

Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" A Literary Ideological Representation

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Abstract

The study explores the factors that led Beckett to abandon religiousness ideology and asserts existential ideas, in his life and writings. The events are exemplified in the twentieth century trauma, as well as his mother. They were philosophically denoted in his play Waiting for Godot (1953). The play bears concepts such as meaninglessness and anguish, where the characters do not have fixed identities; they suffer from the self being. The study follows a qualitative descriptive research method; existential principles. It confirmed that: the concept of "self" is heavily projected and revealed in a very philosophical and ideological manner. Likewise, experience is expressed in a far more profound and fundamental nature than a mere biography. "Suffering of being" is mirrored and reflected as well.

Key words: Modernism Existentialism, Absurdism, Ideology, Philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett witnessed twentieth century events in different levels. As a result, he crystallizes the contextualized ideology through his oeuvre drama. He created characters to deal with the great obsessions

of modern time. Likewise, he fabricated dramatic techniques that suits the condition of the modern man. His play *Waiting for Godot* bears concepts such as meaningless and anguish. Characters do not have fixed identities; they suffer from the self being. As well, freedom has become a confusing question that renders them anxious while choosing one option among various, and it makes them responsible for their free choices. Therefore, the characters tend to be passive agents in life, which is in fact another choice.

The study tends to delve into the internal and external forces that led Beckett to react against the 19th century and become absurdist. These events are considered in two levels: in a border sense, exemplified in twentieth century trauma, and in narrow sense; the engraved images of the author's early stage of life: "the datum of knowledge from the most casual perception of some naïve experiences to "a priori knowledge," which are taken as absolute insights into "necessary essences" and portrayed in a variety of literary forms. In other words, it was a time when the author had numbers of questions and he could not find answers for them. All in all, it is a sort of a journey where a protagonist zealously searched for the truth and expressed, as such ideology in a philosophical manner .

Thereby, the paper pursues an answer for the question of why and/or what are the core conditions in which Beckett holds the meaning of life freedom, and identity as major topics in his play *Waiting for Godot*? And in answering this question a *qualitative descriptive research method* will be followed: Existential principle will be used. Sandelowski (2000: 334) stated that "Qualitative descriptive studies have, as their own goal, a *comprehensive summary of events* in the everyday terms of those events. Researchers conducting *qualitative descriptive studies stay close to their data and to the surface* of words and events.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the beginning of the twentieth century, England was in the midst of a rapid change. Within a very short period, the British were affected by extreme technological, economic, psychological, and sociological changes. The changes also included rapid transportation, the growth of urban England and above all, the great depression after the First World War. Widdowson (2002) stated that, there were

remarkable developments in science and medicine. Along with it, the emergence of philosophies like those of Satire, which directly denied the existence of god and that a human is a being superior to any other force.

As a result of technology and science development, life has become no longer simple and the nature of human psych has grown in complexity; ideas, experiences and philosophies were portrayed and mirrored in literature. They pave along way to the philosophy of the age and the new school of drama “ The Theater of the Absurd”. Therefore, a new era has come to existence; the twentieth century movement which came to be called ‘modern movement’ or ‘modernism’.

Modernity and postmodernity are universal eras and philosophical movements. Lyotard (1984) asserts that “although the dates of periodization, a popular version identifies modernity as the period from Enlightenment to the mid twentieth century, and postmodernity as after that”. (1984, p. 3). Pykett (1995: 10) points out that: “Modernism is obviously: an aesthetic program, a self-conscious artistic movement, a retrospective descriptive category, a way of periodizing literary history, and/or a means of constructing a canon of value.” The quotation indicates that modernism is a flexible term and it could be interpreted in different ways; it is a paradigm in history of literature.

Inasmuch, Samuel Beckett as modern writer has come up with a new form and style of drama that addresses the epidemic and catastrophic condition of modern man. And that is through the creation of plays such as *Waiting for Godot* (1953). He reflects the core ideology of the true meaning of existence for postmodern man which continuously grows in complexion. Then, the newly born dramatic movement has been described as a “short-lived”, but the high significance of its content is beyond doubt.

However, Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* is recognized and comprehended within the frame of existentialism as it represents individuals' state of mind and the good for nothing ridiculousness of the human condition, yet it is also connected closely to the author's biographical setting; the early stage of his life. Thus, a hopeless state of life in the of the past and present and a steady productive deliberation are depicted philosophically in *Waiting for Godot*. Existentialism was a destination and salvation for perplexed writers

such as Samuel Beckett who found himself, as Sartre says, in the middle of a play without a script.

Existentialism

Existentialism could be defined as a movement in philosophy and literature that emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice. Its beginning goes back the mid-to-late 19th Century, but reached its peak in mid-20th Century in France.

In a broader sense, Existentialism is 20th century philosophy which focuses on the analysis of existence and the way humans find themselves existing in the world. The notion is that humans exist first and then each individual spends a lifetime changing their essence or nature.

May (1983. 59) explains, Existentialism is a term covers a number of related doctrines that deny objective universal values and holds that a person must create values for himself through action and by living each moment to the full. Whereas, Davidson (1985) argues that Existentialism is not a comprehensive philosophy or way of life, but an endeavor to grasp reality. May (1983. 105) traces, Existentialism originated with the 19th Century philosophers Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, although neither used the term in their work. In the 1940s and 1950s, French existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus (1913 - 1960), and Simone de Beauvoir (1908 - 1986) wrote scholarly and fictional works that popularized existential themes, such as dread, boredom, alienation, the absurd, freedom, commitment and nothingness. "Existential" simply "concerned with existence". "Existence", as used in this context, means the actual living experience of being human and being self-consciously aware of one's human existence. Thus, the existential approach is therapy grapples openly the questions which are often hidden, or even avoided, in other approaches.

Absurdism

The term absurd was invented by Martin Esslin (1918), in an analysis for works of writers such Ionesco, Genet, Pinter Samuel Beckett and other's.

"The Theatre of the Absurd links up with an older tradition which has almost completely disappeared from Western culture: the tradition of allegory and the symbolical representation of abstract

concepts personified by characters whose costumes and accoutrements subtly suggested whether they represented Time, Chastity, Winter, Fortune, the World, etc." Esslin (1980)

Also Albert Camus within *The Myth of Sisyphus*, explains his idea of the Absurd as the recognition of their inability to find any rational explanation for human life.. He presents methods for modern man so that he can effectively deal with the Absurd world. Camus concludes by providing a mythological example of man versus the Absurd human condition in which he explains the parallel between Sisyphus and modern man; man's futile search for meaning, unity and clarity in the face of an unintelligible world devoid of God and eternity. Does the realization of the absurd require suicide? Camus answers: "No. It requires revolt." He then outlines several approaches to the absurd life. The final chapter compares the absurdity of man's life with the situation of Sisyphus, a figure of Greek mythology who was condemned to repeat forever the same meaningless task of pushing a rock up a mountain, only to see it roll down again. The essay concludes, "The struggle itself ... is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

For Camus, the beauty that people encounter in life makes it worth living. People may create meaning in their own lives, which may not be the objective meaning of life but still provides something for which to strive. However, he insisted that one must always maintain an ironic distance between this invented meaning and the knowledge of the absurd lest the fictitious meaning take the place of the absurd.

Camus (1955) introduced the idea of "acceptance without resignation" and asked if man can "live without appeal," defining a "conscious revolt" against the avoidance of absurdity of the world. In a world devoid of higher meaning, or judicial afterlife, man becomes absolutely free. It is through this freedom that man can act either as a mystic (through appeal to some supernatural force) or an absurd hero (through a revolt against such hope). Henceforth, the absurd hero's refusal to hope becomes his singular ability to live in the present with passion.

It is believed that both Absurdism and Existentialism serve literary and philosophical platform, where Samuel Becket and others are considered representative agents (Şafak, 204).

Philosophy

In answering the question of what is Philosophy? Seifert and Reale (1991, p. 1) in their introductory essay referred to Dietrich von Hildebrand explanation for Philosophy as "the datum of knowledge itself in its different forms, from the most casual perception of some object in our naïve experience to "a priori knowledge," taken as consisting of absolutely certain insights into "necessary essences."

Whereas (ibid, p.1) mentioned: "Plato's central teaching about that kind of human knowledge which transcends or goes beyond the normal limits of the world of time and of becoming is here purified, clarified and deepened. Precise lines are meticulously drawn which distinguish empirical knowledge or practical knowledge, such as is found in the physical sciences, from a priori knowledge, as it can be attained in mathematics, logic and philosophy.

In light of the this given literature, philosophy cold explained, as defined in Oxford dictionary; a "particular set or system of believes, resulting from the search for knowledge about life and universe" and artistically expressed.

Samuel Beckett's "naïve experience" and "piori knowledge"

Samuel Beckett is an Irish novelist, playwright, theatre director, poet, and literary translator, was born in Dublin 1906. A time when the Royal Navy launches the first 'Dreadnought' class battleship.

The drama of Beckett's life mirrors the struggle with his inner demons which is projected in plays. The very act of writing stirred deep conflict.

Beckett's literary output is filled with the absurd and tragic emptiness of human condition. His drama is haunted by an absence of meaning at the center. Within this meaninglessness, Beckett's characters desperately struggle for finding a meaning for themselves. They are born into an irrational world. They live out their lives waiting for an explanation that never comes, and even the existence of this explanation might be only a product of their imagination. Beckett's drama is based on his perception of human condition, that is, being born and mostly living in pain, suffering ordeals, a short rough and unpleasant existence. Man's needs and desires are all reduced. (Tan,2007,p.9).

Becket's mother is instrumental in the complexity of his character and attitudes; she was a loving but a strong and stern woman with a

very overbearing character. Beckett loved, but resented his mother. Their relationship was a constant cause of deep anguish for him, especially when he rejected his faith, as she was a devout Christian woman who strived to instill a strong attachment to religion in her children. In later life he wrote of her 'savage loving', and it seems his later decision to settle permanently in France was as much a flight from his own mother as from the motherland. (McDonald, 2006:7).

Beckett's whole way of life so ascetic, that it comes as a shock to see him surrounded by so many words, enveloped around biographical detail.(Morris Dickstein, 1997).

Beckett was complicated in his abilities and skills. He was a multilingual person, studied Italian, French and English literature. He was self-taught captivated by a deep love of painting (Knowlson, P. 70, 1996). It is been said that a language cannot separated from culture. As he was a big fun of arts and languages, his mind was too broaden to comprehend philosophes like existential existentialism and express its thematic ideas in literature.

Previous Studies

Akhtar and et al (2015) confirms that, ideological processes keep the author silent at certain stages in trying to tell the truth in his own way, however there contradiction between the text and its ideological content. Whereas, Withanage (2011) holds the opinion that *Waiting for Godot* gives deep insight into the human condition, and reflects a mirror to the audience which makes them ask, is this me and my life circumstances. Differently, Cronin (2008) proposes, the wasteland settings of *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and the Internet where we continue to communicate in the wasteland, through telegrams at one time, conversations, or e-mail, in the hope of being understood. Similarly, Hana (2011) advocates in postmodern world ambition, technology, and chaos often leave one to retreat into self-imposed loneliness, Beckett's dramas convey that introspection and interdependence are at the crux of purposeful life.

Interpretation and Analysis

Samuel Beckett was able to develop his own style of writing by creating plays such as *Waiting for Godot* (1953) to address very basic existential concepts. In adapting his personal style, he has thrown away most of the rules in conventional drama and creates techniques

that matches his thematic ideas. His play has a simple style that makes distinguish from others. This unique manner and extraordinary traits was due to the accumulation of artistic aesthesia and philosophical ideology and projected in artistic production.

One feature that differentiate Beckett from other writers is his excessively simplified settings. It is obvious in *Waiting for Godot*, where the entire setting for the first act is explained in a few simple lines:

“A country road. A tree. Evening,” (6)

Such description make Beckett stand-alone among other. Moreover, “Waiting for Godot” does not only matchless for its vague settings, but also the use of short and choppy sentences makes it differ greatly from the great monologues written by other playwrights. For instance:

ESTRAGON: We can always try.

VLADIMIR: Go ahead.

ESTRAGON: After you.

VLADIMIR: No no, you first.

ESTRAGON: Why me?

VLADIMIR: You're lighter than I am.

ESTRAGON: Just so!

VLADIMIR: I don't understand. (Beckett, P. 10, 1953)

One of Beckett's most common tools for breaking up dialogue and slowing down pace is the stage direction “(Pause) as well as “silence” Observably, in , “Waiting for Godot”,

VLADIMIR: It'll pass the time. (Pause.) Two thieves, crucified at the same time as our Saviour.

VLADIMIR: And yet . . . (pause)

ESTRAGON: I was. (Gesture towards his rags.) Isn't that obvious?

Silence

ESTRAGON. Each one to itself.

[Silence]

VLADIMIR. Rather they whisper.

ESTRAGON. They rustle.

[Silence] (Beckett, 1953)

Beckett uses silence as part of sound continuum. Human life according to his point of view, can be discerned as a brief flicker between two great silences, from cradle to grave, as described by

Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*: "They gave birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more"(89). Thus, The break-down of language is shown by the loss of meaning in words themselves, by the inability of the characters to remember what has just been said by themselves or others, or by the degeneration of dialogue which becomes a mere game used to pass time.

Repetition is also a fundamental concept in both existential philosophy as represented in *Waiting for Godot* . It used in word's choice, as well as in character's actions. For instance: Vladimir and Estragon attempt to determine which of three hats are theirs: "Estragon takes Vladimir's hat. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Estragon puts on Vladimir's hat in place of his own which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes Estragon's hat,"

Estragon. Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!

Vladimir (to Pozzo). Tell him to think.

Pozzo. Give him his hat.

Vladimir. His hat?

Pozzo. He can't think without his hat.

Vladimir. I'll give it to him.

He picks up the hat and tenders it at arm's length to Lucky, who does not move.

Pozzo. You must put it on his head.

Estragon (to Pozzo). Tell him to take it.

Pozzo. It's better to put it on his head.

Vladimir. I'll put it on his head.

Waiting for Godot (46).

Beckett purposefully uses repetition in his play. He intended to make audience recognize the repetition in the characters' actions. Whether it is physical repetition or rhetorical repetition.

Words, phrases, and sentences are repeated endlessly. Repetition technique shows not only monotonous and repetitiveness of human action, but also breaks the sense of linear progression, for everything ends the way it begins. Furthermore, it suggests the characters' inability to solve problems, or even their unawareness of the problems. The repetition of words often destroys the power of words, and distances the words from the time of the event which the words try to describe.

Act Two is almost a repetition of Act One. Though, as we see, virtually the same action takes place twice, none of the characters can

remember what happened the day before. There are changes, of course, in Act Two. Pozzo is blind and the rope which binds him and Lucky becomes shorter. Each act of *Waiting for Godot* ends with "Yes, let's go. They do not move." Estragon and Vladimir always talk about leaving the place they are now in the same place they were on the preceding day. The phrase "we are waiting for Godot" is repeated again and again showing the situation in which Estragon and Vladimir are that of waiting. Whenever they are about to lose faith in their "action" or existence they remind themselves of their task.

Freud maintains that, we repeat because we have repressed a traumatic experience which then returns in symptomatic form. Gilles Deleuze, on the contrary, insisted in *Différence et répétition* that we do not repeat because we repress; rather, we repress in order to repeat. In a reformulation of this same point, he contended that we do not disguise because we have repressed; rather, we repress so that we may disguise. Along with arguing for the primacy of repetition over an earlier traumatic event that has been repressed, Deleuze further suggested that the highest function of art is to put into play all the various forms of repetition, ranging from the most clichéd to the most creative. (Cousineau, 2011)

Apparently, Beckett's imaginary character pass through a very traumatic experience as they wait. Time pass by and nothing happen. A very fundamental existential question is raised. What is meaning of their existence?

One of the most important causes of the emergence of existentialism was that people had lost their belief in the existence of a divine being, that is God, owing to the wars and losses in these wars.

Evidently, Sartre's frequently repeated statement, 'Existence precedes essence' constitutes the basic understanding of the Existentialist thought system. The claim, "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself is built upon this understanding. "What does it mean existence precedes essence? Human first exists, encounters themselves, surges up in the world – and defines themselves afterwards" (Sartre, 1948:28). The quote claims that existence is a necessity to have essence. Sartre also states "He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself" (1948:28). As Bohlmann points out, for existentialists, "the world is

utterly without absolute meaning, and man is left to invent his own personal meaning for his existence" (14).

In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, characters are forced to answer very existential inquiries, by being compelled into utterly futile scenarios of endlessness repetition of words, phrases and actions.

Thus, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is recognized and comprehend within the frame of existentialism as it represents individuals'; the good for nothing ridiculousness of the human condition. Besides, *Waiting for Godot* has been named as one of the major samples in post-innovator symbolization which demonstrates the 'collapsing of reality', the starting focuses for the 'theatre of the absurd'.

The play presents conflict between living by religious and spiritual beliefs, and living by existential ideas. It asserts that it is up to the individual to discover the meaning of life through personal experience in the earthly world. That is why a prime goal for the play is to make the audience perceive the idea of being afraid of being nothing in the world. Consequently, its themes are loss of identity, loss of independence, loss of religion, futility of life, isolation, unreliable memory, uncertainty of time, identity, existence, reality, past and indifference. In order to represent them, Beckett constructs characters that are tramps or amputees.

Therefore, *Waiting for Godot* is a literary expression for existentialism. As it's central ideas based on existential codes: Existence precedes essence. Since humankind is not the project of god or some other divine power, people form their essences by their own actions. Experience is the only element to define a person. Thus people have freedom of choice. Evidently, throughout the play, protagonists Vladimir and Estragon always choose to wait for Godot. Although they are not sure if Godot comes or not, they keep waiting for him determinedly.

They showed that, there is no reasonable explanation of why human exist in the universe. Hence, people have to struggle to create meaning for their existence all the time. The idea of straggling is deeply rooted in the author's own life, since he was a child. Beckett was completely hunted by the idea of being born and he claimed to have a kind prenatal memories of life within his mother's uterus. He more than often refers to as a sheltered haven, where he was

protected from harm. Apparently, his rejection to the outer reality has started shortly after his birth. He had the feeling of being trapped, imprisoned, pained and unable to escape (Knelson, 1989:10) Due to, always accuses his mother of committing the crime of begetting him. Nicholas Johnson a Professor of Drama at Trinity College Dublin described Beckett's relation with his mother as "a complicated relationship and frustrated love". Beckett's love-hate relationship with his mother was extended and projected philosophically. When he over emphasizes, that life has no meaning, then he consciously refers to his personal suffering .

According to Kierkegaard's opinion, when people understand that all of their efforts are short-lived and not absolute, they turn their steps towards religion. In the play, Godot can be seen as a symbol of God, since he has a power to punish and save people. Vladimir thinks that Godot would punish them if they drop him, and he also defines Godot's coming as their salvation. When Beckett address as such religious believes as if irony sarcastically refers to his mother's believes and attempts to make him follow her religious track. Godot is the symbol of heavenly power that people search for throughout their journey of living. However, with or without this belief of divine power, sometimes people come across troubles and open their eyes to the absurdity of their lives. They begin to question who is responsible for the good and the bad.

Spectators are exposed to some questions such as; "Who is Godot? Why does not he come to save Vladimir and Estragon? Is he real? In which place Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot? Who beats Estragon and why?" which are the equivalents for "Is there a God? Why are people suffering? Is this world the real one?" Yet, since people have the instinct to survive, they keep struggling to find a meaning, even if they do not find any answer.

Beckett creates a play like *Waiting for Godot* with techniques that matches the nature of his ideological. He aims to discourse philosophical ideas and emphasize that life is pointless despite every single effort. This way, he reflects the ideas of absurdity and existentialism skillfully in his masterpiece *Waiting for Godot*.

CONCLUSION

The study endeavored to highlight the internal and external forces that led Beckett to react against the 19th century and become absurdist. The events were considered in two levels: twentieth century trauma, and engraved images of the author's early stage of life.

It argued the question of why and/or what were the core conditions in which Beckett holds the meaning of life freedom, and identity as major topics in his play *Waiting for Godot*?. In analyzing data, it followed Existential principles.

From the short review above, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is concerned with expressing the difficulty of finding meaning in an ever changing world, where language reveals the limitations of itself both as a mean of communication and as a vehicle for expression of valid statements or thought. His use for the dramatic medium makes it evident that he tried to move beyond the application of language to what is difficult to be expressed.

Beckett addressed the drama of his own life by fabricating dramatic techniques that suits his assumptions about life as meaningless. It begins to end, full of anguish where an individual is not free in choice. He imposed as such ideas philosophically through his imaginary characters as they experience conflict based on their failure in having stability of identity, feeling self-esteem and respect within themselves.

The present study confirmed that, the characters in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* are psychologically ill; distorted, lame and their life is material based; logic. In the other hand, they are spiritually poor. As in the life of the writer, he lived throughout his life against religious ideas which were related to his mother, since he was a child. His mother was religious and had a close relation with the Church. However, she failed to make him religious. As a result, Beckett abomination for religion has been growing, since his childhood until he found a safe haven against his mother's ideas in existentialism.

Thus, self is systematically projected and revealed in a very philosophical and ideological manner.

Experience is expressed in a far more profound and fundamental nature than a mere biography. "Suffering of being" is mirrored and reflected.

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