

T. C.
ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

**THE REPRESENTATION OF EXISTENTIAL ANGUISH IN ABSURD DRAMA AS
REFLECTED IN BECKETT'S PLAY: *WAITING FOR GODOT***

THESIS

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Department of English Language and Literature
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Thesis Advisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Gillian M.E. ALBAN

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İSTANBUL AYDIN ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ

Yüksek Lisans Tez Onay Belgesi

Enstitümüz İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Ana Bilim Dalı İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Tezli Yüksek Lisans Programı Y1412.020006 numaralı öğrencisi **Özlem ASKER**'in "THE REPRESENTATION OF EXISTENTIAL ANGUISH IN ABSURD DRAMA AS REFLECTED IN BECKETT'S PLAY: *WAITING FOR GODOT*" adlı tez çalışması Enstitümüz Yönetim Kurulunun 12.05.2017 tarih ve 2017/10 sayılı kararıyla oluşturulan jüri tarafından **Y. Doç. Dr. Y. ÇEVİK** ile Tezli Yüksek Lisans tezi olarak **Onaylanmıştır**.

Öğretim Üyesi Adı Soyadı

İmzası

Tez Savunma Tarihi :12/06/2017

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Not: Öğrencinin Tez savunmasında **Başarılı** olması halinde bu form **imzalanacaktır**. Aksi halde geçersizdir.

FOREWORD

It is a pleasure to express my acknowledgement for those who made this study possible. First of all, I would like to express my profound gratitude and deep appreciation to my thesis Supervisor Assis. Prof. Dr. Elizabeth Gillian Alban who has always encouraged me with her enlightening suggestions during my study.

I also owe a very important debt to Professor Gordon Marshall who offered technical assistance and sincere encouragement. Furthermore, I deeply thank to my dear fiancé Eray Karakaş who encouraged me to write my thesis and listened to me with tolerance during my study. Lastly, I am indebted to my parents Gülşen Asker, İshak Asker and my brother Tamer Asker for their enthusiastic support and strong encouragement. Their patience made it possible to finish this thesis.

May 2016

Özlem ASKER

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VAROLUŞ KAYGISININ BECKETT'İN ABSÜRD TİYATRO OLARAK GÖSTERİLEN *GODOT'YU BEKLERKEN* OYUNUNDAKİ TEMSİLİ

ÖZET

Bu tez çalışması Samuel Beckett'in yazdığı *Godot'yu Beklerken* oyununu bağlam, mekan, zaman ve dil açısından inceleyerek oyunu ve içindeki Varoluşçu Felsefe ve Absürd Tiyatro unsurlarını analiz eder. Samuel Beckett, genel olarak yazdığı oyunların çoğunda insanların dünyada buldukları anlamsız durumu göstermeye çalıştığından, oyunları varoluşçu felsefe ve absürd tiyatro ışığı altında okunmuştur. Oyunda öncelikle Varoluş felsefesi önde gelen isimleriyle örnekler verilerek incelenmiş sonrasında Absürd Tiyatronun özellikleri anlatılarak bu iki akım arasındaki ilişki gösterilirken oyundaki ana konu olan karakterlerin varolma kaygısı da daha net gösterilemek istenmiştir. Bu oyunda da kendini sorgulama, dünyada kendine bir anlam bulamama gibi birçok varoluş felsefesi unsuruna rastlanır ve oyun zaman ve mekan açısından absürd tiyatronun özelliklerine yakınlık gösterir.

Bu tezde, ana karakterler olan Vladimir ve Estragon'un zaman ve mekandan bağımsız olarak yaşayışları, kendi varoluşlarının anlamını bulmaya çalışırken *Godot'yu* bekleme süresince hiçlikle yüzyüze gelmeleri ve tartışılır. Tez çalışması oyun sayesinde Varoluşçu felsefe ile Absürd tiyatro arasındaki bağı gösterirken, oyundaki karakterlerin varoluş kaygısından da muzdarip olduklarını vurgular. Bu çalışma özellikle oyundaki karakterlerin diyalog, monologlarının ve dil kullanımını detaylıca inceleyerek, onların kullandıkları sözcüklerin hissettikleri varoluş kaygısını nasıl oluşturduğuna ışık tutar. Karakterler, aslında farkında olmadan, seçtikleri ve tekrarladıkları sözcükler ve bazı diyaloglarda tercih ettikleri sessizliklerle kendi içinde buldukları varoluş kaygısını istemsizce ele verirler.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Varoluş felsefesi, Varoluşçuluk, Absürd Tiyatro, Hiçlik, Anlamsızlık, Varoluş Kaygısı.*

**THE REPRESENTATION OF EXISTENTIAL ANGUISH IN ABSURD
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ABSTRACT

This thesis intends to analyse the play *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett in terms of Existentialism within the genre of the Theatre of Absurd by investigating through the setting, context and use of language. It is argued in this thesis that as Samuel Beckett is concerned about human beings' problems of existence in the world in his plays, most of the time, he portrays the representation of human condition which makes his plays to be interpreted in the light of Existentialism. In the thesis, Existentialism as a philosophical movement has been introduced with its prominent names and examples, also the Theatre of the Absurd is explained in detail with its basic qualities to shed a light on how the characters' dialogues, monologues construct their existential anguish through the play while arguing that there are many existentialistic qualities in the play such as characters' searching for meaning and realizing the meaninglessness of the world and nothingness in the process of their waiting for Godot.

Additionally, the link between Existentialism and The Theatre of Absurd is illustrated with a view of the play to prove that *Waiting for Godot* carries the traces of both Existentialism and The Theatre of the Absurd while the characters suffer from the existential anguish. More specifically, this study tries to reveal the fact that Vladimir and Estragon, the main characters in the play *Waiting for Godot* suffer from existential anguish and basically explores how the existential anguish is reflected through the analysis of the characters' language by means of dialogues, choice of words, repetitions and silences.

Keywords: *Existentialist Philosophy, Existential Anguish, Meaninglessness, Nothingness, The Theatre of the Absurd.*



1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims at discussing the significance of Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, investigating through the setting, characterization and use of language and how these features construct the "existential anguish" within the borders of Existentialism and The Theatre of the Absurd in the play. More specifically, this study tries to reveal the fact that Vladimir and Estragon, the main characters in the play *Waiting for Godot* suffer from existential anguish and basically explores how the existential anguish is reflected through the analysis of the characters' language by means of dialogues, choice of words, repetitions and silences.

The Twentieth Century was a period when both world wars occurred and, the Second World war being one of the devastating effect on both individual and society, has changed the entire course of human history leaving people disillusioned with the huge destruction caused by the bombs and resulting in the death of many people. The war was a brutal experience for all humankind from all countries which resulted in both ends and new beginnings. Second World War is one of the deadliest event in the history of the world. It started in 1939 with the invasion of Poland by Adolf Hitler and lasted for six years. The war was in many respects continuation of the disputes that are left unsolved in World War I. It was a war of power among the countries. Germany, Italy, France, Japan, Great Britain, United States, Soviet Union were the belligerents. The war ended in 1945, causing nearly 50 million people's death. The huge massacre of the Second World War victimized people not only physically but also spiritually. After the war, societies were collapsed, and there was a shortage of food as well as other human needs. People may have thought this post-war period to be temporary, however, their previous ordinary life has never been resumed again. People have lost their belief or trust in institutions. Having experienced the war for the second time, death of millions, and the destruction of many civilizations have turned human beings out to be strongly worried with their condition in the world. As a mortal entity, human being wanted to question the significance of their reality, and meaning, for which, reason and religion neglected to give a satisfying clarification. Being incapable of reaching absolute truth, individual's search became hopeless. Human beings lost their

confidence in God as religion could not give any answer for the suffering and endless pain that was caused, especially by the wars. All these events paved the road to the emergence of Existentialism emerged, which mainly emphasize the significance of human existence, freedom, and choice.

Despite the fact that the term Existentialism did not come onto the stage as a philosophical movement until the 1940's, its root goes back till 19th century to Soren Kierkegaard and Frederick Nietzsche later followed by 20th century thinkers Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Even though these thinkers did not accept to be labelled as existentialists, they shared the common issues of human existence and human condition, and how human beings apprehend their existence in the world. Focusing on the responsibility of the individual, existentialists believe that human beings should find the meaning of their life by their free will and choices.

The gist of existential philosophy can be clearly explained through Jean Paul Sartre who is one of the leading figures of existential philosophy; “[M]an is nothing, but what he makes of himself” (Sartre, 1956, p. 291). So, Sartre claims that human beings are not predestined with a certain purpose or meaning in life, they are determined by their free will, responsibility and choice, so they are responsible for creating essence and giving meaning to their lives. But, there is an important point to emphasize that the only thing that an individual cannot choose is the becoming to the world, namely, their existence. “You’re on earth, there is no cure for that” as emphasized by Beckett in his play *Endgame* (Beckett, 1957, p.18). Human beings are free to choose, and responsible for the results, but limited in their given situations. Hence, the condition of human being is in between creating their selves and the anguish that is the absence of certainty of the consequences of their choices. While freedom opens a wide door for the future, it also proposes instability. This process in which an individual is free to discover the self, and the probability that the quest for searching meaning might end with nothingness, is the reason of existential anguish as Sartre states in the quote below:

Sartre sees the origin of anguish in the feeling of a being which is not responsible for its origin or the origin of the world but which, because of its dreadful freedom to choose one form of action over another, is responsible for what it makes of its existence . . . (Bohlmann, 1991, p. 35).

So, as human beings are not responsible for their origins, this responsibility of choice creates the existential anguish.

In parallel with Existentialism, the Theatre of the Absurd also emerged as a reaction to the disappointment after Second World War, which displays the despair and absurdity of the human condition in the world. The concept of the absurd depends on the philosophy of Albert Camus, a 20th century thinker, critic and novelist. In his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus predominantly focuses on the absurdity of the human condition by exemplifying the situation of Sisyphus, who is punished because of his rebellion against Zeus with rolling a stone to the top of a mountain and watching its falling to roll it up all over again (Camus, 1955). Therefore, Camus proposes that human being, as Sisyphus, is burdened with struggle in this world (Camus, 1955). Notwithstanding, Camus does not see human being's condition to be absolutely hopeless but hopeful. At the very end of his essay Camus suggests that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus, 1955, p. 78). Even if Sisyphus's action is futile, the struggle gives him a chance to hope, namely a choice to lead his life, so to say all human beings have a choice to give meaning to their lives.

Even though the concept of the absurd is specified by Camus, the expression "The Theatre of the Absurd" was initially established by Martin Esslin, in his book with the same name "*The Theatre of the Absurd*" in 1961 (Esslin 1961). In his work, Esslin, used this term, to allude to plays having certain qualities such as imaginary setting, meaningless acts, and, miscommunication mirroring anxiety, fear and frustration of human being. In accordance with that, plays do not have a proper plot which indicates the insignificance of human being in a meaningless universe. Esslin (1961) claims that the Theatre of the Absurd is an expression of the meaninglessness of human condition due to the insufficiency of rational thinking, because reason is not enough to explain the meaning of life anymore (p. XX). Therefore, it can be deduced that both Existentialism and The Theatre of the Absurd deals with the human condition; that is; all the questioning about existence, the quest for meaning and the existential anguish that comes through this process. Martin Esslin clarifies the basics of the Theatre of the Absurd by mentioning some of the playwrights whose plays are read under the light of the Theatre of the Absurd even if they do not want to be labelled as absurd playwrights (Esslin, 1961). These are Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter.

Samuel Beckett, with his literary works of art, has a unique place among those names that are mentioned in Esslin's book. Samuel Beckett was born in Dublin, like other

Irish writers Oscar Wilde and William Butler Yeats into a British-Irish Protestant family. Having been born into a Protestant minority family as an “outsider”, being “the other” in the Catholic society of Ireland might be considered as a gift for him, leading him in his quest to become one of the prominent playwrights of the 20th century. Hence the main message through his works is the meaninglessness of human existence in the kind of world where people are excluded if they are not like the majority. Related to this, Martin Esslin states that the Beckettian themes stem mainly from Beckett’s background in which he questioned himself with the question of “Who am I?” and tried to answer this question relentlessly (p. 1). Questioning “Who am I” since his childhood might be the reason that his existential characters deal with the same question throughout all his works. Additionally, the reason why his characters are reflected in the sense of despair and hopelessness might be related to his experience of the Second World War. During the war, Beckett moved to Paris and joined the underground resistance group, so he was in Paris during the Second World War and witnessed the war closely. The years in Paris was Beckett’s most productive years. He wrote most of his novels, poems and plays in Paris. Having experienced the war and witnessing the loss of war, he focused on the human condition in his works full of meaninglessness and despair. In his plays, the characters are usually physically incapable of moving, and unable to change their present condition into the better. Besides *Waiting for Godot*, the study of this thesis, Samuel Beckett’s plays such as *Endgame*, *Act Without Words*, *Happy Days* can be examined within the existential philosophy even if Beckett rejects his relation to any kind of philosophy. Beckett reflects basically the condition of human being and their existence in the meaningless world in those plays in different perspectives. The characters are free to choose their own ways to create meaning for their life, but in each play this freedom of choice turns out to be a heavy burden to carry and all the characters suffer in a different way. For instance, in *Endgame*, the main characters Hamm and Clov have a master-slave relationship (Beckett, 1957). Hamm is disabled and in a wheel chair, while Clov cannot sit down because of the problem in his legs. The other characters Nell and Nag are in a rubbish can that they cannot get out of. All the characters are physically restrained. They cannot move and they are stabilized in their place, they realize that even being in the earth equals the suffering itself so they accept to suffer and the meaninglessness of their existence without trying to search for another option for themselves. The short play *Act Without Words*, on the other hand, reflects the character’s suffering with his

earthly existence which is shown through the physical objects he cannot reach (Beckett, 1957). This leaves him without a choice over his existence. To begin with, he cannot leave his reality of being exposed to be thrown to the stage and incapability of reaching the objects. Thus, the spectator becomes aware that human beings are incapable of leaving their facticity and all their efforts are futile. Another play, *Happy Days* tells nearly the same story by means of lack of choice (Beckett, 2012). Winnie and Willie are the main characters, Winnie is half buried in sand in the first act trying to accomplish her daily routines, but never questions her condition. Willie is there only to listen to Winnie. They are seemingly in need of each other not to feel alone. In the second act Winnie becomes more buried that she cannot move her head to look around. However, she does not question their situation, she can even seem to be optimistic while she is busy with her routine. She does not lose her hope that they will see happy days, may be trying to get rid of her existential angst, because physically she is incapable of act for herself or her husband.

Beckett indeed constructs a world which is not very far from the real world. Human beings are thrown to the world without being asked and they are free to create their own meaning in a world that is already deprived of any meaning after two world wars. Thus, human beings are in an endless anguish only because they exist. The reason why this study focuses on the play *Waiting for Godot* is that the characters are free to choose not to wait for Godot and leave the place and they are not physically restrained but as oppose to the characters in the other plays, they do not leave their duty of waiting for Godot (Beckett, 1965). They might change something in their life if they search for meaning for themselves and get rid of their existential anguish. Indeed, they have a choice but they do not prefer it. While Hamm cannot move, and his family is trapped in the rubbish bin in *Endgame*, (Beckett, 1957) Estragon and Vladimir choose not to move. While the character in *Act Without Words* (Beckett, 1957) is thrown to the same place constantly, and has the fear of being not free, Estragon and Vladimir have the freedom to leave the place but they do not (Beckett, 1965). Moreover, while Winnie is trapped in the sand and still being hopeful about future Vladimir and Estragon are conscious of their present situation and question themselves and still do not act to change something in their lives. Hence, *Waiting for Godot* can be distinguished from Beckett's other plays that freedom of choice does not prevent the existential anguish

they feel that is hidden behind their words and the characters never act to end it instead they chose to put the responsibility on Godot.

So, Godot sustains the idea of waiting in the mind of Vladimir and Estragon. Through this waiting Vladimir and Estragon are relieved of the need to determine their own reality independently, for them existence is no more than an illusion, not to be taken seriously (Levy, 2002 p.227).

Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, originally written in French under the title *En Attendant Godot*, has been staged for almost 64 years, still with full house, and with full attention from its spectators. Since its premier in 1953, it has been one of the most debated plays among the critics as well as the directors of theatre, actors and actresses. The play has been in the heart of art magazines or newspapers which follow each performance. Many critics and writers have much to say about the play in their works. Martin Esslin, the critic who coined the term, the Theatre of Absurd, placing it as a separate dramatic genre for the first time explains the popularity and importance of Beckett's play as;

And against all expectations, the strange tragic farce, in which nothing happens and which had been scorned as undramatic by a number of managements, become one of the greatest successes of the postwar theatre. It ran for four hundred performances at the Theatre de Babylone and was later transferred to another Parisian theatre. It has been translated into more than twenty languages and been performed in Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Spain, Belgium, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Brazil, Mexico, the Argentine, Israel, Czechlovakia, Poland, Japan, Western Germany, Great Britain, The United States, and even in Dublin, being seen in the first five years after its original production in Paris by more than a million spectators – a truly astonishing reception for a play so enigmatic, so exasperating, so complex, and uncompromising in its refusal to conform to any of the accepted ideas of dramatic construction (Esslin, 1961, p.10).

What makes Beckett's play so unique and thus popular for nearly half a century? What kind of messages, life lessons, or pleasure does the play offer to attract such attention? What underlines such popularity even though it is different than the traditional theatre in terms of its characterization and setting?

Beckett does not use the features of traditional theatre such as setting, context, characterization, and a solution in the end in his play *Waiting for Godot*. The play's setting comprises the simple country road and a tree where the main characters Vladimir and Estragon are constantly waiting for Godot who does not appear throughout the play. Even though they are interrupted by Pozzo, a master and Lucky, a slave, the passersby on two occasions, they are all alone trying to communicate to

pass the time while they are waiting for Godot. There is no real communication between characters indeed, as most of the time neither do they listen to each other nor are they aware of the topic they talk about. They are as if thrown to the world which makes no sense, reflecting each human being who desperately tries to find a meaning in it. Considering all the features that are discussed above, the play *Waiting for Godot* can be read through the existential philosophy. In the light of this perspective, it is worth to investigate the play in respect to existential anguish.

While Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* has been read through Existentialism, this study does not intend to fit the play into any specific school of thought, but to underline where the play and existential philosophy intersect specifically, showing how his characters experience existential anguish while searching for meaning.

The first chapter of this study includes Existentialism as a philosophical movement while investigating through the relevance of existential anguish as connected to Existentialism in the play. Firstly, its origins, main concerns and the themes will be explained. Afterwards, the different perspectives and approaches and of its prominent thinkers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus will be examined which will convey the overall argument of this thesis regarding some existential themes such as freedom, choice, responsibility and thus existential anguish to be explored in the close reading of *Waiting for Godot*. In the last part of the first chapter, the Theatre of the Absurd will be analysed in relation to Existentialism. Its components and rules as a literary genre will be initiated through the views of Martin Esslin, the originator of the term Theatre of the Absurd to reflect the tendency of absurd in the play *Waiting for Godot*. This chapter might be seen as a guideline to clarify the main message of the study.

In the first section of the second chapter the play *Waiting for Godot* will be investigated by means of its structural elements such as setting, time, place, the role of language to reveal the place of Existentialism and The Theatre of the Absurd in the play. Also, how absurd drama as a genre contributes into the existential anguish as reflected in the play will be discussed. In the last part of this chapter, in connection with the existential traces in the play, the existential anguish will be revealed through the dialogues of the characters in the play. The aim of this separate chapter is to prove that the characters suffer from the existential anguish deeply.

2. EXISTENTIALISM AND THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* is frequently delineated in the setting of the Theatre of the Absurd and existential philosophy even though Samuel Beckett rejects that his play fits into any specific philosophy. Martin Esslin by repeating Beckett's view, states in his work;

We must not go too far in trying to identify Beckett's vision with any school of philosophy. It is the peculiar richness of a play like *Waiting for Godot* that it opens vistas on so many different perspectives. It is open to philosophical, religious, and psychological interpretations, yet above all it is a poem on time, evanescence and mysteriousness of existence, the paradox of change and stability, necessity and absurdity (Esslin, 1961, p. 30).

Regardless of the possibility that Beckett has effectively covered his own specific perspective, the characters and setting inside his play can be perceived as impacted by a specific point of view of the world.

The motivation behind why Samuel Beckett's works are generally mentioned in an existentialist setting is that he is one of the inexpressible writers of the twentieth century, and the performing playwright of the radical diversion from the routine thoughts of composing, speaking to and coordinating a play (Bair 1990). Having focused on the desperate human condition after World War II, Beckett became one of the prominent writers in the Absurd Drama. At the point when his plays were initially performed, individuals who were used to the traditional theatre were unfamiliar to his dramatization. Be that as it may, especially after World War II, their misfortunes and fears have made them feel near Beckett's characters.

Samuel Beckett's drama is significant because of the lack of meaning at the centre of his plays. Within this meaninglessness, the characters carry the burden of finding meaning which puts Beckett within the realm of the existential philosophers. Even though Beckett's works are linked with existential philosophy in terms of their context and theme, they cannot be fitted into any philosophy or movement. Beckett always rejected the claim of critics that any school of philosophy influenced him. Beckett claimed:

One cannot speak anymore of being, one must speak only of the mess. When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right, I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess. (qtd.in Gungov, 2015, p. 8)

This quotation clearly explains that everyone writes what they experience, and as such Beckett, who witnessed the Second World War, wrote about the human condition after the wars, which he was experiencing at the time. He was concerned about the effect of war on human beings, thus his writings came to be all about people's situations in the world. "Beckett was addicted to silences, and so was Joyce; they engaged in conversations which consisted often in silences directed towards each other both suffused with sadness, Beckett for the world, Joyce for himself" (Esslin, 1961, p. 5). The hopelessness and the burden of finding meaning in such a meaningless and cruel post-war world became the main concern in his writings. This can be related to the existential angst in his characters as well, the effects of post-war life might have caused their angst. Just as those themes were related to Existentialism, his plays were discussed in the light of existentialist philosophy. "The whole of Beckett's world moves relentlessly towards the answering of one question: What is existence? Or, What is man?" (Gungov, 2015, p. 29). In order to clarify the relation between Beckett's plays and Existentialism and thus The Theatre of the Absurd as a tool to reveal a meaning in literature, it is necessary to explain the background of this philosophical approach and the ideas of some philosophers like Kierkegaard, Sartre and Camus who are the exponents of the Existentialist philosophy, and then its connection with The Theatre of the Absurd.

Before explaining the basic features of existential philosophy, it is important to give a description of Existentialism though it is difficult to fit it to any school of thought. Even the leading thinkers of this movement rejected to be labelled as Existentialists yet they are altogether thought to be fundamental to it. In the meantime, it is essential to say that all existentialists have brought up comparable issues, however their responses to these inquiries have been regularly unique. In this way, one can't state that Existentialism is altogether a development. It is a philosophical point of view or slant as opposed to an entire arrangement of thought. Walter Kaufmann argues that it does not fit into a definite description. "Existentialism is not a school of thought, nor reducible to any set of tenets" (Kaufmann, 1956, p.11). Existentialism came of age in 20th century as a philosophical movement against rationalism and absolute reason. The

reason why this movement arose was due to the lasting impact and effects of World War II. Life was perceived as an experience of suffering and meaninglessness due to the destruction of war on human beings both physically and psychologically. People started to question society's value of life after the personal-violation and large-scale destruction of war. They lost their faith in community, social values, and religion. As these institutions lost their ability to convey or impose meaning, the power of the critique brought forth by Existentialism strengthened. By focusing on the existence of the individual, Existentialism emphasizes both individual freedom and the responsibility of choice. Human beings should take responsibility for their freedom to choose and accept that they bear the consequences of those choices, as life is full of ambiguity, suffering, and pain. Thus, it is the duty of humans to fight for their life and to find meaning in the life they have chosen. This idea of freedom of choice is the prominent theme of Existentialism. Since existential philosophy is mainly about individual freedom and choice, according to the existential school of thought, human beings first question their own existence, then choose the best option for themselves to define and create their own meaning by taking responsibility for choices made, and are then forced to justify those choices. Human beings should be able to analyse their existence, finding the meaning of life, because as Sartre argues,

We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and de-fines himself afterwards. If man as existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is noth-ing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself (Sartre, 1956, p. 290).

In order to fulfil their quest to find the meaning of their existence, human beings should take action by making a choice. They are free to choose but this choice determines the aim of their life, so their own freedom might be seen as their destiny. "Life is nothing until it is liked, but it is yours to make sense of and the value of it is nothing else but the sense that you choose" (Sartre, 1956, p. 309). Choice is a key factor in reaching the purpose of life in existentialist thought; therefore, one bears all responsibility for his life. This concept might be seen as a risk as well, because when one is free to choose anything they take a risk in choosing poorly that which will be with them throughout their lives.

The core of Existentialism can be clearly explained through the phrase "existence precedes essence" defined by Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre claims that first of all man exists,

confronts himself, realizes the world then defines himself. Further, that existence should have an essence; in other words, human being creates the value of his being through his own consciousness which in turn defines an identity for themselves. In other words, human beings need to achieve a purpose in life but there is no predetermined meaning or aim. Rather they must be the ones to define themselves because they can only exist via their challenge towards life. Sartre defines this process as self-definition (Sartre, 1978, p. 89).

The existentialist notion of existence is condensed in what has become a slogan of the movement – Sartre’s declaration that, in the case of human beings, “existence precedes essence”. Unlike other things and creatures, what individual beings are, or are like, at a given time is the outcome, not of their given and fixed nature or “essence” but of the choices that they have made, the ways in which they have tried to resolve the “issue” that their lives present them with, and the future possibilities they are in pursuit of. Ortega y Gasset expressed this idea eloquently: a person “consist not what it is already, but in what it is not yet ... Existence means, for each of us, the process of realizing ... the aspiration we are (Cooper, 2012, p. 35).

Rejecting the schools of reason and rationalism, Existentialism stands against the idea that there is absolute truth. The issue of objectivity and subjectivity is one of the central arguments that brought about existentialist philosophy. In the 18th century nature and reason were considered the most important tools to reach the truth or facts, while objectivity was the main focus, but after the technological and industrial developments of the 19th and 20th centuries, human beings started to be used as machines and they became objects. Therefore, Existentialism came to be opposed to the idea of objectivity as a humanistic movement by suggesting instead the supremacy of the individual. “[T]hat man is, before all else, something which propels itself towards a future and is aware that it is doing so. Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life, instead of being a kind of moss, fungus or cauliflower” (Sartre, 1956, p. 291) as Sartre says, in his introduction to Existentialism as a humanistic philosophy. Furthermore, rational philosophy and the Age of Reason, suggested that human beings are the most powerful creatures of the earth with the ability to solve problems with their faculty of reason and knowledge. However, existentialist thinkers concluded that human reason was limited due to neither science nor physics nor the study of psychology were able to prove absolute reality or truth. As an existentialist philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre states; “Existentialism, in our sense of the word, is a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity” (Sartre, 1956, p. 288). As it is also

stated above, subjectivity is one of the crucial points in existential thought which brings human beings to the centre and gives them the right to choose the what and the how of their lives rather than outside forces.

Jean Paul Sartre wrote an essay called "Existentialism is a Humanism" in which he explains the basics of existential philosophy and argues the movement to be an optimistic one, against the criticism of Existentialism to be a pessimist philosophy. Sartre claims that Existentialism seems to be as pessimistic as it is optimistic, showing the reality of life. "You have seen that it cannot be regarded as a philosophy of quietism since it defines man by his action; nor as a pessimistic description of man, for no doctrine is more optimistic, the destiny of man is placed within himself" (Sartre, 1956, p. 293). For Sartre, the idea of freedom of choice and creating meaning enables people to be responsible for their choices instead of being pre-destined by a divine being's will. It is on the one hand a positive quality because one can find the meaning for the self, on the other hand a negative one because the existentialist views life as not only having no meaning but it is also full of nothingness, and it is in this nothingness that human beings should be able to find a solution to existence. To be able to exist, everyone should take on burden of the search for meaning and become aware of their self-being before encountering the nothingness of living. Nothingness is also another term that is frequently mentioned in Sartre's existentialist theory. Human mind becomes full of nothing, when overwhelmed by choices and thus responsibilities. Nonetheless, this nothingness saves human-beings from pre-determinism, giving humans the right to self-define. This definition is totally up to human beings as they create their own meaning through their own actions.

All of the terms that Sartre explains basically focus on choice and freedom to find the self while searching for purpose in your life. This might be considered either advantageous or disadvantageous. Freedom has a positive connotation because your life is in your hands completely and thus, you can make anything out of it. However, alternatively, you might be indecisive and feel trapped as none of the choices in front of you either make sense to you or will satisfy you, and most importantly, there is no end to those choices. They are eternal.

We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say man are condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is

nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does (Sartre, 1956, p. 295).

The word 'condemned' might have been used on purpose since it coincides with the condition of human beings after Second World War. The most important reason for the rise of Existentialism is the deep sense of despair caused by the wars resulting in a loss of faith and the belief in both the existence of God and his divine power. People were left with nothing to trust to be saved from the disastrous events of the wars and death. This fear obviously created "Existential Anguish", the idea that while searching for meaning one might encounter the meaninglessness or nothingness of the world. Therefore, themes such as anxiety of existence, despair, futility of life, isolation, alienation, and unreliability of religion, the suffering of being became one of the central concerns of Existentialism.

Sartre's most important works, *Being and Nothingness* and *Nausea*, mainly discuss his existential philosophy within the borders of searching for meaning and the suffering caused by existential anguish. Chronologically the first text is *Being and Nothingness*, in which Sartre gives a detailed description of the basic concepts of his existential philosophy, such as his motto "existence precedes essence", and the concepts of bad faith and self-deception. His main argument is "nothingness". According to Sartre, nothingness stems from the gap between the one's existence and identity. "I am never any one of my attitudes, any one of my actions" (Sartre, 1978, p.60). He states that existence differs from the identity that one builds and this difference is called self-deception. The real identity and the cultural identity differ. While debating the self and identity, he also puts forward the idea of the nothingness of consciousness: if one deceives oneself about one's identity then one's consciousness can become blurry. Consciousness contained within those observations is also nothing. "Consciousness is a being the nature of which is to be conscious of nothingness of its being" (Sartre, 1956, p. 241). Existence clashes with nothingness, the self is different than then the identity that is assigned by society and thus the meaning of existence becomes nothingness. In his novel *Nausea*, he turns these concepts into the story of a character who experiences Existential Angst and with this angst, nausea. The protagonist Roquentin has nausea because he cannot stand the meaninglessness of both life and the world. He is even irritated by the objects around him. Within the objects his consciousness is nothing and does not make any sense to him. Roquentin states:

We're a heap of existent inconvenienced, embarrassed of ourselves, we hadn't the slightest reason for being there, any of us, each existent, embarrassed, vaguely at ease, felt superfluous. . . and everything is gratuitous that park, this town, and myself. When you realise that it turns your stomach [] That is the nausea (qtd. in Falzon, 2005, p.115).

It can be understood from Sartre's works that existential philosophy's main focus is humanity. He consistently deals with the feeling of the man who has the freedom to choose in a world that he has been thrown into and does not know what to do with that freedom. In the end, this eternal freedom causing the fear of unknown results from the choices that one is about to make. Anguish is being free to choose one's own way in a meaningless world, that suggests nothing and makes human beings feel worthless. As Sartre puts it, anguish comes from the endless choices and a freedom without limit. As existence precedes essence, and human beings are defined by their choices and actions, they become anxious, as their choice might end in unexpected or disappointing ways. The choice of a single human being, according to Sartre, might affect all humankind, so human beings feel anguish because of the potential impact from their choices which they would then be responsible for. Furthermore, anguish also comes with the sense of nothingness that whatever choices human beings make they will eventually encounter nothingness, which without the divine causes anxiety. Thus, the root of anguish is freedom of choice combined with the understanding that the person must accept the responsibility of this choice, which may influence all humanity. . . . "[I]t is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom, or if you prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is in its being, in question for itself" (Sartre, 1978, p. 91). Additionally, the meaninglessness of the world which makes human beings feel worthless and who will eventually become nothing causes anguish. The purpose of living then is to find meaning in your life but this seems as a burden to human beings and results in anguish. The idea of being thrown into a world full of uncertainty is the main anxiety of human beings. There is no safe ground for human being to rest on anymore after the World Wars. One is on the edge of nothingness and in the fear of unknown territory. As he is aware that he is the only one who can create his/her own self and values, this heavy burden causes what is called as existential angst/anguish. Moreover, existential anguish that is emphasized in Sartre's existential philosophy is also emphasized in the plays of Beckett, that which is the main argument of this thesis while analysing the play *Waiting for Godot*.

Another important philosopher is Soren Kierkegaard who is called as “the father of Existentialism” because he coined the name of the philosophy for the first time in 19th century. Sartre opposes Kierkegaard’s argument from the perspective of religion, Kierkegaard defends the significance of faith in Existentialism, while Sartre refers to himself as an atheist existentialist. Even though there are some differences between their ideas there are many things that are common to their individual philosophical perspectives. Kierkegaard’s main purpose in his philosophy is to challenge human beings’ way of thinking not because he aims for people to choose Christianity, but since the unfulfilled lives and absence of moral duties made him feel at unease. Therefore, he emphasizes the human subjectivity in his philosophy. In 17th and 18th centuries people believed in the power of nature and reason unquestionably, but Kierkegaard claims that the reason alone would never lead one to comprehension of God, in other words the only way to find meaning in life can be possible through faith in God, yet the subjectivity of individual experience is the main intent to this unattainable end. He also argues that self-actualization is only possible through having faith in God called a “leap of faith” which is to live with the faith that everything is bound to God. For Kierkegaard, each choice in life should be prompted by subjective truth as human beings have to relate their being to a supreme truth of God. For him, the nothingness of life stems from the rejection of God. For Sartre on the other hand, God does not exist, as such human existence cannot be explained through God. . . . “[I]f God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exist before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality” (Sartre, 1956, p. 290).

Soren Kierkegaard and Jean Paul Sartre agree on the term free will or freedom of choice and the anguish caused by this freedom. Kierkegaard also focuses on human beings suggesting that human beings reveal their real spirit via free will and freedom of choice. “[He] pitted a mode of reflection closer to the individual’s concrete existence” (Kierkegaard, 1956, p. 83). Additionally, Kierkegaard agrees with Sartre on the term that anxiety of existence is caused by the condition of uncertainty in which the individual faces the obligation of choice, a decision that must be made whether rightly or wrongly so as to genuinely live. The possibilities inherent in endless choices and consequences lead human beings into despair and to take on this responsibility of choice and at the same time manage to bear the consequences is their anxiety.

He also ties the anxiety of existence with Adam's fall from God's Grace which according to Kierkegaard, was caused by freedom of choice: to eat the apple or to obey God's restriction.

Why does this anxiety disrupt or dreamlike activity? Because the self is notifying itself that it is free and responsible for its actions, even though it is not yet fully conscious of it. Thus, for Kierkegaard, anxiety informs the self of a higher calling: to take the charge of becoming the self it ought to become ---to become spirit--- and to take the responsibility for that task every step of the way. And anxiety can likewise inform us when we have failed to take responsibility for the self. That is experienced as a betrayal of self, or sin (Söderquist, 2015, p. 88).

As, the quotes above clearly show, Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety is close to the existential anguish in Sartre's philosophy. Although they differ in the application their ideas, both philosophers put human beings at the center, and both believe that power is in the hands of human beings to discover the meaning of life and find their own place in it through freedom of choice which places all the responsibility on the individual to create meaning in their own life. Since this freedom is a huge burden to bear, they state that the freedom of choice is the main source of existential angst.

There is one more important thinker, the novelist and social critic Albert Camus, who should be mentioned here as non-existentialist, but one who carries the traces of Existentialism in his works. Albert Camus is one of the prominent writers in the genre of the "absurd". In his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he tries to prove that he is against the idea of Existentialism and existential angst specifically. *The Myth of Sisyphus* is a Greek myth which tells the story of Sisyphus. Sisyphus is punished by Zeus and forced to push a big rock to a summit of a mountain and watch it roll down the mountain again. He must repeat this process forever as punishment for rebelling against the Gods and wanting to live on earth instead of in the underworld. Camus focuses on this repeated daily routine while questioning the meaning of this action. Camus argues for another reading of Sisyphus's so called meaningless mission, referring to Sisyphus as an absurd character. Camus suggests that even if he has an endless duty that tires him, Sisyphus should be seen as a happy character because he revolted for staying on earth and tries to survive. Because Camus thinks that life even if absurd worth living. Even though Sisyphus leaves the rock to fall after trying to take it up to summit, Camus thinks that he is grateful that he is still on earth. "Although *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* poses

moral problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert” (Foley, 2014, p. 5).

In contrast to Kierkegaard and Sartre’s thoughts on existential angst, Camus thinks that if one has been thrown into this meaningless world without being asked, they should live it to the fullest and take advantage of it, which he calls “living with absurd”. “... [T]he realization that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only a beginning” (Foley, 2014, p. 1).

Camus relates the absurd to revolt in the end because the absurdity of life leads human beings to revolt in order to survive or to live the lives they want. This can be clearly observed in his famous novel the *Stranger*, in which the protagonist Meursault kills an Arab after his mother’s death, an act which was considered a revolt against the absurdity of his life (Camus, 1989). Meursault does not show any signs of grief at the funeral of his mother, and then after he kills the Arab, he is tried and sentenced to death. During his time in prison his lawyer and his friend come to try to persuade him to have faith in God and ask for mercy, but he denies God and refuses to beg for mercy. In time, he gets used to life in prison and accepts his circumstances there. He embraces the idea that human existence does not hold any meaning and he has to learn to be happy with it. When a chaplain comes to persuade him to change his position on God he thinks about the chaplain:

He seemed so certain about everything didn’t he? And yet none of his certainties was worth one hair of a woman’s head. He wasn’t even sure he was alive, because he was living like a dead man. Whereas it looked as if I was the one who’d come up emptyhanded. But I was sure about me, about everything surer than he could ever be, sure of my life and sure of the death I had waiting for me. . . (Camus, 1989, p. 120).

It can be inferred that Meursault is an existential character who suffers from the meaninglessness of events happening around him. Camus suggests that he reflects on the absurdity in Existentialism. Even if Camus does not want to be labelled as an existentialist, he illustrates his perspective of the absurd through the character he creates who seems to suffer from what Sartre would term existential angst. While Camus would definitely not agree with that because his character lives his life even if he knows it is absurd and even if he is going to be executed. For instance, he does not commit suicide. At the end of the novel, his last feelings are about happiness even though he is about to be executed. Camus believes this is a position of hope, rejecting

the angst in Sartre's philosophical existentialism and the very concept of existential angst. Compared to Sartre and Kierkegaard, Camus is more hopeful about the meaninglessness of human life; even if he has no faith in God personally, he has faith in human beings' ability to live and hope. As stated above, according to Camus, the action of living in this meaningless world and being free to decide one's own life is indeed a beginning. Consequently, the two existentialist philosophers Sartre and Kierkegaard believe in existential angst whereas Camus does not. He believes in the absurd, which can be handled within Existentialism.

As for the notion of the "-absurd-" within existential philosophy, each philosopher has their own point of view. Camus finds the meaninglessness of the world to be absurd and it is not an end as in Existentialism but a beginning. Camus emphasized the fact that the existence of human beings in the world is as absurd as the existence of the world itself. None of them are absurd in and of themselves, but absurdity stems from the clash between the two.

I said that the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment, it is all that links them together. It binds them one to the other so only hatred can weld two creatures together. This is all I can discern clearly in this measureless universe where my adventure takes place (Camus, 1955, p. 15).

Therefore, human beings' need for lucidity, recognition and finding meaning are important in this world and ignorance of the world towards this need is the main reason of absurdity for Camus. As such, individual's cognizance of their circumstance is an important component of the absurd. Camus claims that the absurd must be kept alive for the fact that it is the point where life starts and the absurd will not be recognized if one escapes from it, since it is not the end of life but only the beginning, and in a way, it is the challenge of an individual that gives meaning to life. "Living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is, above all contemplating it. Unlike Eurydice, the absurd dies only when we turn away from it" (Camus, 1955, p. 36). On the other hand, Sartre's description of the absurd is "[t]hat which is meaningless. Thus, man's existence is absurd because his contingency finds no external justification" (Foley, 2014, p. 5). It can be understood from these statements that Camus and Sartre both believe that while meaninglessness refers to absurdity, they differ in understanding the place and practice of the absurd. For Sartre, the experience of absurdity is futile

whereas Camus finds it to be worthwhile. On the other hand, Kierkegaard relates the absurd with the idea of the “leap of faith”. “The absurd or to act by virtue of the absurd, is to act upon faith, trusting in God...” (Foley, 2014, p. 6) which Camus is completely against because not only does he not have faith in God, but for Camus surrender is suicide. Each of them has their own explanations and examples of the absurd in their work. But they hold one thing in common: that life is meaningless and the human being is free to do anything with that knowledge either positively or negatively.

From all these writers that are discussed above, it can be assumed that Existentialism is not only a philosophical movement but also a literary genre that tries to answer questions about the significance of the subjectivity of human existence within the borders of human choice and freedom. In such an insecure world, human beings should seek out their own values and compulsorily experience the anguish that comes with that search.

It is no coincidence that the rise of The Theatre of the Absurd emerged at the same time with Existentialism because it the very nature of art to mirror the vision of the world. Like Existentialism, the philosophy of The Theatre of the Absurd is kind of response to the overwhelming destruction of World War II, displaying the human condition on the stage. By definition, “absurd” is: “utterly or obviously senseless, illogical or untrue” and “the quality and condition of existing in a meaningless and irrational world.” The latter definition is a postwar term that connotes the situation of people who come face to face with the meaninglessness of life after the destruction of Second World War. The Theatre of the Absurd, also called anti-theatre, is a movement in theatre which came to the stage after the Second World War in the late 1940’s. Martin Esslin is the critic who coined the term, The Theatre of Absurd, placing it as a separate dramatic genre for the first time. The purpose of his book is to distinguish The Theatre of the Absurd from traditional theatre.

If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerism of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings (Esslin, 1961, p. 21,22).

The Concept of Absurd is based on the philosophy of Albert Camus which is discussed broadly in Albert Camus's essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus introduces Sisyphus as an absurd hero, who repeats his action, rolling a stone up the hill only to watch it roll down the next hill. He then repeats the process over and over again for eternity, as it is his punishment for rebelling against the Gods. Camus tries to show that Sisyphus's life is meaningless, a destiny all human beings share: to live in this absurdity. People repeat the action of their daily routine which might be seen as human beings' punishment in the meaningless world and, thus, they all share Sisyphus's destiny. He tries to show the condition of humanity in a quote from *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity (qtd. Esslin, 1961, p. XIX).

As both society and the people in it changed after witnessing the disastrous and destructive circumstances of war, they began to question everything because they had lost their sense of hope, trust in their community, and more bleakly, towards the future of the world itself. Hence, ideas of art and perspective in theatre changed. As it can be understood from the phrase 'anti-theatre', this movement foreshadows the post-war society's reversed conventions. That is to say, the Theatre of the Absurd displays the absurdity of humankind. Camus, by referring condemned Sisyphus, reflects the human condition after the shocking effects of the war and he calls the resulting meaninglessness of the world as "absurd". The debate around Camus's comprehension of the absurd rests on its interconnectedness with the philosophy of Existentialism, even if he rejects being labeled an existentialist. The Theatre of the Absurd frames human beings' search for meaning in life using their free choice in an absurd world. But while most existentialist thinkers usually associate this condition of humanity with anguish, Camus insists on calling it absurdity which he does not connote negatively. He suggests instead, that man should accept living in absurdity because life does not make any sense. As it is discussed above, Camus is against the idea of absurdity being confused with anguish as he thinks that there is no way out, so one has to live in this absurdity. Sartre thinks that the absurd is a human condition as well but he finds it an absolutely hopeless situation which he calls anguish. The point of contradiction

between the two thinkers is that Camus believes that this absurdity is a beginning and also a “residue of the experience of this world” (Foley, 2014, p. 8). Whereas Sartre believes it is an endpoint of his worldview. However, in Esslin’s view; even if he uses Camus’s understanding of the absurd as a tool to show the traces of Existentialism in the Theatre of the Absurd, he still distinguishes The Theatre of the Absurd from existential philosophy in terms of purpose by referring to Sartre and Camus. Esslin controverts the idea that the Theatre of the Absurd is based on a philosophical explanation. According to Esslin, though Camus and Sartre try to show the absurdity of life in the plays they have written, they recommend that there might be a solution to the absurdity of life, which humankind can find through their freedom of choice, whereas the Theatre of the Absurd merely reflects the absurdity of the world and of life to the audience on the stage.

[B]oth Sartre and Camus in their relentless probing still, by implication, proclaim a tacit conviction that logical discourse can offer valid solutions that the analysis of language will lead to the uncovering of basic concepts—Platonic ideas. This is an inner contradiction that the dramatists of the Absurd are trying, by instinct and intuition rather than by conscious effort to overcome and resolve. The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of human condition: it merely presents it in being—that is in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of existence (Esslin, 1961, p. XX).

Esslin states that the Theatre of the Absurd reflects the absurd human conditions in the world, where all the established values are destroyed. People are looking for meaning in a world which is deprived of any feeling, aim or meaning. “Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought” (Esslin, 1961, p. XX). He emphasizes the significance of irrationality as the purpose of life in The Theatre of the Absurd. The age they live in lacks any real meaning, the most concrete thing that people experience is doubt and the questioning of the suffering and pain of existence. Therefore, he reckons that the aim of the Theatre of the Absurd is not only the reflection of hopelessness, but also a reflection of the process of the characters’ encountering with nothingness in the plays as it is in life which are absurd. “Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost, all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless” (Esslin, 1961, p. 19). Esslin emphasizes the dictionary meaning of absurd meaning “-out of harmony-” (Esslin, 1961, p. XIX) to refer to the world after World War II which has no harmony in it anymore. Thus, art is a contemporary expression, the theatre also having no

harmony in it, lacking a center, a proper plot, or story-line, nor does it present real communication between the characters. It merely mirrors the absurdity of the human condition in such a world, affected by uncommon dialogues, silences, and repetitions. It is far from the realistic world because it does not talk about general truths or offer any kind of direct life lessons to the audience. Most of the plays finish with nothingness at the end. There are not any signs of the habitual plots of ancient plays such as destiny, fate or catharsis. Absurd plays are like a mirror to the audience, while characters are lost within the meaninglessness of their vague dialogues. The audience might begin to question their own meaning turning to their inner selves instead of the stage for answers. Esslin asserts that the Theatre of the Absurd conveys the playwright's personal and intimate and his own point of view of the world, so the topic of the play determined by the needs of the writer which is not quite essentially the same with the traditional plays of the time (Esslin, 1961, p. 293).

Furthermore, there is no characterization, or the construction of a traditional story, and sometimes characters take the role of puppets and they often repeat themselves or stay silent for a long time, and finally, there is no traditional formal demarcation of beginning and end of the play (Esslin, 1961, p. XVI). The characters in the plays are usually unaware of who they are, they need direction to act, they are not independent, they repeat their actions many times during the play and they make no sense. Thus, the Theatre of the Absurd, as its name suggests, breaks the chains of the typical theatre production. Absurd plays end the way they start and the things which happen during the plays does not include any kind of rational experience or explanation. The audience is forced to ask what's going to happen next and yet nothing might happen as was often the case (Esslin, 1961, p. 305). These features indeed of the Theatre of The Absurd mirror the main themes and concept in the existential philosophy in a way that human being looking for a meaning in the world and the experience they have while searching for meaning are totally barren because the world is absurd. Theatre does not serve the purpose of entertainment, in this type of theatre, the desperation and absurdity of human beings, after these wars, are directly reflected to the audience.

The language used in the plays is an important element in the Theatre of the Absurd; where the lines actors speak fail to provide proper communication among the characters. It does not illustrate reality. In such a world where established values are questioned, the language is blurry and repeatedly stresses the meaninglessness of the world through the meaninglessness of language. Although the dialogues and

monologues of a particular absurd play do not offer proper communication, language still has a very important place in the Theatre of the Absurd. Due to the fact that the words do not provide the characters with communication; discovering the meaning of the words and dialogues are left to the audience, which gives multiple underlying meanings to these plays. “The element of the language still plays important, yet subordinate, part in this conception, but what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the word spoken by the characters” (Esslin, 1961, p. XXI). Esslin defines language in *The Theatre of the Absurd* as “verbal nonsense”, which suggests nothing in terms of meaning. Additionally, he alleges that the actual performance is above language, that words might not be able to express meanings as strongly as theatrical effects and as such, without language, performance can offer deeper messages to the audience (Esslin, 1961, p. 231). Because of the limited and inefficient language of absurd plays, understanding the characters becomes impossible and the audience come up with the characters whose intentions and motives can hardly be understood (Esslin, 1961, p. 300). Moreover, Esslin explains that the writing of the absurdist playwright Samuel Beckett strengthens his argument about language’s effect in the Theatre of the Absurd. Beckett is Irish, but he uses French while writing his plays and reveals that while he is writing in French he is less concerned about the aesthetics of language as he is when writing in English. This linguistic difference allows him to catch up, so to speak, with the tradition of the Absurd in which language is minimal and stripped off traditional dialogues and unconventional language (Esslin, 1961, p. 8-9).

Some prominent names in the Theatre of the Absurd are Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre can be also added to this list as they also wrote absurdist plays in the light of their own philosophies of Existentialism. All those playwrights have their own literary styles and manners as well as their own ways. For instance, Beckett and Pinter reflect the absurdity in their plays via minimal dialogues, repetitions, and silent breaks, while Ionesco projects the absurdity of human condition through comics and robot characters (Esslin 1961). All three have one thing in common: they do not believe in the function of language in communication. Hence, their plays are full of a lack of communication. In addition to this Camus and Sartre write in a way that their absurd characters carry existential traces in them.

As it is discussed in the book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, the purpose of The Theatre of the Absurd is not to represent or impose any ideology on the audience, nor to give solutions to any of the problems of the day, but basically the plays show the absurdity of human condition in a meaningless world. “The Theatre of the Absurd expresses the anxiety and despair that spring from the recognition that man is surrounded by areas of impenetrable darkness, that he can never know his true nature and purpose. . .” (Esslin, 1961, p. 314).

It can also be asserted from the above discussion that, the main concern for both Existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd is the human condition which is related to Existentialism and existential anguish that is experienced through questioning the purpose of life. Therefore, it is worthwhile to recognize that the themes and concepts in Existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd has a wide range of influence on Beckett’s plays. It can be clearly seen that Samuel Beckett’s works are full of the hopeless situation of human beings in a meaningless world. There is no message or meaning in the plots of the plays. The characters are in search of meaning in a meaningless world which offers no answer to their questions. They wait for salvation from someone or something which might also be part of their imagination. They are suffering and tormented by their situations. Beckett essentially reflects the subjects of Existentialism such as anguish, hopelessness, nothingness and absurdity of life by using basic features of the Theatre of the Absurd.

In the play *Waiting for Godot*, characters deal with the existential problem of meaninglessness, the play does not have long dialogues or monologues. Although the characters speak as little as possible, it is in these minimal speeches that, the audience encounter nothingness, and existential anguish is revealed through the characters’ suffering on the stage. *Waiting for Godot* is a significant example by means of reflecting existential philosophy, so it is worthwhile to investigate it in the light of Existentialism, especially, in respect to existential anguish.

3. WAITING FOR GODOT

3.1 The Play

This is a play for the thoughtful and discriminating theatre-goer. We are therefore, offering for a limited edition of only four weeks. I respectfully suggest that those who come to the theatre for casual entertainment do not buy a ticket to this attraction (Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, 1990, p. 488).

Samuel Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot* in 1949 in French and it was performed at 1953 in the Left Bank Theatre of Babylon in Paris. Two years later Beckett translated the play into English and this version was performed in 1955 in London. The name of “Godot” in the play has been debated by critics for a long time because “Godot” has always been connoted with God, and created ambiguity around itself. Beckett has always rejected this title, stating that, “If Godot was God, I would have called him that” (qtd. in Bair, 1990, p. 406). Although the play lacks the proper plot and eloquence of other plays of the period, it drew the attention of many people at the time, while being harshly criticised for straying so far from the concept of Aristotle’s definition of a well-made traditional play.

[Waiting for Godot] has achieved a theoretical impossibility—a play in which nothing happens, that yet keep audiences glued to their seats. What’s more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice (Mercier, V.(n.d).

In *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett presents the complexity of the human condition in a meaningless world to the audience. Being one of the most important examples of the Theatre of the Absurd, the play reflects the quest for meaning, meaninglessness of existence, the absurdity of life, and encountering nothingness while searching meaning. The search for meaning is especially emphasized in this play via the concept of waiting for Godot, as this inaction of waiting can be considered as an individual’s endless waiting for a miracle which will give a meaning to their existence in life.

Related to this, Martin Esslin claims that, Godot is a metaphor for waiting in the play:

The subject of the play is not Godot but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. Throughout our

lives we always wait for something, and Godot simply represents the objective of our waiting – an event, a thing, a person, death (Esslin 1961, p. 17).

The absurdity of the play is shown through the fact that Beckett leaves the question of the problems of human beings unanswered. The play only shows the stable situation of human beings after war; they lost their hope for the future, and their past is full of destructive memories of war. In relation to this, the play as an example of The Theatre of the Absurd, overlaps with the rise of the philosophical school of thought 'Existentialism' in terms of questioning the meaning of existence.

The playwright breaks the chains of typical characteristics of the theatre by minimalizing the characters, décor, and language. The play consists of five characters in total, but only two of them, Vladimir and Estragon, are the main characters. They eat, talk, argue, sleep, and think about committing suicide while they are waiting for Godot, who throughout the play, never arrives. The other characters are Pozzo, Lucky, and The Boy. Vladimir seems to be more sensible and responsible character of the two while Estragon looks as if he is the weaker and more helpless one. While Estragon usually focuses on his physical needs, such as complaining about his boots that hurt, Vladimir is mainly interested in serious problems of the world; "Was I sleeping while others suffered?" (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 90). Pozzo and Lucky are the passersby who passes twice from the place that Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot. In their first passing, Lucky is tied with a rope to Pozzo who carries him, in the second act, they exchange roles because Pozzo is blind the rope is shorter to make it easier for Pozzo to follow. In both acts they are tied to each other with a rope. This idea of being tied is also a concern for Vladimir and Estragon who question their being tied to each other as well as Godot. At some point, Estragon questions whether or not they, like Lucky, are tied to Godot. Indeed they are because it is Godot that will give meaning to their lives when he arrives (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 20-21). The Boy is the messenger who brings news from Godot and gives some detail about Godot when Vladimir and Estragon asks. Seemingly, it is not certain that the boy is connected to Godot as there is no clarity about it throughout the play.

In the first act, the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon is shown. They complain about each other and their duty. They try to remember their duty, and argue about waiting in the right place and at the right time. Then all of a sudden they shift abruptly, talking instead about parting but in the end deciding to stay together.

Estragon suggests they hang themselves, but after a discussion they reject the idea and go on waiting in case things will change with the coming of Godot. Lucky is thrown on the stage with a rope around his neck with Pozzo following holding the rope. Vladimir and Estragon initially believe that Pozzo maybe Godot, but after questioning him they learn that he is not. Estragon and Vladimir are happy as the time passes in conversation with Pozzo. Then a boy comes bringing a message that Godot cannot come that day but will come tomorrow.

In the second act, they are in the same place and waiting for Godot while discussing about Pozzo and Lucky, whom Estragon insists that he does not remember. Estragon again comes to the point of death by suggesting that Vladimir kill him. Estragon keeps on forgetting their mission of waiting and Vladimir constantly reminds him. Pozzo enters again; this time he is blind and has exchanged the roles with Lucky; now Lucky controls the rope as Pozzo is blind. They question their waiting again and the boy comes to bring the same news: Godot will not come today but will arrive tomorrow. At the end of the play they decide to give up waiting and move, but they stand still in the same place and do not move at all. “Godot shows us how is it our destiny to “pass the time [. . .] waiting for a meaning that will save us – save us from the pain, ugliness, emptiness of existence” (qtd. Gendron, 2008, p. 54). They stand motionless, as it is stated in the quotation, to wait for a meaning, or to be saved from the burden of existence.

There is no real communication between Vladimir and Estragon but only an exchange of words. The repetition of words is also reflected in the action in the play. In the first act, Pozzo is the one who holds the rope and Lucky is the slave, whereas in the second act Pozzo turns out to be blind and even if he still holds the rope, the rope is shorter to enable him to follow, he still carries Lucky but the hierarchy has changed. It can be inferred that with these repetitions and cycles it is emphasized that nothing changes in the world; even if man acts, things stay the same; as Estragon says; “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful” (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 41). They suffer throughout the night. Estragon is beaten, he does not know by whom and why or he does not want to reveal. Sometimes he is hungry or has awful nightmares which Vladimir does not want to listen to but whatever happens they meet on the stage the next day. Vladimir does not suffer physically, but he has more intellectual problems thinking about the Gospels or biblical stories. They do not give up even if the only

action they take is to wait for Godot who will save them from the boredom of waiting itself.

The play reflects the desperate situation of the people of Europe after World War II. They had lost their hope in the future, and their past was full of saddening memories of war. Their trust in God has been shaken because God did not or could not prevent the death and disaster caused by the war. Human beings have been left helpless in the universe, but still hope for something to happen to save them from this suffering of existence. In the play, Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot, who might change something in their lives that will add meaning to their existence. Winston Churchill describes the reason for this feeling; “What is Europe now? It is a rubble-heap, a charnel house, a breeding-ground of pestilence and hate. It is an atmosphere out of which Godot was born – the despair, hunger and disease of postwar Europe” (qtd. in Blau, 2004, p. 28). In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett expresses the weariness of the human condition, the impossibility of communication, and the anxiety that is caused by freedom of choice. His characters are devoid of meaning in an absurd world and there is nothing meaningful that they can hold on. In addition to this, what makes *Waiting for Godot* different from other Beckett plays, is the stability that is related to the endless inaction of waiting for Godot. It might be connected to the people who were waiting for the war to end so that they can heal themselves from the destruction of war and start to hope for their future. Deirdre Bair writes in her biographical novel of Samuel Beckett that;

Waiting for Godot was written during a time in which Beckett wanted something very much and wished time to pass. . . he chose to write about the abstract idea of waiting for time to pass and for something important to happen in every man’s life. . . (Bair, 1990, p. 406-7).

If the time he wrote the play is taken into consideration, it is after the World War II and it can be assumed that Beckett was expecting a change to occur and was waiting for things to be different and maybe for the suffering to end. At the same time, the action of waiting in the play might be interpreted as either waiting with the hope that things might change in their life in a positive way, or it might be taken as a physical expression of hopelessness as nothing happens while they are waiting. The play does not carry any certain answer to this question. Even the dialogues between the characters are indecisive;

Estragon: (*Giving up again*). Nothing to be done.

Vladimir: (*Advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart*) I am beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it away 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.

Estragon: Am I?

Vladimir: I am glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever.

Estragon: Me too.

Vladimir: Together again at last! We have to celebrate this. . ." (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 9)

This dialogue is from the very beginning of the play. Estragon says "nothing to be done", sounding very pessimistic about their situation and seeming to have already given up before even beginning to wait. They do not know how to view their existence, either to celebrate or lament about it. Whereas this despair is seen many times throughout the play, they are not sure about it. On the one hand they are hopeless, on the other hand they are ready to start all over again as can be seen in the dialogue above. Furthermore, Vladimir reveals their absurd situation in the following dialogue;

Vladimir: All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which – how shall I say – which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths? That's what I sometimes wonder. You follow my reasoning (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 80).

Vladimir is aware of the fact that they are in a vicious circle of waiting and wanting, which he does not want to become a habit, but in the end it does, as they never do anything else. As Esslin explains:

Waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change is in itself 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 (Esslin, 1961, p. 18-19).

So *Waiting for Godot* reflects a portrait of desperate human beings trapped in the middle of nothingness. The characters are in the search of something that will save them from both their futile conversations and their waiting. Estragon and Vladimir question many things, the Gospel, dreams, stories, but in the end when they do not find anything significant amongst those issues, and then they suddenly decide to hang themselves. They cannot find a reason for their existence, they are free to leave the

place and quit their duty of waiting for Godot, but they do not continue to have hope that things might change. “Waiting for Godot” sometimes does not mean anything to them, they even forget about him. This eternal freedom of choice and the awareness of which is forced on them means they can either wait or leave marking them as characters that suffer from existential anguish.

3.2 Context, Stage and Setting

In *Waiting for Godot*, the stage that Beckett designed is quite empty. The play is performed in a barren country in the evening where there is only a tree. An isolated or empty setting might infer a life without purpose, the meaninglessness of existence, or it can be a message to the characters on the stage that they must be the ones to fill their own lives with meaning. However, Vladimir and Estragon are not even sure whether they are in the right place to begin with.

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.

Estragon: (*Despairingly*). Ah! (*Pause.*) You're sure it was here?

Vladimir: What?

Estragon: That we were to wait.

Vladimir: He said by the tree . . . (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P. 14*)

Where they are going to meet is not really clear, it might be under a tree in another place, the meeting point is never specifically referred to. It is probable that they might be in the wrong place because when they arrive at the meeting point the next day they search for clues to recognize the place but find none.

Estragon: We came here yesterday.

Vladimir: Ah no. There you're mistaken. (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P. 14*).

. . .

Estragon: In my opinion, we were here.

Vladimir: (*Looking round.*) You recognize the place?

Estragon: I didn't say that (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P. 15*).

They argue about the place but they are never certain of it, still they keep waiting in a place unsure of its certainty. Furthermore, the tree which is barren in the first act is covered with a few leaves in the second act. They might have even been waiting in the wrong place since the beginning of the play. On the other hand, the tree having no

leaves in the first act, but having leaves in the second act may be a sign that there is a hope that sprouts slowly. It looks like Vladimir and Estragon are thrown into the middle of the world or in their case to the middle of the stage. The place looks like nowhere and this place has no boundaries, no distinguishing features. It might be suggesting either the endless choices of human beings or the never-ending suffering of existence. The desolation of the stage foretells the first opening lines of the play 'nothing to be done'. One cannot do anything in such a place except wait for things to change. While Estragon is trying to pull his boots off because they hurt, Vladimir takes his hat off and inspect it constantly as if there is something inside it. They are not comfortable because they are irritated by the limitations of their outfits. They are constantly in search of something to pass the time, trying to find something that will occupy them and will break the silence even though it is clear nothing will achieve this. Estragon complains about his boots, he wants to talk about his dreams, he is hungry and asks for carrots or turnips. He wants action even if it comes in the form of hanging himself, while Vladimir tries to find the answers to his questions. They always try to interact, so that they will not remember the burden of their meaningless existence which has no significance except for waiting for Godot. "The best way to overcome the doldrums is through the activation of their being together. . . it is at least as a pair that they have to bear their senseless existence (Anders, 1965, p. 147). With the entrance of Pozzo and Lucky, they become happy because they have something to pass the time, otherwise they are bored. They usually feel lonely even if they are together because they cannot express themselves to each other. They cannot communicate properly so they cannot be a solution to each other's problems. For instance, Vladimir does not want to listen to Estragon's dreams or cannot help when he is beaten, while Estragon remains ignorant to Vladimir's philosophical questionings. Hence, their accompanying one another cannot be a remedy for their loneliness or add any meaning to their existence.

The objects such as boots, carrots, turnips, and the hat are significant to the play. Boots hurt Estragon's feet and he constantly complains about them, but later they change colour and are suddenly more comfortable. Unlike boots, the carrots and turnips he seeks are limited in supply. The objects constantly change without reason like life itself. This change of objects in the play might be standing for the instability of life as

well as the traditions and values that have changed because of the huge destruction of wars.

In terms of context, the play does not convey a rational message. It does not carry a context that makes sense. Time and space are totally blurred and there is no coherence found within the dialogues. To some extent, the things that the characters talk about might stand for their past and the context might be drawn out of history. However, these dialogues are unreliable as the characters repeat themselves all the time. Sometimes they repeat each other and it is never certain who takes what action. Furthermore, their memories are vacant; they forget things the instant after they happen. Vladimir: What was it you wanted to know? Estragon: "I've forgotten" (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 20). By using waiting as a tool to emphasize the non-action in the play, Beckett refers to the meaningless of action as part of a larger meaningless world in which nothing ever really happens.

As it is argued the context and setting have a significant place in revealing the existential anguish within the genre of absurd drama.

3.3 Concept of Time in *Waiting for Godot*

The concept of time is blurry, hence irritating in the play because it does not clearly pass and plays no role in ending the characters' suffering of existence. The time that characters refer to is not clear, only the date that the play was written might provide a clue to unravel the confusing concept of the time in the play. Vladimir and Estragon's blurred sense of time is given in the dialogue below:

Vladimir: When I think of it . . . all these years . . . but for me . . . where would you be . . .? (*Decisively.*) You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.

Estragon: And what of it?

Vladimir: (*gloomily*). It is too much for one man. (*Pause. Cheerfully.*) On the other hand, what's the good of losing heart now, that's what I say. We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 10).

What they have achieved or understood is limited because all those years seem indefinite or undefinable within the plot of the play. Which nineties was that million years ago is unclear. The only thing clear is that their past seems to be happier than their present. They yearn for the past and regret the things they did not do.

Vladimir: Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were presentable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up. . . (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 10)

The Eiffel Tower, might be a reference to World War II as France is the place where Beckett lived through the war. Paris was occupied in the war as other countries were and it is not the same anymore for both Vladimir and Estragon. Everything has changed and they are not hopeful for their future, as all past traditions and values seem to have been lost. They will not let them go up to the tower, or it would not give the same feeling even if they were to do so.

As the play continues, Estragon becomes more and more forgetful; he has problems with remembering the past even if it just happened. After Pozzo and Lucky's first appearance, Vladimir mentions them to Estragon, but he does not remember who they are. So, the time becomes an irritating concept to both of them. Estragon is irritated because his memory fails him. Vladimir is irritated because he is tired of reminding Estragon of certain things.

Vladimir: Yes, you do know them.

Estragon: No. I don't know them.

Vladimir: We, know them, I tell you. You forget everything
(*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 48).

It is not certain whether Estragon actually forgets things so easily or he just does not want to remember them. He might even be pretending because he does not want to remember the sadder memories of his life. Sometimes he even seems lost with the very concept of time.

Estragon: I am unhappy.

Vladimir: Not really! Since when?

Estragon: I've forgotten (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 50).

They are also frustrated by the time because of their duty of waiting for Godot. At some point, Vladimir admits that: "Time has stopped" (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 36). They are not only uncertain about the place they are waiting but also about the time they are supposed to meet. They are not even aware of the number of the days they have waited. They do not have an understanding of the concept of the days of the week; they do not calculate the passage of time. They have no occupation except for

waiting, essentially passing time. Time does not pass for them while waiting as Godot never comes and their burden of finding meaning becomes heavier.

Estragon: You're sure it was this evening?

Vladimir: What?

Estragon: That we were to wait.

Vladimir: He said Saturday. (*Pause.*) I think.

Estragon: You think.

Vladimir: I must have made a note of it. (*He fumbles in his pockets, bursting with miscellaneous rubbish.*)

Estragon: (*very insidious*). But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? (*Pause.*) Or Monday? (*Pause.*) Or Friday? (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P. 15*)

The time concept in the play is clearly represented in Pozzo's monologue by referring to the general view of time in terms of the past, present, and future in human life, Pozzo anchors the concept of the passage of time in the play. The suffering never ends for the characters; when their past is distorted, their future is uncertain.

Pozzo: (*Suddenly furious*) Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It is abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that enough for you? (*Calmer*) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then its night once more. . . (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P. 89*)

The quotation reflects the traditional life cycle, people are born, live and die. However, in Vladimir and Estragon's case, one phase is omitted, the one where they live authentic lives filled with meaning. They do not really live, they only wait for something to happen their life is full of boredom.

There is no clear passage of time that can be seen occurring in the play. The act of waiting is endless; they are trapped in time. Thus, the concept of time in the play is one of the reasons that causes anguish.

3.4 The Role of Language in *Waiting for Godot*

The language that is used in the play is quite ambiguous which makes the communication between characters as absurd as the play itself. Language is significant because it constitutes the base of the play by means of questioning the meaning of existence. The language is not used as a medium of communication, because it never

allows proper communication between the characters. Samuel Beckett explains that this happens because; “[T]here is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express (Bair, 1990, p. XVII). The play is overwhelmed with the lack of communication, repetition, purposeless dialogues and meaningless speeches. Just as Beckett states, in a world which is deprived of language, it is not possible to find the right words to express oneself or search for meaning, so the play reflects the language’s inability to provide either real communication or hope of finding the meaning of existence. Even if the characters try to communicate, everybody seems to be confined within their solitude talking to themselves without listening to the others. Throughout the play, Vladimir and Estragon seem to be in a dialogue, but they never comprehend what the other is saying.

Estragon: (*anxious.*) And we?

Vladimir: I beg your pardon?

Estragon: I said, and we?

Vladimir: I don’t understand (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P.19*).

Vladimir is not able to answer Estragon’s question, either he does not follow them or the words are insufficient for Estragon to clearly explain himself. They leave their sentences unfinished or they repeat themselves. They start to talk about a new topic and then another suddenly without reason or consequence. While Vladimir talks, Estragon falls asleep. They do not consider the meaning of their conversation; their only aim is to utter words, convincing themselves that they exist in an arbitrary world which is full of absurdity and meaninglessness.

The independence of language is proof that the characters are intent upon neither expression nor communication. Since all purpose is absent from their conduct, they really do not need language, which thereupon begins to free itself from them. If they continue to speak in spite of this, it is to convince themselves that they are alive (Iser, 1966, p. 255)

Words are there only as objects. Vladimir and Estragon never benefit from them as a tool of communication. Words lose their meanings, and communication becomes purposeless. Their only purpose is to wait for Godot; language is there only to suppress the silence and prevent the boredom of waiting. They do not focus on the meaning of their dialogues, so they themselves become nothing but objects who have been placed on the stage to wait.

Estragon: What do we do now?

Vladimir: Wait for Godot.

Estragon: Ah!

Silence.

Vladimir: This is awful.

Estragon: Sing something (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 63)

Their dialogues are full of irrelevant answers. They do not listen to each other and utter their words one after another since the dialogue is only a tool to pass the time in an aimless meaningless world. Language does not fill them with meaning, but instead, it adds to their sense of nothingness, because they cannot properly communicate. When they do not understand each other, their anxiety becomes more unbearable because they realize the nothingness of their existence. In Ben-Zvi's essay, she discusses the role of language. She claims that in spite of the fact that Beckett's characters' discussion of everyday routines such as hunger, ache, dress, they are aware that they are doing this only pass their time. But, they are unable to change anything with their words (Ben-Zvi, 1980, p. 195).

The only way people can express themselves is language and there is nothing left if it does not work. So Vladimir and Estragon try to calm themselves, and talking, even in a nonsensical way, is better than silence and thinking which faces them, reminding them of their meaninglessness.

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

Vladimir: You're right, we are inexhaustible.

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

Vladimir: We have that excuse.

Estragon: It's so we won't hear (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 62).

Furthermore, the play is full of repetitions. In both acts Vladimir and Estragon are always at the same road, and they meet Pozzo and Lucky twice. Their dialogues are also repeated throughout the play. Consistently, they ask or remind each other about why they are waiting. Nursel İçöz in her essay *Repetition and Difference in Beckett's Works*, suggests that "[t]he desires and fears, the hopes and frustrations of the characters, as well as the themes of the plays, are conveyed through the repetitive devices" (İçöz, 1993, p. 283). Their mission, waiting, consists of repetition of events

and speeches, and is frustrated by fading hope; they understand that the expected event will not happen. After experiencing two world wars, Beckett might be inferring that disastrous events are repeating themselves, and thus the absurdity of life is projected through this frequent use of repetitions. Because in such a world full of the repetition of terrible events it is absurd to even try to find meaning.

Estragon: The circus.

Vladimir: The music hall.

Estragon: The circus (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 35).

.....

Vladimir: Say I am happy.

Estragon: I am happy.

Vladimir: So am I.

Estragon: So am I (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 60).

Despite the fact that they try to communicate and break the silence, the characters are trapped within repetitions and incomprehension. They do not answer each other, thus they cannot realize each other's needs. Lack of communication emphasizes the inefficacy of language to be used as a communication tool in the play. The play overall illustrates the meaninglessness of the universe. The incapability of language supports this idea that man will face nothingness, as there is no language to express oneself and find or create meaning.

So, characters' use of language namely, their dialogues, repetitions and silences become significant component in reflecting their existential anguish.

3.5 Existential Anguish in *Waiting for Godot*

The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell,
hell of heaven. John Milton

Here, I will argue the gist of the thesis which is the existential anguish that is seen through the dialogues of the characters Vladimir and Estragon in the play *Waiting for Godot*. The words and the meanings they repeatedly use will be exemplified to prove how the existential anguish is constructed via the dialogues and inaction of the characters in the play.

After World War II, most people realized that the established values and beliefs of society were no longer valid. In the face of this loss of faith in social institutions and

morality, Existentialist thinkers declared that human beings were not provided with the essentials of living innately, thus it is the responsibility of people to find the meaning of their own life through the choices they make. Moreover, most people had become aware that there was no essence that defined their existence in life, fearing an encounter with nothingness at the end of their search for meaning. Having lost hope, all they are left with is emptiness. This sense of existential anguish rooted in nothingness was due to the fact that people could not find the meaning of their existence which caused anguish and hesitancy even if they were apparently free. In relation to this, Sartre claims that starting point of anguish is the feeling that human beings are not responsible for the existence of the world and themselves, however they are free to pick up any activity over another to create their own their reality (Bohlmann, 1991, p. 35). Similar to Sartre' idea that is quoted in Bohlmann's remark, the theme of meaninglessness or anguish in *Waiting for Godot* stems from the burden of freedom and the responsibility of choosing their own path in life as reflected by the actions of the characters of the play.

At the beginning of the play Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot in the hopes that something, anything, will happen to change their current situation. They attempt to pass the time by occupying themselves by talking, arguing, eating, and sleeping. While they try to rid themselves of the boredom of waiting, they find they are trapped by a sense of nothingness because they do not know what to do next if they quit waiting. Essentially, they have become trapped in an endless loop, afraid to break this cycle because they fear the unknown. They question Godot, they dream of what might change if he arrives. They think of hanging themselves if he does not come: the weight of these endless choices makes them anxious.

My point is simply that the two men assess notions of being, faith, despair and salvation from seemingly opposite ends and yet arrive at the same point, generating a new spiritual enlightenment from the abyss of existential anguish (qtd. Mccandless, 1988, p. 48).

There is nothing to do then, except to endure the silence or end it, so they break the silence. The first sentence Estragon utters is "Nothing to be done" (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 9). Meanwhile, he is trying to take his boots off, so it seems that by saying nothing to be done Estragon refers to his strife to take off his boots, but indeed he does not. The real meaning of this pessimistic phrase is understood when Vladimir enters the stage for the first time and starts to talk as an answer to Estragon.

Estragon: (*Giving up again*). Nothing to be done.

Vladimir: (*Advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart*) I am beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it away 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 (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P. 9*)

Vladimir talks about his struggle in life about trying everything and not giving up. He might be implying that people should not give up trying to search for meaning in their life, but he finally comes to a point, agreeing with Estragon that there is nothing to be done that would find any meaning to their existence. It might also be referring to the idea that coming into the world, namely existence, is not the choice of an individual and there is nothing to be done to change the reality of being born. People are born to the world without being asked. This idea overlaps with existential philosophy's absurdist foundations in a sense. Especially in Sartre's perspective, the notion of existence is twinned with meaninglessness and absurdity. He depicts absurd as: "That which is meaningless. Thus, man's existence is absurd because his contingency finds no external justification" (Sartre, 1978, p. 628).

It is worthwhile to note that Vladimir and Estragon start the play with the quote of "Nothing to be done" (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, p. 9*). They clearly state their existential anguish at the very beginning. They are hopeless and unable to find a reason or explanation for their being except that they must continue to wait for Godot even though they are free to choose not to. They may try to find another option but they do not. As Levy writes in his essay, Beckett's characters deceive themselves by accepting that there is nothing to do even if there are options;

In Beckett's universe, to be is to be deceived, it is to believe, despite available alternatives that there is 'nothing to be done' but continue the same futility, nothing to be known but the same perplexity: What do we do now? (Levy, 2002, p.237)

Their existence can also be seen as absurd because there is nothing to be done about it. They are already in the world, they cannot leave. They are seemingly aware of the nothingness of existence from the very beginning of the play.

The repetition of this phrase continues to the end of the play, but their level of anxiety and the possibility of having to face nothingness increases at each step and is reflected in the changing meaning of their words. The ambiguity of their situation triggers them

to question the things around them, however they find no answer, ending up with a renewed feeling of nothingness. There is nothing to be done except waiting while another day passes and the characters become more fearful of their reality. This can be seen in the words they use, it changes suddenly as shown in the dialogue below;

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

Estragon: Nothing.

....

Vladimir: . . . Nothing to be done (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P. 11*)

At first, they repeat only the situation they are in and the phrase there is nothing to do. Then Vladimir utters the word ‘appalled’ which hints at the fear behind the incapability of doing nothing. The repetition of the quote ‘nothing to be done’ appears with a different use of the same words throughout the play;

Estragon: Nothing to be done (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P.21*)

Estragon: Nothing we can do about it (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P.23*)

Vladimir: We’ve nothing more to do here (*Waiting for Godot, Act One, P. 52*)

Vladimir: There’s nothing to do (*Waiting for Godot, Act Two, P.74*)

Repetition is central to the language of the play because it might be there to emphasize the message that is given again and again. A person is in the universe but it is against his own wishes. And worse, there is no way to change this outcome because there is nothing to do about it. They have to find their own meaning in the world which brings them to nothingness again because the world is deprived of meaning after the two world wars, and increasingly there is a sense that there truly is no hope. In Vladimir and Estragon’s case, these repetitions stand for the emphasis on the meaninglessness of life. As it is remarked by İçöz in her article;

At the beginning of *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon’s “Nothing to be done” may seem to apply to that moment, but being repeated many times, the statement comes to convey the lack of purpose, meaning and freedom in the lives of Estragon and Vladimir. (İçöz, 1993, p. 283).

As this phrase is repeated many times, it can be asserted that it puts an emphasis on the meaninglessness of life. Yet, there is nothing to be done because they have no control over their existence. However, it is still their choice to wait.

Vladimir: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. (*Pause.*) Unless Godot comes.

Estragon: And if he comes?

Vladimir: We'll be saved (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, p. 94)

They are free to leave the place but they do not because of the hope, the very tiny chance that Godot might change their life and they might be saved from the meaninglessness of their existence that prevents them from leaving their routine of waiting until the end of the play. Normand Berlin, explains it very well in his essay;

Beckett is pushing doubt and ambiguity; he is dramatizing the “perhaps” of our lives, the question mark of our existence that contains much mundane comedy – those comic routines of ordinary daily life – but that also taps deep sources of anguish and frustration (Berlin, 2008, p.68).

The other possibility they explore is to hang themselves. They are waiting for the meaning of their life, but they want to be saved from the anguish of nothingness. This feeling of uncertainty brings them to the edge of committing suicide. They even wish they had not been born, because it would have saved them already from the pain of existence.

Vladimir: Suppose we repented.

Estragon: Repented what?

Vladimir: Oh. . . (*He reflects.*) We wouldn't have to go into details.

Estragon: Our being born? . . . (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 11)

In contrast to Sartre's pessimistic view about the absurdity of life and the desperate situation of the individual, and in addition to Beckett's reflection of his characters as pessimists, stands Albert Camus. He believes that while the individual should be aware of the absurdity of life, they also should not give up exploring for meaning and this, in itself will give meaning to life. In his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he explains the human condition stating that one should not give up hope of finding meaning in life because Sisyphus never does. Camus suggests;

It was previously a question of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now becomes clear, on the contrary, that it will be lived

all the better if it has no meaning. Living an experience, a particular fate, knowing it to be absurd brought to light by consciousness (Camus, 1955, p. 36).

Thus, he is against both suicide and pessimism in the face of the meaninglessness of life. He highlights the fact that it is better to look for meaning instead of accepting life being predestined; and further, one should look for meaning even if life is absurd. As opposed to this idea, Vladimir and Estragon will commit suicide if Godot does not come, because Godot is their only hope and because they believe it is Godot that will help them discover the meaning of their life not themselves. They are hopeless refusing to look for another choice or way to find meaning, instead giving up, in direct contrast to Camus's idea. Even though Vladimir and Estragon want to end their suffering and anguish, they never dare to realize their plan of hanging themselves, but even thinking of it makes them different from Sisyphus. So, Gordon remarks;

The paradox of Camus's Absurdism, 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 (Gordon, 2008, p. 125).

Thus, Beckett's characters do not live their lives fully but suffer from the existential anguish compared to Camus's. Nonetheless, their attachment to their duty of waiting for Godot gives them a feeling of safety as well as responsibility, which allows them to cling to life. Doing nothing gives them a kind of confidence over their situation because their mission of waiting gives their lives at least temporary meaning. Stability and inaction make them anxious but as they still hope this mission will change something in their life in a positive way, they accept the suffering.

Vladimir: Well? What do we do?

Estragon: Don't let's do anything. It's safer

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

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot

Estragon: Good idea (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 18).

Even if this sense of safety of doing nothing while waiting for Godot relieves them for the time being, this feeling of safety does not last long. As far as the steadiness

continues due to Godot's delay, they lose their hope again. Because waiting and doing nothing cause silence and boredom which triggers their anguish as it is seen in the quote below;

Vladimir: Say something.

Estragon: I am trying.

Long silence.

Vladimir: Say anything at all.

Estragon: What do we do now?

Vladimir: Wait for Godot.

Estragon: Ah! (*Silence.*)

Vladimir: It is awful (*Waiting for Godot, Act Two, P. 63*).

At some point in the play, they accept that waiting is tiresome that it does not carry any meaning and that they should find something to do in order to forget about their anguish again. In the second act, while they are trying to take Estragon's boot off, Estragon suddenly decides;

Estragon: We don't manage too badly, eh Didi? Between the two of us?

Vladimir: Yes yes. Come on, we'll try the left first.

Estragon: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist.

Vladimir: (*impatiently.*) Yes we are magicians . . . (*Waiting for Godot, Act Two, P. 69*).

It may be deduced that Estragon is referring to their existential anguish, even though Vladimir is not sure because he believes that Estragon sounds like he is making a mockery of him finding meaning in their existence. Here a connection might be drawn to Sartre's *Nausea* in which he also tries to show the true reality behind the banal routine of humanity. Chris Falzon (2005) in his essay *Sartre and Meaningful Existence* explains it as;

First of all, *Nausea* appears to be inviting us to shake off our ordinary, taken-for-granted presuppositions about the world, or more precisely, all the principles, categories and forms we might ordinarily appeal to in order to justify, organize, explain, give meaning, order, or point to the world from our eyes. They are the forms we try to impose on the world, the coverings or trappings that hide the world from our eyes. To abandon them is to discover the truth about the world, to confront things as they really are, to come face to face with brute existence --- meaningless, contingent, superfluous, absurd and nauseating (Falzon, 2005, p. 105).

This excerpt clearly reflects the situation of Estragon and Vladimir since they constantly search for topics to argue about or some physical action to do that will keep them away from facing the meaninglessness of both the world and their mission of waiting. When they are in their routine they are not suffering anguish, but when everybody is gone and they start to think, their anxiety returns. In Cartesian philosophy, Descartes relates existence with thinking. "I think, therefore I am". (Descartes, xx) However, Vladimir states that thinking is dangerous; it is because of thought that their existence is painful.

Vladimir: We're in no danger of thinking any more.

Estragon: Then what are we complaining about?

Vladimir: Thinking is not the worst (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 64).

Thinking depresses them as it forces them to face the truth of their meaningless existence. Later, Vladimir says that it is not the worst, here he might refer to the worst thing which would be probably Godot's not coming and subsequent loss of all their hope to find meaning in their existence. It is very well explained in the quote below;

Amid the comic miscues and interruptions, Didi makes a distinction between "thinking" and "to have thought". "Thinking" they agree "is not the worst" because it lessens the misery of silence, but it is terrible to have thought in the past (and had it come to nothing) as well as to possess thought (Schlueter & Brater, 1991).

While they expect something to change with the coming of Godot, they might be hiding behind this instability of waiting and the so-called safety in which they somehow find a shelter that allows them not to think or act. They can ignore their responsibility to find meaning via waiting for Godot. They might also be suppressing their feelings of anxiety because of their condition: as helpless human beings in the world.

Estragon: We've lost our rights?

Vladimir: (*Distinctly.*) We got rid of them (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 19)

Martin Esslin writes that "The hope of salvation may be merely an evasion of the suffering and anguish that spring from facing the reality of human condition". (Esslin, 1961, p. 27). Whether they lost their rights or not while waiting for Godot is Estragon's concern, but Vladimir supposes that they get rid of them while waiting. Here their right might refer to living in depth and a meaningful life, but Vladimir ignores the vitality

of their rights and thus feels as if he is relieved when there is no burden to find the meaning of their lives. This dialogue clearly proves that as Esslin claims, their waiting is like an escape, what they get rid of is indeed their responsibility to discover the meaning of their lives, so they feel less anguish. Namely, they forsake their freedom by preferring to wait rather than to act. It is easier to wait rather than thinking about the true meaning of existence. “Rather than assume responsibility for their own lives, Vladimir and Estragon place their fate in the hand of Godot” (Duran, 2009. p. 987). As, Duran states in his article, Vladimir and Estragon give up their right to be free and wait for Godot to determine their fate.

They do nothing but only waiting, yet it does not prevent their anguish. It is obvious that while waiting they talk to each other and realize the endless trap of nothingness they are in; Estragon: Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it is awful (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 41). When they do nothing, nothing happens, so it irritates them as they realize the meaninglessness of existence. Existential Philosophy suggests that human beings define themselves and the world through their own subjective view of it, as Sartre explains in his essay *Existentialism is a Humanism*; “Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself” (Sartre, 1956, p. 291). As such, Vladimir and Estragon view themselves as hopeless, and that there is nothing to be done about their situation. It is because this is what they do to themselves and they are the ones who are responsible for this anguish because it is their choice. They are free to give up their duty of waiting for Godot at any time. They can try to accept the absurdity of their situation and live with it while exploring other avenues of life for meaning. Hence, their freedom becomes their fate. But it is this paradox, to either stay or leave, in which they struggle. This choice becomes their burden, and their freedom of choice is the cause of their anguish. “Beckett’s sense of human condition, what makes it ironic and universal is not that they are trapped or condemned, but they are condemned to be free” (Blau, 2004, p. 41).

Estragon: (*chews, swallows*). I am asking you if we’re tied.

Vladimir: Tied?

Estragon: Ti-ed.

Vladimir: How do you mean tied?

Estragon: Down.

Vladimir: But to whom, by whom?

Estragon: To your man.

Vladimir: To Godot? Tied to Godot. What an idea! No, question of it. (*Pause.*) For the moment (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 20-21).

Vladimir does not give a clear answer to Estragon, he says “no question of it” like he does not believe that they are tied to him, but also says “for the moment” which gives the impression that for the moment yes they are tied to him. Alternately Estragon clearly seems to be bothered about waiting without end. “Estragon, far less convinced of Godot’s promises than Vladimir, is anxious to reassure himself that they are not tied to Godot” (Esslin, 1961, p. 23). It is also significant that even though Estragon sees that Lucky is in a worse situation physically and mentally than himself, he seems to be willing to exchange places with Lucky, because Lucky is exempted from all the burden of questioning and finding meaning in life. When Pozzo complains about Lucky, Estragon asks:

Estragon: (*To Vladimir.*) Does he want to replace him?

Vladimir: What?

Estragon: Does he want someone to take his place or not?

Vladimir: I don’t think so.

Estragon: What?

Vladimir: I don’t know.

Estragon: Ask him. (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 34).

Katherine H. Burkman highlights in her essay that Estragon would prefer to be in the place of Lucky, even he is a slave, instead of suffering of endless waiting of their blurred fate (Burkman, 2008, p. 42). Godot means hope for them, so they are bound to the action of waiting. Even if they think they will be saved when Godot arrives, they are like slaves of Godot because there is nothing to do except doing nothing and continuing to wait. Estragon: (*Anxious*). And we? (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 19). Here Estragon is frustrated and constantly asks what to do, and what is going to happen to them when they meet Godot and where they will fit in in Godot’s life. So, for Estragon, it sounds better to be unaware of the things happening around him instead of suffering in the meaningless world while waiting for something that may not come. Additionally, Beckett himself confirms Burkman’s statement when asked about the meaning of Lucky’s name he answers as such: “I suppose he is Lucky to have no more expectations” (Bair, 1990, p. 407).

In addition to being tied to Godot, from time to time they express their dissatisfaction about being tied to each other. They often think of separating and go on to their own ways.

Estragon: It'd be better if we parted.

Vladimir: You always say that and you always come back crawling (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 62).

This suggestion of parting by each character goes on until the end of the play. But they never attempt to part in a real sense, that is, no one ever really leaves. They are unconsciously aware that it will be more unbearable to wait for Godot alone. Time will not pass and each one will become more anguished.

The uncertainty of their future is another reason for their anguish. Throughout the play they question themselves: are they in the right place, or have they confused the day they are to meet Godot? They think about their chances of success by discussing the story of two thieves in the Gospels, one of which was saved. Thus, they believe that there is a fifty percent chance that they can also be saved.

Vladimir: . . . One of the thieves was saved. (*Pause.*) It is a reasonable percentage. (*Pause.*) Gogo.

Estragon: What? (*Waiting for Godot*, Act One, P. 11).

This chance is again Godot, who might save them from their suffering of coming face-to-face with the meaninglessness of their existence or they may hang themselves if he does not come. Indeed, they represent the human condition in meaningless world. As McDonald writes in his essay;

But, *Waiting for Godot* is a play which, from the beginning, seeks to probe the 'why' of suffering. Or, perhaps more accurately, seeks to dramatise the condition of not knowing the answer to this question. It begins, after all, by asking why one of the thieves was saved but not the other. On what basis the selection was made? At the end of Act I, we discover that Godot beats one of the boys but not his brother, but for what reason? The boy does not know. The refrain within Lucky's speech, a parody of academic or philosophical attempts to understand the source of human suffering, is that human beings suffer 'for the reason unknown' (McDonald, 2006, p. 39).

The characters resemble all humanity, thrown into the world, they try to discover the meaning of life when they have the opportunity. But their mission is impossible because of all the uncertainties in addition to waiting for Godot.

Vladimir: Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! (Pause. Vehemently.) Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not everyday that we are needed. Not indeed 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, 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 we 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. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come – (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 80).

They believe that their mission of waiting for Godot somehow gives meaning to their lives, soothing themselves with the idea that they are superior when compared to others because they have been given a mission and they will be saved when Godot comes. Nevertheless, their thoughts change instantly; sometimes they even get suspicious about their very existence in the world, which only enhances their anxiety. When they convince themselves that they are lucky to have a mission which will save them from meaninglessness, they suddenly become anxious, again questioning their existence. For example, in the first act the boy sees them and talks to them but in the second act he does not recognize them,

Boy: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, sir?

Vladimir: Tell him . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . Tell him you saw me and that . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . that you saw me. (*Pause. Vladimir advances, the Boy recoils. Vladimir halts, the Boy halts. With sudden violence.*) You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me! . . . (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 92).

These repetitions and pauses are very significant indicators of anxiety. They show that Vladimir indeed is afraid of the possibility that he does not exist. Estragon also exhibits the same fear when he asks Vladimir: "Do you think God sees me?" (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 76). They consistently try to confirm their existence through an outside authority, either God or the boy. They do this in the hope that the anxiety that is caused by their perceived uncertainty of their own visibility or existence will be cured. The possibility of being saved is what keeps them alive.

Although anguish is clearly seen through the dialogues of Vladimir and Estragon, it is only at the end that Vladimir admits their fear which leads to existential anguish and their continued suffering.

Vladimir: We wait, we are bored. (*He throws up his hand.*). No, don't protest, we are bored to death, there is no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. Come, let's get to work! (*He advances towards heap, stops in his stride.*) In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 81).

Even if they become aware of the absurdity of their own existence, they never act to change it which is their choice. The play ends without any relief for either the characters or the audience. As Sartre puts it: "The only meaning in the world and our lives is the meaning we give them through our prodigious choices. (qtd in Falzon, 2005, p. 112). They still insist on their ability to choose, but suffer the pain of existence because they do not move at the end.

Vladimir: Well, shall we go?

Estragon: Yes, let's go.

They do not move. (*Waiting for Godot*, Act Two, P. 94).

Consequently, they become the own cause of their anguish and as it is argued above, the words they use give their existential anguish away because they cannot stop repeating the anxiety they feel. Their indecisiveness goes on until the end of the play, they decide to leave, but they do not move. They do not end their anguish even as they suffer fiercely. They do not leave the place and give up waiting, thus the curtain closes leaving them to their endless anguish: waiting.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to analyse the context, setting, concept of time, characterization and use of language in the play *Waiting for Godot* written by Samuel Beckett, to illustrate the existential anguish which is caused by the absurdity of the characters' existence. The characters in the play are trapped in the "midst of nothingness" and the meaninglessness of their existence that comes through their freedom of choice. This sense of despair and anxiety in the play is projected through the characters' dialogues which lack meaning and consist of irrelevant responses. It is argued in this thesis that as Samuel Beckett is concerned about human beings' problems of existence in the world in his plays, most of the time, he portrays the representation of human condition which makes his plays to be interpreted in the light of Existentialism.

The reason behind the idea that Existentialist thinkers and Samuel Beckett have many similarities in their existentialist perspectives might be considered as Samuel Beckett's experience of the Second World War. Thus, in his plays, Beckett presents the problematic condition of human beings in the universe after the Second World War, because the world at that time does not meet the basic need of human being which is to find meaning for the self. In relation to this, Sartre suggests in *Being and Nothingness* that human beings are devoid of any purpose in life and it is in their hands to lead their life in the way they want with their choices so that they will discover the meaning of their lives (Sartre, 1978). Similar to this idea, Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* can be read within such an existentialist view. The characters, Vladimir and Estragon are imprisoned in a condition where they wait for something to happen which will fill their lives with meaning and purpose as if they have no other choice. They believe that this meaning will come with the arrival of Godot. So, they wait without action throughout the play. According to Sartre, "man is what he makes of himself" and he claims that an individual is responsible for their deeds which he thinks causes existential anguish. In that sense, what Vladimir and Estragon become in the play is

indeed their own choice. What they do is to try to avoid this painful act of searching meaning for their lives by committing themselves to waiting for Godot. When Godot does not come, they encounter the nothingness and meaninglessness of their being and find themselves in anguish. Moreover, Beckett's minimal setting, language and the characterization signifies the existential features such as despair and anxiety which reveals his existential tendency in the play. For instance, Vladimir and Estragon's meaningless conversation to pass the time reflects their hopeless situation.

Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* has been considered as an example of the Theatre of the Absurd. This unconventional type of drama was delineated by an endeavour to question and disdain the established social mores of the time. Hence, the writers of the Theatre of the Absurd wrote their plays to mirror this sense of hopelessness with the changing situation of human beings in a world which suggests neither meaning nor reason. As Martin Esslin the originator of the Theatre of the Absurd suggests the Theatre of the Absurd tries to display the absurdity of existence which makes the Theatre of the absurd close to existential philosophy in terms of their reflecting life and the human condition. Vladimir and Estragon's miscommunication as well as their futile waiting for Godot might be accepted as an example of the viewpoint of existential philosophy which emphasizes the meaninglessness of the universe.

In this thesis, *Waiting for Godot* is analysed in terms of its setting, concept of time, characterization, context and use of the language. In *Waiting for Godot*, the characters are on an isolated road with a barren tree, waiting for Godot. Estragon is always in the mood of complaining about his boots, his hunger or being beaten by someone while Vladimir tries to calm him down. They are not sure about their aim, they are waiting for Godot, but they are unsure about the place and time of their meeting, sometimes they even forget about it and remind each other that they have to wait. They cannot communicate properly. Sometimes they do not listen to each other or one falls asleep when the other is talking. So, the use of language does not serve for a proper communication. They lack any purpose for themselves or their lives, they are reflecting the absurd condition of humankind on the stage, which also makes Beckett's characters to be viewed as suffering from existential anguish. The rest of the second chapter focuses on the main argument of the thesis which is existential anguish by analysing the dialogues of the characters.

According to the existentialist view, while human beings investigate the meaning of their existence, the probability of encountering the emptiness of life and fear that they might find nothing in the end awakes the feeling of anxiety. Both Vladimir and Estragon suffer because their life, is meaningless, they do not do anything to change their life and their condition is the result of their own free choice. As Sartre claims, “man is condemned to be free. . .from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does” (Sartre, 1956, p. 295). That is to say, Beckett’s characters suffer because of the unbearable responsibility of freedom to choose which determines their destiny. Vladimir and Estragon can change their minds and give up waiting for Godot but they do not because this action will burden them with more responsibility to choose their own way and find their meaning. Instead, they take refuge in waiting for Godot which they believe will release them from their responsibility in a way. Hence their anxiety stems from the fear that if Godot does not come they have to face their responsibility to find their meaning in life. Therefore, they think of committing suicide if Godot does not come. As the time passes, their anguish increases because they have time to think and question. They do not want to think, otherwise they will encounter their meaninglessness in the universe.

They trust in Godot that Godot will bestow them with meaning. As Godot does not arrive their anguish doubles, firstly because of their choice to wait, secondly because of their suspicious regarding their existence. The play ends with the blurry image, Vladimir and Estragon decide to give up waiting, and they suggest each other to leave, but they do not move. The curtain closes with inaction in which Vladimir and Estragon’s anguish does not end. They still are indecisive whether to go or not. It is heavy for them to bear the consequence of giving up waiting because then they have to act for themselves.

Consequently, this study showed the characters’ fail to carry the heavy burden of their existence which is reflected through their use of language. Even though they have a chance to discover themselves, giving up their inaction and to move forward in their life, it is their choice to wait inactively, which enhances their feeling of existential anguish in the play.

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