

From Minimalism to the Absurd: “The Intent of Undoing” in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*

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Abstract

Waiting for Godot ushered in an era of Absurd drama that drew on not only modern thought about life but also the modern image of life. Samuel Beckett, unlike Sartre and Camus as playwrights, stripped the façade of the modern existence and laid bare the scene with the minimum in its real image. To project such a stark condition of human experience Beckett chose to present us the maximum with “mere-most minimum.” The message in *Godot* appears to be existentialist, which Beckett denied, for he asserted that if ever he read philosophy it was Descartes, who gave the dictum ‘cogito ergo sum,’ or “I think therefore I am,” something that reflects a positive undertone of the play. Minimalism of form and content thus becomes the vehicle of the Absurd in *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett becomes the pioneer of the minimalist art in modern drama and champions ‘linguistic gravity’ without any traditional structure of plot. There are series of incidents but they don’t amount to anything and even incidence maybe too big a word. The characters sort of improvise in order to fill the time. The dialogue is repetitious, illogical and nonsensical; the characterisation is sketchy and inconsistent. Although theatre is the most concrete literary form available, when you see *Waiting for Godot* you are definitely seeing a set that consists of a tree and a road and you see five actors impersonating five people. That much is concrete. But no fact or relationship about that place or those people is ever certain. All is questioned and all is in flux. Beckett is not presenting an argument toward the conclusion of existential absurdity. He is presenting images of absurdity.

Keywords: Absurd; Minimalism; Waiting; Godot; Beckett; Undoing

Introduction

In the history of Literature very few playwrights have stood out to usher in something novel, something that would turn the course of its history and shape it in a way that had never happened before, whether it was Greek tragedy or Elizabethan tragedy like those written by Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare or Ibsen and Strindberg. Shakespeare followed Marlowe and so did modern dramatists who followed Ibsen, who is not only credited to have begun what we know as Modern Drama but also for transforming drama from verse to prose. Following the suit is Samuel Beckett who influenced the dramatists of the second half of the twentieth century with his extraordinary plays of which *Waiting for Godot* is the most written about and the most representative of his genius.

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett not only launched a new breed of plays it also became a yardstick for plays to come in a sense that it is almost next to impossible to comprehend what Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov and Edward Albee wrote. Although Existentialism as a philosophy was quite puzzling, the theatre of absurd, which *Waiting for Godot* ushered, added to

the chaos. The theatre of absurd was a result of a century of pondering, by philosophers from Kierkegaard to Sartre, over the purposelessness and meaninglessness of life. Though Kierkegaard represented a seemingly Christian view of an overbearing anxiety regarding the existence of man about which Sartre furnished a gloomy, bleak and pessimistic view or the atheistic view.

There is a sort of existential Angst and human abandonment to the hopelessness of the world. His characters depict an alienated humanity where rootlessness and homelessness are rife and life is lost in a meaningless void. The atmosphere is that of a post-apocalyptic vision, bleak and hopeless. Here meaninglessness of life is overwhelming. This stark diagnosis of the human condition deepens in every play creating a ubiquitous world that has been justly called 'Beckettian.'

This dark and stark Beckettian world calls for a philosophical interpretation not only because there are concrete suggestions of philosophical intent but also because this scene of "issueless predicament of existence" projects an outwardly pessimistic atmosphere embedded with hopeless characters living with an overwhelming sense of the aimlessness and meaninglessness of life. This kind of imagery led many critics pin down the philosophy to which Beckett supposedly subscribed.

Beckett denied any philosophical interpretation of his works and says about philosophers: "I never understand anything they write," which I don't agree with. Yet one needs to tread with caution and not over-emphasize the philosophical in his works, which may discount his serious commitment to aesthetics. His interest in Dante ('Dante's damned'), that he celebrated lifelong, his deep devotion to Rimbaud and Apollinaire, whom he also translated, and his great admiration for André Breton's surrealism, consolidate his commitment to aesthetics.

Beckett culled from Vaudeville as well as philosophical constructs, and made a concoction of these with theology at times. There is lot of restraint in the conversations of his characters, a sort of detached courteousness in difficult situations. Unlike Joyce who was informed by Aquinas at the University College and Neo-Thomist doctrines at Clongowes, Beckett was untouched by that kind of world, though he later read Dante and other Catholic figures like Jacques Maritain.

Waiting for Godot is his first produced play. It was first acted in Paris in 1953, in London in 1955 and in New York 1956. Although it was initially found to be rather puzzling it has proved to be the cornerstone for a vast amount of 20th century Drama. Its innovation profoundly affected many playwrights. It's almost impossible to come to terms with what Albee or Stoppard or Pinter wrote, unless you know about Beckett standing behind them. *Waiting for Godot* was only the start for Beckett himself who went on to write 31 more plays.

He created a new kind of theatre. I don't mean that everybody was influenced by him and others did other kind of play but he is the most striking and influential in the last half century of western theatre. Through the past 65 years an allusion to Beckett in the theatre, a quotation from him in a play by somebody else have had the kind of recognizable and magnetically compelling quality that a quotation for Shakespeare might have or Bible might have among devout people.

Beckett himself remains a rather mysterious figure. He died in 1989 but there isn't much known about his life. He was born in Ireland in 1906, his parents were middle class Protestants he was well educated at Trinity College, Dublin. He became one of the greatest expatriate writers of the twentieth century. He settled in Paris in 1930. Eventually he was forced to flee to the south of France and spent rest of the war more or less disguised as a French peasant. After the war he went back to Paris and settled there living in or near Paris for the rest of his life, which was an intensely private life, writing both fiction and drama in both French and English, but avoiding interviews to

evade explanations for his works, guarding the details of his life. He even refused when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature to turn out and accept it in person.

Beckett is a playwright who sustained a forty years career and became enormously famous by recycling nothing. If you don't like the Avant Garde particularly when it is grim, then this is the sort of thing you don't like. The range of human experience with which he deals is clearly narrow, far narrower than Ibsen or Shaw or Shakespeare, but it is not quite as narrow as the brief description above may sound. It is not all grim. There are some funny moments in Beckett. These are much more obvious on stage.

In over the 32 plays that Beckett wrote there is very considerable range of theatrical inventiveness. Many of his plays are very short but that reflects his constant effort to distil, to focus and to intensify, something critics term minimalism, or to use Brater's phrase "to do more and more with less and less" (Brater, 1987, p. ix).

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As a form, Drama is pretty conservative. People go on writing plays in the same shape of the same kind for year after year up to a century or more. It's very few playwrights who stand out in the history of western drama as founders, as inventors of a new mode. And they have enormous influence on their contemporaries and successors for a generation, two generations, sometimes three. In Elizabethan times it was Marlowe who set the fashion of plays about exotic conquerors and other high aspiring men who thought to challenge human limitations. Marlowe also established blank verse as the standard medium of speech for the elite stage and thereby set the mode for Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and great many others. At the end of the 19th century it was the Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright, who established the prose play in modern drama. With contemporary realistic settings and strong social implications, he forged the mode in which Strindberg, O'Neil, Miller and many others have done their best work. For the second half of the 20th century, this founder figure is certainly Samuel Beckett.

He was active in the production of his works. He himself directed the productions of his plays or consulted extensively with the directors who did. He worked closely with a number of actors and actresses whom he picked out especially talented for his purposes. His later plays suggest his quest for becoming ever more precise, ever more demanding, and ever more detailed in stage directions. His play called *Footfalls*, which involves a woman pacing back and forth across the stage, has such precise stage-directions that tell exactly how many steps she should take in each direction and when she should turn with which word and with which step, the whole thing choreographed precisely. But in no sense did he play the celebrity game, characteristic of many 20th century writers. You see the exact opposite of the other Irish born Nobel laureate and a 20th century playwright, Shaw. He was a playwright as a public man who forever debated public and political issues; Beckett was the dramatist as the private man. Nonetheless there is a widespread public impression of what his personality was like. His physical appearance was bleak; a thin craggy man with high cheekbones, a gash of a mouth and deeply incised facial lines, he looked scathed. That appearance coordinates with the bleakness of his plays, which concern isolated and alienated people, with never more than a few characters with uncertain connections to each other and to their environment, trapped at the extremities of experience. The Beckettian world is a world without colours (Brater, 2010) and usually without warmth. And by colour, I don't mean simply the colours of costume and set but it also means the intonation of the characters. Billy Whitelaw told how he would direct her and kept saying to her not to use much colour in the voice.

Disencumbering myself of Existentialism on the lines of Nick Mount (2008) I would like to focus on what Beckett does with the usual elements of theatre. He strips them down to a bare minimum. The British playwright Tom Stoppard has praised Beckett for an enormous theatrical breakthrough for creating an absorbing couple of hours with so little material, with the bare minimum, in what we can call a “Bergsonian pursuit of the naught” (Colangelo, 2017, p. 38). In Stoppard’s phrase, if we need to label, I would rather use the term minimalist than absurdist.

Minimalism is “sculpture or three-dimensional work made after 1960 [or rather, in the 1960s], that is abstract—or even more inert visually than ‘abstract’ suggests—and barren of merely decorative detail, in which geometry is emphasized and expressive technique avoided” (Baker, 1997, p. 9). But the application of the term “minimalism” to literature, while compelling in response to certain contemporary and subsequent works by *nouveaux romanciers* as well as a certain American tradition, has not been extensively developed. It is generally defined as “a poetics that holds that sparseness, tautness, understatement, and reduction are emblematic of poetic authenticity” (Preminger, 2016, p. 788). As far as prose goes, the only example given in the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* is Samuel Beckett (although more general discussions, for example Strickland’s, often mention Hemingway, Raymond Carver, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and others).

It’s a term that first got applied to art and music and has moved over in recent years into the discussion of literature. Minimalism is a technique that produces considerable perception of events with least textual matter. The structure is simple with lack of details, and readers have to find their own interpretation. It is the maximization of condensation of images that the author weaves with as few words as possible. Robert C. Clark, 2015, in his book *American Literary Minimalism*, says

The effectiveness of a minimalist story depends upon the successful use of three central techniques: allusion, implication, and efficiency. In order to create fiction that achieves thematic and linguistic gravity, authors working within the mode are economical in their use of language. Every word matters. (p. 138)

He says that minimalists concentrate more on details, in order to eliminate them in a palatable manner, and no scope is left for the reader or the audience to dawdle away from the play, and possibly read like a writer. Clark believes that in any minimalist literature, “The author brings us close to boredom, withdrawal, rejection of the work itself” (p. 3). Similarly it can be seen in drama. John Barth (1986) says:

There are minimalisms of style: a stripped-down vocabulary; a stripped-down syntax that avoids periodic sentences, serial predications and complex subordinating constructions; a stripped-down rhetoric that may eschew figurative language altogether; a stripped-down, non-emotive tone. And there are minimalisms of material: minimal characters, minimal exposition, . . . , minimal action, minimal plot.

“When I was working on *Watt*,” Beckett said in 1983, “I felt the need to create for a smaller space, one in which I had some control of where people stood or moved, above all of a certain light. I wrote *Waiting for Godot*” (In Knowlson, 1987) In Beckett’s plays there is so little there on the stage. The set of *Godot*, for example, consists of a tree standing by a road. Late in each act the moon rises, that’s it for the set. These three set objects do not in fact define any place or time. One of the tramps tries to affirm that the place is quite different from another place they have been.

VLADIMIR:

All the same, you can't tell me that this (gesture) bears any resemblance to . . . (he hesitates) . . . to the Macon country for example. You can't deny there's a big difference.

ESTRAGON:

The Macon country! Who's talking to you about the Macon country?

VLADIMIR:

But you were there yourself, in the Macon country.

ESTRAGON:

No I was never in the Macon country! I've puked my puke of a life away here, I tell you! Here! In the Cackon country! (Beckett, *WFG*, p. 93)

The dispute turns on a pun. Macon is the name of a real place in France. Cackon is a made up name based on the French children's word for excrement. So you need to know French to get those puns. Anyway they did not know where they are, whether or not the place resembles another place. One thinks that he is been to another place, the other doesn't think. They are just there by a tree and they cannot even agree on what kind of tree it is. It is in fact rather mysterious. In the first act it is bare, in the second act it has leaves, fully grown leaves. And it is understood or they supposed to understand that it is the next day.

We notice that most of the famous as well as self-reflexive statements of characters in *Waiting for Godot* are a result of the minimalist technique. Minimalism of the plot and self-reflexivity cohere. Even since his earlier days Beckett rejected metaphysical pretensions, for example in his description of Joyce's purgatory and the "absolute absence of the Absolute" (Abbott, 2010; Murphy, 2005). Beckett's minimalism indicts the emptiness in *Godot*, and projects an appeal that incites more engagement, something that fails to reveal itself as a subjective auto-affection. The audience or the readers of *Godot* tends to self-interrogate their selves and find it empty. This emptiness is consciously loud in the play. Because *Godot* does not predicate its emptiness as raw material for our philosophical system, the reader/spectator must ascertain his position to this emptiness, and how this minimum is not only to be preserved and but questioned at the same time.

There is a sort of ideology of absence and invocation of articulate silence here, where lack of purpose, hierarchy and design, define an apocalypse by reduction. This celebration of literary abstraction is "subtractive" in method (Locatelli, 1990) and the implosive weaving of the "merest minimum" is tantamount to "nothing to express, nothing with which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (Beckett in Buning, 2003, p. 36).

The reader (or the viewer) of *Godot* is tempted to surmise that art has been rejected for the sake of the absurd.² The impoverishment of form in *Godot* is more striking and wholesale than it is in Beckett's other works. *Godot* turns out to be an artwork of need and crisis. Although Beckett's other play *Breath* is a class in its own as far as Beckett's minimalism is concerned, there

is not much to see, for there is not much to say. *Breath* is useful as a case study in the dramatic use of impoverished composition. Herbert Blau says:

If *Waiting for Godot* was another testament to the decay of language, it was no mere pantomime of impoverished rhetoric, a mere autotelic gabble of words, words, words. Beckett worked like an engraver or a diamond-cutter. And in the best classical French tradition, he was purifying the language of the tribe, by referring words back to things, by making things of words. Despairing of communication, some of us were getting our kicks from silence. (In Gontarski, 2014, p. 720)

About his plays Beckett writes, “My work is a matter of fundamental sounds, made as fully as possible” (Koczy, 2018). *Breath* is emblematic of the difficulty we encounter in trying to disassemble a text that is nevertheless assembled out of discrete parts. The entire play, a half page long, consists of stage directions, and in this sense the title “Breath” could refer to the French soufflé, which is related to the souffleur or prompter, the one who whispers lines to the actors.

The theatrical situations in which the characters are placed are bizarre, and therefore memorable, and therefore easily the subject for jokes. That’s what one thinks of the plays. In *Endgame*, for example, the lead character is blind and sits in the centre stage and his aged parents live in metal bins, occasionally popping their heads. In *Happy Days*, in the first Act the principal character is a woman who is shown to be stuck in a mound of earth up to her waist. She goes through a routine with a few personal possessions that are within her reach, a comb, a bag, a mirror, etc. She turns her head occasionally to address her largely unseen husband. In Act 2 she is buried up to the neck and can move nothing except her mouth and eyes.

After World War II the most creative period of Beckett began and extended well into the 1960s. He wrote most of the novels and plays which marked his emergence as one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. This was the period that he wrote *Waiting for Godot* in, which made him famous and was responsible for drawing public and critical attention to his fiction. One more thing, remarkable about the period, was that he began to write his novels in French and then translate into English after sometime. After the war was over, Beckett realised the need to have narrated his own story in the first person narrative technique in fiction form. This made his writings more expressive. The subject matter of this first person monologue was he himself. With monologue, he no longer needed specificities of time and place. He need not worry about setting a scene or creating a past life for any of his characters. Beckett, “knows the past, but basically his characters do not [Unlike] Joyce or T.S. Eliot, Beckett does not load the cultural past into his work” (Postlewait, 1978, p. 483). The source of his creative experience was “the dark” he had struggled to keep under. This unconscious, in forms of memories and dreams, Beckett might have tried to express consciously or unconsciously. Like so many writers of that time Beckett was interested in “within” not “without.”

In *Waiting for Godot* two tramps wait on a country road by a tree to fulfil an appointment that they have with a mysterious character named Godot, or that they believe so. In each act two other men come by but they eventually leave without altering the situation. At the end of the each act a boy turns out to say that Mr. Godot wouldn’t come that day. The famous comment on this is that *Waiting for Godot* is a play where “nothing happens – twice” (Mercier qtd. in Busi, 2015, p. 6). In the original New York production some theatregoers felt so bamboozled by this play that the New York taxi drivers began to count on a large exodus, taking place at the intermission. They began to line up outside the golden theatre. Beckett refined this bleakness almost to the vanishing point in a play called *Breath*. It was produced in 1969, the year of his Nobel. In *Breath*, there are no live actors at all and the curtain rises on a rubbish dump, and we hear a faint cry.

Then we hear a faint and slowly inhaled breath accompanied by a slight increase in the lighting level followed by the slowly exhaled breath with a corresponding decrease in the lighting level and the faint cry is repeated exactly the same way, curtain down. The whole thing takes 35 seconds. Latecomers were not to be seated.

The critic Martin Esslin in his book *The Theatre of Absurd*, 1961, remarks that most of the playwrights like Eugence Ionesco, an expatriate writing in Paris, Harold Pinter writing in London, Edward Albee writing in New York, can only be understood with Beckett behind them. Martin Esslin set the discourse for quite some time for years. Absurdity does not here mean ridiculous or stupid. It has a precise philosophical sense meaning illogical, lacking in rational coherence. This philosophical sense was particularly important in mid-20th century. Thought as deriving from existentialism, particularly the existentialism of Sartre or Camus, Existentialism argues that we live in an absurd universe, and that there is a fundamental disharmony between the universe and the human mind and reason doesn't apply to the world. The intellectual systems that we have developed, science, philosophy, and religion are simply castles in the air of our minds. They do not present any meaningful relationship between the world and us. The world is simply a place where we happen to find ourselves. Ideas and ideals have no relations to facts and therefore actions cannot have any real purpose and life has no meaning. We are just inexplicably here, wherever here is.

Camus asks in his essay the Myth of Sisyphus that if this is the case, if our relation to the world is really this absurd one, this absurd non-relation, why should we live at all? Why not kill ourselves? Suicide he says is the primary philosophical question. And suicide is an option considered a number of times by the tramps in *Waiting for Godot*. Its significant to note that in American culture and particularly in American education in the 60s and 70s when Beckett was becoming known to college students and Esslin was writing his book, Camus's 'Myth of Sisyphus' was also widely assigned on college syllabi. It was one of the texts that you could count on for every student having encountered.

Now the notion that life is meaningless has appeared in plays long before 1950s, you can find in Euripides, in crucial moments in Shakespearean tragedies, for example in Macbeth

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (Act 5 Scene 5)

And in fact Camus and Sartre themselves were dramatists as well as philosophers and they wrote plays concerning the senselessness of human lives but there plays were traditional in form. They had plots; they had intelligible dialogues and consistent characterization. They were using

the form inherited from Ibsen. And this is the crucial point that Esslin argues about the Theatre of Absurd. A plot implies a belief in the system of cause and effect. Cause and effect that actually works for the human mind, rational dialogue implies a belief in logic, consistent characterisation implies that human beings are not simply phenomena in flux but have stability and that they are selves or souls or something along that order. They are coherent over time.

As per Martin Esslin's arguments, the existentialist plays of Sartre and Camus contradict their own thematic points with the traditional structures of their plays. Their absurdity is a matter of purely abstract argument and is undermined by the theatrical means used to get the point across. In order to have a true theatre of the absurd one must abolish the traditional dramatic coherences of plot, dialogue and character. And that's what Beckett does; there is no plot in *Waiting for Godot*, it is perhaps "a coherence of incongruity" (Karoli, 1996). There are series of incidents but they don't amount to anything and even incidence maybe too big a word. The characters sort of improvise in order to fill the time. The dialogue is repetitious, illogical and nonsensical; the characterisation is sketchy and inconsistent. Although theatre is the most concrete literary form available, when you see *Waiting for Godot* you are definitely seeing a set that consists of a tree and a road and you see five actors impersonating five people. That much is concrete. But no fact or relationship about that place or those people is ever certain. All is questioned and all is in flux. Beckett is not presenting an argument toward the conclusion of existential absurdity. He is presenting images of absurdity. The longest speech in the play, a three page monologue by the slave Lucky, is festooned with verbal fragments of rational arguments but in fact is quite nonsensical.

Thus far Martin Esslin in the *Theatre of the Absurd* certainly puts his finger squarely on Beckett's major break from traditional theatre. But Esslin's analysis also seems to me to be quite limited. It makes Beckett merely a technical innovator who found a better way to put across an already existing philosophy. Beckett himself contradicted that. In one of the few comments he actually did not make about the interpretation of his plays, he said that neither he knew nor did he care much about existentialism. When he read philosophy he read Descartes, and that reflects directly, in his first poem at least. Furthermore Beckett's innovation seems to me go beyond the theories of existentialism. Camus and Sartre assume that people can still reason, even though reason may not apply to the world, a rational process is going on in the human mind. It is not at all clear of the characters in Beckett can reason or can sustain any such process for more than a moment. The radical changes in dramatic methods that Esslin rightly points out in Beckett are bound to generate new effects, new potential significances. And short or long, all his plays present us with some striking image of a person trying to come to grips with himself or herself, trying to understand his or her relation to past or present. *Krapp's Last Tape* shows us a man with an audiotape he made many years ago, and trying to recognise his younger self. *Happy Days*, the play about the woman trapped in the earth mound deals with the remarkable ability of some people to take life as normal even if they are surrounded by the most adverse situations.

Conclusion

The uselessness of thought and the consequent pointlessness of all human action has been a theme of Beckett's works. His existential and absurdist themes are reinforced by a literary style that experiments with formlessness and fragmented language, something that "works on the nerves of the audience and not its intellect" (Beckett in Graver, 2013, p. 36). The plot of *Waiting for Godot*, if there is one in the usual sense, serves to show that between Estragon and Vladimir there is a strange emptiness. It also demonstrates how the 'relation' between Pozzo and Lucky

reprobates to something as basic as a blind communicating to someone dumb by whipping or by jerking a rope.

Beckett's vision is cryptic, often nightmarish and his writings present a world of meaninglessness, valuelessness and void. His protagonists, mostly weak and disabled, are found in the moods of negation, despair, and hopelessness. The uselessness of thought and the consequent pointlessness of all human action has been a major theme of his plays.

In the wake of the two terrible wars and their horrors and in continued physical and philosophical suffering that Beckett had a first-hand experience of, there was an overwhelming silence imposed upon him. Beckett not only faced this silence in the most uncompromising way but also ways to express the need to write³ in an ever-minimalizing style, almost repeatedly for four decades. As a late modernist Beckett represents a great strand of minimalism in literature where "[T]he truth of being cannot be said with the ordinary language that today is ever more widely misused and destroyed by incessant talking" (Heidegger in Livingstone, 2009, p. 17). His works approach meaninglessness in the minimal form and content. The famous and comic self-reflexive commentary of Beckett's narrators and dramatic characters is doubtless not only a result of this minimalism, but is certainly interrelated. To put it differently, the minimalist style, "a style whose impact on the audience has been designed to be immediate and visceral" (Brater, 1987, p. 5), presents gaps or an appeal, which incite ever more engagement. But this engagement ultimately fails to connect and reveals itself as nothing but pure, subjective auto-affection—unless it then leads to self-interrogation of our projected selves, or relation to the world, and so forth, and find this, too, to be empty. Thus the works present us our emptiness. The shared empty, almost inexpressible presence in Newman and the early Minimalists is what I want to claim for the ethico-aesthetic thrust of Beckett's work. It is not purely aesthetic, nor is it merely discursive—the gloss on the work that has become so important in art since the '60s.

Our interest in Beckett's writing does not emerge from a fascination with the value of what it might be concealing from us, its secret, its reserve, or its shame. It is for this reason that Beckett's minimalist work is misunderstood when it is described as being nihilistic or negative. On the contrary, everything is affirmed, but the affirmations do not predicate a position that would allow the reader to aestheticize his or her understanding of Beckett. *Godot* demonstrates an aesthetic that transcends the limited and often dehumanized sphere we recognize in the poverty of minimalist art.

Notes:

1. See Gontarski, S. E. (1983). The intent of undoing in Samuel Beckett's art. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 29(1), 5-23.
2. In his review of the poetry of Denis Devlin Beckett writes:

[Poetry's] own terms, that is terms of need, not of opinion, still less of faction; opinion being a response to and at least (at best) for a time an escape from need, from one kind of need, and art, in this case these poems, no more (!) than the approximately adequate and absolutely non-final formulation of another kind. *Art has always been this- pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric-* whatever else it may have been obliged by the 'social reality' to appear, but never more freely so than now, when social reality...has severed the connection, [my emphasis]
3. It is interesting to note that some of Beckett's best critics have inverted Beckett's statement in insisting that Beckett's minimalism produces an autonomous artwork, art that witnesses the complete disintegration of the dialogic structure of question and response.

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