

## الصمت في مسرحية بيكيت في انتظار جودو: وجهة نظر

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ملخص البحث. يحاول البحث أن يلقي الضوء على مضمون فلسفة الصمت التي تعبر عن الإحساس بالعزلة والوحدة والإهمال مما يؤدي بالشخصيات في مسرحية "بيكيت" (في انتظار جودو) إلى الاكتئاب كردة فعل للشك والذي هو سمة كتاب مسرح العبث والذين يعرفون الحقائق دون محاولة حل مشاكل مجتمعهم. وسيحاول هذا البحث الإجابة على الأسئلة التالية:

- ما هي فلسفة الصمت كما وردت في مسرحية بيكيت؟
- ما العلاقة بين الصمت في هذه المسرحية ووظيفة الأدب في مسرح العبث؟
- هل يوجد أدب الصمت في الإسلام؟
- ما علاقة أدب الصمت بوظيفة الأدب في الإسلام؟

وسيتم متابعة الصمت في المسرحية وإظهار الفلسفة من هذا الصمت وفلسفة معنى الحياة ووظيفة الأدب في رأي بيكيت، وستتم مقارنة هذه الفلسفة بفلسفة الصمت في الإسلام، كما سيتم تبعاً لذلك مقارنة وظيفة الأدب في مسرح العبث مع وظيفة الأدب في الإسلام.

وتأمل الباحثة أن تؤدي قراءة هذا البحث إلى إقناع القارئ المسلم وإدراكه بأن لا يعتبر كل ما يقرأه في الأدب الغربي كأمر مُسلم به، بل يحكم على الأدب الغربي من وجهة نظر إسلامية لأن ردة فعل القارئ هي التي تقوي أو تضعف العمل الأدبي، كما تأمل الباحثة أن يستفيد القراء غير المسلمين في معرفة وجهة نظر الإسلام عن معنى الحياة ووظيفة الأدب في الإسلام.

The question arises as to how could a great writer like Beckett show this conflict in his writings? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that certain questions always remain unanswered as human knowledge, being limited, cannot provide absolute answers to them. Only the revealed knowledge such as the Qur'an may speak with conviction and absolute certainty about them. Beckett was only a playwright, not a prophet, so he could not be right in all his views.

It is hoped that other works of Western literature, especially those that bear ideas that are contrary to Islamic teachings, would be looked at from this angle, namely, not prohibited or excluded but studied and discussed in the light of Islam. Only this way, one believes studying English Literature would be meaningful, useful and rewarding.

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30- Behold thy Lord said to the angels:  
"I will create a vicegerent on earth." [3, p. 24]

We also read in the same Sura:

34- And behold, We said to the angels:  
"Bow down to Adam": and they bowed down:  
Not so Iblis:- [3, p. 25]

Man in Beckett's play leads a purposeless life, whereas man in Islam has a unique position in this world. Man's great sin, according to Beckett's play, is to have been born, thus all over the play we feel this emphasis on the plight of man. The play is also full of ironic references to the crucifixion of Christ which is contrary to the truth of the cross of Christ in the Qur'an. Man in Islam has a role that is different, and even superior to other creatures. As man has the passions that might lead him to be worse than animals, he also has the sublime soul which may raise him above the angels' rank.

Man in Beckett's play knows nothing, whereas man in the Qur'an is asked to learn, seek knowledge, work hard and attempt to know Allah more and more through the examination of His signs. However, if his judgment is subjected to passion, he will be led to erroneous decisions. We read in Surat *Al-Qiyamat* (The Resurrection), Chapter 29:

5- But man wishes to do  
Wrong, (even) in the time  
in front of him

6- He questions: "When  
Is the Day of Resurrection?" [3, p. 1649]

Man in the Qur'an has free will. Thus, it is his responsibility to refrain from bad acts. Not doing so, however, will make man destined for Hell; for he thus proves to be blind and deaf, even though he has no physical defects.

To sum up, life is not vain. The creation of human beings is in itself a miracle which deserves careful study. The Qur'an is the holy Book which contains all that is required for human beings to lead a happy life in this world as well as in the hereafter.

Actually nothing is omitted from this holy Book. As Abdullah Abdull Rahman Salih puts it: "If nothing is omitted then the Qur'an has an explanation for everything and this is in fact mentioned explicitly in (16:89)-----" [1, p. 23].

It follows then that all the elements which cannot be reconciled with the Islamic point of view, principles and morals should be argued. As literature reflects the ideas and ideals of its society it should not be an exception.

The relationship between people in Beckett's play is 'at bottom cruel' [14, p. 80], whereas the relationship between people in Islam, as well as in Judaism and Christianity, depends on mutual love, communication and forgiveness. A true Muslim cares about his brother and sometimes prefers him to himself.

In his article *Al-Qura'an Wa Natharyat Al-Fun* (The Qura'an and the Theory of Art), Antar Mukhaimar quotes Hussain Ali Muhammad's ideas concerning the differences in objectives between Islamic literature and the Theater of the Absurd. Muhammad believes that Islamic perspective of art requires confirming religious belief picturing idealism, preaching for good deeds, and confirming the humanity of human beings. On the contrary, literature of the absurd is unacceptable as it accepts or adopts ideas that are contrary to Islam such as uncertainty, making fun of prophets and holy symbols, praising obscenity and following dirty passions [17].

In his book *Mafhoom Al-Masrah Al-Islami Wa Al-Masrah Al-Gharbi* (Perspective of Islamic Theater and the Western Theater), Adnan Wazzan confirms this idea, and clarifies the attitude of Islam towards art, which encourages art but under certain controlling rules. Art should encourage Muslims to think of Allah and his creation [22, pp. 4-5]

### Conclusion

In this paper, there has been a humble attempt to give an Islamic perspective of one of the most arguable plays in English literature: Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Tracing silence in this play exhibits the link between the philosophy behind silence in this play and the ideas of the Western society.

As every society aspires to bring up its members in accordance with its ideas and ideals, so does Islamic society. Islam is not mere rituals. It is actually a way of life which is laid by the Qur'an, the eternal Word of Allah. Nevertheless, Muslims may benefit from any human experience which does not contradict Islamic concepts and teachings.

According to the Islamic point of view, Beckett's play gives undue weight to reason. Reason or '*Aq'l*' in Islam is different from human speculation in Greek philosophy. As man's senses are not fit to grasp, in a direct way, the Creator of this universe, man is encouraged to meditate His signs which man's senses are capable of grasping.

On the other hand, we see Beckett's characters degenerate into the level of animals which is not acceptable in Islam as it considers man superior to other creatures including angels who were ordered to postulate themselves to Adam.

Man is thus privileged as he occupies a special position in this universe. He is considered vicegerent of Allah on earth. Thus, we read in Surat *Al-Bakara* (The Cow), Chapter 1:

On the other hand, a person who avoids telling the truth when urgently needed is called 'a dumb devil.'

To conclude, life in Islam can never be a vain, thus we are responsible for whatever we say and do. Literature is not an exception. The role of literature in Islam is to encourage good deeds, give good examples and help create a good human personality; for every word we utter or write would be counted either for or against us! And there comes the Day when all is ended but man's good deeds!

### **Comparison and Contrast**

To compare and contrast the moral value of silence in Beckett's play and silence in Islamic culture and literature, one finds that silence, from an Islamic perspective, has a direct relationship with the teachings of Islam. Beckett's silence is the silence of horror, silence in Islam is sacred and holy. In Beckett's play we find that as religion has lost its authority, therefore the characters should wait for the unknown in vain.

Beckett's view of life is due to a philosophy dominating some Western culture in a purposeless world where religion has lost its effect and authority. Beckett's play represents a comically pessimistic allegory of man's life and condition, his weakness, frustration and helplessness, as man is unwillingly tied to God. Beckett's play portrays Western philosophy about the function of art, which is contrary to the Islamic view, as it does not care to answer questions or solve problems. This view is even contrary to some Western ideas about the function of art adopted by some writers such as Shaw and Miller. Shaw, for example, believes that literature should be "so intensely and deliberately didactic" [21, p. 5] and should help in making the world "a better place", to help the new generations and hand them "the torch of life burning more brightly" [21, p. 121] Miller also believes that a good poet is the one "who is capable of profoundly altering the world", and not merely the poet who makes verses, "rhymed or unrhymed" [14, p. 76].

Islamic literature depends on the Qur'an and Hadiths which answer all the questions in people's minds and deal with spiritual as well as all the other sides of life. Beckett's play seems to 'celebrate' things as they are, not attempting to seek answers to the questions and never attempting to sustain the burden of reforming. This is so because drama is one way of writing about the existentialists' ideas in which life's vanity and the fear of death haunt the writers. Islam actually rejects the idea of art for art's sake, for the literature's role in Islam is not just to picture life as it is but to affect people. The Qur'an is full of great stories which teach lessons in life such as Mariam's (Mary) story and Yousif's (Joseph) story which not only do they picture human weaknesses in a decent way but also teaches lessons. Beckett's play considers filthy and sinful people as heroes, while Islam admits human weakness but does not consider it heroic. Reason in Islam is a gift from Allah that we have to thank Him for it by using it in every good way. As words are the tool of literature they have to be meaningful and convey moralistic messages.

63- And the servants of (God)  
Most gracious are those  
Who walk on the earth  
in humility, and when the ignorant  
Address them, they say "peace!"; [3, p. 941]

As for literature (poetry), poets are praised only when they do righteous deeds, remember Allah (God) much and vindicate themselves after they have been wronged by replying back in poetry to the unjust poetry. Thus, we read in Surat *Al-Shu'araa* (The Poets), Chapter 19:

224- And the Poets,-  
It is those straying in Evil,  
Who follow them:

225- Seest thou not that they  
Wander distracted in every  
Valley?-  
and that they say  
What they practice not?-

227- Except those who believe,  
Work righteousness, engage much  
in the remembrance of God,  
and defend themselves only after  
They are unjustly attacked.  
and soon will the unjust  
Assailants know what vicissitudes  
Their affairs will take! [3, pp. 973-4]

As for the prophetic tradition (Hadith), there are many Hadiths that teach Muslims when to talk and when to be silent. In his Book *ketab Al-samt Wa A'dab Al-lisan* (The Book of Silence and Manners of the Tongue), Abu Issac Al-Hwaini Al-Athari has investigated more than one hundred Hadiths which consider Muslims responsible for their talk as well as for their silence. Thus, one should talk when one feels that his speech would benefit people, his speech is necessary, his speech is true and not a lie and his speech would defend people justly against any backbiting or suspicion [2].

The best talk is, of course, reciting the Qur'an and prayers besides seeking knowledge. However, Muslims should avoid obscene talk, talk that does not concern them, scandalizing or backbiting, mentioning others' defects, praising bad deeds, making fun of others, conceiving and revealing others' secrets [2].

In Arabic literature, there are many good sayings and proverbs which praise silence, for example:

Silence is wisdom, very few do it  
Say good things or be silent.

17- Behold, two (guardian angels)  
 Appointed to learn (his doings)  
 Learn (and note them),  
 One sitting on the right  
 and one on the left.

18-Not a word does he  
 Utter but there is  
 a sentinel by him,  
 Ready to (note it)  
 [3, pp. 1412-13]

In Surat *Al'asr* (The Time), Chapter 30, Allah swears by the token of time through the ages, that:

2- Verily man is in loss,  
 3- Except such as have Faith,  
 and do righteous deeds,  
 and (join together).  
 In the mutual teaching  
 of Truth, and of  
 Patience and Constancy [3, p. 1783]

At the same time, in Surat *Al-Humaza* (The Scandal-Monger), Chapter 30, Allah warns us from backbiting each other:

1- Woe to every  
 (kind of) scandal- Monger  
 and backbiter, [3, p. 1789]

In Surat *Al-Hujarat* (The Inner Apartments), Chapter 26, Allah likens those who backbite each other to those who eat the flesh of the dead. Many teachings concerning the relationship among Muslims are mentioned in this Sura:

12- Ye who believe!  
 Avoid suspicion as much  
 (as possible): for suspicion  
 in some cases is a sin:  
 and spy not on each other,  
 nor speak ill of each other  
 Behind their backs. Would any  
 of you like to eat  
 the flesh of his dead  
 Brother? Nay, ye would  
 Abhor it... But fear God:  
 for God is Oft -Returning,  
 Most Merciful. [3, p. 1406]

In the Qur'an, Muslims are even encouraged to reply back with mild words, as stated in Surat *Al-Furqan* (The Criterion), Chapter 19, where Allah says:

In the same Surat, the silence of Mariam (Mary) was mentioned as such:

10- So eat and drink  
and cool (thine) eye  
and if thou doest see  
any man, say, I have  
Vowed a fast to (God)  
Most gracious, and this day  
Wilt I enter into no talk  
with any human being [3, p. 769]

Words in the Islamic culture are the tool, means and methods of any literary work, therefore, they have to be good. Thus, in Surat *Ibrahim* (Abraham), Chapter 13, Allah likens a good word to a good tree whose "root is firmly fixed", while an evil word is like an evil tree "which is torn up by the root from the surface of the earth", and which has "no stability" [3, pp. 626-7]

There are many other verses in the Qur'an which praise Muslims who prefer to be silent, or talk only when necessary and avoid vain talk, we read in Surat *Al-Mu-minun* (The Believers), Chapter 18:

- 1- The believers must  
(Eventually) win through,-
- 2- Those who humble themselves  
In their prayers;
- 3- Who avoid vain talk;

Those believers will be the heirs of paradise where they will dwell for ever [3, pp. 874-5].

As Allah praises those believers who avoid nonsense talk and turn away from evil, falsehood and all that Allah has forbidden, He also praises believers who order others to do good things, thus, we read in Surat *Al-Nisaa* (The Women), Chapter 4:

114- In most of their secret talks  
There is no good: but if  
One exhorts to a deed  
of charity or justice  
or conciliation between men,  
(Secrecy is permissible):  
to him who does this,  
seeking the good pleasure  
of God, We shall soon give  
a reward of the highest (value) [3, p. 216]

Every single word whether good or evil will be recorded by the Angels and we will be either rewarded or punished for saying it. Thus, as is stated in Surat *Qaf*, Chapter 26, we read:



One can conclude that the general condition of the universe, as Beckett conceives it, is full of sorrow. Man is so forced to face this world that he can no longer rely on his existence. He passes the time waiting for something that he is not sure of, nevertheless, he feels compelled to wait.

Religion in Beckett's play brings no fulfillment, it is the loss of faith in God which echoes the sound of universal silence in the face of reality. This new attitude in literature represents part of Western philosophy of the function of art which, according to this philosophy, does not make a statement but induce responses. Questions are not answered, they are open to many philosophical answers. It is the experience which counts.

Although *Waiting for Godot* is a play which does not negate hope for a fresh start, yet, this kind of literature would not help create a new human personality. The answer to all the questions that are in human beings' minds and the hope for a fresh start can be found, one believes, in the teachings of Islam.

### Silence and the Role of Literature in Islam

Is there any thing such as the literature of silence in Islamic art and morals? The reader might wonder that silence is mentioned in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* either directly or indirectly, but it is the silence of saints, monks and sincere worshippers and not the 'demonic' silence that we see in Beckett's plays. In the *Qur'an*, for example, there is the holy silence of the Spirit and the angels on the Day of Judgment and 'Sure Reality'. In Surat *Al-Nabaa* (The Great News), Chapter 30, we read:

38- The Day that  
The Spirit and the angels  
Will stand forth in ranks,  
None shall speak  
Except any who is  
Permitted by (God) Most Gracious,  
And he will say  
What is right. [3, p. 1677]

The silence of prophet Zakaria and Mariam, Christ's Mother, peace be upon them, is stated in Surat *Mariam* (Mary), Chapter 16:

(Zakarya) said: "O my Lord!  
Give me a sign."  
"Thy sign", was the answer,  
Shalt be that thou  
Shalt speak to no man  
For three nights  
Although thou art not dumb [3, p. 769]

Beckett's view is eventually comic, he sees man "smaller and more grotesque than life" [14, p. 162]. Starting with the undeniable fact of the suffering of human beings, Beckett concludes that: "Not all is right with the world and asks what kind of God has created it or even permitted it" [16]. Beckett actually goes further in concluding that God is if not all "powerful at least all stupid which for the purpose of domination is perhaps even better, and infinitely malicious" [16]. It is this terrible idea that is dominant in the play and that leads the characters to the waiting for Godot or 'God' who is fooling them.

In his search for the truth, it seems that Beckett has never reached a reconciliation with the world. Lamenting the wretchedness of man's lot, Beckett makes his characters talk only for fear of the annihilation silence would bring. They search for meaning but their search is doomed to failure because they are not sure what they are searching for. This might explain the dropping of question marks and turning the questions into mere statements rarely requiring answers.

On the other hand, the characters are silent when they wish to escape from facing the reality of man's anguish and suffering in this miserable world as Beckett conceives it. The sort of silence in the play is almost echoed in every act as a reflection of the "difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to changes" [20]. Language has become void "therefore words can only demonstrate their emptiness" [13, 58].

All the elements of the play contribute in the reinforcement of the idea that human wishes are all vain. Is this the theme of the play? It seems hard sometimes to decide, for Beckett does not confront us with any rational ideas as he wishes to communicate a sense of man's facing the void, and we live through this threat of the void during the performance of the play. Yet, one can detect that the vanity of life and the impossibility of ever attaining certainty are surely some of the major themes of the play.

The miserable relationship between the characters is a reflection of Beckett's horrible philosophy of the real brotherhood of man which, for Beckett, lies in his grief and loneliness—in the age of distress—we are all alone, Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo, so different in appearance yet so similar in spiritual condition, within the mind. For mind, in Beckett's world, is "universal, impersonal and timeless" [8, p. 44].

To sum up, silence expresses the loss of voice in suffering, and it seems that Beckett has chosen to adopt silence to show how voice seems caught in this process of clear disappearance. Thus, Vladimir and Estragon try to escape hearing the murmuring voices of the past, the voices that explore the mysteries of being and the self to the limits of anguish and suffering. The long silence that follows their evocation is broken by Vladimir, in anguish, with the cry "say any thing at all", after which the two relapse into their waiting for Godot.

It seems that whenever Vladimir attempts a religious discussion, he is thwarted by Estragon's defective and superficial recollection of the Bible, until at last there is only silence. Their conversations usually end by Vladimir's plea 'say something' and Estragon's reaction which is suffered by 'a long silence', is the futile cry, 'I'm trying'.

When the characters become frustrated, they also lapse into silence. Vladimir's attempts to grope for meaning and his failure to see any meaning in this absurd world are reduced to incoherence and finally, silence, by his partner Estragon [5, pp. 8-11]. When the characters are frightened by the shouts they hear, they do nothing but also settle down in silence [5, pp. 19-20]. Typical of much of the purposeless dialogue in the play is Lucky's long speech which begins with a solid core of meaning, but degenerates into more noises and finally silence [5, pp. 42-45].

When the past comes to Vladimir and Estragon as 'dead voices' which, being disquieting, and reminds them of their plight and spiritual impoverishment, they either engage themselves in endless talking to avoid hearing the voices or again lapse into silence:

Vladimir: Rather they whisper.

Estragon: They rustle.

Vladimir: They murmur.

Estragon: They rustle.

Silence.

Vladimir: They make a noise like feathers.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Vladimir: Like ashes.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Long silence [5, p. 63]

As this passage has a brooding melancholy tone, emphasized by the comparison of the sound of the voices with the falling of leaves and ashes, both of which are images of deadness, it is entirely fitting that this passage is followed by five momentary silences. This melancholy is asserted again and again in the play as when the two partners emphasize, unconvincingly, that they are happy to be together again:

Vladimir: Say, I am happy.

Estragon: I am happy.

Vladimir: So am I.

Estragon: So am I.

Vladimir: We are happy.

Estragon: We are happy. (Silence) [5, p. 60].

Hassan quotes Pronko's view that claims that "Beckett's view of life is basically a religious one: It is the view of a man who seeks some meaning beyond the trivial happenings of everyday life, a purpose beyond the physical needs of specific time and place" [14, p. 80]. Hassan also quotes Cage's belief that silence in Beckett's plays has "something in common with the silence of holy men, who after knowing pain and outrage, reach for peace beyond human understanding", but Hassan sees silence in Beckett's plays as 'demonic'. He, for example, wonders "how then can men of good will discern value in the silence which the new literature whispers into our inner ear" [14, p. 82].

The relationships between Beckett's characters are based on mutual need: Vladimir and Estragon need someone to break the monotony of their waiting; on the other hand Pozzo needs an audience. Pozzo needs Lucky's services and Lucky needs a master to guide him. The continuous fight between the characters leads to the suggestion that they should part, but they don't, for having complementary natures they are dependent on each other.

The play lacks action; everything in the play continues as in the past. Even the arrival of Pozzo and Lucky which can be considered as the only action in the play comes to nothing and there is no conflict and no conclusion.

### ***The Philosophy behind Silence in *Waiting for Godot****

It might well be known that silence in ordinary everyday communication is, sometimes, alarming and dangerous. The first act to establish links of fellowship is the communion of words, the breaking of silence. Human beings need to talk in order "to get over the strange and unpleasant tension which men feel when facing each other in silence" [11, p. 22]. Therefore, silence in the play is intended to bring not only the feeling of horror, but to create also the feeling of pain of being itself.

When we trace silence in the play, we find that it has been repeated by almost all the characters for more than one hundred times. The words of the play are invaded by 'silence' or 'long silence', and the movements of the characters are punctuated by stillness. Thus, in Act I, for example, the meaningful conversation degenerates into incoherence and finally silence:

Vladimir: Did you read the Bible.

Estragon: The Bible.. (he reflects) I must have taken a look at it.

Vladimir: Do you remember the Gospels.

Estragon: I remember the maps of the holy land. Colored they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look at it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go. I used to say, that's where we'll be happy.

Vladimir: You should have been a poet.

Estragon: I was (gestures towards his rags) isn't that obvious. Silence [5, p. 12].

themselves, they do this only in monstrous monologues. When the characters speak, Beckett reduces language to its minimum, to void, silence and sometimes to absolute zero. Both sound and silence are organized "without reference to the normal patterns of everyday life" [18, p. 77], but this might be intended as to generate "palpable tension in the spectator" [8, p. 47].

### The Play

*Waiting for Godot* (1952) is Beckett's best known play in which very little seems to happen: two men are seen waiting for someone who never comes. The play expresses "the spiritual loneliness of life in a skeptical post religious age" [15, p. 189]. The play was received by mixed reactions in the beginning but then it gained "a distinguished supporters" [8, p. 42].

The play is of two acts of unequal length, the setting in both acts is the same; night falls at the close of each act. Suddenly, a boy descends bringing a message from Mr. Godot. The message is the same in both acts: Godot will not come this evening but 'surely tomorrow'. Yet, Act II is a development and not a simple repetition of Act I as it might appear at first reading, for even though everything in Act I can be shown to have its echo or parallel somewhere in Act II, the tone of each act is different. Even punctuations are modified at the end of Act II (Well, shall we go?). As Beryl and Fletcher are convinced; even if there is a lack of development, this is to insist on the play being always present, now. "The tree", they continue, "has been there all the time, as constant, enduring and meaningless as Estragon and Vladimir themselves" [8, p. 51]. Act II is actually sadder than Act I, yet, it lacks any 'tragic finality'. This might explain why Beckett considered the play a tragicomedy rather than a tragedy.

The play relies for its structure on "the return of the leitmotifs that weave in and out through the work." Thus, "the phrase 'we're waiting for Godot', recurs in different guises a dozen times. But there are other phrases like 'nothing to be done'" [8, p. 47]

*Waiting for Godot*, as most of Beckett's plays, has baffled critics who were concerned with their themes as well as their language. For while some critics like Coe see Beckett's plays 'boring', saying nothing and the language is either 'earthy and realistic' or 'mysterious and disturbing' [8, p. 51], others like its first British director found the play so exciting "in its ability to make dramatic use of boredom to create tension" [8, p. 49].

Brater, on the other hand, considers Beckett's dramatic style as representative of "the theater of our time". Brater then adds "for Beckett does not come from nowhere..... He is very much a writer of his time, shaped by the forces of his time to speak to the new audience of his time" [9, p. 9].

plays ally themselves increasingly with death, for Beckett is haunted by the circle of eternity and "suffers under the thought of eternal recurrence" [12, p. 110]. His universe is haunted by "a circular concept of infinity" emptied of any religious content which makes him unable to "overcome the dread of an infinity of time and suffering" [12, pp. 122-123]. In this "Cartesian nightmare, Beckett leaves only one thing intact: the capacity of human consciousness to reflect upon itself and entertain its own end" [14, p. 80].

As writing for Beckett is only "absurd play", he never attempts to solve problems or reform; his writings 'celebrate' things as they are believing that he is "under no obligation to come at the end of the play and explain the meaning—" [18, p. 79]. Fletcher and Spurling note "Beckett excels in laying bare both the nature of life without any real hope of improvement or change, and the subterfuge we adopt to conceal from ourselves the worst facts of our condition" [13, p. 58].

The theme of Beckett's plays offers no explanation as to what the play is about. Such reaction is probably just what Beckett intended. However, one gets the impression of what the play is in 'a broader sense' and can then be near to appreciating it [18, p. 78].

It seems also that Beckett moved further and further away from the conventional theater in order to convey with the minimum of speech and action, man's failure to communicate and control his destiny. The language of his plays seems to only resemble real speech. In a world where man seems to have no place, Beckett has also abandoned conventional structure and development in both plot and dialogue in order to present a dramatic vision of man's unchangeable predicament.

The setting may be detailed and domestic and the speech appears in everyday speech, but when one thinks that there will be a problem that can be resolved, one will be really frustrated. The speeches' pattern and cliché have "uncanny resemblance to real speech" and actually "a greater reality in its seemingly disorganized and pointless qualities" [18, p. 78].

Beckett has successfully conveyed the sense of order and loss of faith in God through reversing some of the processes of the traditional forms. The lack of plot, structure or information about the characters can prevent us from making sense of what we see or read. Yet, as Pickering notes, this should not frustrate us, for the playwright has "calculatingly played upon this fact" [18, pp. 78-9].

Beckett's characters are introduced to us as human beings in different states of decay. In *Waiting for Godot*, for example, the characters are half tramps, half clowns. They are distinct, yet, occasionally they drop their individuality and speak in 'an impersonal voice' [8, p. 43]. This is so because, for Beckett, human beings are all the same, sharing the same grief, loneliness and spiritual conditions exactly like Estragon, Vladimir and Pozzo [8]. Characters in Beckett's plays say nothing and go nowhere. Even when the characters speak, their words are absurdities, and if they have to express

rational schemes, therefore, his attempts to impose any rational forms upon the world are also absurd.

The general features of this literature can be seen in the sense of man's alienation and the cruelty of his existence. The futility of conventional objectives and of man's struggle beside the strong vein of fantasy are also some of the features of this kind of literature.

This is so because the literature of the absurd, basically, reflects some ideas of Western society and others alike. As George Bernard Shaw witnesses: "The insecurity which operates beneath the surface of Western life is due to practicing Christianity which is really far from the teachings of Christ" [21, p. 121].

The language of this kind of literature is obscene in an attempt to revolt against all that is traditional as to be notified in Ihab Hassan's words: "A crazy shifting pattern of meaning disguised as nonsense, a quizzical statement on the absurd persistence of man" [14, p. 175].

To express the human sterility of modern values, playwrights of the absurd usually use 'a barren setting' or they emphasize on 'inanimate material objects'. "The tone of the plays may range from the broadly comic aspect of the absurd to the unsettling, the grotesque, or even the terrible" [6, p. 4]. But the most important aspect of absurd drama might be "its distrust of language as a means of communication" [20].

Beside the devaluation of language, the plays in the Theater of the Absurd are "conceived as something which the audience must experience even though they may not be able to offer a logical explanation of the details of that experience" [18, p. 77].

### **Beckett's Philosophy**

Beckett's works present "a comically pessimistic allegory of man's condition—often the traditionally farcical gestures of the circus clown and the vaudeville actor are used to portray human weakness, frustration and helplessness" [6, p. 88]. Beckett attempts to create a kind of reality by using a series of images which help in presenting a particular view of the world as he conceives it. If one reflects on the absurdity of some aspects of modern Western life, one may consider how Beckett has successfully conveyed this sense of lack of order and loss of faith in God: Fear, guilt, aggression, insecurity and fanaticism are all elements that operate beneath the surface of Western life. However, these images "may remain imprecise," [18, p. 79] as Berlin notes Beckett's works are full of "contradictions receptive to a dramatic world based on 'perhaps'" [7, p. 52].

Even though Beckett's works have some comedy in them, this comedy is dark; for Beckett is "a comedian of our darkest hope", who "shrinks literature to naught" and "alters the function of words within any given literary form" [14, pp. 80-81]. Beckett's

It seems also that Beckett moved further and further away from the conventional theater in order to convey with the minimum of speech and action, man's failure to communicate and control his destiny. In a world where man seems to have no place, Beckett has abandoned conventional structure and development in both plot and dialogue in order to present a dramatic vision of man's unchangeable predicament.

Unfortunately, some Muslim famous writers such as Najeeb Mahfouz and Salah Abdul Saboor have been affected by ideas of the existentialism and Theater of the Absurd. In some of their works they present ideas which are far from the teachings of Islam. Fear from death, search for the unknown, absurdity of life and unjust fate are all found in the works of these famous Muslim writers who attempted to separate literature from Islam imitating Western absurd writers and forgetting that the ideas of those writers reflect Western moral code, religious views and ethical mood [4]. Therefore, this paper attempts to discuss one of Beckett's plays in order to confirm the idea that ideas in some of the English or Western literary works should not be taken for granted. Muslim readers should be encouraged to comment on Western works which bear negative or immoral views which are contrary to Islamic belief and views. Such works, however, should not be prohibited but discussed in the light of our own ideas as Muslims; for if Western society is adopting such ideas and philosophies, it is our duty as Muslim readers and writers to clarify our point of view towards these ideas to the whole world.

Thus, it is not the purpose of this paper to weaken or trivialize such works as Beckett's plays. Rather, it attempts to clarify the philosophy of the vanity of human beings which is reinforced in Beckett's works, and to evaluate this philosophy in the light of Islam.

### **The Problem**

The sense of exile isolation and negligence which governs most of Beckett's plays, and leads his characters to melancholy and depression, is due to a particular philosophy of uncertainty accepted by the writers of drama of the Theater of the Absurd who lay bare the truth of Western society without attempting to suggest any solutions to their society's problems.

### **Drama in the Theater of the Absurd**

The literature of the absurd shocked its way to widespread recognition in France with the novels and plays of Samuel Beckett. This kind of literature usually refers to those works which "deliberately violate or distort conventions of the novel or the theater, grimly making them ridiculous in an attempt to show the absurdity of the human lives they represent" [6, p. 4]. The real dilemma in this form of literature is the problem of being itself; the problem of the nature of man and his position in this universe. The world in this form of literature is static, void of any dynamic motion. Man is denied any



One type of this recent literature is presented through 'the Theater of the Absurd', which had its origins in the 1950s, and which presents particular difficulties for the readers because the plays are "both inaccessible on the page and frequently baffling on the stage" [18, p. 77].

The first thing to grasp in these plays is that they work by presenting a series of images in the theater, no logical explanation of the details can be conceived by the audience. What all these plays share is "the decree of silence as the human tongue seems speechless in 'fright and ecstasy'" [14, p. 75].

Believing that art has value as it declares itself to have a public appeal, it would be dangerous if this art does not have a moralistic purpose. This paper attempts to shed light on one of Beckett's plays; namely, *Waiting for Godot* to show the philosophy behind silence in this play. This play has been chosen for many reasons: first, it is the most famous and most mature of all Beckett's works. Secondly, the play is considered one of the masterpieces of the Theater of the Absurd. Thirdly, the play stands as a mirror of the contemporary imagination and expresses the uncertainty and loss of faith in the modern Western society. Moreover, this play is taught in the English Departments at some Saudi's universities and colleges.

Studying English Literature by Muslims, one believes, should not be 'a luxury' as we are people of a holy message that should be conveyed to the whole world. As literature reflects the ideas of its people, therefore, an Islamic perspective is necessary especially when the work at hand reflects ideas that are contradictory to our Islamic teachings.

In one point of view, literature has been distorted by dramatists like Beckett, who saw life as a mere 'nightmare'. Beckett is a playwright who is associated with the Theater of the Absurd and who does not believe that literature should be didactic and moralistic. He has never claimed to be a didactic writer "concerned to give a message in dramatic form" [13, p. 68]. Beckett just wanted to glimpse the wordless reality of this cruel world as he conceives it without giving any solutions to its problems. This is so because in the Theater of the Absurd, writers believed that their intention is not to solve problems but to show the reality of life as it is, or actually as is conceived by them, for as Cage puts it:

"Our intention is to affirm this life, not to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one's desires out of its way and lets intact of its own accord." [14, p. 78]

However, one would agree with Shaw's point of view that great art should be 'didactic' [19, p. 5]. Beckett's plays are a mere "meditation upon a world governed by no other divinity than some sort of malignant fate; a world in which man waits and hopes for something to give value to his life and distract him from the absurdity of death" [13, p. 68].

## **Silence in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: An Islamic Perspective**

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**Abstract.** The sense of exile, isolation and negligence, which governs most of Beckett's plays, and leads his characters to melancholy and depression, is due to a particular philosophy of uncertainty accepted by the writers of 'the Theater of the Absurd' who lay bare the truth of the western society without attempting to suggest any solutions to their society's problems.

This paper attempts to shed light on this philosophy as shown in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* by attempting to answer the following questions:

- What is the philosophy behind silence in Beckett's play?
- What is the relation between silence in the play and the role of literature in 'the Theater of the Absurd'?
- Is there any thing like literature of silence in Islam?
- How is this silence related to the role of literature in Islam?

This would be achieved by tracing silence in the play and showing the philosophy behind this silence, the meaning of life and the role of literature in Beckett's point of view. A comparison and contrast of the philosophy behind silence in Beckett's play and the philosophy of silence in Islam would be asserted. Consequently, the role of literature as shown in Beckett's play and the role of literature in Islam would also be compared and contrasted.

It is hoped that this study would lead Muslim students to be aware of the fact that reading and enjoying English literature should not lead us to take whatever we read for granted. Muslim readers, it is hoped, would, thus, be encouraged to discuss and judge what they read in the light of Islam. Muslim readers, one believes, should not be intimidated to express their own points of view, for it is our reaction as readers that counts, our sympathy might strengthen or weaken a work, our duty is to find whether the authors' accounts are credible or incredible, their opinions wise or foolish, their judgments just or unjust. As for non-Muslim readers, it is hoped that this paper would give a clear vision of the meaning of life, and the role of literature in Islam.

### **Introduction**

The "Literature of Silence" seems unduly naive to any Muslim reader as the Western society seems to lose "the confident sense of direction," knowing not which way is forward. The future in this kind of literature seems all "disaster for all who profess this Word", and if there is any hope, it is in suicide [14, p. 74].