

Absurdism and Meaninglessness in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*Sharma, Geeta¹ and Kumar, Ravindra²¹Research Scholar, Department of English, Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh²Professor, Department of English, Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh**Abstract**

An analysis of Samuel Beckett's play's absurd elements the current paper pertains to *Waiting for Godot*. The artistic qualities of this work, including its title, setting, structure, themes, characters, and actions/dialogues, are analyzed via an absurdist lens. Throughout the play, absurdity is depicted in the form of a life devoid of purpose and meaning, characterized by chaos, a passion for death, and emotional and spiritual barrenness. A concept in the philosophy of absurdism holds that the universe is wholly illogical and meaningless and that the individual's quest for order leads to a confrontation with the universe itself. Among the most prominent examples of absurd literature is *Waiting for Godot*, where the people are unrecognizable, the scene is remote, and the conversation makes no common sense. Once Martin Esslin's book 'The Theatre of Absurd' was published in 1961, the phrase 'Absurd Drama' or 'Theatre of Absurd' became a common expression. In the opinion of Albert Camus, a French philosopher, life is lived solely to exist in a world that is no further comprehensible due to the absence of a transcendent being capable of reconciling its incoherence. This concept is exemplified by "Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*," which Camus characterized as "Absurd." With an emphasis on "Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*," we have attempted to comprehend the basic idea of 'Absurdism' in this paper. The conflict in the meanings of life and the struggles of the characters in the present paper is reflected in the inclusion of absurd elements including meaningless dialogues, repetition, desolation, dark humor, fantasy, indefinite time, a lack of a well-crafted plot, puppet-like characters, and a violation of tradition. This paper demonstrates the agony of human beings, their tedium with life, the futility of life, and the conflicts between body and mind, thereby making it impossible to identify which is right and wrong.

Keywords: Absurdity, Chaos, Death, Existentialism, Life, Meaninglessness, Suffering.

Introduction

Samuel Beckett was born in 1906, just outside of Dublin. He resided in Ireland for the majority of his infancy and early adulthood. He pursued his university education in France, where he taught English, after being raised in an Anglo-Irish Protestant family (Norton 749). In 1937, Beckett relocated permanently to Paris, France. Samuel participated in an organization that opposed the German invasion at the onset of World War Two. The novel *Murphy*, which was published in 1953 and was written while Beckett was seeking refuge from the German occupation in France during the Second World War in 1940, and *The Unnamable*, which was published in 1958, are some of the literary works for which the writer is celebrated in contemporary society (Norton 749,750). The literary work for which Beckett is most widely recognized is *Waiting for Godot*, which was published in 1952 and translated into English in 1954. Samuel Beckett's works frequently incorporated humor and tragedy, presenting a tragi-comic and severe perspective on human existence. The play *Waiting for Godot* is an exemplary representation of the aforementioned concepts. The play is predominantly focused on two central characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who are nicknamed Gogo and Didi. The play is comprised of two acts. Vladimir and Estragon engage in a series of superfluous remarks and discussions as they encounter each other by a tree, with the sole objective of determining that they are both anticipating the arrival of Godot or an entity of that name. Similarly, the title of the play *Waiting for Godot* reflects absurdity, as human existence is teeming with problems and dilemmas. The title is *Waiting for Godot*, but the identity of Godot remains unknown. The drama's subject matter isn't Godot, rather the significance of waiting in the human condition. The passage of time can only be experienced while one is waiting. How Vladimir and Estragon leverage time demonstrates the utter worthlessness of life and the struggles it entails. The *Waiting for Godot* is infinite. They are awaiting an unknown purpose. The youth again inform them that Godot won't be arriving, and they wait for him until the following day. It is also absurd to endure such an endless period of delay. The futility and purposelessness of existence are the defining characteristics of the initial dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*.

A lack of purpose, bizarreness, silliness, absurdity, incongruence, ridiculousness, strangeness, and foolishness are the describing characteristics of absurdity. A condition of being absurd is the state of being exceedingly unreasonable, resulting in being regarded as foolish or unimportant. The Oxford English Dictionary defines absurdity as "the quality or state of being widely unreasonable

or ridiculous." Traditional values are entirely rejected in this absurd play. The work is devoid of a plot, proper beginning, middle, conclusion, rising and falling action, pointed dialogues, characterization, distinct theme, logical sequence, and story. Additionally, the language is not poetically expressive. "Absurd Drama and The Theatre of Absurd" were coined by "Martin Esslin's book, *The Theatre of Absurd*." Esslin observes that absurd dramatists are incapable of maintaining a consistent trajectory. The term is useful as "A device to make certain fundamental characteristics which seem to be present in the works of several dramatists accessible to discussion by tracing the features they have in common." 'Absurd' was the term Albert Camus coined for a life that had been lived solely for the sake of its stake in a universe that hardly made sense, as there was no God to resolve the contradictions. Kierkegaard referred to the concept that Camus referred to as 'Absurd' as 'Despair.' By this philosophy, Beckett's legendary drama *Waiting for Godot* originated. The Theatre of Absurd is a tradition to which Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is related. It is unorthodox in that it fails to depict any dramatic conflicts. The play lacks any significant events, development, beginnings, or conclusions. Two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, wait for Godot, whom they have only vague conceptions of, on a countryside road. The entire action takes place in an absurd setting. They are constrained to spend time together, although they have nothing substantive to convey, as they are unable to avoid waiting. A brutal master entitled Pozzo and his half-crazy subordinate Lucky are introduced as two additional characters. A boy approaches with a message that foretells the advent of Godot the following day at a certain time. The curtain descends, and the two tramps remain stationary, resulting in an absence of action. However, they resolve to depart. Except for Pozzo's blindness and Lucky's deafness, the second act is a direct replica of the first. The waiting for Vladimir and Estragon continues, but it is marked by a sense of hopelessness. The world was characterized by this monotony following the conflicts, and the Theatre of Absurd captured and illustrated this condition.

The play's framework the concept of the futility and worthlessness of time, as well as of existence, is conveyed in *Waiting for Godot*. In Acts One and Two, the two primary characters, who are weary of their lives and awaiting Godot's assistance, attempt suicide on two separate occasions. The interminable delay only serves to heighten their despair, rendering their existence absurd. The absurdity of the drama is illustrated by this structure. The Theatre of the Absurd is a creation that arose in the consequences of world wars. In the aftermath of the two disastrous wars, it is a creation

and an attempt to discover ways to bring relief. This allowed humanity to confront the universe in a dignified manner, devoid of its former center and living purpose—faith and God. *Waiting for Godot* was also produced by Beckett with a comparable perspective. The play's title implies that the narrative centers around an extended delay, while the two tramps await Godot. Absurdity was also incorporated into the characters of this drama. To substantiate this assertion, we can observe that Estragon and Vladimir, the primary characters of *Waiting for Godot*, are awaiting an unknown purpose. Additionally, their inability to comprehend the concepts of life and existence is the reason they contemplate suicide. Similarly, they also suggest that Godot was negligent toward them. This relationship is exemplified by the master-slave dichotomy, which is illustrated by Pozzo, the master, and Lucky, the slave. Devaluation and overburdening are inflicted upon the slave without any contemplation. Estragon and Vladimir are to be persuaded that, despite their excitement for Godot, this could ultimately be their fate. A second aspect of the absurdity in *Waiting for Godot* that is also associated with the characters is their reliance on one another for support and strength. Each individual is under the impression that the other will assist, and as a result, they are attempting to stabilize his or her chaotic life.

Sitting on a low mound, Estragon attempts to remove his boots in *Waiting for Godot*. Panting, he grasps it with both hands. Exhausted, he acknowledges takes a break, and then is trying again. As previously stated, Vladimir is permitted to enter. As stated by Estragon:

"ESTRAGON: (giving up again). Nothing to be done.

VLADIMIR: ((advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart). I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying Vladimir, be reasonable, you have not yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon) so there you are again. (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p-1)"

The absurdity of the drama is revealed through this dialogue. In reality, it represents the totality of human existence, in which the current generation is dissatisfied. The fundamental framework of the drama conveys the concept of the contemporary world's life, as well as the usefulness and meaninglessness of time. In Acts One and Two, the two primary protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, attempt to commit suicide on two separate occasions. They are unable to endure this life anymore. To escape the meaninglessness of life, they invite each other to kill each other. This incident is evident in the dialogue that follows:

"VLADIMIR: You always say that, and you always come crawling back.

ESTRAGON: The best thing would be to kill me, like the other.

VLADIMIR: What other? (Pause) What other?

ESTRAGON: Like billions of others. (p-3)"

This results in their lives being disgusted, as their despondency is exacerbated by the perpetual wait for Godot. The dialogues within Vladimir and Estragon are centered on a single subject. The dialogue is repeated throughout the entire drama.

"VLADIMIR: Well Shall We Go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, Let's Go. (But they do not move) (p-4)"

The dialogues were altered; however, they have been unable to arrive at the appropriate decision. The absurdity of human existence, particularly that of contemporary humanity, is illustrated by this matter. Motivational characters are a hallmark of any successful drama; however, this particular production features five characters who are unrecognizable as human beings. They spend their time engaging in activities that lack significance. The characters' backgrounds are unknown to humans. The audience wasn't introduced to them. Their names and their wretched circumstances are the only things we are aware of.

As a result, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* contains nearly all of the elements of a ludicrous drama. It provides a comprehensive overview of the absurdity by focusing on the two primary characters, 'Vladimir' and 'Estragon.' Repetition, meaningless dialogues, and purposeless, foolish, preposterous, ludicrous, and perplexing situations that are in opposition to truth or reason further illustrate the absurdity of human existence in *"Waiting for Godot*. One of the masterpieces of Absurdist Literature, according to Roby Cohn, a distinguished American theatre scholar and expert on Samuel Beckett, is *Waiting for Godot*. In its attempt to interpret the world in which Estragon and Vladimir are ensnared by their modernist nostalgia for legitimation in Godot, *waiting for Godot* is" a direct attack on modernism. This is apparent in the Grand Narrative and ideological framework. As Esslin explains in *The Theatre of Absurd*, "The world is absurd, which means there is no purpose or meaning" (p. 5). The human experience is the source of the absurdity. The tendency of humans to emulate others is a result of the influence of certain powers. Humans are inclined to mimic those in positions of authority, regardless of whether they are conscious of this tendency. The power might prove detrimental when it is followed by malice and results in

terrifying events. The universe in which humans exist is an irrational, meaningless, and empty state in which the lives of individuals lack purpose or significance. Furthermore, Martin Esslin references Ionesco's parallel concept of absurdity: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose.". The actions of man become absurd, meaningless, and ineffectual as a result of his separation from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental origins. (p. 10 of Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd*).

Among the most absurdist plays is *Waiting for Godot*. English audiences were captivated by *Godot mania*, as they recalled the phrase "Nothing happens, nobody comes, and nobody goes." It is genuinely appalling. Peter Hall, the director of the play, noted that "film is simile, lifelike, theatrical is metaphor, about life itself, each and even." Absurdity in the play is exposed by the selection of the characters, dialogues, location, and plot. We become aware of the truthless truth, the actionless action, the plotless plot, the setting less setting, and the characterless characters. The play is replete with absurdity, as the readers and audiences are subjected to the activity of absurdity whenever something occurs but does not result in any action. Upon concluding their reading or exiting the theater, they are plagued by the notion of the folly of life. It is generally believed that the play pertains to the events that transpired during Godot's absence. The play explores the act of waiting for itself, which invariably prompts inquiries regarding the status or identity of the person being anticipated. Why would someone wait for Godot, what is the waiting process, and who is Godot?

To portray God as capricious, partial, and fanciful, Beckett efficiently articulated religious references. The Biblical narrative of the salvation of one thief and damnation of another, as narrated by Vladimir who lived at the time, actually raises concerns about the partial nature of God. Vladimir is informed by the messenger who services Godot that his sibling, a shepherd, is subjected to physical torture without justification. The Biblical narrative of Cain and Able is immediately thrust into the readers' consciousness by this episode of the play. Furthermore, one of the siblings is granted the Lord's grace without any rational justification, which is quite disheartening. In the 20th century, the absence of God is exemplified by Godot's non-appearance. An alternative interpretation is that Godot symbolizes the things that we must wait for but will never achieve. An external force that we believe will provide the answers to our concerns and alleviate the pain of contemporary insecurity is exemplified by *The Godot*. The character of Godot

may represent any aspect of our lives, including pleasure or satisfaction that never materializes.

The theatre of absurd is involved in displaying the author's world, leading to the play's lack of objectivity and the absence of valid characters. It is unusual in that it does not depict any dramatic conflicts. Within the play, there is virtually no action, no progression, and no beginning or end. Contrary to the communicable social and moral teachings, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, an Absurd drama, doesn't intend to recount a narrative. The message of *Waiting for Godot* is instead communicated through a sequence of evocative images.

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