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Submitted by:

**MEKHOLOUFI Rania**

## **Existential Crisis and War Trauma: Psychoanalytical Reading of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot***

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### **Board of Examiners:**

<b>Mr. LAMDJED EL-HAMEL</b>	<b>MAB</b>	<b>Biskra University</b>	<b>(Supervisor)</b>
<b>Mrs. TAALAH Asma</b>	<b>MAB</b>	<b>Biskra University</b>	<b>(Chairperson)</b>
<b>Dr. SAKHRI Hadjira</b>	<b>MAB</b>	<b>Biskra University</b>	<b>(Examiner)</b>
<b>Mr. HARHOURA Kamel</b>	<b>MAB</b>	<b>Biskra University</b>	<b>(Examiner)</b>

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## **Dedication**

In the NAME of ALLAH, the MOST GRACIOUS, the MOST MERCIFUL

With great honour, I dedicate this modest work to

my *FAMILY* and my *FRIENDS*

## **Declaration**

I, undersigned, do hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “ **EXISTENTIAL CRISIS AND WAR TRAUMA: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL READING OF SAMUEL BECKETT’S *WAITING FOR GODOT*** ” has been carried out by me as a partial fulfillment for the Master’s degree in English literature and civilisation under the guidance and supervision of Mr. EL-HAMEL Lamjad, Faculty of Letters and Languages, English Language Division, Mohamed KHIDER University of BISKRA, ALGERIA.

I further declare that the interpretations put forth in this thesis are based on my own readings, understanding and examination of the original texts. The reported findings that I have made use of are duly acknowledged at the respective place. Also, I declare that this work is not published anywhere in any form.

*MEKHOULOUFIRANIA.*

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who has guided me to this achievement.

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is an attempt to investigate into the correlation between the existential tendencies of the Theatre of the Absurd and the trauma of Second World War regarding Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. It contends that the absurd existence typified in this play indicates symptoms of the disturbed mind and psyche of most Europeans during the post-era of that massive war. The problematic that is raised is in what way and to what extent Beckett's portrayal of the existential crisis and absurdity tends to mirror the psychic conflicts in the light of the war traumatic experience. This investigation principally aspires to fathom psychoanalytically the metaphorical meanings behind the existential crisis and the absurd nature of the seemingly traumatised characters. It draws on an eclectic approach of the existentialist, trauma and Freudian psychoanalytic theories. The analysis demonstrates that the characters' psychological collapse, blaming in this the after-effects of the Second World War, becomes the source of their absurd behaving and existential anxiety. Thus, Beckett, as an absurdist playwright, tends to explore the internal states of post-war individual's mind through portraying an absurd existence to convey the brutal reality of this traumatic war.

## **Key terms**

Theatre of the Absurd\ Samuel Beckett\ *Waiting for Godot* \ Absurdity/ Trauma\ Existential crisis\ Trauma Theory\ Psychoanalysis\ Existentialism.

## ملخص

هذه المذكرة هي محاولة لدراسة العلاقة بين التوجهات الوجودية لمسرح العبثية والصدمة النفسية الناتجة عن الحرب العالمية الثانية في مسرحية "في انتظار جودو" للكاتب سامويل باكيت. الأطروحة تحتج ان تصوير الوجود العبثي في هذه المسرحية يعبر عن الاضطراب النفسي و العقلي لاغلبية الاوروبيين خلال فترة ما بعد تلك الحرب الشنيعة. تتمثل اشكالية البحث في الجدل حول كيف و الى اي مدى تطرق باكيت لجدلية الوجود والعبثية يرقى للتعبير عن الصراعات النفسية المرتبطة بالتجربة المؤلمة للحرب و صدمتها. تطمح هذه الدراسة بالدرجة الاولى لتفسير المفاهيم الضمنية للطبيعة العبثية لشخصيات المسرحية التي يبدو عليها الاضطراب النفسي. اذن في هذا السياق تتبنى الدراسة نهج انتقائي في النقد الادبي مفاده الدمج بين الفلسفة الوجودية و نظرية الصدمة و نظرية فرويد في التحليل النفسي. توصلت هذه الدراسة الى ان الانهيار النفسي لشخصيات المسرحية بسبب الحرب يكون المصدر الرئيسي لسلوكهم العبثي و فزعهم الوجودي. اذن يتجه باكيت بصفته كاتباً مسرحياً عبثياً الى الكشف عن الحالات الداخلية النفسية للفرد في فترة ما بعد الحرب وذلك من خلال تصويره للوجود العبثي لنقل حقيقة هذه الحرب الصادمة.

## الكلمات المفتاحية

مسرح العبثية/ سامويل باكيت/ في انتظار جودو/ العبثية/ جدلية الوجود/ الصدمة/ الفلسفة الوجودية/ نظرية التحليل النفسي/ نظرية الصدمة.

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## General Introduction

*“What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it.” (Marquez 20)*

In the ashes of two terrible world wars, the twentieth century seems to be recalled as an age of traumas. Accordingly, it has witnessed to series of conflicts, revolutions, confusions and competitiveness. These accumulated events have caused extreme human suffering. In this case, people have passed through many shell-shock experiences and inner crises which have deviated them from the metaphysical essence of being leading them to call the common postulates of existence eligibility and life validity into question. They have been left spiritless, disillusioned and pessimistic. Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* is merely a publication of this century. So, as the title suggests, the present thesis tends to investigate, through the dimension of psychology, the reflection of existential crisis and war trauma in this play.

Samuel Beckett is a twentieth century Irish novelist, playwright and poet who got the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. In 1928, Beckett went to Paris where he became a student of James Joyce. During the Second World War, Beckett remained in Paris and fought there. After the war, he settled in Paris and in five years he wrote *Eleutheria*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Malloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*, *Mercier et Camier*, two books of short stories, and a book of criticism. Beckett wrote in French and English, but most of his writings between Second World War and the 1960s were written in French. He insisted on his writings to be subjective based on his thoughts and experiences. Beckett’s plays focus on essential elements of the human condition in dark humorous ways. ( Biography.com)

*“Waiting for Godot : A Tragicomedy in Two Acts 1955”* is the translation of the Irish author Samuel Beckett of his original French version *“En Attendant Godot 1948”*. Notably, this play is a significant drama in the postmodern period earning its writer a widespread recognition and international success. Since its first performance at the Theatre of Babylone in Paris 1953, it has puzzled the audience with a non-linear progression defying all conventions known to the traditional theatre. As for this, it explores an innovative form of drama which is codified as the Theatre of the Absurd by the philosopher Martin Esslin. Such theatre tends to represent an absurd and meaningless portrayal of the realities of human life through senseless plot, unusual setting and way strange characterisation.

By an enigmatic schematising, Beckett has composed his play in duality with a circular plot without any proper story or a line of actions. It is a tragicomedy in two vague acts set during two consecutive days that centres on two vagrants who appear to be old friends. Or perhaps they are just acquaintances. Their relationship is not clear. They call each other Vladimir and Estragon and nicknamed as “Didi” and “Gogo”. They await for unknown person in vain for unstated purpose. Gogo concerns himself with his boot, sleeping and eating; the other, Didi, revolves a biblical conundrum and endures a bladder condition.

The first act starts in no clear period and region where both vagrants meet on a barren road by a leafless tree at the evening and commence waiting together for the mysterious Mr. Godot whom they do not even know. While waiting, in a dark clownish mood they engage in pointless conversations and activities, share vague memories, consider to hang themselves and argue to no end. Meanwhile, they encounter with other two men: master Pozzo dragging his slave Lucky. The master treats Lucky carelessly and in the way to sell him. Then, that slave is ordered to entertain Did and Gogo by presenting a long speech for them. After that Pozzo and

Lucky leave the stage and a boy arrives claiming that Mr. Godot is not coming today but surely tomorrow he will appear. So, the tramps agree to leave but they remain motionless.

The second act proceeds almost the same as the first one. The personae Didi and Gogo meet once more in the same place beside the tree which has few leaves now, keep on yearning for the same unknown person and behaving as they did the day before. Though, Estragon seems struggling to remember what happened yesterday. Pozzo and Lucky come again. But this time the master Pozzo is blind and dumb who is led by his mute slave Lucky. He also claims that he did not met them. For the second time, Pozzo and Lucky leave and then the previous boy enters the stage announcing that Godot will not be arriving this day too and maybe the next day. After his departure, Vladimir and Estragon decide to leave, but they do not move a step. The play just finishes like this.

Several studies have delved at length into the aspects of the aimless futile waiting in *Waiting for Godot*, nominating this drama as a representation of the absurdity of human existence and life. However, the missing point that one can notice, in this regard, is the lack of an adequate scrutiny into the disordered psychic that this existential dialectic may behold, as a consequence of the traumatic experience of the Second World War. Thus, the proposed thesis aspires to investigate this interesting issue in an attempt to fill its gap in the academia. Therefore, it argues that though there is no direct clues of the Second World War in this drama, Beckett, through portraying existential agonies and absurdity, seems to target implicitly the traumatic effects of this war on the Europeans' psychological identity.

To address the elaborated problematic, one has to provide an approaching answer to the following primary question: in what way and to what extent does Beckett's portrayal of the existential crisis and absurdity tends to mirror the psychic conflicts referred to the traumatic experience of war? In line with this, several key questions will preoccupy a central

space in the analysis. They are as follows: How could the existential crisis and trauma be approached in literary studies? How does Beckett make use of absurdity to feature the existential crisis? How could the absurdity lying in characters' mysterious nature be explained in terms of psychoanalytical and trauma concepts?

In light of this concern, the purpose of this investigation is to grasp psychoanalytically the metaphorical meanings behind the existential crisis and the absurd nature of the seemingly traumatised characters. In this regard, it manages to explore the psychological reality that Beckett could, as an absurdist playwright, transmit through *Waiting for Godot*. To achieve this end, some objectives are formulated: first, identifying the theoretical background of existential crisis and trauma in literature. Second, examining the thematic features of absurdism. Lastly, psychoanalysing the character's absurd behaving and ambiguity.

This study is expected to convey the possibility of reading Beckett's absurdist drama in the context of psychoanalysis and trauma studies. Hence, it would provide a contribution for literature students whose area of interest appeals to analysing literary works using Psychoanalysis or Trauma theories as well as other students who are interested in *Waiting for Godot* and the Theatre of the Absurd.

Methodologically speaking, the investigation tackles an existentialist psychoanalytical reading of *Waiting for Godot*. Then, it adopts the Existentialist approach to dig into Beckett's treatment of existential crisis and absurdity in this play. Besides, psychoanalytical and trauma theories are employed to scrutinise mystery in the characters' absurd bizarre acts. As for this, the nature of this study is qualitative following descriptive, interpretive, and analytical methods. Thus, data collection is achieved throughout a profound reading and examination of the available relevant primary and secondary sources, including books, articles and theses. The documentation of these sources relies on the seventh edition of the MLA style.

This dissertation encompasses a general introduction, three core chapters and a general conclusion. In the general introduction, the research issue is introduced within its background, problematic, scope, methodology, structure and significance. Chapter one covers the study's contextual and theoretical frameworks. It previews the postmodern context, the existentialist approach, psychoanalytical literary criticism and trauma theory. Chapter two identifies the Theatre of the Absurd and explores its thematic features in the play. The last chapter psychoanalyses the characters absurd status and detects how war trauma influences them. Finally, the general conclusion recapitulates the fundamentals of the conducted investigation in answering the formulated research questions and comments on the findings.

## Chapter One: Contextual and Theoretical Frameworks

*“We live in a postmodern world, where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain.”*

*(Havel Wikiquote)*

### Introduction

The play *Waiting for Godot* has proved, like *Hamlet*, “to be the Mona Lisa of literature” (Ahuja 1). It has been a fertile ground for international commentary and opened to multiple interpretations and critical reactions. For it can be read through multifaceted lenses, such as those of politics, religion, philosophy or even psychology, as Alain Robbe-Grillet argues that trying to fix the play entirely within a certain interpretation is foolish and pointless (Robbe-Grillet 110). Above all, it is important to mention that this drama has been mainly considered to be a central expression of the philosophy of existentialism.

Although the present thesis also unavoidably talks in the discourse of life absurdity and the existential dialectic, yet its focal interest has so far been to uphold that these features are merely provoked by a psychologically traumatic experience of the Second World War. Hence, it is meant to extend the minimal criticism on *Waiting for Godot* in the field of psychoanalysis. So it endeavours to delve into the traumatised condition of post-war/postmodern individuals which is absurdly performed in the deliberated play. The exploration of such an issue would be based on an existentialist psychoanalytical criticism.

The present chapter, as an initial part of this investigation, entails the consideration of providing contextual and theoretical coverages for the study. Its first part is concerned with the contextual framework. So it displays glimpses on the postmodern context. The second part demonstrates three sections of theory that would refine the groundwork for undertaking the stated problematic. The first section involves a short review of the existentialist approach. The

next section section presents an overview of the required Freudian psychoanalytical dimensions. The last provides a brief exploration of the literary theory of trauma.

### **1.1. Contextual Coverage**

Literature mirrors its epoch. It comments on simultaneous subject matters, mental attitudes, ideologies, philosophies prevailing in a certain region and period. In this vein, literature fosters various literary movements. Each movement is defined by its philosophical and theoretical premises. Thus, the attempt to discern any literary production requires a reference to which trend it belongs. So, this study stipulates a prelude to the trend of postmodernism to grasp the postmodern phenomenon and context. The point is to reveal the feasible social-historical as well as the literary backgrounds of the play under study.

The term postmodernism has been variously treated by philosophers, critics and theorists giving way to divergent views and opinions. Even still elusive to be exactly defined, in simple terms Castle asserts, "Postmodernism is a critical reaction to the Enlightenment project of modernity and modernist movements in art and literature." ("The Blac" 144). In the sense of this assertion, postmodernism seems to be a breakthrough which acts as a critique of the modern age, culture and literature.

Within a complicated political atmosphere, at the end of the Second World War and the start of the Cold War, emerges postmodernism. It is a destabilising approach which endeavours to diminish the capitalist institutions that control the World and the Western metaphysics about language, identity and origin. It adopts principles from the philosophies of irrationality such as surrealism, existentialism, absurdism and nihilism. So it utilises the techniques of questioning and undermining relying on dispersal and uncertainty (Elaati 1). On the whole, it is argued that postmodernism can be approached from four angles. First, the historical and philosophical aspect views that postmodernism is a response and a replacement

of modernism and its practices. From another corner, the political-ideological attitude sees that the postmodern uncovers realities about the phantoms of Western ideologies. Finally, the Strategic perspective confirms that the approach to postmodernist texts repels the methodological rules and insists on the possibility of multifarious interpretations (2).

Theorising postmodernism would contribute to the perception of the postmodern thought, condition and society. Charles Lemert discusses this, he writes, “Postmodernity [is] purportedly new state of world’s affairs, and postmodernism is a theory or cultural attitude toward these affairs” (26). On these terms, Lemert seems to identify the postmodernism as a mindset to better understand the situation of a postmodern world. Best and Kellner state that the postmodern theory rejects the modern theory’s allegations of seeking knowledge foundation, totalitarianism, absolute truth and rationalism. Deeply, it chiefly affirms diversity among individuals. Postmodern theory, thereby, insists on the notions of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminacy (4-5). In other words, the theory of postmodernism reveals the fallibility of imposing universal reality through uniformisation and asserts the plural truths through heterogeneity with irrationality.

In the arena of literary theory, postmodernism lacks a solid methods of analysis as a literary approach. It chiefly questions language, truth, causality, history, and subjectivity. Accordingly, they contests the modernists’ claims about art and myth (namely master meta-narratives by J. Lyotard ). For, they are universal which disperse knowledge and meaning in the world. Therefore, postmodernists observe the concepts of “authenticity” and origin as “romanticised myths” which lead to the inconstant constitution for truth. (Castle, “The Blac” 145). Consequently, postmodernists delegitimize and deny the aesthetic and mythic values agitating that they foreshadow meanings and facts.

## **1.2. Theoretical Coverage**

### **1.2.1. The Philosophy of Existentialism**

Since this dissertation is concerned with the issue of existential crisis, then it is necessary to spotlight on the philosophy of existentialism and its fundamentals in treating this concept. The purpose is to provide theoretical connotations to the existential crisis and absurdity in the literary criticism. Therefore, this is what the following pages set out to explore. Above all, before going far in exploring the trend of existentialism, one needs first to clarify the concept of existential crisis.

#### **1.2.1.1. What Is an Existential Crisis?**

The philosopher Richard James defines existential crisis saying, “An existential crisis is a moment at which an individual questions the very foundations of his or her life: whether this life has any meaning, purpose, or value”(qtd. in Islam 10). This reference sheds light on the idea that the existential crisis is kind of an anxious state that shakes the common sense in the life of human beings. Whereby they lose faith in the validity and essence of their being existed. This appears to echo a difficult situation of a terrible feeling about life and existence.

#### **1.2.1.2. A Review of Existentialism**

The Marriam-Webster Dictionary defines Existentialism. It states, “it is a twentieth century philosophy centring on analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong” (“Exist”). In other words, Existentialism is a way of philosophising that ventilates the obscurity of human beings’ presence in the world and the controversy over their free will and responsibility.

Existentialism has attained popularity at the close of the Second World War. During which, early writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus have notably shape the frame of this philosophical movement. Also, artistic and literary productions, to mention here, Alberto Giacometti' sculptures, Jean Dubuffet's paintings, and Samuel Beckett's drama mark the extension of the existentialist trend to arts and fictions (qtd. in Edeh 17). So far, it has been emerged in a critical phase in the European modern history that mirrors the crisis of thinking and being which creates disorder, destruction and chaos (qtd. in Liljeström 8). Hence, existentialism has been the means of expression in multiple fields which manifests hard times experienced after the Second World War.

### **1.2.1.3. Main Themes and Methods**

The basic pursuit of existentialism is to find meaning within existence. Existential writers try to detect meaning through the experience of nothingness and absurdity. Thereby they contend that the ontological capacity that adheres social and human institutions is deprived of the sense of consciousness due to overestimating rationality, acquisitiveness, and productivity. This eventually cultivates the feeling of fragmentation, time disconnection and language uselessness in human beings. This leads to meaninglessness that shakes the human tendency to order and meaning, creating anxiety "Angst" (Childs and Fowler 78). To put it in another way, losing the presupposition of existing creates dispersion in human life which ends in an ontological angst. So, Existentialists endeavours to interpret and to solve this angst.

Most existentialists generally abide themselves to a common assumption that articulates their methods of interpretations. This presumption points to the spontaneous relationship between the dilemma of being and being itself. That is to say that any individual questions himself or herself "what is being ?" cannot solve this query unless each one starts first from his or her being. However, existentialist writers and thinkers do not share a unified

understanding of this premise. Each one among them develops his method for the interpretation of existence (“Exist” Encyclopedia Britannica). Consequently, the existential thought emphasises on the nature of individual being yet existentialists draw variant metaphysical outcomes in analysing this issue.

The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential theory is considered as the closely efficacious. He contends that the inactive presence of human beings leads to a state of semiconscious in which they will fall in the problem of metaphysical and moral anguish. That is what delineates the feeling of absurdity and frustration in their life. But if a human gets out of that passive inactive condition, he will be more conscious of himself. So, the power of awareness frames their sense of being. Here, the capability of free choice enables them to create meaning in their existence and the universe (Cuddon, “The Peng” 317). This leads to say that, according to Sartre, self-consciousness is a required quality for shaping human existence, and it is through the free choice that human would attribute sense to his existence.

More specifically, in his essay “*L’Existentialisme est un humanisme* 1946,” Sartre pronounces that “Existence precedes essence.” This utterance is generally labelled to be an essential credo in the existentialist discourse. It expresses that “there is no predefined essence to humanity, and so people must decide for themselves the meaning of existence” (“Exist” New World Encyclopedia). Sartre explains what he exactly means by his dictum. He claims that acquiring essence requires first the material being, that is to say, that the existence is the initial stage where man is nothing. Afterwards, when man makes meaning for his existence, he then forms his internal essence. Sartre argues that human nature/ essence cannot precede his existence because there is no God (22.)

As seen above, the Sartrean theory would represent atheistic existentialism. On these terms, Sartre accounts for that his existentialist point of view does not stand for the illustration

of God-nonexistence. Instead, it endorses that it does not matter if God exists or not. For, human beings are unrestrained to perform per their options, they are merely responsible for their performances so they must decide alone for themselves. Thus, they need to be aware of “that nothing can save them from themselves” (22-53). Subsequently, a human being is the only responsible for shaping his existence by choosing and deciding what to do or not do. This process is which gives essence to that existence.

Another existentialist Albert Camus, in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*, compares human nature to Sisyphus’ myth who repeatedly roll a rock up a hill to have it, but it rolls back each time he reaches the top. In the light of this, Camus speculates that human beings are already knowledgeable about the inherent absurdity and meaninglessness of the universe; however, they have to strive daily for creating their meaning (“Exis” New World Encyclopedia). Hence, Camus, the same as Sartre, elucidates the connotations of the absurdity of existence and human beings function in articulating significant meanings to life.

### **1.2.2. Freudian Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism**

As already elaborated, the present study endeavours to project the characters’ psychological traumatisations. Here, one needs to approach towards the psychoanalytical criticism in terms of reflecting upon the condition of their mental world behind their absurd performances and manners. Therefore, a general overview of Freudian psychoanalytic criticism with its needed basics in the present investigation is directed below.

Psychoanalytic criticism is a type of criticism in the literary studies that appeared in the twentieth century. It interprets literature in the view of psychoanalysis therapeutic measures. These measures, to treat mental problems, bring the unconscious motifs into the conscious mind through a free talk. The whole process builds on the Austrian Sigmund Freud’s theories of how the mind, the instincts, and sexuality proceed (Barry 96). Then,

Sigmund Freud's assumptions afford the establishment of a psychoanalytic critical approach to literature.

The principles of Freudian classical psychoanalysis operates profoundly in human daily behaviours. Then it is based on this view that the Freudian approach helps better to understand literature. For, literary texts are basically about human behaviours (Tyson 11-12). Thus, in the analysis of literary works, Freudian psychoanalytical critics are generally engaged in the task of investing procedures of neurosis therapy to discern characters psyche as a reflection of human beings.

With this qualification in mind, Cudden articulates that Freudian feedback presumes that a literary piece mostly voices the subdued desires and anxieties hidden in the unconscious portion of the mind. They are stored there as a result of a prior suppression of upsetting scenes experienced during the period of infancy. Thus, Freud observes that the narratives as dreams and tongue' stumbles indicate "a return of the repressed." Whereby readers may experience a perplexing sensation of familiarity, called "uncanny" by Freud, provoked by this returning repressed ("A Dict" 568). Then psychoanalytically, literature tends to unchain suppressed data in the mind of the writer through the literary personae which stimulate the readers.

#### **1.2.2.1. The Concept of Unconsciousness**

Freud states that there is a large area of the psyche that is not under human control. He refers to this as the *unconscious*. Freud contends that there are three ways to access the unconscious whether through dreams; through parapraxes, mainly slips of the tongue; or through the technique of analysis "free association". He, therefore, claims that everything forgotten is stored in the unconscious (Childs and Fowler 191-192). In this sense, Freud concludes that what is forgotten is dismantled from the conscious memory because it is

tormenting. Accordingly, he hypothesises that each embarrassing instinct keeps operating in the unconscious realm, and that is what would produce neurotic symptoms (Habib 574).

### 1.2.2.2. The Tripartite Psyche

Freud develops a model of the human psyche that is known as the tripartite model and sometimes referred to as a structural model. This model is divided into three parts the *Id*, the *Ego* and the *Superego*. The *Id* consists of all what is irrational, instinctual and unconscious lying within the source of psychic energy *Libido*. It, working on the pleasure principle, seeks excitement for the instinctive needs regardless of the social, ethical, or moral control. The *Ego* represents the rational, logical and awakening part of the mind. Unlike the *Id*, the *Ego* operates with the reality principle. It works on regulating the *Id*'s impulses. Lastly, the *Superego* acts according to the morality principle. It watches the *Ego*'s moves in suppressing forbidden desires of *Id*. It creates an unconscious sense of guilt and fear if its norms are not fulfilled (Bressler 126-127).

### 1.2.2.3. Defence Mechanism

Freud proposes that there is a constant opposition between *Id*, *Ego* and *Superego*. Then, the *Ego* is supposed to balance between the desires of the *Id* and the demands of the superego. But if it faces its weakness, it poses an anxiety: *neurotic anxiety* based on the fear that *Id*'s desires take control, *reality anxiety* based on the fear of real events and the *morality anxiety* based on the fear of violating values. Thus, the *Ego* creates unconscious defence mechanisms to handle anxiety and inner psychological conflict ("Freud" Wikipedia.)

Freud with his daughter Anna introduce several *Ego* defences. The main of them, that will be dealt with in the analysis later, are as follows: *Repression* is to force disturbing thoughts out of consciousness. *Regression* is to return to memories to escape reality. *Denial* is to distort reality. *Rationalising* is to make unacceptable thought sounds logical. Often, they

unconsciously tend to repress reality which allows to reducing anxiety and tension (“Freud” Wikipedia).

#### **1.2.2.4. The Significance of Dreams**

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* 1900, Freud asserts that although the conscious mind represses painful memories, desires and wishes in its unconscious part, these latter still influence the conscious by inferiority feelings or irrational thoughts. Therefore, these certain repressed find their way to be redirected in the shape of dreams (Bressler 129). Dobie notes that the appearance of dreams in a literary work, offers rich insights on characters. For, their outer actions and their spoken words might not suggest reality. A dream is symbolic representation that takes the reader beyond the external narrative (Dobie 59-60).

At a deeper level, in the process of dreaming, Freud explicates dreams as indirect expression watched by the still operating *Ego* to fulfil symbolically “unconscious wish.” There, the unconscious cultivates processes of “condensation” of meanings together or “displacement” of a specific concept to a divergent object. For this reason, dreams become “symbolic texts” that require an explication (Eagleton 136-137). In other words, dreams are “ciphered messages” that act as an outlet allowing the unconscious to be somewhat relieved. In literary analysis, the content of dreams is interpreted as “manifest” that is the dream’s images and “latent” that is their connotation. The operation of deviating the unconscious reality through “displacement and condensation” mechanisms are named by Freud the “dream-work” and recognized as a literary activity. In this activity, it is the role of metaphor and metonymy to symbolise the covered desire (Castle, “The Lit” 179).

#### **1.2.3. The Study of Trauma**

Intended analysis in this dissertation which targets the psychological prospect of *Waiting for Godot* promptly affixes this literary work, as a post-war production, within the

realm of a crucial historical trauma dropped behind the Second World War tragedy. To come away with a deeper understanding of the effect of this tragic event on the psychic and mental status in this work, the following passages introduce a general comprehensive review of trauma and its theoretical premises in the literary studies.

### 1.2.3.1. Defining Trauma

Cathy Caruth is considered as a pioneer of trauma theory. She provides a coherent depiction of the phenomenon of trauma acknowledged as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) by the American Psychiatric Association. She identifies trauma as a condition of reliving repetitively memories of a past severe accident through upsetting dreams, hallucination, thoughts or behaviours. She proposes, “The pathology cannot be defined either by the event itself and may not traumatize everyone equally – nor can it be defined in terms of a *distortion* of the event. Rather, it consists solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception” (“Trauma” 3-5). Then, trauma is a pathology which pronounces a deep psychic distress. It can be diagnosed only through the way it is experienced by the patient.

Furthermore, the pathology of trauma has severe consequences on its victims, especially on their mental situation and behaviours. In this sense, Cathy Caruth claims that trauma is “missed encounter” to a traumatic event. She sees that its belatedness makes it a negative ghostly presence which fails to become recognised by time and place. For, people who have suffered traumatic experiences become so “possessed” by them that they frequently describe themselves as living “ghosts” (“Trauma” 9). Therefore, the belated appearance of the traumatic experience makes it untimed as well as place-less. In this condition, the traumatic individual is in a state of phantom ghost-like.

### 1.2.3.2. Trauma Theorisation

In the domain of literary theory and criticism, the study of trauma is identified as a body of theory that generates multidimensional perspectives mainly from psychoanalysis, feminism and post-structuralism. It deals with individual trauma such as abuse or mental illness; and shared experiences of trauma like the Holocaust, slavery or genocide. This field of study provides a theoretical schema to comprehend occurrences that damage human being's adaptation apparatus. Also, it inquires into the way how "memory and truth" are correlated in the sense of how memory and language are influenced by a traumatic accident ("A Dict" 736). This is to suggest that the theoretical trend of trauma in literature is utilised in analysing personal and mass recounted terrible experiences typified in literary texts to study the relationship between memory and truth.

The effect of trauma on memory is discussed in what is predefined by Susan Brison as the traumatic memory. This latter is theorised as memory repression. That is to say, according to Van der Kolk, the act of pushing the unwanted memory away. Then, repression interrupts the flow of memories. This leads to ellipsis whereby the re-emergence of the repressed memory is not fully recalled (Brison 40 and Van der Kolk 168). Thus, trauma restrains memories from articulation wherein perhaps essential elements related to the traumatic incident are omitted. From another angle, Ernst van Alphen in his essay *Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, and Trauma* 1999 deals with the impact of trauma on language. He ventilates the inadequacy of language to convey the position of how the compulsion is exactly experienced. Therefore, this linguistic breakdown is manifested through repetition, omission, and ellipsis where the story cannot be articulated in thought, memory or speech (27). So language institution fails to capture the traumatic event adequately.

Drawing on the significant role of trauma in literature, Caruth argues that there is a moving voice that is paradoxically liberated through “traumatic neurosis,” the re-enactment of painful events. This enigmatic voice witnesses to unknown truth (“Unclaim” 1-3). In this sense, Shoshana Felman also considers trauma as a transmission of a testimonial speech affirming to historical truth. Felman’s notion of testimony elucidates the necessity of listening to the voices of the dead as they continue to speak through the voices of the surviving witnesses (Marder 3-4). Since trauma tends to testify some historical facts, both, further, theorise that studying trauma represented in literature allows to recognise the unspeakable truth in history that perhaps could not be conspicuous at its immediate moment. Felman explains how language of literature is, unlike of the law, does justice by refusing the closure of trauma (Caruth 11 and Marder 6). Thus, the study of literary representation of trauma exposes fragments from the past which remain unspoken and unprocessed.

## **Conclusion**

The necessary contextual and theoretical elements that are required for the analysis in the coming chapters are fulfilled in this chapter. First, there is a reference to the postmodernist context illustrating the world’s mindset after the Second World War that corresponds to incertitude, the loss of faith and irrationality. Secondly, philosophy of existentialism is highlighted for justifying the nature of the existential crisis to bridge between it and the absurd plotting in the play. At last, an insight into Freudian psychoanalytic criticism and trauma literary theory is provided to interpret the psychological conflict and the traumatic effects on the mental states of characters. Having fleshed out this theoretical framework, the next chapter moves on to examine how Beckett makes use of absurdism in his play operating on the existentialist philosophy.

## Chapter Two: Thematic Treatment of the Absurd in *Waiting for Godot*

*“Waiting for Godot is a play in which nothing happens twice.” (Mercier 144)*

### Introduction

Drama holds the attention of its audience by reflecting human preoccupations and social realities. Hence, its plot is usually composed of a successive flow of events and actions. However, Samuel Beckett’s post-war plays proves a breakthrough into public perception towards a new type of drama, namely “Theatre of the Absurd” which gives rise to plenty of critical reactions. His stories are without a line of dramatic conflicts. They are plotless and enigmatic. Since he presents a gloomy absurd vision on self and life.

His play *Waiting for Godot* has been labeled as the first example of this theatre. Characters in this play are dispossessed of all their particularities of existence. They are two tramps put in a vague and unlocalised setting who are deprived of their family, identity, social status, memory and even time-place’s consciousness. In this case, it gives deep insight into the collapsing reality and the absurdity of human condition and existence.

Thus, this chapter is mainly charged in exploring the thematic features of absurdism in this theatre and its relation to existentialism in the whole through outlining how Beckett reflects them in *Waiting for Godot*. Then, this would be helpful to pave the way to dig, later on in the next chapter, into the psychic posture, after war trauma, lies behind the characters’ absurd performances.

### 2.1. Twentieth Century Drama and the Absurd

Each theatre enjoys specific thematic features that are motivated by different social factors. These features make the dramatic work more unique. Because they collaborate to deliver certain beliefs and emotions. The Theatre of the Absurd is purely a product of

postmodernism. It is greatly influenced by the existential philosophy' tendencies. In the realm of the present study raises the need for defining first what is meant by "Absurd", and then exploring the "Theatre of the Absurd" and its themes. All this will take place in the subsequent section.

### **2.1.1. The Notion of 'Absurd'**

As it is mentioned before in the first chapter, Albert Camus is an existentialist who treats the absurdity of human existence. Camus describes the feeling of absurdity asserting that feeling absurdity is an outcome of the disconnection of an individual from his or her life so that they lose memory and hope becoming as alienated and strangers (5). According to him, the term "absurd" indicates something contradictory. It is a comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality. What is more, the absurd is a struggle in an individual's confrontation with the strangeness of what it used to be familiar (30). Camus argues that the absurd, therefore, is an experience that is felt when a human's deep desire for coherence is encountered by the incoherence of the world (51).

To sum up, Camus' perspective of philosophising the Absurd is summarised by Mairowitz and Korkos in their book *Introducing Camus* as follows, " [...] absurd is the confrontation between the sense of the irrational and the overwhelming desire for clarity which resounds in the depths of man" (40). So, the absurd is a situation when mankind experiences a state of inward continuous struggle concerning the irrationality in life from one side and seeking elucidation to this from the other side.

### **2.1.2. The Theatre of the Absurd**

Dramatic works that were mostly written during the 1950s and the 1960s share the reflection of Camus' contemplation of the absurd. To demonstrate some eminent representatives of this, it is important to mention Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. Plays

of such concern have been studied by Martin Esslin in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* 1961. Esslin derives the term “absurd” from Camus to posit these playwrights within a group that he calls The Theatre of the Absurd, tracing the intellectual and philosophical backgrounds to this type of drama. He asserts that these dramatists do share the exploration man’s existential agonies.

Esslin argues that this kind of theatre attempts to accomplish solidarity between the fundamental assumptions regarding absurdism, mainly expressed by the existentialists Sartre and Camus, and the frame in which they are communicated. He articulates that it aspires to depict a “sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition” (24). So, the absurd drama conceivably provides a portrait which manifests the absurdity behind human nature and existence.

In-depth, Esslin contends that the Theatre of the Absurd dispenses the rational systems of reasonable thinking. He describes this Theatre as a mirror of an inexplicable universe. Where the audience are completely unable to be engaged in the developments and intentions of the play on the stage. For they confront with awkward happenings, characterisation and unusual language and symbolism that they entirely struggle to grasp the full meaning. (23). Thus, one can say that vagueness in the plays of the absurd would reflect a state of discontent, irrationality and instability.

In this context, approaching the absurd plays, Esslin condemns that this categorisation dares to reverse all the stated criteria of the traditional drama creating a new genre in drama’s composition. He describes, “These plays confront public with a bewildering experience, a veritable Barrage of wildly irrational, often nonsensical goings-on that seem to go counter to all accepted standards of stage. In these plays, labeled ‘anti-plays,’ neither the time nor the place is clearly stated” (3). So, absurd dramas seem to represent a sort of confusion and a

labyrinthine illogical progression in no pointed time or place creating a sense of emptiness. In brief, incoherence and grotesque cover the absurd plays from beginning to end. This is what makes them a distinct version that dissimilarities with the familiar fashion of dramaturgy.

The main aim of absurd dramatists is to expose the absurdity in life to make people face their condition and position in the universe. Yet, they resort to travesty through implementing satiric tributes. Esslin comments that such theatre embraces slapstick dramatic works that treat severely pessimistic subject matters in a humorous guise. That is why it exceeds the category of comedy and tragedy to combine the ludicrous with horror. He assesses that the role of humour is to make the tragic kind of soft and easy to be swallowed by the spectators (415). Hence, the absurdist playwright echoes the dilemma of meaninglessness and nothingness by mixing tragic and comic elements. Where the comedy provokes hysterical laughter at a miserable life and suffering. This results in blackish humour.

The use of black humour typifies bitterness in the absurd plays that can be summarised in experiencing pain in pleasure and pleasure in pain. This distressful experience causes a harsh psychological effect. Perception of the inner structure of the human mind and psyche, unanimously, gives the stark reality. Accordingly, Esslin contends that the Theatre of Absurd is fundamentally realistic. For, it attempts to display a truer picture of reality illustrated into how the world appears in the individual consciousness and experience as an inner reality. He calls it “an even more total reality” (353, 404).

## **2.2. Beckett’s Thematic Treatment of the Absurd in *Waiting for Godot***

*Waiting for Godot* proves its entire violation in the established canons of drama. Indeed, the play tells no story; it opens with an aimless waiting and closes with it. Its main characters, Estragon and Vladimir, seem to be social outcast tramps who belong to no specific social class. There is nothing else to identify them and their motifs. They share futile

repetitious conversations with broken language that lead to no proper consequence. Employing such unusual formal design contributes to its absurd content. The following is a reading of the remarkable themes that Beckett renders to reflect on the existentialist account.

### 2.2.1. Uncertainty

Uncertainty is the lack of certitude, a state of limited knowledge about details. It takes part in the unknown and the probable that create unreliability and in-authenticity. Uncertainty is among the prominent signs that would best prescribe post-modern world impressions. Whereupon it leads to a world of perpetual struggle where nothing is sure, no expectations and everything is possible. Consequently, the unknown becomes a significant issue, as it is typical in the genre of the absurd.

*Waiting for Godot*, as an absurd composition, tends to reflect the mess of scepticism in the post-modern world. Throughout the play, characters come across a bunch of unanswerable queries. As Estragon bitterly insists that “Nothing is certain” (Beckett 1. 36) as they wait in vain. They never understand what, where and how they are brought that way. The tramps seem undetermined to recognise even the smallest data related to themselves and their position. They are doubtful about everything. In this sense, Esslin states that, in *Waiting for Godot*, the flow of uncertainty feeling from the hope to meet Godot to its repeated disappointment forms the essence of the play (45). This would depict the absence of absolute knowledge about the basic understanding of the universe and life.

Maybe the clearest example that likely clarifies more the uncertain situation that characters are confronted with in the play is voiced when Vladimir becomes profoundly self-doubt. Hereby, he is unable to understand or to explain his stance. For he is verily not sure whether he is sleeping or awake so that he starts to question all what happens to him or probably happens, and he asserts “But in all that what truth will there be?” (Beckett 2. 58).

Godot's unknown identity and his invisibility also indicate a large part of the uncertainty. Though they do not appear sure about why and who they are expecting, the only matter that Vladimir and Estragon are certain about is their waiting for Godot. Vladimir repeatedly invokes this: "Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come" (2. 52). They have never seen or met him before. Indeed, both of them discredit his identity and his name: ESTRAGON. His name is Godot? / VLADIMIR. I think so. (1. 15) / Estragon: Personally, I wouldn't even know him if I saw him. (1. 16). Thus, as Beckett suggests that the keyword in his plays is "perhaps" (qtd in. Driver 21). In this respect, Godot perhaps will finally arrive, perhaps he will not. This, increases the uncertainty of his coming or his existence at all because he did not say for sure he'd come (1. 11).

Another aspect of uncertainty seemingly covers the setting in *Waiting for Godot*. By this, it is meant the unclear representation of both space and time. The play is not only set in an unknown bizarre location but also characters are unaware of their locality. They are not sure where they are standing and whether it is the right place where they are supposed to be in: ESTRAGON. (despairingly). Ah! (Pause.) You're sure it was here?/ VLADIMIR. What?/ ESTRAGON. That we were to wait. (1. 10)

Beckett also makes the time continuance seems uncertain in this drama. In the second act, Vladimir insists that it is the next day. But the few leaves on the tree could denote a transformation in season. Therefore, the duration that separate act one from two remains equivocal based on the ground of probability. Besides, the lead characters do not know when and how long they are supposed to wait for the namely Godot: VLADIMIR. He said Saturday. I think. / ESTRAGON. But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? Or Monday? Or Friday? (1. 11). This emphasises how transcending time-consciousness causes perceptual confusion by bringing about alterations that challenge man's habitual beliefs.

Additionally, the characters are not accurately introduced, no one can recognise neither their situation nor even their exact names. Here, the uncertain proclamation of names portrays how characters are lost without enough cognition of each other names. Vladimir addresses Estragon as Gogo, while the other calls him Didi. Yet, these names appear unfamiliar with maybe the real ones. Because Estragon presents himself to Pozzo as Adam (1. 25). Vladimir, on the other hand, is called Mr. Albert by Godot's boy (1. 33). In the first act, the master Pozzo is known as Pozzo. However, after he has ended up blind in the second act, he does not reply when the vagrants call him "Pozzo". But when they try to holler with different appellations, he responds to them appealing for their assistance: ESTRAGON. Are you sure his name is Pozzo? [...] / ESTRAGON. We might try him with other names [...] / ESTRAGON. We'll soon see. Abel! Abel! / POZZO. help! (2. 76-77)

Finally, the theme of uncertainty could be apparent in the friendship of Vladimir and Estragon. The uncertain quality of the relationship between the two protagonist remains undecided and debatable. In fact, they do not know why they live together, but they do know that they cannot live without each other. From the one hand, they may be pleased to see one another: VLADIMIR. I'm glad to see you back. / ESTRAGON. Me too. (1. 7). On the other hand, they may wish to part: ESTRAGON. There are times when I wonder if it wouldn't be better for us to part. (1. 12). They may sometimes both desire to embrace: VLADIMIR. Come to my arms! [...]. They embrace. (2. 72). Otherwise, maybe one of them refuses to be touched by the other: ESTRAGON. Don't touch me! (2. 38). They may wish to talk to each other: ESTRAGON. That's the idea, let's ask each other questions. (2. 42). Or one may refuse to listen to the other: VLADIMIR. DON'T TELL Me. (1.11)

All in all, the domination of uncertainty over the play illustrates one of the existential agonies and instability of the post-modern society, where nothing is certain or reliable and everything is put into questions. It juxtaposes ambiguous reversals that reduce reality to

paradoxical situations lacking any final explanations. Then, maintaining this uncertainty is kept undecipherable enigma for characters and audience as well. Hence, it is apparent that the general dubious outlook of the setting and characters effectively captures the sense of absurdity that Beckett attempts to demonstrate.

### 2.2.2. Nothingness

Nothingness mainly refers to a complete emptiness. Martin Esslin views nothingness as follows, “Nothingness is related to an empty space, no spur to look forward” (31). The sense of nothingness seems to constitute the major concern for Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*. Again, Beckett’s unusual construction of the setting, as a mere country road featured by nothing but a dead tree, would also reflect the very idea of nothingness. In addition to that Estragon and Vladimir continually check in the boots and the hat as they are looking for something, however, there is nothing inside these nor that. The idea of uncertainty in life elaborated in this play seems to prove the tramps’ intention to spend their time doing nothing.

Much of *Waiting for Godot*’s content suggests the notion of nothingness. This notion is immensely foregrounded through the remark of Estragon and Vladimir’s agreement with him: ESTRAGON. Nothing to be done / VLADIMIR. I’m beginning to come round to that opinion. (Beckett 1. 7). In whole play whenever one asks the question what to do? Other replies nothing to be done. This statement is constantly repeated through the play several times and also through diverse phrases: “Nothing to show.” (1. 8) / “Nothing to say.” (1. 12) / “Nothing you can do about it.” (1. 15) / “There is nothing we can do.” (2. 44).

It appears that both of the vagrants insist repeatedly that they can do nothing worthwhile. They state that nothing to be done at the very beginning of act one, and conclude that “I can’t go on.” (2. 44) by the end of act two. The two tramps are incapable of anything, except for mere cross-talks and fragmented impulses, desires, thoughts,

moods, memories and impressions. They are engaged in different types of odd and illogical behaviours which are quite meaningless signifying nothing, unless for the sake of passing their time. Even Godot do nothing as the boy tells them: VLADIMIR. What does he do, Mr. Godot? [...] BOY: He does nothing, Sir. (2. 59)

It seems that the conclusion that there is nothing to be done, makes the unfortunate tramps do not try to use time. Rather, they prefer to let it to go to waste (2. 52). So, they are convinced that whatever they opt to fulfil will fade into the condition of being worthless. They will only come at triviality, attaining nothing. Consequently, they merely do not try to change their actual circumstance. Because what appears certain may devolve to be uncertain in the next step as Vladimir says, "Nothing is certain when you're about it" (1. 10). Hence, they may think that there is no value in working since the only certainty in life is uncertainty as Vladimir confirms the insignificance of their deeds: "[...] Come, let's get to work! In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness (2. 52)

It can be argued that the principle of repetition is another hallmark of nothingness in the play. The entire play is woven with repetition. The structure of the second act is a copy of the first. It moves in cycles with the same events recurring over and over again. In each act, all details are repeated in a never-ending loop: the appearance of Estragon and Vladimir talking on stage, performing useless actions, discussing the idea of suicide, encountering the master and his slave, then ending by the arrival of Godot's messenger and receiving his disappointing message. As Vladimir says, "Sometimes I feel it coming all the same" (1. 8).

The theme of nothingness in *Waiting for Godot*, symbolically, could define the journey of life as a journey from nothingness to nothingness. Having nothing significant to be done in the play emphasises that everything is meaningless. It looks like things happen unsystematically and this results just in entirely nonsensical actions. Whereupon meaning is

reduced to unresolved paradoxes opposed to reason. Therefore, Samuel Becket insists on the meaninglessness and absurdity of life through expressing the horribleness of nothingness, like Estragon claims: “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful.” (1. 28). Thus, it seems that reaching this conclusion predominantly offers a fair pessimistic vision in the play.

In sum, Beckett tends to exemplify nothingness in the play to shed light on the Existential concept that states that the universe does not naturally have a moral order, so that, it is the human mission to define the sense of his existence through what he chooses to believe in. Therefore, man’s incapability to grasp the essence of existence constitutes the feeling of absurdity, meaninglessness and nothingness.

### **2.2.3. Inaction**

The constructive features of protagonist characters in a literary work seem to be absent in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Protagonists are fundamentally regarded to demonstrate the fair movement in the direction of a story. They are subjected to driving motives that move them forward to reach a targeted objective. Those motives are enforced in the course of their actions. Then, the power to accomplish a certain objective, therefore, plays an important role in the procession of the events. As Carroll describes that the main action in a plot is associated with the character success or failure in achieving his or her goals. Goals are stimulated by some motives such as the desire to survive, to make friends, to obtain an education, or to assist one's friends (Carroll 217).

However, *Waiting for Godot* lacks any coherent action. Its characters appear trapped in their purposeless roles which renders their waiting as meaningless. They are stripped of their ability to progress and change. That they do not seem to go any distance neither physically nor mentally. This situation is clear over Estragon’s tight boots that suggest chains, and the hats that stand for thinking are no longer needed onstage. The crux is that the very

idea of inaction is something that paralyses the characters' body and mind in this work. This leads to say that *Waiting for Godot* is a drama that enacts the action of inaction.

With the surrounding uncertainty and the impression that nothing quite happens. The main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, are living a miserable life. Although they are not physically paralysed, they are almost physically motionless in the sense that they can make nothing happen, as they are endlessly appealing to senseless waiting for an uncertain future without appealing to action. Characters do not go anywhere. They stand still in front of the audience and do nothing except passing the ball; they talk and pass the time. Even when they resolve to leave at the end of each act, they do not do: VLADIMIR. Well? Shall we go? / ESTRAGON. Yes, let's go. They do not move. (Beckett 1. 35) / (2. 60)

The above exchange between Vladimir and Estragon affirms that the play of *Godot* is only activated in the signal energy: "Let's go" which ends only in "They do not move". Often, they gesturally decide to leave the stage, but find themselves physically unable to move. The gestural action goes the same in the following dialogue too. When, Vladimir manages to make a conscious decision that he will return to Lucky, the slave, his hat since Estragon refuses to do so. Though, he cannot translate that mental choice into actual action. Where it results just in that he does not move (1. 28)

Likewise, Vladimir and Estragon do not attempt any single effort to survive. Rather, they can only think of suicide to escape their misery: ESTRAGON. Let's hang ourselves immediately! (1. 12). But, none of them is willing to go first due to the fear of being alone. The paradox is that even suicidal intention is an action which is doomed to failure. Hence, the play remains within the bounds of absolute inaction. Inactive characters seem utterly perplexed concerning what they should truly do.

In particular, they are called to be stranded by a tree and a road in the middle of nowhere to just wait for Godot whose arrival is an illusion. Despite the futility of this task, they are dutifully committed to condense their daily life on fulfilling it. The reality is that they feel entitled to wait for Godot, and so, dependant on him. This dependency is what impedes the two characters from a significant action to lead a better life: ESTRAGON. Don't let's do anything. It's safer. / VLADIMIR. Let's wait and see what he says (1. 13). The point is that such stagnancy would lead to being submissive to what happens without reacting or making a decision. As Barry stipulates the imaginative universe of Beckett presents itself as a world of patients where the action is to undergo experiences passively while waiting for the end (117).

They do not move to find Godot by themselves. Instead, they take part in an endless process of waiting and inaction. Thus, they keep on their usual nonsense interactions and Godot's messenger with resignation, falling into extreme habit and routine. Vladimir states, "[...] habit is great deadener" (2. 59). Habit, then, would seem to be the true driving factor behind the characters' inability to act out of passivity. Habit straightly enslave them to Godot.

It can be noticed that Vladimir and Estragon have free will, yet some limitations appear to be imposed on them. They are somewhat aware of their ability to choose, but the sense of uncertainty, again, prevents them from breaking the cycle of habit during waiting. They seem to be imprisoned by themselves. Their inability to act confines them to a state of passivity and stagnancy. In this vein, Bachakus condemns, "Their inaction is at once ambiguously imposed on them and a voluntary choosing. They are *ahead of themselves*, but in a predicament in which they cannot know the nature of the goal for which they wait" (92).

In short, it remains to be clear the inaction staged in *Waiting for Godot* is one of the central motifs of the play which gives it a rich tone of absurdity. Unfavoured immobility of Vladimir and Estragon represents the existential point of view that the person is free,

responsible for his uncontrollable actions. Therefore, this dramatic work could prove to delineate the necessity for action to achieve life goals.

#### **2.2.4. Desperate Comedy**

When Beckett translated *Waiting for Godot* from French into English, he attached to it the subtitle of “A tragic-comedy in two acts”. This motto would reveal that there is a delicate blend of the motifs of both tragedy and comedy together in the content of the work. At first, this description seems somewhat unsuitable in the point that how something tragic can be humorous at the same time. Generally, feeling the sense of humour in this drama is, perhaps, definite. However, this humour is the hardest thing to experience. That, it exposes a very dark vision which must be taken with almost seriousness. Through this, Beckett establishes an atmosphere of dark comedy or the so-called “black humour” to handle a tragic situation comically. Where hysterical laughter is miserably generated from real pain and suffering.

The fact that Vladimir and Estragon seem completely powerless unable to control themselves and what surrounds them manifests an extreme tragedy. This inspires the absurd notion that man’s existence without action is purposeless and meaningless. Despite this truth, both vagrants persist on living helplessly in the tragedy of waiting. Thus, it is a paradoxical stance which distressingly could display the comedy within the tragedy in this drama. This tragicomic quality often appears in the performances of characters that seem to be funny, but in reality behind them lurks extreme cruelty revealed through clownish behaviours of beating and insulting each other, wordplay and banal conversations

The following dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon may portray the appropriate exemplification of how desperate the comedy is in the play. Arguably, rather it sounds comic but indeed profoundly significant, it centres around the farcical dropping trousers of Estragon at the ending scene of the play. Despite Vladimir’s endeavour to notify his friend Estragon of

his falling pants, but it takes some time for this latter to lastly realise the fact that his trouser are already down. Right, this panorama sounds funny, but it sorely illustrates the quietest tragic and solemn that is being unaware of one's real situation. It appears that this amusement is necessary, because otherwise life would be more dreadful without it. Then, it seems as if life is desperate, it will be at least a desperate comedy:

VLADI M I R. Pull on your trousers.

E STRAGON. You want me to pull off my trousers?

VLADIM I R. Pull ON your trousers.

ESTRAGON. (*realizing his trousers are down*). True. He pulls up his trousers.

(Beckett 2. 61)

## Conclusion

In light of what has been discussed in this chapter, one can conclude that *Waiting for Godot* being identified with the Theatre of absurd following up postmodernism, represents an Avant-garde experiment in drama. In as so, Beckett fixes doubt in every detail in the play. On this basis that nothing is sure, characters realise that nothing will be worth trying. Then, they engage themselves in cycle of repetitious language and performances. Thus, there is no progress only routine. Their submission to such situation of emptiness cripples their thinking and actions so that they just exchange trivial conversations and jokes. As a result of this misfortune, they create a bitter sense of humour which mirrors the ridiculousness of human life without action which expires to endless existential problems of being and meaninglessness. Hence, the next chapter endeavour to provide a psychoanalytical interpretation of such estate.

### Chapter Three: War Effects “Psychological Anxiety and Trauma in *Waiting for Godot*”

*“The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.” (Herman 1992)*

#### Introduction

Beckett belongs to the twentieth century with all its highlights. He would be, at this point, directly or indirectly impelled by its imperative occasions as they frame the society in which he lives. The Second World War is a monumental of the twentieth century that stands as a turning point in the history of humankind. It has not only left visible scars on bodies but also wounds on the mind and has disturbed the psychology of its survivors. That is to say, its unbearable atrocities entangle humanity in an age of continual anxiety.

Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* was written in 1948, shortly after the Second World War. Although it has entirely no straight reference to this tragic war yet one may capture an aura of the post-war painful experience in this work. That, the sense of prevailing absurdity and perplexity with characters’ shattered psychologies in the play might picture the war traumatised victims and their persistent struggle to cope in the aftermath of a phase of catastrophic trauma which is still too vivid to be endorsed as a past incident at that time.

This chapter is mainly held to give an interpretation of *Waiting for Godot* based on a psychological course that strives at understanding Beckett’s dramatic vision of war psychic trauma. Thus, an attempt is made to highlight the inner conflict portrayed through characters and to read how memory and language are displayed as stations of trauma symptoms. Mystic absurd behaviours in the play, therefore, are brought under scrutiny alongside psychoanalysis and trauma theories to delineate how the apparent image of the play tends to represent a re-enactment of a repressed terrible event.

### 3.1. Disordered Psychological Processes and Anxiety

It is supposed that Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, as an epitome, tends to foreground the devastating experience of the Second World War that dropped behind it nothing but catastrophes and chaos. Consequently, every entity in this drama is kind of contributing to picturing an overall psychological discomfort and the lack of mental health. Such a neurotic helpless situation that gradually overruns the substance of cognition leading to an absurd existence and life. The analysis in this segment deliberates Freudian main theories of mental personality and defence mechanisms. The first in forming the characterisation. The second in depicting the rise of anxiety and the endeavours to maintain it.

#### 3.1.1. Characterisation of the Psychic Apparatus

The pairs of Didi and Gogo looks like unhappy together, Estragon does not seem strongly convinced about Godot's arrival and Godot remains invisible. This inconvenience and opposition would often lead to the impression that these three collective protagonists are not able to get along. However, they relatively seem to constitute a triangular relationship. Whereby it can be argued that this framed relationship is kind of complementary in nature. It is likely stimulated by the motif of commutative dependency and need. They connotatively seem to form several parts of the same unity.

Reading this type of enigmatic relationship through a psychoanalytic lens reveals that Beckett's way of absurd characterisation stands for a personification of the faculties of human psychological personality: *Id*, *Ego* and *Superego*. Along with this, it would be, therefore, proposed that Estragon signifies the *Id*, Vladimir incorporates the *Ego* and Godot represents the *Superego*. Up to a point, this projection is grounded in the sense of unification and completeness that lies within their mechanical relatedness. And this would be detected in the demonstration of the disparate roles they perform throughout the play.

For the sake of clarity, the instinctive patterns of *Id* seem to be articulated in the absent-minded unconscious state of Estragon. As this latter is volatile who acts irrationally. He is driven by fulfilling his instinctual targets such as eating and sleeping. Also, he mainly operates on elation by concerning himself in telling funny stories. Alike the rational level of personality *Ego*, Vladimir appears prudent, logical in thinking and spiritual seen as the mind. He is more realistic than Estragon. For he does stay all focused on the duty of waiting and Estragon's acts. In this view, Ruby Cohn asserts, "Didi as mind and Gogo as a body, Gogo eats, sleeps and fears beating whereas Didi ponders spiritual salvation" (Cohn 68).

From the other corner, many critics have held Godot in the significance of God-like. In the support of this, it requires to mention Genzlinger's suggestion: "It seems fairly certain that Godot stands for God" (Genzlinger 2006). Hence, the position of *Superego* as a principle of morality and the source of prohibition for *Id* and *Ego* could be designed in Mr. Godot's background and portrayal. With regards to this, the invisible Godot, similarly, is abbreviated as a figure of sovereignty, systematisation and ethics.

In the light of how *Ego* proceeds in controlling *Id*'s unreasonable urges, it seems that the whole play goes on the way that Vladimir's intellectuality, prudence and spirituality tend to provide a sort of preservation for Estragon in containing his impulses. In this sense, Didi constantly reminds Gogo of what he could not recall and the importance of waiting for Godot. This is maybe implied in Vladimir's declaration that Estragon is nothing without him (Beckett 1. 8) and that he does not know even how to defend himself so that he claims to protect him when he is beaten (1. 39). Indeed, Vladimir's saying that there are things that do not escape him while they do escape Estragon (1. 39) could prove that similarly to *Ego*, he is the more aware of facts among the two of them.

On the other side, Estragon echoes the stubborn nature of the impulsive *Id* in struggling with the *Ego* as Freud defines it “untamed passions” (qtd. in Toksöz 66). This is when he shouts on Vladimir: “Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me!” (1. 38). However, he persists on the presence of Vladimir. This is announced by Estragon at the end of the same previous passage: “[...] Stay with me!” (1. 38). So, even if Estragon refuses to be handled or interrogated by Vladimir, he acknowledges the need for him. Notably, the fact that Estragon is being beaten every night displays the troublesome time he has without Vladimir. Likewise, one could demonstrate that Vladimir, like *Ego*, is stimulated by Gogo, representative of *Id*. Concerning this, Vladimir does not want Estragon to sleep, and therefore he wakes him up because he feels lonely (1. 11). This indicates that they need to work in collaboration. It is meant to illustrate that every one of them merely identifies the existence of the other.

By extension, both of Didi and Gogo despairingly cannot live properly without Godot that missing him disrupts their life. Yet, Didi is the one who strongly believes in the necessity of the absentee Godot to arrive. He sees that their safety is related to him to the point that they should consider to ending their life if he does not show up: VLADIMIR. We'll hang ourselves to-morrow. (*Pause.*) Unless Godot comes. / ESTRAGON. And if he comes? / VLADIMIR. We'll be saved (2. 61). Bettelheim advocates that the *Superego* is better translated as ‘Over-I’ or ‘Upper-I’(58). So in this case, Godot's attendance, functioning as *Superego*, fosters the sense of authority which might provide them with conscious inner critical voice and judgement. This kind of evaluation possibly offers them a sort of organisation and guidance as a salvation from the tormenting disorder they are experiencing.

In the case of *Id*'s relation to *Superego*, in Freudian terms, *Superego* does not pertain with *Id*, but it does with *Ego*. Analogically, it appears that, unlike Vladimir, waiting for

Godot does not matter for Estragon. In this respect, he is less confident about his advent, always forgets about him, doubts his name and insists on leaving. In addition to this, Godot's messenger addresses only Vladimir. Eventually, Estragon is, instead, related to Godot indirectly through Vladimir. This justifies Vladimir's cautiousness of Godot punishment when he notifies Didi that if they drop Godot, he would punish them (2. 60). Ultimately, one may claim that Estragon, Vladimir and Godot are, on the track of the three prongs of mental personality, dynamically in need of each other. This is what would conceivably interpret the absurdity and uncertainty stitched within the characters' relationship and manners in approaching each other.

### **3.1.2. Emergence of Anxiety**

Freud observes that for the ego to function properly there should be the superego (qtd. in Toksöz68). Throughout the play, the function of Vladimir, identified as the ego, is expected to reasonably mediate between the request of Godot of waiting and Estragon's desire to leave objecting this demand. Nevertheless, Vladimir, without the supremacy of Godot, is struggling and does not seem to proceed validly. Even he urges himself to be reasonable, but he resumes the struggle (Beckett 1. 7). That is to say that Godot, portraying a source of moral restriction as the *Superego* does, could constantly guide and remind Vladimir that certain actions lead to unfavourable consequences. Therefore, Godot likely plays a great role in assisting Vladimir. So, his disappearance creates a dilemma.

In the frame of what has been elaborated above, the absence of Godot, as an embodiment of the *Superego*, assumes the absence of consciousness of moral principles and the collapse of social structures. More precisely, it appears as a reflection upon the lack of the self-criticism which results in transgression of values and decay of morality. In line with this, it can be argued that there is a strong possibility that this violation, symbolically, refers to the

general atmosphere of instability in the outer context of post-Second world war. Subsequently, Vladimir is forced to face his deficiency without Godot's assistance. That is what causes a psychological shock and deterioration. Likewise, when *Ego* confronts its weakness, it falls in crippling bouts of anxiety.

Anxiety, in its simplest definition, expresses a troubled state of the mind that suggests the feeling of nervousness implying persistent doubt or fear. This state, in Freudian perspective, serves as a warning that there is something erroneous within the psychological personality. Often, it is a signal which alarms that the *Ego* is being threatened. In the case of Vladimir as an *Ego*, he breaks into reality anxiety regarding the actuality of his condition. Whereupon the frequent frustration to match with the hidden Godot affixes him in a stressful posture. He seems afraid of the fact that the named Godot might not appear, and then the whole process of waiting will be taken into a vacuum. Thenceforward, his awareness of this fact transforms the way of experiencing and dealing with it .

This is perhaps chiefly evidential through two scenes towards the end of the second act. First, it is when he nervously questions the reality of his uncertain situation, the notion of time and the place where he and Estragon are (Beckett 2. 58). In another instance which may prove the anxious state of Vladimir, it is when he acts and talks in kind of offensive tone with Godot's messenger. He bursts his fear out, being full of anger, he insists on that messenger to inform Mr. Godot that Vladimir is waiting for him to come:

Tell him...(he hesitates)...tell him you saw me and that...(he hesitates)...that you saw me. (Vladimir advances, the Boy recoils. Vladimir halts, the Boy halts. With sudden violence.) You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me to-morrow that you never saw me! Silence. Vladimir makes a sudden spring forward, the Boy avoids him and exit running. (2. 59)

### 3.1.3. Attempt to Defensiveness

The Freudian interpretation of *Ego*-based anxiety in the play articulates that the anxious Vladimir tends to become defensive. As discussed previously, the feeling that Godot will never presumably appear keeps on haunting Vladimir. He cannot accept the fact that the outcome of their waiting is unknown and uncertain. Thus, he appears striving to cover this undesirable thought or to exclude it completely. So, his first automatic reaction is to seek rational ways to overcome his fears and to provide a sense of tranquility and safety.

As a result of this, Vladimir is unconsciously engaged in employing various mechanisms to defend himself against the unresolved conflicts and unacceptable ideas attacking him concerning Godot's not coming. Therefore, he establishes a feedback mechanism by which he falsifies and escapes the painful reality that he does not want to think about or deal with. The following is an attempt to outline the eminent mechanisms that Vladimir goes through similar to the *Ego*.

The initial defensive method which Vladimir makes use of is assumed to be classified as a '**Regression**' by which he breaks away to escapism. Perhaps the clearest indication of this may be the following passage uttered by Vladimir, "Hand in hand from the top of Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up" (Beckett 1. 8). Moving backwards to the past, he flees his real dark situation. Mainly, he retrieves the stages of joy and honour in his previous life which are no more at reach. Whereby the pleasure of these moments might relief his exhausted thinking of the heavy complication of reality he is currently experiencing.

The second mechanism through which Vladimir seems to take a refugee is suggested to be '**Rationalisation**'. This is pretty shown through Vladimir interpretation of the situation below when he says:

“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 [...] Or night to fall. (Pause.) We have kept our appointments, and that’s an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much.” (2. 52).

Vladimir imprisons himself with Estragon in the operation of endless waiting. They seem unable to break away from this self-made prison. Consequently, he resolves to rationalise the fact of the possibly futile waiting providing it with a reasonable explanation to make it appears logical. Throughout this way, he creates excuses and motives to justify this waiting. As for this, he legitimises this undetermined act as an appointment or commitment. He is trying to convince himself and Estragon as well that their waiting is considered to be a great achievement regardless of its probable disappointing consequences.

Another attempt by Vladimir to establish psychological security is supposed to be captured in utilising the mechanism defence of *‘Denial’*. To evade becoming aware of the bitterness of factuality, he blocks it from consciousness and refuses to acknowledge or to recognise that it is verily occurring. He thoroughly denies the overwhelming unpleasant thought of Godot’s obscurity leading it to the corner of being ignored. In this way, Vladimir minimises his anxiety by acting out an emotional outburst which is being delightfully pleased. Thence he pretends the feeling of happiness and also asking Estragon to do so, even it is not the truth. The following exchange typifies how the process of reality denial occurs:

VLADIMIR. You must be happy, too, deep down, if you only knew it.

ESTRAGON. Happy about What?

VLADIMIR. To be back with me again.

ESTRAGON. Would you say so?

VLADIMIR. Say you 're even if it's not true.

ESTRAGON. What am I to say?

VLADIMIR. Say, I am happy. (2. 39)

Ultimately, Vladimir refusal to address Estragon's nightmares may delineate an extra dynamic method of defence which denotes '*Repression*'. In both acts whenever Estragon is about to narrate his nightmares, Vladimir gets very irritated and stops him crying "Don't tell me" (1. 11) / (2. 46). He admits that he cannot bear listening to those nightmares (1. 12). In Freudian terms, one's repressed thoughts and instincts in the unconscious may appear in dreams "Freudian slips" (Peterson 350).

When Estragon is dreaming, his repressed horrific memories and fears may feature. By not wanting to hear about these nightmares, Vladimir is keeping their content "manifestation" at a distance because he probably thinks that verbalising them into words will bring his fears into light. He is disquieted over their symbolic quality "latent." They may deeply stand for reality, concerning Godot's absence, which he desires to ignore. Therefore, Vladimir continues to avoid facing the negative reality for him by repressing his threatening thought of waiting in vain from reaching consciousness and from being openly discussed.

All in all, one could suggest that Beckett dramatises the triple parts of the human psyche to depict more vividly the inner grief and stress of individuals after the Second World War. Thenceforward, this interpretation probably reflects the ongoing psychological conflicts within the victims of war collective trauma and their attempts to avert debating it. As for this, the trauma of war and conditions of its aftermath era, including the physical and spiritual destructions besides political disputes, shatter traditional principles, beliefs and ideologies. That the general populace are left traumatised entangled in constant tension. In short, this is

what would expound the allegorical meaning of Godot's absence and anxiety in the play. And it is in this sense that the other characters' perception is wrapped, experiencing absurdity and facing the difficulty to be integrated in life.

### **3.2. The Traumatic Impact of War and its Testimonial Significance**

In light of the preceded analysis which nominates *Waiting for Godot*'s main personae band and their peculiar procedures as representative of the interior anxiety generated by the shock of Second World War. Subsequently, the following study, further, carries an examination of Beckett's exterior manifestation of traumatic effects of war on memory and language. A traumatic experience indeed has no particular identified concrete marks yet because of its unbearable horror, it is recognised as a profound injury. Since it provokes an inner war within the self which impedes the processes of remembering and speech. Hence, in the view of trauma literary theorisation, it is argued that the dysfunction of memory and language, in the play, displays trauma severe signs which tend to stimulate unspeakable history.

#### **3.2.1. Traumatic/ Repression Memory**

Schooler and Hyman, citing Freud, write: "Repression theory argues that when people experience trauma they are likely to place that memory in the unconscious until the anxiety is sufficiently relieved" (536). The underline assumption is that the operation of forgetting would be automatically motivated to avoid the retrieving of painful memories to the conscious area by activating the mechanism of repression. By the same token, trauma theorists argue that the traumatic memory drives undesirable events aloof. This is particularly what makes the trauma-related details insufficiently accessible.

By the end of the first act, Vladimir appears hinting on memory awkwardness. He insists, "Extraordinary the tricks that memory plays!" (Beckett 1. 33). The loss of memory is,

regardless, explicitly addressed in the second act. As for this, forgetfulness seems crucially manipulating the memory of the characters, especially Estragon and Pozzo. While Vladimir relatively remembers the elements of the previous day, Estragon, however, is unable to recognise anything. Accordingly, Vladimir tries to remind him affirming that they are now at the same location as they were yesterday but Estragon only comments: “What is there to recognize?” (2. 40), or “We weren’t here yesterday”, “How would I know? (2. 43).

Estragon also forgets about meeting with Pozzo and Lucky yesterday, denying that he knows them (2. 43). Vladimir tends to prove their encounter with these two passengers by pointing at a wound on Estragon’s shin that was affected by the hit of Lucky. Conversely, Estragon does count on this clue provided by Vladimir. He remembers that this infliction was caused the day before but he does not recall who did that nor when or where. Estragon’s recollection in this context seems to reconstruct the past as a combination of concrete marks of violence and vague memory, where details are lost in unconsciousness.

Additionally, Pozzo, like Estragon, claims to have no memory of meeting anyone on the previous day: “I don’t remember having met anyone yesterday. But to-morrow I won’t remember having met anyone to-day” (2. 57). In this manner, Pozzo insists on his actual obliviousness, and even of what will happen next. What is more, Estragon, the other, does not want to remember acknowledging that he either forgets immediately or never forgets (2. 39). It appears as if these two are trying to avoid intentionally their past. This makes Vladimir disappointed with their forgetful minds because they deny his conscious awareness and memory. From this, it can be concluded that perhaps their past life has been distressful and difficult. Not only this but also they are now suffering in an era of crisis. That is why they are pushing their, even recent, memories away. As Vladimir notices that “the air is full of our crisis” (2. 58).

Further, Berry agitates that our pressed down difficulties remain alive in the unconscious and constantly seek a way to surface, as Freud said “there is always a return of the repressed (100). Since Freud’s interpretation of dreams as an access of the repressed, the appearance of unpleasant dreams “nightmares” could be rooted in the past’s repressed deformities. Therefore, the inclusion and the frequent mentioning of nightmares in the play may generally reflect the recurrence of afflictive experiences related to psychosomatic symptoms of trauma. This is another aspect of pushing memory away. Thus, repressed memory cannot coherently address traumatic experiences. To sum up, through presenting nightmares and deactivated processes of characters’ conscious memory, Beckett seems alluding to the emotional shocks of the Second World War that produce lasting harmful effects on memory.

### 3.2.2. Language Inadequacy

Another site, as trauma theorists suggest, which serves for the demonstration of war traumatic experience tends to be language. Deeply, the nature of the language used in *Waiting for Godot* seems empty and paradoxical. Because the whole play is based on the delivery of useless repetitive dialogues where language loses its fixed forms and symmetry, as Esslin claims “incoherent babblings” (22). What one character says to the other does not make sense, only repeated conversations and playing with the meaning of words.

Significantly, repetitions, omissions, ellipsis and also the long pauses could reflect language failure as a means of human expression and communication in this play. In this sense, Esslin, further, reports that “A yawning gulf has opened between language and reality” (409). Therefore, words fail to express the real essence of human experience, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. An illustration of this takes place in the following exchange between Vladimir and Estragon. It conveys their linguistic breakdown and frustrating fight

against silence: [...] Long silence./ VLADIMIR. Say something! / ESTRAGON. I'm trying.  
Long silence./ VLADIMIR. (*In anguish*) Say anything at all! (Beckett 2. 41)

In another exemplification, one may bring up the unusual tirade of intense thought delivered by Lucky, the slave of Pozzo. It consists of repetitive words and random matching between phrases. So much so that, this speech becomes less and less comprehensible. In this perspective, it is highlighted as a sign of meaninglessness since it is so long and conveys no idea. Considering it as a soliloquy, it also expresses the subconscious flow of Lucky's mind. Above all, it chiefly indicates the difficulty that the play's characters experience when attempting to express themselves with language. The below extracted passage from Lucky's speech demonstrates this:

Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of personal God quaquaqua with white beard quaquaquauqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell... (2. 40)

This broken and fragmented speech of Lucky, with its references to religion, show that religious tendencies have also been demolished in the post-World War. His meaningless words demonstrate the psychological disorder of the characters. Summarising this, it conversely makes logical interaction impossible through language. Thus, communication in this neurotic community turns into a heap of disjointed parts of the language.

In short, by characters' absurd fragmented and clueless conversations, Beckett seems to represent language as inadequate for portraying the fruitlessness of the human mind and the absurd psychological processes of post-war individuals. In this way, the loss of language coherence, hesitation in speech and the moments of silence appear altogether to foreground language itself as a symptom of war trauma. Often, language is in the situation where neither

able to repress nor to adequately enlighten the past trauma. As Laub proposes that in the aftermath of atrocity, the trauma victim becomes entrapped between the imperative to tell and the impossibility of telling (Marder 10). In that case, what is uttered on the stage, therefore, seems to be sort of an attempt to articulate what has been kept unspeakable from the traumatic history.

### **3.2.3. Testimony of Trauma**

As it is discussed in the two previous sections in this chapter, the repressed memory and the inadequate language of characters tend to reveal symptoms of war trauma. However they could shape the presence of traumatic past victimising characters, they do not fully capture the event since they are frozen in the unconscious and partially surface. But most importantly, literature, in this way, still emerges to open a window on massive traumatic experiences because it invites readers to listen attentively to what can only be told indirectly. By so doing, it rejects to close the traumatic experience. Thus, it provides a medium through which they rethink their responses to the deep past realities of pain and sorrow that uncertain stammered language or intrusive memories would hint about.

Accordingly, it seems that survivors of trauma live in two worlds: the world of their everlasting present traumatic memories and the real present. As a result of this, they face the difficulty of integration in both worlds. Instead, they are held right in between living ghost-like. Then, this section would explore the reciprocal relation between being a victim and becoming a witness of the traumatised condition at the same time. That is to say that trauma transforms the life of its victims to such an instrument by which the continuous endeavours are devoted to typify the true narrative of the traumatic history. Consequently, dictated by awakening the inner witness within the victim, it is as if the sorrowful voices of the deads persist to speak through the survivors.

To portray the situation of war survivors, Estragon and Vladimir, as victims, have lost their rights because they are, in the first place, deprived of them against their will and then get rid of demanding them (Beckett 1. 14). Moreover, Pozzo' speech on tears presents the assumption that there is an enduring quantity of desolation. Pozzo says: "The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep somewhere else another stops" (1. 22). This could suggest that the world, in which characters live, contains an ever-increasing quantity of sorrow. This means that there is widespread suffering.

Reflecting the struggle to bear witness may be explicitly addressed in the passage in which Vladimir and Estragon are conversing about the voices of the dead they are hearing: ESTRAGON. All the dead voices. / VLADIMIR. They make a noise like wings (2. 41). These voices seem to arise out of their moments of silence creating clamour because the deads are all speaking at once as Vladimir says. The voices are mainly conveyed through the sounds of nature that troublingly haunt Didi and Gogo: "like wings, leaves, sand, feathers and ashes;" "they whisper, rustle and murmur" (2. 41).

In particular, these dead talk about their lives and they have to talk about it. Since to have lived is not enough for them as well as to have just died is not sufficient (2. 41). It appears as they aspire to lead their horrific whines towards all ears in the sake of awakening some facts that still not yet approached. Vladimir anguishedly asks Estragon to assist him to avoid hearing them anymore. He wants, rather, to break the silence insisting urgently on finding something to say for keeping the conversation on. Estragon tries to do so by suggesting to ask each other questions. But, the first question which immediately stimulates Vladimir thinking is "Where are all these corpses from?" and Estragon appends "These are skeletons" (2. 42). Again, it seems that the sight, the same as the voices, is dreadful.

Subsequently, Estragon shouts, “You don’t have to look” and Vladimir affirms, “You can’t help looking” (2. 42).

There is an interesting thought about the meaning of this description of the images that chase the protagonists’ minds. From one hand, it emphasises their neurotic case due to the non-apparent terrifying sounds and scenes they are hearing and seeing. From the other hand, it testifies the inexhaustible suffering of the dead of the ages that have flown away, yet they continue to speak to the present.

In another testimonial record by the end of the second act, Vladimir discusses the fact that he and Estragon represent “all mankind”. The suggestion is that they are the victims of cruel fate and inhabit an “immense confusion”. Yet they do emerge as representatives of the damaged humanity to release the “cries for help” which still ringing in their ears (2. 51). At last, the condition of Vladimir and Estragon tends to illustrate an imaginary shift between the voice of the victim and the voice of the witness. This would be a mode of report that enacts the traumatic memories and features, but it separates them from their self-hood.

## **Conclusion**

Referring to the catastrophic effects of the Second World War and the chaotic state of its following era, war becomes the major reason behind the individual’s damaged psychology. On this view, this chapter sponsors to detect the viability of reading *Waiting for Godot* as a testimonial drama of war psychic trauma. Hence, it sheds light first, through Freud’s perspective regarding psychic and defence apparatus, on the deterioration of psychological processes that leads to anxiety. Second, it studies memory loss and language incoherence to explore the overwhelming presence of trauma in the play. Finally, it projects how *Waiting for Godot* could testify to the history of Second World War trauma where survivors emerge as victims and witness to a traumatic past.

### General Conclusion

*“Horrors and trauma of war lingered long after the guns stopped firing, forced people to suffer in isolation and silence.” (Buss 531)*

This dissertation is an attempt to investigate into the correlation between the existential tendencies of the Theatre of the Absurd and the trauma of the Second World War regarding Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. It contends that the absurd existence typified in this play indicate symptoms of the disturbed mind and psyche of most Europeans during the post-era of that massive war. The problematic that is raised is in what way and to what extent Beckett's portrayal of the existential crisis and absurdity tends to mirror the psychic conflicts in the light of the war traumatic experience. This investigation principally aspires to fathom psychoanalytically the metaphorical meanings behind the existential crisis and the absurd nature of the seemingly traumatised characters. It draws on an eclectic approach of the existentialist, trauma and psychoanalytic theories.

The first formulated objective holds the identification of a theoretical basis for existential crisis and trauma in literature. Collected data suggest that existential crisis expresses internal anxiety arising from questioning the existence's meaning, purpose and value. Existentialists examine this anxious state as a human condition arguing that there is no predefined essence to humanity. Thus, individuals are responsible to shape the conceptions and validity of their life and existence as they have the free will to choose and to act. This premise would approach literature which manifests existential agonies and absurdity.

On trauma, it is defined as a frequent reappearance of the memories of a terrible past. In literature, it is theorised as a case of testimony that uncovers a historical truth through typifying neurotic states of memory and language in a literary text. These reached ends concerning existentialism and trauma theory; in addition to a view on postmodernism and

Freudian psychoanalytical background, elaborated in chapter one, have been useful to enhance the procedure of unveiling the psychological setting of the absurd existence in *Waiting for Godot*.

The second objective targets the examination of Beckett's design of absurdity to convey existential crisis through *Waiting for Godot*. With a prelude to the Theatre of the Absurd, this objective has been deliberated in the second chapter. Accordingly, the drawn conclusion denotes that Beckett structures absurdity by exposing uncertainty, nothingness, inaction, and desperate comedy. In this case, within a dark sarcastic atmosphere, nothing happens in the play and nothing is done in as much nothing is sure and everything is doubted.

The lack of certainty, meaning, action and seriousness likely emphasise extreme ridiculousness in the life of characters. These aspects of absurdity mainly stand for portraying human disconnection from life. Up to this, Beckett tends to communicate the existentialist thought that the failure of attributing meaning to life detaches human being from the essence of existence and then falling into an existential crisis. This raises the question of what is the connotation behind this absurdity and crisis which Beckett would intend to illustrate.

Hence in the last chapter, the third objective steers to the psychoanalytical explication of the characters absurd nature. The interpretation leads to deduce that this absurdity may represent dilemmatic interior life. That, Freudian theory of the mind, reading the uncertain relationship and identity of the protagonists and their absurd approach to each other, reveals that Beckett tends to objectify Vladimir as *Ego*, Estragon as *Id* and Godot as *Superego*. It proposes that this characterisation is an animation of the internal psychological structures of the Second World War survivors on the stage.

Thus, the invisibility of Godot symbolises the demotion of *Superego* essence so that Vladimir loses the support of morality inspection. Consequently, he is indulged in *Ego*-based

anxiety and intensive defensiveness digested in the suppression of this reality. For, the war chiefly devastated the traditional social values which greatly affects moral judgment. This is what echoes psychological conflict and disorder which act upon the protagonists' behaviours.

Further, employment of literary trauma theory highlights the traumatic impact of war in the play through inspecting both issues of memory loss and language breakdown. Here, the traumatic memory likely explicates the practicability of uncertainty and nothingness which lead to the physical and mental inaction. Moreover, banal and broken language of the personae and its collapse to provide a convenient expression of their condition provoke laughter, yet it is an indication of war trauma. This is what makes it a dark amusement. Victimised characters also act as witnesses since they communicate the voices of the dead and such terrifying views. Therefore, this absurd drama is proclaimed as a testimonial report on the psychological ravages of the Second World War.

Overall, the analysis that has been conducted within this investigation displays that Beckett's demonstration of a context of existential absurdity with a sense of neurotic anxious life, to a great extent, tends to portray the psychologically traumatised condition of individual who have lost their perception of time and the meaning of their existence. Hence, Characters' absurd behaviours and existential anxiety would be shaped by their psychological disorder. Up to this point, Beckett seems to reflect and to blame the undeniable destruction of Second World War in creating incurable psychological wounds and life instability. Deeply, he mirrors how traumatic is to experience the horrors of war. So, he would offer a vision of the brutal reality of this war.

As a conclusion, Beckett resorts to project the suppressed meanings and experiences into the unconscious determinants through his imaginary characters. By so doing, he accredits them to approach the foundation of the human mind's reality. Hence, *Waiting for Godot*,

being chiefly a postmodernist absurdist play, tends to focus on the psyche of the post-war/postmodern characters. In this sense, the Theatre of the Absurd, through acknowledging the absurdity of the world, attempts to project inner realities by revealing the internal states of the human mind. Therefore, it depicts a deeper kind of realism that deals with essences rather than appearances and activates the psychological forces in the readers and the audience.

In the end, this investigation is still far from perfection. Hence, as far as psychoanalysis is concerned, this modest study has not covered the issue of Beckett's objection of female characters besides the sexual interpretations through this play. In this case, further research could, therefore, be held to explore other literary aspects of Beckett which in turn correlate with psychoanalytical thematic parameters. In short, this thesis could be significant data for future researchers in Literature to make space for new readings.

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