

Covid-19 and the Absurdity of Life: A Psychoanalytical Reading of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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Abstract: This Research paper explores Covid-19 and the absurdity of life from a psychoanalytical perspective in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. This work based on the idea that with the surge of Covid-19 and the large number of sudden change and deaths caused by this disease, humankind's life becomes irrational and pointless. *Waiting for Godot* and Covid-19 are the best specimens which portray the derisory of human condition. Characters in the play draw similar irrational features as Covid-19. The use of psychoanalytic tools helps construct the paper's aim which claims that both the surge of COVID-19 and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* picture absurdity of human life.

Keywords: absurdity, COVID-19, death, illness, psychoanalysis, repetition, trauma.

Résumé : Cette recherche explore l'absurdité à l'ère de la COVID-19 à travers une lecture psychanalytique de *En attendant Godot* de Samuel Beckett. Ce travail est basé sur l'idée que la montée de la Covid-19 et le grand nombre de changements soudains et de décès causés par cette maladie, la vie de l'humanité devient irrationnelle et inutile. *En attendant Godot* et la Covid-19 sont les meilleurs spécimens qui dépeignent le côté dérisoire de la condition humaine. Les personnages de la pièce dessinent des schémas similaires à ceux de la Covid-19. L'utilisation d'outils psychanalytiques aide à construire l'objectif de l'article qui prétend que l'apparition de la COVID-19 et *En attendant Godot* de Samuel Beckett représentent l'absurdité de la vie humaine.

Mots-clés: absurdité, COVID-19, maladie, mort, psychanalyse, répétition, traumatisme.

Introduction

The COVID-19 suddenly broke out worldwide. Originating from nature or human actions, the COVID-19 infects and kills millions of people in a short period of time around the world. According to Licensee Francesco Gennaro *et al.*, (2020, p. 2), the COVID-19 pandemic has a “natural and zoonotic origin.” The present paper claims that both the surge of COVID-19 and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* picture the absurdity of human life. COVID-19 interrupts everything. It changes our lifestyle, and calls into question the power of medicine. There is no logical explanation or justification for that sudden or premature death caused by the disease. All this gives an absurd meaning to life. No one is spared, rich or poor; everyone seems helpless in front of the devastation of the disease. It seems that humanity is waiting to be infected and die. From these observations, one can question emerges about the logical purpose or the rationality of life.

The British writer Samuel Beckett portrays such a reality faced by human being in his theatrical play *Waiting for Godot* published in 1948. The play tells the story of men visibly in bad shape physically and morally who are waiting for someone who is supposed to deliver them from this difficult situation. Decision and inaction, hope and despair intertwine in this long and painful wait which finally results in the absence of the long-awaited savior. The story depicted in this play visibly shows a sick and confused world from which no one knows exactly where salvation will come from. It is a play with no true plot, no logical sequence, no rising, and falling action in the story, no clear theme, no proper beginning, middle, and end, no pointed dialogues and even its language is not really poetic.

Some scholars and researchers work on *Waiting for Godot* and Covid-19. Waliullah Lecturer (2020) explores the absurdity in Samuel Beckett’s play. He asserts that Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot* focuses on the absurdity of life. This play completely deals with the life of a modern man who feels tense in a meaningless life. The same theme is shared by Abdul Bari Khan (2018) who tackles the impact of absurdism in “*Waiting for Godot*.” More, Martin Julius Esslin (1963) deals with the theatre of the absurd. According to Martin Julius, absurdism is the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose. Brindou Noël (2021) sees the Covid-19 as a disease which deconstructs patriarchies and upset the pre-established order of things.

It seems that humankind is being stroke and destroyed by the COVID-19. The destructive effects of COVID-19 are similar to a doom or an apocalyptic end to human nature.

To prove that COVID-19 portrays the absurdity of humankind life is what leads to the choice of the following topic: “Covid-19 and the Absurdity of Life: A Psychoanalytical Reading of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.” This work underlines that the present world is irrational, purposelessness, and meaningless due to Covid 19.

Waliullah L. (2020, p. 1) asserts that for an absurdist, “There is no meaning in life. Life is permeated by men but there is no man. Human life is like a bubble.” According to Oxford English Dictionary, absurdity means “the quality or state of being ridiculous or widely unreasonable.” Absurdism in this work refers to COVID-19 and Samuel Beckett’s philosophy of irrationality and purposeless of human life. The term actually is used to delineate the nonsensical, irrational, meaningless, purposeless, and pointless aspects of human life. Psychoanalysis constitutes the theoretical framework of this article. The COVID-19 portrays in similar ways as *Waiting for Godot*’s characters do, the tragedy and the irrationality of human life. Then, what are the psychological strategies used in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* to portray the absurdity of life? Otherwise, how does COVID-19 act to show the irrationality, and meaningless of humankind’s life?

To answer the above questions, the work is organised in two parts. The first part tackles the tragedy of human condition by throwing light on Covid-19 which debases the human body. It tackles the illness and traumatic end that the disease sets on humanity. The second part deals with nihilism of humankind existence during which human being is doomed to wait for things to happen. This part is concerned with the nihilistic aspect of life caricatured by endless repetition of events which dwells humanity in a state delirium, psychotic disease and death. Everything seems to be vanity.

1- Tragedy of Human Condition

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, tragicness is “regrettable serious or unpleasant situation marked by a sense of tragedy.” If the world is so rational and humankind so important, how can Covid-19 upset everything, bring disorder the whole world and destroy so many lives? Everything suggests a completely inexplicable and absurd phenomenon for the whole humanity. For Abdul Bari (2008, p. 313), a philosophical definition of absurdism is “It is a school of thought stating that the efforts of humanity to find inherent meaning will ultimately fail because no such meaning exists...” *Waiting for Godot* and Covid-19 totally deal

the ephemerality of the existence of human beings and also prove how humankind lives an insignificant life which can vanish quickly with Covid-19 infection.

1-1- Illness: Covid-19 as Human Body Debaser

The setting of *Waiting for Godot* clearly shows something not common. The play presents a leafless tree, two homeless and very sick characters that are waiting for something or someone unknown supposed to deliver them from their hardships. The setting of the play may remind the current conditions of the Covid-19 which brings serious sickness, confusion, uncertainty, despair and pessimistic outlook. Everyone is waiting for a cure but not sure about adequate cure. The setting of the play is bare. There is only one tree in the first Act. It is without leaves. The whole background may be absurd. It reminds of man's loneliness and alienation. There is suffering, agony, anxious wait, futility and all sorts of absurdity. The setting of the play portrays the miserable condition in which Covid-19 is currently plunging all the humanity.

The COVID-19 pandemic infects, sickens and kills people all over the world in high stage. At the very first moment the disease breaks out, data reported by the WHO (2020) relates:

Situation in Numbers total cases in last 24 hours: Globally 750 890 confirmed (57 610) 36 405 deaths (3301) Western Pacific Region 104 868 confirmed (1093) 3671 deaths (22) European Region 423 946 confirmed (31 131) 26 694 deaths (2733) South-East Asia Region 4215 confirmed (131) 166 deaths (8) Eastern Mediterranean Region 50 349 confirmed (4020) 2954 deaths (142) Region of the Americas 163 014 confirmed (20 935) 2836 deaths (379) African Region 3786 confirmed (300) 77 deaths (17) Who Risk Assessment, global level still very high. (WHO, 2020, p.1)

Based on a clinical analysis of medical actors, it can be said that Covid-19 completely distorts human nature and value. It infects the human organism and reigns supreme there. It destroys all vital organs and lowers the patient to collapse. According to recent medical studies, Covid-19 has no limit in the human body. It subjugates the patient's organism and also causes psychological disorders by attacking the brain. Covid-19 alters in such a way as to degenerate and degrade the whole body and mind of the victim until it kills him.

A medical review made by Doctor Gabriela Pichardo MD (2022) concludes that Doctors still continuing to learn about the short-term and long-term effects of Covid-19

on human body. Covid-19 can eventually affect the lungs, liver, kidneys and the brain. Once the virus enters the body, it usually settles in the cells that line your nose, sinus cavity, and throat. The virus may move down into your lungs. In acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), the COVID-19 pneumonia gets worse quickly, and the body's response can damage your lungs more. Many doctors think an overblown immune response causes many of the more serious consequences of COVID-19.

According to Gabriela, Doctors notice a number of heart issues in people with COVID-19, especially in those who are seriously ill. COVID-19 seems to be able to attack cells that line your blood vessels. Aside from heart issues, it can also cause blood clots that lead to a stroke or pulmonary embolism. COVID-19 appears to cause problems with the nervous system as well, including seizures. Other symptoms including loss of consciousness, loss of sense of smell and Stroke or heart attack are linked brain attack by the virus.

For Kristina Sauerwein (2022), movement disorders, memory problems, strokes and seizures are among the complications. Researchers examine brain health over a year-long period. Neurological conditions occur in 7% more people with COVID-19 compared with those who are not infected with the virus. Those who are infected with the virus are at increased risk of developing a range of neurological conditions in the first year after the infection. Such complications include strokes, cognitive and memory problems, migraine headaches, depression and anxiety.

Health issue is one of the theme portray by Samuel Becket in *Waiting for Godot*. What characters discuss in prescient to the advent of the Covid-19. Heart attack is one of the subjects debated by Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*:

Estragon: And what for it?

Vladimir: (gloomily). It's too much for one man. On the other hand what's the good of loosing heart now, that's what I say. We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties. (Act 1, p. 2)

Since the nineties, health problem is predicted in *Waiting to Godot* to happen by an infectious virus like Covid-19. Contextually, Ziyad Aly (2020) affirms:

It is definitely important to get vaccinated but also important to understand that they do not offer complete protection against these long-term neurologic disorders...Memory problems, colloquially called brain fog are one of the most common brain-related, long-COVID symptoms...it's unlikely that someone who has had Covid-19 will get Alzheimer's out of the

blue...and lead to difficulty speaking, cognitive confusion, vision problems, the loss of feeling on one side of the body, permanent brain damage, paralysis and death. (Ziyad, 2020, pp. 1-3)

Estragon is the perfect symbol of Alzheimer symptoms for he always forgets everything. He forgets everything from the Act 1 when performing Act 2 as if nothing happens:

Vladimir:

Is it possible you've forgotten already?

Estragon:

That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately...

Vladimir:

And Pozzo and Lucky, have you forgotten them too?

Estragon:

Pozzo and Lucky?

Vladimir:

He's forgotten everything! (Act 2, p 5)

Covid-19 and *Waiting for Godot* display similarities in their way of performance. Characters in the play are all sick with the same types of sickness as those provoked by Covid-19 infection. Characters are tramps which represent boredom and ennui. They produce a sense of baffled helplessness which humanity experiences in Covid-19 period. It seems that people are forced to remain in a situation which they do not understand and over which they have no control. The world is experiencing situations in which all are waiting and wait continuously for solution. Pozzo for example is blind (Act 2, p. 32) and he always cries for help. Till the end of the play, Pozzo cries for help. This means that nobody really recover from illness. The situation remains worse.

Through the observations and medical results mentioned above, one can come to the fact that Covid-19 distorts and devalues human life. There are so many sick and dead that humanity no longer seems to have any particular interest in life or death. It all becomes a matter of fate. Either it is life or it is death and that's it. Life seems no longer precious. Life as well as death is treated as a joke, nothing very important. Life and death are perceived as unimportant facts. What matters is to wait for the salvation or the miracle that comes to deliver humanity from calamities.

According to Noelle Toumey Reetz (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic is the most traumatic collective event of lifetime. And after two excruciating years and more than a million deaths, it is still unclear when, or if, the pandemic will end. That uncertainty is one of many stressors, along with worries about health, family, work and finances that have taken a significant toll on mental health.

1-2- Covid-19: A Source of Anxiety and Trauma

Psychologist Cathy Caruth (1995, p. 11) argues that trauma can be regarded as “a bodily or mental injury usually caused by external agent.” In addition to that, she says in the same book that:

Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence or death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the response of catastrophe. The common denominator of trauma is a feeling of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation. (Cathy Caruth, 1995, p. 11)

In this absurd play, the characters become anxious and traumatised. In *Waiting for Godot*, Characters lose their mental health in Act 2. Their relationship is in doubt and they do not recognise their fellows. They spend the night apart. Life to them is an endless delirium. Estragon and Vladimir lose their mental faculties. The other pair of characters Pozzo and Lucky become blind and dumb respectively. Suicide is a recurrent temptation and it supposed to be the last resort to them. According to Christophe (2012, p. 6), Freud speaks of Thanatos, which means the drive for destruction and death caused by the constraints of life.

Since COVID-19 kills many people all around the world, individuals' levels of death anxiety due to COVID-19 are likely to be promoted often resulting in increasing the levels of fear during the pandemic. Çakar FS (2020) explains that death anxiety, also known as thanatophobia, is anxiety produced by thoughts of one's own death. Its negative impacts are shown in various areas of people's lives such as pessimism, despair, poor understanding of social support, and insufficient life perception.

In addition, A. M. Ali et al., (2020, p. 17) reports: “cytokine storms in severe COVID-19 are reported to trigger damages in the central nervous system resulting in the development of psychiatric disorders.” Accordingly, *Waiting for Godot* and Covid-19 present people who are perceived with poor physical health and those with psychological disorders which lead them to more distress and trauma symptoms. Psychological trauma is relevant to the Covid-19 outbreak. Moreover, trauma and anxiety are well portrayed by Samuel Becket through the soliloquy of slave and sick man “Lucky”. Lucky symbolises the irony of current life. His name is Lucky but he is the most unlucky character. He is a slave of a sick master and his quite

trauma by all that happens in his world. Through Lucky's text, one can read all the characteristics of a disappointed man.

Lucky:

Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with ...for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire whose fire flames if that continues and who can doubt it will fire the firmament that is to say blast hell to heaven so blue still and calm so calm with a calm which even though intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the labors left unfinished crowned by the Acacacademy of Anthropopometry of Essy-in-Possy of...unfinished for reasons unknown of Testew and Cunard left unfinished...reasons unknown but time will tell fades away...matter the facts are there and considering what is more much more grave that in the light of the laborslost of Steinweg and Peterman it appears what is more much more grave that in the light the light the light of the labors lost of Steinweg and Peterman that in the plains in the mountains by the seas by the rivers running water running fire the air is the same and then the earth namely the air and then the earth in the great cold the great dark the air and the earth abode of stones in the great cold alas alas...I resume for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis the facts are there but time will tell I resume alas alas...I resume the skull fading fading...in spite of the tennis on on the beard the flames the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull the skull in ... (*Mêlée, final vociferations*) ... tennis ... the stones ... so calm ... Cunard ... unfinished ... (Act 1, p. 37-38)

Through Lucky's text, several aspects of life in times of Covid-19 emerge. Lucky in a confused and delusional state invokes strange gods with uncommon names for unknown reasons. In fact lucky is so burdened with the weight of problems and illnesses that he falls into a state of spiritual conflict. Despair and trauma make him no longer know which saint to turn to. His text translates a hallucination, a gradual loss of memory. As indicated by doctors, memory loss and hallucinations are visible aspects of Covid-19. Lucky's memory loss reflects a loss of collective memory of human beings currently under the influence of the disease which attacks not only the body but also the psychic faculties.

Lucky tells a rambling story without punctuation. This fact explains the rapid deterioration of the human condition. This shows how human life is degrading and dying out very quickly. Human life is fleeting and insignificant. In addition to these facts, Lucky highlights the calamities that strike humanity through certain expressions. The river flowing with fire, the rain of stones and the penumbra that invade the surface of the earth, many dead people, human skulls that replace tennis balls. All these expressions evoked by Lucky in his delirious state show the great suffering of humanity and this, for unknown reasons. Yes, for

unknown reasons, the Covid-19 effectively accomplished all these calamities revealed and noted in the delirious story of Lucky. Seemingly the end is near.

1-3- Covid-19 or the Apocalyptic End

The current Covid-19 pandemic leads to existential crises. One way of finding meaning in this is through apocalyptic narratives. Simon Dein (2021) writes:

Covid-19 pandemics indicate the fragility of life and the world, engender paralyzing anxiety that the world is dissolving, a sense of detachment and raise significant issues of meaning resulting in existential crises. Self-isolation and quarantine create a sense of being separated from the community and world generally—a sense of anomie. This was summed up well over two thousand years ago by the Roman poet Virgil's notion of a maze of dread: The world itself seems entirely unreliable: not only dangerous but also deceptive. The appearance of being a safe and thriving land becomes only a façade that hides the threat of death. (Dein, 2021, p. 5-7)

All these aspects provoked by Covid-19 outbreak may engender the terrible idea of suicide. Since the world is fragile and nothing is reliable, the world can no longer afford shelter to humankind. Self-isolation and quarantine create a sense of being separated from the community. Isolation can be perceived as death or the road leading to death. People who feel isolated are invaded in by the idea of death or suicide. Life is no warmer and it loses its sense.

People are sick and cloistered in a fixed place awaiting deliverance; unfortunately it is slow or does not even come. This despair that arises in the mind is an open door for suicide. Suicide becomes the only option to free yourself from suffering and have your freedom. This is exactly what characters perform in *waiting for Godot*. They find themselves there, at a fixed place waiting for Godot who is supposed to come to deliver them but he does not come. So they think to commit suicide to regain their freedom.

The two main characters Vladimir and Estragon with nonsensical existence, in Act one and Act two, they try to commit suicides two times. They cannot bear this life anymore. They invite each other to kill each other so that they can escape this meaningless of life. This incident is clear from the following dialogue.

Vladimir: You always say that, and you always come crawling back.

Estragon: The best thing would be to kill me, like the other.

Vladimir: What other? (Pause) What other?

Estragon: Like billions of others. (Act 2, p. 6)

They are waiting for Godot whom they never met. They argue to each other and make a plan of suicide and discuss passage from the Bible. Godot's identity remains unanswered till the end of the play. Godot may relate to Death. Godot may represent Death, and people are waiting for death to come.

This death is a sort of deliverance from Covid-19. Although Characters in the play may say that they are waiting for Godot, they cannot say who or what Godot is. Nor can they be sure that they are waiting at the right place or on the right day, or what could happen when Godot comes or what could happen if they stop waiting. Yet in the context of Covid-19 no one can predict the future. Whether adequate solution will be found or humanity will perish.

Due to Covid-19, Noelle Toumey Reetz (2021) reports Shannonhouse words in these terms: "We know 19 million people, or six percent of the U.S. population, have thoughts of suicide. That's a huge issue, and yet anyone can do a suicide intervention, anyone can get these skills." In Covid-19 period, life is tragic that it is meaningless to expect a better end. Maybe only fate matters in life actually. Humanity is undergoing decadence due the unexpected outbreak of Covid-19.

Things are getting so alarming that characters are only looking for God to help them out. Estragon and Vladimir are discussing the hard period such as Covid-19 period and turn toward God and implore his mercy.

Estragon:

What?

Vladimir:

Suppose we repented.

Estragon:

Repented what...

Vladimir:

One daren't even laugh any more.

Estragon:

Dreadful privation...

Vladimir:

Did you ever read the Bible?

Estragon:

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

Vladimir:

Do you remember the Gospels?

Estragon:

I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll

go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy...

Estragon:

Saved from what?

Vladimir:

Hell. (Act 1, p. 4-5)

People are appealing and confine their fate to God. God is supposed to save them from hell as Estragon and Vladimir discuss about. The world is plunged into total confusion. The only dot on the horizon is uncertainty. Through a story, Vladimir gives an overview of this moment when nothing is at hand. Suffering and sickness become unbearable. Everything escapes the human being. Only a divine being can still intervene for any salvation for humanity. Otherwise it is a catastrophic end.

Vladimir:

Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! (*Pause. Vehemently.*) Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally well, if not better. To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! What do you say? (*Estragon says nothing.*) It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflection, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. 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—

Estragon:

Ah!

Pozzo:

Help! (Act 2, p. 26)

The author portrays urgent period of the disease or pandemic. People should react against the disease in anticipation. This is a call for all humankind to act, to help, to take actions before it gets too late or the propagation becomes uncontrollable. But seemingly, it is not possible for human being to master the situation. Unnatural being is the only saviour in that confusing situation of Covid-19. Just kipping faith in waiting for God(ot) to intervene.

2- Nihilism of Humankind Existence

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, nihilism is “a viewpoint that traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and that existence is senseless and useless.” According Jamie Parr (2020), Nietzsche asserts: “the state of nihilism is the idea that life has no meaning or value, it cannot be avoided; we must go through it, as frightening and lonely as that will be.”

Nihilism results from the failure to find meaning in one's life. Nothing can be trusted, nothing is certain; nothing is as it seems. This part depicts the derisory and nihilistic character of human existence. It is interested in the fact that the life of every human being is a cycle of repetition of dream or delirium and whose finality is only a fact of destiny and nothing else.

2-1- Irony of Repetition

At the opening of the play (Act 1, p. 1-2) Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again.

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

Vladimir: I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resume the struggle.

The ending of the play is not a conclusion as such. It is like a beginning. Characters are still waiting a person whose name is Godot, Godot does not come and they don't move for other things. They just wait. Vladimir and Estragon's dialogues also revolve around one thing. They repeat the same dialogues in whole drama:

Vladimir: Well Shall We Go?

Estragon: Yes Let's Go.

But they don't move.

They wait for a person but their waiting is useless. They are not sure about his coming. So, these elements show the repetition of things without clear goal. The continuous waiting for Godot increases their despair and their lives are disgusted in thus way. They change the dialogues but they do not take proper decision. This shows the absurdity of human life especially modern human beings. The actions of first act repeated in the second act with just a few and insignificant changes.

Characters' conversation and their dialogues are repetition of things. The play start with a same thing that the two characters are waiting and the play also end with the same thing that they are still waiting:

Vladimir:

(*stooping*). True. (*He buttons his fly.*) Never neglect the little things of life.

Estragon:

What do you expect, you always wait till the last moment.

Vladimir:

(*musingly*). The last moment . . . (*He meditates.*) Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?...

Vladimir:

The essential doesn't change.

Estragon:

Nothing to be done. (*He proffers the remains of the carrot to Vladimir.*) Like to finish it? ...

Estragon:

Then adieu.

Pozzo:

Adieu.

Vladimir:

Adieu.

Pozzo:

Adieu.

Silence. No one moves.

Vladimir:

Adieu.

Pozzo:

Adieu.

Estragon:

Adieu.

Silence.

Pozzo:

And thank you.

Vladimir:

Thank *you*.

Pozzo:

Not at all.

Estragon:

Yes yes.

Pozzo:

No no.

Vladimir:

Yes yes.

Estragon:

No no.

Silence.

Pozzo:

I don't seem to be able . . . (*long hesitation*) . . . to depart.

Estragon:

Such is life. (Act 1, p. 40-41)

Characters are spending their time for doing nothing. No decision is taken seriously. They have defectuous memory and they can't do anything else just repeating words, expressions and actions in order to wait for the strange and unknown creature. As modern human beings live meaningless lives. Modern men have no clear purpose in lives. Modern men also are ignorant and they have no useful information and knowledge even modern man doesn't know about the purpose of his life.

This form of repetition of things which does not lead to too much is currently the daily life of all human beings who suffer the effects of Covid-19. On 11 March 2020, World Health Organisation declares the COVID-19 a pandemic. Prevention of human to human transmission is the most challenging one worldwide. Following that, most countries announce preparedness plans for COVID-19 “including lockdown, self-isolation, social distancing, hand washing and wearing face mask.”¹ At any time and in any place, the message is clear, you must continually wash your hands, avoid contact, wear masks, sneeze into your elbows, take the test, get vaccinated... wash your hands, avoid contact, wear masks, sneeze into elbows, take the test, get vaccinated... And again and again. But the virus remains a perpetual danger for everyone. What else to do, just go back to the same things and wait.

Life itself is a cycle of repetition for all human beings. After Birth there is Life and the end is Death and nothing more. The same fate awaits all human beings. However, all of life boils down to this.

2-2- Death of Thinking

In *Waiting for Godot*, the very first dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon shows meaningless and purposelessness of life. Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before Enter Vladimir:

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

Vladimir: ((advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart). I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon) so there you are again. (Act 1, p-1)

This dialogue brings into light the absurd nature of the play. Actually it represents the entire human existence where man of the present world is disappointed. The basic structure of the drama presents the idea not only about the usefulness and meaninglessness of time but also of life of the present world. Vladimir and Estragon just passing a time with useless activities they don't have any knowledge and information they are ignorant. They stop thinking about important thing which can bring positive income to their miserable condition. They live as they have no existence and they have no identity. They are in a place and a mental state where

¹ World Health Organisation, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019> (Accessed 26/01/ 2023)

nothing is happened. They portray a death of thinking since there is no clear objective in their interactions and thinking.

There is a breakdown of communication. Their dialogues are useless and meaningless. When the messenger boy comes with a message that Godot will not come today but surely come tomorrow so at this spot they exchange a dialogue:

Estragon:
Where shall we go?
Vladimir:
Not far.
Estragon:
Oh yes, let's go far away from here.
Vladimir:
We can't.
Estragon:
Why not?
Vladimir:
We have to come back tomorrow.
Estragon:
What for?
Vladimir:
To wait for Godot....
Vladimir: well shall we go?
Estragon: Yes let's go.
But they don't move. (Act 2, p. 40-43)

They change the dialogues but they don't act. There is neither imagination nor thinking in the dialogue. So, all things remain the same. No development show throughout the play. Lack of action is one of the major characteristics of this absurd play. Thus in the world of Godot even the minimal action or imagination is impossible. Nothing really changes and everything remains static. The Act 2 of the dialogue starts by: "Next day. Same time. Same place" (Act 2, p.1)

Effect of time is not so important since characters have no watches, no time tables and there is no one from whom they can get much information. They do not have the essential knowledge and are therefore ignorant. All that they do is to seek ways to pass the time in the situation which they do not understand and over which they have no control. As Estragon says later, "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." (Act 2, p. 14) This shows the very essence of boredom. They have to do something to kill time.

What can come from this excerpt is that they do not exist since Godot is not present. And what can help them feel their existence is to play meaningless plays so as to wait the one who is supposed to give importance to their life. People do not find a problem in stopping thinking. They sometime conclude that things arrive naturally. Thinking about what happens brings more misery. Estragon can say: “We should turn resolutely towards Nature.” (Act 2, p. 9) The place of the theatre and the play itself are reminiscent of confinement and its effects in this area of Covid-19.

Passiveness is more common during this lockdown moment. People are clustered in their home with nothing to do. Ennui and leisure are what remain as the play can present: “Next day. Same time. Same place.” (Act 2, p.1) The idea of confinement is well pictured in *Waiting for Godot*. This confinement may be the cause of the characters bad conditions. They seem depressive and anxious. As result, they cannot do anything, they cannot move. They are psychologically dead.

No more possibilities to be creative. People feel inexistent and useless at all. Human kind’s existence becomes useless or not productive. According to Xuehui Sang, et al., (2020, p. 1), “Covid-19 home confinement creates various psychological impacts, negatively affecting the emotional state due to depression and anxiety.” Since people are mentally defectuous, there is no more possibility to have useful thinking. The confinement due to COVID-19 dismantles men’s creativity. Therefore, Thinking becomes useless and meaningless. A fine example is given by *Waiting for God* through the acts of its characters.

2-3- Waiting for What: Absurdism of life

Collins Dictionary defines absurd drama as “a drama in which normal conventions and dramatic structure are ignored or modified in order to present life as irrational or meaningless.”²

Waiting for Godot is an absurd drama and it presents the absurdity of human life. There is no female character and the characters of the play are not sure about their own identities. The entire situation produces meaninglessness which is one of characteristic of absurd play. In this drama nothing is happened at all and no development of plot is found. The title of the play “Waiting for Godot” reflects absurdity in the sense that it too is replete with problems and

² <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/theater-of-the-absurd> (Accessed 26/01/2023)

dilemmas as human existence is. As the title is “Waiting for Godot”, but still nobody knows that who or what Godot is. God is made a non-entity.

Godot’s identity remains unanswered till the end of the play. Godot may stand for God. The characters of the play wait for him so that he may deliver them from misery and suffering or from their miserable existence. Godot may therefore suggest the intervention of a supernatural being. Or perhaps Godot stands for a mythical human being whose arrival is expected to change the human situation. Godot’s identity remains unanswered till the end of the play. Godot may relate to Death. Godot may represent Death, and people are waiting for death to come. This death is a sort of deliverance from hardship and sickness:

Vladimir:

We've nothing more to do here.

Estragon:

Nor anywhere else.

Vladimir:

Ah Gogo, don't go on like that. Tomorrow everything will be better.

Estragon:

How do you make that out?

Vladimir:

Did you not hear what the child said?

Estragon:

No.

Vladimir:

He said that Godot was sure to come tomorrow. (*Pause.*) What do you say to that?

Estragon:

Then all we have to do is to wait on here. (Act 1, p. 48)

The subject matter of the drama is not only Godot, but “waiting” which is an important aspect of human condition. It is only while waiting one can experience that passage of time. The way Vladimir and Estragon passes time shows the meaninglessness of life and the struggle that existence is. The waiting of Vladimir and Estragon for Godot is an endless waiting. They are waiting without knowing the purpose they are waiting for. Again the boy informs them that Godot is not coming but they still wait for Godot till the next day. Such endless waiting also seems absurd.

All the characters in the play spend their time with doing through meaningless activities. One does not know past of the characters. They are not introduced to the audience. The play only shows their names and their miserable situation. Thus this play *Waiting for Godot* contains all the elements of absurdism tracing the human condition in Covid-19 area.

The hopelessness in Vladimir and Estragon's lives demonstrates the extent to which humans rely on illusions such as religion, to give hope to a meaningless existence and sickness.

There is nothing significant in the play. In this play nothing significant happens except waiting and waiting. The waiting also becomes meaningless because no Godot arrives. When the play starts Estragon and Vladimir agree that they have nothing to do. They think that they lose each other. They admit that struggle is of no use. Sometimes they feel that they should jump from a tower and kill themselves. On another occasion they want to hang themselves immediately with a tree. Mattia Riccardi (2018, p. 268) can mention that “nihilism results from the failure to find meaning in one’s life, or in the world as such. In nihilism, nothing can be trusted, nothing is certain; nothing is as it seems...” As nothing real happens in the play, what really happens is simply an illusion. Modern life is an illusion. Humanity is waiting for nothing.

Conclusion

The scrutiny of *Waiting for Godot* in the age of COVID-19 through the lens of psychology helps demonstrate that Characters in the play and COVID-19 portray the ephemerality of the existence of human beings and also prove how humankind is in danger of vanishing. The play *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett contains almost all the elements of an absurd play. It delineates all the elements of the absurdity through the two main characters Vladimir and Estragon. *Waiting for Godot* emphasises on the absurdity of human existence by employing repetitions, meaningless dialogues, purposeless, foolish, nonsensical, silly, and confusing situations, terrible sickness which are opposed to truth or reason.

In *Waiting for Godot* Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for a Godot but they don't know about Godot, who Godot is and they even never met Godot before. So “Waiting” is an essential part of human beings. Every person in the world lives a life and waiting for something. Some persons are waiting for a job some are waiting for a wealth, some are waiting for death so all persons live in a state of waiting. In this terrible situation of humanitarian disaster caused by Covid-19, the world is waiting for someone of something. One does not know exactly what but that being is supposed to deliver humanity from chaos.

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