



# A comparative study Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*

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**Abstract**— *The definition of ludicrous according to Eugene Ionesco is "that which is devoid of purpose. Man is lost when he is cut off from his transcendental, philosophical, and theological origins; all of his activities become ludicrous, meaningless, and pointless. Every time Ionesco defines the term ridiculous by referring to the same concept of the absurd, his representation of the absurd infers a paradox. The term "absurd" doesn't have a clear definition. Therefore, despite all attempts to provide meaning, the absurdity of the ludicrous exists in the situation of meaninglessness. The word "absurd" defies easy interpretation in Camus and Ionesco's statements. Ultimately, it is impossible to definitively define the word "absurd". How therefore may the concept of the Theatre of the Absurd be defined? The term's creator and leading theorist, Martin Esslin, claims that "the Theatre of the Absurd is a part of the "anti-literary" movement, which has found expression in abstract painting with its rejection of "literary" elements in pictures or in France's "new novel" with its reliance on the description of the objects and rejection of empathy and anthropomorphism." Esslin, like Camus and Ionesco, doesn't give the concept of the ridiculous a specific meaning. Instead, he is able to draw attention to the connection between European literature and abstract art from the 1940s and 1950s. A literary text either imparts or asks for the process of concretization anytime it interacts with the reader, therefore there may be an "abstract" painting but not a "abstract" piece of literature, one could say. "Absurdity" of the literary text appears to be the equivalent of "abstractness" in art in Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" and Ionesco's "Rhinoceros" due to the ways in which both concepts contest the established structures by undervaluing ideas or disobeying the rules of artistic and literary production in art and literature. However, these two works touch on the subject of resistance in the process of enacting it. As a result, a counter-performance occurs in Beckett's text, inviting the reader to interpret it in a different way. Or, the text of Ionesco shows a character against the enigmatically alluring, jouissance-like harmony of the rhinoceroses. Resistance ends up being the only defining trait of "Literature of the Absurd". Additionally, the absurdity of these poems is a result of resistance. Resistances represent both the idea of absurdity and the texts of the Theatre of the Absurd. As a conclusion, we might state that the concepts "absurd" and "absurdity" defy accurate definition and clear interpretation. Certain referents and signifieds cannot under any circumstances be associated with these words. Second, the absurdity of the texts is created by resistances that either the narration or the literary text's structure exhibits in the works that Martin Esslin refers to as texts of the Theatre of the Absurd. Exploration of the word "resistance" is necessary here.*

**Keywords**— *Absurd, Ionesco, resistance, anthropomorphism, transcendental, philosophical.*



## INTRODUCTION

One of the key individual in French avant-garde theatre in the 20th century was Eugène Ionesco, a Romanian-French writer who was born in and died on 28 March 1994. He wrote most of his plays in French. With his "anti play," *The Bald Soprano*, which helped launch the Theatre of the Absurd, which includes a number of plays that, in keeping with the ideas of the philosopher Albert Camus, explore concepts of absurdism and surrealism, Ionesco started a revolution in the ideas and techniques of drama. In addition to receiving the Jerusalem Prize in 1973 and the Austrian State Prize for European Literature in 1970, he was admitted to the Académie française in 1970.

Samuel Barclay Beckett was an Irish novelist, playwright, short story writer, theatre director, poet, and literary translator who lived from 13 April 1906 to 22 December 1989. His writings are grim, impersonal, tragicomic, and frequently paired with black humour and foolishness. These themes are present in both his literary and theatrical works. As his artistic career developed, his work grew more repetitive and self-referential, with greater aesthetic and linguistic experimentation. He is regarded as one of the last modernist authors and a major player in the Theatre of the Absurd, as defined by Martin Esslin. Beckett, who spent the majority of his adult life in Paris, wrote in both French and English. Beckett received the Croix de Guerre in 1949 for his service as a member of the French Resistance organisation Gloria SMH (Réseau Gloria) during World War II. The Nobel Prize in Literature was given to him in 1969 "for his writing, which, in new forms for the novel and drama, finds its elevation in the destitution of modern man." He and Jorge Luis Borges earned the first Prix International in 1961. In 1984, he became the first individual to be chosen as Saoi of Aosdána.

**1.1.** The theatre of the absurd is a term coined by the critic **Martin Esslin** to describe a group of plays written by European writers, including Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, in the aftermath of World War II. These writers sought to create works that would reflect the sense of existential despair and alienation felt by many people in the post-war era.

The key features of the theatre of the absurd include:

- **Illogical and fragmented narratives:** Absurdist plays often lack traditional narrative structures and feature disjointed and seemingly random events.
- **Nonsensical dialogue:** Absurdist plays frequently make use of language in unconventional ways, with characters speaking in circles or using meaningless phrases.

- **Surreal and absurd elements:** Absurdist plays often feature surreal or absurd situations that defy logic or reason.
- **Themes of existentialism and alienation:** Themes pertaining to the human condition, such as the purpose of life, the absurdity of human existence, and the sense of alienation that many people feel in contemporary society are explored in absurdist plays.

**Eugène Ionesco** and **Samuel Beckett** are two of the most prominent writers associated with the theatre of the absurd. Although they have distinct styles and themes, their works share many similarities in terms of the use of illogical narratives, nonsensical dialogue, and surreal elements. Ionesco's plays, such as "**Rhinoceros**" and "**The Bald Soprano**," often feature a sense of the grotesque, with characters and situations that defy logic and reason. The plays use humor, irony, and satire to critique modern society and question the meaning of human existence. Ionesco's plays often focus on the loss of individual identity and the dangers of conformity. Samuel Beckett's plays, including "**Waiting for Godot**" and "**Endgame**," are known for their spare, minimalist style and bleak, existential themes. Beckett's works often feature characters who are trapped in absurd situations and are unable to escape their own sense of despair and alienation. Beckett's plays use repetition, silence, and absurdist humor to explore the human condition and the limitations of language and communication.

Both Ionesco and Beckett were influenced by the philosophical and existential ideas of their time, particularly the work of thinkers like **Martin Heidegger** and **Jean-Paul Sartre**. Their plays reflect a sense of disillusionment and skepticism about traditional values and institutions, and they offer a critique of modern society and the human condition. Overall, the theatre of the absurd, as exemplified by the works of Ionesco and Beckett, challenges audiences to question their assumptions about the nature of reality, language, and human existence. The works of Ionesco and Beckett are important in literature because they pushed the boundaries of traditional dramatic forms, reflected the anxieties and uncertainties of their time, and explored fundamental questions about the human condition. Their legacy continues to inspire writers and artists till date.

"*Rhinoceros*" by Eugène Ionesco and "*Waiting for Godot*" by Samuel Beckett are both plays that are commonly associated with the theater of the absurd. Although the two plays have distinct plots and characters, there are several similarities between them.

- **Lack of Logical Narratives:** Both plays lack a conventional narrative structure, with events happening in a seemingly random and disconnected manner. The characters are often confused about what is happening, and the audience is left to draw their conclusions about the meaning of the events.
- **Themes of Existentialism:** Both plays explore themes of existentialism, questioning the purpose of human existence, the meaning of life, and the nature of reality. The characters in both plays grapple with these questions, often with no clear answers.
- **Repetitive Dialogue:** Both plays make use of repetitive and nonsensical dialogue, with characters often repeating the same phrases or talking in circles. This technique adds to the feeling of confusion and disorientation experienced by both the characters and the audience.
- **Symbolism:** Both plays make use of symbolism to convey their themes and ideas. In "Rhinoceros," the rhinoceros is a symbol of conformity, while in "Waiting for Godot," the tree is a symbol of hopelessness and despair.

The concept of absurdity is defined as follows by Albert Camus in "The Myth of Sisyphus": "A world that can be described by logic, however flawed, is a familiar world. But man feels alienated in a cosmos that has been suddenly bereft of the illusion of light. His exile is unrecoverable since he lacks both the memory of a past home and the prospect of a future promised place. The separation between the actor and his environment, and between the actor and his life, is what genuinely creates the absurdity sense." According to Camus, "life" lost all of its meaning during a time of war and atrocities, when death is most apparent. So, man shouldn't try to end his life. It is not strange that characters in The Theatre of the Absurd's plays battle and resist despite their futility and desperation. This fight, which Camus refers to as the experience of absurdity, may be seen as the effort to exist. Camus describes the sensation of absurdity as a constitution that calls for additional interpretation; he does not define the absurdity or the ludicrous itself; rather, he defines the emotion of absurdity. Camus attempts to define the phrase, but is unable to pin down the absurd's fundamental meaning since there isn't one. However, according to Eugene Ionesco, absurdity is "anything which lacks aim... Man is lost when he is cut off from his transcendental, philosophical, and theological origins; all of his activities become ludicrous, meaningless, and pointless." Every time Ionesco defines the term ridiculous by referring to the

same concept of the absurd, his representation of the absurd infers a paradox. The term "absurd" doesn't have a clear definition. Therefore, despite all attempts to provide meaning, the absurdity of the ludicrous exists in the situation of meaninglessness. The word "absurd" defies easy interpretation in Camus and Ionesco's statements. Ultimately, it is impossible to definitively define the word "absurd".

How therefore may the concept of the Theatre of the Absurd be defined? The term's creator and leading theorist, Martin Esslin, claims that "the Theatre of the Absurd is a part of the "anti-literary" movement, which has found expression in abstract painting with its rejection of "literary" elements in pictures or in France's "new novel" with its reliance on the description of the objects and rejection of empathy and anthropomorphism." A literary text either imparts or asks for the process of concretization anytime it interacts with the reader, therefore there may be an "abstract" painting but not a "abstract" piece of literature, one could say. "Absurdity" of the literary text appears to be the equivalent of "abstractness" in art in Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" and Ionesco's "Rhinoceros" due to the ways in which both concepts contest the established structures by undervaluing ideas or disobeying the rules of artistic and literary production in both art and literature. However, these two works touch on the subject of resistance in the process of enacting it. As a result, a counter-performance occurs in Beckett's text, inviting the reader to interpret it in a different way. Or, the text of Ionesco shows a character against the enigmatically alluring, jouissance-like harmony of the rhinoceroses. Resistance ends up being the only defining trait of "Literature of the Absurd". Additionally, the absurdity of these poems is a result of resistance. Resistances represent both the idea of absurdity and the texts of the Theatre of the Absurd. As a conclusion, we might state that the concepts "absurd" and "absurdity" defy accurate definition and clear interpretation. Certain referents and signifieds cannot under any circumstances be associated with these words. Second, the absurdity of the texts is created by resistances that either the narration or the literary text's structure exhibits in the works that Martin Esslin refers to as texts of the Theatre of the Absurd. Exploration of the word "resistance" is necessary here. The word "gap" also carries political and social connotations. Ionesco defines "rhinocerosization" as- "I was astounded to see everyone around me completely embrace Nazism. Of course, it took time; it wasn't an overnight procedure. Everyone eventually found a good enough cause to join the ruling party. When you ran into an old acquaintance, he would suddenly start to alter right in front of your eyes. I was instructed to keep my opinions to myself. I have witnessed

mutations firsthand. People have changed just in front of my eyes. They lost their original personality and acquired a new one. They merged into one another." Ionesco alludes to the process of "thingification" of the ego, or identification with the object of one's flight. Given that he fights against nazification as well, Ionesco opposes concretization. It is the rhinocerosization, raising both political and literary issues at once, expressing the text's rejection of your acceptance of the text with its blank spaces. Berenger, like Vladimir, represents the reader who refuses concretization in this manner and is self-forgetting.

The blind reader in "Waiting for Godot" is portrayed by Estragon and Pozzo as someone who continuously forgets everything. Pozzo responds, "I don't remember meeting anyone yesterday." But tomorrow I won't remember what I said to whoever today. So don't depend on me to teach you. Boy, Godot's messenger, is also blind, as shown by his admission to Vladimir that despite having visited him the day before, he doesn't know who he is. Estragon and Vladimir's tendency to be unthinking also develops into an issue of forgetting oneself- "No longer are we in danger for thinking. Not the worst thing are thoughts. Thinking is a terrible act. The characters would prefer not to think because it requires them to memorise information and make rational judgements. They still act in certain ways, but Ionesco argues that their actions have no purpose. "My darling Berenger, you don't exist because you don't think," responds Jean" in response to Berenger's admission that he periodically doubts his existence. You'll think once you get going. Unlike Jean, who accentuates his willpower in a Nietzschean way, Berenger thinks that "life is a dream." When speaking about his alcoholism, Berenger says, "I'm conscious of my body constantly, as if it were made of lead, or as if I were carrying another man on my back." "I have a hard time accepting who I am. Even my own identity escapes me. Once I've had a drink, the lead then leaves and I return to being myself." Berenger learns the purpose of his life by losing himself and entering his unconscious. He successfully avoids remembering and thinking on a regular basis. Or, to put it another way, he struggles with awareness, which compel him to remember and reflect. He reaches the realm of self-forgetfulness and learns about his true self in the process. Due to his fixation with logic and reason, Berenger maintains his self-forgetting throughout the performance by refusing to remember, even when every single person transforms into a rhinoceros.

Resistance to language: Lucky in "Waiting for Godot" delivers a protracted monologue that makes no sense at all. First of all, Benjamin says that Lucky's meaningless speech is an example of pure language since it "no longer means or expresses anything." The second problem is

linguistic suffering. As Lucky expresses the original language without referring to a specific meaning, he not only exhibits the death of the language and frees it from the illusion of reading, but his expression also conveys a notion of the text's unreadability. The inability to interpret Beckett's writing suggests that the signifier does not match a certain signified. Loss of origin in the literary text results from the separation of the reference and the referent. Silences are another element of Beckett's prose that contribute to its unintelligibility and discontinuous narrative. Beckett devalues language, in Esslin's words, "to communicate the incommunicable." Since he wants to transmit the uncommunicable, Beckett periodically suspends the narration by going into silence. The author communicates the incommunicable by urging the reader to participate inside the text so that the text may realise its existence since he lacks the text to illustrate it with suitable discourses and logical explanations. As a result, the text demonstrates its desire for the reader. Godot cannot be conveyed; the only way it can be is via the language's loss of value and its origin. In order for the reader to recognise the text's presence at this point, Beckett's text extends an invitation.

Eugène Ionesco's play "Rhinoceros" can be interpreted from several political perspectives. One interpretation is that the play is a critique of the rise of fascism and totalitarianism in Europe in the 1930s and 40s. The play is set in a small French town where people are turning into rhinoceroses one by one. The transformation is seen as a symbol of conformity and the loss of individual identity. The play can be seen as a warning against the dangers of mass movements and the surrender of individual will to group thinking. The rhinoceroses can be seen as a metaphor for the Nazi Party and the way in which individuals were swept up in the movement without thinking critically about their actions. Another interpretation of the play is that it is a criticism of the French Resistance during World War II. In this reading, the characters who remain human are seen as passive and ineffective in the face of the rhinoceros transformation. The play can be seen as a critique of the French resistance's inability to prevent the Nazi occupation of France. Finally, the play can be seen as a commentary on the human condition and the struggle to maintain individual identity in the face of societal pressures. The transformation of the characters into rhinoceroses can be seen as a metaphor for the loss of identity that occurs when people give in to societal norms and expectations.

## 1.2. Imagery of Rhinoceros in Eugene Ionesco's play.

Eugene Ionesco's play "Rhinoceros" is a dramatic exploration of conformity and the rise of fascism. The play features the imagery of rhinoceroses as a

metaphor for the transformation of human beings into mindless beasts.

In the play, the rhinoceroses are initially a symbol of something exotic and rare, but as more and more people transform into rhinoceroses, they become a symbol of a brutal and violent society. The imagery of the rhinoceros also highlights the absurdity of conformity, as people start to follow the herd and abandon their individuality.

As the play progresses, the rhinoceros becomes a symbol of power, as those who transform into rhinoceroses gain strength and become nearly invincible. The rhinoceros also becomes a symbol of destruction, as the transformed individuals wreak havoc on their surroundings.

Overall, the imagery of the rhinoceros in "Rhinoceros" serves as a powerful metaphor for the dangers of conformity and the potential for humanity to devolve into mindless beasts under certain circumstances.

### 1.3. Imagery of *Waiting for Godot* in Samuel Beckett's play.

Samuel Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot" is a tragicomedy that explores the human condition through the experiences of two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who are waiting for someone named Godot who never arrives. The play is famous for its use of imagery to convey a sense of despair and absurdity. Here are some examples of the imagery used in the play:

1. **The Tree:** A solitary, leafless tree stands in the center of the stage, serving as a visual symbol of the characters' isolation and barren existence. The tree is a constant reminder of the passing of time, as Vladimir and Estragon remark on its slow growth and the changing seasons.
2. **The Road:** The play takes place on a desolate road, with no indication of where it leads or where the characters have come from. The road represents the journey of life, with all its twists and turns, and the uncertainty of what lies ahead.
3. **The Hat:** Pozzo, a character who appears in the second act, wears a hat that becomes a focal point of the play. The hat represents the trappings of power and status, as Pozzo flaunts his wealth and control over his slave, Lucky.
4. **The Moon and Stars:** The moon and stars appear throughout the play, serving as a source of light in the darkness and a reminder of the vastness of the universe. However, they also add to the sense of confusion and disorientation, as the characters struggle to make sense of their surroundings.

5. **The Absurdity of Everyday Objects:** Beckett often uses everyday objects in unexpected ways to highlight the absurdity of human existence. For example, Vladimir and Estragon's hats become a source of endless amusement and frustration, while Lucky's rope is both a symbol of his enslavement and a tool for his brief moment of freedom.

Overall, the imagery in "Waiting for Godot" serves to highlight the themes of isolation, uncertainty, and the absurdity of life.

Eugène Ionesco and Samuel Beckett's absurd plays remain relevant in contemporary society for several reasons:

- **They challenge conventional thinking:** The theatre of the absurd, as exemplified by the works of Ionesco and Beckett, challenges conventional ways of thinking and invites audiences to question their assumptions about the nature of reality, language, and human existence. In an era of "fake news" and alternative facts, the works of Ionesco and Beckett can serve as a reminder to think critically and challenge established ways of thinking.
- **They explore universal human themes:** The works of Ionesco and Beckett explore universal themes such as the search for meaning, the struggle for identity, and the limitations of language and communication. These themes continue to resonate with contemporary audiences who are grappling with similar issues in their own lives.
- **They offer a critique of modern society:** The works of Ionesco and Beckett offer a critique of modern society and its values. They challenge the status quo and encourage audiences to question the institutions and norms that shape their lives. In an era of political and social upheaval, the works of Ionesco and Beckett can serve as a call to action for those seeking change.
- **They inspire new forms of art:** The works of Ionesco and Beckett have had a significant impact on contemporary art forms, including theatre, literature, and film. Their legacy continues to inspire new generations of artists who are experimenting with new forms and pushing the boundaries of conventional thinking.

## CONCLUSION

The sole distinction between Ionesco and Beckett is that Ionesco's text gradually depicts the resistance act using words rather than against language as Beckett's text does.

Although Ionesco is engaged in politics, one cannot label his writing as political. Ionesco depicts the nazification of the continent in his writing in a horrible way. It is catastrophic, contains critiques of rationality, Nietzscheanism, Nazism, and even Sartrean existentialism, but the way the book plays itself in contrast to the rhinocerosization phenomena is unorthodox; hence, it is anti-political. Ionesco instead discards any potential performances that may arise in response to rhinocerosization, offering no new strategy for the fight against Nazism or any other ideology. Ionesco doesn't allow his book to finish with an Adam and Eve scenario, even as Daisy and Berenger were beginning to think about getting married and having kids so they might fight against those strange monsters. Ionesco emphasises the disaster that Berenger is fighting alone to avert rather than battling Nazism on political fronts. The presence of a pure language makes the calamity obvious. Given that only Berenger speaks and understands it, that pure language is also dead. As a final point, despite my hypotheses about the ways in which jouissance appears in Ionesco's text, together with Beckett's text, they can both be read as texts of jouissance, which imposes a state of loss, discomforts, unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of the reader's tastes, values, memories, and brings to a crisis the reader's relation with language.

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