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“Existentialism” in Samuel Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot”

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With great honor and deep feeling, I would like to dedicate this modest attempt work to my family, including my wife, who patient a lot with me during the period of middle school by correspondence, lessons of night, after work, the same for the secondary school, furthermore, during U.F.C., and university many once.

As, also I dedicate this work to my children: Mohamed, Ahmed, Fatima, Meriem, Aissa, Belkheir, Abderrahim, in addition to my grand-daughters: Rania, Wissal.

To all the cast of the English department in particular the teachers who taught me and even those who did not.

I also dedicate this work to our supervisor teacher, Mrs. Tidjani Hind, who really encouraged me, further did her best to help me and push me forward.

To all my friends who know me and I may not know them.

To all students of second year Master.

To all my colleagues, at work, mainly, Principal Inspectors, of Finance.

Berdji Mohamed Habib.
First, we thank God for help and, praise him enable me to fulfill this work.

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Abstract.
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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Topic:

Samuel Beckett’s existentialism, in his major work *Waiting for Godot*, we attempt to analyze and critic text, in order to take off the existentialism in it. The play which is altogether absurd, as it is called also, anti theatre, emerged mainly after the Second World War, by some writers adopting Anti Theatre, who were despair from the dramatically result after the Second World War: such as Lonesco, Camus and Samuel Beckett, choosing existentialism, Notably, Samuel Beckett, in *Waiting for Godot*, the unique phenomenon in our literature, as bilingual work, in the second half of Twenty Century.

Motivation:

Samuel Beckett as he said Mr Jean Paul Sartre, he added to literature something, which was not added during thirty years, a witness of the father of existentialism, this due to his talent of criticizing the human condition after the dramatic result, of the second world war, with an Anti-Drama, attempting to change this dramatically situation, which attract our attention to study his novel into the potentialities of his style.

Problematic:

On the basis of our observation after reading *Waiting for Godot* it is noticed the prevalence of certain themes such: emptiness, loneliness, hopelessness and despair. These themes inspire any reader of *Waiting for Godot* to think of the recurrence of these themes and their impact on the reader, the fact that motivated the researcher to think of the suitability of the adoption of existentialist theory to approach *Waiting for Godot*

Research Question:

*Is there Existentialism in Waiting for Godot?*

Hypotheses:

*Waiting for Godot* is a text that can be approached from an existentialist point of view
Research Methodology:

The actual research adopts an analytical descriptive method of approaching the text of *Waiting for Godot* on the basis of the defined literary framework.

Structure of the Dissertation:

Chapter one represents the theoretical overview, providing the main ideals and assumptions of Existentialism, followed by a second practical chapter that consists of an analytical approach to the text on the basis of the provided theoretical framework.
Chapter one

Existentialism a Review
1. Existentialism: A Definition

1.1 Introduction

Defining existentialism has proved an exceptionally problematic task. Some intellectual historians have offered general and often ambiguous definitions of the movement; others have preferred to characterise existentialism as a supple, protean attitude rather than a cohesive school of philosophy. Marjorie Greene pessimistically laments that ‘the word is nearly meaningless’ because ‘nearly every philosopher since Hegel is shown to be in some sense an existentialist.’

The struggle to define existentialism is made harder by the fact that many of its key figures resist narrowing their work to a single, clear-cut set of ideas. In the introduction to Search for a Method, Sartre declares: ‘It is in the nature of an intellectual quest to be undefined. To name it and define it is to wrap it up and tie the knot. What is left? A finished, already outdated mode of culture, something like a brand of soap, in other words, an idea.’

Penelope Deutscher regards the ‘transformational terms’ in Simone de Beauvoir’s work as ‘an increasingly complex intersection of accumulated meanings’, which are ‘constantly challenged, reconsidered and refined.’ The same can be said of existentialist thought more generally, as its central terms are always in the process of critical negotiation and re-evaluation.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the themes and concepts explored by existentialists are interconnected. Even though many of the figures identified with the movement expressly repudiated the term ‘existentialism’, there are various overlapping ideas in the writings of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir and Camus. Rather than attempting to wrestle with conflicting definitions of existentialism, it is more helpful for the purposes of this introductory chapter to enumerate the principal philosophical ideas shared by key existentialist thinkers.

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‘The word existence,’ explains Karl Jaspers, ‘is one of the synonyms of the word reality, but owing to Kierkegaard it has acquired a new dimension; it has come to designate what I fundamentally mean to myself.’

Kierkegaard’s most significant contribution to existentialism was his observation that human beings are deeply invested in the experience of existing.

1.2 Kierkegaard

and the major existentialist thinkers who followed him, philosophical investigations begin with the basic premise that individuals are actively engaged in the processes that shape and constitute their existence.

1.3 Heidegger

As Heidegger argues, to exist is not simply to be, but to be concerned about oneself; we ‘care’ about the nature of our existence. This leads existentialists to suggest that human existence is not reducible to an aggregate of definitive essences or instantiated universals. This anti-essentialist view of the human self is crucial for existentialists. Heidegger chooses to hyphenate the word ‘ex-ist’ in order to bring to light the word’s etymological roots and draw attention to the way human beings ‘stand out’ from their characterizing properties.

1.4 Sartre

Sartre tells us: ‘Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards.’ What Sartre suggests here is that an individual has the ability to decide how he or she stands in relation to his or her own life. This idea underpins his famous dictum ‘existence precedes essence’. In a similar way, Heidegger’s describes Being and Time as an inquiry into the ‘being that we ourselves are.’ For existentialists, human beings are conscious, sentient, self-creating individuals. Existence is always in a state of flux, constantly being formed through an individual’s actions and choices.

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7 Ibid. p. 28.
Existentialists insist on the characterization of a human being not as an object or thing, but as an event - the unfolding realization of life as a whole. Existentialists suggest that there are two elements of human existence: facticity and transcendence. Aspects of facticity – race, class, age, past, body, beliefs, desires, personality traits - are the given, factual dimensions of human existence. They are aspects of a human being that can be viewed from a third-person perspective.

Human beings, existentialists claim, have a special, complex relationship to these aspects of their existence. Although an individual can try to adopt an objective stance towards them, that perspective will remain largely subjective, because an individual will always interpret these facts in terms of what they mean to him. He cannot truly view himself as others do, as if he were an object. My facticity belongs to me and my perspective on it contributes to my sense of my unique, distinctive existence.

In Sartrean terminology, human consciousness exists ‘in-itself’ (en soi) and ‘for-itself’ (pour soi). In a fundamental sense, consciousness exists: this is what Sartre calls Being-in-itself. But a distinctive feature of consciousness is its capacity to separate itself from its determining factors: this is what Sartre calls Being-for-itself.

As a consequence, consciousness is irreparably divided. Consciousness is not the property of an individual; likewise, there is no inhabitant of consciousness. Instead, it acts as a mental framework that structures our apprehensions of the world. It is the ability of consciousness to reflect on itself that makes choice, decision, action and agency possible.9

Although existentialists insist that human beings have the ability to transcend the givens of their existence, they also insist that human lives are always enmeshed in social, historical and cultural situations. There is no sharp, definitive distinction between self and world: they form a tightly woven whole, which Heidegger terms ‘Being-in-the-world’.10 Transcendence allows an individual to formulate projects or position themselves in the world, but these projects are also situated and circumscribed.

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1.5 Human Existence and Consciousness

We can transcend our situations, but we cannot transcend the limits of the world we know. Human consciousness is always situated and embodied. But human beings are not solely the product of their historical and cultural conditioning. They are also capable of choosing how they respond to the world. Jaspers puts it this way: ‘Although my social I is thus imposed upon me, I can still put up an inner resistance to it.

"Although I am in my social I at each moment, I no longer coincide with it. I am not a result of social configurations, for though my social existence determines all of my objective phenomenology, I retain my own original potential."\(^{11}\)

Existentialism is popularly associated with the idea of absurdity. It is important to separate existentialist philosophy proper from the fashionable existentialist cultural movement that swept through Western Europe in the wake of the Second World War.

The popular image of the existentialist dressed in black and brooding on man’s pointless struggle against an irrational and absurd universe is one that must be dispelled. The notions of alienation and absurdity are still important for existentialism, but they must be properly explained and qualified. Existentialists claim that there is no ultimate, transcendent meaning to the world. Human beings create gods, religions, and teleology’s because they want to believe the world is ordered and purposeful.

According to the existentialists, responsibility for one’s life lies entirely with oneself. Although there are religious and Christian forms of existentialism, the major thinkers argue that the world contains meaning only because individuals have projected meaning onto it.

This shift towards a more secularised view of human meaning largely came about as a response to the increasing dissatisfaction in Europe with theological constructions of meaning. The question of the human creation of meaning arose as a result of Nietzsche’s questioning of the validity of a universal moral code and thus paved the way for the argument that human life is meaningful because man chooses to make it so.

But it is important to note that existentialists are concerned with the absurdity of human choice as well as metaphysical absurdity. Sartre argues that there is no rational basis for choice because all motives, justifications, reasons and desires operate within a chosen world.

By, this he means that we all choose to exist because; we could not choose to exist. He writes: ‘The choice is absurd because there has never been any possibility of not choosing oneself.’\textsuperscript{12}

What Sartre means by this is that, paradoxically, freedom is not freely chosen. Instead, ‘Man is condemned to be free.’\textsuperscript{13}

There is no escaping freedom, because to exist is to be freely engaged in the world. Sartre elaborates further: ‘Precisely because here we are dealing with a choice, this choice as it is made indicates in general other choices as possibles. The possibility is lived in the feeling of unjustifiability; and it is this which is expressed by the fact of the absurdity of my choice and consequently my being.’

The absurd is located in the tension between our serious engagement with the world and the lack of justificatory ground on which this engagement is built. But, as Albert Camus stresses in \textit{The Myth of Sisyphus}, absurdity does not inexorably lead to nihilistic despair.\textsuperscript{14} Human beings must strive to overcome the absurdity of existence by choosing to act. Sartre concurs and extends his understanding of the absurd to his understanding of the absurd in Shakespeare. The idea that life is ‘a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing’ (\textit{Macbeth}, V.v.25-7), Sartre insists, ‘should not pass as Shakespeare’s final word.’\textsuperscript{15}

An individual’s capacity for freedom is created by the way their consciousness is structured. For a large part of their existence, human beings are absorbed in the actions, concerns and desires of their everyday life. At these times, consciousness and circumstance are fused together. In Heidegger’s terminology, objects and things in the world are encountered as ‘ready-to-hand’\textsuperscript{16}, meaning that human beings naturally think of objects as types of functional equipment.

But these objects have another dimension of being: They are also ‘present-at-hand’.\textsuperscript{17} They can be dissected, inspected and contemplated until they become unfamiliar. The instrumentality of things conceals a deeper dimension of reality. In a state of alienation, the usefulness of the object is no longer taken for granted. When the individual confronts the brute existence of an object or thing, he becomes alienated from the world. A distinctive

\textsuperscript{12} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, p. 501
\textsuperscript{13} Sartre \textit{Existentialism and Humanism}
\textsuperscript{14} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, p. 502.
\textsuperscript{17} Heidegger, \textit{Being in Time}, p. 101.
characteristic of human consciousness, argues Sartre, is that it is capable of ‘nihilating’ being. An individual ‘causes a world to be discovered’ through the negativity he imparts to elements of the world.18

Sartre uses the example of looking for his friend Pierre in a café and realizing that his friend’s absence is as real and vivid as the other physical features of the café.19 This leads him to suggest that there is a nothingness at the heart of human consciousness which allows individuals to doubt, imagine and interrogate things in the world.

Existentialists believe that the phenomenological analysis of moods reveals fundamental aspects of the self. Anguish or angst are the terms existentialists employ to describe how freedom reveals itself to human consciousness. Sartre writes: ‘The permanent possibility of non-being, outside us and within, conditions our questions about being.’20 When consciousness becomes aware of its capacity to nihilate things, to be other than the things that surround it, the individual becomes anguished or angst ridden.

For Heidegger, this experience has an important individualizing power. In a state of angst, when the usual meanings of things ‘sink away’ and objects become unfamiliar, an individual’s understanding of himself and the world is challenged. He realises he has the power to shape the significance of his life by taking up the task of existing. An apprehension of death functions in the same way. Sartre writes: ‘Death is the limit, but also a constituent of my freedom . . . If a being was endowed with temporal infinity, he could realise all his possibilities . . . he would disappear with respect both to individuality . . . and to freedom’.21 If an individual’s life had no temporal limit, he would be pointlessly free.

The finitude of life makes freedom meaningful and possible. Death is also crucially significant for Heidegger. He suggests that there is a deep connection between an apprehension of human finitude and the authenticity of a life. If we fully understand the limits of our existence, we begin to see the importance of taking responsibility for our actions and choices. But angst and the experience of apprehending death, although existentially important, are sources of distress, and thus human beings naturally look for ways to flee from them.

18 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 48.
19 Ibid., p. 34
20 Ibid., p. 29.
There are various ways in which human beings try to evade their existential responsibilities. Existentialists claim that, in a state of alienation, the sense of man being essential to the construction of the world is lost. This results in the individual using disingenuous ploys to stave off a sense of alienation. They retreat into the world of what Heidegger terms the ‘They-Self’ and Kierkegaard calls ‘the Public’. In this state, the individual recoils from the difficult task of choosing himself and instead leads an inauthentic life. They become absorbed or tranquilized by ready-made belief-systems; they live in ‘bad faith’, an inauthentic mode of existence that involves self-alienation and self-deception. Bad faith is a response to anguish in the face of freedom.

The individual’s sense of alienation is exacerbated, according to Sartre, by another facet of human existence: ‘being-for-others’. the world is not only revealed to me, but I reveal the world to others. For the most part, human beings unreflectively go about their life absorbed in their first-person perspective. However, when the individual becomes aware that they are being looked at, their existence becomes objectified: their subjectivity becomes part of the world of another. The individual becomes aware that they have an external nature or character that can be objectified or viewed from a third-person perspective. The individual’s realization that another person can access this dimension of their being (which the individual cannot) makes them feel alienated and ashamed.

1.6 Authenticity

A crucial term for existentialists is Eigentlichkeit or ‘authenticity’. Authenticity is best defined as the attitude with which an individual engages in his projects as his own. Existentialists claim that there is a gap between basic existence and the realisation of the responsibility one has for one’s existence, which opens up the possibility of creating an authentic self. Authenticity is the way individuals recover from their sense of alienation or anxiety without fleeing into inauthentic modes of being. A resolute commitment to one’s life is an explicit self-choice. In Being and Time, authentic existence is described as ‘anticipatory resoluteness’.

An authentic individual is ‘anticipatory’ because he projects forward towards a final end: death. Whether human beings realize it or not, each individual presses forward in a way that imparts coherence, continuity and cohesiveness to his life. An authentic individual is also

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22 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 246.
23 Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 352.
‘resolute’ because he overcomes his groundlessness and his entanglements in everyday life by becoming his own ground for existing. He takes a stand on his situation and becomes fully committed to his own existence. To be authentic, therefore, requires a degree of transparency with regard to a given situation. Ironically, authenticity is often misrepresented as individualistic self-assertion.

For existentialists, this is only a more subtle and inconspicuous form of inauthenticity. The premium placed on self-assertion, independent thought and individual action actually makes an individual’s subjection to their They-self even more thorough. Authenticity, on the other hand, means that the individual must take responsibility for a self that he cannot ever be entirely responsible for.

The idea of freedom runs parallel to the idea of authenticity in existentialist thought. Sartre remarks that a man, being free, ‘carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders . . . [He] is the only one by whom it happens that there is a world; . . . he is also the only one who makes himself’. But it is important to clarify some misconceptions about the existentialist notion of freedom. Firstly, unlike political or social freedom, it cannot be increased or decreased. It is an individual’s relationship to his freedom that is susceptible to change rather than the degree to which he is free.

Secondly, existential freedom is not manifested in the commission of unmotivated acts gratuits. ‘Freedom is not the caprice . . . of inclining in this or that direction’, writes Heidegger. Instead, it is the very fact that human beings are situated in the world, subjected to things that they cannot control, that makes them free: their facticity is a condition of their freedom. As David Detmer asserts, for Sartre there are two kinds of freedom: ontological freedom and practical freedom.

Human beings are ontologically free, because the for-itself of consciousness allows them to reconsider their relationship to the world. But their practical freedom is always conditioned and limited by the circumstances in which they find themselves. Heidegger makes a similar distinction when he writes that an individual’s freedom is ‘released from the illusions of the They’, yet remains ‘within the limitations of its thrownness.’

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24 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 576.
25 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p.
26 The following clarification of existential freedom is based on David E. Copper’s lucid analysis in Existentialism: A Reconstruction, 2nd Bedn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 153-4.
In *Existentialism and Humanism*, Sartre offers a broad understanding of his philosophy. He claims that it is a doctrine that ‘render[s] human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an Environment and a human subjectivity.’\(^{27}\) This is an important starting point for exploring existentialism in detail. Recently, David E. Cooper has offered a succinct summary of the core ideas in existentialist thought:

Existence . . . is a constant *striving*, a perpetual *choice*, it is marked by a radical *freedom* and *responsibility*; and it is always prey to a sense of *Angst* which reveals that, for the most part, it is lived *in authentically* and in *bad faith*. And because the character of a human life is never given, existence is *without foundation*; hence it is *abandoned* or *absurd* even.\(^{28}\)

### 1.7 The Existential Ideals

What unify the existentialists are the themes and concerns that tend to show up in their work. Here are the top ten themes that recur again and again in existential philosophy, as well as in art, literature, movies, and any number of other fields:

- **Absurdity**: For the existentialists, life is absurd; it makes no sense and has no meaning or ultimate purpose, but human beings need it to make sense, to have meaning and purpose.

- **Rejection of meaning-giving narratives**: It isn’t enough to say that life is absurd; the existentialists repeatedly make the point that when philosophy, religion, or science tries to make sense of it, the attempts always fail.

- **Alienation**: This is the feeling that you’re a stranger in your own life, a stranger in the world.

- **Anxiety**: This is the feeling of unease you get when you start to recognize that life is absurd.

- **Forlornness**: This is the feeling of loneliness you get when you realize that no one can help you make sense of your existence.

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Responsibility: Everyone bears responsibility. If no one is going to give you a guidebook to life, you have to bear responsibility for making your way through it and creating some kind of meaning for it.

Authenticity: People want authenticity — to live in a way that’s in tune with the truth of who they are as human beings and the world they live in.

Individuality: An important part of developing an authentic and satisfying life is individuality. Reason, science, and systems that try to cover up the absurdity of life often take individuality from you.

Passion/engagement: Being passionate or engaged is another important aspect of living an authentic life, and it’s under attack from the same forces that take away your individuality.

Death: This is the ultimate context for all human actions and an important source of the absurdity of life.

Like Cooper, it is attempted to outline the main concerns and arguments of Existentialism far from an exhaustive history of the movement. It is important to remember that the perspectives and arguments of existentialists often vary greatly; no two existentialist thinkers are the same. Reflecting on the experience of writing on existentialism, William Barrett commented that ‘what had seemed a single branch had already broken out into a cluster’, and his aim was to find ‘a way through this greater density, in search of the line of development in relation to which each of these philosophic shoots has its own grade of relevance.’ This is also the way existentialism is being approached in this modest paper. A fuller and more detailed explanation of these key ideas will be offered alongside the analysis of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

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29 Heidegger, *Being in Time*, p. 417
Chapter Two

Existentialism in *Waiting for Godot*
Though human affairs are not worthy of great seriousness, it is yet necessary to be serious. . . . God alone is worthy of supreme seriousness, but man is God’s plaything. . . . What then is the right way of living? Life must be lived as play, playing certain games, making sacrifices, singing and dancing, and then a man will be able to propitiate the god, and defend himself against his enemies, and win in the contest.

Johan Huizinga (2002: 55–69)

2.1 Introduction

In a world devoid of belief systems, the mind and heart cry out for validation, for the assurance that life has meaning and actions have purpose. One may accept, as an existential truth, the assumption that despite the individual’s endeavors to comprehend or change the world, “there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecclesiastes), and, as Beckett puts it, “the tears of the world are a constant quantity. . . .” But one also occupies a world of temporal measurement. Time passes and one ages, and, facing these inescapable facts, one journeys with tenacious will through the arbitrary divisions of time and space holding onto goals and belief systems as if they were absolute.

Life is not what the traditional dramatists portrayed, a series of ordered events with beginnings, middles, and ends. Neither are language and logic effective means for the communication and discernment of meaning. Nevertheless, the human creature, even if no longer motivated by the conviction of a divine mission, is continuously compelled toward purposeful activity. The need for a moral or spiritual anchor remains.

2.2 Existentialism in Waiting for Godot: Samples and Analysis

Waiting for Godot portrays both the need for purpose and the emotional fragmentation that accompanies the struggle for this anchoring of self. Vladimir and Estragon have inherited a world they cannot master, and despite their heroic accommodations they cannot escape the turmoil that accompanies their sense of purposelessness. It is as though an unfathomable anarchy had been loosed upon their inner world. Most of their efforts toward filling this emptiness reinforce their loss of energy and indecision and increase the disjuncture between their thoughts and actions. In reality, they are capable of participating only in temporarily meaningful action and fragmented communication. And they know this. That they persist defines their courage; during their good moments they explain:
ESTRAGON: I wasn’t doing anything.
VLADIMIR: Perhaps you weren’t. But it’s the way of doing it that counts, the way of doing it, if you want to go on living.
ESTRAGON: I wasn’t doing anything.
VLADIMIR: You must be happy too, deep down. . . .
ESTRAGON: Would you say so? . . .
VLADIMIR: Say, I am happy.
ESTRAGON: I am happy.
VLADIMIR: So am I.
ESTRAGON: So am I. . . .
VLADIMIR: Wait . . . we embraced. . . . We were happy . . . happy. What do we do now that we’re happy . . . Go on waiting . . . Waiting.

During their worst moments, boredom and ambivalence are replaced by anxiety and mutual intimidation: “There are times when I wonder if it wouldn’t Waiting for Godot: The Existential Dimension be better for us to part.” Having searched the world for role models, for anything that might inspire a sense of purpose (and their conversations are filled with the wisdom of the ages), their quest remains unfulfilled. If their past has provided no codes or figures to respect or emulate, their future is similarly disheartening.

They will inspire no disciples, peers, or children, for if they lack a coherent belief structure and sense of self, what legacy could they offer anyone else? Their repeated inability to act—“‘let’s go.’ (They do not move.)”—reflects their deepest, awareness, of their failed efforts to discern anything right, or purposeful in life.
In order to act, after all, one needs a sense of direction, of ideals or goals.

The paradox of survival in Waiting for Godot involves a rereading of Camus’ “The Myth of Sisyphus.” Sisyphus had the choice of abandoning his rock at the foot of the mountain or of continuously rolling it to the top, the only certainty being that after the rock fell, he could, if he so chose, once more perform this arduous, useless act. For Camus, Sisyphus’s perseverance, in literal spite or contempt of the meaninglessness of his task, defined his superiority. By ignoring the irrationality of his fate and focusing on the blue of the sky and the texture of the rock, he could exult in his defiance of fate.
3.3 The Absurd

The paradox of Camus’ Absurdist, like Sartre’s Existentialism, demands a tension between engagement and impotence and between logic and absurdity, where the awareness of life’s ultimate meaninglessness—*when placed at the recesses of the mind*—allows one to live fully and without anguish in a random and disordered universe. But Beckett’s heroes differ from those of Camus: they lack a sense of defiance regarding their lot in life. One would never imagine a weary, disconsolate Sisyphus at the end of his rope, either literally or metaphorically; but this is Vladimir and Estragon’s frequent situation.

Beckett’s people also lack Sisyphus’s most minimal assurances, for example, that the rock or the mountain will be present the next day or that time and space are as they appear. It is not only dubious as to whether Beckett’s characters’ most modest wishes can be fulfilled, but it is unclear if what they speak or hear is the intended message. They lack the most basic certainties upon which defiance depends, and this, along with their voluntary submersion of individual identity in role playing as a means of survival, makes them aliens in Sisyphus’s world. The word *happiness,* used by Camus to finally describe Sisyphus, is, at best, only occasionally applicable to Beckett’s figures.

Vladimir and Estragon’s only certainty is the terrible uncertainty of the world, together with their accompanying need to assume that somehow and someday meaning will become manifest. That there must be a Godot who will provide this is the ultimate focus of their everyday activities, and in their pursuit of this hope lies the paradox of their busyness in waiting.

The very act of survival or waiting becomes Beckett’s exposition of the games and rituals people construct in order to pass the hours and years, the accommodations they make to those closest in their lives, the alternation of hope and despair they endure in these accommodations, and the illusions and rejections of illusion that accompany each of these acts. Vladimir and Estragon’s relationship is thus geared to distract them from boredom, to lift depression, and to fight paralysis. Although there are many other ways of surviving a world bereft of meaning, including work, family life, and social action, they have rejected these alternatives, despite scattered evidence in the play that they were onetime considerations.
Vladimir and Estragon have also rejected the more self-indulgent roles that permit the outlet of anger and frustration, those less salutary emotions that accompany one’s experience of the void. Masters like Pozzo and servants like Lucky pursue these less admirable roles, of the dictatorial sadist and submissive masochist; even for them, as Pozzo admits, “the road seems long when one journeys all alone.” But Vladimir and Estragon assume a more humane relationship, one in which Vladimir assumes the more rational, philosophical role and Estragon the emotional, instinctual one; by so doing they can aspire to some egalitarian stability. They may pursue a relatively peaceful and predictable coexistence, unless, of course, something out of the ordinary disrupts their equanimity, something such as the intrusion of strangers like Lucky and Pozzo. Should this occur, as it does, their masks will fragment, and their less savory aspects will surface and rupture the equilibrium of their relationship.

The existential condition thus establishes the philosophical backdrop of the play, although Beckett neither answers nor systematically interrogates theoretical issues. It is in Beckett’s rich depiction of both conscious and unconscious thought, the subject of future chapters, that Godot achieves its great intensity. That is, equally exposed in his characters’ survival games is the emotional landscape in which their stratagems for survival function.

3.4 Waiting and Emptiness: a Human Reality

Beckett accomplishes by counterpointing the activities and efforts to manage each day with the feeling of emptiness and loneliness that motivates the well-patterned scenarios. Repeated objects, phrases literary references, gestures, and spatial patterns—the mise-en-scène—become manifestations of the masked emotional life. In his emerging poetic images of hopelessness and despair, Beckett reveals the inner mind in counterpoint to the conscious efforts to survive. Dramatic conflict depends upon revelations about human nature within the context of the human condition.

First, Vladimir and Estragon appear as agents of free will; regardless of their doubts and despair about the future, they choose to live rather than the alternative. Unlike Camus’ solitary Sisyphus, Beckett’s journeymen have a companion for comfort or distraction; this may give them a better chance of surviving. But this is a complicated arrangement, for if their existential needs and emotional hunger necessitate their interdependence, defined by specific
role play, these constructs betray them as well. Emotional needs continuously surface, and because role playing is, after all, an arbitrary accommodation to the mess, the most carefully patterned script may produce identity confusion and role reversals; at times, the scripts may fail completely.

The play's most compelling moments occur when an authenticity of self emerges. Ultimately, the insoluble problem is that each player has needs that will forever be unmet: Vladimir will never have anyone to answer his philosophical inquiries, just as Estragon will never have anyone to listen to his dreams. Thus, they await Godot, unsure of who or what “he” is and entirely unsure of the outcome of their awaited meeting. They are not disheartened over the possibility that Godot may be a brute: they know, after all, that Godot beats the young messenger boy, yet they still wait. It would be worthwhile if he came, even if he abused them, so intense is their need for direction.

Godot, then, is that someone or something that would obviate the need for the games that tentatively provide a purpose in life. Waiting is the human condition, in which one constructs games or a lifestyle that mask the unknowable. The name of Vladimir and Estragon’s game is “To be or not to be,” and when they whisper or weep over this question, their words resound in a void reminiscent of Ecclesiastes: “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” That their deepest dimensions of being prohibit any sense of peace recalls Hamlet’s “I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.” Confronted with such complex stage images, we, the audience, engage Waiting for Godot with responses much like those of Vladimir and Estragon. As we progress through the time of the play, we too await a denouement, an intuition of meaning, Godot.
3.5 The Existential in Theater

*Waiting for Godot* encompasses a sparse natural world—of animal (man), mineral (the road and Estragon’s mound or rock), and vegetable (Vladimir’s tree). Its two inhabitants perform the most basic functions: one or the other eats, sleeps, urinates, exercises, dances, embraces the other, argues, or sulks. They also think. Within the mysterious cycles of external nature (a radish displacing a carrot) there seem to be intimations of a larger, equally mysterious cosmic world (an unpredictable moon). In comprehending the natural or supernatural, as the play’s first line announces, there would seem to be “Nothing to be done.”

Lacking a social history or identity, *Godot’s* Everymen are being, or existence without essence. They stand before us asking to be understood, as they themselves try to understand, and they exist, as we respond to them, in a context of virtual absence and its correlative, endless potentiality. Standing on a road that similarly lacks definition in that it goes toward and has descended from nowhere, they define themselves primarily in their relationship to one other and with roles so well scripted that each is the other’s audience: each gives validation to the other’s existence.

Simultaneously, even while adhering to a script, each is the main actor in the scenario that plays out his life. That Vladimir and Estragon share the singularly most profound life goal, that is, of determining a purpose for living, is clear in the very name of their quest: Godot. If this refers to (a diminutive) God, the external world (cosmic or natural) might provide their much-needed rootedness. But, Godot is also virtually a contraction of their nicknames, Gogo and Didi, the inner self that might alternatively give cohesion to their lives. As Gogo and Didi thus await an answer, an external or internal solution, it is natural, in moments of disorientation or disconnection, when they say, “Let’s go” that they also return to their game with the ritualistic “We’re waiting for Godot.”

The universe in which they function reflects their identities and is a construct of how they envision it. The archetypal tree, rock, and lonely road lend themselves to multiple associations, some of which are ironic. The rock is not Sisyphean or Promethean; it is merely a place to sit; the tree, first skeletal and later blossoming, neither permits them a place to hang or crucify themselves in an effort to emulate the absent deity or simply to escape their failed lives; nor does it fulfill its function as the designated meeting
place with Godot. The leaves of the tree, an ambiguous sign of regeneration or hope, become a symphony of voices that haunts them with elegies of past sojourners who similarly walked this lonely road. The most minimal objects in their possession recall other echoes of the historic and mythic past—all consumed with the question “To be or not to be?” To live is to think, and to think embraces all the voices of the silence. Peace or, more precisely, silence, as Beckett himself once stated, may be attained only in death.

Beckett mirrors the paradoxes of existentialism—the persistent need to act on precariously grounded stages—with the repeated absence of denouement in the enacted scenarios. Since much of act 1, with its series of miniplays, is repeated in the second act, which concludes with an implicit return to act 1, Beckett creates a never-ending series of incomplete plays within the larger drama, each of which lacks a resolving deus ex machine.

The paradox of purposive action and ultimate meaninglessness pervades Deceptively simple boot routine is rationalized as purposeful activity:

VLADIMIR: It’d pass the time.

(Estragon hesitates.)

I assure you, it’d be an occupation.

ESTRAGON: A relaxation.

VLADIMIR: A recreation.

ESTRAGON: A relaxation. . . . We don’t manage too badly, eh

Didi, between the two of us? . . . We always find something, eh

Didi, to give us the impression we exist.

At times, their stoicism weakens. Routines fail to disguise the anguish of feeling (in Estragon) or of thinking (in Vladimir). Vladimir entreats Estragon to play his part: “Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can’t you . . . ?”

Estragon must similarly encourage Vladimir: “That’s the idea, let’s make a little conversation.” At some points, the couple finds it difficult to distract each other from “seeking,” which implies the act of “finding” (there is “nothing to be found”), which would inevitably lead back to “thinking,” which is, as they say, “the worst.” Then, their exchanges, with multiple overtones from the Crucifixion to the Holocaust, follow:
ESTRAGON: The best thing would be to kill me, like the other.
ESTRAGON: Like billions of others.
VLADIMIR: (sententious) To every man his little cross. . . .

Where are all these corpses from?
ESTRAGON: These skeletons . . .
VLADIMIR: A charnel-house! A charnel-house!
ESTRAGON: You don’t have to look.
VLADIMIR: You can’t help looking.
ESTRAGON: True.

Perhaps, they meditate, it might be best to just “hear” (“We are incapable of keeping silent”), although hearing brings back the voices of the leaves, their thoughts, and the past, whereupon they are thrust into the circular miasma of thought-frustration-rationalization. Their goal remains the ambitious: “to try to converse calmly” according to their well-performed script:

ESTRAGON: So long as one knows.
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.

At times, they reveal the true subject of their game:

VLADIMIR: Now what did we do yesterday? . . .
ESTRAGON: Yesterday evening we spent blathering about

nothing. [emphasis added]

Even if these well-planned interchanges fail to adequately anesthetize them, there are workable alternatives. They can play with their words: “Calm . . . cawm,” “tray bong”; poke fun at, contradict, or create versions of their generic script: “That’s the idea, let’s contradict ourselves. . . . This is becoming really meaningless.” Then their words can become like their hats, to be juggled to fill the void, another means of diffusing anxiety. As for their words as communicative tools, Vladimir and Estragon learned long ago that words not only are
inadequate constructs for authentic experience but that, at best, they connect on different and variable wavelengths. The permutations and combinations regarding meaning are legion.

But Vladimir and Estragon remain exemplary in the elasticity of their absurd accommodation. Among their adversaries—the unknown, erratic, or uncontrollable forces—is logic, which appears to be more discrete and manageable than, say, such fateful events as physical debilitation or the sudden appearance of intruding strangers or any occurrence that might change their routine. Logic, after all, gives the impression of cohesion and viability. It seduces one toward feats of accomplishment; it helps in the pursuit of survival.

It dictates coherence, indicating this, rather than that, course of action. It also gives one a sense of comfort, for it is a natural state of mind. And thus, Vladimir and Estragon’s most ordinary routines, even their silliest vaudeville exchanges, like the bowler hat jostling, depend on the mechanics of logic, on continuity and causality. In fact, most of their interchanges depend on memory, which again depends on continuity and causality. If their games fail, they have emergency measures, which depend upon their past knowledge of one another and their anticipation of the other’s response. Although a good deal of Godot’s humor arises from the two men’s failure to enact simple tasks, like removing shoes and buttoning pants, and while habit may be a “great deadener” of anxiety, habit continues to demonstrate one’s logic in a random and chaotic universe and provides the hope of linear and predictable behavior. As such, the characters insist on the truth or validity of their actions. Vladimir insists, “That’s right,”

and when speaking of the limited human condition and need to help others, says, “It is true . . . we are no less a credit to our species.” Lucky also asserts that the content of his monologue is “established beyond all doubt,” although Pozzo insists there is not a “word of truth” in a remark made to him. Vladimir similarly implores the messenger to tell them the truth, and because they receive the answer they expect, they grow more confused about their query than before they asked it.

Even Vladimir, Beckett’s logician, concludes his seemingly lucid “Was I sleeping?” speech by wondering: “But in all that what truth will there be?” Vladimir and Estragon’s major logical problem is why their designated appointment with Godot never materializes. Ultimately, Vladimir and Estragon doubt; therefore they exist, and in their most modest, mutually willed activities, just as in their responses to the gratuitous events that befall them,
they are pawns of an undefined fate that determines the erratic efficacy of causality and any of logic’s other manifestations.

Sensory experience is another adversary and dimension in the absurdist paradox. One would assume that, like logic, sense perception is natural and reliable. Yet when Estragon asks for a carrot and is given a turnip, Vladimir says, “Oh pardon! I could have sworn it was a carrot.” Their most facile assumptions regarding the simplest of sense perceptions are uncertain: although Estragon is traditionally portrayed as the portlier of the two men, their conversation about the rope that might hang them suggests the reverse:

ESTRAGON: Gogo light—bough not break—Gogo dead. Didi heavy—bough break—Didi alone. . . .
VLADIMIR: But am I heavier than you?
ESTRAGON: So you tell me. I don’t know. There’s an even chance. Or nearly.

The reality of human incapacity is nowhere more evident than in their use of language. The inability of words to communicate the most urgent of situations is underscored when each man cries for help and is treated much as though he had asked for the time of day. “Help me!” elicits the response, “It hurts?” So, too, even if language, logic, and the senses appear to hold, and the two try to assert their will, as Vladimir explains, one is not master of his moods. Thus, contradictions of word and mood are frequent, such as,

“Vladimir: Don’t touch me! Don’t question me! Don’t speak to me! Stay with me!” and “Estragon: I missed you . . . and at the same time I was happy.”

Finally, there is time, the least comprehensible of their adversaries and perhaps the most terrifying. Despite their every effort, Vladimir and Estragon cannot deal with either mechanical or cosmic time. They can change neither themselves nor the world, which operates independently of them. To change would necessitate a sense of purpose, but because the world is indifferent in providing this, Vladimir and Estragon know well one of Beckett’s axiomatic truths: In the absence of attainable goals or ideals, nothing, in a concrete way, can change. As Martin Esslin, who understood Beckett’s sense of time, explains, “Waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change.”
And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change in itself is an illusion. The ceaseless activity of time is self-defeating, purposeless, and therefore null and void. The more things change, the more they are the same. That is the terrible stability of the world.”¹ Nevertheless, Beckett’s play appears to move in a linear manner toward the future when Godot will arrive; and it is filled with traditional terms like tomorrow and yesterday and the colloquial exaggeration a million years ago and specifics like in the nineties. These, however, appropriately in an existential universe, function either in personal or in abstract terms. That is, in Godot, days, months, and even years pass in an instant; the tree blooms overnight; in what they believe is the next day, Pozzo and Lucky age; Pozzo is blind, Lucky, dumb. “When! When!” laments Pozzo. “Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time?” Beckett’s figures live out their lives before us existentially, and in their recurrent identification with historical and biblical figures they become archetypes of all humanity.

Time thus bends and contracts throughout Godot, as Beckett constructs a multidimensional tapestry of the human condition. One plays out one’s life against a complex counterpoint of mechanical time (in which one ages and moves to death and obliteration), and cosmic time (in which one’s acts have no function whatsoever). In the end, one’s life is enacted within a universe that is indifferent yet autonomous—mysterious and stable, decaying and regenerative—a world of entropy and eternal renewal.

But time and space as existential or mechanical dimensions are further complicated by the psychological experience of them, and here Beckett stretches the paradoxes of human comprehensibility and adaptability even further. If, given the gratuitous events that require continuously adaptive stratagems, the will is continually self-renewing, the individual functions against an equally mysterious and autonomous force of the eternal unconscious, where time, space, and another sort of determinism operate in additionally mysterious configurations.

Thus portraying the multiple levels of psychological, existential, and mechanical time and space that are integral parts of his canvas, Beckett goes beyond the mere rejection of traditional narrative dramaturgy and character development to make space, time, the senses, and logic take on the dimensions of characters on stage. The forces that war with one another and determine the boundaries of human freedom are so complex and of such infinite power that he gives them a function once reserved for the Olympic deities in classical drama.
With the interplay of time and space so prominent in the play, it becomes very difficult to isolate the meaning and motivation of single words or lines because each demands an evaluation vis-à-vis all the others, and then a reevaluation within the multiple contexts of time and place in which each functions. The image of Chinese boxes within boxes is appropriate here, as Beckett’s stage directions reinforce how, for example, a gesture performed in front of the tree or rock or an activity replayed multiple times may be both existentially unique and a variation of a single, constant emotional experience. Meaning at that point is dependent upon the spatial location in which it is enacted.

A single word may also reflect a different time and place in the speaker’s life, depending upon which hat he is wearing or whether his pants are up or down. Meaning and motivation become as fluid and accretive as single words or gestures and function like isolated facets in a Cubist painting, in which the briefest sequence cuts across time and space, and the perceiver, with the power of associative or linear memory, juxtaposes the fragment against circular, vertical, or cosmic time. The part is thus integrated within the totality of the other facets and shifting planes of the design, like the circular or oval dimension of a teacup, which in its many-sidedness is impossible to represent on a flat canvas.

Indeed, Beckett’s manipulations of time and space recall a broad range of art, from the Impressionists to the Abstract and Geometrical Expressionists, in which vertical and horizontal time is simulated in order to convey the complexities of perception, logic, and final human incomprehensibility. Godot’s every word and gesture resounds in a void of silence, and the purity of Beckett’s minimalist designs echoes with everything unsaid, the infinite polyphony and silence of the universe. The ultimate absurd paradox is that an indefinite possibility of meanings accrues to a world without definition.
Notes


Waiting for Godot, by Samuel Beckett, Vladimir and Estragon, the main characters in Samuel Beckett’s tragicomic play *Waiting for Godot*, do nothing. They sit. They talk. They wait. And while they wait, they try to pass the time. They’re aided in this attempt by the passing Pozzo and his servant, Lucky. In the first act, Lucky entertains them by dancing and thinking. (Yes, thinking.) In the second act, Pozzo is blind and Lucky is dumb. They don’t remember meeting Vladimir and Estragon the night before. At the end of each act, a boy appears and tells the characters that Godot won’t be arriving today but will definitely be here tomorrow.

Much of the action of the play is repetitious and absurd. You never find out who Godot is or why they wait for him, but they seem unable to stop waiting even when they try. Indeed, they often decide upon a course of action only to remain immobile. They consider suicide to escape the emptiness of their endless wait but decide against it principally because they don’t have effective rope. Estragon repeatedly suggests they leave but is reminded by Vladimir that they can’t because they’re waiting for Godot.

*Waiting for Godot* doesn’t line up point for point with any existential philosophy, but it raises fundamental existential questions and problems that all the existential philosophies attempt to address. The play explicitly has the characters recognize that they represent all humanity. Godot is traditionally interpreted as being God, but even this is open to debate. Beyond that, the play is wonderfully open to interpretation and, at the same time, resistant to any single interpretation. Much of its significance lies in its evocative nature and ability to elicit a direct emotional recognition of desolation, anguish, and forlonges.
General

Conclusion
**General Conclusion**

After completing the research, it was clear that the text of *Waiting for Godot* still had a lot of gaps still unexplored. In spite of, appear like an attracted text on the form *Waiting for Godot*, really contained a lot of messages that were subtly left within to its readers. This could influence them with Samuel Beckett’s life over his works, as his critical absurd manner, and his writing to reveal human condition in a derisory style, and an existential perspective. In a period in which, the world faint because of, the catastrophic result of the Second World War. And the cold War, it appear that, *Waiting for Godot*, as a wonderful surprise as an Anti-Theatre piece; which have received unique attention.

So, by the completion of chapter two, it could be noticed, that Beckett lived in an era which is disturbed, this is what push our writer to adopt this doctrine of Existentialism.

It was difficult to analyze the text, while overlapping the dimensions of the author’s past. The use of absurdist, and various areas within the text, which included the themes and characters. However, the research focused on existentialism extract under an analytical descriptive method. Though it was performed on a general basis, there were considerable results which sufficiently answered the research question, that was outlined by the research.

There were various examples of the extracts to be analyzed, and from the content analysis. It was discovered that there is an overuse of existentialism wrapped with absurd style.

We attempt to achieve all its objective, and complied with the guidelines set by research question the general historical background of Existentialism, and its literary characteristics were able to provide ample information and become a foundation to the research.

Finally, the analysis aimed to answer modestly the research question satisfactory, using the prior information gained from the literature review, and the researcher’s own judgments in the reasoning and justification of the results of the analysis.
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Appendix
Presentation of the Author (Samuel Beckett)

Samuel Beckett was born into a prosperous middle-class family in Dublin in 1906. He went to a famous Irish public school, Portora Royal, Enniskillen (where Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) had preceded him) and on to Trinity College, Dublin, in 1923. He excelled at sport as well as academic work, touring England with the university cricket team in 1927. As a result of coming first of his year in his modern languages degree, Beckett, in 1928, gained the coveted post of exchange lecteur at the Ecole normale Supérieure in Paris. While there, he is reputed to have puzzled his students by introducing them to the sound of the English Language through the music of the German composer Wagner! Beckett amassed, at this time, at this time, a large body of notes on the life and work of the philosopher Descartes (1596-1650) with the possibility in mind that they might form the nucleus of the thesis. The thesis never materialized, but the notes formed the basis for the poem ‘Whoroscope’, which won him the Nancy Cunard prize in 1930.

Beckett described Paris in the twenties as ‘a good place for a young man to be’. The city was at this time the intellectual hub of Europe and humming with new ideas in art in literature. This new ideas can best be categorized under the heading ‘Modernism’, a general term designating the many remarkable creative experiments that took place in the period between the beginning of the twentieth century and the early thirties. It was period characterized by great technological change; by the terrifying weapons of the First World War; and by a number of new intellectual theories, such as Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) writings on psychology, Henri Bergson’s (1859-1941) writings on time and Fernand de Saussure’s (1857-1913) writings on linguistics. Although it is difficult to give any precise definition to creative era, most of the major works of modernism-such as the novels of Marcel Proust (1871-1922) and James Joyce (1882-1941)-attempt to question traditional creative conventions and to find new ways of expressing the complexity of twentieth-century life.

Before he had been long in Paris, Beckett fell under the spell of his fellow Dubliner James Joyce, one of the most original literary talents of the day. Richard Ellman, in his biography of Joyce, describes the two men as engaging ‘in the conversations which consisted often of silences directed towards each other, both suffused with sadness, Beckett mostly for the world, Joyce mostly for himself’. In 1929 Beckett’s was the first contribution to a book of critical essays on Joyce’s ‘work in progress’ (Finnegans Wake, London, 1939),
an essay flatteringly entitiled ‘Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce’. In 1930 Beckett had to return to Ireland to take up his post as assistant lector

Beckett’s Works:

Beckett’s writing was influenced by writers and philosophical and theoretical writers like: Dante, Rene Descartes, Arnold Geulinex (who learned from Descartes), James Joyce. Nothing matters, but the writing. There has been nothing else worthwhile… a stain upon the silence.

His writing:

ABSTRACT

This work undertakes a fundamental reappraisal of Samuel Beckett's existentialism in his major work *Waiting for Godot*. In an attempt to shed light on the existential perspective in the previously mentioned play, representing a corpus of analysis, the actual research adopts an analytical descriptive method of approaching the text on the basis of the defined literary framework in the first chapter.

The introductory chapter of this thesis provides a preliminary sketch of existentialist thought and surveys its different definitions and theories. The second chapter constitutes the practical part in which a critical reading is provided adopting the existentialist point of view to answer the research question: can we approach *Waiting for Godot* from an existentialist point of view. Provided that the argument of this research is for a strong presence of the theme of nothingness reflecting the absurdity of life, leading thus to adopt an existential point of view for any interpretation of the play in question.
المتزمنا في هذه المذكرة بتفحص الوجودية عند الكاتب "صومال بيكات" في عمله الجبار "في انتظار غودو" محاولين إلغاء الضوء على الرؤية الوجودية في المسرحية العبثية المذكورة والمتمثلة في المجموعة المكتوبة للتحليل ، إننا في هذا البحث نتبني التحليل الوصفي كمنهاج للاقتراب من النص . على أساس الخطة الأدبية المعروفة في المبحث الأول .

في المبحث الأول كمداخل لهذا الموضوع مزود بخطة تمهيديّة هزلية للوجودية كفكر ومطلعين على مختلف التعريفات والنظريات .

المبحث الثاني مخصص للجانب التطبيقي والتي به قراءة نقدية مزود ببنية الوجودية كوجهة نظر للإجابة على فرضية البحث للاقتراب من "في انتظار غودو" من وجهة نظر وجودية مزودين بهذه الحجة لمواجهة هذا البحث ، والتي توجد به قوة فكرة "لاشي قد يقع " مبرزا عبئية الحياة ،والذي يقودنا لتبني الوجودية كوجهة نظر في أي ترجمة لهذه المسرحية العبثية موضوع البحث .