

## Absurdity in Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot"

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### Abstract:

This research paper explores the absurdity in Samuel Beckett's notable play "Waiting for Godot". Samuel Beckett is considered to be a prominent figure among the *French Absurdist*.

"Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett, is one of the masterpieces of absurdist literature. The creative features of this play such as title, setting, structure, theme, characters, dialogues, and actions are overviewed through the lens of absurdity. The play "Waiting for Godot" was first written in French in 1948 and called *En attendant Godot*. Elements of absurdity for making this play are very lively and charming. Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot" focuses on the absurdity of life. This play completely deals with the life of a modern man who feels tense and its meaningless life. According to the Absurdist, "There is no meaning in life. The life is permeated men but there is no man. Human life is like a bubble" This work based on the belief that the present world is irrational, purposelessness, and meaningless and the search for order brings the individual into disagreement with the universe. This paper is an enterprise to shed light on "Waiting for Godot" as an absurd play.

**Key Words:** Absurdity, Samuel Beckett, Belief, Waiting for Godot, *En attendant Godot*.

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### I. INTRODUCTION:

Absurdity means meaninglessness, purposelessness, silly, strange, incongruence, ridiculousness, bizarre, nonsense. An absurdity is a thing that is awfully unreasonable, so as to be foolish or not taken seriously, or the state of being so. According to Oxford English Dictionary, Absurdity means "the quality or state of being ridiculous or widely unreasonable". The word absurd was coined by "Martin Esslin to delineate the anti-realistic post-war drama of playwrights as Beckett, Arthur Adamov, and Jean Genet" (Nelson, 1993, p. 67). Absurd play is the complete denial of old values. It has no plot, no characterization, no logical sequence, no rising, and falling action, on story, no clear theme, no proper beginning, middle, and end, no pointed dialogues and finally its language is not poetic.

Absurdity is in fact a condition where man is compelled to exist without his individualism in society and hence does not possess any degree of effective communication (Robert, 1995). Martin Esslin at first used this term in his writing. The term actually used to delineate the nonsensical, irrational, meaningless, purposeless, foolish, and silly aspects of human life. The French philosopher Albert Camus also believed, "Accepting the absurdity of everything around us is one step, a necessary experience: it should not become a dead end. It arouses a revolt that can become fruitful"

There are many dramas in literature world based upon the philosophy of absurdism. Absurdism is applied to the plays written in the 1950, and 1960, by the writers including Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, and Holder Pinter. Among those writers Samuel Beckett is more important because he has written many plays. "Waiting for Godot" was his first play which proved to be the most successful absurd play.

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) is one of the leading literary and dramatic figures of the twentieth century. Samuel Beckett was an author, playwright, and a critic. He was born on April 13, 1906 in Dublin in Ireland. During the 1930s and 1940s he wrote his first novels and short stories. He wrote a trilogy of novels in the 1950s as well as famous plays like *Waiting for Godot*. In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for his outstanding contribution in literature. Samuel Beckett started his literary career as a novelist. He published many stories and poetry. He was well known for his notable play "Waiting for Godot".

"Waiting for Godot" is an absurd drama and it presents the absurdity of human life. There is no female character and the characters of the play are not sure about their identities. The entire situation produces meaninglessness which is another characteristic of absurd play. In this drama nothing is happen and no development of plot is found.

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The title of the play "Waiting for Godot" reflects absurdity in the sense that it too is replete with problems and dilemmas as human existence is. As the title is "Waiting for Godot", but still nobody knows that Who Godot is. The subject matter of the drama is not Godot, but waiting which is an important aspect of human condition. It is only while waiting we could experience the passage of time. The way Vladimir and Estragon passes time shows the utter meaninglessness of life and the struggle that existence is. The waiting of Vladimir and Estragon for Godot is an endless waiting. They are waiting without knowing the purpose they are waiting for. Again the boy informs them that Godot is not coming and they wait for Godot till the next day. Such endless waiting also seems absurd.

In "Waiting for Godot" the very first dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon has meaningless and purposelessness of life. Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before Enter Vladimir. 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)

This dialogue brings into exterior the absurd nature of the play. Actually it represents the entire human existence where man of the present world is disappointed.

The basic structure of the drama presents the idea not only about the usefulness and meaninglessness of time but also of life of the present world. The two main characters Vladimir and Estragon with non-sensical existence, in Act one and Act two, they try to commit suicides two times. They cannot bear this life anymore. They invite each other to kill each other so that they can escape this meaningless of life. This incident 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.

The continuous waiting for Godot increases their despair and their lives are disgusted in thus way. The dialogues of Vladimir and Estragon revolve around one thing. In the whole drama they repeat the same dialogues.

VLADIMIR: Well Shall We Go?

ESTRAGON: Yes Let's Go.

(But they do not move.)

They change the dialogues but they do not take proper decision. This shows the absurdity of human life especially modern human beings.

Every good drama has motivational characters but in this drama, we have five characters that are not recognizable human beings. They pass their time with doing through meaningless activities. We don't know past of the characters. They are not introduced to the audience. We know only their names and their miserable situation.

Thus this play "Waiting for Godot" contains all the elements of absurdism. The central themes in Waiting for Godot include the human condition, absurdism and nihilism, and friendship. The human condition of the present world: The hopelessness in Vladimir and Estragon's lives demonstrates the extent to which humans rely on illusions—such as religion, according to Beckett—to give hope to a meaningless existence.

#### **Research Objectives:**

- To explore the absurdity in "Waiting for Godot"
- To analyze the meaningless life of modern human beings.
- To define the need of valuable human life.
- To know drawbacks of modern man in present world.

**Research Questions:**

- How does Samuel Beckett propagate the logos of life in “Waiting for Godot”
- What is the prime reason behind the purposeless life of human beings?
- Why does the modern human life remain meaningless?

**II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

This research paper focuses on the absurdity in “Waiting for Godot”. The nature of the research is qualitative approach as for as descriptive method is used for analysis. “Waiting for Godot” is the text which is taken as a sample to make clear the absurdity in the mentioned play.

**III. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

The complex structure of “Waiting for Godot” is based upon symbols and ideological content. For this, it has been always a central target for world’s researchers. Many researchers interpreted its different rudiments from different angles.

Holder bloom edited a book entitled “Samuel Beckett: Modern Critical Views” (1985), which is an important criticism almost on all the important works of Samuel Beckett, especially “Waiting for Godot”. The book consists of various critical commentaries by different scholars on the author under analysis, from different angles.

Martin Julius Esslin edited a book entitled “An Anatomy of Drama”, which is a thought provoking book. He also edited another book, entitled “Samuel Beckett: Twentieth Century Views” (1980), which consists of various views on the author under discussion, relating him to the “Theatre of the Absurd” According to Martin Esslin, Absurdism is "the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose" Absurdist drama asks its viewer to "draw his own conclusions, make his own errors". Though Theatre of the Absurd may be seen as nonsense, they have something to say and can be understood".

The French philosopher Albert Camus in his philosophical essay (1942) “The Myth of Sisyphus” “delineates absurdity as a confrontation and opposition a conflict or a “divorce between two ideals. Specially, he defines the human situation as absurd as the confrontation man’s desire for significance and the silent, cold universe”.

Danish philosopher Soren Kierke-Goard wrote comprehensively on the absurdity of the world. “In 19th century in his journals (1849) Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard wrote extensively about the absurdity of the world. In his journals, Kierkegaard writes about the absurd: “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 ... I must act, but reflection has closed the road so I take one of the possibilities and say: This is what I do, I cannot do otherwise because I am brought to a standstill by my powers of reflection.”

**IV. FINDINGS:**

The play “Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett is an absurd play for there is no female character. All the characters are devoid of identity. Beckett’s play “Waiting for Godot” carefully delineates the life of modern human beings. This play deals with the meaningless and aimless of human life. Beckett’s play “Waiting for Godot” has no motivational characters, has no conventional plot, and has no setting, has no beginning, has no middle, and has no ending. All the characters of this drama and dialogues and their actions evidently show the absurdity of human beings. The play “Waiting for Godot” contains almost all the elements of an absurd play.

**V. CONCLUSION:**

Thus the play “Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett contains almost all the elements of a absurd play. It delineates all the elements of the absurdity through the two main characters “Vladimir” and “Estragon”.Waiting for Godot emphasizes on the absurdity of human existence by employing repetitions, meaningless dialogues, purposeless, foolish, nonsensical, silly, and confusing situations which are opposed to truth or reason. Roby Cohn, an American theater scholar and a leading authority on playwright Samuel Beckett, looks upon "Waiting for Godot" as one of the master — pieces of Absurdist Literature. As Nealon puts it "Waiting for Godot" is an attack on modernism with its ideological and Grand Narrative that claims to interpret the world Estragon and Vladimir are trapped by their modernist nostalgia for legitimation in Godot”

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