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Samuel Beckett, 1969 Nobel Prize Winner the First Author of the Absurd to win an International Fame.

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Abstract:

In the profound and peculiar style of modern novelists like James, Conrad, Joyce and Woolf, Samuel Beckett's fiction refers to, in a parallel way to his drama, the absurd situation of human beings in the world. Beckett was among many of the writers of Post-World War II and experienced the chaotic situation of Modernism. Since its first performance in 1953, the Absurdist play's very depiction of the act of waiting for someone or something which has no real existence has for long been read along existential lines. The very presence of Godot through its absence in the lives of Vladimir and Estragon and their constant search for it throughout their lives constitutes not only an ontological or an existential crisis marked in post-world war Europe but is indicative of a much deeper psychological crisis at the heart of the human characters. As such Waiting for Godot can be seen as being invested with a deeply complex psychical structure that tries to demonstrate the fundamental crises and desires of the human psyche.

Key Words: Modernism, alienation, international fame, human psyche.

An analysis of Beckett's dramatic contributions, it would be helpful to look at the Theatre of the Absurd as a whole; we shall see that our play-wright in question is far from original and that he is merely a late pioneer in a rather well developed tradition .. Today the term "modern drama" often comprises play-wrights as far back as Henrik Ibsen and Bernard Shaw who were most prominent around the turn of the century. Although this term would be slightly misleading if applied to the plays of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, or others in the Absurd movement, it would have meaning when used to illustrate the background of our contemporary theatre. The great "moderns" in the school of Ibsen and Strindberg revolted against melodrama and non-realistic theatre just as the absurdist's react to realistic congruous drama.

The definition of 'absurd' is 'something that is completely stupid and unreasonable'. In a musical context it means "out of harmony" (The Theatre of the Absurd,). However, the definition 'absurd' derives into the literature from the mid-twentieth-century-essay Myth of Sisyphus by the French author and philosopher Albert Camus. In 1962 Martin Esslin wrote his book on the topic, entitled simply The Theatre of the Absurd. In this book Esslin mentions, the Romanian and French playwrights Eugène Ionesco's definition for the 'absurd':

Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless .

Waiting for Godot is a story of 'time' written in the form of 'absurd', set during two consecutive days. The two main characters are tramps awaiting Godot's arrival. Nevertheless, Godot's continual absence wastes time in the lives of the tramps by making them living puppets in the world of the absurd, therefore they simply "Let it go to waste" instead of finding an appropriate way to spend it. Beckett's intention in creating these characters may have been to make them the victims of time, pointing out that we cannot stop time, suggesting that we live in the present moment with what we have, instead of waiting for better lives or for what we do not have. Anthony Chadwick refers to this in his article "Waiting for Godot": We seem to have a choice between waiting for one "better" thing after another or simply living with what we have. Both past and future are illusions, and seen under this aspect, we begin to taste the notion of eternity.

He says that the concept of a past and future is an illusion, and yet the play seems to be only set in the "present". However, the present does not seem to have a fixed beginning or end and the play seems to hold its audience in a kind of limbo. It would seem that we cannot control time, and the senselessness of time suggests that it is pointless to attempt to stop its passage. Time passes, we age, become sick, and one day we eventually die; the truth is that time stops us. Therefore, no matter how hard we try to succeed in our lives, all our achievements are buried with us as time survives unchanged "In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness". A possible solution to this would be the path to eternity; which could be represented by Godot. This idea of "eternity", an escape from death, is commented on by Anthony Chadwick who says "Death as a final ending, as a final silence, is absent from the play". Furthermore, this suggests that if the tramps intention is to find the way to eternity through Godot, and if they are certain that Godot is able to guide them, it would be advisable to invest their time in that hope. In reality, it proves to be the most absurd investment; a whole life spent waiting for someone mysterious to come and rescue them.

The above argument proves that the tramps do not live in the present moment, and instead of enjoying the present time, they are waiting. They are excited that Godot will come along after some time and "Will miraculously save the situation" (The Theatre of the Absurd,). As Vladimir says "To-morrow everything will be better" because the boy said to them "Godot was sure to come to-morrow" Time could be identified as another major character in the play, since the tramps have nothing else to do in their lives but wait for Godot. In fact, the idea behind the waiting is that letting time pass on its own, instead of using it, is harmless. Indeed, if we do not like the present moment, the only thing we have to do is wait. For example if we do not like the winter time then we only have to wait for summer, and as we are waiting, we can look forward to it by fantasizing what a wonderful summer it will be. The tramps' excitement to meet the mysterious Godot may be a representation of man's desire to fill the time between birth and death with something meaningful. This period of time often could be a continuation of endless hope which connects the beginning, birth, to the end, death.

In *Waiting for Godot* it seems that the tramps' hope is Godot; they continue their lives with that hope of meeting Godot, because they believe that they "Will be saved". However, if they did not have the hope of meeting Godot they may already have taken the action of suicide as Angela Hoteling points out "The only options that seems available to the men are waiting or suicide". Meanwhile, as the tramps are waiting for Godot, they try to find something to do in order to pass the time. The suggestion of suicide is tragic and yet the audience receives it as a comic one: On one hand, in his play, Beckett may use humour as a vehicle to explain and capture the attention of audience, helping man understand the importance of time in his own existence. On the other hand, Gylfi Kristin son pointed out in his thesis that it could be Beckett's way of sugaring the pill for a subject which is rather boring, harsh and bitter (*Waiting for the Absurd: An Analysis of the Absurd in Two Works by Samuel Beckett and Tom Stoppard*). On the one hand, this is a clever way to bring humour into the play through outright absurdity. On the other hand, it is meaningless, nonsensical and absurd to hang oneself in order to pass the time. However, the tramps do not hang themselves and they continue their journey, coming again the next day with the same hope despite nothing significant happening. The escape from suicide is mentioned by Albert Camus "Since life had lost all meaning, man should not seek escape in suicide" (*The Theatre of the Absurd*).

The same concept is discussed by Angela Hoteling, she mentions in her essay that suicide could be thought of as the ultimate conclusion to a meaningless life; when man cannot find meaning for his existence then his life becomes absurd, and that state of absurd is what Camus calls "philosophical suicide". As she insists; Camus' concept of philosophical suicide is when by claiming that life is meaningless, one attempts to find meaning amidst the meaninglessness. After finding life meaningless, one attempt to escape it, however, Camus claims that to escape the absurdity of existence is philosophical suicide. The tramps hope that Godot will be the saviour to bring comfort into their lives. Estragon asks "If he comes?" Vladimir replies "We'll be saved". However, after deciding against the idea of suicide they select the act of waiting. In the very first sentence of the play, Estragon states "Nothing to be done" concluding with the idea that the tramps may want to spend their time doing nothing. This becomes certain when Vladimir insists "I'm beginning to come round to that opinion" and throughout the play they come back to the same conclusion, "Nothing to be done". During the second act, when they try to remember how they spent yesterday, Estragon's memories for yesterday and the last fifty years of their lives awaken:

Oh...this and that I suppose nothing in particular. Yes, now I remember, yesterday evening we spent blathering about nothing in particular.

That's been going on now for half a century It comes to light that they have wasted "half a century" by repeating the action of waiting, and it seems that there is nothing much left to try as Vladimir says "We've nothing more to do here" with Estragon insisting "Nor anywhere else" except waiting for Godot's arrival. Estragon insists, "In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent" to strict the silence, and break the discomfort of silence between two people by feeling their existence; they tell stories, think, sing, dance, eat, fall asleep, converse, and exercise, because "It'll pass time". It seems that the

tramps' idea of wasting their time on these ceaseless activities is utterly irresponsible compared to what we are supposed to do in reality. Therefore, the audience doubts whether the tramps are aware of their time, and the way they spend it. Vladimir's consciousness comes to light in his dialogues, "We wait. We are bored. No, don't protest, we are bored to death" . That is why they choose to wait for Godot, because it wastes their time, more coherently, "A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste". This suggests an awareness for their time and meaningless routine as Beckett concluded in his study of Marcel Proust "Habit and routine were the cancer of time" (The Theatre of the Absurd,). Time has an important role in the play because it seems to highlight the idea that the present moment has already become part of history: that time does not regenerate.

When Estragon complains "Nothing to be done", Vladimir insists "Be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything", and he is disappointed by Estragon's forgetful memory: Estragon does not have memory for the past events, he explains himself "That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget". Vladimir insisting:

You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it...it's too much for one man. We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties. Undoubtedly, it proves that the tramps have no sense of time or they may not be as concerned with time as we are. They talk about the nineties as being a million years ago as mention above from the words by Vladimir "We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties". Similarly the play itself has no time setting, because the play has been written in the fifties, but they talk about the nineties. So the question of who is right, either the characters or the setting, certainly has no answer because none can be proven right.

Similarly, the tramps are uncertain of the day that they were to wait for Godot: Angela Hoteling points out "Not only is the waiting difficult, but figuring out what to do while waiting is difficult". The tramps do not seem to consider their use of time and doing something that will make a significant change in their lives. At the end of the second act, somehow the tramps are capable of spending time without the expected outcome of Godots' arrival. So, twice in the play, two days in a row, nothing significant happens. It seems to suggest that the circle of coming and going is the only choice in the tramps' time, and "waiting" is an inevitable product of this circle.

The play suggests that "waiting" is the only choice the tramps have if they want to continue their lives "The subject of the play is not Godot but waiting". Esslin points out "Waiting is an essential characteristic of the human condition". All our lifetime is an endless wait for something, and Godot simply seems to represent that object of our waiting. We wait for "an event, a thing, a person, death". There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us...Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us heavy and dangerous... The flow of time confronts us with the basic problem of being-the problem of the nature of the self, which, being subject to constant change in time, is in constant flux and therefore ever outside our grasp.

In *Waiting for Godot* the tramps are merely passively waiting. They are confronted with the action of time itself; therefore, all the ceaseless activities, perhaps absurdist activities, they engage in is to waste time, which is an essential characteristic of the human condition as Esslin points out: Waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change is in itself an illusion. The ceaseless activity of time is self-defeating, purposeless, and therefore null and void the theme of "Waiting as an essential characteristic of the human condition" is a statement that becomes clearer among the confusion and disappointment of the play; the tramps are waiting for Godot, just as Vladimir says, "In this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come".

Their waiting functions as an absurd parallel to our real lives, as we wait our whole lives to be happy for something we do not have instead of being happy with what we have. Sometimes we wonder if waiting is a habit because waiting is tied with hope, and there is no human existence without hope. Indeed in our lives we have rational and practical hopes which may be fulfilled one day, unlike the tramps, who seem to have irrational hopes waiting for the mysterious Godot to come and to be "saved". Their hope reflects responsibility for themselves as Vladimir says, "No further need to worry" then Estragon says "Simply wait", and Vladimir replies "We're used to it". It seems the tramps are fully confident of their meeting with Godot, although we do not see any hope for his arrival. Most probably the tramps are not waiting to meet Godot, but waiting to wait for him. So the "waiting" represents a common theme both in absurdity as well as in reality, as we continue waiting until we are satisfied, even though in reality what we are looking for may never happen. Hence, it seems life is waiting, and all these activities happen while we are waiting. Godot seems to be the only hope in the lives of the tramps, which have no existence without the hope for Godot, therefore their future depends on that hope because the tramps truly believe that Godot can rescue them from their hardship and discomfort. Angela Hoteling's brings the same idea of the tramps hope on Godot, goes on to explain it as such:

The characters Vladimir and Estragon anxiously wait for Godot to come. Although Godot does not appear in the play, they make the uncertain assumption that there might be some hope in their existence, which is why they do not give up waiting for him. This means that the rest of their lives will probably not have any significant events happening, except waiting for him:

Estragon: And if he doesn't come?

Vladimir: We'll come back to-morrow.

Estragon: And the day after to-morrow.

Vladimir: Possibly.

Estragon: And so on.

Vladimir: The point is.

Estragon: Until he comes.

The tramps hope to meet Godot continues their desire to fight for their lives as Vladimir says, "Let's wait and see what he (Godot) says...I'm curious to hear what he has to offer". Beckett, Modernism was a means with a power to intensify the chaos of human

situation, to deepen the alienation of man and the concealment of his real identity. In an attempt to display the chaotic satiation of man in his alienation, his fiction deals with a way to express the reality of his situation in modernism and an inability to attain his identity. It is about both the writing of the novel and the search of a character wherein by the end of the novel we still do not know what has happened. Like a mystery story, Beckett's novel is a demonstration of a search for the self, for truth, for a modern idiom, but unfortunately without arriving there. His serious concern with language introduces new elements into the novel such as the detective story and the self-reflexive narrative. In a way to accomplish his fiction, distinguished from other authors, Beckett attempts to introduce his literature of disappointments. Rather than plot, there is storytelling without progression; instead of characterization, there is lack of character depth; there is no specific time or place. We often wonder where we are, whether months or days or hours have passed.

Beckett's work seeks a different location for the human psyche than that of the realist fictions of Austen, Balzac, George Eliot and Tolstoy; he tried to find his way in literary life away from the realist writing. He was always pursuing a way to protest against the prescriptive and limiting nature of 'realistic' conventions in his fiction. The major change he could bring in the tradition of prose fiction was to break down the reliable notions of character, location, culture and narrative convention. As a result of this change, Beckett could achieve the feat of composing novels which disintegrate into silence as they unfold. As an art of failure, his works refer to the author's lifelong suspicious about the Self. According to this view, Beckett's thought, as portrayed in his works, is characterized by a continual idea of mortality and Self losing, as he asserts: "we change, we lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" (Endgame) He believes that man's existence in this world has no meaning. Both limitations and compulsions of birth and death involved in human life and the universe which imposes such limitations is absurd and meaningless in the extreme.

In his way of creating an art distinguished from traditional writing, Beckett faces with the basic notions of Existentialism such as the anguish of 'being' and the anguish of human condition in its particularity. These notions give rise to a lamentation for man who "wastes and pines." (Waiting for Godot) Man's existence is an inexplicable and irrational surd which reduces the human condition to a permanent state of absolute helplessness. The limitations of the human condition make the human aspirations impossible of getting fulfilled. In the light of this concept of 'impossibility' one can understand most of Beckett's concepts like meaninglessness of man's existence, the despair, the failure of language and communication, the failure of human understanding to know the ultimate truths, the failure of love, the failure to discover one's own identity of the present self with that of the past in the flux of time, the failure to solve the problem of death and perishing. The search for man's own identity- the finding of the true nature of the self and the raising of the problem of identity, and finally the confrontation of the audiences with the existence of their own problematical and mysterious condition are well known as the theme of Beckett's plays, novels, prose sketches, and poems.

Beckett's works also explore and probe the notions of alienation and freedom, a clearing away of excrescences to make a placeless place where increasingly primal uncertainties

may be known. He finds himself facing with some questions like: Why is there all imperfection in life and why is man always stuck in his miserable condition? The frequent impossibility of Self-discovery in searching leads him to a profound rejection of whatever the world presents in life. In part owing to these qualities, his work appears to stay on the Absurdist movements with which he was associated.

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