



ISSN 2830-3385 (Print)
ISSN 2830-3202 (Online)

BATARA DIDI: English Language Journal

Vol. 3 No. 2, 2024 (Page: 93-112)

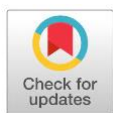
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56209/badi.v3i2.110>

Between the Existential Angst and the Absurdist Quest: Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and the Search for Meaning

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Article History



Keywords

Sartre
Existentialism
Samuel Beckett
Absurdism
Nihilism

Abstract

This paper explores the existential themes present in Samuel Beckett's iconic play, *Waiting for Godot*. The paper aims to unravel the existential intricacies and complexities of meaning and purpose in a world devoid of both through the lens of Albert Camus' absurdist philosophy and Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy. The play explores into the realm of the absurd, compelling the audience to confront the existential nature of existence and actively pursue significance. The protagonists' persistent inquiry and pursuit of significance mirror the existentialist notion of constructing personal purpose in a world devoid of inherent meaning. Through an analysis of the characters, dialogue, and setting, the paper illuminates the ways in which Beckett's work reflects and challenges existential ideas, ultimately offering a deeper understanding of the human condition and the quest for meaning.

Introduction

The twentieth century can be aptly described as the age of war and trauma. The brutalities of the wars and fascist horrors that occurred during this time period created a sense of emotional hopelessness in societies around the world, leading to a pervasive sense of pessimism reflected in literature (Norton p.9). The uncertainty about the future and the ever-changing world and environment faced by post war characters in literature highlighted a crisis of ideas and thoughts among writers, who struggled to situate themselves in a world they found difficult to understand (Norton p.910). As a result, post war characters are presented struggling with the dilemma of being and existence.

The aim of this article is to examine the existential themes in Samuel Beckett's (1965) well known drama *Waiting for Godot* 1951. The study applies Jean-Paul Sartre's existential philosophy as a lens to explore the existential nuances and complexity of meaning and purpose in a world bereft of both. The play's characters' struggles and motivations can be understood within the framework of Sartre's ideas about freedom, responsibility, and the fundamental absurdity of existence. In the end, the article offers a deeper understanding of the human

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condition and the search for meaning by demonstrating how Beckett's work both reflects and confronts existential ideas through an examination of the characters, dialogue, and setting (Permana & Kustanti, 2022).

Absurdity and Absurdism

Absurdity and absurdism are very similar concepts, and they are frequently used interchangeably. However, any bizarre or nonsensical idea is particularly referred to as absurdity, which is a cultural and philosophical phenomenon. Absurdism, on the other hand, is a post war literary movement, often associated with the works of authors including Beckett, Pinter, Osborne, and Albee as well as existentialist philosophers Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. Absurdism is based on absurdity to investigate the absurd and how it relates to the human condition, to replicate the abstract conditions of modern life, such as the nameless, incomprehensible world, and to subvert conventional concept of rationality of human existence (Plant, 2009).

The idea of Absurdism was initially introduced by Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1979). Camus (1991) argues that "the notion of the absurd as crucial and believes it can be seen as the first of my truths", highlighting that the absurd arises from the conflict between humanity's quest for meaning and the irrational, meaningless essence of the world.

Martin Esslin expanded on the concept of Absurdism in his work, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (2004). Esslin describes absurdist theatre as a rejection of conventional dramatic frameworks in favor of unconventional modes of expression. He maintains that the dismissal of traditional plot and character ideals in the *Theatre of the Absurd*, along with the devaluation of dialogue and language itself, has paved the way for more radical forms of artistic expression beyond traditional theatre creations. He suggests that this new artistic movement reflects the illogical and futile nature of human life, and by embracing the absurd, artists can uncover fundamental truths about the human experience. According to Harmon & Holman (1985), the term (Theatre of the Absurd) stands for "the kind of drama that presents a view of the absurdity of the human condition by the abandoning of usual or rational devices and by the use of nonrealistic form."

Esslin (2004) claims that The Theatre of the Absurd is "violent and grotesque" and that the absurdist's art "most sensitively mirrors and reflects the preoccupations and anxieties, the emotions and thinking of many of their contemporaries in the Western world". Neil Cornwell (2016) asserts that the absurd is "a disengagement both resulting from and leading to a breakdown in human interaction" and "a breaking down of norms, or a series of grave disharmonies within them, as perceived by the individual" in sociological terms. For Henri Bergson 2005, p.89 in Ford (2018) "The comic in its extreme form [is] the logic of the absurd".

Philosophically speaking, absurdism highlights how pointless and illogical human existence is. In the words of Camus, "The Absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (1991). Absurdism implies that there is no point to life and that searching for meaning is ultimately pointless.

The absurdist movement emerged as a response to the aftermath of World War II and the ensuing Cold War, giving rise to feelings of disillusionment and existential despair. The plays of Absurd Theatre center on man's existential dilemma and mirror this sentiment by depicting characters who are confined in a senseless reality "cut off from [their] religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots", without any hope of liberation (Ionescu, cited in Esslin, 1965). In this senseless world of depravity and disillusionment, "man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile" (Camus, 1991).

Camus' absurdist philosophy

The principles of absurdity, nihilism, rebellion, and morality served as the foundation for Camus's thoughts and concepts. A key idea in Camus' philosophy is absurdity. Camus maintained that the universe does not care about human existence and that life has no intrinsic meaning. "Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined," he writes (1991). He also contends that in order to live truly, people need to acknowledge and deal with this absurdity.

The alienation of reason implies an alienated meaning of becoming. [...] Be it noted: if becoming is understood, by definition, as the annulment of Being, or as Being's emerging from nothingness, then the truth of Being prohibits that Being become and proclaims it to be immutable; but the problem, now, is another, namely: does Becoming appear as such annulment or as such emergence? In other words: is the Becoming that appears a becoming that cannot be predicated of being? (Severino, 2016).

According to Camus (1991), the only "genuinely serious philosophical question" is whether or not life has any purpose. He goes on to say, "The solution to the primary philosophical question is whether or not life is worth living. That answers every other query. He makes the case that nihilism may be both liberating and destructive. He is adamant that the nihilist judge evaluate life according to standards that determine existence's ultimate meaninglessness (McNeil & McNeil, 2021).

Another important idea in Camus' philosophy is rebellion. He thought that people might choose to resist against life's absurdities or to accept them. He writes: "Rebelling against life's absurdity is the only way to deal with it" (1991). He contends that revolt can result in constructive transformation and the development of new ideals and that it is a necessary reaction against nihilism. Revolt, according to Camus, is the first step in overcoming a "continuous confrontation between man and his own obscurity" (1991). The absurd, he argues, is "his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day to day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance" (1991). Camus concludes that revolting against the ridiculous is "one of the only coherent philosophical positions" in dealing with it (1991).

According to Camus, this is an action that the individual undertakes in order to give his meaningless world meaning by acting indifferently. Man is always a victim of his realities, according to Camus. He cannot break free from them once he has acknowledged them (1991). Regardless of the repercussions, he contends that individuals must act in line with their own truths.

Sartre's existential philosophy

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy is constructed on the belief in human freedom only: "*Construction de 'essence,'*" which means that a person cannot say that his actions are caused by another human being, but rather himself is the reason because Man is the cause by his actions and his thoughts. Sartre (2018) claims: "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself . . . being is the existent's ever present foundation; it is in it everywhere, and it is nowhere; there is no being that is not the being of some way of being, and being can be grasped only through the way of being that manifests it and conceals it at the same time".

Sartre's existential philosophy posits man's life is determined by his choice, which entails his being and existence, loneliness and responsibility: "My thought is me: that is why I can't stop. I exist by what I think . . . and I can't prevent myself from thinking" (1949). The question of

“human-reality” or, the ontological “inquiry itself and its results stand, by definition, completely outside the possibilities of an ontology” (Sartre, 2018). In order to “decipher” man’s “desires, drives, and inclinations” or “pseudo-irreducible”, Sartre introduced the method of what he calls “existential psychoanalysis”, which, he argues, is based on the principle that “man is a totality and not a collection.” (p. 568)

Sartre's approach to psychoanalysis underscores the significance of personal agency and accountability, as opposed to traditional psychoanalytic techniques that concentrate on hidden unconscious drives. In *Being and Nothingness* (2018), Sartre posits the concept of a "fundamental project" that imbues an individual's life with meaning, an endeavor that is shaped by choices and actions rather than being predetermined. The realization of this existential freedom often triggers anxiety as individuals grapple with the obligation to create their own life meaning. Sartre's existential psychoanalysis endeavors to help individuals address and move past this anxiety by examining the decisions and behaviors that contribute to their fundamental project (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2020; Heidenreich et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Sartre's philosophy of atheistic existentialism arises from the despair and anxiety prevalent in France during the aftermath of world wars, leading him to outline the dichotomy of externalist realities and the nature of human existence. The concept that "existence precedes essence" underscores the absence of predetermined essence in humanity, leaving individuals to define themselves through their actions and choices (Sartre, 1973). Sartre's notions of abandonment, anguish, and despair are borne out of the rejection of divine support, emphasizing the individual's moral responsibility and freedom. The idea of acting without hope reflects Sartre's belief in human agency and commitment to action despite the absence of guaranteed outcomes (Sartre, 1973).

Existential Philosophy in *Waiting for Godot*

Existentialism often emphasizes the absurdity and meaninglessness of human existence. Jonathan Webber argues that “as originally defined by Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialism is the ethical theory that we ought to treat the freedom at the core of human existence as intrinsically valuable and the foundation of all other values” (Webber, 2018). *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines existentialism as "A philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will." In *Philosophy Dictionary* existentialism is defined as “the individual, the experience of choice and the absence of rational understanding of the universe with a consequence dread or sense of absurdity in human life” (Adorno & Jones, 1982; Arinze & Onwuatuegwu, 2020).

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. Such is the first principle of Existentialism,” says Sartre in *Existentialism and Humanism* (Sartre, 1949). “What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, materializes in the world and only afterwards defines himself”. This 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 (1949).

Samuel 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 (Langland-Hassan, 2020). 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. Therefore, "All Beckett's work comprises a unity in which certain attitudes are expressed in different ways with much force and rare imagination: life is cruel and painful; failure is no worse than success because neither matters; what is important is to avoid giving pain to others and to share misfortune" (Chambers, 1987). That is to say, for Beckett, there is neither meaning nor explanation; there is and there remains only nothingness, which puts him close to the Existentialists. Within this context, human relationships in his plays are reduced to cruelty, hope, frustration and disillusionment revolving around the repetitive themes of birth, death, and human emotions like anxiety and despair, and physical obstacles (Sipling, 2020).

According to existentialist philosophy, individuals must reject the notion of relying on external sources for salvation and instead take control of their lives to imbue them with significance and live authentically (Einsohn, 2023). Vladimir's assertion that "Habit is a great deadener" is echoed throughout the play, as demonstrated by the recurring motif of "Nothing to be done". The characters Estragon and Vladimir, though distinct, blur into a singular representation of humanity, exemplifying the idea that "all mankind is us". The interchangeability of characters and the interchangeable names suggest a universality of human experience and struggle.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett depicts how complex is the human condition in a worthless world. Being one of the most important examples of the Theatre of the Absurd, the play reflects the search for meaning, 'meaninglessness of existence', the 'absurdity of life', and 'encountering nothingness'. The concept of the title '*Waiting for Godot*' implies the search for meaning. The inactive waiting for a meaningful existence can be considered as an individual's endless waiting for a miracle to change his/her life. In this connection, Martin Esslin argues that, 'Godot' is a metaphor for waiting in the play: "The subject of the play is not Godot but waiting ... throughout our lives we always wait for something, and Godot simply represents the objective of our waiting an event, a thing, a person, death" (2004).

Vladimir concludes his conversation agreeing with Estragon's pessimistic point that there is nothing to be done. This conclusion might be understood in terms of existence. People come to this world without their choice. This point can be connected to Sartre's perspective on the philosophy of existentialism. According to Sartre, meaninglessness is associated with the idea of existence. He depicts absurd as: "That which is meaningless. Thus, man's existence is absurd because his contingency finds no external justification" (Sartre, 2018). Camu's idea of suicide as an existential issue is echoed in the play when Vladimir and Estragon think about killing themselves.

VLADIMIR: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow (Beckett, p.90).

However, as they keep thinking, they are faced with the reality of their meaningless existence and thus they get more and more depressed. Vladimir thinks that he is not the worst hoping that Godot will come and end all their worries. For him, the worst thing may happen is to keep waiting for Godot in vain.

VLADIMIR: We're in no danger of thinking any more.

ESTRAGON: Then what are we complaining about?

VLADIMIR: Thinking is not the worst (Beckett, p.64).

Esslin hailed Samuel Beckett as the quintessential Absurd Theatre playwright, attributing this to his ability to use characters and narratives that effectively convey the trauma, senselessness, and meaninglessness of the post-war world. As suggested by Esslin (2004), "Beckett's preoccupation with the problem of being and the identity of the self might have sprung from the Anglo-Irishman's inevitable and perpetual concern with finding his own answer to the question 'Who am I?'"(p.29). According to Esslin, "The Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought". (p.24)

Beckett's enigmatic play, *waiting for Godot* is a literary response to the trauma and disillusionment of the post-war life that seems meaningless and chaotic. The play features characters who are trapped in oppressive and absurd situations, struggling to make sense of their existence, resonating the existential crises of the modern age (Hooti & Torkamaneh, 2011). The play is often interpreted as fundamentally existentialist in its exploration of life. The absence of a clear mental history for the characters leads them to constantly struggle to affirm their existence. Existentialism rejects the concept of deriving meaning from religion and instead posits that individuals are responsible for creating meaning in their own lives. The play underscores the importance of taking action rather than passively waiting for a deity who may or may not bring salvation. The play is punctuated by existential themes of decay and deterioration, as the characters struggle to make sense of their mortality and the passing of time (Kachur, 2024).

In the following sections, we will explore in detail the Beckettian representation of these existential themes in light of Sartrean existentialist philosophy. This paper ventures to analyze how Beckett employs existential themes in the play to inspire introspection on the human condition.

Existential themes in *Waiting for Godot*

Beckett's work idiosyncratically combines elements of two contrasting philosophies: "determinism," which insists that human action is not free but determined by external forces acting on the will, and "existentialism," which insists that the individual is free and a responsible agent who determines his or her own development. The result is a total confusion, which is what Beckett sees as the reality of life. The search for salvation has become increasingly problematic in a modern world that questions even the concept of salvation. In Lucky and Pozzo this leads to despair, but Vladimir and Estragon maintain hope, which is sufficient to sustain them. Thus, the play is not hopeless: Vladimir and Estragon's lives, despite their apparent meaninglessness, become meaningful to them in their persistence in the face of hopelessness and refusal to be destroyed (Tennakoon, 2022).

Man's anguish

Waiting for Godot raises questions about the futility of human existence and the uncertainty of life's purpose. Throughout the play, the theme of man's anguish is explored through Vladimir and Estragon's conversations, actions, and interactions with other characters, like Pozzo and Lucky. Right from the very beginning of the play, we observe the angst that the two tramps undergo. Estragon gets beaten by strangers on a daily basis. He says this quite casually, asking, "Beat me? They certainly beat me." (Beckett, p.9) It is also important to recognize that Vladimir's kidneys and Estragon's feet are physical conditions that they both suffer from. The tramps object to being questioned about if it hurts anymore. It should go without saying that there is constant pain. Estragon replies, "Hurts!" (Beckett, p.10) when Vladimir asks if his boots are hurting him.

Based on Sartrean existentialism, man has no predetermined purpose or meaning. Rather, humans define themselves because their individual lives come into being as a response to the challenges proposed by their existence in the world. As Sartre states, "life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing" (Sartre, 1957). Thus, life has no ingrained meaning or purpose unless man creates it himself.

Anguish is a consequence of the dread of the nothingness of human existence and the meaninglessness of it. Sartre regards anguish as the manifestation of freedom. (2018, p.422). That is because the recognition of nothingness, according to existentialists, is considered as something liberating since man realizes that he is free to choose what he will make of himself due to the fact that he has no ready-made essence. For Sartre, existentialism is the doctrine which confronts man with a possibility of choice. (1973, pp.19-20).

Anguish takes its source from the claim that in choosing for oneself, man chooses for all humanity. The result of this act is a profound feeling of responsibility, which makes human beings anguished. Anguish especially appears when one has to choose and act having no proof that the action is right because the state of anguish does not guarantee the aptness of that particular act it, on the contrary, clearly displays that there are many possibilities open to be realized in this specific action. "Consciousness in one stroke opens up a world of possibilities, yet at the very moment poses their annihilation: this, says Sartre, is our anguished lot" (McCulloch, 1994).

The play begins with the valid observation that there is "Nothing to be done". Estragon's nostalgia for the Dead Sea map is particularly poignant. Their world is one of negations in which inaction is the safest course of action; as he says, "Do not let us do anything. It is safer" (Beckett, p.18). In fact, their trouble is so bad that it even prevents them from laughing.

From Jungian perspective, the pairs in the play comprise the four archetypal identities or parts of the soul: the ego and the shadow, the persona and the soul's image (animus or anima) (Ashdown, 1986). All of the hated feelings that the ego suppresses are kept in check by the shadow. Lucky, the shadow, represents the subjugation of the unconscious shadow by the tyrannical ego. Pozzo, the archetype of affluent mediocrity, is egocentric and constantly manipulates and oppresses his subordinate. Since Lucky is permitted to "think" (Beckett, p.42) for his master, his monologue in Act I seems to be a torrent of suppressed unconsciousness. Beyond its association with the fragrant herb tarragon, the name *Estragon* also has a connection to the female hormone *oestrogen* (Sion, 2004). This leads us to associate him with Vladimir's soul's feminine representation, the anima. It clarifies Estragon's inclination toward poetry, his sensitivity, his dreams, and his illogical mood swings. Vladimir comes across as the thoughtful type's logical character or as the complimentary masculine principle (Sion, 2006).

Drawing on Sigmund Freud's Trinitarian account of the mind in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) and onomastic techniques, Bernard Dukore advances a triadic theory in Didi, Gogo, and the Absent Godot. The characters are defined by Dukore according to what is lacking: the rational, represented by the Go-go, the incomplete ego, the principle of missing pleasure, (e) go-(e) goes. Di-Di, or the id-id, is the most primal and illogical of the two and is considered the subversion of reason or the backward id. The superego's or moral norms' role is fulfilled by Godot. Pozzo and Lucky are just an echo of the protagonists. Dukore interprets Beckett's play as a metaphor for the senselessness of human existence when one looks to an outside source for rescue while being prevented from reflecting on oneself (Sion, 2004).

Ioana Sion (2004) sees "correspondences between *Godot* and canto 3, the "waiting room" of the *Inferno*" which "explores the ontological function of the four characters in connection with

Dante and analytical psychology, and finally focuses on the emerging model of the immanent, universal soul of contemporary man proposed by the playwright."

Chance and destiny

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* features a significant role for Chance. In human life, chance and destiny have a greater influence on our lives than reason. According to Beckett, human existence is entirely based on chance, and without chance, time would have no meaning. Chance is both the fundamental cause of existence and has an effect on the value of time. It is implied in the play that chance underlies both existence and, hence, human life. This was established by Beckett fairly early on in the play. "One of the thieves was saved. It's a reasonable percentage" (Beckett, p.11). While one of the two said that both thieves were horned the other claimed that only one of the thieves was damned. Though it may not appear significant, this situation makes a significant effect on one's chances of salvation. The likelihood of salvation would be fully if all the four thieves were saved; nevertheless, the likelihood of salvation would be as little as fifteen percent if three of the thieves were condemned. Therefore, salvation is based solely on chance. The two boys exhibit volatility and chance. Godot beats one of them while sparring the other, saying, "He beats my brother, Sir". (Beckett, p.51)

The idea of chance and destiny also plays a significant role in the play, as the characters often find themselves at the mercy of unpredictable events and circumstances beyond their control. This sense of uncertainty and lack of agency adds to the overall sense of existential dread and absurdity that permeates the play (Cornwell, 2016). The characters' repeated attempts to make sense of their situation, only to be met with confusion and frustration, underscore the idea that life is ultimately unpredictable and meaningless. As they wait for a mysterious figure who may or may not bring them answers or salvation, Vladimir and Estragon grapple with the idea that their existence may be governed by forces beyond their understanding. In the end, the play leaves the audience with a sense of unease and contemplation about the nature of existence and the futility of trying to find meaning in a chaotic and indifferent world (Wolterman, 2022).

Beckett utilizes Pozzo's predicament as a metaphor for the impact that aging has on people (Bhusal, 2024). Because human life is founded on chance, it is pointless and just prolongs the meaninglessness of time. "Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time. It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?" (Beckett, p.89). A life dictated by chance is meaningless.

Choice and Predetermination

This theme of predestination is an existential dilemma. It forces us to grapple with the idea that perhaps our lives are predetermined and that no matter what choices we make, we are ultimately powerless in the face of a greater, unseen force. In Beckett's world, the concept of predetermination is a recurring theme that adds another layer of complexity to his exploration of human existence (Figlerowicz, 2011). The characters in the play grapple with a sense of inevitability, a feeling that their fates are already sealed and that they are powerless to change the course of their lives. This sense of predestination creates a sense of despair and hopelessness as the characters struggle to find meaning and purpose in a world that seems to offer only suffering and uncertainty.

Beckett's portrayal of predetermination forces us to confront our own beliefs about free will and destiny, challenging us to consider whether our lives are truly within our control or if we

are simply at the mercy of forces beyond our understanding. For example, in Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, the characters Vladimir and Estragon are stuck in a cycle of waiting for someone who may never come, highlighting their sense of powerlessness and lack of agency in their own lives. Despite their efforts to change their circumstances, they ultimately remain trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of despair and uncertainty.

Humans have a propensity to find significance in seemingly random events because life is random (Becker, 1997). Estragon and Vladimir try not to concede the meaninglessness of life. In an attempt to divert their attention, they quarrel, chat with Lucky and Pozzo, and nap. Their motivation for holding onto Godot is straightforward. They have a purpose in life because of Godot, but Godot may not even exist. They look to him to provide them with a better life and to address their issues. They have a cause to continue and not hang themselves as long as they think that Godot exists and will eventually make an appearance. "Ah Gogo, don't go on like that. Tomorrow everything will be better" (Beckett, p.52). "He said Godot was sure to come tomorrow" (Beckett, p.53). Their source of hope comes from an unknown outside power called Godot.

In his work *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre discusses two distinct forms of existence: the unconscious (being in itself), which is fixed and tangible in its nature; and the conscious (being-for-itself), which is self-aware and changeable, but lacks a predetermined essence. According to Sartre, the conscious individual must create their own identity from a state of nothingness, as they do not have a set essence like unconscious beings such as trees. While trees simply exist as they are, humans actively engage with the world and define their own existence. In *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir seem to have disengaged themselves from this freedom and consciousness, opting instead for passivity and endless waiting in a world perceived as devoid of meaning. However, unlike the tree they lean against, the protagonists in the play may have the ability to shape their own essence from this perceived emptiness.

In the play, the characters are seemingly free to leave and end their waiting, yet they choose to stay. Throughout the play, Vladimir and Estragon contemplate leaving and not waiting anymore, but ultimately, they never seem to make a concrete decision to do so. They are free to talk, to walk, to act, but they are bound by waiting for an unknown agency. The characters' choices to stay demonstrate their acceptance of their predicament, serving as a commentary on the existential struggle between freedom and the weight of existence.

The idea of choice is presented as an illusion in the play, as the characters are seemingly trapped in their routine of waiting, unable to break free from it. Their inability to make a definitive choice reflects the existentialist idea of being stuck in a meaningless and absurd existence, unable to make any meaningful decisions (Renaudie, 2023). Additionally, the character of Pozzo and Lucky also illustrate the theme of choice in the play. Pozzo appears to have control over Lucky, dictating his actions and treating him as a slave. This dynamic highlights the power dynamics at play in relationships and the illusion of choice that can exist within them.

Waiting

The existential themes are further emphasized by the repeated motif of waiting, as Vladimir and Estragon pass the time with trivial conversations and activities while questioning the significance of their actions. The play has an existential sense of general isolation. The existential theme is portrayed by the fact that Estragon and Vladimir do nothing but be and exist. Despite their desire to depart, the two never go; instead, they wait for Godot. By the

play's conclusion, it seems as though the two will continue to wait for the man who will never arrive under weird circumstances in strange places.

Beckett challenges the audience to consider the futility of waiting for a purpose or meaning that may never come. The play's minimalist setting and repetitive dialogue serve to emphasize the characters' sense of ennui and hopelessness, mirroring the monotony and absurdity of everyday life. Vladimir and Estragon try to pass the time by engaging in various activities such as talking, singing, and even contemplating suicide, but ultimately find themselves no closer to understanding their purpose. This highlights the absurdity of their predicament and serves as a metaphor for the human experience of searching for meaning in a universe that may not provide any clear answers.

The protagonists' recurrent actions and unwavering trust in Godot's arrival are evocative of the Myth of Sisyphus, which existential philosopher Albert Camus utilized to illustrate the absurdity of life. Similar to how Estragon and Vladimir seem to have consigned themselves to the never-ending duty of waiting for Godot, Sisyphus was destined to repeat the pointless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain; in both cases, the situation is stagnant. The play comes to an end with this final exchange, but it also leaves room for an endless loop:

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.

They do not move.

Curtain. (Beckett, p.54)

This sense of despair and purposelessness resonates with Sartre's existential philosophy and Camus' absurdism. Existentialism emphasizes the individual's struggle to find meaning and purpose in an absurd or chaotic world. Camus argued that humans must confront the absurdity of life and create their meaning despite the inherent meaninglessness of existence (1991). Vladimir and Estragon's struggle to find meaning in their monotonous waiting.

Sense of being loss

The sense of loss of being is a central theme in *Waiting for Godot*, as the characters Vladimir and Estragon struggle to find meaning in a seemingly meaningless world. Their constant waiting for someone who may never come mirrors the futility of searching for purpose in a world that offers no clear answers. Beckett's exploration of the human condition in the play forces audience to confront their own feelings of insignificance and mortality, challenging them to find meaning in a world that often seems devoid of it.

Beckett anchored his work *Waiting for Godot* around the concept of "the suffering of being." Without really seeing Godot, the characters carry on their exploration of the "self". The play revolves around Estragon and Vladimir's yearning for something to jolt them out of their monotony. Godot can be viewed as just one of the many things that individuals have to wait for in life.

The existentialist themes are further exemplified in the portrayal of futile struggles and the inevitability of death. Despite contemplating suicide, Vladimir and Estragon opt for inaction, symbolizing the paralysis that stems from existential despair. The stagnancy in human relationships, as illustrated through the master slave dynamic between Pozzo and Lucky, reflects the dehumanizing consequences of seeking connection in a meaningless world.

The characters' reliance on each other for companionship underscores their essential interdependence. Vladimir's panic at the thought of being left alone emphasizes the fear of

existential isolation, while Estragon's need for Vladimir's intellectual support highlights their mutual reliance on one another. Together, they embody the existential dilemma of existence in a world devoid of inherent meaning.

Through the absurdity of action, Beckett tackles the notion of meaninglessness. Throughout the play, Vladimir and Estragon struggle to find any sense of purpose in their lives, as they wait endlessly for a figure who may or may not exist. Their conversations are filled with absurdist humor and existential musings, highlighting the sense of emptiness and despair that pervades their existence. The nihilist world of the characters is intensified by the illusion of waiting and hoping for the unknown, the uncertain, and the elusive. No one else to interact with except each other and the enigmatic Pozzo and Lucky. Their interactions are also filled with moments of disconnection and discord, underscoring the profound sense of alienation that characterizes their lives. As the characters grapple with the absurdity of their circumstances, they also confront the inevitability of death and the fleeting nature of time. This existential crisis is further emphasized by the repetitive and circular nature of the play, with the characters seemingly stuck in a never-ending cycle of waiting and uncertainty. The sparse and barren setting of the play also adds to the sense of isolation and despair, highlighting the characters' struggle to find meaning.

In order to find meaning in their world, humans often turn to external forces for comfort and distraction from their struggles. This reliance on outside sources is essential for their survival. In the play, Godot serves as a representation of such an external force, appearing silent and indifferent. Despite this, Godot provides a sense of purpose to the two desperate tramps, who find some semblance of meaning by creating a pattern out of chaos. This pattern, in this case, is the act of waiting. Vladimir reflects on this sense of waiting in Act II, stating, "What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come" (Beckett, p.80). This illusion of salvation is necessary to cope with the inherent meaninglessness of life. Godot becomes a source of hope in the face of futility, as humans are compelled to invent or rely on such figures to avoid despair. As Webb aptly puts it, "Waiting for Godot" is the story of two vagabonds who impose an illusory, yet fiercely defended, pattern of waiting on their desolate surroundings" (1972, p.26).

Irreligiosity

The play also explores themes of irreligiousness, with the characters frequently questioning the existence of a higher power or divine being. This skepticism adds another layer to their existential crisis as they grapple with the idea that there may be no greater purpose or meaning to their lives. Beckett's use of the story of the two thieves from Luke and the discussion of repentance that follows can be interpreted in a number of ways. The lone tree can easily be interpreted as a symbol of the Christian cross or even the tree of life. Many people believe that God and Godot are one and the same. This interpretation is further supported when Estragon asks Vladimir early in the play what he has asked Godot for:

Vladimir: Oh ... nothing very definite.

Estragon: A kind of prayer.

Vladimir: Precisely.

Estragon: A vague supplication.

Vladimir: Exactly. (Beckett, p.18)

The absence of Godot, the mysterious figure they are waiting for, serves as a metaphor for the absence of a higher power or guiding force in their lives. As they wait in vain for someone who may never come, the characters are forced to confront their own beliefs and values, leading to a deeper exploration of their own identities and the nature of faith. Ultimately, the characters are left with a sense of emptiness and uncertainty as they realize that their search for meaning may be futile. According to Mary Bryden (1998), "the hypothesised God who emerges from Beckett's texts is one who is both cursed for his perverse absence and cursed for his surveillant presence. He is by turns dismissed, satirized, or ignored, but he, and his tortured son, is never definitively discarded."

If God does exist and chooses to remain silent, it only adds to the chaos of the world. As Pascal observed, life operates based on percentages, leading some to believe in God as a safeguard as Vladimir notes, "It's a reasonable percentage." (p.11) However, despite attempts to find meaning in the randomness of existence, the true tragedy lies in God's unresponsive silence, echoing the universal plea for answers. According to Alan Astro (1990), both philosophers and clowns alike are left feeling helpless in the face of God's silence, leaving humanity to navigate a world dictated by chance and arbitrariness in the absence of divine intervention. It becomes a stark reality that either God does not exist, or he simply does not care.

The play raises questions about the nature of existence and the human condition, leaving the audience to ponder their own beliefs and values. In the absence of Godot, the characters are forced to confront the harsh reality that they may be alone in a world devoid of purpose or direction. The play serves as a powerful reminder of the complexities of faith and the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe. For example, in one scene, Vladimir and Estragon debate whether or not they should wait for Godot, questioning if their faith in his arrival is justified. As they grapple with their existential crisis, they come to realize that their reliance on an external force for meaning may be misguided, leading them to confront the harsh truth that they are ultimately responsible for creating their own purpose in life.

Power and absolutism

These themes are further explored through the character of Pozzo, who represents the oppressive nature of power and control. His treatment of Lucky, his submissive and mistreated servant, highlights the destructive effects of totalitarianism and the abuse of power. Through these characters and their interactions, Beckett delves into the complexities of human relationships and the struggle for autonomy in a world dominated by forces beyond our control.

In the midst of this bleak and seemingly hopeless landscape, Beckett introduces the character of Estragon, who serves as a foil to Pozzo. Estragon's vulnerability and existential despair stand in stark contrast to Pozzo's arrogance and cruelty, offering a glimpse of the emotional turmoil that lies beneath the surface of all human experience. As Estragon and Vladimir grapple with their own sense of futility and longing for connection, the audience is confronted with the universal struggle for meaning and connection in a world that often feels indifferent to our desires and struggles. Estragon expresses his fear of being alone and abandoned, highlighting the vulnerability that lies at the core of his character. In contrast, Pozzo's callous treatment of Lucky underscores the cruelty and indifference that can exist within human relationships, shedding light on the darker aspects of human nature. These contrasting dynamics between the characters serve as a mirror, reflecting the complexities and contradictions of the human experience.

Lucky-Pozzo relationship further emphasizes the absurdity. Lucky is in a rather unfortunate situation. There are sores on his neck, and he is reduced to a beast of burden. He is treated like

an animal by Pozzo. Pozzo and Lucky's relationship dramatizes our existential life. Pozzo's blindness and Lucky's incapacity exacerbate the awful situation. Both of them feel powerless. "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it is awful," (Beckett, p.41) remarks Estragon at one point.

The play contrasts the relationships between Vladimir and Estragon, built on friendship and mutual support, with that of Pozzo and Lucky, characterized by exploitation and cruelty. Through their interactions, Beckett explores themes of power dynamics, inequality, and the limitations of faith. As Pozzo's fortunes decline and Lucky loses his voice, their characters symbolize the moral and emotional decline that comes with unchecked power and blind adherence to false beliefs. In contrast, Vladimir and Estragon's resilience and cooperation demonstrate the potential for human connection and hope amid life's challenges.

Human deterioration

The theme of human deterioration is prevalent throughout the play. The characters, Vladimir and Estragon, are stuck in a cycle of waiting for someone named Godot, who never arrives. As they wait, they begin to deteriorate both physically and mentally, symbolizing the decay of the human spirit in the face of uncertainty and hopelessness. Lucky's speech in Act One highlights the harsh realities of existence and the futility of trying to make sense of a world that seems devoid of meaning. Through Lucky's rambling and nonsensical monologue, Beckett showcases the absurdity of human existence and the inevitable decline that comes with it. The characters' struggle to find purpose in their waiting reflects the universal experience of grappling with the unknown and the inevitability of deterioration in the face of life's uncertainties.

Beckett manipulates both language and characters in his plays. His characters embody various roles such as truth-seekers, delegates of humanity, political analysts, historians, clowns, fools, religious figures, scoundrels, speakers, oppressors, and the oppressed. The ambiguous setting in Beckett's works is a paradoxical space that is neither definitively hell nor paradise, permanent nor temporary, new nor old. This setting reflects the existential crisis of the common man in the twentieth century, who grapples with the loss of dignity, rights, and identity due to dominant forces prioritizing self interest over moral values, war over peace, and the Self over the Other. This theme is epitomized in Lucky's poignant monologue in Act II, lamenting the decline of human values and the descent of humanity into a realm governed by absolute power and selfish motives.

Lucky's philosophical speech is a characteristic parody of human disintegration:

Given [acknowledging] the existence . . . of a personal God ... [who exists] outside [of] time . . . [and] who . . . loves us dearly . . . and [who] suffers . . . with those who . . . are plunged in torment . . . it is established beyond all doubt . . . that man . . . that man . . . for reasons unknown . . . for reasons unknown . . . for reasons unknown . . . [our] labors abandoned left unfinished . . . abandoned unfinished . . . (Beckett, pp. 44-45)

In his speech, Lucky goes on a long tirade about various nonsensical topics, such as the meaning of life and the existence of God, leaving the other characters bewildered and unable to comprehend his words. This exemplifies how individuals may try to make sense of their existence in a world that can often feel meaningless and chaotic.

Lucky's speech is in essence an attack on the paradox of human existence and its link to divinity. Through intricate metaphors and allusions to scholarly works, he offers profound insights into humanity's plight the idea that while God may have forsaken man, He still holds compassion toward him. This speech encapsulates the core theme of the play, where the main

characters find purpose in their perpetual anticipation of Godot, a mysterious figure. Their wait, shrouded in ambiguity, grants significance to their lives and deters thoughts of self-destruction.

Beckett's portrayal of Lucky's speech serves as a powerful commentary on the human condition and the struggle to find purpose in a world filled with confusion and despair. Lucky's ramblings highlight the futility of trying to grasp onto concrete truths in a world that is constantly shifting and uncertain.

Irrationality

Waiting for Godot is an absurdist play characterized by its purposeful irrationality and lack of meaning. Absurd theater deviates from traditional dramatic conventions such as chronological plot, logical language, thematic development, and identifiable settings. The play also explores the dichotomy between intellect and physicality, with Vladimir embodying intellect and Estragon representing the physical body; their interdependency is emphasized throughout the work. From the outset, readers are thrust into the nonsensical exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon, with no indication of how long they have been waiting. As the play progresses, the repetitive conversations and lack of coherence contribute to the overall sense of absurdity. The ambiguous ending, or lack thereof, leaves readers contemplating their existence in a disordered and ambiguous world, questioning the value systems that govern human life.

Irrationality in *Waiting for Godot* serves to highlight the existentialist and absurdist themes of the play. The characters' actions and conversations often seem irrational and absurd. This irrationality is a key component of the play's existentialist and absurdist themes. The characters, Vladimir and Estragon, seem to be waiting for someone or something that may never come, leading to a sense of futility and meaninglessness. Their dialogue is often circular and repetitive, reflecting the absurdity of their situation. One example of irrationality in the play is the characters' inability to remember past events or even each other's names. This lack of continuity or coherence mirrors the randomness and unpredictability of life. The characters live in a perpetual present, unable to access their memories or make sense of their past, which contribute to the overall sense of irrationality. They engage in pointless activities, such as trying to take off their boots or exchanging hats, which serve no purpose other than to pass the time. These actions highlight the characters' existentialist struggle to find meaning in a seemingly meaningless world.

Additionally, the character of Godot himself represents an irrational figure. The characters have no clear understanding of who or what Godot is, yet they continue to wait for him, hoping that he will provide them with some sort of salvation or purpose. This blind faith in an unknown entity reflects the characters' irrational belief in the possibility of meaning in a chaotic and absurd world. The fear of death and the unknown can also trigger irrational thoughts and behaviors. Some individuals may become consumed by anxiety and existential dread, leading them to make impulsive decisions or engage in self-destructive behaviors. The realization of our mortality can be overwhelming, causing us to question the meaning of life and our place in the universe.

Nothingness

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* centers on the idea of human existence and the search for meaning. Within two seemingly similar acts, likely identical tramps (Vladimir and Estragon; Pozzo and Lucky), vaguely same place, same setting, similar actions and things, the play showcases the uncertainty, absurdity, meaninglessness and trauma of the modern world. Based on the paradoxicality of the absurd, everything in the play communicates the uncommunicable, and speaks through the unspeakable. Repetition, senseless actions, illogical dialogues and

seemingly endless cycles of waiting are used to martialize and trivialize the hidden human abstracts, and existential trauma that plagued humanity, and the struggle to find any purpose or meaning in man's existence. Estragon fails to remove his boot, and finally succumbs to nothingness: "Nothing to be done." Indeed, from this opening line onwards, nothing is done. Vladimir restates at the end, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" (Beckett, p.41).

As individuals confront the void that may accompany a midlife crisis, they may find themselves questioning the meaning and purpose of their existence. This existential dread can be overwhelming, but it also presents an opportunity for introspection and growth. Embracing the concept of nothingness can lead to a deeper understanding of the impermanence of life and the importance of living in the present moment. Instead of fearing the void, individuals can learn to accept it as a natural part of the human experience and use it as a catalyst for personal transformation.

By acknowledging the emptiness that may arise during a midlife crisis, individuals can begin to explore their values, beliefs, and priorities in order to create a more meaningful and fulfilling life. Rather than viewing nothingness as a negative force, it can be seen as a blank canvas upon which new possibilities and opportunities can be painted. Through this process of self-reflection and exploration, individuals may discover hidden talents, passions, and desires that have been suppressed or ignored. By embracing the void and delving into the unknown, individuals can embark on a journey of self-discovery and personal growth that ultimately leads to a deeper sense of fulfillment and purpose. For example, a person who has lost their job may initially feel lost and unsure of what to do next. However, by taking the time to reflect on their values and passions, they may discover a new career path that aligns more closely with their true desires. Embracing the void of unemployment can ultimately lead to a more fulfilling and purpose-driven career that brings them greater satisfaction and happiness.

Timelessness

One of the striking features of the play is its portrayal of time. A key element in the play is the ambiguity surrounding time, leaving both characters and audience questioning when the events are unfolding. The specific time frame of the play remains unclear as events unfold in a non-linear manner. While Vladimir believes Act II follows Act I by a day, other characters disagree, leading to a sense of forgetfulness and confusion. Vladimir and Estragon even argue about the time of day within Act II, emphasizing the recursive nature of time in *Waiting for Godot* where events and dialogue repeat themselves.

The characters are ensnared in an eternal time loop, where time seems to stand still. Vladimir expresses a sense of arbitrariness in the ending of Act I as the characters endlessly wait for the elusive Mr. Godot. The play presents a challenge in tracing the exact origin of the story, raising questions about the duration of Vladimir and Estragon's presence on the same road. The circular and repetitive nature of the play creates uncertainty regarding the progression of events, the consistency of characters, the setting, and the temporal dimension. Set against a backdrop of an isolated road with a lone tree, *Waiting for Godot* leaves the audience pondering when, where, and how the characters are trapped in this endless cycle.

Time in *Waiting for Godot* is cyclic and indefinite, rendering time essentially meaningless. Vladimir and Estragon repeatedly return to the same location to wait for Godot, experiencing similar events with slight variations on each occasion. This consistent cycle of events, without a clear link to past, present, or future, highlights the chaotic nature of time in the play.

According to Eugene Webb (1972), "One of the seemingly most stable of the patterns that give shape to experience, and one of the most disturbing to see crumble, is that of time".

The differing situations of Pozzo and Lucky in Acts I and II symbolize the arbitrary and ruthless treatment of human life. Pozzo's transformation from a healthy individual planning to sell a slave to a blind man with no recollection of the past illustrates this theme. Pozzo's denial of time and memory, as shown in his response to Vladimir regarding his blindness, emphasizes the insignificance of time on human existence. The shift in Pozzo and Lucky's circumstances reflects the concept that life lacks meaning in a world governed by chance.

Beckett uses the characters of Vladimir and Estragon to showcase human attempts at distracting themselves from the void of time's meaninglessness. Despite engaging in fruitless activities and trying to avoid facing the reality of their situation, these characters ultimately acknowledge their predicament while persisting in their cycles of meaningless actions. The characters' struggle to fill the void of time reflects humanity's struggle with its own existence. According to Andres Gunther (1965), "...while, in the case of Vladimir and Estragon, it is just the incessant attempt to make time pass which is so characteristic, and which reflects the specific misery and absurdity of their life".

Vladimir and Estragon's futile attempts to distract themselves underscore the play's central theme of meaningless existence. In their seemingly cheerful but ignorant actions, these characters represent humanity's tendency to avoid confronting the emptiness of life. The characters' longing for Godot's arrival, despite the futility of this hope, highlights humanity's desperate need for purpose in a world where time has lost its significance. The choice between persisting in meaningless action or succumbing to death underscores the characters' ultimate predicament and the broader dilemma of the human condition. As Webb (1972) notes, "Pozzo, after his vision of the emptiness and futility of human life, revives his Lucky and cries, 'On!' though they have nowhere to go and nothing to carry but sand."

By embracing the void and delving into the unknown, individuals can also experience a sense of timelessness. When one is fully immersed in the present moment, free from distractions and worries about the past or future, time seems to stand still. This sense of timelessness allows individuals to fully appreciate the beauty and wonder of the world around them, leading to a greater sense of peace and contentment. In this state, individuals can truly connect with their inner selves and the world in a way that is both profound and transformative.

Time, in Beckett's view, is based on chance. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon live in a world of chaos and no real order. Every day, they return to the same location to wait for Godot, who never shows up.

Estragon: And if he does not come?

Vladimir: We'll come back tomorrow.

Estragon: And then the day after tomorrow.

Estragon: Until he comes. (Beckett, p. 14)

No one seems to remember what happened the day before. "What did we do yesterday?" (Beckett, p.14). Neither Vladimir nor Estragon seem to be certain of what happened in the past. Instead, they merely make assumptions, such as "In my opinion we were here". (Beckett, p.15)

De-subjectivation

De-subjectivation is a concept that challenges the idea of the individual self as the center of the universe. It involves letting go of the ego and recognizing that one's identity is not fixed or

separate from the world around them. Instead, de subjectivation encourages individuals to see themselves as interconnected with all of existence, blurring the boundaries between self and other. This shift in perspective can lead to a deeper sense of empathy, compassion, and unity with the world, ultimately fostering a greater sense of fulfillment and purpose in life. By embracing de-subjectivation, individuals can break free from the constraints of ego and embrace a more holistic view of themselves and their place in the world. This can lead to a profound shift in consciousness, allowing for a greater sense of interconnectedness and understanding with all living beings.

De subjectivation can inspire individuals to act with more compassion, kindness, and empathy towards others, creating a ripple effect of positivity and unity in the world. De subjectivation in *Waiting for Godot* is exemplified through the characters of Vladimir and Estragon, who struggle to find meaning and purpose in their seemingly futile existence. Survival creates the action of the play, as we witness how humanity survives the empty existence Beckett sees as life. Vladimir and Estragon (or Didi and Gogo, as they call each other) pass the time conversing, arguing, dreaming, telling stories, contemplating suicide, eating carrots and radishes, pulling their boots on and off, to keeping going. "We always find something," Estragon tells Vladimir, "to give us the impression we exist" (Beckett, p.69).

As they wait for the elusive Godot, they are forced to confront their own egos and insecurities, ultimately leading them to question their own identities and place in the world. Through their interactions with each other and other characters, they begin to see the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of compassion and empathy in navigating the complexities of life. In the end, their journey towards de-subjectivation allows them to find a sense of unity and purpose in their shared experience, demonstrating the transformative power of letting go of the self. For example, in one scene, Estragon and Vladimir argue over whether they should continue waiting for Godot or move on with their lives. This internal struggle reflects their own insecurities and fears about facing the unknown. Despite their differences, they ultimately realize that their bond and shared experiences are what truly matter, highlighting the importance of human connection in finding meaning in a seemingly chaotic world.

Conclusion

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a masterpiece that prompts readers and audiences to confront existential concerns and the human quest for meaning. Through the use of philosophical concepts, Beckett challenges traditional narratives, highlighting the absurdity and ambiguity of human existence. The play explores the absurd, urging the audience to face life's existential reality and actively seek meaning. The characters' constant questioning and search for meaning reflect the existentialist idea of creating individual purpose in a world lacking inherent meaning. Therefore, Beckett's play not only embodies existential themes but also critiques the human condition and universal struggle for significance in an indifferent world. In this play, Beckett made use of the universal theme of "human condition, and man's despair at being unable to find a meaning in existence" when confronting human's desire to understand the meaning of life (Esslin 45). Beckett's finesse is in his ability to surprise the audience by transitioning the unknowable in the play seamlessly into increased uncertainty, illustrating that everything in the world changes except change itself. If Godot is an illusory figure, then we are "waiting for nothing."

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