

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: The Dual Motif

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ABSTRACT

Following two world wars, the human essence was affected by pessimism and a loss of faith. As a result, new existentialist literature was produced, resulting in a new wave of absurdist fiction plays. The theatre of the absurd was first termed by Martin Esslin, whereas the term 'absurd' was first used by Albert Camus in his classic essay 'The Myth of Sisyphus'. Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," a tragic comedy, (1952) is among the most mysterious dramas of the twentieth century that represents the philosophy of absurdism. By adopting the philosophy of theatre of the absurd in analyzing "Waiting for Godot," this study focuses on Beckett's employing the dual motif in the plot of the play and its implications, represented in chances that play a significant role rather than logic in the characters' lives. As a result, the study concludes that Beckett's use of such a technique underlines the equal opportunities in the world of the play, where chances have their effects on humans; Godot might or might not come, and the characters might leave or not: illustrating the unpredictability of the real world.

Keywords: absurdism, Beckett, existentialism, the dual motif, waiting for Godot.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Disappointment and a loss of faith influenced human development throughout the mists of the two world wars. Consequently, a new type of existentialist philosophy and theater emerged, creating a new wave of absurdist fiction plays to popularity. In the Theatre of the Absurd, suffering and desperation emerge from a human being's realization that he is encircled by everlasting darkness, or will never reveal his pure essence or destiny, and no one will offer him pre-made standards of behavior, which are bluntly displayed. After Martin Esslin, a British-Hungarian critic, journalist, and dramatist published his essay in 1961, "The Theatre of Absurd," "Absurd Drama" or "The Theatre of Absurd" became popular. He argues that there is nothing such as a typical "Absurd dramatists" movement; demonstrating in the preface of his book that theatre of the absurd is "a device to make certain fundamental traits which seem to be present in the works of a number of dramatists accessible to the discussion by tracing the features they have in common" (Esslin, 1961, p. 12).

This kind of theatre makes the person conscious of the essential truths of his position and shocks him out of a life that has become banal and mechanical by indicating the devastating feelings of loss resulting from the departure of absolute certitude. The narratives of such dramas are frequently non-traditional and follow a consistent pattern, with the play finishing in the same manner it begins, as in a circle. Esslin considers the "element of absurd" as the fundamental element that unites these plays. Esslin (1961) asserts that neither the term's original meaning, which denotes a song that is out of tune on a musical scale, nor its common connotation of "ridiculous" are the foundations of absurd theater. He refers to Ionesco for an explanation of the absurd, as a man who is lost when he is stripped of his spiritual, intellectual, and philosophical origins; all of his efforts become meaningless, absurd, and pointless, in an article he wrote concerning Franz Kafka (as cited in Cornwell, 2006). Human existence's absurdity, particularly, the feeling of hopelessness that brings with it, is the core theme of absurd theatre productions. According to Esslin, the plays of Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet, and Samuel Beckett embody and reflect the preoccupations, worries, feelings, and thoughts of many of their Western contemporaries.

The absurd and disastrous nothingness of the human situation characterizes Samuel Beckett's literary works. Martin Esslin considers Samuel Beckett to be one of the most important absurdist playwrights. When compared to the other productions of the Absurd Theatre, he describes the whole of Beckett's plays as being completely plotless. Beckett's drama is characterized by a lack of purpose along the lines of its narrative. Despite its insignificance, Beckett's characters attempt to find meaning for them. They are created in illogical surroundings, waiting their whole lives for a solution that never happens as well as the validity of this cause could be a figment of their fantasy. The plays of Beckett are founded on the understanding of human situations, namely, humans are primarily in pain, suffering, and living a short and wretched life. That is why the works of Beckett are signified by the way he expressed his attitudes in various ways,

however with relatively scarce imagination. He visions life as cruel and stressful; success and failure are the same as they do not matter, however, what matters is to prevent reflecting pain on others and sharing suffering (Chambers & Prior, 1987).

In other words, there is no significance or interpretation for Beckett's writings; there is simply nothingness, putting him in the ranks of Existentialists. Social relations are subjected to harshness, hope, disappointment, and despair in his works, which revolve around the issues of death, birth, and feelings like anxiety and depression, as well as physical difficulties. Beckett led to the re-discovery of underlying truth that seemed to be beyond the human mind's comprehension through drama, both physical and abstract, logical and emotional, according to Haney, by uniting such extremes of knowledge tangible and the conceptual, intellectual and instinctual, controlled and unrestricted Beckett's contributes to the uncovering of true aspects that appear to be beyond the reach of a deliberate intellect solely (2001).

According to this, Beckett's plays offer an overall picture of his understanding of human nature rather than a continuous, polyphonic progression. *Waiting for Godot* (1952), a unique and well-known play was written in French and first performed in front of a Parisian audience. The reader, eventually, has an overwhelming experience of delightful tension as a result of the drama, the anxiety of being confronted with a situation that is both familiar and unknown. There is really no story to be recounted in *Waiting for Godot*, in which the plot revolves around a static situation. Waiting for someone named Godot, who never appears, is the only action of the play. Absurd theaters' tradition is represented by *Waiting for Godot*, which is remarkable in that it contains no major clashes. Hardly anything happens in the plot, there is no progression, and there is no beginning or ending point. The whole action takes place on a strange country road involving two vagrants-like, Vladimir and Estragon, both of them are just killing the time while waiting for Godot, whom they know nothing about. The impact of absurdism in Samuel Beckett's play is examined in this study. As the play lacks a conventional and regular structure, this study focuses on the dual motif by analyzing its plot and characters.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Existentialism became a trend after WWII, especially in literary and philosophical works. It encompasses various layers of subjectivity and individual existence. The characteristics of existentialism are associated with human situations, and it explores the essential traits which might be taken into consideration to be the core of human existence. The movement in philosophy has its influence on literature which focuses tremendously on characters such as freedom, preference, and existence. The existential perspectives of the writers found their way into their literary works. The Theatre of the Absurd served as a darkly comic representation of this movement, bringing the dramatic transformation of the previous era to a whole new level, in which the Absurd Theatre was a quest for serenity following two devastating wars. 'Absurdism' refers to something absurd, silly, nonsensical, meaningless, or perplexing. In 1961, Hungarian critic Martin Esslin coined the term "Theatre of the Absurd" to represent a group of playwrights' works, most of which were published in the 1950s and 1960s, in his influential book of the same name. Esslin clarifies that the absurd convention stems from a severe sense of disappointment, and a loss of sense of meaning in life, which was prevalent in nations such as France and the United Kingdom mostly in the years following WWII (as cited in Maroufi, 2017).

The term "absurd" derives from Albert Camus's classic essay "The Myth of Sisyphus," which exposes human's absurdity of life through Sisyphus's pointless labor. As a result, many existentialists regard this essay as a source of inspiration, as it served as the model for this viewpoint. He presented the term "Theatre of the Absurd" to portray the search for meaning in a world that does not supply it (Tan, 2007). Camus' questions in his article revolved around the idea that life has no significance, which in turn, is not worth living. According to him, the perception of absurdity emerges as a result of the conflict between man's ambitions and what the world has to offer him. Camus explained that the separation between both mankind and the surroundings, between both the performer and the outer world, is what gives rise to a sense of absurdity (2019). This term "absurd drama" refers to a group of plays that share a common theme and are set in a post-World War II era of "chaos." Whereas characteristics of absurdity have been carried forward into the twentieth century from ancient Greek drama. The absurd theatre is distinguished by its willful disregard for theatrical standards that had traditionally constituted the literary world. The theatre of the absurd, eventually, "strives to express its senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices of discursive thought" (Esslin, 1961, p. 24).

As this kind of theatre is situational rather than a chronological event theater, it employs language based on concrete visual patterns rather than contentious and argumentative communication. The absurd theater is preoccupied with the depiction of one's essential state rather than the description of events, the narratives of destiny, or the experiences of characters (Debata, 2013). The issue here is one of a higher order of absurdity: humans' absurdity in a civilization in which religious convictions have vanished and man has

lost his certainty. The work of Samuel Beckett and the French playwrights Eugene Ionesco, as well as the English playwright Harold Pinter, represented the Absurd Theatre. It reflects the absurdity of human existence and human predicament in a dramatic and vivid manner, with the absurdity stemming mostly from a failure of communication. Language, drama, characters, and plot are contradictory to traditional norms of theater which almost do not clearly be presented but are all noticeable characteristics of absurd plays (Zhu, 2013). In contrast to traditional plays, no regular conventions are followed when staging a story in Theater of the Absurd.

The absurdist plays' core element, on the other hand, is lyrical visuals and dream settings, with essentially no tension during the presentation (Power, 2008). Besides, Man is continually warned that his living is, in general, absurd. In this regard, Samuel Beckett's dramatic works can be considered a milestone, as the topics demand that the audience be intelligent and confront the situation carefully. Beckett's plays are based on his visions of the human experience, which includes being born and predominantly living in anguish, going through adversities, and having a brief and dreadful life. The needs and desires of humans have been distorted, in which Theatre of the Absurd depicts reality as a perplexing entity. The audience observes the occurrences on stages wholly from outside, never really comprehending the whole significance of such unusual events, much like recently arrived foreigners may see activities in a nation where they have not fully acquired the dialect (Bloom & Hobby, 2010). The ridiculous waiting in "Waiting for Godot" is reminiscent of the waiting between cradle to grave in Gelber's plays. Martin Esslin evaluates Waiting for Godot, as well as other Beckett plays as instances of the theatre of the absurd, notably Act Without Words I and II, End Game, All That Fall, Krapp's Last Tape, in addition, his plays in radio and screenplays. Absurdity is realized in every aspect of Beckett's plays including characters, plotless action, and the use of dysfunctional language, in which bizarre circumstances or even normal ones appear in an unexpected order. Arnold P. Hinchliffe (1969) stated that for most of Beckett's writing, the tone is far more important than the content, that it refuses the scientist's final say and characterizes Absurdity.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Hardly anything happens in Waiting for Godot, it depicts Estragon and Vladimir's basic situations. Things happen here, but they do not form part of a narrative or plot. They are a representation of human conditions. The entire plot is a complex picture made up of subordinate images and motifs that are interwoven in the same way that musical tones are, not to present a line of progress as in most well-made plays, but to create in the observer's mind a fully complicated perception of a basic and constant condition. Starting the play on a rural road of nowhere, Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot there. Both Pozzo as the oppressive and Lucky as the oppressed appear twice while a boy announces that Godot will arrive tomorrow instead of today. There is no plot other than these incidents, with the play's focus being on the main characters' strange resilience in the face of illogical and arbitrary surroundings. There are no rational actions in the absurd drama. Estragon in "Waiting for Godot" properly points out "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" (Beckett, 2011, p. 36). Actions are replaced with feelings and pictures expressed through talks. Nothing happens in "Waiting for Godot" except that some leaves bloom on the tree. The start and the end are nearly identical. Estragon and Vladimir are seen waiting for Godot from the beginning of the play, and both remain to wait until the end. In other words, rather than being linear or progressive, the play moves circularly. The play is a masterful depiction of time's dominant movement and man's experience of it, the transition is an illusion in and of itself. By breaking the play into two acts, the play dramatizes the themes of monotony, repetition, and routine, where the second act is a repeat of the first.

Many aspects of dualities are perceived in "Waiting for Godot." Each character has a counterpart, and the two personas frequently complete and oppose each other. Vladimir and Estragon seem to be remarkably similar at first glance, yet their unique characteristics indicate that they are essentially two halves of the same image. Pozzo and Lucky seemingly are opposites from social perspectives, however, they possess a mutual reliance. The boy is written as a single character, he could possibly be one of two brothers, one of whom cares for the sheep and the other for the goats. The entire play has a double structure, in which two acts present essentially identical events. Act 2 replicates Act 1, with the events of Act 2 reflecting the events of Act 1 in a darker light. Obviously, the two days depicted in the play are reflections of many previous days, as well as days that will continue forever into the future. Three groups of characters appear in the play: Vladimir and Estragon's relationship, Pozzo and Lucky's relationship, besides the tramps' relationship with the unknown Godot. Consequently, the playwright can portray the elements of paralysis, denial, ignorance, loss of memory, and futility, in which individuals and their interactions generate a distinct sense of frustration and confusion.

Estragon and Vladimir are the two tramps while Godot is a strange and doubtful person who supposedly is on his way. Despite their similarities in different ways, they are distinct people who share the same sense

of loss and agony. Vladimir is a dependable and protective companion. He tends to help Estragon who appears to be an irresponsible individual, whereas Estragon is an emotive character who is constantly whining and yelling. Vladimir, on the other hand, is silent and thinking, contrary to Estragon who is in bodily anguish. Both of them cannot separate, they continue together in this manner indefinitely as if they constitute a human being as a whole.

“Vladimir: ... So, there you are again.

Estragon: Am I?

Vladimir: I’m glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever.

Estragon: Me too.

Vladimir: Together again at last! We’ll have to celebrate this. But how? (He reflects.) Get up till I embrace you” (Beckett, 2011, p. 2).

They are connected as they are waiting for Godot where there is nothing that could detach them from waiting, although they realize that Godot might never come. By presenting such a situation, Beckett creates a sense of despair amid a struggling sense of optimism, illustrating the confusion of the characters.

“Estragon: (chews, swallows). I’m asking you if we’re tied.

...

Vladimir: But to whom? By whom?

Estragon: To your man.

Vladimir: To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it. (Pause.) For the moment.

Estragon: His name is Godot?

Vladimir: I think so” (Beckett, 2011, p. 15).

Although they are waiting for Godot’s coming, a fear of the unknown fills their speech. In “The Theatre of the Absurd” (1961), Esslin makes it clear that the arrival of Godot does not seem like a cause of sheer happiness, it could be a source of damnation. As in the second act when Estragon thinks that what approaches him is Godot, his reaction was to shout as being accused and have to run, whereas Vladimir was happy that finally, they would meet him.

Beckett employs absurdity to investigate concepts like time and place. The two tramps are waiting for Godot, but his constant absence causes them to waste time, turning them into actors in an absurd reality. As a result, they waste time rather than discover an acceptable way of spending it. The fundamental causes of existential experiences of optimism and pessimism seem to be time and space. For the tramps who live in a fixed and continuous present, time appears to be essentially meaningless and non-existent. Estragon clearly states, “They all change. Only we can’t” (Beckett, 2011, p. 42), as a reflection of man’s misery. On the other hand, time appears to be a cause of optimism in this situation, as they wait for Godot in the hopes that he may appear at any time.

“Estragon: Let’s go.

Vladimir: We can’t.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We’re waiting for Godot” (Beckett, 2011, p. 42).

Continuous waiting implies that the tramps’ hours in such situations are extremely prolonged, which appears to be the reason for their uneasiness and strain, but it also offers them hope for their inspiration. To a purposeless life, suicide can be viewed as an inevitable end. Life without clear meaning is kind of absurd. The hope that the characters witness during their waiting for Godot, “Fifty years maybe” (Beckett, 2011, p. 49), is concealing, on the other hand, their discussion about committing suicide.

“Vladimir: It’s for the kidneys. (Silence. Estragon looks attentively at the tree.) What do we do now?

Estragon: Wait.

Vladimir: Yes, but while waiting.

Estragon: What about hanging ourselves?” (Beckett, 2011, p. 10)

Vladimir and Estragon regard themselves as tragic heroes based on the tragic situation, they are in. They consider Godot a savior which is why they continue waiting for him although they know nothing about him.

“Vladimir: Oh, he’s a . . . he’s a kind of acquaintance.

Estragon: Nothing of the kind, we hardly know him.

Vladimir: True . . . we don’t know him very well . . . but all the same . . .

Estragon: Personally, I wouldn’t even know him if I saw him” (Beckett, 2011, p. 18).

On the other hand, they are afraid when Pozzo and Lucky appear on stage, thinking that Pozzo is the purpose that they are waiting for. They are debating whether Pozzo or not is Godot as if he were a vague character.

Beckett, in this play, creates various things holding their contradiction where he managed to reveal the uncertainty; the main theme of the play, by exploiting characters' speech, actions, and even the place. Esslin (1961) demonstrates, that the doubt created by the waiting for Godot, as well as the rise and fall of that ambiguity of that hope of finding Godot's secret to its continuous frustration, is the play's soul. The circular structure that Beckett uses in the play helps to support the research topic of the dual motif. While Vladimir and Estragon show the desire to move on, they do not do anything. Beckett employs the language also to indicate the buzzing life with no purpose. Ghanem Oteiwiy (2012) sees that even repetitive language is a sign of limited expression; the drama is full of duplication; there is no variation or originality, and there are no resolutions to the contradictions.

Vladimir and Estragon's understanding of life and waiting are contradictory. They seem to exemplify different decisions at the beginning of the play, but when they choose "to go," instead, they do not leave. At various times, the same conversation was exchanged between them.

"Estragon: Let's go.

Vladimir: We can't.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.

Estragon: (despairingly). Ah!" (Beckett, 2011, p. 7, 42).

However, the same persons having nearly the same conversation show another motif representing Vladimir's consciousness of the reason for their waiting, whereas Estragon's reply illustrates his unconscious of wasting time more than the fundamental notion of waiting. They want to move for different motivations according to their understanding of the current situation, yet they wait. Although the act of "waiting" for Godot may have started as a deliberate act, it soon becomes a choice for them, to move on or not.

All the characters seem to be confined in a prison they have built for themselves. According to their own failure to act and communicate, they are tied to a situation of inactivity and stagnation. The one who is bodily a slave to any other has no extra freedom than the others being apparently free; on contrary, he seems to have more freedom since he is conscious of his captivity. Vladimir and Estragon are slaves to their concept of waiting for Godot, just as Lucky is to Pozzo. Lucky's situation, for example, is the most optimal because he knows he will be told what to do. So, this hypothetical freedom is accompanied by a sense of detainment: no one could be genuinely free if he is bound to objects or dreams. Despite having their own freedom, Vladimir and Estragon are bound to the mysterious Godot, considering the act of waiting for him as one of the causes of their confinement. They are bound to the spot where they have to wait, trapped by the aspirations and the vision of Godot that has been formed by their thoughts, besides, they are ready to give up their freedom, and in case he never arrives, they will return in the following days.

"Vladimir: A-What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?

Estragon: He should be here.

Vladimir: He didn't say for sure he'd come.

Estragon: And if he doesn't come?

Vladimir: We'll come back tomorrow.

Estragon: And then the day after tomorrow.

Vladimir: Possibly.

Estragon: And so on" (Beckett, 2011, p. 7).

From Pozzo's viewpoint, it is that suffering is caused by oneself. He is irritated by Lucky's plight, which he has created. Pozzo thinks that by manipulating Lucky, he is doing him a favor; in such ways, he seems to be. This is also one of the factors Lucky is regarded as fortunate-someone is always there to advise him on how to do things. Pozzo claims there is no such thing as enslavement or captivity because every deed is a question of choice. If lucky does not place his baggage down, it is simply due to the fact he does not want to, not because he cannot. Pozzo inquired when being asked by Estragon and Vladimir why Lucky doesn't relieve himself, they wanted to put things straight as if Lucky has rights or not, however, Pozzo said that he has yet he does everything to impress him.

"Pozzo: He used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the fandango and even the hornpipe. He capered. For joy. Now that's the best he can do. Do you know what he calls it?

Estragon: The Scapegoat's Agony.

Vladimir: The Hard Stool.

Pozzo: The Net. He thinks he's entangled in a net.

Vladimir: (squirming like an aesthete). There's something about it . . . Lucky makes to return to his burden" (Beckett, 2011, p. 34).

Beckett, furthermore, employs the setting in the plot to enhance his themes of absurdity. The significance of the tree is really important as it is considered the place where Godot would meet the characters. It exposes different views of Vladimir and Estragon. The tree as an existing object amid the emptiness represents a different meaning. The barren bushes in the first act served as a reminder of the idea of suicide. It represents the meaningless and barren world in the play.

"Vladimir: He said by the tree. (They look at the tree.) Do you see any others?

Estragon: What is it?

Vladimir: I don't know. A willow.

Estragon: Where are the leaves?

Vladimir: It must be dead" (Beckett, 2011, p. 7).

Contrary to that, the same tree when moving toward the second act shows the passage of time. Although Vladimir describes the tree as "covered with leaves." Still, only "four or five" leaves are specified in the stage instructions. Godot, the tramps' desire for the future, may be symbolized by the tree blooming with only very few leaves the next day. An empty place, on the other hand, could indicate the tramps' spirits yearning to be enlightened by Godot. Withanage (2011, p. 16) comments that the tree could represent many things, including mortality, life, transformation, and existence. The tree without no leaves or fruits might be a metaphor for death and dreariness. Beckett was involved in the creation of an unusual play, both in terms of style and content, that revealed features of contemporary human experience, a play that raises questions but answers none of them. The situation in which no answer is provided for these characters creates an uncertain and hesitant atmosphere in which various motifs for the same issue are displayed.

IV. CONCLUSION

After two world wars took place, human growth was shaped by despair and a lack of faith. A new philosophy of absurdism arose which sparked a new wave of absurdist fiction plays. The realization that a human is surrounded by eternal darkness causes worry and hopelessness, and that he will never reveal his true essence or destiny is portrayed in the Theatre of the Absurd. Martin Esslin, a critic, coined the term "Theatre of the Absurd" in 1961, after studying the works of four significant writers: Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamo, Samuel Beckett, and Jean Genet. According to Haney (2012), these playwrights were compelled by their cultural and historic circumstances to investigate the mind's realities by means that featured the demonstration of characters in theatre, regardless of the lack of a clear purpose. Albert Camus' viewpoint, as a novelist, journalist, philosophical essayist, and playwright influenced the formation of absurdism as a movement. By placing his thoughts into fiction, Camus was able to make them more accessible to a wider audience due to the similarity of the language to that of the people.

Because it deals with a topic of absurdity, Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" is a brilliant portrayal of the theatre of the absurd; a human's predicament is presented in a real-life in which religious conviction has vanished and man's certainty has been destroyed. "Waiting for Godot" is a narrative of Vladimir and Estragon, two tramps, whom both are Waiting for Godot, a figure who might clarify or bring an end to their everlasting pointlessness. According to Kruse (1975), Waiting for Godot is described as a tragicomedy by Beckett; Vladimir and Estragon, the characters, are foul clowns who are presented as heroes of modern civilization tragedy. While they wait for Godot, nothing happens. Estragon and Vladimir's basic circumstance is depicted in the play, where things happen, but they do not form part of the storyline or narrative. In two acts of play that parallel one another, Beckett explores the core issue of existence: "Why do humans exist?" He employs pairs to create absurd disparities among characters, and the usage of pairs is responsible for most of the scenes' silliness. All of the play is built on a circular dual structure where symbolism is seen in the manifestation of duality. Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky, and the child with his sibling all are counterparts in the play, which allows for numerous ambiguous arguments. Becket, by using the effect of the double motif, emphasizes the equal opportunities in the world of the play, Godot might or might not come, and the characters might leave or not, which illustrates the uncertainty of the real world.

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