

Existential Dread in Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot'

Dr. Shilpi Bhattacharya

Professor, Department of English, Kalinga University, Raipur (Chhattisgarh)

Abstract

This time period is best recognised for its complex literature, science, and technology, as well as its wide range of academic disciplines. This period is regarded as the era of existentialism, symbolism, formalism, psychological paralysis, experimentation, individualism, and absurdity. Existential crisis and existential dread are both caused by the absurdity of one's existence. The first translation of Kierkegaard's book, "The Concept Of Anxiety," gave rise to the term existential dread. He believes that facing life's uncertainty is what causes worry. Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" eloquently captures these ambiguities of existence. The goal of the current article is to evaluate how the play's characters' unending predicament is intricately woven with the real-life human scenario. Through the plot, characterization, and language, an attempt is made to capture the essence of existential crises.

Key Words: Existentialism, crisis, dread, absurdity, uncertainty, anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

This time period is best recognised for its complex literature, science, and technology, as well as its wide range of academic disciplines. This period is regarded as the era of existentialism, symbolism, formalism, psychological paralysis, experimentation, individualism, and absurdity. One experiences a fear of choosing a possibility that will send them into an abyss when they suddenly become aware of the endless choices surrounding them. Thus, existential dread stems from a fear of our own potential future actions. The first translation of Kierkegaard's book, "The Concept Of Anxiety," gave rise to the term existential dread. He believes that facing life's uncertainty is what causes worry. Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" eloquently captures these ambiguities of existence.

DISCUSSION

Samuel Beckett has chosen the technique of tragicomedy to present the human situation in this play. As Esslin says, The tragicomedy is life enhancing because it tries to "Remind the audience of the real need to face existence 'knowing the worst', which ultimately is liberation with courage and humility of not taking oneself or one's own pain too seriously, and to bear all life's miseries and uncertainties; and thus to make the most of what we have rather than to hanker after illusory certainties and rewards." (Beckett 47) Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett depicts the conflict between adhering to existential philosophy, which holds that the only way to understand the purpose of existence is via one's own experiences in the physical world, and adhering to religious and spiritual ideas. Based on personal interpretation of the language and action within the play as well as interpretation of statements made by Samuel Beckett and his detractors, this claim about the play's essence is supported. Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett depicts the conflict between adhering to existential philosophy, which holds that the only way to understand the purpose of existence is via one's own experiences in the physical world, and adhering to religious and spiritual ideas. Based on personal interpretation of the language and action within the play as well as interpretation of statements made by Samuel Beckett and his detractors, this claim about the play's essence is supported. The following is an example of dialogue which supports this concept:

Vladimir: Let's wait and see what he says.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot.

Estragon: Good idea.

Vladimir: Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand.

Estragon: On the other hand it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes

In this scene, Vladimir is relying on Godot to inform him of his presence, whilst Estragon insists that they do not have time to wait and that they must act immediately before it is too late. The metaphor of the cooling iron implies that humanity does not have enough time to wait for spiritual reflections to lead to enlightenment, that the opportunity will pass, and that once it does, their efforts won't be effective. This leads us to the conclusion that the play actually supports Estragon's recommendation that he and Vladimir go their own ways immediately,

before it's too late. Estragon is the one who subscribes to the idea of turning to existentialism rather than continuing to look to religion for guidance.

Waiting for Godot, is a play composed of two Acts and is portraying the situations of different characters in a desperate and confused mood, especially that of Estragon (Gogo) and Vladimir (Didi). Many of the disparagers critiqued on the plays along with Ackerley and Gontarski, as they shared their views, that; "Waiting for Godot is Beckett's translation of his own original French-language play, *En attendant Godot*, and is subtitled (in English only) "a tragicomedy in two acts". (Ackerley and Gontarski, 2006). The viewpoints of Modernism and its enormous consequences on the very masses of the modern period are briefly portrayed in this drama. As we watch the play, we see a variety of characters struggling with self-indulgent issues and becoming victims of existential crises, psychological paralysis, loss of faith, pessimism, valuelessness, meaninglessness, and absurdism... Putting the dilemma under considerations, the very starting lines are the clear presentation of the Absurdism. As Estragon remarks, that;

Scene: Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boots. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before.

Estragon: (giving up again). Nothing to be done.

The voice in the lines above could be interpreted as Estragon, who is trying to remove his boots but immediately quits up due to his absurdist temperament. This statement conveys how deeply impacted Estragon is by his reluctant and delaying tendencies, which push him toward absurdism. The same absurdism later drove them to alienation, which made him experience existential dread. The philosophy of absurdism has its origins in the writings of Soren Kierkegaard and, particularly, Albert Camus. It simply signifies the lack of meaning in meaningless world and tries to find meanings and values in the valueless world. As one of the critique presents his standpoints about Absurdism, as; "In philosophy, "the Absurd" refers to the conflict between the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life, and the human inability to find these with any certainty."(Dotterweich, John, 2019). Vladimir and Estragon are both depicted quite accurately as the byproducts of the meaningless civilization. Vladimir, in contrast, has some form of hope for life and is doing his best to fill and overcome the gaps of meaninglessness and valuelessness. Estragon, on the other hand, is profoundly perplexed in his outlook on life and has a type of nihilistic approach to existence. As soon as they both begin discussing their views on the Bible and Jesus Christ, his ludicrous approach becomes immediately apparent. Here, Estragon might be interpreted as a disturbing creature who is entirely ignorant of religious concepts. Vladimir, on the other hand, has some foreshadowing and prior knowledge of the Old Testament and Holy Myths. As is evident from the text;

Vladimir: Did you ever read the Bible?

Estragon: The Bible...(He reflects.) I must have taken a look at it.

Vladimir: Do you remember the Gospels?

Estragon: I remember the map of the Holy Land. Coloured they were.

CONCLUSION

Here, we can observe how the characters feel about the natural world and about religious texts. The aforementioned passages sound familiar in that both seem to be confused about how to divide up the significance of life. In his masterpiece *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett plays with the dilemma of life. Humans have been struggling with the problem of "how to get through life." In his play *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett makes an attempt to address issue. Estragon and Vladimir both appear to be victims of absurdism, which drove them to despair and then flung them back into the abyss of existential dread. Act 2's waiting scene for the ambiguous character "Godot," who is absent and unsure throughout the entire play, has undertones of existential dread. The drama aims to convey the ambiguity or emptiness that human existence finally leads to. Beckett presents an experience rather than a claim or statement so that each audience member can make his or her own judgement about it. Before our birth, nothing exists. Our entire lives are spent with the hazy notion of getting someplace, but soon we find ourselves back where we started, and the thought of the future begins to worry us, which ultimately results in existential dread.

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