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Today's fear of 'Being' in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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Abstract

*The New Theatre, The Theatre of the Absurd emerged in Paris in the 1950's and it took the theatre world by surprise. In the new theatrical context, the term is used to talk about plays that are out of harmony with reason or convention. The Theatre of the Absurd has its affinities with existentialism. It consists of the plays that do not satisfy the expectations of audiences, plays that do not conform to the codes and conventions of theatre that had governed play till then. The present paper made an attempt to discuss how in *Waiting for Godot* Beckett describes the existential philosophy and its absurdity and how human beings simply exist in a universe that does not have any overarching meaning. *Waiting for Godot* has an overall feeling of absurdity while simultaneously lead to existentialism. Beckett warns the common reader against wasting one's life and he make realize them to make meaning out of their life instead of simply living.*

Keywords: *Absurdity, Existentialism, Disillusionment, Inadequacy, Disintegration.*

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After Second World War, the theatre was fruitless. New interests were carried towards new subjects. During that period, a new theatre appeared in front of the audience with a greater force, without any showy manifestation, Theatre of the Absurd. The main feature of it is its refusal of realism. The main principle is to search, on the contrary, in a fundamental unreality which manifests itself as much in the framework as in the intrigue or the characters who oscillate between isolation, lack of feeling, boredom, disillusionment, improbability etc. Theatre of the Absurd is having affinities with the mime, clown-plays, and improvisation etc. This new theatre may be called the 'Theatre as Ritual' which necessarily seeks a collective experience, means in which everyone participates. It is an experience of individual vision. The spectator may also experience the same. It was originated in France, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Samuel Beckett, Fernando Arrabal, Eugene Ionesco were leading figures of the theatre. Albert Einstein argues that:

If at first an idea is not absurd,
there is no hope for it.

(Einstein's Heroes)

What is absurd? The dictionary meaning of word absurd is against reason or common sense, clearly false or foolish; funny because clearly unsuitable or impossible. The book *The Theatre of the Absurd* by Martin Esslin, adds absurd as 'out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous,... illogical'. Simply absurd means 'ridiculous'. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* presents an existentialist point of view of the universe and reality and he forces the audience to 'consider the meaning of their existence in a world where there appears to be no true order or meaning'. It seeks to find and define meaning and identity in a world of disillusionment and chaos. *Waiting For Godot*, represents the repetition of life and the premise is the futility of waiting. The characters show no growth and development and the language and set are also very basic. It represents desperation and despair in life.

The Theatre of the Absurd ... can be seen as the reflection of what seems to be the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time. The hallmark of this attitude is its sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions.

(Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*)

Waiting for Godot is an absurdist play by Samuel Beckett, in which two characters Vladimir and Estragon, wait endlessly and in vain for someone named Godot to arrive. It was voted 'the most significant English language play of the twentieth century'. It is Beckett's translation of his own French translation, *En Attendant Godot*. There are certain incidents in the play which clearly define the absurdity. The two tramps wait for someone whom they did not know and they claim him as an acquaintance but in fact hardly know him, admitting that they would not recognize him when they see him. The play opens with the character Estragon struggling to remove his boot from his foot. Estragon eventually gives up, muttering, 'nothing to be done'. His friend Vladimir takes up the thought and muses on it, the implication being that nothing is a thing that has to be done. They both are incapable of anything. When Estragon finally succeeds in removing his boot, he looks and feels inside but finds nothing. On one occasion when they feel that Godot is near, they both mutter 'We are saved'.

In Act II, the boy again returns to inform that not to expect Godot today, but he promises them that he will arrive the next day. They consider suicide but their rope with the help of which they want to hang, breaks in two when they tug it. On one occasion Estragon's trousers fall down, but he does not notice until Vladimir tells him to pull them up. They revolve around to bring a more suitable piece and hang themselves the next day, if Godot fails to arrive.

“VLADIMIR: We will hang ourselves tomorrow.

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Unless Godot come.

ESTRAGON: And if he comes?

VLADIMIR: We will be saved”.

(*Waiting For Godot*,87)

During the whole course they decide that they will move, they said it twice, but does not moved. They both agreed but neither of them makes any move to go.

“VLADIMIR: Let's go.

ESTRAGON: Let's go”

(Samuel Beckett, *Waiting For Godot*)

There are certain incidents in the play which describe that they have no ambition, no special purpose, no place to go. Their predicaments are the common, human ones, aching feet, sour breath, the pangs of hunger and the ever revolving fear. When the two friends decide to pass their time by means of exercises they alternately use the words such as 'our movements', 'our elevations', 'our relaxations', 'our elongations', when they decide to abuse each other they use the expressions such as 'morain', 'vermin', 'abortion', 'sewer rat', 'curate', 'crritic' etc. All these words lead to laughter but at the same time describes the senselessness of the language they are using for each other. The endless cross talk act of Vladimir and Estragon is at the same time funny as well as sad. Funny in the way the cross talks are humorous and sad because their main reason of this senselessness is to pass the time, to fill the gap.

They give birth astride of a grave,
the light gleams an instant, then it's
night once more.

(Samuel Beckett, *Waiting For Godot*)

According to Ionesco, Absurd is 'that purpose... cut off from his religious, metaphysical, is devoid of and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless'. At the same time theatre of the absurd, express its 'sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the abandonment of the rational devices and discursive thought'.

The basic existential questions arise in our mind are why we are alive, why we have to die, where is injustice and suffering, why do we exist, etc. Whereas, existentialism is a philosophical movement which emphasizes on individual existence, freedom and choice. As Descartes argues that 'I think therefore I am'. In other words, 'existence precedes essence'. Existentialism describes the human conditions and states that man exists and in that existence man defines himself and the word in his own subjectivity, and wanders between choice, freedom and existential angst. We can create a world around us through our own action. Things exist as well as we exist. We are living beings. We should create on our own, unless we have no meaning as non living things have. Human beings are totally free to do anything and they are responsible for what they make of themselves.

Albert Camus, one of the existentialist philosophers, in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* says that the human condition is essentially absurd, or devoid of purpose. The writers share a pessimistic vision of life in which human beings are struggling for their existence to find a purpose. The resulting trauma and turmoil of the living under threat of nuclear annihilation and the World War II bring the precariousness of human life. Theatre of the Absurd is surreal, illogical, conflict less and plots less. Some people describe it is an accurate parable on the human condition in which "the more things change, the more they are the same".

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It also describes their helplessness, frustrations and resentments. It makes us keenly aware of the human predicament and human misery. Life is presented as a bleak and hopeless. It dramatizes the habit, boredom and sufferings of being. In the middle of the play, Vladimir says 'habit is a great deadener. The play is about ignorance and impotence. The feeling of helplessness is conveyed to us in the very opening dialogue when we are told that Estragon has been beaten as usual by the same lot, of unknown people during the night which he felt compelled to spend in a ditch. It describes the miserable condition of the two tramps. The absurdity is also dramatized by the two more characters Lucky and Pozzo. Lucky's plight is indeed, pitiable. He is no better than a beast of burden and there are sores on his neck. Pozzo treats him worse than an animal. Pozzo – Lucky relationship represents a master slave relationship, the tyranny of the master arouses deep resentment in us, and the abject surrender of the slave arouses mingled feelings of pity and disgust. Pozzo's going blind and Lucky going dumb deepens the tragic and pathetic condition. They both feel helpless. Estragon on one point says 'Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful'. At another point Estragon expresses his misery 'All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud'. On one occasion Pozzo utter 'One day he went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die...it's night once more'.

The overall feeling of isolation in the play is existential. The fact that Vladimir and Estragon do nothing, except be and exist, it portrays existential theme. The two wait for Godot instead of searching him out, and though they want to leave, they never do. By the end of the play, one gets the feeling that the two will remain in strange condition in the strange place, waiting for the man who will never come.

VLADIMIR: Well, shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

[They do not move.]

(*Waiting For Godot*, 47)

Existentialism leads to some other basic fact as the loss of identity. Vladimir and Estragon are called by the nick names as Didi and Gogo. Vladimir is also called as Mr. Albert by the boy messenger. It dictates their pathetic condition as they are not even called by their original names. It is the loss of identity that causes mankind's helplessness that is why existentialists emphasized giving one's life a purpose. They would argue that God has not given your life a purpose, and therefore it can mean nothing, unless you give it meaning yourself. Beckett warns the audience against wasting one's life by 'waiting instead of doing'. The way in which Lucky has been presented to us represent us an instrument in the hand of Pozzo. He carries the orders of the Pozzo. This has been shown by Beckett how, one can live one's life without any meaning or purpose and to make people contemplate and think about this and may be realize how they too are Estragon and Vladimir or Lucky , living one's existence waiting or allowing one's life to be controlled by another. There is some chaos created by Beckett as Vladimir and Estragon wait for two days and then they again decided to return back but still they do not move .They will hang them tomorrow if Godot would not come but they only verbally say but do not do any action. Another question arises in the mind that Godot exist or not? If yes, why didn't he appear in the play as they both are waiting for him endlessly and if not, then from where the boy messenger come to increase their trouble. There is complete disparity and chaos between the character's words and actions. All the happenings in the play lead to absurdity and it present a very simple question in the minds of the people why do they exist and at the same time it aware the people to do something instead of wasting their life. Beckett tries to educate people and want to tell that, we are not essentially good or bad; we are what we make of ourselves by our own choice.

Thus we can say that absurdity and existentialism run simultaneously in the play and he shows how creative evolution explores the elements of experience and shows how and to what extent all human beings carry the seeds of such depression and disintegration within the deeper layers of their personalities, which is a meditative rhapsody on the nullity of human attainment.

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