

The Absurdity of the Waiting in “Waiting for Godot”

By Edison E. Blanco Reyes

Paper submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in
English Philology and Languages

DIRECTOR:

Professor Norma Ojeda

Author’s note

Edison E. Blanco Reyes, Foreign Languages Department

National University of Colombia, Bogotá

E-mail: eeblancor@unal.edu.co

November 27, 2017

Acknowledgments

I am especially indebted to Professor Norma Ojeda who has provided me with new perspectives and countless tools not only for the realisation of this paper but also for my future career. Her passion for literature has encouraged my own pursuit of the beauty and the sublime in arts. I would also like to thank my parents for their support and encouragement during my study.

Abstract

This study identifies and interprets the “absurd” from a Camusian perspective in the aesthetics of “Waiting for Godot” and, particularly, its compositional form as the means for the realisation of the aesthetic act. The absurd is a term coined by French philosopher Albert Camus and used by critics to classify some works of art that explore, through the embodiment of concrete images, man’s reaction to the meaninglessness of existence. Different critics interpreted “Waiting for Godot” as absurd but from a philosophical point of view as it has many allusions to philosophy, but Beckett categorically refused these interpretations and instead, motivated people to see the play as it is. In this sense, this study argues that “Waiting for Godot” does not intend to explain the absurd but it uses the absurd as a principle of formal construction. It is through the shape of the absurd that the aesthetic act is fulfilled. The absurd—depicted as silence—takes the shape of the confrontation between human nostalgia—represented through the routines and constant wondering—and the irrational world—represented through the language failures and contradictions. This silence becomes the great revelation, it reveals that ultimately, we are all tied to the waiting.

Key words: Compositional form, aesthetic act, nostalgia, irrational, silence

Resumen

Este estudio identifica e interpreta el “absurdo” camusiano en la estética de “Esperando a Godot” y particularmente en su forma composicional como el medio para la realización del acto estético. El “Absurdo” es un término acuñado por el filósofo francés Albert Camus y que utilizan los críticos para clasificar las obras que exploran la reacción del ser humano frente a la falta de sentido de la existencia a través de la materialización de imágenes concretas. Varios críticos interpretaron “Esperando a Godot” como absurdo desde un punto de vista filosófico puesto que la obra presenta muchas referencias a la filosofía pero Beckett, categóricamente rechazó estas interpretaciones y en cambio promovió ver la obra tal como está. En este sentido, este estudio argumenta que “Esperando a Godot” no intenta explicar el “absurdo” pero que lo usa como principio para la construcción formal de la obra. Es a través de la forma del absurdo que el acto estético se realiza. El absurdo (representado a través del silencio) adopta la forma de la confrontación entre la nostalgia humana (representada a través de las rutinas y el cuestionamiento constante de los personajes) y el mundo irracional (representado a través de las fallas y contradicciones de la lengua). Este silencio es la gran revelación, revela que esencialmente todos estamos atados a la espera.

Palabras claves: Forma composicional, acto estético, nostalgia, irracional, silencio

Table of Contents

Abstract.....2

Table of Contents.....4

Introduction.....5

Justification.....7

Objectives.....9

State of the Art.....12

Referential and Theoretical Framework.....25

The Absurdity of the Waiting in “Waiting for Godot”.....40

Conclusion.....55

Bibliography.....57

Introduction

“Waiting for Godot” is, for many, one of the most exceptional plays in the 20th Century. This unusual play originated many reactions all around the globe and impressed scholars and people alike. But its complexity was also its weak spot as many scholars tried to organize and reduce the play to a single meaning; they strayed from what the play intended to present. This led many to look for answers outside the play. Desmond Smith who wanted to present Godot in Canada asked Beckett about the meaning of the play to what Beckett answered: “I am afraid I am quite incapable of sitting down and writing out an “explanation” of the play. (...) Do try to see the thing primarily in its simplicity, the waiting, the not knowing why, or where, or when, or for what”(Beckett, 1956).

From the tons of papers that try to explain the play there are just a few that considered the feelings that arise from the play because it is almost impossible to describe these feelings with words. The impossibility of describing the feelings that result from the play becomes the leitmotif and it is strongly connected to the idea of the Camusian “absurd”. The absurd, defined by French philosopher Albert Camus, is the awareness of the human futility to give meaning to himself and his universe. Both, the absurd and “Waiting for Godot” agree that language is futile when trying to convey meaning, but the play goes beyond the philosophical absurd as the play does not intend to explain the absurd but it presents it in terms of concrete images. The play takes the shape of the absurd and uses it as the principle of formal construction.

The philosophical absurd presents a confrontation between man’s burning desire for meaning and the unreasonable silence of the world. This confrontation is also present in the play, but oriented towards the aesthetic act; that is, oriented towards the feeling of nothingness that

arises from the play. In a sense, the play intends to show that the real duty of art is to reveal the failure of language which, to a certain extent, is to reveal the absurd. The feeling of the absurd is the feeling of the contemplation of the nothingness and in order to contemplate this void the language layer must be torn apart. It is through the confrontation between the human nostalgia and the irrational world that the play shatters the language layer and displays the nothingness that lies beneath it. This is the reason why it feels like nothing is happening. Vivian Mercier accurately pointed out that “Waiting for Godot” is a play where “nothing happens twice”(Words on Plays, p2) because that is how it feels when the aesthetic act is fulfilled, it feels like contemplating a void where the only familiar piece is silence.

Justification

“Waiting for Godot” is the story of two tramps waiting for a man called Godot in a country road by a tree. They perform monotonous activities and have banal conversations while they wait for time to pass. It is unclear whether they are waiting at the right place or for the right person which generates a sense of confusion and anxiety to understand and escape from that confusion. That is the first impression of the play and soon tons of symbols emerge creating new impressions that generate more confusion. The audience think the characters should know more about their situation but that is not the case. The audience know as much about Godot as the characters.

The characters’ identity is twisted so that they do not represent any specific human behavior but the human condition itself. This identity is not the leitmotif, they are just characters that share one single thing with the audience and that is their human condition. So, the play becomes a magnifying mirror that amplifies the audience’s human condition, their existence. There are no divisions between the characters and the audience, they are placed at the same level. They are all waiting for Godot.

But Godot is not the leitmotif of the play either, it is not even clear if he, in fact, actually exists. What matters is what they are doing while waiting for him. The characters and the audience cannot go until Godot or the night arrives. The audience, as well as the characters, are attached to their purpose which is to wait for Godot to come and it is even referred to multiple times in the play so that the audience become aware of this attachment.

ESTRAGON: Let’s go.

VLADIMIR: We can’t.

ESTRAGON: Why not?

VLADIMIR: We’re waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON: (*despairingly*) Ah!

The idea that Godot represents is different for every person, even for each character because Godot has no identity, he can be anyone or anything. For Vladimir, Godot is different than for Pozzo. Even his name is confused and twisted so that his identity becomes unclear or even absent.

POZZO: (...) what happens in that case to your appointment with this... Godot... Godot... Godin... anyhow you see who I mean, who has your future in his hands... (*pause*)... at least your immediate future?

Neither Godot nor the characters are the heart of the play, the waiting is the leitmotif and there, the characters begin to wonder about the reason to wait, the tediousness of it and the attachment to a senseless purpose. They begin to question their own existence.

The feelings that arise from the play being performed on stage become more intense and it is easier to realize that the characters are not different from the audience; they are a representation of them. They are also just survivors of the meaninglessness of their existence. They fight, not against the tediousness of waiting, but against their futile attempt to make sense of their purpose and the world in which they exist. They either live being aware of the uselessness of their existence or give up and immerse themselves into their disappearance by keeping their attachment. The gestures, voices and expressions of the characters that can be seen on stage try to push back oblivion, to repel their desire to experience their non-existence. This fight between the characters' desire to understand their world and the world that remains quiet was previously defined by the French Philosopher Albert Camus as the absurd.

Objectives

Thus, the general objective of this study is:

to interpret the aesthetics in “Waiting for Godot” as an embodiment of the idea of the absurd from a Camusian perspective.

In that sense and in order to achieve the general objective the study,

- compares and contrasts different definitions of the absurd such as Sartre’s and Kierkegaard’s;
- creates a working definition of the absurd from the Beckettian, Camusian and personal perspectives;
- clarifies Bakhtin’s notions of aesthetics, compositional form and material in a work of art;
- contrasts the characteristics of the absurd with the form of the play;
- identifies and interprets the way the absurd is achieved by means of the the compositional form along with the non-verbal material—such as silences, gestures, props, time—and the verbal material such as metaphors, puns, arguments;
- illustrates the way the aesthetic act of the play is achieved through the absurd.

Limitations of the Study

The written version of the play published by Grove Press in 1954 will be the one considered. The focus of the study will be merely on Beckett’s perspective, not on his biography; the characteristic features, use of puns and main themes of some of his literary works will eventually be compared in general with “Waiting for Godot”. The English version of the play translated by Beckett himself will be used in this study, not the original version written in French but eventually, some verbal elements in the French version such as puns or symbols that are not presented in the English version will be extracted and compared if needed; non-verbal elements in the French Version will not be taken into account.

Also, Camus’s idea of the absurd and how to cope with it presented in the essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” will be used to create the selection criteria to extract the most relevant excerpts of the English version of the play; these excerpts can be verbal or non-verbal. Other definitions of the absurd such as Sartre’s and Kierkegaard’s will be briefly considered if needed in the analysis of the excerpts and the play in general and they will be compared with Camus’s ideas to understand their differences. Another point to take into account is that there is no need for a historical account of the postmodern philosophy so, the study will focus on the absurd rather than the whole existential philosophy that accompanies it.

Another aspect to bear in mind is the difference between the existential literature and the theatre of the absurd. Both literary genres convey a similar sense in terms of content but differ greatly in terms of form therefore, rather than trying to argument in a rational and philosophical way the meaning of “being in the world” this study will focus on the way Beckett portrays the attributes—and especially the Absurd—on the basis of Camus’ tenets and those of other

existential philosophers. The content will not be stressed and instead, the study focuses on the form and material and its content will be taken into account generally. This portrayal of the absurd is expressed in the compositional form of the play so, Bakhtin’s definition of verbal material, compositional and architectural form will be taken into account but only the compositional form and the verbal material will be explored in depth, the other elements of the aesthetic object will be considered generally.

State-of-the-Art

“Waiting for Godot” was written in 1949 but staged only until 1953. At the time, new trends and movements in philosophy were arising in Europe and USA after the destruction in Europe caused by World War II which lead philosophers to “question the next step for humanity in the face of meaninglessness “ (Britten, P2). All of these aspects gradually affected artists, such as Beckett, who were moving from modernism to postmodernism. In his master’s thesis “Beckett, Barthelme, and Vonnegut: Finding Hope in Meaninglessness” Britten argues that Beckett finds hope for humanity influenced by the philosophical trends of the time. Beckett’s works reveal expressions of French Existentialism and traces of Kant’s, Nietzsche’s and Kierkegaard’s ideas.

However, Britten is not considering French Existentialism of the time lead by Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus in its broadest sense. These ideas influenced different playwrights that produced works with similar themes such as “the belief that, in a godless universe, human existence has no meaning or purpose and therefore all communication breaks down”(Chatterjee, P186). These plays were classified by critics such as Martin Esslin as “Theatre of the Absurd” where the plays, in a general sense, convey a theme of absurdity. “The Absurd in these plays takes the form of man’s reaction to a world apparently without meaning or man as a puppet controlled or menaced by an invisible outside force” (Chatterjee, P187). In his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* Esslin conceived the term “absurd” to refer to the sense of anxiety, confusion and uncertainty when confronting an undefinable world.

Absurdity in this theatrical trend is extracted mainly from Albert Camus’s philosophical essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” written in 1942 where “Camus analyses the reaction of man faced

with the inexplicable” (Chatterjee, P187). For Camus, the human futility of giving meaning to a meaningless existence is the absurd. “We want the world to make sense, but it does not make sense. To see this conflict is to see the absurd” (Kamber, p52). Existence itself is not absurd, nor the world; the absurd arises from the attempt to give meaning to existence and failing in the process. Being aware of the absurdity of existence is a pure act of human intellect and it can only be achieved in a godless society. “This newly godless society defined by absurd qualities was popularized by the works of Samuel Beckett.” (Chatterjee, p188).

“Waiting for Godot” was not the first “experimental and unconventional” play of the time but it had a great impact in the audience since its premiere in 1953 due to some atypical features such as lack of movement, parallelism, unawareness of time, of place, and so on. “Uncertainty is pervasive throughout the play: the uncertainty of purpose, of time, place, emotion, relationships, truth and hope. Existence is the only certainty the play allows” (Chatterjee, p189).

It seems that each word of the play was carefully chosen so that the play brings this uncertainty and these feelings of despair to the surface. According to Chatterjee, Beckett was concerned with the faultiness of the language to communicate meaning. For instance, in “Waiting for Godot” Beckett portrays his perception of the nature of reality “as an endless stream of signifiers, signifying nothing much at all...Beckett's technique, to demonstrate the lack of referent (or signified) in language, illustrates the lack of meaning not only in language but also in life.” (Chatterjee, p189). Beckett “adopts the minimalist and reflexive nature of modernist writing” (Britten, p4) but also denies an important aspect in modernism which is that subjective meaning possesses value. This modernist writing, according to Britten, is merely a device to capture what Lacan refers to as the “real” which is pre-linguistic and “beyond the symbolic. The “real” is

defined as something that can be traced “underneath our fragmented symbolic structures”.

Beckett realised that by shattering and twisting the symbolic layers and all performance, the real in nothingness would arise. “Language fails us just when we need it the most. Even when the language conveys the sense, we tend to run away from the truth” (Chatterjee, P190). The use of silence in the play uncovers the emptiness of the void that lies beneath the symbols. Silence is used to reveal the reality that is contained beyond the symbols as silence is not corrupted by language. Beckett writes, “and even more my own language appears to me like a veil that one must tear apart in order to get to the things (or the nothingness) lying behind it” (Britten, p16).

Beckett rejects the “traditional literary techniques” to fragment the pre-established symbolic structures so that he can depict the collapse of causality. “Their works do not offer a message, they enact messages” (Britten, P10). The back-and-forth dialogues, the absence of movement, morality and human themes are some of the distinctive characteristics that enact the collapse of causality. Britten argues that “Beckett’s plays are almost entirely allegorical”. His characters tend to be representations of ideas. They represent the paradoxes of existence rather than a particular human interaction. Beckett “speaks to the mind” and eventually attempts to dehumanise his works by shattering the symbols that attempt define the world; “Beckett’s nothingness cannot be expressed through materiality or linguistic symbols” (Britten, p12).

Britten states that when the play attempts to break the symbolic layers it also affects its structure which contains a set of unique characteristic such as the absence of climax, progress, and the blurred difference between the beginning of the play and the end. This structure “reveals the false presumptions of progress and time in a world without causality” (Britten, 17). The audience is immersed in the unexpected world of an endless waiting where symbols are broken

and this forces them to look beyond the symbolic. In a letter sent to Desmond Smith, Beckett encourages Smith to watch the play as it is and not to try to come up with an explanation of it. “Do try to see the thing primarily in its simplicity, the waiting, the not knowing why, or where, or when, or for what” (Beckett, 1956). Seeing the play in its simplicity implies soaking in the broken language and structure and avoiding the attempts to make sense of the play because that means returning to the faultiness of the language to communicate meaning. “Beckett does not provide the reader/viewer with a definitive, logo centric text with decidable meaning — nor is this his purpose” (Chatterjee, p191). But, how does the play break the symbolic layers? How do the audience achieve to get at least a glance of what it is under these layers?

The answers are contained within the play. In a letter written by Beckett to Michel Polac Becket says: “I know no more about this play than anyone else who manages to read it attentively” (Beckett, 1952). What the audience perceive is all what it is. “Everything that happens on stage presents itself to us as a self-contained reality” (Halloran, p69). All that can be known is in the play and if one tries to go out of that universe then, the play will not make any more sense than staying within it. There is nothing to understand, nothing to make sense of because it does not make sense and only by doing that the audience can get a glance of nothingness. “Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo, and Lucky, their time and their space: if I did manage to get slightly acquainted with them it was only by keeping very far away from the need to understand.” (Beckett, 1952).

By trying to make sense of the play the audience do not see the essential which is just in front of their noses. Beckett writes that in art “the danger is in the neatness of identifications” and that those who attempt to link the unidentifiable to an identity are guilty of fragmenting it, of

“hoisting the real unjustifiably clear of its dimensional limits, temporalizing that which is extratemporal” (Britten, p14). Instead of trying to categorize the symbols that are already broken, one should focus on the feelings that arise from the play since they are part of the essential. The tediousness, confusion, hope, uncertainty will eventually lead to the awareness of nothingness, to the absurd. Feeling instead of attempting to understand the symbols in the play is what would eventually lead to the “real” because “it is not in any sense a symbolic work” (Beckett, 1956).

Regardless of the nature of the play being a non-symbolic work, in order to see the nothingness beneath the symbolic layer there has to be a symbolic layer to break. Carolyn Lenske argues in her article “Symbols of Waiting” that it is not the meaning of the symbols what matters but their contradictions. These ambiguities will eventually contribute to break the symbolic layer which will lead to nothingness. The characters often contradict themselves, even changing their personality; “Beckett creates an incredible sense of flux and movement in the characters’ interactions, even while the narrative and action of waiting remain frustratingly the same”(Lenske, p22). Jacques Audiberti writes “I won’t narrate the play for you ; does one narrate a landscape, a face, a pattern, an emotion? One can describe them, or interpret them” (Words on Plays, P29). Thus, how is the play narrating the waiting if its symbols are in constant confrontation?

James Calderwood remarks in his article “Ways of Waiting in Waiting for Godot” that “as an activity, waiting is negative by virtue of having no fixed identity and hence of being impossible to recognize.” What is recognizable is what it is done while waiting— jumping, thinking, eating turnips or carrots— “It’s not what he’s doing but what he’s not doing that constitutes the waiting” (Calderwood, p366). Those activities performed while waiting are

cancelled, nullified by the waiting; they are indeed happening but what is "really" happening is waiting and that overshadows those activities.

The waiting is in itself a confrontation; "as an instance of ekphrasis "waiting" exhibits self-negating impulses in which the spatial seeks to cancel the temporal and vice versa" (Calderwood, p366). Waiting compresses the past, present and future. One waits in the present for something that will happen in the future. One waits for the unknown; "waiting erases the past and diminishes the present but apparently aggrandizes the future in which the waited-for will appear" (Calderwood, p367). In the case of Gogo and Didi, they wait so that they can avoid a confrontation with an unknowable future. Past, present and future are similar even though the future is in some way uncertain. "The past is lost to memory, the future is not yet and never to be, and the present is negated" (Calderwood, p368).

It is similar to Vladimir's song about the dog and the tombstone where the last and first verses are equal. "The play, like the round, has neither beginning nor end; the title merely marks a pause" (Calderwood, p365). The audience witness the repetition and conclude that if there were to be a third act it would be a mirror of the two previous ones. "Waiting for Godot itself, as Vivien Mercier wittily puts it, is a play in which nothing happens — twice" (Calderwood, p367). Some actions in the routine can change but "one thing is constant: they are waiting for Godot" (Calderwood, p368).

In the case of Pozzo and Lucky, the waiting is traveling "such travel is merely a spatial parenthesis between departure and destination" (Calderwood, p368). But when the destination becomes traveling itself, the waiting nullifies itself. "If travel is an end in itself, then you can never arrive at a destination because you are already there. Pozzo's endless going is the opposite

of Didi and Gogo’s endless staying” (Calderwood, p369). Still, the waiting moves towards an end. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for salvation, they wait for Godot to end their agony; Pozzo waits for the travel to end so that he can sell Lucky in the fair. The waiting is tedious and if Pozzo wants to finish it faster then, he needs to travel faster. But, what about Gogo and Didi? How do they wait faster? “the only way to speed up waiting is by trying to forget you are doing it” (Calderwood, p369). By performing all of those monotonous actions they try to speed up the waiting. The characters are not the only ones waiting, the audience is also part of it. The audience experiences just a pause of the circular waiting. Calderwood argues,

“We have waited for Waiting for Godot, and now as the curtain rises on the two tramps the appointment has been kept; Waiting for Godot has come. But then Gogo ceases wrestling with his boot and says "Nothing to be done." And as this "nothing doing" continues in various forms we gradually realize that we have not ceased waiting, for the play's coming is a curious deferral of coming” (Calderwood, p371).

Once the curtain rises the audience become part of Beckett’s characters; “we, the audience, believing in the promise of entertainment, seek a distraction for the evening to pass the time and save us from boredom and loneliness” (Lenske, p23). But Beckett being Beckett plays Judas on the audience. Rather than an amusing and memorable night the audience confront the immense void of nothingness and wait for Godot who never arrives. What makes the audience stay and wait along with the characters is that the audience is “passionately involved in the deepest metaphysical significance of what it is—not what it *means* but what it *is*—to be in the world”(Halloran, p75). The absurdity of existence is on stage stripped naked. But, “somehow, in recognizing the cruelty and misery in Beckett’s plays, we are apt to find the humor in it” (Britten, p21).

The waiting cannot be seen because it cannot be performed. What the audience sees is

series of monotonous activities that the characters perform while waiting, to pass the time. The characters are still waiting but the audience feels free once the play ends. That freedom is soon overshadowed by the awareness of the time spent in the theatre waiting for Godot who never arrived. “Death will come but not Godot. Meanwhile we eat carrots on good days and turnips on bad ones,(...) get annoyed with one another, (...) go to plays by Beckett, write about them, read what has been written about them, and wait” (Calderwood, p373). Or as Spanish critic Alphonso Sastre puts it: “Waiting for Godot” “is a lucid testimony of nothingness...The gray and meaningless mass of our everyday existence is suddenly illuminated, disclosing its true structure, naked and desolate. That is the great revelation” (Words on Plays, p30).

This lucid testimony of nothingness and the absurdity that arises from it in “Waiting for Godot” can be also traced in the works of existential writers such as Sartre and Camus but they differ in an important aspect which is the way they deliver this message. While the works of Sartre and Camus “present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning” the Theatre of the Absurd “strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational-approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought” (Esslin, p XX). These philosophers present their “new content” through the traditional devices whereas the Theatre of the Absurd goes one step further by attempting to create an harmony between the basic assumptions of the new content and “the form in which they are expressed” (Esslin, p XX). Beckett’s works “do not offer a message, they enact messages” (Britten, P10).

But that does not mean that there is a divorce between the content and the form of the play. It is impossible to isolate the form from its content, of its meaning; because—as Beckett

himself puts it in his essay on Joyce's “Work in Progress”—“the work of art as a whole is *its* meaning, what is said in it is indissolubly linked with the *manner* in which it is said and cannot be said in any other way” (Esslin, p12). With that in mind, the feelings, the uncertainty and hope that arise from the play are part of the very essence of the play.

Beckett depicts this absurd world where everything is twisted and fractured by detaching the play from plot, development, recognizable characters and even common sense. To accomplish that, language plays an important but complementary role in the way those fragmentations are depicted. While Sartre and Camus present their ideas in a logical and argumentative discourse, the Theatre of the Absurd “presents (these ideas) in being—that is, in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of existence” (Esslin, p XX). In other words, language is still important but is now subordinated by the actions on stage. “What happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken by the characters” (Esslin, p XXI). Towards the end of the first act Estragon says “well, shall we go?” to what Vladimir answers: “yes, let’s go” but the prompts announce “*they do not move.*” (Beckett, p35); and the two tramps remain immobile on stage until the curtain falls. In this particular scene what happens on stage contradicts what the characters are saying which creates a sort of ambiguity and proves the futility of language to convey meaning or any particular sense.

“‘Waiting for Godot’ does not tell a story; it explores a static situation” (Esslin, p13). Beckett characterizes the human condition in a world devoid of purpose, the despair that springs from the futility to find meaning in existence. By removing the plot these characteristics are easier to perceive. Even though “the sequence of events and the dialogue in each act are different” (Esslin, p14), in essence both acts are the same, “nothing happens, nobody comes,

nobody goes, it's awful!” (Beckett, p27). The variations between both acts are mere devices used to “emphasize the essential sameness of the situation— *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*” (Esslin, p14).

According to Richard Durán in his article “‘En attendant Godot’ or ‘Le Suicide Philosophique’: Beckett’s Play from the Perspective of Camus’s ‘Le Mythe de Sisyphe’”, the absurd presented in “Waiting for Godot” reveals an interesting amount of key concepts from one text in particular which is essentially Albert Camus’s philosophical essay “The Myth of Sisyphus”.

In “The Myth of Sisyphus” Camus first explores the possibility of suicide as a response to the absurd since life has lost any conceivable meaning but then he concludes that—as the absurd nature is a confrontation between the rational man and the irrational world—if the rational man disappears so does the rational world and this annuls the reality of the absurd. Suicide is also explored in Beckett’s play, The two tramps refer to it multiple times as an escape to the tediousness of the waiting, as a liberation of the pointless world and situation they feel forced to live; Vladimir even expresses his remorse for not having jumped from the Eiffel Tower when they could. But suicide is not a simple solution; the fear of death is greater than their need to avoid the absurd and they prefer to get used to the void and wait for the end.

As the play unfolds the audience notices that “Vladimir and Estragon live in a world wholly devoid of reason. The characters engage in pointless acts, the dialogue abounds in non-sequiturs and contradictions, and memories are short—characters often forget whom they know or what they know” (Durán, p983). They perform monotonous activities and contradict each other to feel less anxious from the waiting, to alleviate boredom. It often seems that they are

conscious that if they do not distract themselves from the waiting they will get carried away by the fact that the world where they exist in, is devoid of purpose which will lead to despair—and nothing is more terrible than waiting in despair.

That estrangement of the world was also explored by Camus in “The Myth of Sisyphus”. He argued that “a world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger” (Camus, p2). The world in “Waiting for Godot” cannot be explained with reason therefore, the characters become strangers in their world and the absence of reason and unity creates a sense of nostalgia in the characters. “That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama” (Camus, p6). Besides their burning desire for unity, the more they experience it, the more painful it is. The void is bigger as the day goes and reminds the characters their day-to-day existence. “Estragon's declaration, "nothing to be done”—the play's well-known opening line—presages the sense of boredom and apathy that prevails throughout the play” (Durán, p984).

What to do in a world devoid of purpose? Boredom fills the two tramps' life and they spend most of their time “devising ways to fill the emptiness of their mundane lives” (Durán, p984). It seems that the characters have been performing the same futile activities for a long time and they got used to it and live out of this familiarity, this routines. “Camus explains that one continues to live this type of absurd existence largely out of habit” (Durán, p984). “Living, naturally, is never easy. You continue making the gestures commanded by existence, for many reasons, the first of which is habit” (Camus, p2). The habit of living is also explored in a similar view by Beckett in his essay on Proust:

“Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence. Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit” (Durán, p. 984).

These routines are all over the play and constitute an important part of the characters’ lives as these are the only familiarities they have left so, they cling to their routines intensely. They stick to the routines since fear is worse than boredom. They fear the consciousness of the absurd and evade thinking as thought will lead to this terrible state of consciousness. Vladimir and Estragon “attempt to do all they can to avoid Camus's "pourquoi.”” (Durán, p985).

VLADIMIR: One can bide one's time.

ESTRAGON: One knows what to expect.

VLADIMIR: No further need to worry.

ESTRAGON: Simply wait.

VLADIMIR: We're used to it. *He picks up his hat, peers inside it, shakes it, puts it on.*

The characters spend their time avoiding what seems inevitable. “A man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it” (Camus, p11). Towards the end of the play Vladimir seems to acknowledge the nature of the absurd but his fear for the absurd and his desire for unity make him return to habit; suicide is not a valid solution as fear of death is stronger than fear of the absurd. Still, another way of escaping the absurd is possible. If the absurd is a confrontation between the rational man and the irrational world and there is no possibility of eliminating the irrational man through suicide, the possibility of eliminating the irrational world can be conceived. “Despite all evidence to the contrary, one may choose to view the world as truly rational” (Durán, p986). Vladimir and Estragon embrace the waiting, “they see their hope in the coming of Godot, someone who will satisfy all their wants and needs” (Durán, p986). Godot is the one, the unifier and he gives hope and meaning to their lives. They have now a reason to

live, they do not simply wait for their death, they wait for Godot, Vladimir says: “Or for night to fall. (*Pause.*) We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?” (Beckett, p51).

Camus also explored the possibility of removing the irrational world, he calls it “Philosophical Suicide”. “By adopting systems of belief such as religion, philosophy, astrology, or what have you, one imposes a false logic and order on this world.” As a result, man “finds a reason to continue living in spite of a lingering sense of life's absurdity” (Durán, p986). This is what differentiates Kierkegaard’s conception of the “Absurd” with Camus’s. Camus rejects this alternative by saying that “Christianity is the scandal, and what Kierkegaard calls for quite plainly is the third sacrifice required by Ignatius Loyola, the one in which God most rejoices: “The sacrifice of the intellect.”” (Camus, p13). In a sense “the absurd is the contrary of hope” (Camus, p12).

Theoretical Framework

“We get into the habit of living before acquiring the habit of thinking” (The Myth of Sisyphus, p3).

By the examination of the nature and essence of the perceivable world, including oneself, philosophers and artists have established their own philosophy through rationality giving way to the creation of a variety of philosophical movements from Platonic Realism to Deconstructionism and Postmodernism. “Generally speaking, the philosopher has wished to rise above the realm of Becoming and find a truth universal and eternal” (Wahl, p3).

One of the priorities, if not the most relevant one, in philosophy was the attempt to delineate and understand the world perceived and the self from a rational perspective. But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this concern—triggered by a burning desire for totality, for finding one universal truth—took an unexpected shift. The destruction and death in Europe occasioned by the two World Wars brought despair and confusion to the point that people questioned whether life had lost its meaning or if this meaning ever existed at all. They were trying to find meaning and unity in a meaningless and broken world. This led philosophers to “question the next step for humanity in the face of meaninglessness “ (Britten, P2). Determining how to react to the awareness of the lack of meaning and redefining the “being” and “being in the world” turned into the priority of philosophy which established new trends and movements such as the death of God, deconstruction, and the end of certainty. This new priority in philosophy represented a new movement—not only in philosophy but also in arts—called existentialism. This movement, rather than inquiring about “existence” in a general sense, proposed that man’s knowledge falls short when trying to compress the idea of “being”. “What makes this current of

inquiry distinct is not its concern with “existence” in general, but rather its claim that thinking about *human* existence requires new categories not found in the conceptual repertoire of ancient or modern thought” (Crowell, 2016).

The classical conceptions in philosophy are insufficient when trying to compress the idea of “being” and therefore, trying to determine the meaning of it is not only a futile but also an inappropriate task. That awareness of the insufficiency of human thought and human futility to give meaning to himself and his universe was deeply explored by the philosophers of the time such as Søren Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus and each one of them proposed a different response to it. These tenets that were trending also influenced arts greatly. At the time, many writers were moving from modernism to postmodernism and one of the new trends in literature was the theatre of the absurd which was inspired by the idea of the absurd and in particular, Albert Camus’s perspective of it.

Absurdity in this theatrical trend is extracted mainly from Albert Camus’s philosophical essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” written in 1942 where “Camus analyses the reaction of man faced with the inexplicable” (Chatterjee, P187). For Camus, the human futility of giving meaning to a meaningless existence is the absurd. Different playwrights used this and other ideas coming from this philosophical trend, as compositional and aesthetic material to create unique and unconventional plays. These ideas deserve a wider discussion so that its influence in arts and particularly, in the theatre can be appreciated.

Camus characterized the absurd as that awareness of the insufficiency of human thought and the human futility to give meaning to himself and his universe. Other philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Sartre also interpreted the “absurd” in a similar sense but with different

responses to it. Therefore, in order to understand the absurd more in depth and different from a Camusian perspective the term can be introduced by opposing Camus' concept with versions from existentialists like Sartre and Kierkegaard as the tenets of these existential philosophers are commonly associated with Camus's.

On the one hand, “for Sartre—with whom the idea is perhaps most usually associated—the term “absurd” denoted the contingent nature of human existence, the realization which brings what he called nausea” (Foley, p5). That is to say that, the absurd arises from the awareness of the world's lack of sense and man's hunger for meaning and unity. In Sartre's influential book “Being and Nothingness”, the absurd is defined as “that which is meaningless. Thus man's existence is absurd because his contingency finds no external justification” (Sartre, p628). In order to raise awareness of the absurd, man must break the rational and symbolic layers that tie him. Man is free at last and his world has become a blank slate, a new beginning. But the realisation of that freedom is not in any sense amusing or joyful, it is rather intimidating. Sartre determines his notion of the absurd through logical reasoning but Camus disagreed and criticized this interpretation of the absurd by saying that “the realisation that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only a beginning (...) It is not this discovery that is interesting, but the consequences and rules for action that can be drawn from it” (Foley, P1).

On the other hand for Kierkegaard, the absurd is “the paradox of eternal, immortal, infinite God being incarnated in time as a finite immortal” (McDonald, 2016). People represented God with human characteristics and capacities such as love and forgiveness even though God transcends these human categories. The absurd is this paradox of providing mortal characteristics to an entity that transcends all human capacities. According to Kierkegaard, this central paradox

can be faced with two possible attitudes which are either having faith or taking offence but it can never be faced by virtue of reason as human reason is limited and inferior. “If we choose faith we must suspend our reason in order to believe in something higher than reason. In fact we must believe *by virtue of the absurd*.” (McDonald, 2016). As Kierkegaard puts it, “the absurd, or to act by virtue of the absurd, is to act upon faith, trusting in God” (Foley, p6). Later Camus criticized this interpretation of the absurd by calling it “philosophical suicide”.

In general, the interpretations of the absurd convey a similar sense—man realises that his knowledge is insufficient and as a result his world loses its sense and unity which leads man to confusion and despair. Yet, “for Sartre absurdity belongs to the world prior to activity of consciousness, while Camus’s idea of the absurd is closer to Kierkegaard’s and Nietzsche’s—the absurd is a direct consequence of the absence of God” (O’Brien, p1). God served as an unifier but at one point religious faith started to decline. This weakening of faith was first covered by the growing totalitarian fallacies, nationalism and other religions but all of this was shattered by the Second World War. Without the idea of God, the world was not any longer a unity and it started to deconstruct itself. “By 1942, Albert Camus was calmly putting the question why, since life had lost all meaning, man should not seek escape in suicide” (Esslin, p23). Camus reflected upon the human situation in a world ruled by the collapse of beliefs, to what he concluded the following:

“A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity” (Camus, p2).

Man stands face to face with the irrational. He confronts the meaningless world and feels that burning desire for unity, for rationality. That confrontation is the absurd or, as Camus puts it,

“the absurd is born of this confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (Camus, p10). The world conceived before was a familiar one where things were portrayed in the same way they were perceived; humans counted on this familiarity and concluded that the world could be reduced to rational meanings and reliable symbols. This attempt to reduce the world to rational symbols that humans considered relevant soon confronted a world that refused to be understood. “We want the world to make sense, but it does not make sense. To see this conflict is to see the absurd” (Kamber, p52). Recognizing this requires a great amount of knowledge and understanding but up to this point where the world is now a void full of meaningless symbols, what is the next step? Should one deny the absurd and seek for forgiveness in God so that he can bring together what has been divided, free oneself from any conjecture and overcome this absurd world in order to achieve freedom or contemplate the absurd world and accept it and live it?

Here is where Camus’ interpretation of the Absurd differs from others. Instead of rejecting the absurd or overcoming it, Camus argues that one should encourage the absurd and live with it. “Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully” (Camus, p18). The absurd not only gives way to despair and nostalgia but also works as a path that will lead to truth and purity. Accepting the absurd fate is keeping it alive and especially contemplating it. “The very thing that led to despair of the meaning and depth of this life now gives it its truth and its clarity” (Camus, p13). Therefore, Camus distances from Kierkegaard’s philosophy by alleging that Kierkegaard is “reducing the problem of the absurd to the hubris of the human desire to reduce the world to clarity and coherence, (...) Kierkegaard makes of the absurd the criterion of the other world”(Foley, p8). He uses the absurd as an unifier that attempts to bring together the

fissures of this broken world. In contrast, Camus sees the absurd as what is left after experiencing and living in this world. Kierkegaard sees unity in God and the meaningless broken world finds meaning through God. Camus argues that: “There is no longer a single idea explaining everything, but an infinite number of essences giving a meaning to an infinite number of objects” (Camus, p15). Thus, Camus calls it philosophical suicide since man replaces reason for faith even being aware that finding unity and meaning is a futile task; the absurd transforms into a fraudulent faith.

To acknowledge the nature of the absurd—which in the long run is accepting the “character of human condition”—is characterized as Revolt. Quoted by Foley, Camus states that “one of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus, revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity (...) That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it.” (Foley, p10). This revolt cannot arise if one overcomes or rejects the absurd fate. This confrontation translates into purity and courage. “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart” (Camus, p24).

In Sartre’s philosophical novel *Nausea*, Antoine, the protagonist, confronts a state of “nausea” which is defined as “the awareness of the disgusting and nauseating aspect of a world reticent to meaning, order, and beauty” (Deranty, 2015); instead of accepting and contemplating this nauseating aspect of the world, Antoine tries to escape from it. In that sense, the hero never experiences Revolt as he does not accept this absurdity; instead, he escapes and overcomes it. In Sartre’s novel “aesthetic experiences trigger some exceptional moments in which the hero manages to escape ontological ‘nausea’”(Deranty, 2015).

Camus embraces the absurd and—contrary to other philosophers—he does not seek to

escape from it; therefore, the following conception of the term “absurd” in Albert Camus’s essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” will be the one considered for the purposes of this work:

“At this point of his effort man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world. (...) The irrational, the human nostalgia, and the absurd that is born of their encounter—these are the three characters in the drama that must necessarily end with all the logic of which an existence is capable” (Camus, p10).

The Absurd is that constant confrontation between man’s burning desire to find reason and unity and the irrational world that resists to be understood and remains silent. Understanding this confrontation requires an abundant experience of the world and once man is aware of this confrontation it will remain part of his life.

With these and some other ideas, theater critic Martin Esslin coined the term “Theatre of the Absurd” to classify some of the experimental plays that were written in the 1940’s and 1950’s as these plays had similar characteristics and approached the “Absurd” in an artistic way.

“Waiting for Godot” is perhaps one of the most notorious plays in this theatrical movement. But that is not to say that Beckett was part of a specific artistic movement. In fact, it is impossible to know whether Beckett had these philosophical ideas in mind when he was writing the play or if these ideas influenced him greatly but what can be said is that Beckett was, according to Dermot Moran, “one of the most philosophical of twentieth-century writers” (Moran, p1).

Beckett’s works include many philosophical references that vary from Deconstructionism to Descartes. The estrangement of what is ideal and secure is a recurring feature in Beckett’s writing where everything is uncertain. “Beckett’s characters portray a rootless, homeless, alienated humanity. One no longer at home in the world; one lost in a meaningless void” (Moran,

P93). These features were almost begging for philosophical interpretations which led many critics to attempt to define Beckett’s philosophical stand. They were looking for the “key” that untangles the chaotic world where Beckett’s characters live but this exercise was futile and biased due to Beckett’s problematic relation with philosophy. He refused to reduce his works to any philosophical interpretation or hidden meaning, what there is is all what there is. Beckett’s answer to philosophy is to refuse it, give it a ‘kick in the arse’”(Moran, p94).

He refused any philosophical interpretations to his works since he claimed not to understand philosophers. Quoted by Dermot Moran in his article “Beckett and Philosophy”, Beckett said: “‘I never understand anything they write.’ And again he wrote: ‘I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that is simply a mess’” (Moran, p94). Beckett claimed that there was no point in trying to find the meaning of his works or what they represent because they did not represent anything.

Even though Beckett rejects philosophical interpretations of his work, a “deep knowledge and wide reading in philosophy from the Pre-Socratics onwards has ensured that a rich vein of reference and allusion stretching from Parmenides to Sartre runs throughout his oeuvre” (Carney and others, p2). He was aware of the many postures in philosophy and used many allusions to them just as “playful gestures and reminders that “the mess” still remains opaque to human rationality” (Carney and others, p2). According to Moran, Beckett and James Joyce, who were really close friends, live “for their art, share and austere ‘art-for-art’s-sake’ aesthetics that raised the artist up to the quasi-divine craftsman whose work has to stand alone, independent of the world, independent of everyday concern” (Moran, p95).

Beckett’s influences begin with Descartes and the Cartesian tradition which can be found

in most of his characters’ concerns. When Beckett was still in the *École Normale*, he read “*La vie de Monsieur Descartes*” by Baillet and the result of this reading was his prize-winning poem “Whoroscope” which suggests that “Beckett viewed philosophy as little more than a source of humour and satirical material, this is belied by the frequency of philosophical motifs in the subsequent works” (Carney and others, p3). These Cartesian traditions such as “the division between body and mind, the epistemological uncertainty that characterises all of our knowledge, the nature of language and indeed the doubtful ontological status of the world itself” are some of the preoccupations that the Beckettian “hero” faces (Carney and others, p2).

According to Ruby Cohn in his article “Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett” when Beckett began to write in French, “his protagonists turned from a kind of Logical Positivism to a kind of Existentialism (...) The French work is Existentialist in conveying human dread and despair “at” (sic) a world of unreconstructed absurdity” (Cohn, p41).

There is a sort of philosophical influence in the work of Samuel Beckett but “besides philosophers influencing Beckett, he has also interested—even mesmerised—contemporary philosophers and critics” (Moran, p100). Even Beckett attempted to establish an aesthetics. In his famous German Letter written in 1937, Beckett “tries to suggest that the true power of art is to show up the failure of language” (Moran, p102). He tries to break the language layer and see what is beneath. “It is to be the literature of the ‘unword’”(Moran, p102).

Even though, there are many philosophical symbols in Beckett’s works “to look for philosophical commitments outside Beckett’s artistic work itself would be to betray its artistic intention and so we should be unsurprised by his silence” (Moran, p96).

Martin Esslin had many of these ideas in mind when he classified Beckett as being part of

the “Theatre of the Absurd”. What he found is that in terms of content the theatre of the absurd differs little from the existentialist theatre of Sartre and Camus. Both convey "a similar sense of the senselessness of life, of the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose" (Durán, p982). The difference lies in their form. Rather than "arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being—that is, in terms of concrete stage images" (Durán, p982).

In his work “The Language of Silence: Adorno Reads Beckett”, William Díaz states that “the fate of Beckett’s heroes cannot be classified as essentially absurd, (...), The category of the absurd becomes empty and abstract if it is not dialectically understood” That is understanding the absurd not as a “substantial category of being but (as) the result of a dialectical movement between cultural and historical development” (Díaz, p17). According to Díaz, German philosopher Theodor Adorno interpreted Beckett on the basis of this dialectical process. Adorno claims that “absurdity in Beckett is no longer a state of human existence thinned out to a mere idea and then expressed in images” (Adorno, p119). “According to Adorno, Beckett overcomes existentialism—and every philosophical discourse—by using it as aesthetic material, while existentialist literature presented the lack of meaning as a metaphysical content, Beckett uses it as the principle of formal construction” (Díaz, p17).

Beckett uses absurdism as a principle of formal construction even though he is not part of any philosophical trend, Beckett stated: “I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them (...) it is the shape that matters” (Díaz, p5). The form of “Waiting for Godot”—and specially the compositional form—is based on the absurd which is presented in different ways throughout the play but it is the shape of the absurd what matters, not its

metaphysical content.

For Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay “The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art” the problem of form is much more complex than it appears to be. The form not only takes the material and shapes it, like an artist that takes his chisel and creates a sculpture on the marble, but it goes beyond that. For Bakhtin the form of a work of art considered as a systematic order of symbols only conveys meaning in a physical, psychological sense but the form with an aesthetic significance tends towards something; it refers to something that is beyond the material itself to which it is tied. Therefore, the content has to be considered in order to contemplate the aesthetics of the play which, in a sense, is beyond the material and superior to a mere physical experience.

Now, in order to interpret the material and its form in an aesthetic perspective the work of art has to be considered not in its sensible reality but towards what it represents when the artist and the observer direct their aesthetic activity to the work of art. The content of this aesthetic contemplation directed towards the work of art and its structure—which is the architecture of the aesthetic object—is what constitutes the object of an aesthetic analysis.

According to H elene Pouliquen, Bakhtin contributes two significant changes to the traditional form-content model. What was previously considered “form” Bakhtin calls “material” and to the result of this change (material-content) Bakhtin adds a new element: the “form” (Pouliquen p20). The concepts resulting from this change are the content, the material and the form; the analysis of the form has to be carried out in two directions: in a compositional and an architectural way. Bakhtin gives an account of these definitions in his essay “The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art”.

According to Bakhtin, the “material” has to be understood in its exact scientific definition without adding any other element to it. In theatre, the material can be pointed out as verbal and non-verbal. The verbal material is then, the word seen in its pure linguistic nature. “It is possible to understand the significance of the word for cognition, for artistic creation, and in particular for poetry only after having understood its purely verbal, linguistic nature completely apart from the tasks of the cognition of artistic creation, religious worship, etc” (Bakhtin, p292). The novel is seen as a language phenomena, isolated from its cultural, social or historical aspect and analyzed only in its linguistic aspect. In this sense, for the work of art, “language only represents a technical element” and this aspect of language places it outside the aesthetic object That does not mean that language as material of the work of art is not relevant, the aesthetic act is oriented towards the material and gives shape to it but, without the material, the aesthetic act cannot be achieved.

The non-verbal aspect of the material in theatre can be called image. This image has the same technical aspect as language and it is directed towards the aesthetic act that is beyond what the image shows. “It is, of course, completely impossible to see with the eyes alone a represented human being as a human being” (Bakhtin, p300).

The aesthetic object is beyond the symbols that conform the material so, the artist has to go beyond the symbols. “The artist frees himself from language in its linguistic determinateness not through negation but by way of perfecting it immanently: ” (Bakhtin, p297). The artists overcomes language with language and makes it go beyond itself.

Bakhtin defines the importance of the material in the artistic creation in the following way: “While it does not enter into the aesthetic object in its material, extra-aesthetic

determinateness, it is indispensable for the construction of the aesthetic object as a technical element” (Bakhtin, p302).

The work of art exists in the world in its physical aspect, it fills a space in a bookshelf, it exists in time and space but “is alive and valid in a world which is also both alive and valid—cognitively, socially, politically, economically, and religiously” (Bakhtin, p275). The work of art seen from the material is a language phenomena but seen from the content it becomes a cultural act. But “no creative, cultural act has anything to do with completely random and unordered matter that is completely indifferent to value (...) rather, it always has to do with something already evaluated and somehow ordered, in relation to which it must responsibly assume its own valuational position” (Bakhtin, p274). This characteristic of the work of art that recognizes and values this reality of knowledge and of ethics is called content of the work of art.

The content comprises two important elements which are a pre established knowledge and ethics appreciation. These elements give relevance to the material so that a valuational position can be adopted. The content is closer to the real world and it is part of the aesthetic act. “Outside its relationship to content, that is, to the world and its constituent moments, to the world as the object of cognition and ethical action, form cannot be aesthetically valid and cannot fulfill its basic functions”(Bakhtin, p281).

Regarding the form of the work of art Bakhtin argues that “artistic form is the form of content, but a form which is realized entirely in the material—is attached to the material, as it were”(Bakhtin, p303). Because of this the form has to be understood in two directions: “From within the pure aesthetic object, as architectonic form, axiologically directed toward content (the possible event) and referred to it; from within the compositional material whole of the

work”(Bakhtin, p303). Now, the compositional form must not be confused as “the form of the material” but just as the form “realized in the material and with its help” (Bakhtin, p303). In brief the compositional form is “the organization of a given material” and the architectural form is “the unification and organization of cognitive and ethical values” (Bakhtin, p304).

Here, and to avoid confusion, a distinction between the artistic form and the cognitive form has to be made. In the artistic form “I find myself, find my own productive, axiologically form-giving, activity, I feel intensely my own movement that is creating the object” (Bakhtin, p304). This desire for creating not only resides in the primary creation of the work of art but also in its contemplation. The artistic form has an author-creator involved whereas the cognitive form lacks this author-creator since the cognitive form is placed in the object. “I must experience form as my own active, axiological relationship to content, in order to experience form aesthetically: in form and through form, I sing, recount, and depict; through form, I express my love, my affirmation, my acceptance” (Bakhtin, p305). One cannot perceive the artistic form only by hearing or looking at it, it is necessary to become a creator in what was heard or looked and through this overcome the materiality of the work of art. “all the movements of the work in which we can feel ourselves, our own activity in its axiological relation to content, and which are overcome in their materiality, must be assigned to form” (Bakhtin, p306).

In brief, the compositional form—defined by Helena Rodrigues Rojo in her article Bakhtin Circle’s Speech Genres Theory: Tools for a Transdisciplinary Analysis of Utterances in Didactic Practices—has “the characteristic of stability, being “practical,” “teleological”—although “restless”—“available to realize the architectural task” (Rodrigues, p303). Whereas for Bakhtin and translated by Rodrigues the architectural forms:

are the forms of moral and physical values of the aesthetic man, the forms of nature as his environment, the forms of happenings in his aspect of particular, social, historical life, etc...are the forms of aesthetical being in its singularity....Architectural form determines the choice of compositional form (Rodrigues, p303).

Bakhtin gives two examples that notably clarify the distinction between compositional and architectural form. The rhythm as an architectural form is oriented emotionally and related to the value of the aspiration and of the inner tensions that it fulfills whereas the rhythm, as a compositional form, is the form of the organization of the sound material that can be perceived empirically, audible and recognisable. Bakhtin also states that “Drama is a compositional form (dialogue, division into acts, etc.), but the tragic and comic are architectonic forms of consummation.” (Bakhtin, p269). “The architectonic form determines the choice of the compositional form. Thus, the form of tragedy (a form of the event, and to some extent that of a person—the tragic character) selects the appropriate compositional form—the dramatic form” (Bakhtin, p270).

“Waiting for Godot” is classified as a tragicomedy in two acts and those elements constitute the compositional form but are oriented towards the realisation of the absurd. Through the tragic and comic the play fulfills its aesthetic act and reveals the futility of language to convey meaning which, in a sense, is to reveal the nature of the absurd.

The Absurdity of the Waiting in “Waiting for Godot”

“Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful” (Waiting for Godot, p27).

In late modern and postmodern philosophy the Victorian beliefs, that were strongly influential at the time, began to be questioned by the philosophers of the time and one of the questions that intrigued them the most was the nature of the very existence; whether existence could be reduced to a definition, or if it really had a meaning. When trying to solve this issue of existence, different conclusions were formulated and these conclusions not only influenced philosophy but also fine arts. But still in late modern philosophy, this issue was explored by quite a few philosophers until the early 20th century where the destruction and death in Europe occasioned by the two World Wars brought despair and confusion to the point that not only philosophers but also people in general, questioned whether life was worth living or not.

There were times of desperation that unveiled another nature of man and all the atrocities that he is able to do. The two World Wars served as a vantage point and people were trying to find meaning in a world in ruins, in a meaningless world. This change in society also altered philosophy and arts and new trends and movements in philosophy such as the death of God, deconstruction, and the end of certainty arose. These philosophical movements were present in arts resulting from writers negating the modernist aspects and moving to postmodernism; “Waiting for Godot” was written at the time writers were moving to postmodernism and it reflected some of these philosophical trends and ideas which lead critics to attempt to make sense of the play and classified it into a trend. One of these critics, Martin Esslin, classified this and some other plays as the “Theatre of the Absurd” which was greatly influenced especially by

French philosopher Albert Camus and his ideas of absurdity.

Beckett—like Camus—lived in the occupied France and was even part of the French resistance during the war. He was aware of the philosophical and artistic trends that were developing and also had a wide knowledge of philosophy from the ancient period onwards which provided him with references and material for his works. Even so, he was not part of any artistic movement and rejected any philosophical interpretation or attempt to classify his work in a philosophical or artistic movement. Beckett said: “I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that is simply a mess” (Moran, p94).

Nevertheless, Beckett’s works include many philosophical references but he used these postures in philosophy, not as metaphysical content, but mainly just like “playful gestures”. However, there are some works that reveal a different approach to philosophy, as if Beckett had considered philosophy beyond a humorous source; one example of this is his prize-winning poem “Whoroscope” which he wrote in his days in the École Normale and was deeply influenced by Adrien Baillet’s book “La Vie de Monsieur Descartes”. This Cartesian tradition will continue to be present in some of his works.

Still, Beckett did not accept these interpretations since he “lived “for (his) art, share and austere ‘art-for-art’s-sake’ aesthetics” (Moran, p95). Beckett encouraged people to see his works in their simplicity without trying to clear up the mess, to come up with an explanation of them. In a letter sent to Desmond Smith and referring to “Waiting for Godot”, Beckett said: “Do try to see the thing primarily in its simplicity, the waiting, the not knowing why, or where, or when, or for what” (Beckett, 1956).

Here is where critics struggle, “Waiting for Godot” exudes philosophical features that are almost begging for an interpretation. This led many to attempt to find the “key” that untangles the chaotic world in the play but then, Beckett himself is saying that there is no need for a philosophical interpretation or to try to make sense out of the play because it does not make sense and only by not making sense of the play one can get a glance of what the play really is about, the aesthetic object. Is there a way to interpret these philosophical references in the play without trying to make sense of the play so that the aesthetic object remains present? How can these philosophical references be overcome?

Beckett once stated: “I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them (...) it is the shape that matters” (Diaz, p5). If it is the shape of the philosophical references what Beckett used in the play and not their content; then, there is a way to interpret the play without losing sight of the aesthetic object. Beckett overcomes any philosophical discourse by using it not as a metaphysical content but as “the principle of formal construction” (Diaz, p17). What Beckett uses is the shape of the philosophical discourse and this shape is oriented not towards a creation of knowledge but towards something else. In his famous German Letter written in 1937, Beckett “tries to suggest that the true power of art is to show up the failure of language” (Moran, p102). The shape then, is oriented towards the realisation of the failure of language.

Trying to find a representation of a philosophical trend in the play would not make any sense since the play is not representing any. Instead, the way Beckett uses these philosophical trends as an aesthetic material to show the failure of language can serve as a guide to understand a part of Beckett's aesthetics in the play. Martin Esslin considered this aspect of Beckett's plays when classifying them as “Theatre of the Absurd” and concluded that in terms of content, these

plays were similar to the existentialist theatre of Sartre and Camus. Both, the existentialist and the absurd theatre, show the degradation of ideals and the lack of meaning in life; the difference lies in their form. The existentialist theatre presented its ideas in an organized and more or less scholar speech where they pretty much discussed about the human condition. In contrast, the theatre of the absurd presented these ideas “in terms of concrete stage images” (Durán, p982). Beckett’s works “do not offer a message, they enact messages” (Britten, P10). Here Camus’s ideas of “absurdity” begin to emerge. The absurd arises from man’s futility to make sense of his world whereas Beckett's aesthetics suggest the futility of language to convey meaning. The similarities are undeniable. Language is the tool man has to make sense of his world and if language fails to convey meaning then, man cannot make sense of the world and will experience the absurd. If Beckett argues that the true power of art is to show the failure of language to create meaning then, the true power of art lies in the awareness of the absurd.

Now, in order to see the absurd in the aesthetics of “Waiting for Godot” from a Camusian perspective, the definition of the absurd extracted from the philosophical essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” is considered:

“At this point of his effort man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world. (...) The irrational, the human nostalgia, and the absurd that is born of their encounter—these are the three characters in the drama that must necessarily end with all the logic of which an existence is capable” (Camus, p10).

Camus characterized the absurd as that awareness of the insufficiency of human thought and the human futility to give meaning to himself and his universe. He states three key elements in the drama which are: the irrational, human nostalgia, and the absurd and they are part of his

definition of the absurd. Through these elements all the logical explanations of existence are torn apart leaving the futility of man to convey meaning, the nothingness of existence. These elements are also present in the form of the play but oriented towards the realisation that language is futile when trying to convey meaning.

The Human Nostalgia:

In Camus’s essay, human nostalgia is defined as the burning desire for unity, for finding an intelligible meaning to one’s own existence. But this human nostalgia only arises when the unifier that man considered as the only one that brought everything together starts to shake and deconstruct. The awareness that this unifier does not really unify anything is the first step in the realisation of the absurd. Camus says: “But one day the “why” arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. “Begins”—this is the impulse of consciousness” (Camus, p5). It is the habit what keeps man from reaching consciousness of the world that cannot be unified. “We get into the habit of living before acquiring the habit of thinking”(Camus, p3). When this habit begins to be tedious and fatiguing, man starts to question it, to question whether there is really an escape and there he begins to be conscious of the routines which takes him to wonder and right at that moment, the “why” emerges.

The play presents this human nostalgia since the very moment the curtains open up. Right on the stage the audience meet the two tramps for the first time and they begin to exist, Estragon trying to take off his boot cries: “nothing to be done”; and that nothing doing becomes their daily “activity”. They build a routine, they perform monotonous activities and have conversations that lead to nothing and they go on doing the same all over again; it begins to become tedious and fatiguing and the absence of movement helps to build up this tediousness. The audience has no

idea of what is happening and the play does not give any clue; the audience start to draw conclusions and try to make sense of the play until it gets to the point:

“ESTRAGON: Let’s go

VLADIMIR: We can’t

ESTRAGON: Why not?

VLADIMIR: We’re Waiting for Godot

ESTRAGON: (*despairingly*). Ah! (*Pause.*)” (Waiting for Godot, p10)

It is the first time the name Godot is mentioned in the play and everything makes sense again. They are waiting for a man called Godot and they are just passing the time by playing silly games. It is simple, they just need to wait; still, Godot does not arrive and the sense of despair returns. Godot is the answer, the unifier that ties everything together but the play continues and the routine is more and more fatiguing resulting in the characters getting desperate again. What if they are waiting in the wrong place or at the wrong time? What is exactly what Godot has to offer? Estragon asks: “His name is Godot?” to what Vladimir replies: “I think so”. They begin to question their task and even discuss suicide as an escape but their fear of death is stronger and they end up doing nothing. Estragon says: “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful” (Waiting for Godot, p27).

They distract themselves with Pozzo and Lucky but in the end they are still waiting, they eat carrots and change hats but what they are really doing is waiting. What keeps them going and allows them to escape from the uncertainties of life is the waiting and the waited for. But the waiting becomes itself unbearable and they begin to question it:

VLADIMIR: Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? To-morrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of to-day? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? (Waiting for Godot, p58).

But as soon as they begin to question their futile task, their appetite for unity makes them return to the waiting as an unifier. Every time they express their desire to escape Godot appears to prevent them from going. Vladimir seems to have acknowledged the routine and the absurdity of the waiting by the end of the second act when the Boy approaches and Vladimir remarks: “Off we go again”; then, the Boy and Vladimir have a quick talk—which is in essence the same as in Act I—and just when the Boy says everything he has to say he asks “What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?” Right at that moment, Vladimir has the possibility to escape from Godot and the routine but the fear of the uncertainties outside the waiting for Godot and the appetite for unity keep him from escaping so, he replies the following:

“VLADIMIR: Tell him ... (*he hesitates*) ... tell him you saw me and that ... (*he hesitates*) . . . that you saw me. (*Pause. 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! *Vladimir makes a sudden spring forward, the Boy avoids him and exit running. Silence. The sun sets, the moon rises. As in Act I . Vladimir stands motionless and bowed.*” (Waiting for Godot, p59).

Vladimir commits what Camus calls “philosophical suicide”. Vladimir rejects the futility of his task, he refuses to accept that the world is broken and that Godot will never arrive to connect the pieces and instead, continues waiting. It is his nostalgia for unity what motivates him to wait even being aware that Godot will not arrive. Vladimir 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” (Waiting for Godot, p51).

The Irrational:

In “The Myth of Sisyphus” Camus argues that the human capacities and conceptions are

insufficient when man thinks and reflects about *human existence*. The classical conceptions in philosophy and other sciences are deficient and cannot compress fully the idea of *human existence*. Attempting to define the nature of human existence requires new categories that are beyond human capacity. Understanding the existence and the world itself requires a level of understanding that surpasses human understanding; in this sense, trying to determine the meaning of existence is not only a futile but also an inappropriate task as it is beyond human reach. In other words, the irrational is the world that resists being understood.

In the play the irrational is depicted through the futility of language to convey meaning. Language—being a human creation—cannot define existence as language is imperfect. Through the contradictions and failures of language the play presents the irrational; in some parts of the play the characters question the capacity of language to convey meaning.

VLADIMIR: Sometimes I feel it coming all the same. Then I go all queer. (*He takes off his hat, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, puts it on again.*) How shall I say? Relieved and at the same time ... (*he searches for the word*) ... appalled. (*With emphasis.*) AP-PALLED. (*He takes off his hat again, peers inside it.*) Funny. (*He knocks on the crown as though to dislodge a foreign body, peers into it again, puts it on again.*) Nothing to be done.

Vladimir stresses the word “appalled” and repeats it as if the word was new for him, wondering how one word can compress all the things he is feeling. This questioning of language is a recurrent feature in the play. At the beginning of the play the two tramps talk about the only tree there is in the place where they were supposed to wait:

ESTRAGON: (despairingly). Ah! (Pause.) You're sure it was here?

VLADIMIR: What?

ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.

VLADIMIR: He said by the tree. (They look at the tree.) Do you see any others.

ESTRAGON: What is it?

VLADIMIR: I don't know. A willow.

ESTRAGON: Where are the leaves?

VLADIMIR: It must be dead.

ESTRAGON: No more weeping.

VLADIMIR: Or perhaps it's not the season.

ESTRAGON: Looks to me more like a bush.

VLADIMIR: A shrub.

ESTRAGON: A bush

How to define an object or a place? Godot said they have to wait for him “by the tree” but which tree? is the tree a willow or a pine? Does it have leaves? is it big or small? Language cannot even entirely define the place where they need to wait and this contradiction is what represents the irrational world. How can this tree that we see be a tree if it does not even have leaves? For Vladimir the tree could have been a bush but for Estragon if it is not a tree, it surely is a shrub. There is no way to know who is right or wrong but wait and see if Godot arrives and clarifies the misunderstanding but Godot does not arrive.

Even images are difficult to represent. The first thing that is exposed is the setting: “A Country Road. A Tree. Evening.”. Those are the coordinates where the two tramps and the audience are going to be waiting for Godot throughout the play. But, which tree? What country road? The stage directions are vague and the place could be anywhere yet nowhere. Also, what it is represented on stage sometimes does not coincide with what is said. Towards the end of the first act Estragon says “well, shall we go?” to what Vladimir answers: “yes, let’s go” but the prompts announce “*they do not move.*” (Beckett, p35); and the two tramps remain immobile on stage until the curtain falls. In this particular scene what happens on stage contradicts what the characters are saying which creates a sort of ambiguity and proves the futility of language to convey meaning or make any particular sense.

The waiting itself is also hard to represent. A representation of “the waiting” is

unconceivable, what it is really represented in the play is what the characters are doing WHILE waiting and this feature of the play nullifies all the actions that are happening on stage. Estragon takes off his boots but what he is really doing is waiting, they jump, play, eat carrots but those actions are nullified by the waiting and what is left is a void where the nothingness arises. This nullification of the actions on stage is accomplished by detaching the play of plot or unfolding and it is oriented towards the architectural form where the audience feel as if nothing had happened at all. "Waiting for Godot itself, as Vivien Mercier wittily puts it, is a play in which nothing happens — twice" (Calderwood, p367). As there is no plot in a sense nothing ever happened even though the characters were on stage and for more or less two hours they waited for Godot that never arrived. That silence of the world is the nothingness and the void that lies beneath language; that silence of the world is the irrational.

The Absurd:

According to Camus the absurd is born from the confrontation between the human burning desire for unity (human nostalgia) and the world that resists to be understood (the irrational). The world conceived before was a familiar one where things were portrayed in the same way they were perceived; humans counted on this familiarity and concluded that the world could be reduced to rational meanings and reliable symbols. But then these symbols began to break down and the attempt to reduce the world to rational symbols that humans considered relevant, soon confronted a world that refused to be understood and remained silent; the result of these confrontations is the awareness of the absurd. Camus also states that once man experiences the absurd he is bound to it forever.

But the awareness of the absurd—according to Camus—is only the first step. Man should

respond to it. Man should embrace the absurd and live with it. and that Camus calls it “revolt”. Camus declares that “one of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus, revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency” (Camus, p18). But this revolt can only arise if instead of overcoming or rejecting the absurd fate, man acknowledges this fate and maintains it constantly as this constant confrontation is the only truth he knows. This confrontation translates into purity and courage. “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart”(Camus, p24).

In the play the absurd arises out of the confrontation between the characters with their irrational world that remains quiet. These confrontations are exposed first just as silly games just to pass the time but then they become object of questioning not only of outside and isolated things but their existence itself. The two tramps first question things that do not involve them directly but that show a failure of man when trying to convey meaning. In Act I, Vladimir asks his partner if he remembers the Gospels and then Vladimir moves on and discusses one specific story:

VLADIMIR: Ah yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story?

ESTRAGON: No.

VLADIMIR: Shall I tell it to you?

ESTRAGON: No.

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

ESTRAGON: Our what?

VLADIMIR: Our Saviour. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other ... (*he searches for the contrary of saved*) ... damned.

The discussion begins only as a way to pass the time; Estragon first discusses it reluctantly but, as the conversation goes on, he remarks some interesting points rejecting Vladimir's interpretation; Estragon discussed the topic as if it was too obvious to require a

further discussion but Vladimir’s hunger for understanding makes him evade Estragon’s remarks and continue with the discussion ferociously until Estragon’s last remark finishes the argument:

VLADIMIR: But one of the four says that one of the two was saved.

ESTRAGON: Well? They don't agree and that's all there is to it.

VLADIMIR: But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?

ESTRAGON: Who believes him?

VLADIMIR: Everybody. It's the only version they know.

ESTRAGON: People are bloody ignorant apes.

The ambiguity Vladimir is discussing is properly “solved” with Estragon’s final remark. People are ignorant not because they do not know but because they cannot fully convey a clear meaning and end up believing the most convenient version. In the case of the Two Thieves story, people cannot really know with veracity the genuine version of what really happened so, they choose to believe the most convenient version. What started as a silly game to pass the time turned into a heated discussion and concluded that there is no way to fully understand something. This conclusion is repeated multiple times but it is distant from the characters. Towards the end of the Act II Vladimir discusses with Pozzo about Lucky, he asks Pozzo to tell Lucky to sing or to think or to recite but Pozzo replies that Lucky is dumb and that he can’t even groan. Vladimir continues questioning and Pozzo, tired of it, answers heatedly:

VLADIMIR: Dumb! Since when?

POZZO: (*suddenly furious*). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer.*) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant. Then it's night once more. (*He jerks the rope.*) On!

Tired of Vladimir’s constant questioning Pozzo answers furiously that there is no need to overthink everything and search for totality as it is impossible to know everything. One day

Lucky went dumb and that is the end of that. There is no need for an explanation, he will continue to be dumb even after trying to explain why. Vladimir and his burning desire for totality confronts a situation that resists to be compressed and only when he is conscious of this aspect the absurd arises and it is a familiar absurd because it involves him directly. The silence after the confrontation is what marks the realisation of the absurd.

The absurd arises not only when they discuss something but also when they express something that does not coincide with what they feel or do. Examples of this are the last lines of the two acts where the two tramps express their desire to leave but remain immobile on stage until the curtain falls. In these particular scenes what happens on stage contradicts what the characters are saying which creates a sort of ambiguity and proves the futility of language to convey meaning or any particular sense giving way to the nothingness and the absurd.

The elements that constitute the absurd are present in the formal creation of the play and in particular in its compositional form. In other words, the absurd in the compositional form is the result of the confrontation between the human nostalgia—represented through the routines and the constant questioning—and the irrational world—represented through the language failures and contradictions. Once these elements confront each other the absurd—represented through silence—arises.

These elements in the form of the play are only realised through the material but they are oriented towards something that goes beyond the material and that is the realisation of the futility of language to convey meaning. The constant confrontation in the play breaks the language layer and goes beyond it. The aesthetic act is fulfilled once the audience and the characters are able to perceive what lies beneath the fragmented layer of symbols and that is nothingness. Silence is

what constitutes the nothingness. Language cannot express the nothingness as it is imperfect but silence can, as silence is not corrupted by the imperfection of language. Almost every time there is a confrontation between the characters’ desire for totality and the unreasonable silence of the word, what follows is a silence gap:

ESTRAGON: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.

VLADIMIR: You're right, we're inexhaustible.

ESTRAGON: It's so we won't think.

VLADIMIR: We have that excuse.

ESTRAGON: It's so we won't hear.

VLADIMIR: We have our reasons.

ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.

VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

VLADIMIR: Like sand.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

Silence.

There is even a pattern of silence described by Deborah Weigel in her article about Beckett and John Cage where she states that “Waiting for Godot” follows the pattern silence-sound-silence which “represents the fundamental structure upon which the rest of the levels are built” (Weigel, p255). The play itself is a confrontation that results in the absurd. Before the play begins there is silence, then the two acts begin and the characters begin to question and to confront the irrational, this questioning is sound; at the end of the play the two Tramps remain immobile on stage and what is left is pure silence but this silence is different from the silence before the play is performed, this silence marks the result of breaking the symbolic layers throughout the play, it marks the absurd.

When the characters and the audience cease to search for meaning and instead, begin to listen to the silences and contemplate them, then the aesthetic act is fulfilled. But not all silences

are depicting nothingness, the silences that follow the confrontations are the ones that represent nothingness as they are the result of breaking the symbolic layer. Without a questioning or the awareness of the absurd, the symbolic layer will not break and the silences would not represent the void that lies beneath. The characters become closer to the audience than ever as now not only are they waiting, they are listening to the silence gaps and the audience is also doing it. Spanish critic Alphonso Sastre once said that: “Waiting for Godot” “is a lucid testimony of nothingness...The gray and meaningless mass of our everyday existence is suddenly illuminated, disclosing its true structure, naked and desolate. That is the great revelation” (Words on Plays, p30).

The play ends with a contradiction and what follows is a long and undefinable silence that does not mark the absurdity of the play but the absurdity of life. The audience, waited for Godot for two hours and questioned every symbol that appeared on stage looking for an explanation of the play but that questioning lead to nothing, it did not explain anything and what it is left is silence and nothingness. This silence becomes the great revelation, the revelation that everyone is condemned to the waiting. William Butler Yeats accurately pointed out that “life is a perpetual preparation for something that never happens”(Ellman, p237).

Conclusion

“Waiting for Godot” takes human reality to the point of desperation and reveals the futility of finding the meaning of existence and the world. The way this revelation is presented differs from the existentialist theatre in the form of the play. Rather than arguing about human existence and the absurd, Beckett goes beyond these ideas in philosophy by using them as an aesthetic material and not as a metaphysical one. This aspect of the play is what sets the play apart from other works that attempt to present the absurd through organized speech. The way Beckett used these philosophical trends—and in particular the Camusian absurd—as an aesthetic material reveals Beckett’s view of aesthetics.

In the play the absurd can be traced in its compositional form since the shape of the absurd—which is the constant confrontation between human nostalgia and the irrational world—is present all throughout the play.

The human nostalgia in the play is presented through the routines and monotonous activities that the characters perform. These activities gradually become tedious and exhausting which lead the characters to question the reason why they are performing them and to seek escape. But every time they express their desire to escape Godot appears to prevent them from going. It is Godot who gives them reasons to wait and through him they find unity.

But soon this questioning confronts the irrational world which is presented in the play through the contradictions and failures of language. The characters play to contradict each other, they fight about the type of tree or the place where they are supposed to wait. Even what they say contradicts what they do. They try to look for answers but they only find silence. The characters’ constant questioning of their world and the world that remains silent is what lead to the absurd.

This constant confrontation is what breaks the symbolic and language layers in the play and reveals what lies beneath it, which is nothingness and ultimately, silence. The awareness of this silence is what constitutes the leitmotif of the play and reveals a similarity between the aesthetics of the play and what Beckett proposed in his famous German Letter in 1937 where he “tries to suggest that the true power of art is to show up the failure of language” (Moran, p102).

The shape of the absurd present in the compositional form of the play is oriented, not towards the creation of knowledge, but towards the realisation of the failure of language. This awareness is what constitutes the aesthetic act and eventually becomes the great revelation. Being aware of the faultiness of language is, in a sense, recognizing the absurd.

It is through silence that Beckett depicts the nothingness; silence is not only present in “Waiting for Godot” but it is also a key element in almost all of his works.

A further study on the way Beckett uses silence, not only in “Waiting for Godot” but also in his other works, will reveal many other aspects in the pursuit of Beckett’s aesthetics and will contribute to the analysis of the formal construction of other works created by Beckett. In *Molloy*, Beckett states that “to restore silence is the role of objects” (Beckett, p13). In this sense, the way the material and the content are oriented towards silence is also an interesting feature that could be explored in depth.

Bibliography

- Adorno, T. W., & Jones, M. T. (1982, Spring). Trying to Understand Endgame. *New German Critique*, 26, 119-150.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1990). Supplement: The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art. In *Art and Answerability* (Ser. 9, pp. 257-318). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Beckett, S. (1996, June 24). Who is Godot? *The New Yorker*, p. 136.
- (2003). *Molloy ; Malone dies ; The unnamable: Samuel Beckett trilogy*. London: Calder.
- (1954). *Waiting for Godot*. 841 Broadway New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. translated by Justin O'Brien.
- Britten, A. M. (2012). *Beckett, Barthelme, and Vonnegut: Finding Hope in Meaninglessness* (Master's thesis). Oregon State University.
- Brodersen, E., Werner, J., Paller, M., Walsh, P., & Lenske, C. J. (2003). *Words on Plays: Insights into the Play, the Playwright, and the Production Race by David Mamet*. San Francisco: American Conservatory Theater.
- Calderwood, J. L. (1986). Ways of Waiting in Waiting for Godot. *Modern Drama*, 29(3), 364-375
- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. Translation originally published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1955.
- Chatterjee, A. (2013). *Camus "Absurdity in Beckett"s Plays: Waiting for Godot and Krapp's Last Tape*. *Lapis Lazuli - An International Literary Journal*, 3(2), 186-196.
- Cohn, R. (winter 1964). Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett. *Criticism*, 6(1), 33-43. URL =< <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23094159>

Crowell, Steven, "Existentialism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), URL =<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/existentialism>

Deranty, Jean-Philippe, "Existentialist Aesthetics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

Díaz, William Fernando, 1970-Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Facultad de Ciencias Humanas: *The Language of Silence: Adorno Reads Beckett*, London Queen Mary Westfield College 1999

Dick, S., & Ellmann, R. (1989). *Omnium Gatherum: Essays for Richard Ellmann*. Gerrard Cross, Buck.: Colin Smythe

Durán, R. (2009, April). "En Attendant Godot" or 'le Suicide Philosophique': Beckett's Play from the Perspective of Camus's "Le Mythe de Sisyphe". *The French Review*, 82(5), 982-993.

Esslin, M. (1968). *The Theatre of the Absurd, Revised and Enlarged Edition*. Pelican Books.

Foley, J. (2008). *Albert Camus: from the Absurd to Revolt*. Stocksfield: Acumen.

Halloran, S. M. (1973, Spring). Language and the Absurd. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 6(2), 97-108.
URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40236838>

Lenske, C. J. (2003). Symbols of Waiting . *Words on Plays - Waiting for Godot*, 21-23.

Moran, D. (2006) “Beckett and Philosophy”, in Christopher Murray (ed.), *Samuel Beckett – One Hundred Years* (Dublin: New Island Press), pp. 93–110.

Pouliquen de Vidal, Hélène “Teoría y Análisis Sociocrítico” Bogotá Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Facultad de Ciencias Humanas 1992

Rodrigues, Roxane H., et al. “Bakhtin Circle's Speech Genres Theory: Tools for a Transdisciplinary Analysis of Utterances in Didactic Practices.” *Genre in a Changing*

World, Parlor Press and the WAC Clearinghouse, 2010, pp 295-316.

Wahl, J. A. (1949). *A Short History of Existentialism*. New York: Philosophical Library.

Weigel, D., & Cage, J. (2002). Silence in John Cage and Samuel Beckett: 4' 33" and "Waiting for Godot". *Samuel Beckett Today*, 12, 249-262. Retrieved November 20, 2017, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25781422>