Trabajo Fin de Grado

Theatre of the Absurd: “Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett

Alumno: Santiago Riaza Martínez
Tutor: Juan Ráez Padilla
Dpto: Filología Inglesa

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0. Abstract

In this essay, it is going to be analysed the enigmatic and eclectic play *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett throughout a philosophical point of view. Some of these philosophies are related to existentialism, absurdism, hegelianism and religion. Besides, it is going to be explained the genre of this play: The Theatre of the Absurd, its historical background and the relationship between this play and contemporary cinema. The main purpose of this essay is giving some food for thought to its readers to face the problematic and mystery that surrounds this play.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

Samuel Beckett is one of the most interesting, eclectic and mysterious writers of the 20th century. His most notorious play, *Waiting for Godot*, is still an enigma to us. Although it has been written a lot of papers about it, because we will never know whether this play has an exact meaning. Therefore, in this essay, we are going to develop some ideas around the content of this play in order to provide the reader a tool to face this complex piece of drama.

2. Context

2.1. Biography

Samuel Beckett was born in Dublin in the year 1906. His family belonged to the Protestant Irish middle class. He later became an atheist, though during his youth he considered himself almost a quaker\(^1\). It has been argued that his preoccupation towards the problem of being and the identity of the self comes from this Anglo-Irish theological concern. It has a grain of truth, but it is necessary to go in detail about his thought to really understand its complexity. Being surrounded by this religious society can be one of the keys to understand why his works are influenced by some biblical contents.

When Beckett was fourteen, he studied in Portora Royal School at Enniskillen, one of the most traditional boarding schools in Ireland. Although we know that his writing reveals him as a highly tormented artist, not only did he become one of the most brilliant scholars in the Irish cycles, but he was also an outstanding sportsman. Here we can appreciate that since he was a young man, he will develop an eclectic personality. His eclectic taste will be reflected in this play, where we can see the influences of silent films, vaudeville and other arts in it.

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During the beginning of the twenties, Samuel Beckett started his university career in Trinity College, Dublin, where he obtained a Bachelor’s Degree in Art. Due to his outstanding academic distinction, he was proposed by this Dubliner university as a representative in a classic exchange of lecturers with the celebrated Parisian university, Ecole Normale Supérieure.

Thus he started his famous lifelong relation with Paris. In this city, he met James Joyce, who will be one of his best friends and his literary master, appreciating his influence in this play when we are talking about the limits of language.

One can readily affirm that at the age of twenty-four Beckett appears to have launched a brilliant academic and literary career. Besides, he obtained in 1930 his Master’s degree in Arts writing about Proust works. But his work as a university lecturer was unbearable for a man like him whose thoughts about routine and habit were related to anxiety, death in life and loss of creativity. He decided to leave this institution in 1932, and threw up his career, dedicating some years of his life writing poems and stories. During these Wanderjahre or years of travel, he also moved from Dublin to Paris and London, travelled to Germany and France and worked as a labourer and volunteer in the Red Cross unit.

In the beginning of the Second World War, Beckett joins the French Resistance against the Nazis and leaves the city when he received a message that he was being chased. It is said that his pessimistic view of humankind in his works is related to his experiences during this war.

In 1945, he returned to Paris. This homecoming will be the beginning of the most productive period of his life. Fed by a big creative impulse, he wrote in French during five years plays like Waiting for Godot (1952), Endgame (1957) and Eleutheria (1947) and the so-called trinity novel: Malone Dies (1951), Molloy (1951) and The Unnameable (1953).

In 1965, Beckett and Alan Schneider started a project for a film which consisted in three short contributions of absurd drama writers such as Harold Pinter, Ionesco and himself,
Beckett. Only one of this three, Beckett’s short film, was materialized. In August of the same year, this short film was first shown at the Venice Biennale. As we are going to see during the whole essay, the influence of cinema in Beckett’s works is reciprocal, because his works will serve as an influence for so many film directors.

In 1969, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Although he was living the years of his world fame, Beckett remained elusive and worried with preserving his privacy. Therefore, when he won the prize, he did not appear on television, or radio or give any newspaper interviews. We can see that this personality is reflected in their characters. They are anxious, solitary and ostracist.

During the years after the Nobel Prize, he enjoyed his marriage with Suzanne Dumesmil, dividing his time between his apartment in Paris and a small cottage at Ussy-sur-Marne and directing his own plays in Germany, above all in Berlin, until the year 1989, when he died in Paris and was buried in the Montparnasse cemetery.

2.2. Literary Works

Although most people know Beckett as a playwright, he was a multifaceted author. As has been noted, during his lifetime he worked in many different professions, which determines his versatile nature as a writer. Besides, he also had a curious interest in new artistic fields such as the radio, the television or the cinema. This adventurous spirit will make him one of the most complete authors of the 20th century.

This section does not intend to cover all the works which Samuel Beckett has produced, but the most relevant existentialist and absurdist plays of his entire career:

In the beginning of his career, in the thirties and forties, he wrote the play Eleutheria (written in 1947, published in 1995), which was influenced by his own personal experiences. It deals with existentialist topics such as the search of freedom and the right to live one own’s life.
After this epoque of his life, where he was living in France and producing works highly influenced by his life experience, Beckett started his more prolific period as a writer in the fifties and early sixties. Apart from important novels such as *Malone Dies* or *Molloy*, he also wrote during this period the two most important plays of his career: *Waiting for Godot* (1952), one of the most enigmatic, exasperating and complex plays of all times, as we are going to see in the next sections; and *Endgame* (1957), a play in one act that some critics have compared to *Waiting for Godot* for their similarities in characters and topics.

Beckett’s career does not end here; after this highly productive phase, he continued to write well-known plays such as *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958), an innovative play performed by a single actor commenting on a tape recorded during his youth years. Besides, he wrote two more popular plays amongst his production such as *Happy Days* (1960) and *Play* (1963), where Beckett reached new levels of simplicity in his writings and created a mythical universe. Later on, in the year 1972, he produced the play, *Not I*, where there were no scenario, characters (only a mysterious Arab, called the Auditor) or plot, only a talking mouth surrounded by complete darkness. All these works which made him famous as one of the best literary authors of the 20th century were written in French. These plays also share the same characteristics, because they develop the topics of the absurd, the solitude and ostracism. Their characters share the same personalities, being depicted as lonely characters that feel that they do not belong to this world. For escaping to this anxiety, they shut themselves in, searching for the meaning of life that will not be found eventually.

2.3. Historical Context

When the play *Waiting for Godot* was first published in the middle of the fifties, the world was absorbed by a tense situation: the Cold War.

The Cold War (1947-1991) was a conflict between the two main superpowers of that time, USA and the USSR, and their allies. This conflict was the clash between two different ideologies: capitalism, supported by the USA, and communism, by the USSR. The main purpose of this conflict was the domination of the world and the setting up of one of these
ideologies in the whole world. What was somewhat new about this worldwide clash was that both superpowers did not actually fight each other directly. They both used other international conflicts related to the clash between the two aforementioned ideologies, such as the Vietnam War (1955-1975) or the Korean War (1950-1953), to influence and control these countries. Apart from that, the Cold War was characterized by the continuous use of the intelligence services as a weapon and the mass media new inventions, such as the television, to influence the spectator’s political view about the conflict. This mass media informed citizens constantly about the launch of atomic intercontinental missiles and the dangerous tensions between these two superpowers, creating among citizens a climate of constant fear and despair. This waiting, this sensation of anguish was inspirational for the creation of a great number of artistic expressions. Talking about Waiting for Godot, we would contend that this play was influenced by this tension, for we believe there is a sort of parallelism between the desperate waiting for apocalyptic ending of the war and the waiting that the characters suffer.

2.4. The Theatre of the Absurd

This genre is one of the most influential and important movements inside the literary world in the 20th century. The shadow of this genre is still present nowadays and plays such as Waiting for Godot are still represented in some theatres around the world. But what does the theatre of the Absurd really mean? For the literary critic Martin Esslin in his study of drama after the Second War World entitled The Theatre of the Absurd (1961), Samuel Beckett would be grouped among dramatists and people who were exiled and wrote in French such as Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter and Edward Albee. Esslin related their intellectual roots to Camus’s reflections during the Nazi occupation in France, particularly The Myth of Sisyphus (1942): “This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity” (Esslin, 1961: 23). For Esslin, the term Absurdity was “part of the ‘anti-literary’ movement of our time” (Esslin, 1961: 21), reflecting the breakdown of reason in Western Europe. Esslin also relates the theatre of the Absurd to the disintegration of language and irrationality of existence.
Some theatrical critics still manifest a lack of understanding towards this kind of plays, for the new conventions that this genre offers have not been fully explained or understood. It is inevitable to say that when a certain play is written, it must be analysed considering the standards and criteria of that age. In our case, when the theatre of the absurd began, there were some established assumptions that allow us to measure the good quality of a play: a well-constructed story, the complexity of the characters’ psychology, a theme exposed in the beginning of the play and finally solved in the end, the truly representation of of the reality and a witty dialogue. But these conventions will be completely destroyed by this new genre making us doubt about our concept of what a play should be like. In these plays, some new characteristics will be found, creating new standards: no plot nor theme is structurally developed or explained, muppet-like characters, a representation of an oniric reality and babbling instead of dialogues.

The dramatists of the theatre of the Absurd do not belong to a self-proclaimed or self-conscious school or movement. They are outcast lonesome individuals isolated in his private world. Besides, each of them has their own particular point of view for approaching different subject matters and their writing styles differ from one another. They also have their own influences, roots and specialities. In spite of all these differences, they share something in common: their works reflect their anxieties, preoccupations, feelings and thoughts about the contemporary world.

2.5 Are the Theatre of the Absurd and the Existentialist Theatre the same genre?

It is true that the main theme of the plays by Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Genet and others is the understanding of philosophical anxiety related to the absurdity of human condition. But it is not only this subject matter what defines this movement. Many writers such as Giraudoux, Anouilh, Salacrou, Sartre and Camus share a similar theme related to the understanding of the senselessness of life, the unavoidable depreciation of ideals, purity, and purpose. Nonetheless they differ from the playwrights of the absurd in that they present their thoughts of the senselessness of the human condition in a logically and lucid constructed way, while the Theatre of the Absurd tries to express these ideas leaving the rational
mechanisms and discursive thought. Therefore, the Theatre of the Absurd is part of the anti-literary movement of their time.

This kind of irrational expressions can also be found in abstract painting, concerning its philosophy related to the rejection of literary and rational elements in pictures. The new novel\(^2\) in France is also significative as regards anti-literalism, with its faithful description of objects and its denial of empathy and the view of the human being as the centre of the universe.

2.6. The tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd

The Theatre of the Absurd is a return to old, even archaic, traditions. Its novelty lies in the combination of these antecedents and its criticism. This combination will show that although some of the innovations may be incomprehensible and iconoclastic by some spectators, they are, in fact, a revaluation and development of familiar and acceptable features, but put in contexts that are slightly different.

To sum up, the Theatre of the Absurd displays age-old traditional performances (such as clowns, mimes, bullfighters, jugglers did), but in new and individually varied combinations. It also serves as the expression of wholly temporary problems and preoccupations.

Some literary critics, such as Esslin, argue that this genre represents pure abstract theatre, which is an aspect of its anti-literary nature. This kind of attitude implies turning away from language as a vehicle for the expression of our deepest rational and meaningful thoughts.

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Other characteristics of this attitude is its will to return to theatre as an expression related to performance, not just mere language. Theatre can be read, but true theatre can only exist if actions are executed on the stage.

2.7. Is *Waiting for Godot* a modernist or a postmodernist play?

The answer to the question is rather abstract, because for some people the definition of modernism and postmodernism differ significantly. In this section, it is going to be explained, in a general way, what these terms mean and some of their characteristics. Samuel Beckett suffered the transition between two different epoques in two different places: the traditional and modernist Ireland, based on Catholic values; and the vanguardist France, where the existentialism was the dominant philosophy after the Second War World. This clash between two different conceptions of the world will influence Beckett’s eclectic writing, producing an ambiguous mixture of forms and themes.

Drama before Modernism

Drama before the 20th century, when modernism started, sought to promote the idea that the audience was not part of the representation, that they were observers. The illusion of this “fourth wall” will disappear thanks to the modernist writers, allowing the characters to look straight to the audience, interact and speak to them.

During the Victorian period and before, plays were performed as if the audience were not watching it. As if they needed to eliminate the audience in order to create a more realistic dramatism to the play. In most of the cases, themes and events were related to everyday experience or events which analysed the particularities of that age realistically.

Dramatists like Bertolt Brecht wanted to break that fourth wall and destroy the illusion within the illusion of realist drama, making the stage and the audience an unbreakable ensemble. In other words, he does not split the darkened auditorium from the illuminated stage.
What is Modernism?

According to Josh Rahn, modernism is a period marked by “sudden and unexpected breaks with traditional ways of viewing and interacting with the world. Experimentation and individualism became virtues, where in the past they were often heartily discouraged.” (Rahn, J. (2011). Modernism. February 3, 2016. Jalin Inc. Online web: http://www.online-literature.com/periods/modernism.php)

Characteristics

These are some of the modernist characteristics:

One of the modernist characteristics is its relation to the meta-theatre. This can be found in old-age plays such as La vida es sueño (1635) by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. This Spanish play has based the definition of metatheatre, creating two postulates: the first one is that the world is a stage; the second that life is a dream. What happened under Modernism is that it transcends these postulates. What Modernism did was to influence these ideas to the aesthetic realm, where illusion was opposed to the real. Metatheatre signifies a medium that is totally aware of itself and makes the spectator be involved in an act of self-awareness.

There are a few indicators which the very metatheatrical aspect of Modernism implies. One of the metatheatrical aspects that Modernist dramaturgy implies is its label of the aesthetics of silence. It is characterized by its fragmentary language and the nonverbal theatrical intercourses. These tendencies seem incoherent, low-keyed and inarticulate to realist playwrights, whose point of view towards drama is more rationalistic.

Another important modernist characteristic is the tone of serious levity towards the genre of drama and its classics. They want to revise the classics and add some contemporary elements to them. These characteristics can be irony, humour, modern clothes and popular references. Some of the examples can be the postmodern revision of Hamlet by Tom
Stoppard entitled *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967). In this play can be appreciated that the exploration of violence, above everything the psychological one, and the fights between antagonists is also a very recurrent theme in modernist drama. But the psychological violence must be in the shadow of the great homicidal classics such as *Hamlet*.

Another modernist characteristics is that mixed genres such as the tragicomedy are a prefered instead of the purer forms that offer classic theatre: comedy or tragedy. To conclude this section, as has already been noted, a preference towards to play *outside* the stage (being public and actors a whole) is recurring in this genre.

Crisis of Modernism / the birth of Postmodernism

In the fifties, when *Waiting for Godot* was performed, the modernist movement was in crisis since the thirties. Economic and political changes that began when Hitler took over the power in 1933, until Stalin died in 1953, forced the movement into its cessation. Therefore, civilisation itself was in danger struggling with the inhumanity that created those dictatorships and changes. The time for the pursue of art for art’s sake \(^3\) was over. But the end of the Second World War in 1945 marked the beginning of a new era where humanism was needed in order to fight the hellish totalitarian oppression which was a menace to the entire world. This urge combinated with the horrors that generated this war (destruction, tens of millions of killings, etc…) generated the revival of Modernism, which experienced a second development between the 1950s and the 1970s. This new flowering was called Postmodernism. Beckett played an important role, establishing the new patterns that literary genre will follow in the next years.

\(^3\) “Art for art’s sake" is the usual English rendition of a French slogan, "l'art pour l'art,'" which was coined early in the nineteenth century. The artists and writers of the Aesthetic movement asserted that there was no connection between art and morality and tended to hold that the arts should provide refined sensuous pleasure, rather than convey moral or sentimental messages. (New World Encyclopedia. (2012). *Art for Art's Shake.* July 25, 2015. New World Encyclopedia. Website: http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Art_for_art's_sake).
Postmodernism also included other different artistic expressions such as painting (pop art, American Abstract Expressionism), literature (nouveau roman, also known as new novel in France), electronic music and cinema (Alfred Hitchcock in the USA and Ingmar Bergman in Sweden).

After this brief introduction to Postmodernism, some of the postmodernist characteristics of Beckett’s plays will be expounded below:

One of these is this particular use of language: “toward a radical devaluation of language, toward a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself”; he further explains, “still plays an important part in this conception, but what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken by the characters”. (Fletcher, 2001: 18-19).

Sherzer also refers to the particular use of language in Waiting for Godot:

“Beckett is a great manipulator of, exploiter of, and performer with the manifold resources and possibilities of language. For are not the passages borrowed from other literary texts, the use of banal, everyday conversations mixed with literary language, the slang, puns, and modified clichés, the importance granted to talking (to torment the other or to make time pass), and the careful creation of rhythms and use of repetitions all ways of demonstrating the exuberance of language and Beckett’s ability to play with it and to manipulate it resulting in a new and powerful dramatic expressiveness?” (Fletcher, 2001: 18-19)

Beckett and Ibsen have the opposite point of view towards drama and its spirit (the opposite pole in time, such as Ibsen, but also in spirit). Modernists such as Ibsen tend to be symbolic, but Beckett had a postmodernist view towards this characteristic, rejecting its symbolism.
3. Analysis of the play *Waiting for Godot*

After knowing the context and the main characteristics of this play, it is necessary to move to the next part of this essay. In these sections, the main themes and peculiarities of this play are going to be analysed. But first of all, we are going to answer this question: what is *Waiting for Godot*?

*Waiting for Godot*, subtitled in English as *a tragicomedy in two acts*, is Samuel Beckett’s translation of his own play written in French: *En attendant Godot*. *Godot* revolutionized Western theatre. The dialogue of the play transmits a sense of emptiness, desolation and uncertainty that was never seen before in Western literature. It was performed around the world with a huge success, but one of the most astonishing performances of this play was in San Quentin prison, while New York intellectuals were discussing about the meaning of *Godot* (God?, Happiness?, Eternal life?...). The audience at San Quentin felt captivated of time, guessed the meaning of the play immediately. Although, they might not comprehend the philosophical background of this play (surrealism, existential philosophy...etc), they know what it feels like to be inside the prison of waiting (they wait for their mail, for their families to come and for getting the freedom they lost). In conclusion, this experience makes us realise that the Theatre of the Absurd and *Waiting for Godot*, concretely, are more related to emotions than to reasoning.

Some critics argue that *Waiting for Godot* main themes could be existentialism; others say that it is more related to Christianity and salvation; and there is a third way, the one that shares Beckett’s argument that this play’s main theme is whatever you can imagine, included the ones written at the beginning of this paragraph, or none of them, being a literary work focused on the shape of ideas.

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4 Samuel Beckett’s comment to Harold Hobson in 1956: “I take no sides. I am interested in the shape of ideas. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine: ‘Do not despair, one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume, one of the thieves was damned’. That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.” (Ackerley, C.J and Gontarski, S.E, 2004:593).
Supported by the last paragraph, this analysis will deal with these ideas and some more, in order to give the readers an universal view of this play to draw conclusions by themselves after they read it.

3.1. *Waiting for Godot*: the existentialist philosophy, the wait and the time

The first idea that is going to be explained is the relation between *Waiting for Godot* and existentialism. But what is this philosophical thought? Which are their main premises?

Existentialism was first developed by Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) in reaction against Hegel’s abstractions and his idealization towards rationalism. This movement created by Kierkegaard was not named as such until some French and German writers decided to adopt it in their writings. There were two branches of this idea. On the one hand, the Christian existentialism, whose main aim is to give answers to the problem of existence through God. The main mentors of this type of existentialism were Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, and Paul Tillich. Whereas, the existentialist atheism was followed by Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Albert Camus. These philosophers thought of looking for answers in a world that was still facing the death of God.

In the approach of this play, we will focus on the Sartrean existentialism, which is associated with secular existentialism, considered a humanism by himself in a declaration in 1946: “L’existentialisme est un humanisme” (Ackerley, C.J and Gontarski, S.E, 2004: 185). “From phenomenology (and, indistinctly, Kant), he (Sartre) made the distinction between pour-soi, or purposive possessors of will and consciousness, which are the main characteristics in human existence, and en-soi, the self-sufficient world of inert matters” (Ackerley, C.J and Gontarski, S.E, 2004:185-186). There is another idea that is important to understand Beckett’s play: the agonistic element of freedom, which is burdensome and

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5 Sartre, Jean-Paul (1905-1980). French existentialist philosopher who was Samuel Beckett’s near contemporary at the École Normale. Samuel Beckett read *La Nausée* in 1938 and admired it, being one of his influences in further writings. (Ackerley, C.J and Gontarski, S.E, 2004: 500)
liberating at the same time. This is based on the fact that human beings are condemned to make choices, therefore they are condemned to their freedom.

Besides, the development of these ideas in the main characters of the play, Vladimir and Estragon, can be perceived. Instead of being free, they both are tied to Godot. This makes an allegory of the human condition. It is an allegory because the elements (time, space and the absence of dialogue) that surround the play do not follow the reality of our world in a faithful manner.

It is very important to bear in mind that Waiting for Godot does not tell a story. This play deals with ideas and explores a situation-being static “Estragon: Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful!” (Beckett, 2006:41). This situation is generated because they are waiting for somebody who will save them from their anguish, s/he will be the one who can finish it, but Godot is also the cause of their suffering. Generating a paradox which can explain existence or, to be more precise, how time influences the human condition.

There is another topic related to the concept of waiting: time. Waiting is to experience time purely. When we do not have anything to do or we are expecting for something to happen, the perception of time changes. If we perceive it ceaselessly, it is self-defeating, without purpose, null and void. This routine for Beckett is the cancer of time and a paradox, where people are trapped in anxiety. Time goes by, one day is like the next one, continually, without a pause. As Pozzo said:

“One day, is that not enough for you, one day like 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’ll die, the same day the same second….They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more”.  

(Beckett, 2006:83)

The uncertainty of the hope of salvation is one of the other themes of this play. This topic appears, for example, in the biblical theme about the two thieves on the cross. There

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were two thieves that were crucified with Jesus Christ. Both of them were looking for salvation, one of them was saved, the other one was damned: “Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other...damned” (Beckett, 2006:14). A certain parallelism can be shown between these two thieves and Vladimir and Estragon, who are looking for salvation. But will they both get it? Or only one of them? That is why, this statement is so powerful, because it shows the idea with which we began this paragraph, the uncertainty we have if we will be saved, condemned or just die without any future consequences. This is a doubt that they both have when Vladimir tells Estragon that they will be saved from hell: “Estragon: Saved from what?”/ “Vladimir: Hell.” (Beckett, 2006:14). And later on Vladimir said from death: “Vladimir: Because he wouldn’t save them.”/“Estragon: From hell?”/“Vladimir: Imbecile! From death.”/“Estragon: I thought you said hell.”/“Vladimir: From death, from death.” (Beckett, 2006:14-15).

This hope of salvation may be a way not to face the suffering and anguish that generates the confrontation of the reality of human condition. With this statement, the philosophy of existentialism appears again in this section, because there is a certain parallelism between both Beckett and Sartre. For them, people have the duty of confronting the human condition. We must relate the concept of the human condition to the concepts of liberty, nothingness; and the obligation of making ourselves throughout our own decisions. Deducting from Sartrean philosophy, we can say that Godot represents or might be the allusion to what Jean Paul calls mauvaise foi (bad faith).  

If we see the situation through the view of existentialism, we may get to the conclusion that if they are condemned to choose and there is anxiety in the act of waiting, why do they just not leave or put an end to their misery?. They certainly try to do that, when for a brief moment, Vladimir has a lucid moment and is aware of the horror of human condition: “The air is full of cries” (Beckett, 2006:84). They think that suicide would be the best solution to end this waiting and they also think that the preparation of this suicide may

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7 In this case, I want to clarify that I am talking about as salvation in a neuter way, without any religious connotation; although I am writing about a biblical reference.

be funny and good for losing time while they are waiting for Godot: “Estragon: What about hanging ourselves?”/ “Vladimir: Hmm, it would give us an erection” (Beckett, 2006:18). Besides, they do not believe in wealth or reason such as Pozzo and Lucky. Thus, Vladimir and Estragon are superior than the other two characters, because they are aware of the nothingness and the senseless action of time that produces waiting. But Godot functions as an element that changes their perspective, making them unconscious again: “Vladimir: Let’s see what he says” (Beckett, 2006:19). The main reason why Godot does that is because it represents the habit of hoping. Godot gives them a reason to wait, to be saved and a routine of waiting that paralyzes and cannot permit them the painful and fructiferous awareness about the human reality and they even negate this idea, as Vladimir said “To Godot, tied to Godot? What an idea! No question of it (Pause). For the moment.” (Beckett, 2006:22), believing that they are deciding their future, instead of being predisposed or conditioned by the figure of this mysterious character, creating an illusion full of senseless hope.

This experience of temporality, evanescence and the difficulty of becoming aware of one’s existence is a merciless process that occurs when time changes. This experience is also the result of the communicative difficulties between ourselves; and the classic quest for reality in a place where everything is uncertain (the problem with distinguishing between what dreaming and being waking are).

Times changes us and our reality, creating new objectives and the concept of ourselves within the world. This makes human beings continuously search for a meaning in their lives and a finite pursuit for their self-identity, a goal that is difficult to achieve; because we are unsatisfied and continuously volatile animals. Therefore, this internal seeking and the chasing of new objectives create frustration and unhappiness. But that pursuit keeps us running like a horse which rides to get a carrot.
In order to eliminate this anxiety created by our will, we should accept the nothingness of life and face it heroically. We can see here some influences from Schopenhauer’s philosophy.

3.2. Waiting for Godot: A religious or an atheist play?

After this analysis of the play through existentialist eyes, we are going to tackle one of the most repeated questions when people face the text of Waiting for Godot. Is Godot an allusion to God? Is this a religious or an atheist play? In words of Beckett himself, there is no answer, everything is in the text: “It means what it says” (Fletcher, 2001:48). But as commented above, this essay aims at showing the different perspectives from which the text can be analysed with a view to providing the reader with food for thought for their own interpretations.

With regard to the first question, we must note that there is a good number of critics who established an etymology for Godot’s name. Some people suggested that Godot comes from the word God, which makes sense for the Christian interpreters of the text. This interpretation is based on the allusion to Simone Weil’s book Attente de Dieu (1942). Other critics argue that Godot is a diminutive on the analogy of Pierre-Pierrot, Charles-Charlot, with the addition of Charlie Chaplin character’s Charlot in French (God+Charlot=Godot) (Esslin, 1961:49). This reference to Charlot is based on the use of his hat in the representation of the play. But Godot may also be the reference to a more hidden literary allusion. As the literary critic Eric Bentley demonstrates, there was a character that was always talked about but never seen in a Balzac play whose name is Godeau. This character has some parallelism

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9 Schopenhauer, Arthur (1788-1860): heir to Kant and forerunner of Nietzsche in the tradition of German counter-rationalism. His work has dubious standing among philosophers, and shallow thought. His lasting influence is on literature, Proust, Mann, Borges and Samuel Beckett not alone in their attraction to his lucidity and the fine metaphors through which his ideas are expressed. Beckett commented: “his intellectual justification of unhappiness-the greatest that has ever been attempted-is worth the examination” (1930). (Ackerley, C.J and Gontarski, S.E, 2004: 511).

10 Balzac, Honoré de (1799-1850) was a French writer related to the realist literary movement. He was the creator of La Comédie humaine, on which Samuel Beckett lectured at Trinity College (Dublin). (Ackerley, C.J and Gontarski, S.E, 2004:37).
with Godot. Godeau is also a character that does not appear in the whole play, but it is mentioned and expected by some other characters.

If Godot intervenes as a supernatural agency or as a mythical human being who is going to save everyone for their situation, or both, it is a matter of no importance. The main subject of the play is the act of waiting as an essential characteristic of the human condition. While we are living, we are waiting for something, and Godot is the representation, the allegory of our waiting. It may be death, meeting somebody, discovering something or waiting for an event. Thus, the flow of time makes us confront with the problems generated by being human: the problem of our natural self, which is a constant flux and beyond our range, as Proust, one of the main influence in Samuel Beckett’s writings, wrote:

“Personality, whose permanent reality can only be apprehended as a retrospective hypothesis. The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours”. 11


Godot, which is Vladimir’s and Estragon’s wish, seems beyond their reach. We cannot be sure if we are going to change through time, and with that, our wishes. That is to say, we, as human beings, are a product of time plus circumstances, that are everything that surrounds us. Taking into account this affirmation, our desires may change or may be still the same as we wanted after a certain period of time.

With regard to the Christian view about Godot, we can say that he is like a kind of God whose personality is unpredictable in feeling kindness and punishment. He is a chaotic God, like the one who appears in the Old Testament. This argument is based on the scene where a boy, Godot’s Messenger, intervenes in one of his two appearances in the play. He, Godot, minds the goats and treat them well; but the boy’s brother is punished and beaten, because he minds the sheep. That is to say, Godot punishes Boy because he does not follow

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11 Proust, Marcel (1871-1922): he is a French author and one of the main influence for Beckett’s work. Being the topic of his final thesis. The topic about the relation between time and our existence is taken as an influence from *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Ackerley, C.J and Gontarski, S.E, 2004: 457).
its morals or behaviours, although the latter boy did a right thing, that was taking care of the sheep. These actions are absurd and do not follow a logical pattern. This may be a criticism against dogmas as a negation of criticism and its danger to become fundamentalist ideas. As dogmas are a set of fixed morals, if they are not followed, although somebody does anything right (as we can see in the case of the latter boy), s/he will be damned and punished, arbitrarily. As we can see when Vladimir questions: “And why doesn’t he beat you?”, the boy responds: “I don’t know sir” (Beckett, 2006: 49). He cannot give a reasonable response, he is punished and he does not question himself why.

The relationship between the two brothers has a biblical reference, and therefore an argument for the people who believe that this play has a hidden religious meaning: the parallel between Cain and Abel. One of them felt under God’s grace (the Boy) and the other (the boy’s brother, who is minding the sheep) do not without any reasonable reason, supporting the Old Testament vision of God that influences the figure of Godot for the Christian interpreters. But Godot also acts like a kind of antichrist figure, because he did the contrary what God did, as the Last Judgement says: “And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left” (Esslin, 1961:55). With this argument we could say that his coming cannot mean a source of pure joy but it can also mean damnation. As we can see in the second act, when Estragon believes that Godot is arriving, he thinks he is accursed. And when Vladimir shouts: “It’s Godot! At last! Let’s go and meet him”, Estragon says: “I’m in hell!” (Beckett, 2006:68-69).

As we can see in the example of the two brothers, grace will divide human beings in two. The ones who are going to be saved, the boy who minds the goats, and the ones who are going to be condemned, his brother, who minds the sheep. But God and Godot do it arbitrarily.

Focusing on the other two characters of the play, Pozzo and Lucky, we must say that they are also related to religious themes. In this case, Pozzo’s activities may be concerned with his attempt to draw that fifty-fifty chance of salvation upon himself.
It can be appreciated in the first act that Pozzo wants to sell Lucky at the fair (this fair in the French version is named *marché de Saint-Sauveur*\textsuperscript{12}). With this action, is Pozzo trying to get the redemption of Lucky? Or is he trying to divert the fifty-fifty chance of redemption from Lucky to Pozzo? The presence of Lucky disturbs Pozzo and cause him a big pain. The reason why that happens is because Pozzo thinks that Lucky will be redeemed and therefore, saved. Lucky demonstrates, when he demonstrates by his thinking, that he seems worried about the concept of the unpredictable salvation in this chaotic monologue:

> “Given the existence(...)of a personal God(...)outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown(...)and suffers(...)with those who for reasons unknown are plunged in torment…” (Beckett, 2006:42)

In this quote, we can see the concept of the personal God: a God who does not feel empathy, a mute, silent God who does not communicate with us but who loves us dearly, and sends to hell the ones that are full of hatred. Therefore, this God is a judge that condemns us for reasons that we do not know, because He cannot feel for us. He is other entity that looks after us, as a cruel father looks after his son, making us dependent to him and accepting every punishment that He gives us.

Going deeper into the Christian interpretation of the play, which stands that their waiting, Vladimir and Estragon’s, can be explained by their firm faith and hope. The other original religious explanation can be seen in that the relationship, their mutual interdependence, and kindness towards each other is an example of the Christian charity. But there are many counter-arguments against these interpretations. One of these is one that overlooks some features of the play, for example, the constant anxiety that both characters are suffering when they are waiting for Godot, his irrationality and the demonstration that the repetition, the habit of his waiting creates a bunch of hopes that, sooner or later, will be futile. Another argument can be their suicidal tendencies, in order to finish with the anxiety that creates the waiting.

\textsuperscript{12} In English: ‘The Market of the Holy Saviour’
A final Christian interpretation of this play can be perceived when some critics consider Didi and Gogo clearly superior to Pozzo and Lucky. Vladimir and Estragon have a purpose in life: waiting for Godot, but Pozzo and Lucky live hopelessly. They do not have a clear objective, they are egocentric and they are in a sort of sadomasochistic relationship.

Following the existentialist interpretation of the play, we can see that their searching, their objective when they are waiting for Godot is totally absurd. But what is the term *absurd*?

Three different views about the concept of absurdity are going to be shown. The first one is postulated by Martin Esslin that absurdity was “part of the anti-literary movement of our time, reflecting the lack of reason in western Europe” (Esslin, 1961:2). The second one was created by Ionesco, who explains: “Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (Esslin, 1961: 23). The third definition of absurdity that is created by Albert Camus 13 is, in our view, the one that is more intimately connected to the play:

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

(Camus, 2005:4-5)

3.3. Form and language in *Waiting for Godot*

After considering some of the most outstanding concepts and themes of the play, we are going to analyse now the form of the play. In the next paragraphs, the main features of his

writing will be explained. These features make possible the transmission of these ideas. Because the form, structure and mood cannot be separated from meaning.

First of all, it is necessary to write the antecedents of the idea that structure and meaning are interdependent. His interest in the relation between form and meaning was introduced by his master Joyce\(^{14}\) and concretely the reading of the work *Critique of Language* by Fritz Mauthner. A book that “was one of the first works to point to the fallibility of language as a medium for the discovery and communication of metaphysical truths”. (Esslin, 1961: 34).

Another curious characteristic about Beckett’s writing, apart from being more interested in form than meaning, is that he decided to write his works first in French and later on translate them in his mother tongue. But why did he do that? The main reason is because he felt that some discipline was required, and the use of an acquired language would help him to fulfill this objective. Another reason was that he thought that French was a language where writing without style was easy. That is to say, if a writer wants to produce a work in his own language, he is tempted to add more virtuous elements than if he writes in an acquired language. On the contrary, writing in an acquired language allows the writer to be clearer thanks to the economy of his/her expressions. Another reason why he wrote in French suggests that Beckett did not like some things about himself and he wanted to hide them from the public.

As we know this play is unusual and against all the traditional conventions, some hidden meanings should be translated into everyday language. We could maybe discover some hidden clues, but these attempts are condemned to fail, because this play is full of secrets and as an unconventional play the meaning is not so clear as in the traditionalist plays. That is why, the objective of this essay is to get closer or explain some of the main ideas, but

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the main meaning is still unknown. Therefore, some of ideas regarding its meaning will be explained in the next paragraphs.

The play is not written in a linear way; instead of that, it is written in a polyphonic way in order to represent the human intuition and condition during his entire life. This polyphonic way of written is related to the modernist period, as we can see in books such as *Ulysses* (1922) by his friend and master, James Joyce.

The plot and the characters are not conventional, because the different subject matters are tackled at a level where neither characters nor plot exist. But why? Because characters must have a personality and individuality that matters; and the plot is a collection of events that happen one after another, and in this case, there is only one static event: waiting for Godot. In *Waiting for Godot* the assumptions that events are significant in time are questioned. There are no events which begin and later on finally end, but situations that are repeated forever. Therefore, the pattern of Act I is repeated in Act II with few variations. Besides, Vladimir and Estragon are the embodiments of some attitudes that human beings choose in their life: “Vladimir is the more practical of the two, and Estragon claims to have been a poet. (...) Estragon is volatile, Vladimir persistent. Estragon dreams, Vladimir cannot stand hearing about dreams”(Esslin, 1961:48). Instead of characters, they seem to be or personify virtues and vices in the vein of Spanish mystery plays *autos sacramentales*.

Dialogue in Beckett’s play seems to obliterate what the characters say in the previous lines. There is a communication breakdown between Beckett’s characters because, when we confront a meaningless world, it is a very difficult, almost impossible to make a senseful statement.

As noted above, one of Beckett’s play objectives is to show the difficulties in finding meaning in a world that is continually changing. Thanks to the language that he uses in his

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works, he shows the limitations generated when we use communication to express valid arguments and thoughts. Therefore, he tried to find ways to express ideas beyond language thanks to the dramatic medium.

The stage is the only place where language and action can be put together, showing their opposite relationship. With this method, the facts behind the language are shown to the audience. Here, Beckett demonstrates the importance of mime, knockabout comedy and silence. The main purpose of Beckett is to reduce the differences between the limitations that generate language towards the conceptual development of the intuition of being. The seeking of the idea that the existence of human beings is meaningful, it is impossible to be formulated through words.

When Beckett mixes all these elements his objective is to name the unnameable. There are a lot of ideas that cannot be expressed by means of rationality; therefore, they must be acted, in this case performed, to show that the tools of reason, in this case, language, cannot express.

Paradoxically, Beckett uses language to express its failure when we are trying to express abstract themes like the human condition. A collection of events, feelings and confusion that we cannot really put into exact words; it is necessary the addition of some action to express this theme in the most complete way.

Throughout his career, Beckett’s main purpose was to search for what lies behind the reason and the rationalist way of seeing the world. Another paradox in his writing is that he may criticize language as a mean to communication, but we cannot negate his master use of the language. Besides, in the stage he added a vanguardist dimension to language creating a big impact into the audience.

He also contributed with another idea that is very interesting in order to try to understand how human beings perceive their condition. There is a distinction between different tools that permit us perceive the world: thanks to the visual images which allow us to see the physical reality and dreams, memories and the deepest non-verbal consciousness of
pure emotion make us aware of ourselves as much as words do. Words run in an endless stream of consciousness and many people conceive this situation as an endless story that allows us to create a perception of ourselves. Because what we think and remember is our identity. Nobody can truly know our identity, even ourselves, because it is part of our most inner and abstract thoughts and language is not capable to explain them. Therefore, there is anxiety, because our language limitates the concept of ourselves:

“Heidegger \(^{16}\) considers the human condition coldly and announces that the existence is humiliated. The only reality is ‘anxiety’ in the whole chain of beings. To the man lost in the world and its diversions this anxiety is a brief, fleeting fear. But if that fear becomes conscious of itself, it becomes anguish, the perpetual climate of the lucid man ‘in whom existence is concentrated’”.

(Camus, 2005: 22).

But are these words and images our real self? Where do they come from? They certainly do not come from the material world but paradoxically they are spelled in a material organ: the mouth. Therefore, we can say that the mouth is where the material and the non-material meet together.

After this explanation of the use of language in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, what is what Beckett tried to say? In order to sum it all up, the main purpose of his plays was not to create a very rationalist writing where a lot of linguistic tricks and complex statements are written. His real main purpose was to create a single moment where emotions were fully intense and show people the totality of existence. But which are the techniques that Beckett display in order to create these sensations? One of them is, of course, dialogue.

The special use of dialogue is one of the main characteristics of Beckett’s prose. His prose seems created for armchair reading and for stage performance. One of the verbal

\(^{16}\) Heidegger, Martin (1889-1976). is widely acknowledged to be one of the most original and important philosophers of the 20th century, while remaining one of the most controversial. Heidegger’s main interest was ontology or the study of being. In his fundamental treatise, *Being and Time*, he attempted to access being (Sein) by means of phenomenological analysis of human existence (Dasein) in respect to its temporal and historical character. (Korab-Karpowicz, W.J (2015). *Martin Heidegger*. December 10, 2015. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Website: http://www.iep.utm.edu/heidegge/)
devices he used in order to create this kind of dialogues is the cancellation or qualification, which as noted above, helps support the deep-seated scepticism about the medium of language itself as a useful tool for communication. We can give an example about this concept of cancellation when Vladimir repeats twice his ignorance about the nature of the tree: “I don’t know” he says, and adding later, “A willow” (Beckett, 2006:87). Analogically, we can perceive hesitation concerning why perhaps some of the play’s many questions finish in a full-stop, instead of finishing in a question mark. They do not need a question to answer it; they do it, because it is mechanical for them. It shows how language is sometimes a prop to occupy our time without listening carefully to the speaker. Therefore, we are used to answer although ours does not correspond with the question or the context. To sum up, broadly speaking, a low percentage of all remarks are replied. Besides, many questions are long held in suspense, creating a mysterious sensation and slowing down the perception of time. We can see one example in the sentence “Vladimir: How do you mean tied?” “Estragon: Down” (Beckett, 2006:22). Besides, there are questions that are not answered, creating a communication breakdown between the main characters: “Estragon: Like to finish it?” (Beckett, 2006:22) and showing the absurdity of their lives, where sometimes answers do not matter. Because what really matters is the act of waiting, language and communication is only a way to occupy their time in order to escape from the nuisance of their fully perception of time.

Many of the dialogues written in Samuel Beckett’s plays, and concretely this one, imitate the spontaneity of everyday’s life speech, a speech that does not have any consequence. Each participant of the dialogue tends to pursue a line of thought with some independence from each other. This technique is very common in Harold Pinter’s\textsuperscript{17} plays. He is in fact considered an expert in this kind of dialogues, raising them to the level of high art, as we can see, for example, in his play *The Birthday Party* (1957):

\textsuperscript{17} Pinter, Harold (1930-2008): is a renowned playwright and screenwriter. His plays are particularly famous for their use of understatement to convey characters’ thoughts and feelings. Inspired in part by Samuel Beckett, he created his own distinctive style, marked by terse dialogue and meaningful pauses. In 2005, Pinter was awarded the Nobel Prize of Literature. (Biography.com Editors. (n/a). *Harold Pinter Biography*. February 5, 2016. A&E Television Networks. Website: http://www.biography.com/people/harold-pinter-9441163).

(Pinter, 1990:19-20)

Beckett’s main difference from Pinter is that in his plays he counterpoints resulting misunderstandings with comic subtlety. An example of this can be appreciated when before Lucky’s speech, Estragon supposes that Lucky wants to offer him money, whereas Pozzo thinks about the free performance by his servant:

“Pozzo: So that I ask myself is there anything I can do in my turn for these honest fellows who are having such a dull, dull time.” “Estragon: Even ten francs would be welcome” “Vladimir: We are not beggars” “Pozzo: Is there anything I can do, that’s what I ask myself, to cheer them up?” (...) What do you prefer? Shall we have him dance, or sing, or think, or-” (Beckett, 2006: 38-39).

This situation contributes to one of the influences that makes it possible to attain the inimitable style of Waiting for Godot: the vaudeville18. We can see an example of this kind of dialogue when Vladimir starts it with this question to Estragon: “Where are your boots?”, Estragon replies “I must have thrown them away” “Vladimir:When?” “Estragon:I don’t know” “Vladimir: Why?” “Estragon: I don’t know why I don’t know!” (Beckett, 2006:62).

But even language is corrupted by the influence by the influence of time when it comes to talking about everyday life subjects. There is sometimes confusion generated by the passing of time and some words lose their precise meaning. There is an example that can help us to see this point. Pozzo, totally blind, asks in Act II “Are you friends?”, which provokes that Estragon starts to laugh: “He wants to know if we are friends!”, and later on Vladimir mediates here and says “No, he means friends of his” (Beckett, 2006:79).

These last quotes are good examples of one of the other main sources that Beckett introduces in his plays: the music-hall\(^{19}\) cross-talk routines. These dialogues are based on two characters and each of them has a function. There is a serious man that talks with his counterpart, in this case, a funny guy. This latter makes the public enjoy and participate in some problems that are complex, and his partner, the serious man, is trying to face it with an unbreakable patience to escape from his benefit.

But which are their personalities like, exactly? As cross-talk act characters, Vladimir and Estragon have personalities that are complementary to each other. Vladimir is the practical one of the two, and Estragon says that he was a poet. Another aspect of their contrary but complementary personality is when they eat a carrot. When Estragon eats it, he finds that the more he eats of it the less he likes it, while Vladimir reacts the opposite way; he has a personality that is based on the enjoyment of the routine. Estragon is volatile, Vladimir is persistent. Estragon dreams, Vladimir is not capable of hearing about them. They both have problems related to their smell. Vladimir has stinking breath and Estragon smelly feet. Vladimir has a great memory and tends to remember past events; Estragon, on the contrary, tends to forget them as soon as they have happened. Estragon loves telling jokes, Vladimir hates hearing them. Vladimir is the voice of hope; he is always reminding Estragon that Godot is going to appear sooner or later, while Estragon is the sceptical one, he has serious doubts about that and sometimes forgets the name of Godot. Vladimir is more extrovert or shows more leadership than Estragon, because he is the one who comes closer to Godot’s messenger and speaks to him. Estragon is the weak character, because he is beaten up by mysterious people everyday, whereas Vladimir is the protector, because he helps Estragon relax when he sings a lullaby to make him sleep, and covers him with a coat. The opposition of their temperaments makes them think about falling apart, due to their endless fightings, but they also cannot live without each other, they are dependent; and they must stay together. There are parts in the play when they sound like a married couple who want to get the divorce.

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“There are times when I wonder if it wouldn’t be better for us to part” (Beckett, 2006:17), Estragon retorts. Marriage may be the closest approximation to their way of living in the real world, where a couple are united until they die, suffering a lot of disagreements but, at the same time, their love makes them dependant from each other.

Apart from that, another characteristic of the music-hall genre is with whose technique a comic gag is created. There are many examples in the play, but a few are going to be commented. For example, Vladimir and Estragon are each one related to a particular object. Vladimir is related to his hat and Estragon to his boots. Then, both say practically at the same time, shouting the same sentence, “Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!” (Beckett, 2006:12). Other kinds of repetitions: “What did we do yesterday?” (Beckett, 2006:16), uttered by both characters, one after the other does not represent any kind of humours technique; it is only a representation of their communication breakdown and the meaningless conversation they have in order to wait for Godot.

Apart from these techniques, humour is also worth noting, specifically black humour. As can be seen at the very beginning of the play, when Estragon says to Vladimir that since he is the heaviest one, he should try hanging himself from the bough first, as it is logical: “If it hangs you it’ll hang anything” (Beckett, 2006:19), he finally says showing some anger. Beckett portrays a very humiliating scene with some humour, creating a powerful and oddly humorous one. This particular sense of humour will appear in lot of parts in the text.

Another speciality in music-hall comics is the monologue. In this play, Pozzo is the one who practices this method, in his discourse on the twilight which ends with comic gloominess, “That’s how it is on this bitch of an earth” (Beckett, 2006:37), and also in Act II when he talks about life lasting an instant but in a more serious way “they give birth astride of a grave” (Beckett, 2006:83). Pozzo is not the only one with bravura passages, Vladimir has them too. For instance, we can see a comic banter which starts with “Let us not waste our time in idle discourse” (Beckett, 2006:74) and goes on to do just that. Lucky also has his discourse (Beckett, 2006:42-43), but it is a collection of nonsensical sentences, imitating Joyce’s stream of consciousness style that sometimes seek for a musical purpose.
“quaquaquaqua” (Beckett, 2006:42) or “acacacacademy” (Beckett, 2006:42). With this monologue, Lucky is presenting a key element in Beckett’s play: language as a meaningless instrument for communication because it changes through time and it is not necessary for the complete understanding of our world and existence. This monologue, although it is shown a little part of it in this essay, also plays an important role in this work as a whole:

“Lucky: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Purcher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white bread quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire…” (Beckett, 2006: 42).

This role is related with the meditation upon a world that is not governed by a divinity, but rather by a malignant fate. A fate that is based on the damnation related to the search for a meaning to our existence in order to console the absurdity of their death.

Regarding influences in Beckett’s play, we can also point out that the circus is another source of characteristic humour in Waiting for Godot. It has been linked this play with Pascal’s Thoughts (1670), and particularly with the performance of the two main characters. They were compared to the clowns of this work by Pascal. We can see this circus humour when they act. For example, as Fletcher remarks: “Certainly the totters, the pratfalls, the tumbles, Estragon’s trouser-dropping, Vladimir’s duck-waddle, Lucky’s palsy and Pozzo’s cracking of his ringmaster’s whip are all lifted straight from the repertoire of the big top” (2001:66).

Another sketch where we can see this kind of humour is the part when Estragon and Vladimir entertain the public switching the hat21 (Beckett, 2006: 67) in a very complex routine, which implies a challenge for the actors who play these roles. Again, as noted above, one of the modernist characteristics in drama is the alternance of comic passages and tragic

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21 The hats themselves are a direct tribute to the masters of silent film comedy, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, and their successors in sound movies, Stan Laurel and Oliver Handy, for each of whom their characteristic headgear was a kind of trade-mark. (Fletcher, 2001:66).
ones. Beckett does it perfectly and creates new situations that result in a fresh result to the reader.

The alternance of comic and tragic passages are created by this complementary but opposed techniques. On the one hand, there is also a sort of ping-pong dialogue makes the action faster and creates a rhythm that has a perfect timing, like the sound of the hand of a clock. This timing is related to the the play’s characteristic rhythm that reveals when this play is entertaining and witty. But on the other hand, the silence takes an important role in this play to generate the opposite feeling. It is mainly used to create an odd atmosphere in the whole play, that, sometimes, suffocates the viewer.

All of these characteristics plus the music-hall patter, circus clowning and cinema, which were considered some of the most popular entertainments at that time, are mixed with deep reflections and passages that are considered high art. This combination is very common in postmodern drama, which means that although this play is considered modernist, it has some postmodernist characteristics, such as the ironic tone, the black humour and the tendency towards creating pastiches of other genres and texts, that make it a more complex play. These postmodernist characteristics are taken from The English Literature Companion:

“Defining the literary qualities of postmodernism is notoriously difficult, but one could summarize them as an ironic tone; black humour; narrative experimentation (of varying degrees); a tendency towards creating pastiches of other genres and texts; the denial of originality; metafiction; radical historiography; paranoia” (Wolfreys, 2011: 199).

All in all, this play has a fixed structure based on repetition, the alternance between popular cultural references and entertainment and quotes from the Bible (where there is a mixture between the established-high culture and the low culture), together with the balance between elements where the aforementioned sentence by Saint Augustine22 (the two thieves) can serve us as an example of this kind of formalistic perfection.

22 Augustine, St (354-430) greatest of the early Church fathers. He brought together Patristic and Hellenistic doctrine and laid the foundation of scholasticism for the next thousand years. (Ackerley, C.J and Gontarski, S.E, 2004: 30).
3.4. Action versus inaction in *Waiting for Godot*

After these explanations about diverse themes such as existentialism, religion and the form of this play, we are going to deal with another relevant topic: do the characters want to change their situation or do they prefer to stay motionless? On the one hand, they want to stay motionless as we can witness at the end of the play: “Well, shall we go?” says Vladimir; ‘yes, let’s go (They do not move)” says Estragon (Beckett, 2006:88), but on the other hand, they think about moving and taking part in the destiny of their lives in some parts like: “Let us do something, while we have a chance!” (Beckett, 2006:74), Estragon says. At the end of the play, they finally convince themselves that they had better wait for Godot, instead of doing something to escape from their static existence. Therefore, we can find a sort of influence from the philosophical thought called *quietism*. But paradoxically, taking these ideas into account, we can make ourselves the following question: is not the act of waiting an action, static as it may be? This question, as many of other Beckett’s thoughts cannot be answered due to its metaphysical nature. Because, then, we can make another question related to this: is nothingness something? Is there a complete void? These questions are still a problem in philosophical debates, and it will still be, and, of course, Beckett do not want to answer them, he is always doubting about these questions and wants the reader to think about them.

3.5. Pozzo, Lucky and the Hegelian dialectic

Another relevant theme about *Waiting for Godot* is the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. It can be said that it can be an allegory of Hegelian dialectic, where there is a lord and a slave. Their relationship is dependant, Pozzo is always ordering Lucky but

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23 *Quietism*: a doctrine of asceticism and devotion, teaching that the chief duty of man is the contemplation of God or Christ, through independence of outward circumstances. (Ackerley, C.J and Gontarski, S.E, 2004:473).

24 Hegelian dialectic: “(...)the Hegelian process of change in which a concept or its realization passes over into and is preserved and fulfilled by its opposite(...)development through the stages of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis in accordance with the laws of dialectical materialism ....any systematic reasoning, exposition, or argument that juxtaposes opposed or contradictory ideas and usually seeks to resolve their conflict (...)the dialectical tension or opposition between two interacting forces or elements.”-Merriam-Webster (Friedrich N. and Rapana N. (2005), *What is the Hegelian dialectic?*. December 10, 2015. n/a. Website: http://www.crossroad.to/articles2/05/dialectic.htm).
although the master may appear that he has the power, it is not true. They need each other and without slave there is no master and vice versa. This argument about relating Hegelian dialectic with this idea is somehow problematic, because Beckett prefers Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Schopenhauer was very critical against Hegel: "Hegel, installed from above, by the powers that be, as the certified Great Philosopher, was a flat-headed, insipid, nauseating, illiterate charlatan, who reached the pinnacle of audacity in scribbling together and dishing up the craziest mystifying nonsense" (Cobley, B (2014). Schopenhauer on Hegel: "A flat-headed, insipid, nauseating, illiterate charlatan."). February 5, 2016. n/a. Website: http://afreeleftblog.blogspot.com.es/2014/01/a-flat-headed-insipid-nauseating.html).

Apart from that and what is more important, Beckett does not want to relate his work with any political philosophy. As we know, he opposed the Sartrean thought about the figure of the politically committed writer. One example of this discord was when Sartre rejected the Nobel Prize for political disagreements against the Swedish authority, Beckett called that act “inelegant” (Fletcher, 2001:501). Thanks to this example, we can see that there is a difference between Sartre’s existentialism and Beckett’s condition of doubt. There is another counter-argument that is important to develop: the Theatre of the Absurd is based on emotion, whereas the Hegelian philosophy is rationalist. Therefore, we can say that relating this philosophy with Pozzo and Lucky can be interesting but not very accurate in some ways. Nevertheless, this view is acceptable and can help some readers to change their mind or look for a different and interesting perspective of the text. Another tool to face the complexity of this play and see it by the political perspective that may be interesting to some of the readers.

3.6. Cinema and the Theatre of the Absurd

The silent film comedy is unquestionably one of the main influences on the Theatre of the Absurd: “It has the dreamlike strangeness of a world seen from outside with the uncomprehending eyes of one cut off from reality. It has a quality of nightmare and displays a world in constant, and wholly purposeless, movement”. (Esslin, 1961:335).
As already mentioned, there were two masters of the silent comedy cinema that influence the work of Samuel Beckett and his contemporaries: Charles Chaplin and Buster Keaton. These men show the stoicism that the human race has to adopt in order to confront this mechanic world, where sometimes, machines control humans because of their deficiencies, instead of the other way around. This can be seen in classic films such as *Modern Times* (1936) by Charles Chaplin or *The General* (1926) by Buster Keaton.

When the sound in the cinema came, it killed the tempo and fantasy of that age of comedy; but it opened another where the vaudeville tradition got some protagonism. Some of the protagonists of this new genre were Laurel and Hardy, W.C. Fields and the Marx Brothers, and they all influenced the Theatre of the Absurd.

The Marx Brothers, for example, alternated their reactions and skills as comedians with musical performance, being a kind of clowns. The Marx Brothers and Harpo, concretely, with his speechlessness and his surrealist dialogue may be a bridge between the tradition of the *commedia dell’arte* and vaudeville, and it could also represent a link with the theatre of the Absurd.

Present cinema (after the Second World War) lacks the ingenuity and spontaneity that classic films had, they are more conscious and their actors are more sophisticated. That is, the actors needed some dramatic skills, such as: diction, the use of the voice, and its tones; but, above all more realistic performances than the overacted and sometimes, improvised, silent films ones. But although, contemporary cinema is remoted to the influences of silent films, therefore to Beckett’s inspiration, there are directors such as Jacques Tati, David Lynch, José Luis Cuerda, Ingmar Bergman that have approached closely to the theatre of the Absurd and the essence of Beckett’s plays.

Tati’s *Monsieur Hulot* (1953) is a figure that lives in a heartless and mechanical civilization where language and dialogue is practically a murmur, not being a medium to communicate. The use of symbols is also very important in this film.

David Lynch has been influenced by surrealism and also by the theatre of the Absurd. We can appreciate this practically in his entire filmography, where what appears is not what it really is. An example where we can see certain influence of *Waiting for Godot* can be appreciated in his most famous series *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991). In this series, sometimes, some characters live in the Red Room, a restrained place where time and space are not like we appreciate them in our real world. The characters of these rooms are waiting for something, but we do not know what it really is, like in this play. Communication between characters do not exist, they open their mouth but say nonsensical sentences backwards.

José Luis Cuerda shows his influences related with the Theatre of the Absurd, and concretely with *Waiting for Godot*, in *Amanece que no es poco* (1989). The two main protagonists look like two peculiar Vladimir and Estragon (although they look more like Don Quixote and Sancho, because they ride in a modern horse: a motorcycle). There is also a significant scene where two of the citizens want to hang themselves, but this tragic image is transformed into a comic one, like in Estragon and Vladimir’s scene.

Ingmar Bergman is possibly the director that is more influenced by Beckett’s plays and his philosophical background. Films like *The Seventh Seal* (1957) or *Wild Strawberries* (1957) explore topics such as the condition of man, death and the absurdity. Apart from that, Bergman also uses some of Beckett’s techniques such as the permanent use of silence to create an asphyxiating atmosphere, the use of sharp and cold language by the characters and concretely the waiting for something to come. In the case of *The Seventh Seal*, they are waiting for the Black Death, it finally comes and play chess with one of them, who bets his own life in this game. This scene is considered one of the most recognisable and absurd ones in the history of cinema.
4. Conclusion

First of all, form will be considered in our conclusions. Form is a key element in the whole play, because it transmits the sensation of the absurd that Beckett wants to create. More than words, action and form are more important in this play than many other contemporary plays where the dialogues overtake action, making sometimes very rational plays where the ideology and morals of the playwright are somehow transfused to the audience.

Beckett has no intention whatsoever of providing us with pamphlets about his ideas; instead of that, they are created by the audience with the help of their own experience, because although this play has been defined, sometimes, as an incomprehensible play, it actually deals with a universal theme, where everyone can feel himself/herself identified with: the existence.

It is plain to see that this play is tragic and sometimes depressive, but it is also true that it is full of jokes and popular references where we can laugh, giving a positive meaning to the play. Although our existence is based on both laughter and mourning, but what we remember is the laughter in the end. And, in my opinion, this play has more to do with comedy than tragedy, as we laugh after having overcome a difficult part of our life.

Secondly, taking into account the philosophical idea created by Hegel, there may be another interpretation about the relationship between Pozzo and the rest of the characters. This interpretation is related to a current problem: the economic crisis. Although Beckett has not lived in this period, the majority of the economic crisis are the same since the beginning of civilizations. There are always people in power that wants to convince us that they are the solution to this problem and that we must wait for a result, for the end of our troubles, instead of finding a solution by ourselves. Sometimes, as in the current economic crisis, we lose our rights or paying for their mistakes instead of them. As we can see in this two quotes, that are going to be written next, that allow us to appreciate some relation between our current political’ discourse and the plot of the play. As Estragon said: “We’ve lost our rights” and
Vladimir replied “We got rid of them” (Beckett, 2006:20). These quotes are related with the loss of some rights in part of the middle and low classes due to our trust to Godot. They have lost them in order to wait for him, because we think he is the solution to our troubles, creating a certain parallelism between both situations. The relation between Pozzo and Lucky may be a parallelism between the status quo (people from the establishment such as politicians and the economic powers) and the rest of social classes, who must follow their orders, if they do not want to fail in their lives. Besides, there also exists a dependent relation between them, where these classes allow these social classes to exist thanks to their buying and votes.

Having said that, I think that it is more accurate the relation between the theme of waiting and the crisis. The theme of waiting is open to many different interpretations, one of them can be waiting for the crisis to end and the figure of a political saviour, independently from his/her ideology, that is going to save Spain, Europe or the entire world with s/he ideas, as he/she were a kind of white knight rescuing the princess. This figure as you can image is our particular Godot, somebody who we are waiting for but instead of that it is only an illusion that cannot allow us to move and change the situations by ourselves. Although, here is the paradox, we are actually doing something giving them our hopes, trust and work. But will it make a difference? When we finish this crisis, will there not be another one, because Godot is still the same? is not it better being our own Godots? I cannot answer all these questions, I realised that our situation does not matter, we will always wait for our Godot, sometimes it will be bad or good news but after this Godot, we will wait for another one in a cyclical way as a pastime, without an end until we die, finishing the tragicomedy of life. As a famous actor said: “comedy is tragedy plus time”, a quote that I think summarizes the spirit of the play.

5. Bibliography:


