

Endlessly Waiting, Endlessly Becoming: Time, Subjectivity, And The Deconstruction Of Narrative Progression In Beckett's Absurdism

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This paper offers a philosophical and dramaturgical analysis of the temporal structures and existential themes in Samuel Beckett's absurdist theatre. Focusing on the key motifs of "waiting" and "becoming," it explores how Beckett challenges traditional ideas of linear narrative and character development to create a theatre of temporal suspension and ontological uncertainty. Through close readings of important works such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Krapp's Last Tape*, the study demonstrates that the repetition of waiting functions not as a transitional phase but as a state of ongoing delay, a lived experience of time without a telos. Drawing on phenomenological philosophy (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty), existential thought (Sartre, Camus), and poststructuralist theory (Blanchot, Deleuze), the paper argues that Beckett's dramaturgy deconstructs narrative logic by dislocating temporality, fragmenting subjectivity, and emphasising a poetics of becoming without resolution. In Beckett's universe, waiting signifies endurance rather than anticipation; becoming signifies unravelling rather than reaching a destination. Ultimately, the paper contends that Beckett's theatre constructs a philosophical space where temporality is no longer a tool for progress but a domain of existential stasis and metaphysical exposure.

Key-words: Theatre of the Absurd, Temporality and Waiting, Narrative Deconstruction, Existentialism, Subjectivity, Phenomenology, Ontological Becoming, Repetition.

INTRODUCTION

The mid-twentieth century marked a significant shift in the philosophical and aesthetic landscape of Western theatre, leading to the emergence of what Martin Esslin later named the Theatre of the Absurd. Rooted in profound existential disillusionment caused by the catastrophes of two world wars, the Holocaust, and the decline of Enlightenment ideals, this theatrical approach broke away from the structural certainties of classical dramaturgy, mimesis, and linear narrative teleology. Within this avant-garde movement, Samuel Beckett emerged as a distinctive voice whose plays not only embodied absurdist ideas but also explored them as a philosophical inquiry into time, identity, and the failure of language. In well-known works such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett constructs a

theatrical world where time is fractured, subjectivity is unstable, and narrative coherence is continually deferred.

Unlike his contemporaries-Ionesco, Genet, or Adamov-whose absurdism often embraced grotesque spectacle or political satire, Beckett's minimalism highlights an ontological paralysis rooted in the experience of time itself. Time in Beckett's plays is not a neutral medium through which events unfold, but rather a metaphysical deadlock: the present is indefinitely postponed, the past disintegrates into unreliable fragments, and the future looms as an inaccessible void. His characters, lacking narrative progression or psychological development, are suspended in cyclical patterns of waiting, repetition, and forgetfulness. The existential motif of becoming- central to philosophies of freedom and self-realisation- is here rendered futile, caught in a perpetual loop where anticipation replaces action and stasis supplants movement.

This research paper explores the ontological and aesthetic implications of Beckett's temporal imagination through the twin methods of philosophical hermeneutics and close textual analysis. It examines how Beckett's dramaturgy deconstructs traditional notions of temporally anchored subjectivity, causality, and narrative structure by engaging with the ideas of Martin Heidegger, Henri Bergson, and Gilles Deleuze. Heidegger's Being and Time provides a framework for understanding temporality as the existential horizon of Dasein. Meanwhile, Bergson's concept of *durée* offers a model of lived, non-linear temporality, and Deleuze's concept of the time-image emphasises the affective and perceptual aspects of temporal disjunction in Beckett's theatre.

By positioning Beckett's plays as sites of temporal disruption and ontological suspension, the study argues that absurdist time is not merely a thematic device but a fundamental and destabilising force that redefines subjectivity, narrative expectation, and the phenomenology of theatrical experience. In Beckett's universe, waiting becomes a mode of existence, and becoming is reimagined as an ongoing process without end, origin, or culmination. Rather than a literature of nihilism, Beckett's absurdism appears as a metaphysical inquiry into the incommensurability of time, the elusiveness of selfhood, and the disintegration of narrative into silence, gesture, and infinite recurrence.

THE ONTOLOGY OF WAITING: SESPENDED TIME IN WAITING FOR GODOT

In *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett elevates the act of waiting from merely a dramatic premise to an ontological condition that defines existence itself. Far from functioning as a narrative device to build anticipation towards an eventual climax or resolution, waiting in Beckett's theatre becomes the very foundation of being - an endless posture in time that prevents closure. Vladimir and Estragon's unending vigil for the unseen Godot is not a bridge to revelation or encounter; it is, instead, a terminal condition - one that precludes arrival, denies transformation, and suspends purpose. Beckett reverses the traditional teleology of narrative time by staging anticipation not as a passage, but as a destination in itself. In doing so, he creates a dramaturgy that does not move, but persists; that does not resolve, but loops endlessly in the hollow rhythm of expectation.

What unfolds on stage is not a sequence of events but a repetition of patterns. The two acts of *Godot* are, both structurally and thematically, mirror images - differentiated only by the subtlest disintegrations. Time does not progress; it circulates—memory wavers. Days repeat themselves without change. This recursive temporality dismantles the traditional framework of dramatic progression, replacing it with a temporal structure characterised by sameness and stillness. The linear progression of time - its promise of direction, causality, or resolution - is replaced by a stagnant present where the past remains elusive and the future is indefinitely deferred. Beckett does not merely depict waiting; he enacts it, compelling the audience to sit within its boundaries, feel its weight, and face its emptiness.

The ontology of waiting is most clearly depicted through Beckett's choreography of inaction. The characters' movements - removing boots, contemplating suicide, endlessly arguing - lack practical or narrative purpose. These are not actions in an Aristotelian sense; they are performative gestures that pretend to agency while exposing its emptiness. Beckett creates a theatrical space where the act of performing replaces genuine action, and meaning disintegrates in the repetition of the meaningless. The characters are trapped in a cycle of delayed decisions, futile motions, and circular speech. Language also falters: words break into fragments, clichés, pauses, and silence, reflecting the breakdown of thought and intention. What remains is not communication but the echo of its impossibility.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett presents not only an absurdist view of the human condition but also a profound philosophical exploration of temporality, agency, and subjectivity. The self, in this context, is not formed by action or progress but by endurance - by the capacity to inhabit suspension without resolution. The play opposes notions of history, development, and finality, instead suggesting a world entrapped in the pull of the present moment, one that repeats endlessly without ever reaching an end. In this suspended time, Beckett constructs a metaphysics of waiting, where the meaning of existence is neither sought nor discovered, but endured in the silence between gestures and the stillness beneath words.

SUBJECTIVITY IN FLUX: MEMORY, VOICE AND THE DISINTEGRATING SELF IN KRAPP'S LAST TAPE

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, Samuel Beckett constructs a stark and elegiac confrontation between fractured temporality of the self, employing the technological device of the tape recorder not merely as a dramatic element but as a philosophical instrument through which the incoherence of identity is exposed. The play depicts an intrapersonal dialogue between two incompatible temporal registers: the recorded voice of a former self expressed with youthful confidence, longing, and self-importance, and the aged, corporeal Krapp, who listens silently, interrupts with derision, and recoils in melancholic alienation. This division between the embodied present and the disembodied archive does not simply dramatise the passage of time; it disrupts the notion of subjectivity as continuous, instead exposing it as a dispersal across incompatible fragments of memory, language, and voice.

Listening, in this context, becomes a form of ontological dislocation. The tape recorder - claimed to be a prosthesis of memory - fails to restore presence; it deepens absence. The voice, once a symbol of intimacy and aspiration, manifests not as self-recognition but as

estrangement. It is theatrical, unlivable, even grotesque. Beckett shifts memory from its traditional role as a stabilising narrative function and redefines it as an archival haunting - a confrontation not with what was, but with what can no longer be inhabited. The past is not recoverable but staged, performed through repetition, always already mediated by technological distance and existential rupture. In this way, Krapp's Last Tape dismantles the illusion of memory as coherence, revealing instead its part in the breakdown of selfhood.

This disintegration echoes Heidegger's idea of *Dasein*, especially about temporality as being-toward. For Heidegger, the self is never fully present to itself; it is shaped through its projection toward future possibilities. Krapp, however, exemplifies a form of radical temporal stasis. His obsessive focus on past recordings signifies a breakdown of futurity, a retreat from projection into the static repetition of what has already occurred. He no longer inhabits the openness of *Dasein* but exists among the ghostly remnants of memory. The act of playback becomes an anti-event: not a celebration of continuity, but a display of temporal deadlock, where voice fails to anchor identity and time collapses inward.

In Krapp's Last Tape, Beckett rejects the comforting idea of autobiographical synthesis. The self is not reconstructed but fractured; not narrated, but postponed. Language does not act as a bridge but as a barrier - its repetitions signalling not mastery but loss. In this sparse and haunting dialogue between archival remains and embodied exhaustion, Beckett presents the subject not as a unified whole but as a continually unravelling site, where identity flickers in the space between voice and silence, memory and emptiness, past and the impossibility of return.

ENDGAME AND THE RITUAL OF REPETITION: DECONSTRUCTING PROGRESSION

In *Endgame*, Samuel Beckett develops his philosophical dramaturgy through a radical dismantling of narrative teleology and temporal linearity, creating a theatrical landscape governed by ritualised repetition, ontological exhaustion, and the delay of finality. The play unfolds not as a moving narrative but as a final tableau - an aftermath without antecedent, a closure without consummation. Through the interplay of cyclical dialogue, mechanised gestures, and a sparse theatrical minimalism, Beckett constructs a dramaturgy that resists the very grammar of progression. Repetition, in this context, is not generative but entropic; it functions not as a stabilising rhythm but as an existential trap, enacting a perpetual suspension between action and its abandonment.

At the centre of this theatre of halted motion are Hamm and Clov, two figures caught in a liminal state of dependence and postponement. Hamm, immobilised and blind, issues commands from his chair that mock the remnants of authority. Meanwhile, Clov, chained to both servitude and escape, performs gestures of departure without ever crossing the threshold. Their exchanges, filled with ritual familiarity and the futility of repetition, rehearse abandonment but never actualise it. Hamm demands a narrative that stumbles; Clov threatens to leave but always returns. In this cyclical choreography of unresolved tension, both characters become symbols of what might be called terminal being—entities trapped in a

looped temporality where the possibility of an end is endlessly postponed. Beckett thus redefines finality not as a culmination of time but as a permanently rehearsed absence.

This recursive structure deliberately disrupts the traditional flow of narrative progression. Endgame rejects catharsis, climax, or resolution; instead, it immerses the audience in a claustrophobic temporality characterised by sameness, inertia, and ontological suffocation. The gestures performed on stage, whether it is Clov's pacing or Hamm's insistence on storytelling, do not lead to change but accumulate as dead weight. Time, in Beckett's dramaturgy, is not a vector but a closed circuit. It is a temporality lacking futurity, animated not by becoming but by the compulsion to repeat. Repetition here becomes the grammar of despair: a language of stalled subjectivity and metaphysical weariness.

Beckett's aesthetics of reduction, his sparse scenography of bins, chairs, windows, and ladders, reflects the stripping away of character to what might be called ontological residue. Hamm and Clov are no longer subjects of narrative or agents of transformation; they are skeletal traces of human presence, emptied of depth, history, and teleology. Their speech, marked by pauses, repetitions, and silences, signifies the disintegration of language itself, its collapse into sonic residue and gestural debris.

Thus, Endgame stages are not the event of ending but the impossibility of its arrival. It functions as an end: unending, reiterated, and structurally unresolvable. Beckett's theatre, in this light, becomes a space of ontological unravelling where repetition displaces progress, voice succumbs to silence, and the ritual of performance only serves to reaffirm the absence of transcendence. In this recursive suspension, Beckett enacts the philosophical unmaking not only of narrative but also of being itself.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT: FROM PHENOMENOLOGY TO POSTSTRUCTURALISM

To engage meaningfully with the philosophical aspects of Beckett's dramaturgy, characterised by recursive stasis, temporal disjunction, and ontological depletion, it is essential to map his aesthetic sensibility across a conceptual landscape that stretches from the phenomenological project of finitude to the post-structural destabilisation of meaning. While Beckett resists systematising philosophy, his theatre nonetheless conducts a sustained interrogation of core categories: temporality, selfhood, narrative closure, and metaphysical finality. In this context, the ideas of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot, and Gilles Deleuze offer critical perspectives through which the spectral logic of Beckett's theatrical minimalism may be interpreted.

Heidegger's ontological analysis of Dasein, particularly his concept of Sein-zum-Tode (being-toward-death) in *Being and Time*, presents finitude as the central horizon of existential understanding. For Heidegger, death is not merely an eventual event but an existential condition that reveals the authenticity of being by situating it within the context of its impossibility. Beckett's theatrical universe, however, represents a notable departure from this anticipatory framework. In *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, death does not serve as an existential goal but as an indefinitely postponed event, dislocated, spectral, and lacking

finality. His characters dwell in a suspended temporality where the promise of death as revelation or resolution has been removed. Time does not progress towards an end but instead stagnates into a durational void, what might be called being-in-suspension. Here, Beckett reimagines Heidegger's idea of existential futurity as a recursive temporality, where death is no longer a horizon but a diminishing echo, and being becomes a residue without transcendence.

This suspended temporality profoundly echoes Maurice Blanchot's concept of the "incessant return" and the impossibility of closure. In *The Space of Literature*, Blanchot describes literature as a movement without origin or destination, continuously drawn towards an impossible end. Instead of concluding, the narrative folds back upon itself in a cycle of endless deferral. Beckett's theatre exemplifies this sense of narrative exhaustion: his plays neither advance nor resolve but linger within a recursive failure to arrive. Language is stripped of authority, stories are halted mid-gesture, and repetition becomes the core condition of expression. In this context, Beckett's dramaturgy reflects Blanchot's neuter - a space where narrative voice is neither subjective nor objective, but spectral, suspended at the boundary between articulation and erasure.

Deleuze, by contrast, provides a re-evaluation of repetition not as a failure but as an ontological force. In *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, repetition is viewed as the driving force of becoming, a dynamic process through which identity is constantly deconstructed and reformed as difference. Beckett's utilisation of repetition appears, at first glance, contrary to this model: his characters do not change but endure, trapped in cycles of futility. Yet, this very suspension activates what Deleuze might call a counter-actualisation: a repetition that does not affirm identity but emphasises its dissolution. In Beckett, becoming is not forward progression but an intensification of stillness - the paradoxical force of life halted in its inertia.

Beckett's theatre thus sits along a philosophical fault line: between Heideggerian finitude and Deleuzian difference, between Blanchotian erasure and ontological residue. It is a theatre of negation, not in a nihilistic sense, but in its radical refusal of closure, continuity, or transcendence. Beckett compels philosophy to face stasis not as absence but as a fundamental mode - a poetics of the endless, where being is understood not through action or essence, but through its unravelling.

CONCLUSION

Samuel Beckett's theatre, often situated within the aesthetic framework of absurdism, invites a more philosophically expansive interpretation - one that resists simplistic links to existential despair and instead considers his dramaturgy as a sustained exploration of the ontological conditions of time, subjectivity, and becoming. Beckett's dramatic architecture is not merely a stage for illustrating absurdity but a metaphysical space in which the normative structures of narrative coherence, teleological time, and unified selfhood are dismantled with meticulous care. His work does not merely perform the failure of meaning; instead, it uncovers the scaffolding on which meaning is precariously built and reveals the structural fractures beneath

its seeming solidity. In this sense, Beckett emerges not merely as a dramatist of the absurd but as a philosopher of ontological exposure. His characters are not psychological agents in the traditional sense but embodiments of temporal attrition - figures suspended within the recursive drift of memory, ritual, and repetition. They do not evolve; they endure. Stripped of narrative agency and existential futurity, they become manifestations of a self-diffused across time's residues - voices and bodies caught in an interminable deferral of presence. In Beckett's theatrical universe, subjectivity does not traverse time; it is constituted by its suspension - by time as stasis, echo, and remainder.

Beckett's theatre thus functions as a metaphysical laboratory - a pared-down space where the architecture of progression collapses, action unravels into inertia, and language moves ever closer to silence. This aesthetic minimalism is not merely stylistic but ontological: a staging of the erosion of form itself. By dismantling narrative logic and destabilising teleological temporality, Beckett prompts a rethinking of the basic coordinates through which existence is understood. Temporality here is not linear but immanent - a flattened field of recurrence in which becoming happens not through transformation, but through the intensification of stillness. Ultimately, Beckett's theatre should not be viewed as a lament for lost meaning but as a radical reconfiguration of its potential. Absurdism in his work is not nihilistic rejection but an ontological reorientation - a philosophical stance that highlights the discontinuities, silences, and suspensions underpinning being. What emerges is a theatre of temporal becoming: not linear, not redemptive, but recursive and unresolved. In this space beyond resolution, Beckett presents the residue of presence after presence is undone - the trace of thought following structure, and the potential for meaning within its perpetual deferral.

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