

Love and Death
in the Absurdist Works of Samuel Beckett and Albert Camus

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the thirteen people who are my constant inspiration and beacon of light. They have helped me navigate nights of overthinking, insecurity, and anxiety, and have given me a sense of hope and belonging every time I doubted my place in this world.

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Abstract

The thesis examines the thematic belonging of love and death in absurdist fiction. Martin Esslin's "The Theater of the Absurd" and Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* are critical non-fiction essays that are examined to define and understand absurdism as a philosophy and absurdist literature. Samuel Beckett and Albert Camus are the primary authors whose works are closely analyzed to explore absurdist literature and its importance in the English literary canon. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days* are excellent examples of the theater of the absurd because these plays illustrate human fear regarding death and meaninglessness in a brutally honest and bizarre portrayal. His novel *How It Is*, and Camus's novels *The Plague* and *The Stranger*, go deeper into the absurd realities of life and the indifference of the world. Camus's short stories "The Silent Men" and "The Growing Stone", and Beckett's short story "First Love" showcase absurdity through hope and love. Through absurdist readings of these works, this paper explores the extent to which love and death work as themes in an absurdist context.

Keywords: Absurdism, Absurdist literature, Love, Death, Absurdist fiction.

Chapter 1

Introduction

We know little, but that we must hold to what is difficult is a certainty that will not forsake us; it is good to be solitary, for solitude is difficult; that something is difficult must be a reason the more for us to do it. To love is good, too: love being difficult. For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 41.

Love, a four-letter word, encapsulates a myriad of meanings and definitions. It is affection for someone or something that requires genuine effort because love is difficult. It is the gratitude one feels for parents, siblings, and family. It is also the gratitude one feels towards nature and all its creations. It is the affection one feels for animals and birds. Love is found in all of these spaces, situations, and beyond. To love is to desire someone. Love can also be found in a simple connection between people. It is not necessary for the connection to be deep, though love does exist in such a way, but love can also exist on the surface, in superficiality. The Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke says love is a mystery. The act of loving someone else is one of the most difficult things to do. Loving an object often comes more naturally to people than loving another person. Most difficult of all is the act of loving oneself. Love is an intricate part of life, which is why it has been explored in literature throughout history.

The Irish playwright, poet, novelist, and literary critic Samuel Beckett is far from a conventional romance author, and yet one cannot say his works do not have elements of love in them. Beckett's use of love is in his exploration of genuine human connections. Similarly, the

French author, philosopher, and dramatist Albert Camus is also not associated with the romance genre. His works are more on the absurdist and existential side of literature. Nevertheless, elements of love do manifest in different ways in his works. For example, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus talks about love indirectly and very sparsely throughout the essay. Both Beckett and Camus depict love in an absurdist way. Absurdism is a philosophy that views the world as indifferent. It states that looking for meaning in life is futile, and it creates conflicts in people that may lead them closer to death. The conflict “occurs when our need for meaning shatters against the indifference, immovable and absolute, of the world” (Zaretsky 13). Through this philosophical thought, Absurdist fiction demonstrates how man can navigate an absurd world. Beckett and Camus place their characters in worlds where there is indifference, irrationality, and sometimes very little logic.

The other prominent element that is common in the works of Beckett and Camus is death. Death, grief, symbolism and metaphors about dying and decay, and dark imagery are the more recognisable traits of absurdist fiction. Death is the eventual end of all living beings. It is the ultimate mystery because it is the point of no return. Different religions have tried to explain what happens after death, but one can never be certain because no one has come back from it to tell us what it means to die, and if one remains conscious enough to comprehend it. This is one of the reasons why death or deathly symbolism and imagery is so attractive to authors and readers alike. We know very little about this world. When faced with the vastness of the universe, man feels insignificant, and so absurdism addresses man’s futile existence. It is the philosophy that talks about the conflict man has with the world and his own existence.

Absurdism and absurdist fiction are the main theoretical frameworks of this thesis. Using absurdist texts, this thesis explores love and death because they are crucial themes that are so

versatile that they not only appear in all the different genres of literature but they also play significant roles in different works of literature. Samuel Beckett and Albert Camus have contributed greatly to absurdism and so they are the primary authors whose works will be closely examined to determine the place of love and death as themes in absurdist fiction.

Rationale for the Research

Any work of literature, be it fiction or nonfiction, cannot be interpreted in only one way. Different readers read the same text and come to different conclusions. There are countless different ways to interpret absurdist texts. Absurdism is a way of writing that defies genres through different experimentations done by different authors. Most of the time, the authors themselves reject this label. In fact, Samuel Beckett has never called himself an absurdist writer. Readers and critics read his works that way because it is one of the many ways they are able to make sense of Beckett's works. His works can also be read from an existentialist perspective, or even a nihilistic perspective. A lot of his plays can be categorized in the nonsense literature genre. Similarly, Albert Camus's works are often read from an existential and nihilist perspective. He is often compared with the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche because of this, but Camus has never called himself a nihilist. Nihilism is a philosophical thought that sees life as meaningless and that moral values are pointless. Camus did not think of himself as a nihilist because he defined absurdism with a subtle optimism. His works talk about a sense of freedom that can be found in an absurd world.

Since the emergence of absurdism as a literary genre, readers and critics alike have researched and reviewed different works in this genre. Beckett and Camus's works have also been thoroughly researched and reviewed from an absurdist perspective. However, their works

have not been analysed based on specific themes such as love and death; which is what thesis does. It explores the works of Beckett and Camus to look for the importance of love and death as themes. The main purpose of this study is to determine what love and death, as themes, can bring to the absurdist worlds of the novels, plays and short stories of Beckett and Camus. Though this thesis examines the works of Beckett and Camus from an absurdist lens, it acknowledges that there are other interpretations. For the purpose of this thesis, which is to determine the place and importance of love and death as themes in absurdist fiction, it does not address any of the other interpretations of the works of Beckett and Camus. What it does offer instead are analyses that bring out the hope and love buried deep within the works of Beckett and Camus.

Beckett and Camus

Born in Foxrock, a suburb in Dublin, on 13 April 1906, Samuel Barclay Beckett wrote plays, novels, poems, short stories, and essays on literary criticism. His works encompass a wide variety of genres and themes, but the most prominent elements in his works are absurdity, impersonal episodes of life, depictions of decay and decline, and literary nonsense. His plays shaped twentieth-century theatre, which is why he is often regarded as a modernist. The intensity of absurdity in his plays, however, also makes critics associate him with postmodern literature. In 1969, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his exceptional contribution to literature as well as theatre. Beckett was an extremely private man. According to Ronan McDonald, he wanted his texts to speak for themselves, so he refused interviews and avoided talking about his works at length. “However, when his authorised biographer, James Knowlson, pointed out the recurrences of images from the Ireland of his childhood in his writing, he agreed. “They’re obsessional,” he said” (McDonald 06).

According to Doctor Geoffrey Thomson, Beckett's friend, to understand him, one must know about the strained nature of his relationship with his mother. She was loving and attentive, but also stern and intimidating. She was very religious and raised her children as Anglicans. Beckett later became an agnostic, and "it seems his later decision to settle permanently in France was as much a flight from mother as from motherland" (07). He went to Paris after finishing his BA from Trinity College Dublin. There, he was introduced to James Joyce, another Irish author, with whom he had a close friendship for a long time. He wrote in both French and English, and he translated his French works into English himself. Apart from thematic similarities, the French language is something that connects Albert Camus to Samuel Beckett.

Camus was born on 7 November 1913 in French Algeria. He has written novels, plays, and essays. He was also a political activist. Albert Camus received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957. He was 44 years old at the time, making him the second youngest recipient of a Nobel Prize in history. He studied philosophy at the University of Algiers. According to Robert Zaretsky, Camus became interested in the absurd "as a literary and philosophical quarry" after he submitted his dissertation on neo-Platonism (Zaretsky 15). During the Second World War, he was editor-in-chief of an outlawed newspaper called *Combat*. His works have absurdist and existential themes. His philosophy of absurdism became the pinnacle of absurdist literature through his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Though there are no records of Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett being acquainted with one another, they did live in Paris at the same time, and they both wrote and published in French. It is not far-fetched to say that they may have stumbled upon each other's works from time to time.

Love in Literature

Love has been a motif, a literary device, for as long as literature has existed. Epics such as the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*, and so on used different elements of love as a theme in different ways. Historians have found traces of ancient love poems in different texts. Tragic Greek plays also featured love in a lot of ways. Love for one's empire and its people, familial love from the perspective of a king. Attending the theatre to watch plays being performed was also a form of love and devotion to their cities by the population of ancient Greece, as it was believed that witnessing a depiction of tragedy on stage invoked a catharsis among the population that made them better citizens and better human beings. The Arthurian Legends also feature love as a literary device and recurring motif. It is also one of the very first pieces of literature to talk about chivalry and courting a person of interest. Many other literary works written in the Medieval period, sometime from the 12th to the 15th centuries, talked about romance and the courtly love between knights and noblewomen. The brotherhood amongst the knights was also a prominent feature in the works from this time. The Elizabethan and Jacobean eras in English history brought about the emergence of William Shakespeare, who has become a permanent and essential part of the English literary canon. His plays and sonnets can spin an extraordinary tale of love, betrayal, loyalty, and everything in between. John Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* during the Restoration period.

Sometime towards the end of the eighteenth century, William Blake pioneered the development of the Romantic period in literature. Then came prominent names such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and so on. Byron developed and popularized the archetype of the brooding, mysterious male protagonist. One can argue that this Byronic Hero has evolved to be the protagonist that can be

seen in a lot of postmodern literature, where characters defy traditional norms and grapple with an unknowable future that they need to actively work towards. The Victorian era focused a lot on regular people and their lives. Charles Dickens is a great example of that. His works show the regular lives of the people of that time, their struggles, their relationships, and their passions. If the Romantic era was the era of poems and short prose, the Victorian era was the era of novels. *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* are novels that have emerged in the Victorian era and gone on to become classic pieces of literature that are still revered to this day. One cannot talk about romance without mentioning Jane Austen. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, *Persuasion*, and *Northanger Abbey* are some of the most popular romance novels. So much so that these novels are not only widely read all over the world to this day, but they have also been adapted into many forms of media.

Modernism as a literary movement emerged in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. This is when literary techniques evolved and took new forms. Writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce challenged existing conventions and started writing in a style called the stream-of-consciousness. *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses* are excellent novels that have traces of love and human connection spread throughout the stories without being the main focus. T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is a central work of modernist poetry. It references many other works and is essentially about the hopelessness of modern society. And yet, elements of love and fragmented relationships are in every stanza of the poem. It goes to show how integral the concept of love is for humans. Absurdism emerged around this time, between the modern and postmodern periods. Existentialism, surrealism, nonsense literature, nihilist philosophy, all became more popular as literature started to move from the modern to the postmodern era. Works of fiction, prose, and

poetry started to become more and more experimental and genre-bending. Throughout it all, however, elements of love as a theme have been in most works of literature in different capacities. Some authors placed love in the forefront, such as contemporary romance novels, and some authors kept it in the background, such as Haruki Murakami and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Along with love, the other literary component that has continuously endured all shifts in genres and the emergence of different literary movements is death. Just like love, death finds its way into almost all kinds of novels and poetry with different intensity.

Death in Literature

Humans are mortal, and they must fall into death's arms eventually. This fact has haunted humanity since the beginning of time. Most creative endeavors and scientific inventions came about because humans want to live longer. Medicine and healthcare have developed to fight the diseases that destroyed entire nations at one point in time. Humanity's innate desire to cling to life has been reflected in literature as well. Works such as *Doctor Faustus* and *Frankenstein* illustrate how dangerous it is to covet immortality. Abstract, intangible objects can also die. Hopes and dreams die all the time. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously said, "God is dead" sometime in the nineteenth century. He did not mean it literally. He said it to point out the decline of religious beliefs in people and the need to be concerned about the state of the Western world. Life and death, though opposite concepts, are deeply intertwined. Where there is life, there is death. Where there is death, life will follow. Just as the beginning of something signifies its inevitable eventual end, the end of one thing also signifies the start of another. Nietzsche claimed God is dead so that people of the time would wake up from their reverie and look around themselves. So that they can realize the state of their world and do something to

change it by looking within themselves. If religion was not enough for them to hold onto their sanity anymore, then they needed to come up with something else to cling to, something that would bring hope. Nietzsche wanted people to be their own moral compass. Albert Camus's works use death and the imagery of death in a lot of different ways. Some of his works talk about death directly through the death of a character, and some of his works incorporate the theme of death indirectly.

Death has been portrayed in numerous ways in literature throughout history. Death of one or more characters, grappling with grief and loss, anticipating one's own death, and encounters with the abstract concept of Death itself are some of the ways death has been portrayed in literature. Death is used as symbolism, as tragedy, and even as a means of philosophical inquiry. Russian novelist Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" is a short story that chronicles the life and death of Akaky Akakievich, the protagonist. It is about alienation, isolation, and the tragic consequences of one's financial inabilities. This short story is considered one of the best short stories of all time. Another Russian masterpiece is Leo Tolstoy's novella, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. It portrays the anticipation of one's death and the impact of it on the human psyche. The protagonist, Ivan Ilyich, is a common man living a common life with his family. When he hurts his back and suffers a long period of pain and discomfort, his attitude changes. His behavior towards his family also changes. He becomes aware of his mortality and grows to resent his family for acting as if he were only sick and not dying. In the end, when he is closest to death, he is struck by a realization that he is no longer afraid of death. There are a number of interpretations for this novella, but the one thing most readers and critics agree on is that the epiphany that Ivan had at the end of his life gave him the opportunity to make his death meaningful, and therefore, make his life meaningful. Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and*

Punishment is a novel where the protagonist contemplates killing someone. He convinces himself that he will do good deeds with the money he will acquire by killing the unsuspecting pawnbroker and that her murder is a necessary evil that is justifiable. However, after he kills her, he is consumed with guilt, paranoia, and confusion. These different works of literature use and portray death in different ways, though death remains a subject of interest for these authors. Death is essential for these stories because of what it represents and for the stories to leave a lasting impression on the reader.

The most common use of death is in literary works that portray war, its destructiveness, and the tragedy that it leaves in its wake. Works that talk about society and different causes also use imagery and themes of death. Poets such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, and Edward Thomas have written about death, dying, grief, and loss in their poems. They described their experiences with war and death. Ernest Hemingway, Kurt Vonnegut, Walt Whitman, Albert Camus, and so many other authors have also written about death, war, and its consequences. All of these poets and writers wrote about the horrors of war and its impact on society and its people. They also wrote about the heavy toll that death can leave on a person's body and mind. Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* is a great example of what experiencing war firsthand can do to a person, what it is like living with an injury that permanently damages one's body, and the impact it has on one's relationships. Australian author Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005) is a historical fiction novel, where Death itself is the narrator. The novel depicts the lives and perspectives of many victims of the Second World War. Death is used symbolically in a lot of genres of literature. Ravens, coffins, darkness, broken clocks, are some of the symbols that signify death. Gothic literature, which emerged towards the tail end of the Romantic period,

played a lot with different portrayals of death. American writer Edgar Allan Poe is most famous for his use of dark, eerie imagery that often predicts or is a result of death.

Methodology

This thesis is a work of qualitative research. Scholarly journal articles, books, and websites are used to establish love and death as essential themes of literature throughout history, define and use absurdism as the overarching theoretical framework, and give insight into the different yet similar absurdist perspectives of Samuel Beckett and Albert Camus. The paper also closely analyzes primary texts from both authors. Beckett and Camus have distinct styles in their writing. Their works move past the standard literary styles and challenge them. The contents of their works, such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Happy Days*, *The Plague*, and *The Stranger*, are just as absurd as the writing itself. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, *Happy Days*, *How It Is*, and "First Love" are the selected works that will show how elements of love and human connection work in the context of absurdist literature, and Camus's "The Silent Men", "The Growing Stone", *The Plague*, and *The Stranger* are the selected works that will illustrate the place of death, dying and dark concepts in the theater of the absurd. These eight texts will then be examined together to determine love and death's place in absurdist fiction.

Research Statement

Love and death are important themes for any and all works of literature. They can act as catalysts that move the plot forward, or they can stay in the background without attracting too much attention. Absurdist literature explores man's insignificance in an indifferent world. Samuel Beckett explores decay, decline, and loss through absurdist techniques in his works, and Albert

Camus establishes his philosophical views of absurdity through obscure moments of hope and optimism in the face of absurdist situations. There is love, hope, and light along with death, grief, and existential reflection in the works of both Beckett and Camus. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore love and death as themes in an absurdist context through examining Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, *Happy Days*, *How It Is*, and "First Love", and Camus's *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, "The Silent Men", and "The Growing Stone".

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Absurdism

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines absurdism as “a philosophy based on the belief that the universe is irrational and meaningless and that the search for order brings the individual into conflict with the universe” (“Absurdism”, def. 1). This philosophy claims that since people engage in these conflicts with the world, existence in and of itself is absurd. Absurdism emerged as a literary theory or technique sometime around the 1950s and 1960s. Following the Second World War, this era in history saw people becoming hopeless and disillusioned with the world. Writers and poets of the time then started to experiment with their writing style and the content they wrote about. If Hemingway’s minimalism is considered a deviation from traditional writing techniques, then the absurdist way of writing challenged the existing conventions even more. Hemingway is notable for using a technique called the “theory of omission” or the iceberg theory. In his 1932 novel, *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway talks about subtext. “If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them” (Hemingway 98). This technique is an elevated way of presenting a metaphor or symbolism in prose. Absurdist fiction is similar to this technique in the sense that it also omits details and the reader is then expected to infer what has not been said based on what has. For example, Doctor Rieux in Albert Camus’s *The Plague* is the narrator but he does not bring his personal reflection to his narration. He narrates in the third person to make it more clinical and detached. Camus does not explicitly state the emotional turmoil of this

doctor who is dealing with a national epidemic but the reader can note his resilience in the way he narrates the story and how he connects this disease to other problems in the world, such as war. The difference between absurdist writing and the theory of omission is that absurdist authors want the reader to feel that absence, whether it be the absence of context or explanations, descriptions, or even logic. Because the absurd is found in the confusion, in the incongruity, and in the seemingly illogical actions of the characters.

Hungarian-born British critic, journalist, and dramatist Martin Esslin wrote about absurdism, absurdist fiction, and especially absurdist plays in his 1960 essay “The Theater of the Absurd”. In the essay, he quoted Romanian-French playwright Eugene Ionesco’s definition of absurdism. “Absurd is that which has no purpose, or goal, or objective”. Ionesco had given this definition in a note on Franz Kafka (Esslin 04). Through this essay title, Esslin coined the term theater of the absurd. It is a designation used for the plays of absurdist fiction written by a number of European playwrights during the post-World War II era. Esslin began his essay by pointing out how the plays of Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, and Eugene Ionesco received much applause from the audience, even though they “could not understand what [the plays] meant or what their authors were driving at” (Esslin 03). It is because the plays featured elements that were drastically different from what the general European theater-goers were accustomed to. Plays such as *The Bald Soprano*, *Jack or the Submission*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Happy Days*, and so on throw their audience into a trance by displaying something wildly irrational. Actions that are more often than not nonsensical. And when the audience somewhat finds their bearings, when they think they know what is about to come, these plays switch things up. Characters change their behavior, or roles are suddenly reversed. For example, in Act I of *Waiting for Godot*, Pozzo and Lucky appear as master and slave, but when they return in the second act, their situations

have dramatically changed. Pozzo returns blind, and Lucky is mute. Neither of them has any idea of ever meeting the protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon. Such is the way of the theater of the absurd, and absurd fiction as a whole. It baffles the reader, leaving them confused yet entertained to a certain extent. Not only does one have to suspend one's disbelief when reading a work of absurd fiction, but one also must suspend one's knowledge of the laws of probability and those of physics, because at first glance, nothing makes sense in the play or novel. Readers must come to terms with the fact that these works of fiction really are, as they are aptly called, absurd.

Esslin further says that Beckett's absurdity is bleak and melancholic. It is disillusioned by old age and chronic hopelessness. The argument on Beckett's views on old-age is the further explored by Elizabeth Barry in her essay titled "Samuel Beckett and the Contingency of Old Age". in the essay, Barry argues that "Beckett had been anticipating and identifying with the experience of old age for most of his life", not because he sought after the wisdom that comes with experience and age, but because through the diminishing of powers, a writer may come in the possession of powers he had "been seeking all along" (Barry 206). This argument is also applicable to Beckett's characters. For example, Winnie in *Happy Days* is buried up to her neck by the end of the play. This can be taken to mean that she and her partner, Willie are close to death and that is why Winnie reminisces about happy days throughout the play; to reflect on her life one last time.

Absurdism in Beckett's works

Samuel Beckett was an Irish playwright, novelist, poet, and literary critic. He spent most of his adult life in Paris, writing in both French and English. He is regarded as one of the most influential figures in 20th-century literature. He challenged traditional styles of writing and

experimented with both language and aesthetics. While his experimentation with his writing style and the contents of his texts continued, he made a point to conceal his private self from his texts. Any links between Beckett's life and his work "are inevitably, and almost invariably, far from straightforward", writes James Knowlson in "Samuel Beckett: The Intricate Web of Life and Work". Beckett was determined to break the molds of traditional fiction, theatre, film, and television. He used his vast knowledge of art, literature, philosophy, and music in interesting ways that not only let his works adopt a unique voice but also led to an intriguing interrelationship between his life and work (Knowlson 19). Even as he attempts to restrict his personal life from seeping into his works, Anna McMullan argues that Beckett's aesthetics can be placed "in an exilic genealogy of Irish writing" because traces of Irish history and frame of references can be found in his works (452). Nevertheless, one cannot tie his works down to one location or identity, as Beckett's works, particularly his plays, have resonance in the contemporary global era. Written and published during the twentieth century, his works bear the heavy markings of an age where hope is lost. In an essay titled "Samuel Beckett: The Dialectics of Hope and Despair", Michael Mundhenk writes that the twentieth-century artist lives in ambiguity. "He is not an expert, but an inventor, a re-inventor of the world". Beckett's works are works of imagination that "attempt to escape the disorder of things". When the predominant feeling all around the world is insecurity and doubt, modern art cannot deny this reality. One must keep their eyes open to the chaos and let the confusion in so that the art can renovate itself. The artist must accommodate the mess. Though that does not mean the artist is passively surrendering to "an incoherent and obfuscated universe", it implies a severe criticism of the mess that pushes the artist to face his own conventions. Mundhenk goes on to say that Beckett's body of work proves "the artist's self-conscious exploration of the limitations of his medium"

(Mundhenk 227). Ethel Cornwell delves deeper into the abyss of Beckett's works by closely examining his novels in her essay, "Samuel Beckett: The Flight from Self". Cornwell prefaces her essay by saying Beckett's novels and stories demonstrate an "existential necessity of self-creation". Man is not given existence, merely the "abstract possibility" of it, and according to Cornwell, Beckett is more than aware of it. Beckett burdens his protagonists with a consciousness that gives them self-responsibility. The Beckett hero yearns for self-destruction but does not have the courage to use it as a means of escape. He "flees from" his identity in a quest for anonymity, for "self-annihilation" (Cornwell 41).

In "Samuel Beckett's Figurative Language", Rubin Rabinovitz argues that Beckett's characters do not trust their impressions of the outside world. Instead, they rely on introspection (317). Beckett's descriptions of the outside world are often metaphors for the character's inner state of mind. For example, in *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon are surrounded by nothingness. There is a tree, but it is bare and lifeless. Their days are filled with conversation and contemplation. Most of what they say is nonsensical. Their jumbled-up thoughts, combined with their barren surroundings, really drive home the pointlessness of their endless waiting. Rabinovitz points out that Dante's *Divine Comedy* is an important reference that helps Beckett in building his figurative landscapes. Landscapes in the *Divine Comedy* contribute to his imagery of the afterlife. Another influence, says Rabinovitz, is Giambattista Vico, an Italian philosopher whose ideas on language and metaphor made an impression on Beckett. He discovers through Vico that the language of poets is much more direct than the language of philosophers. Philosophers use literal language to emphasize abstract ideas, but poets use figurative language, which conveys a more precise and individual reality. And so Beckett develops his own metaphorical language, with which he fills his fiction with subtle and elusive concepts. For

example, in *Molloy*, Moran is constantly moving. He “visits unfamiliar places, encounters strangers, and finally returns to the place from which he set out”. This constant need to keep moving can allude to “the events that take place during journeys of exploration in the mind” (319). Beckett’s use of figurative language and metaphors is what makes his characters struggle so much with not only their existence, but also the existence of the world around them. Ethel Cornwell argues that, in *Molloy*, although Molloy and Moran’s stories seem entirely separate, they are connected through Beckett’s use of metaphors and symbols. The novel is part of a trilogy of novels, where all three are connected, but one cannot see the connections clearly until one has read all three novels. Keeping the focus on the characters and their inherent battle with the self, Cornwell goes on to say that Molloy desires death because it “reverses the act of birth”, and Moran wishes for total paralysis when he suffers from a local paralysis so that he can “dread death like a regeneration” (Cornwell 44). The reversal of death as a concept is a common motif Beckett uses throughout his writing. His characters reject life, but they cannot escape it. This rejection of the self, combined with the other elements, is what backs the reader into a confusing corner. However, this confusion is not Beckett’s creation, argues Michael Mundhenk. “The ataxia and turbidity in his writings are the product of the sociocultural conditions”, which create a chaotic and unstable environment that is constantly changing, but the desires of the characters remain stagnant (Mundhenk 228). Beckett’s sense of invalidity and inadequacy as a twentieth-century writer seeps into the pages. The characters’ despair stems from Beckett’s own loss of selfhood and feelings of powerlessness. “Beckett suffers from an extreme estrangement from the world, from himself, and from the validity of his artistic means (230). An alienation that had become universal in the post-war world, but every man suffered on his own in an ironic twist of fate. This alienation paved the way for absurdist fiction as the writers attempted to prove their

artistic ability to the world and to themselves. Nonsensical actions and dialogues, rejection of the self, and fragmentation of the physical body, along with any other baffling elements of absurdist fiction, are meant as much for the writer's own artistic benefit as they are meant for the confusion of the reader.

Absurdism in Camus's works

French author, philosopher, dramatist, journalist, and political activist Albert Camus is regarded as one of the most important figures in the genre of absurdist fiction. While Beckett wrote more for the theatre of the absurd, Camus wrote more on absurdism from a philosophical perspective. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he introduces his version of the philosophy of the absurd. Robert Zaretsky argues that *Sisyphus* is an essay "of impressions, some intimate, others literary, all of them urgent and lucid" (Zaretsky 13). The absurd emerges from the juxtaposition between man's need to find meaning in life and the cruel silence of the universe in response. The absurdity of man's life is in the fact that while wanting his life to mean something, man finds his life to be meaningless and essentially pointless. His first encounter with this torturous truth has the potential to lead to an existential crisis that could very well end in suicide, but Camus argues that one must revolt against the absurdity instead of succumbing to it. Louis Rossi says in "Albert Camus: The Plague of Absurdity" that the protagonists of Camus have remained the same absurd man. There is a "homogeneity" in Camus' writings. "His absurd man has evolved dialectically with time and the exigencies of cataclysmic events". Rossi argues that since the notion of absurdity comes from the realization that there is a deep chasm between what man thinks the nature of the world to be and the nature of the world as it is, the logical conclusion that man draws from it is death. And this burdens man with the responsibility of death (400).

Camus begins *The Myth of Sisyphus* by claiming that the most important philosophical problem is “whether life is or is not worth living” (Camus 01). Suicide has always been dealt with as a social problem, but Camus views it from an individual point of view. “An act like this is prepared within the silence of the heart,” and it is not much different from a great work of art. Camus believes that suicide is not committed through reflection; instead, it is always something “unverifiable” that is triggered suddenly. Even though the precise moment that the mind opts for death is untraceable, the act of suicide itself is a confession. That life “is not worth the trouble”. Living is a culmination of patterns and habits. When one recognizes the “ridiculous character of that habit”, of the pointlessness of suffering every day, that is when one dies voluntarily. The moments before the decision is made, one feels “deprived of a lost home or the hope of a promised land”. He feels like an alien, a stranger. This alienation between man and this life, according to Camus, is the feeling of absurdity (02).

George Sefler explains in his essay “The Existential vs. The Absurd: The Aesthetics of Nietzsche and Camus” that though absurd art points man towards the philosophy of absurdism, the essential realization that the suffering one endures while trying to make life meaningful is futile, it does not give any explanations for the problems of life’s absurdity, nor does it give any solutions. Referencing Camus' *Sisyphus*, Sefler points out that man, upon realizing that there are no absolutes in life, constantly searches for “the good”, “the true”, and “the beautiful” but is disappointed every time. At this point, “despair seems imminent”, and yet man revolts. He perseveres in the face of absurdity (Sefler 415). This contempt is what Camus talks about in *Sisyphus*, that the absurdity of life should not lead man towards suicide. In the last section of the essay, Camus introduces Sisyphus, a figure in Greek Mythology who defied death and the will of the Gods. He was then condemned to roll a rock up a hill for all eternity, where the rock rolls

down when it reaches the top and Sisyphus is forced to start over. Like Sisyphus, whoever longs for death, on account of finding life not worth living, must keep living in an act of revolt. Camus ends the essay arguing that “one must imagine Sisyphus happy” because the struggle itself “is enough to fill a man’s heart” (Camus 24).

Enoch Brater takes Camus’ philosophy and applies it to better understand Beckett’s plays. Brater argues that Beckett is a dramatist, not a philosopher or theoretician. Therefore, this absurd man must confront the absurdity of life on stage. For Camus, the absurd man is an actor on a stage set, where the stage serves a metaphorical function. But for Beckett, the stage is real. Beckett’s absurd man, the protagonists of his plays, are “forced to confront directly on stage a level of absurdity never felt by the reader within the lucid pages” of either Beckett or Camus. Beckett’s plays feature many disembodied voices. The actor on stage must become the disembodied voice in order to play the character (Brater pp. 196-199). The dilemma the actor is faced with while playing one of Beckett’s characters is needed to show the audience the depth of the absurdity. It is as important as writing on the pages. Camus’ novels also consist of characters who face the absurd constantly. For example, Meursault in *The Stranger* must face his guilt and come to terms with his severed relationship with God. Camus's use of words, his ability to construct a story that captures the essence of the absurd, leaves the reader shaken and bewildered. Beckett’s words have the same power. More than the absurd nature of this genre of fiction, it is the way Beckett and Camus weave a story that truly captures the reader. The exploration of human nature, human connections, the human desire to long for death, and the more obvious absurd elements do tend to push the reader into a momentary stupor immediately upon finishing a novel or play, but the content also remains with the reader for a long time. It encourages reflection on the absurdity of the reader’s own life.

Chapter 3

A Love So Absurd: Love, Relationship, and the Human Condition in the Works of Samuel Beckett

Absurdist fiction emerged as a literary movement sometime after the Second World War. A time when tradition was at a loss, as people were losing their faith in God and in humanity. Countries were busy rebuilding themselves to notice the change the war left in them, both internally and externally. Absurdist fiction gave writers a way out of the post-war haze. It meant starting anew. They did not need to adhere to conventional genres or writing techniques. Samuel Beckett's works reflected this change in literature. His works talk about love, relationships, human interactions, being on your deathbed, dying, grief, and so on, just as many others before and after him. What is different about him is that Beckett spins tales in a way that confuses the readers, not to be vague on purpose, but to bring them into this new world of possibilities and introspection, where absurdist ways of writing give readers a different perspective to view the world. The absurd is an overwhelming phenomenon, where one must grapple with the fact that his existence on this plane of earth may not hold any significant meaning. Beckett incorporates elements of the absurd not just in the content of his works but also in the words and sentences themselves.

There are numerous fragmented, unfinished, or grammatically incorrect sentences. Some words are repeated several times throughout the plays and novels. It is this kind of disjointed dialogue that confuses readers even more because they can hardly make sense of what is being said. Both *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days* are great examples of plays by Beckett that have this kind of bewildering dialogue. In both of these plays, the protagonists are in some sort of barren land. When staging the plays, Beckett would give detailed directions because in his mind,

he had a concrete image of what he wanted his plays to look like. They were visual art for him in that sense. The mound of sand, a handbag, and the small loose items in *Happy Days* and the lone willow tree in *Waiting for Godot* are as essential to the story as the dialogue between the characters. The setting remains the same throughout the entire play, suggesting that there is nothing else going on in the characters' lives that is worth showing on stage. It creates a monotonous yet intriguing atmosphere.

Love and Absurdity through *Happy Days* and *Waiting for Godot*

In *Happy Days*, the protagonists are a couple, Winnie and Willie and they are the only characters in the play. In *Waiting for Godot*, the protagonists are two men who are acquainted with each other, Vladimir and Estragon. Though three other characters show up at different times, Vladimir and Estragon are alone most of the time. Nothing is conventional about these plays, so the characters also have unconventional relationships. For example, it is unclear whether Vladimir and Estragon are good friends or mere acquaintances and whether Winnie and Willie have a good marriage is also a mystery. Beckett explores the absurdity of different human relationships through the lens of absurdism. He sprinkles elements of love and genuine connection here and there. Despite the depth of their relationship remaining obscure, the reader can be sure that Vladimir and Estragon have shared a long history. There is familiarity in the way they speak to each other. However, emotions and feelings in his works are often tinged with a pessimistic hue because most of Beckett's characters view relationships to be meaningless. The narrator in "First Love" goes along with a relationship because of the convenience it brought him but abandons it when it does not feel convenient for him anymore. Love is not a visible theme in Beckett's works, but it is there in the background like a cloud; soft yet ever-present. In romance novels

where love is placed front and center, it drives the plot forward or creates situations of intrigue. For example, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Jane eventually comes back to Rochester and stays with him even though he is not the man he once was. It is their love that helps them endure the bad days and find solace in each other. Love is what enables the novel to end on a happy note. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the youngest Bennet sister, Lydia Bennet, runs away with George Wickham because of her love for him. Here, love creates a tense situation for all the characters, the resolution of which drives the novel towards its end as with Lydia's future secured the protagonists are closer to achieving their happy ending. Beckett's characters do not talk about love the way Brontë's or Austen's characters do. They do not profess their love in a dramatized context, and their actions are not motivated by love. Nevertheless, they show their love in quiet moments. For example, even though Willie is largely hidden, he is still there with Winnie. His company brings her comfort. Vladimir and Estragon both being worried for each other is a sign that they care about each other deeply.

Happy Days begins with Winnie buried in a mound of sand up to her waist. This image immediately puts the reader out of his or her comfort zone. It notifies the reader that they must remain alert in order to understand the play. The play has two acts. In Act I, Winnie has access to her bag, which holds the necessary items such as toothpaste, a toothbrush, a comb, a hairbrush, and so on. The bag also contains a mysterious revolver. Willie is mostly hidden by the mound. Winnie does most of the speaking. Some of it makes sense, some of it does not. She reads the fine print on the tube of toothpaste, talks to Willie, and reminisces about happy days. Happy in the context of play is a vague feeling. It is not pleasure or elation. Perhaps the word 'happy' equates to life in the play. In Act II, she is buried up to her neck. Now she does not have access to anything and can only move her eyes. She still reminisces about happy days. Throughout both

acts, she repeats, “this is going to be a happy day” (Beckett 15). If happy is taken to mean life then this indicates that Winnie believes that this will be a happy day because she is still alive. She can still speak and think, even without the use of most of her limbs, she is still present. She has not withered away completely and that is enough for this day to be a happy day. In a review for *The New York Times*, Howard Taubman comments that *Happy Days* “reflects a sorrowing vision of man and his world”. “The earth reduces him to a crawling thing and ultimately swallows him”, while man desperately clings to hope. Winnie knows her days are numbered. The earth is swallowing her little by little. And yet she keeps speaking, however nonsensical her words may be. She talks to Willie even though he barely replies. She insists on this day being another happy day, all while knowing it most certainly is not. At the end of the second act, Willie emerges from his hole and tries to reach Winnie. His efforts are in vain because he cannot reach her, no matter how hard he tries. In the last scene, Willie is dressed like a gentleman. Winnie remarks that he is dressed as he was when he had asked for her hand. He is wearing a coat, a top hat, and white gloves. The irony is that he could be dressed for a happy function or a funeral. In simplest terms, this play is about the inevitability of one’s death. Winnie and Willie both know this. Willie seems to have accepted his fate. He is hidden most of the time and says very little. It is Winnie who is clinging to something, anything, even though she knows it is futile.

Waiting for Godot is also about clinging to something that may very well be pointless. Here, Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot, but Godot never arrives. They themselves do not know why they are waiting for Godot, or if Godot will actually arrive, yet they keep waiting. There is much debate on what this Godot could represent. There are countless interpretations. Beckett has famously said that the Godot that Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for is not God (Knowlson 372). It can be anything the reader wishes it to be. It can be God, or any other form of

higher power, it can be hope, or it can be death that they are waiting for. It is not what Godot represents that is important, but rather the act of waiting. What one feels while waiting, and what company he keeps. The futility of waiting when they do not know whether this Godot will ever arrive or not. This is another instance where, despite being in an absurd world, love shines through. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting in vain but they are waiting together. They are passing the time by conversing with each other. Again, love is not obvious here. It is subtle. It is in the friendship between the characters, in the fact that they are willingly keeping each other company. This is another play in two acts. In the first act, Vladimir and Estragon meet by a lifeless tree. They speak at length about different things that do not really matter or make sense. They encounter a traveller called Pozzo and his slave Lucky. Lucky is mute, but when Pozzo commands him to “think!”, he breaks out into a long monologue. Most of it is nonsensical, just words strewn together haphazardly. This monologue, dubbed Lucky’s Speech, goes on to become very popular in the literary field. Just as the meaning of Godot has been much debated, Lucky’s speech has also been closely examined by readers and critics alike to decipher its hidden meaning, if there is such a thing. After the speech, Pozzo and Lucky leave. Vladimir and Estragon remain confused by this encounter for a while, and then they meet a young boy who is the messenger of Godot. The boy says that Godot will not be arriving tonight, but he will be there tomorrow.

Act II begins with Vladimir and Estragon waiting by the same tree, which has grown a few leaves. They encounter Pozzo and Lucky again. Only they have no recollection of ever meeting Vladimir and Estragon. Pozzo has somehow gone blind and Lucky is fully mute. The boy arrives again to say that Godot will not arrive tonight but surely tomorrow. He claims to have never met Vladimir and Estragon. In the last scene of the play, Vladimir and Estragon

contemplate committing suicide, but they do not have a rope. They remain motionless as the play ends. The play is both hopeful and pessimistic. Vladimir and Estragon find this waiting to be tedious and pointless, and yet they continue doing it. This indicates that this act of waiting gives them a purpose, something to hold on to. Just as Albert Camus says in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the act of rolling the stone uphill creates a new world where this matters and so imagining Sisyphus happy is the most logical conclusion. Vladimir and Estragon forget things throughout the play. They forget events, words, and encounters, and they even forget the passage of time. The only thing keeping them going is waiting for Godot. Therefore, readers must conclude that the waiting is anything but futile; it is an act of survival.

In both *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days*, Vladimir and Estragon, and Winnie and Willie, only have each other. The two pairs depend on each other, talk to each other, and spend the time that they have together. The connection that the two pairs have with each other is the other thing that keeps them going, gives them a sense of hope. Winnie keeps speaking even as Willie ceases to respond, and Willie tries his hardest to reach Winnie. No matter how pointless they find it to be, both Vladimir and Estragon always come back to that place, and they wait for Godot together. It is the flicker of hope amidst the pessimistic existence that makes both plays so poignant. The characters love and care for each other. They do not express it explicitly, but it shows through their actions. Death looms heavily in both plays in a symbolic manner. There is a revolver in *Happy Days* that Winnie or Willie never uses, but its visibility indicates that they may have wanted to use it at some point. Vladimir and Estragon consider hanging themselves towards the end of the play, but they do not go through with it. Looking at it from a romantic point of view, it can be said that perhaps none of the characters resort to committing suicide because they do not want their companion to be completely alone. If Winnie's almost buried body indicates

her being close to death, then Willie's last effort to reach her and perhaps keep her with him for a little while longer is heartbreaking yet moving because it shows the power love holds over humanity even in an absurd world.

Absurdist Love and Solitude in *How It Is* and "First Love"

Beckett's short stories and novels also have elements of human connection that become warped and distorted in the absurdist world of his texts. He wrote thirteen short prose pieces between 1950 to 1952 and called them "Texts for Nothing". These were published along with three of his earlier short stories in a collection called "Short Stories and Texts for Nothing". Among the short stories in this collection, "First Love" is the most puzzling because it tells the tale of an unnamed narrator as he navigates through grief and feelings of romantic love. The father of the narrator passes away at the beginning of the story. This event leaves him homeless. A woman finds him on a park bench and takes him to her home. Beckett's employment of absurdist writing techniques makes the events in this short story even more mysterious. Details of the narrator's relationship with this woman are vague and unreliable. They have a child together, and this event jolts the narrator out of his reverie. He abandons both the woman and the child. The narrator is vulgar at times, but he is literate and well-read. He is deliberate in his unreliable narration. It is a love story of sorts. A love that is entangled with grief and man's absurd nature.

In an essay on Beckett's narratability, S. Jean Walton argues that expression and extortion are synonymous in a lot of his works. That his protagonists are reluctantly subjected to external influence that brings out their self-expression. Here, extortion means the force that the characters must face to be able to express themselves. In "First Love", Beckett splits the son from the father and unifies him with a "female Other" (Walton 550). The narrator is so consumed by his role as

son that facing the potential role of a father prompts him to run away. The extortion in this case is of a sexual kind, “where sperm is forced out of the unwilling protagonist” (551). It is as if the story itself is forced out of the narrator. The story of his self going from son to lover to potential father. As a lover, the narrator is much the same as he was as a son. It is the birth of the child that shakes his entire being. He started feeling uncomfortable during the pregnancy when the woman would talk about the baby coming soon. “She kept plaguing me with our child, exhibiting her belly and breasts and saying it was due any moment” (Beckett). He believed he was “worse off” in this house, but he “wasn’t blind to its advantages”. However, even those advantages were not enough to keep him in his role as lover and face the challenges of being a father. He thinks about his own father as he’s moving away from the house, the baby, and his responsibilities. His father had shown him constellations, including the Wains. He looked for the Wains specifically because, without his father, he was not able to recognise any of the other constellations. This is indicative of how he is not prepared for something as huge as being a father. The only thing he knows is being a son, and so he remains a son by running away from the responsibilities of being a father.

Beckett intensifies the use of absurdism in his novel *How It Is*. Separated into three parts, the novel is a monologue of the narrator’s life. The narrator tells the story of his life as he crawls through endless mud. The text has no punctuation and is divided into paragraphs of different lengths. The narrator is alone in the first part. He is in the dark, in a muddy place, and he does not know how he arrived at such a place. He talks about a time when he was in the light, living a more traditional life. In this life in the light, he had a religious childhood. A life with a woman, where there was a house. The details of this life are vague and ambiguous. Peppered throughout this part of the novel is also the description of the muddy place the narrator is currently in. There

is no sky, no light, no sense of time or place. Only mud and darkness. Part 1 ends as the narrator discovers a creature in the dark, muddy space, whom he calls Pim. In Part 2, the narrator is with Pim. There is talking, and there are happy moments. The narrator becomes the tormentor of Pim. Pim talks about a life similar to the narrator's life in the light. Just as the narrator had talked about disjointed and repetitive stories, Pim's stories are also fragmented. In this part, the narrator calls himself Bom. The second part ends as the narrator is left alone in the mud once again. In Part 3, the narrator is alone but now with the memories of Pim. he begins to question whether Pim really existed. He then thinks there may be others living in the mud like him and Pim. However, he can only be sure of himself, the dark, and the mud. The entire novel is introspective. Beckett does not give closure to the arcs of the characters' stories, nor a structured tale. The reader is left with a vague tale of existence. The novel alludes to the decay of the physical body, the end of man, and the world around him. It is a novel about life as much as it is about its decline.

In an article for *The Guardian*, Nina Power remarks that "not a single punctuation mark breaks the relentlessness of the text (Beckett's *How It Is*), yet the prose is anything but flowing". The novel resembles a free verse poem in this sense. The fragmented sentences dance somewhere between poetry and prose. The voices of the narrator and Pim are like distant pasts that have faded to such a degree that it is unrecognisable. Fragments of memories that may not be the narrator's own. He does not know for sure that the life in the light that he receives flashes of memories from is his own life or that Pim existed. He can only be sure of his current self who is in this dark, muddy field. Floating just above the bleak emptiness of the muddy cage-like space are memories of light, a blue sky, a life of routine, and the obscurity of relationships. The gaps within the narrator's life in the light prompt the reader to fill in with their own stories and

reflections. The abruptness of the entire novel mimics life in a way because life starts without the individual's permission, it follows its own path, and then ends when it needs to. All one can do is try to remember events and incidents. The narrator fails to remember most details. Therefore, the only certainty he is left with is that he "shall die" (Beckett 147).

Beckett and Love: A Conclusion

Waiting for Godot, *Happy Days*, *How It Is*, and "First Love" all have similar messages, yet at face value, they could not be more different. Of course, the relationships portrayed in these texts are anything but conventional. Even tropes of friendship and found family cannot be applied here in the same way they can be applied in the romance genre, but the underlying message is the same. At the end of the day, a genuine human connection is more important than anything else. Beckett explores the human condition, interactions with one another, and the effect people have on each other. Winnie, Willie, and the unnamed narrator in *How It Is* are all at the end of their lives. Winnie and the narrator both reminisce about the past. Winnie thinks about happier days when Willie would be near her; now she can hardly see him. The narrator vaguely recalls a life in the light. Broken moments, objects, and obscure memories of other people around him. His happy moments are with Pim in the second part of the novel. Pim talking about his other life made the narrator happy. Happy to know he is not alone in this dark mud. Vladimir and Estragon stay together even as they bicker and say nonsensical things. Pozzo and Lucky also stay together as they suffer life's cruel fate.

The narrator in "First Love" grieves for his father, not so much in words, but in actions. His time with the woman gave him purpose; staying at the house had advantages that tied him to it for a while. The birth of his child is a terrifying experience. He is not ready to be a father when

he has just lost his own. He is terrified, he is grieving, and he is an absurd hero. The combination of which makes him run away instead of facing the challenges life throws at him. It is not to say he is weak. None of Beckett's characters is weak. They have a quiet strength about them, hidden within the edges of their absurdity. No two characters are the same, and yet Beckett excellently delivers a deeply touching tale of the human condition every time. Loving someone is a difficult task, but it is also rewarding. It does not always mean to give yourself away. To love someone, one must love themselves. One must "become world for himself for another's sake", which means one must become whole before giving himself to another (Rilke 41). To love oneself, one needs solitude. The narrator in "First Love" was not ready to love the child, as he himself had lost his father recently. He needed the learning time, the solitude that would have prepared him to love his child. These are the things that are not explicit in Beckett's works but they reveal the characters' states of mind and motivations for their actions. Martha Nussbaum argues in "Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love" that one learns their emotions from society through stories. The way one perceives the world around them impacts the way one perceives emotions and feelings (Nussbaum 287). Thus, Beckett's characters, who are thrown in an absurd world, view love in an absurdist way because that is the only way they know how to view emotions.

Along with allusions to love, death's presence can also be sensed in Beckett's works. Absurdism makes the deathly symbolism more known, while love remains in the shadows. Winnie, Willie, Vladimir, Estragon, and the narrator in *How It Is* are close to death. Their absurd lives point to a vibrant life that has long been put to rest. In Vladimir and Estragon's fragmented and distorted conversations, there are glimpses of a life where they were not bound to a barren land. In *How It Is*, the narrator was not always in the dark. He had a life in the light but his being

in this dark, muddy place is indicative of a grave. Even Winnie talks about a time when she and Willie had met other people. All of this alludes to their declining lifespans. Erich Fromm argues in *The Art of Loving* that man's awareness of himself and his eventual death becomes the reason for his alienation from life (Fromm 8). This argument, when seen from an absurdist perspective, indicates that love and other emotions are also involved in making man realize the absurdities of life and thus, become isolated. As one grows closer to death, his existence becomes disunited with his emotions, which is demonstrated in the actions of Beckett's characters. Death being so close to the characters is an absurdist element that is also seen in Albert Camus's novels and short stories. Though there is no record of it, Beckett's way of employing absurdism in his works does suggest that he may have been aware of Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. It is a seminal work that has framed the philosophical ideas of absurdism.

Chapter 4

An Absurd Death: Death, Grief, and Existential Reflection in the Works of Albert Camus

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus opens the argument by saying how most people gravitate towards suicide after discovering the absurd, which is a philosophy that forces people to face the meaninglessness of their own existence. He then goes on to emphasize that even though death may seem like the most plausible solution to the problem of the absurd, it is not the answer. The absurd is the conflict between man's desire to give meaning to his life and the indifference of the world. The indifference of the world to man's need to make his existence meaningful is what makes man turn to death. However, Camus ends the essay on a surprisingly hopeful note: that death is not the answer and one can go on living even if there is no great meaning to his life. Like this essay, many of Camus's works of fiction also have hints of optimism. *The Stranger* is one of them.

Finding Optimism in an Indifferent World

The novel begins with the news of the protagonist's mother's passing. This immediately sets the tone of the novel. It is eerie, mysterious, and confounding. The absurdist hero is indifferent throughout most of the novel. In part one, Meursault attends his mother's funeral as if it were any other day. He does not cry, does not react at all. He begins a relationship with an old acquaintance, Marie. He helps his neighbor, Raymond, get revenge on a girl without feeling any concern or remorse. In the following days, he learns that his neighbors have negative opinions about him. Then, one weekend, Meursault and Raymond encounter the brother of the girl

Raymond had taken revenge on and an Arab on a beach. After the brother injures Raymond with a knife and runs away, Meursault returns to the beach alone. He is disoriented, on the verge of a heat stroke, and he has a revolver with him. He sees the Arab who has a knife with him. In a dizzying commotion, Meursault presses the trigger of the revolver and the Arab is shot. He shows signs of emotions then, and says, "I knew that I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I'd been happy" (Camus 59). The exact nature of his emotions was unknown as he proceeded to shoot the motionless body four more times. Part 1 ends as he says, "And it was like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness" (59).

In part 2, Meursault is in prison, awaiting his trial. He does not show signs of remorse or guilt initially. He does not deny the murder charges either. His days in his cell are quite tolerable, though at one point he realizes that he has started to talk to himself. The prosecution decides to use his lack of tears at his mother's funeral to paint him as a cruel monster. He is then sentenced to be publicly decapitated. His impending doom looms over him as he is put in a new cell. The prison chaplain visits him one day in hopes of reconciling him with God, but Meursault rejects the chaplain's offer because it comes from a worldview where he cannot fathom Meursault's willingness to be in conflict with God. In rejecting the chaplain's offer to reconcile with God, he also rejects this notion of putting God on the highest pedestal. Meursault then thinks about what his mother must have felt as she awaited her death at the retirement home. All hopes of an escape or appeal leave his body and mind as he accepts the "gentle indifference of the world" (122). The novel ends as he discovers that he had been happy and that in that moment, waiting to die, he was happy again. Happy in the sense that he was content with what his life meant and content in the way his life was about to end. Even though to others this may seem like a dishonorable way to go, as Meursault's death is the result of a death sentence in a court of law, to him it reaffirms

his belief in the world being indifferent and that brings him contentment. Camus leaves the reader with the same perspective he did with *Sisyphus*, that one must imagine him happy even though he is living in an absurd world where his actions do not seem to matter, because he is able to give purpose to his life. Meursault had lived his life in indifference, and now, faced with death, he understands that the indifference of the world is much like him; “so like a brother” (123). It is as if Camus is saying that embracing the indifference of the world is exactly what the absurd demands.

This kind of subtle optimism in the face of despair, where characters find freedom in rebelling against the absurd, can be found in Camus’s other works too. For example, in *The Plague*, the people of Oran do not give up even though they know they cannot win against a disease as strong as the plague. They keep resisting it. *The Plague* is another novel by Camus that has its fair share of eerie atmosphere and existential crises. Set in the 1940s in Oran, a French Algerian City, the novel begins as rats in Oran start dying unbeknownst to the people. Doctor Bernard Rieux discovers that a concierge has died of fever, and together with a colleague, he determines this may just be the start of an epidemic. However, no one takes his concerns seriously until the death tolls rise and there is no other option but to quarantine the city. Other characters are introduced who want to escape the city, even with the quarantine restrictions. There are breakouts of violence and looting, and martial law has to be enforced. After a few months of this chaos, an anti-plague medicine is created, but it fails the trial. Things turn very dark. Characters who initially wanted to leave the city stay and help others fight this terrible disease. And then towards the end of the novel, things start looking up. There are fewer and fewer people dying because of the plague, and after a few more months, the city gates are finally opened.

The novel ends as Bernard Rieux thinks that this plague or any other plague could still attack innocent people in a happy city. It can lie dormant for years to come. Louis Rossi compares the plague to one's ability or urge to murder someone. One must continuously fight the 'plague' within them, because "we are all contaminated by the germ of murder, all guilty in some measure" (Rossi 417). Germaine Bree calls *The Plague* a classic because not only does it illustrate precisely the inner transformation millions of people today go through but it also defines man's humanity. The novel creates double symbolism through the plague. It is a spiritual evil as well as a physical one. "The reader draws from the book a sense of human dignity" (Bree 99). There are no clear villains in the novel. Camus is able to paint a clear picture of human nature without pointing fingers at anyone. Of course, chaos ensues at several points in the novel. Funerals become a regular activity where the deceased do not receive the respect they should, but that is to be expected since there is a city-wide crisis happening. However, within the chaos, there are things to be admired. How Doctor Rieux continues to help patients till the end of the novel. Raymond Rambert changes his mind and stays in Oran. There is moral ambiguity in almost every page. As Bree points out, Camus creates a concrete fictional universe where people act exactly as they do in the real world. Fighting the plague is much like facing the absurdity of life because one must create one's own purpose within the chaos and ambiguity.

Hope in an Absurd World in Camus's Short Stories

In 1957, Camus published a collection of six short stories called *Exile and the Kingdom*. The stories continue to explore Camus's ideas and ideals that his earlier novels, such as *The Stranger* and *The Plague*, had explored. Anne Minor regards these stories as examples of classic art. She says that within the pages of these stories, Camus has chosen ordinary men. There is a "kind of

restraint, a will not to go beyond the limits of man” (Minor 75). There is existentialism and there is absurdism. Through these stories, Camus brings in social commentary and politics and pairs them with his views of the absurd. “The Silent Men” is the third short story in the collection. It speaks about the labor and management systems and the power dynamics between them. The age-old class struggle is brought into focus. The story is also about camaraderie in a way. The silent men are workers at a cooper’s shop. They arranged a strike to receive a raise, but it failed, and they returned to work. They were still enraged and so they refused to speak. When there is news that the owner’s daughter is seriously ill, they still do not speak. Once there was a sense of camaraderie between the workers and the owner but now the workers do not feel a sense of kinship with the owner any longer because of his rejection of their demands. The owner’s attempts at reconciliation fail, and the workers do not greet him as he leaves for the day. Despite their cold attitude towards the owner, the atmosphere amongst the workers remains friendly and warm. Yvars, the protagonist, however, is deeply affected by the owner’s daughter’s illness. The other workers seem morally unaffected. But Yvars cannot stop thinking about the little girl.

The story ends as he shares the day's events with his wife and concludes that it is the owner’s own fault. To some extent, Yvars, as an absurd hero, can be seen as the opposite of Meursault. Meursault was indifferent to most things in his life, including the death of his mother. Yvars, on the other hand, is affected by the owner’s daughter’s illness even though he is disappointed with the owner himself. The overall theme of the story is powerlessness. The business is in decline. The workers return to work even as they are unhappy about the results of their strike. This event has forever altered their relationship with the owner. So, they stay but enforce a rebellion of their own by not speaking. Everyone will eventually die, and so in the grand scheme of things, they choose not to lash out at the owner. Power struggles between the

working class and the master class almost always turn out this way. It is the working class who eventually gives in or makes compromises. As people grow older and older, the inevitable existential realization that their time on earth is coming to an end puts things into perspective and they choose which battles are worth fighting. In this case, the workers choose to remain employed. They choose their struggle and recognize the purpose in their chosen struggle.

The sixth and final short story in the collection *Exile and the Kingdom* is “The Growing Stone”. Set in Brazil, the story is abundant in its symbolism as it creates a bridge between reason and faith. French engineer D’Arrast arrives at a town in Iguape, Brazil, with the goal of constructing a sea-wall to protect the lower quarters from a flood. His arrival paints a stark contrast between him, an educated European with Western values and reasoning and the town in Iguape that is humid and mysterious. He sees poverty everywhere he goes but he also sees the vibrant nature of the local people. Most of the local people are not keen on him, and he can feel their hostility towards him. Socrates, the man who has been driving D’Arrast around, tells him of the holiday and the festivities that will take place that night. He explains that some fishermen found a statue of Jesus that had drifted upstream from the sea. The people stored it in a grotto, a cave. A stone grew there, and now every year they celebrate by hammering the stone for blessings of happiness. “And then it keeps growing and you keep breaking. It’s the miracle!” (Camus 62).

D’Arrast then meets a sailor who tells him a story of his own miracle. He was at sea when his ship caught fire. The boat capsized and he went down with it. He was able to see the light of the church of Jesus in Iguape and made a promise to Jesus that if he saves him, he will bring a 100-pound stone on his head. The waters became calmer after that and so did the sailor’s heart. He was able to swim to the shore. He tells D’Arrast that tomorrow he will keep his

promise. He also invites D'Arrast to a different festival where there will be dancing. That evening, D'Arrast goes to a hut near the forest. There is a statue of a horned god. Women and men dance around the statue. The sailor had told D'Arrast that he would not dance since he had to carry a stone the next day, but he got caught up in the festivities and started dancing. The next day, he struggles to carry the stone and eventually abandons the idea of carrying the stone to the church. D'Arrast steps up and carries the stone without a word. But he does not carry it to the church; instead, he carries the stone to the hut where the local people had their ritual. He places the stone in the center, in the place of the hearth. People from the night before arrived. No words were spoken for a while; the only sound they could hear was of the river. The story ends as the people invite D'Arrast to sit down on the floor with them, signifying their acceptance of his effort.

D'Arrast's decision to place the stone in the hut instead of the church indicates his alliance with the people. Though he may not understand their religious values, he empathizes with them. His act of carrying the stone does not come from a place of religious faith. It comes from the acceptance of other people's faith. It is entirely human, a gesture of compassion and humility. William Birdsall argues that the main message of the story can be found in the title and the contradiction it embodies. One does not think of stone as something that can grow. So, the title, "Growing Stone," suggests the breaking down of a hard exterior through powerful natural and human forces. It reveals "a man's journey into an alien material world and the resulting transformation in his consciousness of himself and his place in the world" (Birdsall 01). It points directly to the existential reflection one must do after encountering the absurd. D'Arrast acts morally not for the sake of being moral or because it is the right thing to do. He does it because of his growing consciousness and emotions towards the poor people in Iguape. According to

Anne Minor, the stories in *Exile and the Kingdom* “present the philosophical and poetic symmetry which Camus has always favored” (Minor 76). Though none of the stories are directly linked to one another, they illustrate the bigger image of Camus’s existential and absurdist philosophy.

Camus and Death: Concluding Remarks

Camus has always preferred to be called an absurdist and not an existentialist or a nihilist like Nietzsche, despite drawing inspiration from him. Camus’s novels and short stories prove why Camus is not a nihilist. There is an underlying optimism that comes with every one of his stories, in varying intensity. In “The Growing Stone”, the optimism and hope are stronger than in “The Silent Men”, where Yvars is sympathetic towards the owner’s daughter but does not do anything about it. D’arrast, on the other hand, takes the moral and physical weight of another’s promise. He carries the stone himself when the sailor fails. He also understands how much they value their old religion and places the stone in the hut. When examined from this perspective, it is easier to see that Camus’s absurdist heroes become progressively more hopeful from text to text. Meursault in *The Stranger* comes to terms with the absurdity and inherent indifference of the world when he faces his own death. Doctor Bernard Rieux in *The Plague* takes on a moral duty and continues to do it in the face of adversity. And as mentioned a few sentences earlier, Yvars from “The Silent Men” only begins to grasp the moral institutions of humanity, and D’Arrast from “The Growing Stone” takes that understanding further by taking action. Through these absurdist tales, Camus once again establishes the point that he made in *Sisyphus*: understanding and encountering the absurdity of life is only the beginning. Living with that understanding is the end goal.

Chapter 5

Love, Death, and Absurdity

Absurdist fiction demands attention. The content, the writing, the thought process behind the writing, the authors, all of it is important in the theater of the absurd. Both Beckett and Camus know this, and they utilize their knowledge very well. Linguistically, Beckett and Camus could not be more different. Beckett's language is absurd in and of itself. It is fragmented and at times nonsensical. Camus's language is less chaotic than that of Beckett. It is dark and haunting. It is within the darkness of the words that Camus weaves in little pockets of light and hope. The sense of hope in Camus is deeper within the text but still clearly discernible. Beckett, however, makes it harder for the reader to find hope or light in his works. One must look very closely to understand that the light in Beckett's works is in the relationship between the characters. It is where the elements of love come into play, even though Beckett did not write about traditional romance. His use of fragments and broken sentences also breaks down the relationships between humans to paint a clear picture of the human condition. It is the base on which his works stand. Beckett's understanding of the absurd is rooted in and tied to the human condition.

Linguistic Absurdity

The absurdity in both of their works starts from the titles themselves. In *Waiting for Godot*, Godot does not arrive. Vladimir and Estragon do not know who or what Godot is, or why they are waiting for this mysterious Godot. Usually, waiting for someone or something means familiarity to some extent. One does not wait for someone if they do not know the person. So, Vladimir and Estragon's unfamiliarity with the figure of Godot makes the waiting itself

meaningless and absurd, which in turn makes the title absurd. In *The Stranger*, Meursault is rejected by the people around him, by the society he lives in. He is “thrown in jail” and eventually sentenced to death. His indifference to the people around him makes him an unknowable entity. Thus, he becomes a stranger to everyone, an alien in his own society. Thus, the title reflects the absurd nature of the protagonist as well as the content of the novel (Ullah et al., 50).

As mentioned earlier, the language in both *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days* is fragmented. Characters abruptly shift to different topics; sometimes the shift happens mid-sentence. Most of Vladimir and Estragon’s conversations go nowhere. They repeat themselves quite frequently. This breakdown of communication is Beckett’s way of showing how meaningless things have become. That there is no use in actually communicating because nothing matters. When Vladimir begins to tell the story of the two thieves from the bible, Estragon is confused at his use of “our Saviour”.

VLADIMIR: It'll pass the time. (*Pause.*) Two thieves, crucified at the same time as our Saviour. One—

ESTRAGON: Our what?

VLADIMIR: Our Saviour. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other... (*he searches for the contrary of saved*)... damned.

ESTRAGON: Saved from what?

VLADIMIR: Hell.

ESTRAGON: I'm going.

He does not move.

(Beckett 05).

This indicates that not only does Estragon not remember Jesus, but he also does not remember heaven and hell. He has forgotten more than religion. He has forgotten the most basic truth about the world. To him, none of it matters, and yet he does not move. This happens several times in the play. Both Vladimir and Estragon say they will leave or move or do something, but they keep sitting or standing in the same place. Their words do not match their actions. It shows not only the breakdown of communications but also of Vladimir and Estragon as individuals. They have lost their sense of selves. They are in despair. Later on, in Act II, even as they struggle to communicate, Vladimir and Estragon hold on to each other because they are all they have left. Their sense of selves may have been lost but their camaraderie remains.

VLADIMIR: You again! (*Estragon halts but does not raise his head. Vladimir goes towards him.*) Come here till I embrace you.

ESTRAGON: Don't touch me!

Vladimir holds back, pained.

VLADIMIR: Do you want me to go away? (*Pause.*) Gogo! (*Pause. Vladimir observes him attentively.*) Did they beat you? (*Pause.*) Gogo! (*Estragon remains silent, head bowed.*) Where did you spend the night?

ESTRAGON: Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!

VLADIMIR: Did I ever leave you?

ESTRAGON: You let me go.

VLADIMIR: Look at me. (*Estragon does not raise his head. Violently.*) Will you look at me! *Estragon raises his head. They look long at each other, then suddenly embrace, clapping each other on the back.*
End of the embrace. (Beckett pp. 50-51).

In *Happy Days*, it is mostly Winnie who speaks. Willie hardly ever responds. Therein lies the breakdown of their communication. Winnie keeps mumbling things. Different topics in the same sentence. She gets distracted quite frequently by the different items she has around her. For example, the fine print on the handle of the toothbrush that she has. Her speech is much more fragmented and disjointed than that of Vladimir and Estragon's.

Winnie -no pain- (looks for toothbrush) - hardly any - (takes up toothbrush) - great thing that - (examines handle of brush) - nothing like it - (examines handle, reads) - pure ... what? - (pause) - what? - (lays down brush) - ah yes- (turns towards bag) - poor Willie - (rummages in bag) - no zest - (rummages) - for anything - (brings out spectacles in case) - no interest - (turns back front) - in life - (takes spectacles from case) - poor dear Willie - (lays down case) - sleep for ever - (opens spectacles) - marvellous gift - (puts on spectacles) - nothing to touch it (looks for toothbrush) - in my opinion - (takes up toothbrush) - always said so (examines handle of brush) - wish I had it - (examines handle, reads) - genuine ... pure ... what? - (lays down brush) - blind next - (takes off spectacles) -ah well - (lays down spectacles) - seen enough -

(Beckett 10).

Her memory is deteriorating, and her eyesight is less sharp than before. She is worried about Willie. The excerpt, without any context, looks like someone has put together random words without any connection, but even with the context of the play, this excerpt hardly gives any clue as to what exactly the state of mind of Winnie is. What she is thinking is hard to discern, which is what makes this such an excellent piece of absurdist fiction. Upon examination, it becomes clear that Winnie has also lost her sense of self. She is half-buried in a mound. Her partner is

hardly visible. She is slowly slipping away from existence. Throughout the play, despite it all, she keeps saying it will be a happy day. Just like Vladimir and Estragon kept saying that they were waiting for Godot. These repeated sentences in the plays are the mantras that the characters are holding onto, for without them, they really will have nothing left to go on. The use of fragmented language can also be seen in *How It Is*. The entire novel lacks punctuation. The narrator talks about his life in light in broken and distracted sentences. For example, “that's all for the moment there I leave I hear it murmur it to the mud there I leave for the moment life in the light it goes out” (Beckett 09). Here, the narrator was giving disjointed descriptions of his life-in-light and then the memories went away, so he could not give more descriptions. He then moves on to narrate about the mud that he is currently in. “on my face in the mud and the dark I see me it's a halt nothing more I'm journeying it's a rest nothing more” (09). Beckett uses this linguistic fragmentation as an absurdist writing technique to truly capture the human condition when faced with their own decay and deterioration.

Camus does not use fragmentation to capture the absurdity in his works. He uses different linguistic techniques. His prose is blunt and to the point. It is emotionally detached. The bluntness is what immediately throws off the reader. For example, the opening two lines of *The Stranger*. “Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know” (Camus 3). The first sentence itself is enough to grab the reader's attention, but Camus adds the second line to truly drive home Meursault's indifference. Later in the novel, he just watches as Raymond insults and assaults a girl in the name of revenge. “The woman was still shrieking and Raymond was still hitting her. Marie said it was terrible and I didn't say anything. She asked me to go find a policeman, but I told her I didn't like cops” (Camus 36). After the police had broken up the fight, Meursault went about his day as if the incident had not happened at all. After returning home, he says, “Marie

and I finished fixing lunch. But she wasn't hungry; I ate almost everything. She left at one o'clock and I slept awhile" (37). Meursault's narration is as devoid of emotion as it can be. He states facts like how Marie had lost her appetite, but does not explain or ponder how that might be because of the fight they had just witnessed. And Meursault himself is not affected at all. He knew the fight was coming because Raymond had talked to him about his plan. He did not say anything then, and he did not say anything when he saw Raymond hitting the girl.

Similarly, the language in *The Plague* and "The Growing Stone" is also emotionally detached and point-blank. Especially when the narrator updates the reader about the death toll in *The Plague*. "On the previous day ten deaths had been reported" and "On that day forty deaths were reported" are two examples of how clinical and matter-of-fact these reports are. As if they are not reporting the count of human beings dying, but just numbers and figures. This level of detachment is needed in a story like this because the use of language is masking the horror of it all. It is shielding the reader as well as the characters themselves from emotional breakdowns.

The word "plague" had just been uttered for the first time. At this stage of the narrative, with Dr. Bernard Rieux standing at his window, the narrator may, perhaps, be allowed to justify the doctor's uncertainty and surprise, since, with very slight differences, his reaction was the same as that of the great majority of our townsfolk. Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from a blue sky. There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise. (Camus 18).

This novel is different from *The Stranger* in the sense that the characters are actually surprised by the arrival of the plague in their town. Meursault accepts the indifference of the world. He

does not take his death sentence as the world being cruel to him, but the townsfolk and the doctor in *The Plague* do see it that way. It is in the juxtaposition between indifference and cruelty where absurdity shines through in the novel, and it leads to the resilience of the characters. They accept their fate but do not succumb to it.

Absurdist Settings and Atmospheres

The setting of Camus's works is also imbued with his philosophical understanding of the absurd. In *The Stranger*, there are three places where death takes place. The retirement home where Meursault's mother dies. Her funeral is an extension of this death. Then Meursault kills the Arab at the beach. Lastly, the prison and court where Meursault is sentenced to death. The story jumps from one place of death to the next with indifference. The setting in *The Plague* is a plague-stricken town, where death is inevitable. It is where indifference meets cruelty. "The Silent Men" and "The Growing Stone" have similar settings in the sense that in both short stories, there is a working environment. Yvars and his group of silent men navigate the relationship between the working class and the owner class. They return to work and do it silently all day. And D'Arrast is in an unfamiliar place because of work. He is placed in a setting where he is a foreigner. He is on the outside looking in. The prose reflects that beautifully. In the beginning, he is unsure of everything. The local people, the rituals, and even their hostility towards him confuse him. As he begins to get his bearings and learns more about the rituals and their value, he becomes more understanding. To the point where he is able to decide to carry the burden of the sailor, and he then also comes to the conclusion that the stone is better suited to stay in the center of the hut, where the rituals take place, instead of the church.

Beckett's settings also pull the reader in. The barren tree in *Waiting for Godot*, the mound of sand in *Happy Days*, and the muddy darkness in *How It Is*. In these works, the setting remains the same till the end. The barren tree in *Godot* grows a few leaves in Act II, which is the only indication of time passing. Winnie being buried up to her neck in Act II of *Happy Days* indicates that her end time is nearer than when she was buried up to her waist. And in *How It Is*, the narrator goes in and out of describing his life in the light. The narration is not linear. In "First Love", Beckett uses a detached tone for the narration. Grief mingles with indifference and absurdity. The prospect of new beginnings comes into the mix, and that scares the narrator. Doubt is an important component in this short story. "The narrator tries to structure his existence by means of notes, measurements and a system of living, but confesses and stresses that he knows nothing for sure". He is reflective of his previous actions, but "his need to control reality prevents him from understanding the world around him" (Fledderus 01). The birth of the baby lets him know that he cannot control his reality any longer. He must face the uncertainty of life. This knowledge ultimately leads to him running away. Relationships are meaningless in his view. By running away, he leaves behind the opportunity to understand relationships, and he also leaves behind the possibility of understanding himself.

Echoes of Love, Death, and Absurdity

If the absurd is the belief that everything is meaningless, then love is what leads one to find meaning in life. Death is invariably connected to the absurd. When faced with the indifference of the world, one almost always turns to death. Camus uses this connection to illustrate grief and loss in an absurdist way. He uses death as a prominent theme in almost all of his works. Death cannot be separated from the absurd, but Camus also shows that hope is possible even when the

absurd hero finds everything to be useless, even when he sees existence itself as meaningless. Just like Sisyphus, Meursault, Doctor Rieux, Yvars, and D'Arrast also face the absurdity of life and accept their fate in a way that either brings them happiness or makes them persevere. Camus's philosophy of the absurd may be dark but it is also imbued with light and hope. It is an intentional choice that Camus makes. This is where Beckett's absurdist thought differs from that of Camus. In Beckett's portrayal of the human condition, in the interactions between different characters, and in the absurd relationships among the characters, one can find elements of love as a theme. And almost always, there is also death, grief, and existential thought.

It is because Beckett illustrates his absurdist thought through images of decay and deterioration. Love is not a conscious choice he makes for his characters and yet it remains as an afterthought. It goes to show how inextricably love is connected to human beings, to nature, and to life itself. In Beckett's works, love does not represent romance. It represents life among the varying images of loss, decay, and decline. Beckett does not try to inspire hope in his readers like Camus does. He is pessimistic throughout the novel or play or short story. He shows the uselessness of existing in a world where nothing matters. Because none of it lasts forever; decline is inevitable. Still, life shines through as different hues of love. This is why love is such an important theme in literature and why it has been showing up in all kinds of literature since the beginning of time. Just as death is inevitable, love is also a force that can weather any storm. Both love and death have been used as themes, be it central or peripheral, in literature throughout history. They are literary devices that move the plot forward, explain the actions of the characters, and even help readers understand the absurd nature of the world, as illustrated by Beckett and Camus.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Literature at its very core is a vehicle with which humans express themselves. Works of fiction illustrate the author's imagination and creativity, but they also reflect the human condition and society as we know it. Love and death are two inseparable elements of life that find their way into any genre of art and expression. Both themes have had a place in literature since the very beginning. Because of its very nature, one may think that love as a theme does not belong in an absurdist work of fiction, but this thesis can conclude that love does belong in absurdism. The problem of the absurd is the realization that humans are insignificant to the immeasurable universe. When faced with the fact that human existence is meaningless, one can only think of death as a solution. This is why death is discernible as an essential theme in absurdism. Both Samuel Beckett and Albert Camus are noteworthy figures whose works have made absurdist fiction a prominent part of the literary canon. They were contemporaries and wrote around the same time. They were also living in Paris at the same time. It is a shame that there are no records of these two important writers ever being in touch with one another.

Samuel Beckett's contribution to the theater of the absurd is especially important because it framed and transformed twentieth-century theatre. *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days* perfectly embody absurdist action and dialogue, elements of love and friendship, and allusions to death. Together with *How It Is* and "First Love", Beckett's works illustrate just how important love and death are as themes in absurdist literature. *The Stranger* shows how man can find happiness and contentment even in the face of death by accepting the cruelty of the world. This happiness is the rebellion Albert Camus talked about in *Sisyphus*: that one must rebel against the

absurd instead of submitting to it. Doctor Rieux's resilience in *The Plague*, Yvars's concern for the daughter in "The Silent Men", and D'Arrast's decision to place the stone in the hut in "The Growing Stone" are excellent examples of accepting the absurd but doing it on their own terms and rejecting death as the only solution. There is hope in Camus's works. It is subtle and deep within the text, but it is still visible. This hope is the element of love as a theme that solidifies love's, along with death, place in Camus's absurdist works and philosophy. Through exploring Beckett and Camus's works, one can thus say that love and death certainly belong in absurdist fiction. This is why love and death are pivotal motifs that are needed in any and all works of literature.

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