



Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Diyala
College of Education of Humanities
Department of English



Language and Absurdity in Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett.

Submitted to the Council of the English Department/ College of
Education for Humanities / University of Diyala

In Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements of Undergraduate Studies for
the Degree of B.A. in English

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2022 A. D.

1443 H.

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

(مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ بَاقٍ ۗ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّ الَّذِیْنَ صَبَرُوْا اَجْرَهُمْ بِاَحْسَنِ مَا
كَانُوْا یَعْمَلُوْنَ) (النحل، ۹۶)

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate"

{ Whatever you have will end, but what Allah has is lasting.
And We will surely give those who were patient their
reward according to the best of what they used to do. } (Al-
Nahal, 96)

Dedication

To the Almighty God , thank you for the guidance , strength , power of mind , protection and skills and for giving us a healthy life . All of these , we offer to you.

Acknowledgments

We would like to present our thanks fist to our Almighty Allah for giving us power, strength, and patience .

Secondly, Our supervisor, Asst. Inst. Aymen Hussein Maloo, for his guidance and for giving us the golden notes . Without his help, this research would not be completed .

Lastly, many thanks for our friends, relatives and classmates for helping us .

Abstract

Language is what determines the regulated world, the signification of which provides the foundation of our culture, our activities and our relations. It defines our identity as a form of reassurance. It deals not only with the impossibilities of knowing the motivation of human beings, but also presents the problem of communication between human beings. Speech is, undoubtedly, the proof of existence as well as a manner of contending silence, Solitude and death, and it is man's unique heritage.

Absurd dramatists' use of language probes the limitations of language both as a means of communication and as an instrument of thought as there can be no definite meanings in a world deprived of values, principles and virtues. They have chosen to write in a language devoid of content to become the adequate representation of stagnant life; they present language as an inefficient tool to express one's thought, to comprehend the world, or to define one's self. So, Becket materialized the absurdity of modern life and human condition in his play.

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Chapter One

1.1 Samuel Beckett's Life and Works:

Samuel Barclay Beckett (13 April 1906 – 22 December 1989) was an Irish novelist, playwright, short story writer, theatre director, poet, and literary translator. A resident of Paris for most of his adult life, he wrote in both French and English. Beckett's multi-faceted work offers a bleak, tragi-comic outlook on existence and experience, often coupled with black comedy and nonsense. It became increasingly minimalist in his later career, involving more aesthetic and linguistic experimentation. He is considered one of the last modernist writers, and one of the key figures in what Martin Esslin called the "Theatre of the Absurd"(Cakirtas, 2014: 194) His best-known work is his 1953 play *Waiting for Godot*.

In 1928 he became a reader in English at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* in Paris , where he met the self-exiled Irish writer James Joyce who is the author of the modern novel “*Ulysses*” , and became a member of his circle . Members of that group or circle had been arrested by the German Gestapo , therefore he moved to a safe zone Southeastern unoccupied France and supported himself as an agricultural labourer until the country's liberation . for that resistance work he was rewarded the *Croix de Guerre* (Esslin , 2020 :4).After working as a teacher for many years , Beckett found teaching uncongenial to his creative activities and soon turned all of his attention to writing . Between 1930s to 1940s , his writing included a critical studies (Prost and others), poems and two novels (*Murphy* and *Watt*) all were in English (Roberts,2021,7). Beckett is one of the most innovative and difficult writers of the twentieth century

yet students who study his works can replace interpretation because of the simple annotation explaining the origins of references , an illusion , a character or an event rather than searching their meanings with the logic of the text . We could reach to a point that his childhood has a great impact on his works “You might say I had a happy childhoodalthough I had a little talent for happiness . My parents did everything that they could to make a child happy . But I was often lonely” so loneliness , solitude ,and alienation would become recurrent themes in his later works (McDonald , 2006:7). Beckett gained famous mostly through his plays than through his novels . the most well-known plays are (Waiting for Godot 1953), (Endgame 1957) and (Happy Days 1961) that held the novels’ same themes . he indeed gained a large quantity of literary outputs including publishing the poetry collection , *Mirlitonades* 1978, the extended prose pieces and a lot of novels as well as short stories (Encyclopedia of World Biography , 4) . His fruitful life was stopped in Paris , France at December 22, 1989 .(Esslin , 2018:9).

Beckett was awarded the 1969 Nobel Prize in Literature "for his writing, which—in new forms for the novel and drama—in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation" He was elected Saoi of Aosdána in 1984 (Ackerley, Gontarski, 2004: 108) .Beckett is most famous for his play *En attendant Godot* (Waiting for Godot; 1953). Like most of his works after 1947, the play was first written in French. Beckett worked on the play between October 1948 and January 1949.[28] His partner, Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, was integral to its success. Dechevaux-Dumesnil became his agent and sent the manuscript to multiple producers

until they met Roger Blin, the soon-to-be director of the play (Bair, 1982: 13).

Blin's knowledge of French theatre and vision alongside Beckett knowing what he wanted the play to represent contributed greatly to its success. In a much-quoted article, the critic Vivian Mercier wrote that Beckett "has achieved a theoretical impossibility—a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats. What's more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice."(Ackerley&Gontarski, 2004: 622). The play was published in 1952 and premièred in 1953 in Paris; an English translation was performed two years later. The play was a critical, popular, and controversial success in Paris. It opened in London in 1955 to mainly negative reviews, but the tide turned with positive reactions from Harold Hobson in *The Sunday Times* and, later, Kenneth Tynan. After the showing in Miami, the play became extremely popular, with highly successful performances in the US and Germany. The play is a favourite: it is not only performed frequently but has globally inspired playwrights to emulate it (Bair, 1982: 13). This is the sole play the manuscript of which Beckett never sold, donated or gave away. He refused to allow the play to be translated into film but did allow it to be played on television(Ackerley&Gontarski, 2004: 622).

1.2 Waiting For Godot's summery:

The play is divided into two acts. In Act I, two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon; or "Didi" and "Gogo", are waiting on a country road for a mysterious Godot, who eventually sends a boy to inform them he is not coming but will surely come the following day. The tramps think about separation and even suicide in each act, yet remain dependent on each other and never do anything. The other two characters, Pozzo and Lucky, who are physically linked to each other by a rope, make continuous purposeless journeys to fill their existence. The play ends with the two tramps still waiting for Godot, who never comes

As the father of absurdist theatre, no examination of the form can take place without looking to Samuel Beckett, the Irish playwright known for *Endgame* and his most famous and successful play, *Waiting for Godot*. And *Act Without Words*. (Chamberlain,2016 : 9) *Waiting for Godot*, tragicomedy in two acts by Irish writer Samuel Beckett, published in 1952 in French as *En attendant Godot* and first produced in 1953. *Waiting for Godot* was a true innovation in drama and the Theatre of the Absurd's first theatrical success. The play consists of conversations between Vladimir and Estragon, who are waiting for the arrival of the mysterious Godot, who continually sends word that he will appear but who never does. They encounter Lucky and Pozzo, they discuss their miseries and their lots in life, they consider hanging themselves, and yet they wait. Often perceived as being tramps, Vladimir and Estragon are a pair of human beings who do not know why they were put on earth; they make the tenuous assumption that there must be some point to their existence, and they look to Godot for enlightenment. Because they hold out hope for meaning and direction,

they acquire a kind of nobility that enables them to rise above their futile existence.(Britannica, 2019: 1)

Chapter Two

2.1 The Theater of the Absurd.

The theatre of the Absurd or absurdism is a movement where theater was less interested or concerned with a plot which had an obvious beginning , middle , and an end , yet it dealt with the human condition . two main playwrights of this time were Samuel Beckett, whose plays tended to deal with the human condition in the metaphysical senses , and Eugene Jonesco who was interested in the social relationships (Delaney,2019:1) . Theater of the Absurd is considered as a form of drama which concentrates and highlights the absurdity of human existence by employing disjointed ,repetitious and meaningless dialogue , useless and confusing situations as well as plots that are unreal or illogical (Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary) . it's origins are obscure plus it was not a conscious movement . in addition to that , there was no organized school of playwright who claimed it for themselves . European playwrights like Samuel Beckett , Eugen Lonesco and Jean Genet , viewed their plays as an expression of their personal vision and opinion of the world (Chamberlain , 2016:2) .

Zhu (2013) stated that the theater of the absurd occurred in France as a new form of drama after the end of the second world war . its name was connected by Martin Iselin's book *The Theatre Of The Absurd* 1961 a strange form and contents plays were created reveling the human existence in the modern society . By some playwrights it reached its top position from 1960s to 1970s and spread in the other countries (p:1) .those plays when first performed on the stage , they puzzled their audiences since they

were strangely different than anything performed on the stage (Alsharadgeh, 2018:3) The absurd dramatists , however, did not solve the issue of man's meaningless existence . in fact they offered no solution to the issue (Alsharadgeh,2018:4)

2.2 The Themes of the Theater of the Absurd.

That swept post world war second in Europe included primary of the acknowledgment that the 'Certitudes' and 'Assumptions' of the prior generations had been examined and discovered wanting that they were discredited as cheap and childish illusions. Two themes which reoccur frequently throughout absurdist dramas are meaningless world and the isolation of the individual (Esslin, 2004: 23) .However , the absurdist playwrights tend to create characters with unknown or strange personalities on the stage with an absurdity sense to dig out their hopelessness to life and society . their language is usually simple and suitable (Jallouli, 2019 :3).

“the language of the absurd is not conspicuous for its lyricism or vernal seduction . the characters do not exhibit any dazzling repartees or witticism , they use a rather down to earth , banal language . in fact , they are involved almost exclusively in speech acts that occur in everyday interactions : declarations , commands , greetings , leave- takings , requests , insults , short questions-answer sequences”(Sherzer , 1978: 271)

Here is an absurd dialogue :

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.

Vladimir: (Sententious.) To every man his little cross. (He sighs.)
Till he dies. (Afterthought.) And is forgotten. (57) (Jerns, 2013: 16)

2.3 Absurd theatre in Waiting for Godot.

If one takes the very titles of both the texts and compare it with reference to absurdity, then it is made aware that both the titles show the absurd nature of the texts. For example the title “Waiting for Godot” reflects absurdity in the sense that it too is full of problems and dilemmas as human existence is. As the title is “Waiting for Got”, but still nobody knows that who Godot is. Usually waiting is done for those who we associate some meaning and purpose but here in this play neither purpose nor meaning is associated and hence create the effect of meaninglessness in the title. It is this meaningless which not only makes things ambiguous but also absurd .(Jerns, 2013: 12)

2.3.1 Absurdity in Setting:

The setting of the play “Waiting for Godot” is an odd and alien one. It is a roadside where two men are standing under a barren tree and waiting for someone named Godot. This is this strangeness, barrenness and loneliness, which set the environment of despair where one’s hopes could not fulfill. Here too, the two persons who seem deserted and isolated from the community, with rags and tattered clothes got no destiny except waiting. The strangeness and despair natureof the setting produces sense of anarchy and thus adds to the absurd nature of the drama. (Jerns, 2013: 13)

2.3.2 Absurdity in Structure:

The play “Waiting for Godot” is structured in a way, which presents the idea not only about the uselessness and meaninglessness of time but also of life. The basic structure of the drama where being tired of their lives and waiting but without any help from Godot, the two main characters with non-sensical existence, two times both in Act one and Act two, try to commit suicides. The continuous waiting increases their despair and their lives are disgusted in this way and thus absurd. This is this structure, which shows the absurd nature of the drama) .(Jerns, 2013: 13)

2.3.3 Absurdity in Theme:

As we have been through the structures, titles and settings of both the texts and found elements of absurdity in them. So the same can be the case with the themes of the texts. The major theme in both the texts seems to be that of isolation; physical, spiritual and mental isolation. If “Waiting for Godot” is taken, it is obvious from the setting i.e., country roadside, a barren tree and evening time and two absurd characters Estragon and Vladimir, the isolation and detachment in this case is more physical than spiritual one. They are waiting for Godot quite away from their community in a detached and absurd manner .(Jerns, 2013: 14)

2.3.4 Absurdity in Characters:

The characters of the texts also got elements of absurdity. In order to prove it, if we consider the main characters of “Waiting for Godot” i.e., Estragon and Vladimir, we can see that they are waiting without knowing the purpose they are waiting for. Furthermore, they are not making sense of the lives and existence and that is why they think about suicide. In the

same way, they also indicate the carelessness of Godot towards them. This relationship is represented in the shape of master slave dichotomy named Pozzo, the master and Lucky, the slave, where no importance is given to the slave and is overburdened without any care. This isto make Estragon and Vladimir realize that though you are waiting for Godot but this could be your situation in the end. Another thing which is also associated with the absurdity in the characters of “Waiting for Godot” is their trust on each other for holding up and support. Each of them believes to get some sort of help fromthe other one and thus tries to put a seal to his chaotic life).(Jerns, 2013: 15)

2.3.5 Absurdity in Actions/Dialogues:

In “Waiting for Godot”, the very first page and in fact the very first dialogue between Estragon and Vladimir has absurdity and purposelessness of life. Estragon while pulling off his shoes, panting and quite exhausted rests for sometimes when

Vladimir enters. Estragon says:

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 haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon.) So there you are again. (p-1). (Jerns, 2013: 15)

This dialogue bring into surface the absurd nature of the play where though Estragon is discussing his problem of taking off of his shoes but it represents the entire human existence where man is disappointed and disillusioned by the very fact of existence which bring despair and hence, absurdity. It means that man cannot change his situation. What simply he can do is to exist and suffer. This “nothing to be done” is repeated four times in this play (pp. 1, 3, 4& 15). It stresses the helpless nature of man. The word “again” in the above extract refers to repetition which makes the life monotonous and boring. Similarly, Vladimir’s state of action is also symbolic in nature as he gets inflicted with prostrate disease due to which he is moving with legs wide apart and with stiff strides. It represents man’s suffering in this universe where life is nothing but absurd. In another place ,the despair in life is discussed as ”:

Vladimir: (gloomily). It's too much for one man. (Pause. Cheerfully.)
On the other hand what's the good of losing heart now, that's what I say. We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties.
(p-2) (Jerns, 2013: 16)

Vladimir is fed up of the routine miseries of life and that is why he says “it is too much for one man”. He means to say that life is a sort of burden where living has got no incentives and no purpose and hence, quite absurd. Vladimir’s actions too are absurd. He starts gloomily and after a pause becomes cheerful when he says that it is no use of crying over spilt milk. It means that the time has gone when he should have thought about these troubles. Now, he has lost all that he had. His life is completely absurd. The two character of the play “Waiting for Godot” are in fact inviting death. They cannot bear this absurd life anymore where there is no

clarity of purpose and goal. They invite each other to kill each other so that they can escape this absurdity of life. This fact is clear from the following dialogue .

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.

Vladimir: (Sententious.) To every man his little cross. (He sighs.)
Till he dies. (Afterthought.) And is forgotten. (57) (Jerns, 2013: 16)

Chapter Three

3.1 The Essence of Language in Waiting for Godot.

Samuel Beckett has chosen to write in a language that always points out that the world is absurd and chaotic, that man is alone and in despair. He demonstrates that language is the fundamental means of deception. But his language is used as a system devoid of content which moves only with itself. Beckett's language is a mixture of elements rarely found together in the same narrative. It is "murky, baffling, circular, contradictory, full of offensive details, furious violence and sardonic, terrifying insights into the meaninglessness of human life."(Graver & Federman, 1979: 4) His language is difficult to interpret for its general verbosity by the difficulty of the words and phrases. It is serious because it, mainly, deals with complex and oddly tragic characters who cannot reconcile the unreality of the seen world with the reality of the unseen. Language is reduced by Beckett making it nothing more than a deserted castle whose gaping cracks let in the wind and rain. He, however, uses it just like the body and the mind of his characters, considers it as a faulty and inadequate tool. Speech, another mark of man's finitude, breaks down within the individual. Moreover, it sometimes leads to deterioration and often to total failure of communication with others.(Butler, 1961: 17).

Since Beckett uses language to show the function of language in human existence, the speech patterns of the characters: recurrent vocabulary, pronoun shifts, sound effects, etc., re-enforce the major themes and the mixed tone of the play. In other words, the comic effects of language used by characters grimly underline the themes of tedium and

absurdity that dominate the plays. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir is the character who gropes for meaning, but the meaning does not appear. His attempts are reduced to incoherence and, finally, silence by his partner, Estragon. (Graver & Federman, 1979: 4)

3.2 Labyrinth of Language.

The dialogue, between the characters, is studded with words that have no meaning for normal ears. They (words) reconcile themselves with reason that makes the dialogue often baffling. Beckett makes it difficult to demonstrate which comes first, memory deterioration or language disintegration, one clearly accompanies the other. Thus, in Lucky's case a traumatized memory is combined with "partial aphasia and ultimately total silence." (Graver & Federman, 1979: 6). This situation manifests itself in stuttering (acacacacademie; anthropometric; qua-quaquaqua, (Beckett, 2002: 10) in stammering (etablitable, ce qui suit qui... etc. (Beckett, 2002: 52-53). In addition to the aphasia and stuttering there is some evidence of a certain amount of speech disintegration that are ellipsis and stammering which are observable in Pozzo's speech from the stress of Vladimir's criticism:

I can't bear it...any longer...the way he goes on...you've no idea...it's terrible...he must go...(he waves his arm)...I'm going mad (He collapses his head in his hands)...I can't bear it...any longer...(Beckett, 2002: 22-23)

One of the major causes of misunderstanding among the characters proceeds from faulty communication due to types of imprecision such as ambiguity, misconstruing a question, confusion of sounds, etc. *Waiting*

for Godot opens on an ambiguous note, “Nothing to be done,” that does not lead into a dialogue but into monologues- Estragon discussing his shoes, Vladimir their tedious existence and their inability to alter it. Again misunderstanding arises from ambiguous syntax when Pozzo asks “Are you friends?” Estragon interprets, this is to mean “Are you and Vladimir friends?”, and Vladimir has to explain that Pozzo is asking whether Vladimir and Estragon are friends of his.(Beckett, 2002: 97). Beckett, in his use of language, reveals the fallibility of language as a medium for the discovery and communication of metaphysical truth. He ensures that his writing remains a constant struggle, a painful wrestling with the spirit of language itself. The themes of *Waiting for Godot* and other plays persist the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to incessant change, his use of language probes the limitations of language both as a vehicle for the expression of valid statement- an instrument of thoughts or truths.(Esslin, 1967: 84)

3.3 Inefficacy of language for conveying thought.

Since Beckett’s characters are deliberately drawn as generalized Characters, their speeches have the function of not individualizing, But generalizing them by means of recurring words and phrases in Their speeches which portray the same puzzled frustrated but Determined men in speech of comprehending the world and Themselves through their narratives. All the characters vacillate Between hope and despair concerning the completion of their quest. Esslin asserts that “these characters can be linked when they Set out with the same naïve belief, that with a little more effort their Quest will be ended.”(Esslin, 1967: 84) All of them express their belief in progress And hope to move forward in their

quest, just to contradict Themselves by sinking into despair, but they are late to rekindle Their hope afterwards. For them, language becomes a “buzzing” Sound, empty and meaningless. In the narrative prose Malone Dies Malone says:

All I heard was one vast continuous buzzing. The volume of Sound perceived remained no doubt the same, I had simply Lost the faculty of decomposing it. The noise of nature of Mankind and even my own, were all jumbled together in one And the same unbridled gibberish.(Molloy, 1959: 50)

In Unnamable the Unnamable agrees, with Malone that he sees No difference between man’s language and the sound of beats; “the Sounds of beats, the sound of men, sounds in the daytime and Sounds at night... all sounds, there is only one, continuous, day and Night.”(Molloy, 1959: 390). The conversation between the characters seems to be void of Meaning. There is no apparent meaning in it, because their life is meaningless and also their world has no apparent meaning .Beckett’s language is totally separate from knowledge or truth. This meaninglessness can be expanded to all Beckett’s language. His characters engage in ridiculous language to pass the time and to give them the impression that they exist. But Beckett’s language reveals that man is essentially bewildered, disoriented and lost. In spite man longs for knowledge, he has only the words of his speech to use, and these are inadequate. Words are little suited to knowledge since each word is surrounded by the undertones of its own history. Words are inadequate for piercing the essence of reality. Language, with which Beckett wrestles, is his medium and its inadequacy haunts him. He makes his task more difficult by occupying

himself with suffering creatures. They suffer from partial aphasia which manifests itself in their stuttering "quaquaquaqua".(Beckett, 2002:51) Waiting for Godot is perhaps more lurid than The rest of his plays. There is hardly any action, and the dialogue is Repetitive and contradictory; language like everything else being Incapable of giving meaning to an absurd world. The speeches of the characters subvert the conventional function Of speech to individualize characters because their language Contributes to their anonymity, and because their speeches, like Their actions, are similar to each other, giving the sense that the Same puzzled and frustrated voice. Beckett presents language as an Inefficient tool to express one's thoughts to comprehend the world, Or to define one's self. Hence, the efforts of the characters to Comprehend the whole or to comprehend the thought or to define The self are doomed to failure. Their attempt to comprehend the World fails because if the world is unreadable and its sense Unattainable, human effort to create it is doomed to failure.(Molloy, 1959: 391)

3.4 Inefficacy of Language for Passing Time.

Time is another recurring theme in the works of Samuel Beckett Who regards it as an enemy that ruins people and carries them to Their ultimate end, that is death. So time and death are closely Interrelated for him. He calls time "the double-headed monster of Damnation and salvation."(Beckett, 2002:1) Consequently time figures as a Destructive power in his works. Time is also treated as a void which Needs to be filled up in verbal or non-verbal ways. Time is an Infinite emptiness that stretches without any beginning or end; Therefore, characters cannot differentiate yesterday from today, and Memory fails them since time is

composed of days almost identical With each other. Beckett also elaborates on memory in relation to Time; memory is unreliable since it is impossible to remember past Events as they happened. What one remembers is just distorted Pictures of past events because “people deform the days by altering The pictures of past actions which reside in the memories stored in The mind.”(Ben-zui, 1986:24) Therefore, it is impossible to be sure about past Events. In *Waiting for Godot*, the two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, Who represent all humanity, utter remarks that any one of us can Utter. These two men speak to each other without understanding. They do this to keep busy. To pass time, they talk and talk about Godot, whom they really don’t know much about. Words are intrinsically inadequate for thinking and Communicating; they are nothing but words, without Representational content. Winnie in *Happy Days* says, “...I look and I see pictures, creatures, emitting sounds that are a kind of language I no longer understand or even register.”(Calder, 1964: 141)

Conclusion

The writer is famous for his absurdity, so his present works, also shows Absurdity because of the meaninglessness of actions, sterility of the characters and strangeness of setting etc. Furthermore, we can say that both the works show some sort of absurdity. Habit, Boredom, monotony, ignorance and impotence which enveloped the world after the wars and created an absurd existence, is recreated by Beckett in "Waiting for Godot" Beckett captured this situation and depicted it through the deadening condition of the two tramps in a null and void state without any real action.

The play has often been interpreted as a parable where Godot stands as God, or for a mythical human being or for the meaning of life, death or something eventful

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