

Title:

Absurdity of Absurd: Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Go dot);

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Summary:

What does 'Absurd' mean ?When I searched the glossaries ,I found the word to be 'out of harmony' (1).But yet the definitions trying hard to explain the term , just to end in total 'Absurdity' (assuming for a while that we know the meaning of the word),as they talk in total sense, the nonsense about it and of course that means they fail(in their attempt).But considering the term to be linked with literature (and other forms of art too!),when I searched for more I came across the lines that states

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Article Body:

What does 'Absurd' mean ?When I searched the glossaries ,I found the word to be 'out of harmony' (1).But yet the definitions trying hard to explain the term , just to end in total 'Absurdity' (assuming for a while that we know the meaning of the word),as they talk in total sense, the nonsense about it and of course that means they fail(in their attempt).But considering the term to be linked with literature (and other forms of art too!),when I searched for more I came across the lines that states that no 'literary criticism' [in which I include the attempts to explain the literary terms] can take the literary work itself ,or to be more specific '...it [literary criticism]is no substitute for reading the work itself' (2),as it [the piece of work]is the most exactly and precisely ,the thought conveyed or explained. So, I reached the idea that to understand 'absurd' .I must view an absurd work by an artist, rather than poring over the talks about it. Hence as a literary student what first came to my mind at this instant is none, but WAITING FOR GODOT by Samuel Beckett, the so called absurd play structured around 'Go dot', the axis all absurdity[as till the date none could declare with confidence 'who' or 'what' Go dot is !]

What I found in the dustbin of my memories about this go dot is:

"On 19 Nov 1957, a group of worried actors were preparing to face their audience . The actors were members of the company of the San Francisco Actors' Workshop . The audience consisted of fourteen hundred convicts at the San Quentin penitentiary . No live play had been performed at San Quentin since Sarah

Bernhardt appeared there in 1913 .Now ,forty four years later ,the play that had been chosen ,largely because no woman appeared in it , was Samuel Beckett's 'WAITING FOR GODOT' (3). ..."Beckett real triumph ,...came when 'WAITING FOR GODOT' which appeared in book form in 1952,was first produced on 5 January 1953 , at the little Theatre de Babylone (now defunct),...'(4)
And I found also some lines of this play:

"...
ESTRAGON:Didi.
VLADIMIR:Yes.
ESTRAGON:I can't go on like this.
VLADIMIR: That's what you think.
ESTRAGON:If we parted?That might be better of us .
VLADIMIR:We'll hang ourselves tomorrow.(Pause)Unless Go dot comes.
ESTRAGON:And if comes?
VLADIMIR:We'll be saved
..."(5)

It is said about Beckett that when he was asked that what he meant by Go dot he answered "If I knew ,I would have said so in the play"(6). 'WAITING FOR GODOT' does not tell a story ;it explores a static situation '(7).So it is clear from the very beginning that Beckett tried to create a 'character' without a character' as he himself doesn't know him [Go dot], and again the movement of plot tends to zero ,i.e. there is absolutely no plot . Previously it was taken for granted that if there exists a literary piece then there must be either a story(or plot) to tellor any character to be represented .But did exactly opposite to revolutionize his concept .He presents a 'character' whom he himself does not know and tell a plot which is nothing but variations in arrangements and sequences of few events with negligible movement or action : 'nothing happens , nobody comes nobody goes ...' (8).

But can be the term 'Absurd' assigned to merely these qualities of the play? No, there are still more as mentioned by critics .In an essay on Kalfka ,Ionesco defined his understanding of the term as ' Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose...' (9).And the purposeless becomes evident when ' the more things change , the more they are the same '(10).And this is done by creating uncommon situations in the play by Breckett . For instance the boy who carries message of Go dot to Estragon and Vladimir fails to recognize them on each day of his reappearance ."The French version explicitly states that the boy who appears in the second act is the same boy as the one in the first act , yet the boy denies that he has even seen the two tramps before , and insists that this is the first time he has acted as Go dot's messenger'(11).And this is done while 'waiting' which is interpreted by Martin Esslin as 'Waiting is to experience the action of time , which is constant change . And yet , as nothing real ever happens , the change is itself an illusion .The ceaseless activity of time is a self defeating purposeless...' (12).

And thus by this purposelessness Beckett tries to prove the absurdity of his play .But is this really absurd ? If we view it from some different point of views we can suddenly find something contradicting . It is because we know the fact that ' truth is never real' ,and what we define for a situation becomes a truth for us , for that moment . So is the case of abnormality or normality of a situation . When any action is most common that becomes ' normal ' for us and this is the very base of our understanding .We understand what is most common and general .We understand something uncommon by referring it to some common things or actions we understand .So our very base of understanding is based upon some general truth or common events ,the state which we call normal .Now when we something out of order in a play (e.g. WAITIG FOR GODOT) ,we interpret it in terms of those ' commons' of our memory .But on this view we analyze , can uncommon or absurdity be perceived by us directly without any aid or reference to our definition of 'normality' ? It is similar to what Rene' Wellek tried to explain in his essay 'ATTACK ON LITERATURE' by citing an example of Samuel Beckett's ENDGAME .Becket has portrayed a character in END GAME who was ' looking for the voice of his silence '(13).'The artist's dissatisfaction with language can only be expressed by language .Pause may be a device to express the inexpressible ,but pause can't be prolonged indefinitely ,cann't be simply silence as such . It needs contrast , it needs a beginning and an end..' (14). This statement suggests the importance of contrast and this is as true in case of absurdity and non-absurdity as it is true in the case of silence and music . In this light we can reach decision that there is no sense of absurdity without the normality . But how this is true in case of Go dot can be analyzed as follows :

Beckett tries hard to achieve absurdity by doing through his characters , the abnormal things (or at least normal things in abnormal sequence) , still there remains the elements of non-absurdity in every corner of the play . The boy who doesn't recognize the two tramps bring message from the same Go dot (It never happens ever that Go dot brings a message from the boy ;or the tramps bring message from the boy to go dot ;or tramps speak out the message that the boy brings from the Go dot for them ;or Go dot never receives message from tramps and so many can be the absurd case).It was only one angle of interpretation of the situation .Other interpretations can be many in numbers :Go dot waits for tramps ;or tramps don't wait for Go dot while they say they waited. etc. etc. When I mean to say is that whatever action is done in the play has therefore the elements of non-absurdity .We could have recognized them if what we call absurdity would be the most normal and what we now feel normal would have been absurd .In fact we can't express absurdity itself and this is the deceiving nature of 'Absurdity' , because the moment we speak out something it becomes a little different from what we originally meant to express . 'Words , the medium of fiction ,are a fabrication of man's intellect .They are a part of human lie '(14).And for this reason any literature needs that medium to be expressed ,

that becomes deceptive .So Roland Barthes of France says therefore that 'Literature is a system of deceptive signification...emphatically signifying ,but never finally signified '(16).

Therefore whatever actions Beckett tried to fabricated in to the play , stands till today between in the limits of absurd and non-absurd and how this action is nearer to any of these two limits depends on what words are used and how they are used to define the limits .

That's why the play '..of the supposedly esoteric avant-grade make so immediate and so deep an impact on an audience of convicts...' (17),where as the critics could not easily accepted the play as an art in the beginning .

Martin Esslin writes : ' because it confronted them [the prisoners] with a situation in some ways analogous to their own ? Perhaps . Or perhaps because they were un sophisticated enough to come to the theater without any preconceived notions and readymade expectations ,so that they avoided the mistake that trapped so many established critics who condemned the play for its lack of plot ,development , characterizations , suspense or plain common sense '(18).And of course this is what we see as the attempt to define absurd with non-absurd .Similarly many other attempts have been made in the past and present to create uncommon out of common .For example the Dadaist Movement . 'Attempts have been made not only to widen the realm of art ,but to abolish the boundary between the art and the non-art . In music , noises of machines or the streets are used ; in painting, collage uses stuck-on news papers , buttons , medals and so on , or 'found objects' -soup cans , bicycle wheels , electric bulbs , any piece of junks—are exhibited . the newest fad is 'earth works' , holes or trenches in the ground , tracks through a corn field , square sheets of leads in snow . A 'sculptor' , Christo wrapped a million square feet of Australian coastline in plastic . At 1972 Bicennale in Venice , a painter ,Gino de Dominicis , exhibited a mongoloid picked up from the streets as a work of art .In poetry poems have been concocted by the Dadaists by drawing news paper clippings from a bag at random ; more recently poems have been produced by computer and a shuffle novel (by Marc Saporta) has appeared , in which every page can be replaced by another in any order ...' (18).

Similarly we can cite the example of Pop-Culture now so popular by the young generations ,which was once considered as absurd .So what conclusion we reached can be seen in the light of that contrast theory of silence and music told in this essay in the beginning , that whatever we want to express (may it be 'Silence' or 'Absurdity') we need words to express . But 'a word can never be a thing '(20).So we can either achieve a situation or express it , but we cannot do both because , if we try to do , the situation won't be the same .This is what we can imply when we speak of absurdity ; i.e. we can't be totally absurd in expression as there is no proper medium exists .

By concluding this I think I have reached at the ' right place at the right time' , because if I am right then I will reach the right thing , but if I reach

the wrong (as I will get non-sense)that will be rather a right thing due to our context . My attempt of criticism , ' is an attempt to make us more reasonable'