of the theme absurdity. On the contrary, extending the analysis to Camus contribute to deepening the discussion. This is a beautiful argument for explaining how Baker employs the use of the theatre environment and setting to gently steer the audience into dealing with some of the most fundamental philosophical issues that the characters have to face. It discovers a richness of relation to Absurdist ideas from the very beginning of the play.

### Awareness of Imprisonment

The characters realization that this is a true scenario is when absurdity arises. When someone becomes conscious of their place in the world, it usually happens when they experience fatigue, stress, or boredom with their everyday routine. The routine is meaningless and repeats itself every day: getting up, taking the streetcar, working for four hours, eating, sleeping, and repeating the cycle on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and

Saturday. They are not free because their own business put them in this jail scenario (Donnell, 2020). This confinement does not always imply that the individual is confined to a jail cell; rather, it refers to the way that every character in the book feels like they are incarcerated due to their knowledge of the passing of time.

In *The Flick*, the characters experience time in a way that aligns with Albert Camus' concept of absurdism, where the repetitive, unchanging nature of their lives makes them prisoners of their own daily chores and job. Their awareness of time is pointed by a sense of uselessness, as they claim that their existence, like the work they do, is of no meaning. This sense of imprisonment about them both mentally and physically intersects with the definition provided, where characters feel manacled in a repetitive, pointless routine. **"Sam: It just puts me in an awkward position because/I'm- ... SAM. I had to do soda and make a whole batch of popcorn by/myself. AVERY. I'm so sorry"** (Baker, 2014, p.14). Sam's, sadness in this textual line focuses on the unworthiness of the life as it contradicts to the unawareness of time. The easy-going methodical repetition of their life chores mirrors the revolving nature of their life, where everything is unchanging and futile, and time seems to stretch indifferently. Thus, somehow defined life as an impulsive but similar revolving around the actions that never ends. The characters, imprisoned in their daily work, make them powerless when it comes to get escape of time and the similar routine, much like Sisyphus in Camus' metaphor, endlessly moving forward without any purpose.

**"Avery: And the truth is, one day I'll come back to visit Massachusetts and you'll still be here sweeping up popcorn. And the truth is, working for some bigot from Nashua. And I'll be like...I'll be living in Paris or something. So... you know"** (Baker, 2014, p.114). Avery's opinion and observation about Sam that "you still be here sweeping up the popcorn" mirrors his increasing knowledge of the meaninglessness of Sam's life. The never-ending repetition of his actions like sweeping, rewinding, cleaning represents the main idea of absurdity in Camus' literacy. This feeling of being "stuck" in time, where pointlessness has the main seat, echoes Camus' description of the human condition: individuals are shackled in a universe where they opt to learn and grow but out of the boundaries in which life tie them, they find nothing but only a mundane life. Avery's acknowledgement of this temporary stickiness added up to his feeling of imprisonment, where time passes slowly in a demeaning way, but simply revolves in its routine. **"SAM: He told me I couldn't wear my Red Sox cap anymore."** **AVERY: He figured out dinner money. ROSE: Wait, why was he looking at the books from last month? What does he care? He has like a whole new system and a credit card machine! We're not gonna steal from him!"** (Baker, 2014, p.104). From this exchange, there is a feeling of entrapment in the feature that Sam is ordered by his boss that he can't wear the red cap because now his boss knew all the truth about them. The notation of a red Sox cap represents here not a mere liking but liberty which has been denied by an agent of force. Even the question about "dinner money" raises by Avery clearly shows that they have limited financial freedom too. The last dialog between Rose and themselves magnifies the cubicle's sense of entrapment when Rose cannot figure out why the boss is auditing past financials even though advanced systems seem to exist.

It also supports Camus' theory of self-fulfillment, where an individual looks for purpose where there is none. It is from this that they develop their awareness of imprisonment as a result of understanding that even with the various systems put in place to increase effectiveness, there are still many constraints placed on their, or anyone else's freedoms and individuality. It is possible to see this free dialogue as their desire for freedom as an adapting human being to the lack of it's too much extent that it becomes absurd indeed in the structure surrounding them.

The awareness of imprisonment in *The Flick* serves as a powerful metaphor for the characters' existential struggles, revealing their entrapment within both their mundane jobs and the broader societal expectations. This sense of confinement is not only physical but also psychological, as they grapple with feelings of insignificance and stagnation in their lives. The repetitive tasks they perform highlight their lack of agency and the futility of their aspirations, mirroring the absurdity of human existence. Ultimately, this awareness fosters a deeper understanding of their reality, prompting a search for meaning amidst their limitations. Through their experiences, the play illustrates the tension between desire for freedom and the inevitability of life's constraints.

The knowledge of being imprisoned in *The Flick* works as an allegory for the main characters and talks about their searching of freedom in the endless existential limbo as well as in the formal work places. This sense of imprisonment is not only, therefore, geographical but emotional as well. The fact is that they are tortured by feelings of worthlessness and rudeness, as well as by boredom in life. The everyday chores they do are very much enforcing a lack of choice and how futile their life is notify by the meaninglessness of their existence. Finally, it creates awareness of their condition in the world and encourages the look for purpose in their lives among their constraints. It shows desire for freedom juxtaposed to other forms of social containment across the play among its characters.

### Curiousness

Absurdity involves a catastrophic tone and thoughts of frustration that occur out of the negation between the human chase for the connotation of life and its inaccessibility. "The way happens and everything starts in that exhaustion touches with amazement. Exhaustion comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. The workman of today works everyday in his life at the same tasks, and his fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious." In other words, absurdity arises from moments when all the act of life that flows mechanically stops, and when consciousness starts to wake up and move (Litman, 2005). This means that the non-sense of life has been opening in the only one perplexing feeling. "Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined." **"Avery: Well, yesterday I had this thought. was like: okay. I Maybe it's never gonna get better. Maybe I'm gonna live with my dad for the rest of my life and like the actual problem is just that I'm waiting for things to change. Like maybe I'm just gonna be that weird depressed guy and I should just like accept it. And that'll be the life I get. And that'll be okay"** (Baker, 2014, p. 68). This is an example of existential curiosity that can be identified in the play when Avery begins to think over the course and life experience, asking himself if something will change, or the life he is living is the best he could hope for. He asks himself whether his current state is his final state or whether the thing he expects to change is the reason for his discontent. This contemplation is reminiscent of one ingredient of Camus' treatise of the absurd to the tendency towards struggling with the world that offers no purpose. Avery's interest in his future and the acceptance of his centrality and unchanging life are some of the aspects dignifying the aspect of absurdity in the novel.

According to Camus, protagonist of an absurd play, rejects the condition of the world and lives a life without expecting a better and different condition. Avery's monologues about accepting his position of the "weird depressed guy" is a scene in which he seems to come close to this absurd acceptance when he questions whether he should not wait for a change but accept this role instead. His interest in the results of life resorts to an existential urge to find meaning. Nevertheless, he starts doubting if such urge is purposeless and, thus, according to Camus, one must accept absurdity in order to live.

**“SAM: And it was like everyone was acting so happy. Like trying so hard. Like on this whole fucking charade is so fucking joyful. (pause) And it's like the only actually happy people here are retarded! The rest of you are just miserable fucks. (Long pause. They sweep.) SAM. And everyone always pretends like the catering is so good!”(Baker, 2014, p.77).** Thus it is also true for Sam’s line “And it was like everyone was acting so happy;” he is interested in the facade that people put on. He notices people faking happiness in a situation where it is much better to say that we as humans are not happy with our lives.

Sam was observing that people are more likely to put on a happy face when in fact they are not happy at all. This can be related to the theory of the absurd, by Camus. Where people try to build prospects and definitions in a world that is non ergonomic and void of meaning. Sam’s irritation with the "charade" of happiness mirrors towards an intense existential interrogating that why do people have to maintain those social masks when they are fully aware that the joy is fake?

According to Camus, the right thing is to proclaim the absurd with the rebellious interpretation, the reading, of the world and of limits. Revolt and passion help find purpose even if no comfort is expected to be found in the lie. Camus’s who encourages people not blind themselves to the absurd and to do so in this world. Therefore, Baker ‘shade in’ absurdism the prospective integration as of when Sam transforms from the naive dizziness of angst for a aesthetic and authoritative reconciliation with existential absurdity is one of the great yet challenging aspects in the light of Camus. **“SAM. (quietly) Why'd you show Avery how to do the projector? (Baker, 2014, p.81) SAM. Do you know how humiliating it is to be working with like twenty-something who are rising in the ranks of your shitty job faster than you are?” (Baker, 2014, p. 82)**

The dialogues of Sam here are saddening everybody with his frustration and humiliation from having to work for a “shit job” that seems to progress in rank other employees who are way younger than him, that is why he pretends to be both curious and depressed about Avery? Even though he served at the theater more than Avery, This shows revelation of Sam’s concern about fate and why some are rewarded while he stays still. Sam’s question implies a deeper existential struggle like why are there people that get promoted and more privileged while some like him are stagnant? This curiosity about lack of progression in one’s life corresponds to the sensation of sadness observed when anticipations are not met. On the existential plane, Sam’s sense of hopelessness is linked to a system whereby people search for purpose and recognition only to come across the cold, indifferent face of the arbitrary nature of existence.

As a result of this analysis, the researcher finds out that in the play *The Flick*, the characters’ points of curiosity occurs when they starting finding meaning of their lives, whether they are happy or not. They found themselves in a bounded freedom, limited locations, and a search of hopelessly unattainable happiness which depicts the idea of Albert Camus’ absurdism which makes them confused and depressed by all means. Their cyclical routine, flow of time small interactions and little knowledge about the world sometimes make them frustrated and confused even that they start questioning their existence and meaning of their lives. This process of questioning leads them to absurdity they feels weary and depressed while consciously trying to find the alternatives and also assuming that the alternatives might be useless and meaningless as their lives in the present moment. However thus help them to understand life deeply.

### Conclusion

The theory of Absurdism according to Albert Camus, *The Flick* by Annie Baker serves to demonstrate Baker’s play that is actually a representation of contemporary absurdism, an eternal fight of human against meaninglessness of our existence. In *The Flick*



Baker describes reactions to an awareness, which shows acceptance and defiance. What can be attributed to the given acts in play is that they are similar to the absurd hero, who though weighed down with meaninglessness still but still wants to go on living. In the play *The Flick* by Annie Baker themes of existentialism are so wonderfully set in line with Albert Camus' theory of absurdism; the fact is that man exists within a universe that is indifferent to their search for purpose. There is no clear explanation of what Camus meant by the absurd but he explains that the absurd results from a clash between man wishing to give meaning. The characters in the play *The Flick* theme of absurdity shows up clearly but in different manner like a theme of time, another of space, and yet in respect to the recurrence of the work in the given sphere of theater. These all are the themes of caging, of the repetition, of the disconnection and this entire echo with what Camus had prescribed to as the absurd, the situation in which a person is faced with an empty or futile universe. Their interest is again and again not a solution-oriented interest, but a deepened relevance of existential life's problems, precisely the kind of philosophical suicide to which Camus refers as being able to make people happy with the hope of life because they've swallowed the Absurd.

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