

**People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
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University of Tlemcen**



**Faculty of Letters and Languages  
Department of English  
Section of English**

**A Study of Absurdity in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot***

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**Presented by**

Miss. Zineb CHOUITI

**Supervised by**

Dr. Fatiha BELMERABET

**Co-Supervised by**

Miss. Faten BOUABCHA

**Board of Examiners**

**Prof. Wassila MOURO**

**PROFESSOR**

**President**

**Dr. Fatiha BELMERABET**

**MCA**

**Supervisor**

**Dr. Meryem MENGOUCHI**

**MCB**

**Examiner**

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## **DEDICATIONS**

I dedicate this dissertation to the soul of my father  
My beloved mother and my dear sister.

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## ABSTRACT

Samuel Beckett's absurdist play *Waiting for Godot* is considered a ground-breaking work in the movement of the theatre of the absurd. This research applying literary criticism approach attempts to study the absurdity in *Waiting for Godot*. The study analyses the elements of Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, and highlights the absurdity in its plot, language, and characters, as well as its main themes. Eventually, the findings show that absurdity was prominent in Beckett's play; thus, *Waiting for Godot* is a perfect illustration of the theatre of the absurd.

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# **General Introduction**

## General Introduction

The theatre of the absurd is a literary and philosophical movement that was born as a reaction to the Second World War. The term “theatre of the absurd” was first coined by the critic Martin Esslin (1918-2002), who studied the works of a group of playwrights and came up with a new movement, called the theatre of the absurd. The absurdist playwrights were not aware that they belong to a specific movement, each one of them wrote in his own style with the total belief that he was isolated and unique.

Moreover, the bloodshed and brutality of the Second World War had a strong impact on people’s physical and mental health. The playwrights of the theatre of the absurd illustrated the war’s impact and people’s miserable situation in their plays; they used themes of cruelty, gloominess, meaninglessness, and isolation, which is exactly how people felt during the war. This theatre is characterised by lack of plot, disorder of characters, and incoherence of language.

The theatre of the absurd was highly influenced by the absurdism of Albert Camus (1913-1960), who is regarded as the father of absurdism. Camus’ thoughts and ideas in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1945) influenced the new theatre and its playwrights. The existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905- 1980) was present in many absurdist plays in order to describe the existential crisis that faced the playwrights and people due to the war.

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), a leading figure in the so-called theatre of the absurd, demonstrated the meaninglessness and absurdity of post-war life in his works. The cruelty of World War II, changed Beckett’s perspective on life; the meaninglessness he felt was clearly reflected in his plays at the level of themes and



structure. His play *Waiting for Godot* (1952) is considered a seminal work in the theatre of the absurd.

The absurdity and meaninglessness of life and people's sufferings are vividly portrayed in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, which is the dissertation's case study. Samuel Beckett's most famous play, *Waiting for Godot*, is a major work in the theatre of the absurd; it illustrates perfectly the nothingness and boredom the human being faced at that time.

This study aims to shed light on the theatre of the absurd. The research also highlights the absurdity in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. This research paper will gradually answer the following questions:

- What is the new theatrical movement called the Theatre of the Absurd?
- What are the aspects of absurdity in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*?

As a literature and civilization student, the study of the theatre of the absurd and absurdism as a literary and philosophical movement is quite interesting. Although the theatre of the absurd was a short-lived movement, it is still a remarkable movement in Anglo-Saxon and worldwide literature that needs to be analysed and studied.

This research paper consists of two chapters; first chapter is a theoretical part that defines the movements of absurdism and existentialism and explains their relation. It also gives a definition and historical background of the theatre of the absurd, its main figures, artistic features, and main themes.

The second chapter attempts to highlight absurdity in the elements of Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, from the plot, language, and characters to its main themes.

**Chapter One**  
**Historical Background**  
**of the Theatre of The**  
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## **1.1. Introduction**

World War II (1939-1945) did not only affect the people's physical health but their mental health too. The impact of the war led to the birth of the philosophy of absurdism and later the theatre of the absurd, which demonstrates the meaninglessness and nothingness that people felt.

This chapter establishes a theoretical background for absurdism and existentialism, their relation, how absurdism and irony influenced drama and the absurdist playwrights. Then the chapter defines the theatre of the absurd, gives and explains its artistic features (plot, language, characters), and its major themes (meaninglessness of the world, the cruelty of human being, the isolation of the individual). It lays the foundation for the second chapter where an analysis of absurdity in Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* is done.

## **1.2. Absurdism Defined**

The strong desire of man to seek the meaning of life and create it has existed since the creation of the world. Man, always tries to find a relation between himself and the universe. Most of the time, it starts with believing old inherited stories and giving them the ultimate importance and meaning. Usually, religion and believing in God are the starting points. Humans seek meaning in God, a spiritual power, or holy books. They try to find meaning in other things, such as nature with all its elements fire, trees, or the moon and sun. Some also believe in art and science. On the other hand, some people think that life is devoid of meaning and that there is no such relation between the universe and man. Those who think that life is meaningless and not worth living are called absurdists.

In the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, "the absurd is a term derived from the existentialism of Albert Camus, and often applied to the modern sense of human purposelessness in a universe without meaning or value" (Baldick 1).

Absurdist built the philosophical theory of absurdism on the meaningless relation between humans and the universe, which means that all the efforts they put into understanding the purpose of life always fail. That's why these efforts and this relation are absurd. And the term itself means an “ adjective so silly that it makes you laugh ” (Oxford 2); it is something that is against logic and its rules and one of the highest levels of irony that is inconsistent or incompatible with anything. In other words, it is the difficulty that faces humans while trying to understand the meaning of life and the universe.

The absurd has its roots back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote about it in his journals while he was developing his existential philosophy. Kierkegaard said:

Now what is it that I have come up against? The absurd. And what is the absurd? It is, as may quite easily be seen, that I, a rational being, must act in a case where my reason, my powers of reflection, tell me: you can just as well do the one thing as the other, that is to say where my reason and reflection say: you cannot act—and yet here is where I have to act ... The absurd, or to act by virtue of the absurd, is to act upon faith, trusting in God. It is perfectly simple. I must act, but reflection has closed the road, so I take one of the possibilities and turn to God saying: This is what I do, bless my actions, I cannot do otherwise because I am brought to a standstill by my powers of reflection (qtd.in Miller 37).

Absurdism as a philosophy and belief saw the light and flourished by the end of World War II (1939-1945) and the devastating situation in Europe, where millions of people were killed and injured. Witnessing such horrors led people to lose hope and to stop believing in God. The war affected people's mental health as well as their physical health. The French absurdist Albert Camus (1913-1960) witnessed all the

happenings when he joined the French war against Germany. All that he experienced in World War II and in his birth country Algeria during colonialization affected his writings and philosophy. Camus wrote his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), which is now considered a major work in the movement of absurdism. In his essay, Albert Camus gave an example of repetition and meaninglessness that man faces in life with the Greek myth of Sisyphus, the fictional character who is cursed by the Gods to push a huge, heavy rock to the mountain and pull it back again. Sisyphus is obliged to repeat this operation for an eternity. People, because of the routine they live in, are in a similar situation as Sisyphus. Albert Camus started the essay with:

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest — whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories — comes afterwards.

These are games; one must first answer. (3)

Camus argues that “suicide” is a confession that life is meaningless and absurd; it is a reflection from man to declare that life is not worth living because of all the absurdity he receives from the universe while trying to understand life. It is a conflict between the two creations, man and the universe. By recognising that life is ultimately meaningless, one can free himself from existential anxiety.

Albert Camus believed that life does not inherently have meaning or purpose, the universe is indifferent to humans, and there is no godly scheme behind our existence. According to him, the key to the misery that people get from insisting on finding a meaning to life is to leave looking for a meaning and believe that there is only absurdity in this life. Man should rebel against the meaninglessness and absurdity by enjoying living life with the full knowledge that there is no meaning to seek, and this is what Camus calls freedom (Aronson). In his essay *The Myth of*

*Sisyphus*, Camus imagined Sisyphus happy with his task by abandoning the need to find meaning behind it, he is condemned to that rock anyway, so he better enjoy doing that than being miserable while trying to understand the meaning of his task, Camus writes: “one must imagine Sisyphus happy” (Camus 91).

### **1.3. Existentialism Defined**

The heart of existentialism is the free will of humans to create meaning for their lives. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, existentialism is a current in European philosophy that focuses on the human being’s existence. It has its roots back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, but it was not really influential until the 20<sup>th</sup> century in France and Germany, when Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers paved the way for Jean-Paul Sartre and other French existentialist philosophers. Sartre’s thoughts and ideas are most significant in existential philosophy (Baldick 119).

Sartrean existentialism is different from that of Kierkegaard; it is an atheist philosophy about human freedom, built on individual responsibility and authenticity. The notion of existentialism is about creating meaning and essence in an inherently meaningless world. Humans are condemned to be free and obliged to create meaning for their lives and be responsible about their choices (Baldick 120).

“Jean Wahl (1969) argues that existentialism is best described as ‘an atmosphere, a climate’ and the categories he uses to convey this atmosphere include existence, being, transcendence, possibility and project, situation, choice and freedom, nothingness and dread, authenticity, the unique, paradox, tension and ambiguity.” (Cited in Craib I) .

### **1.4. Absurdism’s Relation to Existentialism**

Absurdism and existentialism both concepts are related to the same philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, who is widely regarded as the father of existentialism. Kierkegaard stated that humans are the only ones responsible for giving meaning to

their lives and living all of it with passion and sincerity, despite all the obstacles they face during their journey including death, absurdity, boredom, and anxiety. Existentialists later kept the focus on individuals same as Kierkegaard has determined, but they differ on how the human can reach a satisfying life and the obstacles he needs to get rid of, including whether God exists or not. Absurdism is related to existentialism because its first appearance was with the Danish existentialist Kierkegaard. As a philosophical and literary movement, absurdism was separated from existentialism when Albert Camus published his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where he clearly demonstrated the idea of absurdism as a concept that is completely separated from existentialism's concept.

Although there are some theories that associate absurdism with existentialism, many scholars determined that absurdism is a completely different concept. The 20<sup>th</sup> century existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre and the absurdist Albert Camus represented and illustrated each concept in a clear way that demonstrates the difference between these two philosophical movements. Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905- 1980) existentialism is based on the phrase he coined: "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 55), meaning that the meaning of life is meaningless without existence itself. For Sartre, constructing a meaning is the human essence and being. For Camus, absurdism is not about finding a value of meaning it is more about the transience of meaning, and that meaning is always faced by the illogical silence of the universe. For absurdist, any meaning humans try to construct is meaningless because the world is meaningless and absurd, which humans cannot comprehend. It might be possible but it is still irrelevant to the human experience. While existentialism is about the creation of human's essence and seeking meaning, absurdism is about the meaninglessness and absurdity of life that leads human either to suicide or to rebel against life itself with the total acceptance of its absurdity. Also, existentialists believe in freedom and free will, while absurdist believe that human should try his



best to live in defiance despite the pressure of the absurd. Both philosophies may look similar at first sight, but Albert Camus detached absurdism from existentialism with some unique ideas about the reality of life and how to live it (Ben).

The dissimilarity between both philosophies, existentialism and absurdism, does not stop some absurdist dramatists, such as Samuel Beckett, from employing existentialism in their works besides absurdism. One of the most famous absurdist works with an existential tone is Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* 1952, which is considered a seminal work in the new theatre of the absurd (Albert 226).

### **1.5. Absurdism and Irony in Drama**

Since the days of Aristotle, drama has portrayed fictional and non-fictional events through one standard type of dialogue, structure, language, and plot. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines drama as follow: "drama is a major genre of literature, but include non-literary forms, and has several dimensions that lie beyond the domain of literary dramatist or playwright." (Baldick97). Absurd drama is considered as a subgenre of drama that is different from the formal drama, it focuses on the meaninglessness and absurdity of human life. This genre was popularized by Albert Camus through his philosophy of absurdism; it is not specific nor does it have a purpose because at the end it does not solve any problem, and the final situation is either absurd or comic. Also, there is no dramatic conflict in it.

Irony is closely related to the absurd drama, and the most recognised type of it is dramatic irony. Dramatists used irony as a way to express their opposition to the system and to mock it. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* "... dramatic irony, in which the audience knows more about the character's situation than the character does, foreseeing an outcome contrary to the character's expectation, and thus ascribing a sharply different sense to some of the character's own statement." (Baldick 174); the best example of irony in absurd drama that explains this definition is in Samuel Becket's absurdist play *Waiting for Godot*. In

the second act all the characters lost their memory except Vladimir. Because of that, he starts thinking that he is hallucinating, since he was the only one who remembers what happened the last day. The audience clearly knows that Vladimir was right and that he was not crazy, but the rest of the characters are the ones that are mistaken (Beckett 61-88).

## **1.6. Absurdist Dramatists**

A number of avant-garde dramatists in France, Britain, and the United States such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Arthur Adamov marked a huge development in the new theatre with their absurdist plays.

### **1.6.1. Samuel Beckett**

The Irish author, critic, and playwright who wrote a ground breaking play that is considered as a major work in the so-called theatre of the absurd, *Waiting for Godot*, a play with different structure, settings, characters, and plot than the standard Aristotelian plays. The pessimistic view of humanity in this play and the other plays by Beckett is obvious, the characters represent the anxious and hopeless man, same with the setting that is all destroyed and empty just like Europe looked like after World War II (Esslin cited in Encyclopaedia Britannica).

### **1.6.2. Eugene Ionesco**

The Romanian with French origins dramatist is one of the important pioneers of absurd drama. He wrote numbers of plays such as *The Lesson* (1951), *The chairs* (1952), and *Rhinoceros* (1959), in which he explored themes like the absurdity of human existence, isolation, and identity. Like most of absurdist playwrights, Ionesco presented in his plays the horrible truth of his society. Through his characters he illustrated the feeling of people outside (Patel 289).

### **1.6.3. Arthur Adamov**

The Russian author of many powerful plays and one of the most important playwrights in the absurd drama. He began to write for theatre by the end of the

World War two. His writings represented the loneliness of man, the cruelty of life and the absence of communication. In his famous play *La Parodie* (1947) “Adamov did not want to represent the world, he wanted to parody it” (Esslin 54), the inside world in this play is like a parody about a man’s desperate searching for meaning to the existence, which even it exists, is inaccessible to him (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica).

Absurdist dramatists were highly affected by the World War two and all the happenings after it. Their writing reflects the human’s misery and hopelessness perfectly. With a mix of irony and tragedy, dramatists created a new theatre called the theatre of the absurd.

### **1.7. Theatre of the Absurd Historical Background**

The theatre of the absurd, is a term that was first coined by Martin Esslin<sup>1</sup>, who studied the works of many absurdist playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov and Eugene Ionesco. The new theatre was born as a reaction to the World War two and all the happenings during the post war period (Hussain 1479). People’s lives were affected during the war because of death, injuries, and the destruction of lands and properties. The fall of the economy also hurt the citizens indirectly (“Effects Of War”). This image of violence led people to lose faith in God and question their own existence, some of them even committed suicide because of the feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness in their life (Dickson).

The violence and bloodshed of the World War two led to the birth of a new theatre that fit the post war life perfectly. Similar to Dadaism<sup>2</sup> and surrealism<sup>3</sup>, absurdism is built on the idea that life is meaningless and does not make any sense,

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Esslin, a drama critic, teacher and author of "The Theater of the Absurd," (Gussow)

<sup>2</sup> An \*avant-garde movement of anarchic protest against bourgeois society, religion, and art, founded in 1916 in Switzerland by Tristan Tzara, a Romanian-born French poet (Baldick 78).

<sup>3</sup> An anti-rational movement of imaginative liberation in European (mainly French and Spanish) art and literature in the 1920s (Baldick 323).

and theatre as well should not make sense. Absurdist with the theatre of the absurd revolted against the old traditions. Theatre has developed into a whole different stage because of the different artistic visions of absurdist (Cunningham-Day). Unlike the traditional formal theatre, the New Theatre was characterised by the rejection of the formal and logical structure, with a sense of absurdity. Samuel Beckett's famous absurdist play *Waiting for Godot*, changed all what was traditional from the plot to the language, the characters, the settings and the structure (Cunningham-Day).

The theatre of the absurd opened the space for the playwrights to write about new topics. On the one hand, old playwrights wrote very limited and familiar topics; they wrote about economic, politics and culture (Wang cited in Zhu 1465). On the other hand, absurdist dramatists did not limit their visions, they wrote openly about whatever they wanted and about the post war miserable situation without any restrictions.

The plays of this theatre were given the name of anti-plays because they were against the principals of the classical theatre. This made the new theatre in a critical position; this kind of drama was not accepted by critics. Although the big confusion, it gained fame later with its sense of absurdity and complexity. Esslin elaborates:

The success of the theatre of the absurd, achieved within a short span of time, remains one of the most astonishing aspects of this astonishing phenomenon of our age. That plays so strange and puzzling, so clearly devoid of the traditional attractions of the well-made drama, should within less than a decade have reached the stages of the word from Finland to Japan, from Norway to the Argentine, and that they should have stimulated a large body of work in a similar convention, are in themselves powerful and entirely empirical tests of the importance of the Theatre of the Absurd. (Esslin xxiii).

## **1.8. Artistic Feature of the Absurd Theatre**

The absurd theatre demonstrates the philosophy of absurdism; it is characterised by having a strange plot, incoherent language, and disordered characters.

### **1.8.1. Plot in the Theatre of the Absurd**

In the formal Aristotelian theatre, the plot is simple and standard, it usually locates the time and place in the first act and introduces the theme and characters. Then it moves to the development of action in an organized sequence, until it leads to the highest point of tension: the climax, then to the last part which is the denouement, where the play concludes (Myers 118). Conversely, the plot in the theatre of the absurd discards the traditional pattern. It does not introduce the characters or the theme, there are no rising or falling actions. It consists of emptiness and repetition of the same routine. The theatre of the absurd has almost no plot, because of the nothingness and repetitiveness in it, which means that the play is not going anywhere (Al Sharadgeh 180).

Theatre of absurd is a mixture between absurdity and illogicality. It demonstrates the tragedy the human live with a bit of comedy. In these plays man is facing the absurdity and meaninglessness of his existence without providing any solution at the end. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the main characters Vladimir and Estragon are in the same place with the same situation waiting for the unknown. The play demonstrates the routine and nothingness that characterise the plot in the theatre of absurd. Although their tragic situation there was many humorous scenes, and comedy in their conversation (Beckett) .

This kind of plots were created to confuse the viewers and to demonstrate the concept of absurdity and nothingness. In the traditional plays the plot is obvious, and it follows a chronological order of events. The viewer can guess what would probably happens at the end, without asking the question “why” or “how?”

(EnglishLiterature.net). On the contrary, the absurdist plays make the audience raise the question from the beginning of the play because of the difficulty of linking between the events and how the play would end, and actually there is no link or a clear idea to show because there is no story. Esslin commented on the plot in this theatre: “If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of.” (xvii)

The rebellion of the absurd theatre against the traditional structure is obvious. Plays can have three or four acts with the same idea, dialogue, and characters, unlike the traditional theatre where the plot is clear and leads to the end of the story, without repetition and meaninglessness. In *Waiting for Godot*, acts contain the same dialogue and events, nothing changed from the beginning until the end. In the absurdist plays, the structure and plot does not change no matter how many acts they have; it starts and ends with the same rhythm and without solving the problem. “In *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, plays drained of character, plot, and meaningful dialogue, Beckett has shown that such a seemingly impossible tour de force can in fact be accomplished.” (Esslin 46).

### **1.8.2. Language in the Theatre of the Absurd**

Language must carry a message to the listener and the speaker as well. A rational conversation is built on a clear concept with the use of a clear language. The rebellion of the absurd theatre was not only at the level of the structure and plot but at the level of language too. Since language does not describe the feeling of nothingness and hopelessness; it is a useless tool to be used as a way of communication. The theatre of absurd contains a chaotic and paradoxical language; it uses many illogical expressions that makes the audience confused and even suspect the sanity of the characters. The characters in the play cannot communicate properly, because of the meaningless use of language. In Beckett’s plays the language “... serves to express the break- down, the disintegration of language. Where there is no

certainty, there can be no definite meanings and the impossibility of ever attaining certainty is one of the main themes of Beckett's plays." (Esslin 44).

The characters in the theatre of the absurd are not related to each other in any way, because of the lack of logical communication and language inability. The dialogue between the characters in the absurdist plays is pointless and does not carry meaningful expressions. The theatre of the absurd perfectly demonstrates the ineffectiveness of language in creating a logical conversation between the individuals. It is noticeable that each character is totally living in its own circle, and that there is no common thing between them (Al-Aabedi 4-6). The absurdist dramatists saw language as a senseless tool, that can't deliver any meaning.

The one thing that can really destroy a language is repetition. The language used in the absurd theatre is full of repetition; characters in their dialogues use meaningless and repeated expressions many times during the play. The use of repetition in these plays is to show the struggle of the characters in creating a conversation to communicate between each other. When one of the characters in the play is wondering about something or asks a question, he does not get a clear satisfying answer. Although the answers that the character receives are nonsensical, he keeps asking the same question many times over again and receives the same strange and awkward expressions as a response every time. Samuel Beckett is famous with this language in his plays. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon in many scenes kept saying the same expressions and use repetition in their dialogues. For example, Vladimir said: "nothing to be done" (Beckett 9-11-21). Another example is when Vladimir keeps asking the same question "you want to get rid of him?" (Beckett 31-32). This repetition is used in order to emphasise the absurdity of the play and to leave an impact on the audience.

### **1.8.3. Characters in the Theatre of the Absurd**

Characters in the absurd theatre follow the same rebellious structure that was invented by absurdist dramatists. Unlike the Greek theatre where the characters are playing their roles according to the plot, (Optiz) the characters in the theatre of absurd do not play any role; it is the universe that plays with them. They find themselves facing the nothingness of the world and trapped in a routine. The actions played by the characters do not take the play anywhere and they are completely purposeless (Hornby 640).

The characters in the absurdist plays struggle all the time while trying to find meaning and understand life, but actually there is no meaning and nothing to understand. Because of this absurdity, the heroes feel like strangers while trying to understand the absurd world they live in. The characters discover that their own existence is meaningless and absurd. The way they communicate is absurd too; although they are desperate to interact, the words they use are meaningless (Dominte 4-5).

The Second World War's impact was reflected in the works of absurdist dramatists. The characters in the theatre of the absurd had the same mental and physical state as the people in real life; they were hopeless, pessimists, and broken from the inside. After the war, people could not trust life again or live it properly; they could not communicate or interact normally because of the fear and darkness that were embracing them. This is what was illustrated in the plays of the absurd theatre by its characters; for the absurdist dramatists there is nothing to see or analyse except gloominess and nothingness. Esslin stated that: "Waiting for Godot and Endgame, the plays Beckett wrote in French, are dramatic statements of the human situation it- self." (39)



## **1.9. Themes of the Theatre of the Absurd**

The themes of the theatre of the absurd are related to the post war period, which was characterized by cruelty, gloominess, and meaninglessness.

### **1.9.1. The Meaninglessness of the World**

For those religious people who believe in God, life can be meaningful somehow. Believing that there is life after death, heaven, and Hell gives people hope and a meaning to hold on to life. But for those who do not believe in any spiritual authority there is no such meaning; they do not have a reason that brings hope and meaning to their lives and all what they get from the universe is unsatisfying answers and nothingness. This meaningless relationship between the universe and man is what is called the absurd. People after the Second World War found themselves in an absurd situation that led them to lose hope, lose faith in God, and see the world as a meaningless place. The absurdist playwright Eugene Ionesco describes life after the Second World War as follow “There comes a time” ... “when you can no longer accept the horrible things that happen.” (Qtd in Brée127).

Most of the absurdist dramatists, if not all of them, were affected by the war and all the bloodshed they witnessed. The absurd plays were illustrating the meaninglessness of real life. The characters in the plays always get disappointed and unhappy because of the nothingness and absence they always get from the universe. In *Waiting of Godot*, Vladmir and Estragon were waiting for someone called Godot from the beginning of the play until the end. They waited for him to come every day without getting any hint from him, and they spent their time waiting and getting disappointed every time he did not come to meet them. This situation lasted until the end of the play and without getting any answer from Godot (Beckett). In the theatre of the absurd, the world is viewed as a meaningless and gloomy place.

### **1.9.2. The Cruelty of Human Beings**

The cruelty of humans has been seen throughout the centuries. As a theme in the theatre of the absurd, cruelty is a common aspect in the absurdist plays. What was happening during World War II was too much to handle, and life started to change. The economy improved, and new inventions appeared. The technology developed so fast in western countries, and this put people in a difficult situation. They were obliged to follow the variations of society and adapt to their new life as soon as possible, but not all of them could accept this fast change. Some people found themselves strangers to this new cruel life and could not find their identification. Those people's mindsets were strange and full of cruelty; some pioneers of the theatre of the absurd reflect their feelings and thoughts in their works and use cruelty as a theme in their absurdist plays (Wang cited in Zhu 1465).

In Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, the character Pozzo represents the theme of cruelty of human beings perfectly. Pozzo is a strong, powerful, and wealthy man that lords over the weak and inferior character. Lucky is mistreated by his lord Pozzo, who does not care about him if he gets hungry or tired, he beats him and makes him carry the bags for him without any pity. The way Lucky was treated is the same how people were treated outside. The stronger lords over the weaker, and treat them him with cruelty (Beckett).

### **1.9.3. The Isolation of the Individuals**

Theatre of the absurd is famous with the use of isolation as a theme in its plays. The characters in absurd drama are isolated from the outside world; they live in their own world. Even if there are many characters in one play, it is noticeable that each of them is living inside a bubble handling his own special thoughts and ideas. In *Waiting for Godot*, the theme of isolation is strongly present in the main characters. Vladimir and Estragon are isolated from the outside world; they are alone in an

isolated place all the time. Although they were together, each one of them was living in his own circle and dealing with his thoughts (Beckett).

This theme of isolation concerned the playwrights themselves. When they started writing this type of drama, they were not aware that they belong to a literary movement. They started writing in a specific style with a new structure and plot, adopting isolation in the way they wrote and as a theme in their plays. Each dramatist thought that he was isolated and have a new style in writing his works (Esslin xviii). But later Martin Esslin coined the term theatre of the absurd in his book *Theatre of The Absurd*, where he talked about this new genre of drama and considered those playwrights as its main figures.

### **1.10. Conclusion**

Though it saw the light with Albert Camus in the period of the World War II. Absurdism has its origins back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The war influenced this philosophical and literary movement and Camus himself. The war did not influence absurdism only, a new genre of drama was born which is the theatre of the absurd. This theatre was based on absurdism with an existential tone. Absurdist playwrights wrote their plays with a rebellious structure and themes that totally differ from the formal Aristotelian theatre. The next chapter treats absurdism in the play *Waiting for Godot*. It analyses its artistic features (the plot, language, and characters), and its themes.

**Chapter Two**  
**Study of Absurdity in *Waiting*  
*for Godot***

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## **2.1. Introduction**

Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* is one of his most famous plays, and one of the major works in the theatre of the absurd. It is the perfect example of this new theatre. Beckett illustrated the feeling of absurdity that people felt during the World War Two. He reflected on the gloominess of the war and the meaningless relation between the human and the universe through his absurdist play.

This chapter provides a study and analysis of the absurdity in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. First, the chapter gives a biography of Samuel Beckett, then a brief summary of the absurdist play *Waiting for Godot*. After that, it analyses the absurdity in the artistic features of the play (absurdity in plot, absurdity in language, and absurdity in characters). The last part is an analysis of the absurdity in the themes of the play (meaninglessness of life, the cruelty and suffering of human beings, and the isolation of the individuals.)

## **2.2. Samuel Beckett's Biography**

Samuel Barclay Beckett, born in Dublin on 13 April 1906, in an Irish middle-class family, he is an author, poet and playwright, who wrote in both English and French. He is the laureate of the noble prize of literature in 1969. Beckett is best known for his play *Waiting for Godot*, in which he represents a new genre of drama that was against the old formal traditions ("The Nobel Prize in Literature 1969"). He belonged to a protestant family but he did not keep religious. (Esslin 1)

Beckett entered Portora Royal School at Enniskillen, at the age of fourteen and he was an excellent student. After that he entered Trinity College and got his bachelor degree in Arts. Because of his knowledge of both languages English and French, he worked as lecturer in Paris, at Ecole Normale Supérieure. He started his career in France and found a welcoming home there. Then, he met the Irish James Joyce and became a member of his circle (Esslin 2). Beckett worked as a lecturer of

English in Paris and as a teacher of French when he went back to Ireland. Then later, he discovered his passion of writing. Most of his early literary works were written in English but, he switched to French. Although he wrote in French, he himself translated his own works to English, and this was the case with *Waiting for Godot*, that was first published in French under the title *En Attendant Godot* (Esslin qtd in encyclopaedia Britannica).

Beckett was involved in the World War two, because of his residence in Paris. In 1942, he joined the resistance group, but he did not stay there for a long period; he soon moved to the secure zone of France and worked as a farmer until the end of the war (Esslin qtd in encyclopaedia Britannica). The cruelty of the war and all the happenings at that period influenced Beckett's life and literary works. The war was not the only influencer, but his home country's strict laws and the church's pressure affected his mental health and his view toward his country.

Beckett's style of writing was influenced by many writers such as Rene Descartes, Dante, and his Irish friend James Joyce. His works are full of allusions. Moreover, he dealt with the crisis of human being, the relation between humans, their attitude and acts (Esslin qtd in encyclopaedia Britannica). *Waiting for Godot* is his most known play and it contains all these themes. Beckett while writing his plays was not aware that he belongs to the theatre of the absurd, he wrote with the belief that he was isolated and writing in a unique style.

### **2.3. Summary of *Waiting for Godot***

*Waiting for Godot* is a play written by Samuel Beckett, the play was first published in French *En Attendant Godot* 1952. The play contains four characters and two acts, its main characters are Vladimir and Estragon. The first act starts with Vladimir and Estragon in an empty road with a leafless tree, and having a conversation about waiting for someone called Godot. While waiting for him they fought, talked, and even tried to commit suicide. Meanwhile, a guy named Pozzo

with his slave named Lucky arrived; at first, Vladimir and Estragon think that he was Godot but they realized that he was someone else. Gogo and Didi (as they call each other) were shocked from the mistreatment of Pozzo to his slave, he beats him, calls him pig, and he was going to sell him because he became useless. despite this mistreatment, Lucky was afraid that his owner would abandon him and he was trying to impress him all the time. This was so strange and shocking to Vladimir and Estragon. Because they were bored, Pozzo ordered his Lucky to dance and think for them, but it did not end well, because Lucky forgot how it is to dance and think, and they left right after that. When Pozzo and his slave left, a child came to Vladimir and Estragon with news from Godot that he is not coming today but surely tomorrow, by this scene the first act ends.

In the second act, they woke up and everything remained the same and they did the same things when waiting for Godot. They tried to talk and play, so that time can move faster, but it is still too long and boring. Pozzo and Lucky came back again but Pozzo lost his sight and became weaker than the day before, and lucky became dumb and could not even groan. All the characters lost their memory and they did not remember anything from yesterday except Vladimir. Pozzo left again after arguing with Vladimir about yesterday's conversation that he cannot remember. The child came back again to repeat the same words and message from Godot, but without remembering that he met them before. Estragon tells Vladimir that he wants to leave but Vladimir tells him that they have to wait for Godot to come tomorrow.

At the end, Vladimir and Estragon want to hang themselves again, but they could not, so they decided to do it tomorrow if Godot would not come. They decided to go but they do not move and the curtain falls.

#### **2.4. The Artistic Features of *Waiting for Godot***

*Waiting for Godot* is characterised by a strange and meaningless plot, incoherent language, and disordered characters.



### 2.3.1. Absurdity in Plot

In *Waiting for Godot*, the plot is strange and does not follow the formal Aristotelian structure. The play starts with Vladimir and Estragon waiting for someone called Godot; the scenes of waiting and their dialogues about waiting for Godot remain the same throughout the whole play. The expression “we’re waiting for Godot” was repeated from the beginning of the first act until the end of the second act. Whenever Estragon wants to leave that place and do something else, Vladimir tells him that they cannot; they have to stay there and wait for Godot.

Estragon: Let’s go.

Vladimir: We can’t.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We’re waiting for Godot.

Estragon: Ah! (Beckett 14-48-68-71-78)

There are no rising or falling actions; the same routine is repeated. Even when Pozzo and Lucky enter, nothing changes; they do not bring any news about Godot or anything else that may change their situation of waiting. Even when the child comes with a message from Godot himself, he does not take the events to another level, and the message he comes to deliver is about asking them to wait more for Godot. The child says: “Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won’t come this evening but surely tomorrow.” (Beckett 50) The word “surely” gave them hope and made them believe that he is definitely coming tomorrow, and this means more waiting for Godot without doing anything else.

The plot displays absurdity and meaninglessness; the play has almost no plot. The same events are repeated in both acts, nothing changes, and Godot does not come to see Vladimir and Estragon or, as they say, to save them:

Estragon: And if he comes?

Vladimir: we'll be saved. (Beckett 94)

The play was not about Godot himself; it was about the time they spent waiting for him. It is about waiting because Godot never comes to see them.

### **2.3.2. Absurdity in Language**

The language in *Waiting for Godot* is chaotic, paradoxical, and repetitive. It contains illogical dialogues that make the characters look crazy and mentally unstable. It is common to see the same expression or word repeated so many times. Even the character's body language is ridiculous and silly.

In the beginning of the play, Vladimir and Estragon talk about different things and many topics at the same time, and it is such a mess that nothing is clear or has a clear meaning. Furthermore, their questions and answers to each other are shocking. Estragon is struggling to get his boots off, and he asks Vladimir for help, but Vladimir does not care about what he says, and he continues talking nonsense. Then he asks him what he is doing, like he did not hear him the first time he asked:

Estragon: Ah stop blathering and help me off with this bloody thing.

Vladimir: Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were presentable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up. (Estragon tears at his boot.)  
What are you doing? (Beckett 10)

After asking him about what he was doing, Estragon answers with a weird response he says:

Estragon: Taking off my boots. Did that never happen to you?

Vladimir: Boots must be taking off every day, I'm tired telling you that.

Why don't you listen to me? (Beckett 10)

It is illogical to ask someone if taking off his boots ever happened to him, and Vladimir's answer means that Estragon does not take off his boots every day like a normal person does. After all this, Estragon still does not get help from Vladimir:

Estragon: (*feebly*). Help me!

Vladimir: It hurts?

Estragon: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

Vladimir: (*Angrily*). No one ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have.

Estragon: It hurts?

Vladimir: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

Estragon: (*pointing*). You might button it all the same.

Vladimir: (*stopping*) true (*he buttons his fly*). Never neglect the little things of life.

Estragon: What do you expect, you always wait till the last moment.

Vladimir: (*musingly*). The last moment... (*he meditates.*)

Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?

Estragon: Why don't you help me? (Beckett 10)

This conversation shows the meaningless use of language. Beckett used this language to mock language itself; it does not send any message or introduce the characters. Estragon wants help, but Vladimir keeps talking about many different meaningless things that have no meaning at all without giving him any help at the end. This shows how every character in the play is isolated and lives in his own world. Although they are always together, they do not interact properly. This absurdity in language also makes the characters look insane because a normal human being would help his friend the moment he asked for it, and all that nonsense talk would not be said.

The repetition was highly used in *Waiting for Godot*; the purpose of this use is to increase absurdity in the play; this absurdity is a reflection of the outside world. Every time Estragon loses his patience and wants to leave, Vladimir tells him that they have to wait for Godot: “We’re waiting for Godot” (Beckett 14-48-68-71-78). This expression was repeated many times until the end of the play as a reminder to Estragon and to show the absurdity of what they are doing, which was waiting for the unknown to save them. The use of repetition is not only in their dialogues, but even in their names. Vladimir and Estragon call each other Didi and Gogo, which is a repetition of two letters, and these nicknames are ironic because Gogo in French means imbecile and Didi in French slang means a toe. (O’Nan 4-6) These nicknames have many meanings in other languages, and all of them are ironic. The use of irony is common in absurd drama.

When Pozzo asked Lucky to deliver a speech to entertain them, he talked with incomprehensible annoying language and idiotic sounds:

Lucky: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white that is to say blast hell to heaven so blue still and calm so calm with a calm which even though intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the labors unfinished crowned by the Acacacademy of Anthropopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunard it is established beyond all of Testew and Cunard it is established beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labors of men that as a result of the labors unfinished of Testew and Cunnard it is established as hereinafter but not so fast for reasons unknown that as a result of (Beckett 42)

after a long while he continues:

public works of Puncher and Wattmann ... I resume alas  
abandoned unfinished the skull the skull in Connemara in  
tennis the skull alas the stones Cunard (mêlée, final  
tennis ... the stones ... so calm ... Cunard ...  
(Beckett 45)

This speech is the best example of the absurdity in language in the theatre of the absurd. Lucky does not say anything meaningful, just many repeated sentences and useless words. This absurdity of language shows Lucky as an insane and isolated being who is incapable of interacting with others. Beckett succeeds once again in using language as a useless tool to give a clear meaning while still serving the absurdity in the play.

### **2.3.3. Absurdity in Characters**

*Waiting for Godot* has five characters besides Godot who never appear in it. Vladimir and Estragon are the main characters; they appear together, waiting for Godot to come. Although they have a good friendship, they are the exact opposite of each other.

Vladimir is a selfless, rational, and caring character compared to Estragon. He is the one who thinks more and tries to find solutions. In the beginning of the play, he first appears to be thinking about something that he has been thinking about all his life, and this shows how much he overthinks things in life:

Vladimir: 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  
haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle.  
(Beckett 9)

Vladimir seems intellectual and interested in talking about Christianity and the bible:

Estragon: What do you expect, you always wait till the last moment

Vladimir: (*musingly*). The last moment. . . (*He meditates.*) Hope  
deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?  
(Beckett 10)

“Hope deferred maketh the something sick” (Beckett 10) is a verse from the Bible; the correct verse is as follows: “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick” (King James Bible 424), Vladimir does not remember it clearly. In many other scenes, he mentions the Bible and it is obvious that he has good knowledge about it: “Did you ever read the bible?” (Beckett 12). He told Estragon about the story of the two thieves “Ah yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story?” (Beckett 12). This story is associated with the crucifixion of Jesus, and it is well known to Christians.

When Estragon forgets what they are waiting for, Vladimir always makes him remember that they are waiting for Godot. Besides making him remember the things he always forgets, he is a caring friend; in the second act, when Estragon could not fall asleep, he sings for him and gives him his coat:

Vladimir: Wait. (*He goes over and sits down beside Estragon and begins to sing in a loud voice.*) Bye bye bye bye Bye bye—

Estragon: (*looking up angrily*). Not so loud!

Vladimir: (*softly*). Bye bye bye bye Bye bye bye bye Bye bye bye  
bye Bye bye... (Estragon sleeps. Vladimir gets up softly,  
takes off his coat and lays it across Estragon’s shoulders,  
then starts walking up and down, swinging his arms to keep  
himself warm). (Beckett 70)

On one hand, Vladimir seems to be wiser than his friend, pays attention to details and is willing to solve problems better than any other character in the play. Estragon, on the other hand, is the exact opposite of Vladimir. He does not care about the others nor about Vladimir. He likes to sleep, eat, and go discover other places.

The philosophical and religious matters do not interest him. Most of the time, he is sleepy and wants to rest.

When Vladimir asks Estragon if he read the Bible he says “The bible... (*he reflects.*) I must have taken a look at it”. (Beckett 12). This shows how careless he is about religion, unlike Vladimir. He is not open-minded; every time Vladimir wants to tell him a story about something new, he says that he does not want to know:

Vladimir: ... Do you remember the story?

Estragon: No

Vladimir: Shall I tell it to you?

Estragon: No (Beckett 12)

Compared to Vladimir, Estragon is weaker. When he spends the night in the ditch, he is beaten, but he does not care much about it, and it is not the first time:

Vladimir: And they didn't beat you?

Estragon: Beat me? Certainly they beat me.

Vladimir: The same lot as usual.

Estragon: The same? I don't know. (Beckett 9)

Vladimir commented about Estragon's:

Vladimir: When I think of it . . . all these years . . . but for me... where would you be...? (*Decisively.*) You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it. (Beckett 9)

Estragon has no dignity; he does not even care or pay attention to such things. He just cares about the material stuff. When Pozzo threw the bone, Estragon immediately wanted it:

Estragon: Er... you've finished with the ...er... you don't need the... er... bones, sir?

Vladimir: (*scandalized*). You could not have waited? (Beckett 26-27)

Vladimir is ashamed, but Estragon is not, and he picks the bone from the floor and eats it. Anyone who thinks logically would not take someone else's leftovers from the floor and eat them without being ashamed or cares about his dignity. Estragon is a lazy character who just wants to eat whatever he finds and sleep wherever he goes without bothering himself to think about moral things in life.

In the second act, Estragon sleeps most of the time. He does not care about the coming of Pozzo and Lucky again. He did not remember them at all, nor did he care about boy who brings messages from Godot; actually, he does not care about Godot at all; it was Vladimir who was reminding him about him and his importance to them. At the end of the play, he tells Vladimir, "I can't go on like this" (Beckett 94). He continues: "If we parted? That might be better for us" (Beckett 94).

Vladimir and Estragon are friends, but Beckett made each of them the opposite of the other. Although they had different personalities, they are always together, waiting for Godot. Estragon has issues with his feet; his shoes are smaller than his feet; which may symbolise that he does not fit in that place, and he always wants to leave it. He kept telling Vladimir "Let's go". Vladimir, on the contrary, his hat is bothering him all the time, and this may symbolise his overthinking and intellectuality, because sometimes so much awareness can be a trouble. (Phillips)

Another duo is that of Pozzo and his slave Lucky. These characters illustrate dominance and submission. Pozzo is the strong, rich master who likes to lord over everyone. When he first appears in the play, he is tying Lucky with a rope and driving him. Pozzo seems so confident and arrogant; when he meets Vladimir and Estragon, they thought that he is Godot, and this made him angry:

Estragon: (*timidly to Pozzo*). You're not Mr. Godot, sir?

Pozzo: (*terrifying voice*). I am Pozzo! (*Silence.*) Pozzo! (*Silence.*)

Does that name mean nothing to you? (*Silence.*) I say does that name mean nothing to you? (Beckett 22)



It was like they were supposed to know who he is; this shows how arrogant he is. Although he told them that they are from the same species as humans, he says that they are imperfect, which means inferior to him: "...Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes (*he puts on his glasses and looks at the two likes*) even when the likeness is an imperfect one. (*He takes off his glasses.*) (Beckett 24).

He treats Lucky worse than Vladimir and Estragon; Lucky is an animal according to him, and he is not from the same species as him. When Estragon wants the bone, which is usually for Lucky, Pozzo tells him to ask Lucky for it, and when he does:

Estragon: Mister... excuse me, Mister

Pozzo: You're being spoken to, pig! Reply! (*To Estragon.*)

Try him again.

Estragon: Excuse me, Mister, the bones, you won't be wanting the bones?

*Lucky looks at Estragon*

Pozzo: (*in raptures*). Mister! (*Lucky bows his head.*) Reply! Do you want them or don't you? (*Silence of Lucky. To Estragon.*)

They're yours. (*Estragon makes a dart at the bones, pick them up and begins to gnaw them.*) ... (Beckett 27)

He asks politely, saying "mister", but Lucky does not respond, and Pozzo mocks the word "mister" and called him "pig", this is the only way Lucky responds to.

Lucky only gets his bad luck from his name. He becomes an animal because of his master; he has no human rights; he is not allowed to speak or move whenever he wants; and he is living only for his master. Lucky's life is consumed by his master; his whole existence becomes only for Pozzo. When he wants to sell him, he refuses

and tries to work harder to please him so that he can stay with him. When Pozzo asks Lucky to dance for them, he only makes one silly move and cannot dance properly:

Pozzo: ... Dance, misery! *Lucky puts down basket, advances towards front, turns to Pozzo. Lucky dances. He stops.*

Estragon: Is that all?

Pozzo: Encore!

*Lucky executes the same movements, stops.* (Beckett 40)

According to Pozzo, Lucky used to be a good dancer but now he barely does one move:

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... (Beckett 40)

When Lucky is asked to deliver a speech, the same thing happened. He cannot give one correct meaningful sentence and Pozzo says that he was better at that before:

Pozzo: He even used to think very prettily once, I could listen to him for hours. Now... (*he shudders*). So much the worse for me. (Beckett 39)

Lucky loses all his capacities; he cannot move, dance or talk properly. When he becomes a useless slave, Pozzo wants to get rid of him.

In the second act, things changed between Pozzo and Lucky. The dominant, powerful Pozzo becomes blind and weak, and after lording over Lucky, he now cannot make any move without him. Now Lucky becomes the one driving his master, and all Pozzo can do is follow him pathetically. Their relationship transforms from that of a master and his slave to that of a weak blind man and his assistant, and he does not call Lucky by animal names anymore.

The boy who appears at the end of both acts is a messenger from Godot to Vladimir and Estragon. He appears twice with the same message: "Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow." (Beckett 50)

He comes to do the same thing without remembering that he was there yesterday. This is an example of the routine and repetitiveness in the absurd plays.

The last character Godot, is mentioned in the whole play, and the title of the play contains his name, but he never appears in it. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for him all the time, but they got nothing at the end. Many critics relate his name Godot to God, relying on Beckett's relation with God and how the God did not come to help people during the war. ("Godot Character Analysis in Waiting for Godot | LitCharts") Some others say that Godot is similar to the English word "God", so technically Beckett was referring to him (Patkovszky 3). Although Vladimir and Estragon were waiting for Godot, the play is not really about Godot or is significance; it is about "waiting", the time Vladimir and Estragon spent waiting. Godot can be happiness in life, hope, love, or anything humans wait for.

#### **2.4. Themes of Waiting for Godot**

The meaninglessness of life, the cruelty and suffering of human beings, and the isolation of individuals are the main themes of *Waiting for Godot*.

##### **2.4.1. The Meaninglessness of Life**

The meaninglessness of life is one of the most important themes in *Waiting for Godot*, the characters are waiting for something unknown. Godot represents the meaning of their lives. Thus, they are waiting endlessly for him, but he never comes, and they never get what they waited for. This means that their life is meaningless. Vladimir and Estragon are living in emptiness and nothingness; they do nothing in their life except wait for Godot. They do not care about their miserable situation of waiting as much as they care about Godot. Moreover, they do not have clean clothes or food, and they do not do any activities. Estragon, many times, tells Vladimir that he cannot go on like that, but he does not do anything to change that situation. All what they say at the end is "nothing to be done". (Beckett 9-11-21) This expression was repeated all over the play to demonstrate the absurdity of their life. Although

they know that waiting was not what they really wanted there was nothing they could do about it.

Pozzo and Lucky have a meaningless life too. Pozzo, in the first act, is pretending that he knew where he was going and that he was in control of his life and Lucky's, actually he was not. He says that he is going to sell Lucky, but he does not; he is just walking around without knowing what he really is going to do. Lucky on the other hand, loses himself in slavery. When they appear once again in the second act, they are in a miserable situation. Lucky cannot speak a word, and Pozzo lost his sight. He is so done with life he told Vladimir:

Pozzo: One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day,  
one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf,  
one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same  
second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer.*) They give birth astride  
of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more."  
(Beckett 89)

This expression by Pozzo illustrates the meaninglessness and absurdity of life; people are born and then die without finding any real meaning in between.

#### **2.4.2. The Cruelty and Suffering of Human Beings**

Cruelty and suffering are used side by side as a theme in *Waiting for Godot*. An example of cruelty and suffering is that of Pozzo and Lucky, Pozzo is the heartless, cruel master who lords over Lucky and mistreats him. Pozzo's cruelty is because of his wealth and strong position. He is willing to lord over everyone, and he always sees others as inferior to him. Lucky suffers from his cruelty during the whole play. Although he is serving him and doing all that he is asked to do, that is never enough for Pozzo; he uses him without having pity on him. Even when Pozzo loses his sight and is suffering himself from it, he keeps using Lucky as a slave and mistreats him. His suffering does not change his cruel nature.

Pozzo: Well to begin with he should pull on the rope, as hard as he likes so long as he doesn't strangle him. He usually responds to that. If not he should give him a taste of his boot, in the face and the privates as far as possible. (Beckett 87)

Vladimir and Estragon suffer in many ways too; Estragon suffers a lot from his feet and Vladimir from the pain he gets when he laughs. They do not suffer physically only, but psychologically too. They are trapped in their waiting for Godot. Estragon always wants to leave and discovers new places, but he cannot because of Godot. Vladimir's psychological suffering is because of the people around him; they always forget all happenings, and he is the only one who remembers. In addition, he has to deal with Estragon's amnesia, and tells him constantly what they are waiting for. It is like he is the only sane person amongst insane people, and this can be a mental torture. Godot is cruel enough when he gave them hope and sent a message that he is surely coming for them, but he never did. Eventually, this makes them suffer from the long, boring waiting, which is meaningless because at the end they get nothing from it.

#### **2.4.3. The Isolation of the Individuals**

The first sign of isolation in *Waiting for Godot* is the setting of the play; which is on a country road. Vladimir and Estragon are alone and isolated most of the time in the play. Although they are always together, each of them has his moments of isolation. Estragon prefers to sleep than talking to Vladimir or communicating with others, and Vladimir often steps aside to meditate and think alone. Each one of them is living in his own world, and this is shown many times in their talk and conversations. Sometimes Vladimir talks about a specific topic and Estragon talks about a whole other topic at the same time. Estragon in particular is forgetting all the

events, and this makes him isolated and the least interested in all what was happening. The lack of communication and the unreasonable silences between the characters so often, emphasise the theme of isolation in *Waiting for Godot*.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

Absurdity is strongly present in *Waiting for Godot*. Starting from the artistic features of the play, which are as follows: the meaningless plot that has no rising or falling actions and only many absurd actions, even at the end there is no clear resolution of the story. The end remains open to interpretation since Godot never comes and Vladimir and Estragon never leave the place where they were waiting for him. Then, the useless language that contains many repetitions and incoherent expressions. At last, the characters that are mentally unstable, never get well. The themes in the play emphasise absurdity too. The theme of the meaninglessness of life perfectly demonstrates the philosophy of the absurd. The cruelty and suffering of humans are the main reasons that make people think that life is absurd. Furthermore, using them as themes serves the absurdity in the play. Finally, the last

theme is the isolation of human beings, which is highly used in the theatre of the absurd. Eventually, Samuel Beckett demonstrates the notion of the absurd perfectly through his play *Waiting for Godot*.

# **General Conclusion**



## General Conclusion

At first sight, *Waiting for Godot* seems like a meaningless play played by two idiots trapped in repetitiveness and routine. However, the play demonstrates the absurdity that people suffered from after World War II. The themes of suffering, meaninglessness, cruelty, and isolation were prominent in the play in order to illustrate the reality of the outside world.

Samuel Beckett's play was analysed to explore and highlight the absurdity in its elements and themes. As a general conclusion, the playwrights of the theatre of the absurd reacted against the happenings of the war and the meaninglessness of their lives, by writing in a new rebellious style. The dramatists created a whole new theatre that expresses the meaninglessness and absurdity of life through its elements, such as the strange plot, incoherent language, and disordered characters, as well as its themes of cruelty, meaninglessness, isolation, and suffering.

The theatre of the absurd was heavily influenced by the absurdism of Albert Camus. This philosophical and literary movement is built on living life with the total belief that it is meaningless and absurd. One has to accept this reality without trying to find meaning in other things. Although the theatre of the absurd was influenced by absurdism, the existentialism tone is present in many absurdist works to show that humans try their best to find meaning in their lives, yet all their attempts fail, and this means that there is only one true reality, which is the absurd.

The movement of the theatre of the absurd faced many critics; the plays were given the name of "anti-plays", and they were not accepted when they first appeared; neither the audience nor the critics were pleased by them, but later the strangeness and puzzling of these plays made them popular. The theatre of the absurd movement was remarkable but short-lived.

Samuel Beckett, like other absurdist playwrights, experienced the brutality of World War II. All the happenings and suffering of people were too much for them as intellectuals and writers, so they rebelled against this absurd situation by creating the theatre of the absurd.

As a final point, Beckett's absurdist play *Waiting for Godot* is a seminal work in the theatre of the absurd. The absurdity is prominent in the elements of the play besides its main themes. Samuel Beckett illustrated the happenings of the war and the sufferings of people in his play *Waiting for Godot*, which makes it a timeless literary piece.

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