

Deconstructing the absurdity of characters in “waiting for godot” drama by samuel beckett

Tomi Arianto¹, Afriana¹, Septriani²

¹ Department of English Literature, Putera Batam University

²Department of Cultural anthropology, the Indonesia Institute of the Arts, Padang Panjang

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ABSTRACT

This article aimed to analyze an absurd drama entitled "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett. Derrida's theory is used to reveal the complexities contained in the narrative of the drama. This study used a qualitative descriptive method with the technique of deconstruction analysis. The results of this study answer two research variables including binary opposition as a form of deconstruction reading strategy and Arbitrary Relationship as a form of reversal of meaning in the story. There are 6 binary oppositions determined in this deconstruction strategy, namely Existence and ex-absentia, Hope and Despair, Loyalty and betrayal, Friendship and slavery, Perfection and Suffering, Reality and Imagination. Binary opposition is intended to see the relation that has been considered as a single meaning centered on a text. From this hierarchy of those binary opposition deconstruction could be seen that Vladimir and Estragon as the main characters of this drama are representation of the lower class which have been the victims of the Second World War. Absurdity is again present in the relationship between reality and hope. This hopes then leads to a construction of existence that is realized through the narrative character of Godot.



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Corresponding Author:

Tomi Arianto,

Departement of English Literature,

Putera Batam University,

Soeprato Street, Tembesi, Sagulung, Batam, Riau Island.

Email: tomy2088.ta@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Literary works have their own power system in presenting various dynamics of social phenomena. Literature displays various social aspects that can be interpreted openly by the reader. Literature can also be used as entertainment, escape, singing, criticism, and even as a means of resistance. With this reality, literature tends to be interpreted by critics as a social reflection. The same thing was conveyed by Sangidu (2004) that literature is the response of its creator (author) to the world (social reality) it faces. Literature contains the subjective experiences of its creator, a person's subjective experiences (individual or libidinal facts), and the experiences of a group of people (social facts). Teuww in Wiyatmi (2013) said that literary works are not born from a cultural vacuum. Thus, various phenomena can be revealed through literary works.

The relevance of reading deconstruction in an absurd work becomes complex and enigmatic. The absurdity of an understanding is based on the existence of non-existence. Camus in Foley (2014) explained that absurdity is meant to mean a life that is meaningless. The absurd is a state that is not reasonable (irrational) and even impossible (Camus in Yulistio, 2015). Is absurdity seen as a meaningless void? Of course not. Derek (2017) considered that absurdity gives birth to a measure in an abstraction. It is this complexity that leads to the dismantling of meaning by deconstructing its meaning arbitrarily. Literature can

then be read as a form of sarcasm, ideological criticism, resistance to culture, or a resonance that reflects a society. In this case, deconstruction is present as a complex textual reading method.

One of the drama scripts works that presented an absurd narrative wrapped in a comedy story entitled "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett. Beckett is an Irish novelist, playwright, short story writer, and theater director. He is indeed famous as a writer of black comedy and nonsense (Muldoon, 2014). He was subsequently nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969. He was also awarded the Saoi of Aosdána in 1984 (Turiel, 2014). The play *Waiting for Godot* was first written in French in 1948 and then translated into English in 1995. It was first performed in English in London by the British Royal National Theater in 1998. This performance was later chosen as the most significant English language play of the 20th century (Aleks, 2000).

Waiting for Godot involves very few characters but provides a significant role and builds a different character identity. The characters in this story included Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, Lucky, and Boy. It is begun with a desperate scene of Estragon taking off his boots, Vladimir talks about political, economic, and unfinished problems. They also told of their past successes and return to the present, where they don't know what to do with the repeated words "Nothing to be done." While waiting for Godot, they also wanted to hang themselves as a form of entertainment. Then Pozzo and Lucky came, they initially thought of as Godot. Lucky is a loyal servant of Pozzo. He walked around tied up and carrying two bags that were never taken down. Various uncertain conversations continued to flow between Vladimir and Estragon as they awaited the arrival of the Godot. The Entity of Absurdity is present in every dimension of the narrative: uncertain life certainty, unclear activities, character confusion, paradoxical relationships between characters, and strange storylines.

The phenomenon of this absurd entity is actually a reflection of what humans have felt until this century. The existence of Godot in the story describes an *ex absentia*, or existence from nothing. The *ex absentia* entity in Indonesia is also present in the belief of some people in the presence of "Ratu Adil" or "Satrio Piningit." He is believed to be a leader who is able to bring the archipelago to glory (Dahlan, 2014). The first fair queen was initiated by Prabu Jayabaya, the king of Kadiri who ruled around 1135–1157. According to his prediction, the signs of Ratu Adil's arrival were a social crisis, natural disasters, and the fall of the feared great king (BBCnew, 2020). The myth of the arrival of the just queen is very similar to the story of *Waiting for Godot*, who awaits a savior who can give happiness in the future.

The phenomenon above increasingly reveals that there are various forms of absurdity in the story but also present various interpretations that have their own common thread. Derrida's concept of deconstruction offers a delay in meaning. The meaning carried out by researchers at this time will certainly be openly distorted by subsequent deconstruction interpretations. Similarly, absurd humor exhibits complexity. Therefore, the researcher raised the theme of "deconstructing the absurdity of characters in the drama script "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett. There are two research variables in this study including binary opposition as a form of deconstruction reading strategy and arbitrary relationship as a form of reversal of meaning in the story.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used descriptive qualitative to see the relationship between variables in the study. The text reading method in this research used deconstruction reading stage offered by Derrida. Deconstruction reading could thwart conceptually differences in the text. Although it is often found that the differences between the basic concept for the creator of a work in the text is known as a logo centrism, The method of reading text deconstruction is inconsistent and even paradoxical, so that the standards are contained in the text itself (Endraswara, 2011). The standards are used reflectively to destroy differences that were originally in the form of binary opposition.

The data collection method used in this study certainly refers to librarian research. By using the deconstruction reading technique, the research team compiled several stages carried out and collected research data. Data collection techniques used in this study includes:

1. Reading the research primary data, namely the script of the drama "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett and finding research data in the form of the construction of binary oppositional relationships between each text
2. Re-reading to the findings carefully to ensure the correctness of the data
3. Recording data findings in a systematic and organized manner, accompanied by data sources to facilitate re-checking when needed

Data analysis in this research is done by looking at the relationships between textual units contained in "Waiting for Godot" drama script. In addition, we will also see the relationships of the textual units with data coming from outside "Waiting for Godot" drama script. Among them are texts related to Indian culture and customs. The work steps undertaken in this study can be summarized as follows:

Deconstructing the absurdity of characters in "waiting for godot" ... (Tomi Arianto)

1. Presenting data according to the research problem, namely deconstructing the absurdity of characters in the script drama "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett,
2. Data analysis according to research problems
3. Interpreting data according to the specified variable, namely binary opposition as a reading strategy for deconstruction and arbitrary relations of absurdities in the text
4. Conduct deconstructive analysis by considering Binary Opposition, Blind spot, Text's internal contradiction, Reconstruction-deconstruction, Text self-destructing
5. In research reports, interpret arbitrary absurdity relationships and report on them.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Deconstruction is one of the strategies for reading literary works in the poststructuralism approach. This methodology is offered by Derrida with his epistemology the rejection of the existence of a single center. Deconstruction reading prefers to dismantle a hierarchy that is considered an establishment in a text. In the context of literary works, the hierarchy of the text's stability can be revealed through narration, symbols, plot, characterization, time, and even circumstances (Gough & Price, 2004). The application of deconstruction to this literary work is aimed at tracing the most absurd drama of its time written by Samuel Beckett in the play *Waiting for Godot*.

Waiting for Godot's story involves very few characters. The main characters in this drama are Estragon and Vladimir. Both are homeless bums who have no direction or even a purpose in life. Strangely again in this story, these two old friends who are just waiting for the time to die are both expecting the arrival of someone they call Godot. I don't know what they expect from Godot, but the narration says that happiness will arise when they can meet Godot. Throughout the plot they will meet Lucky and his master and think that it is Godot. The next narration, filled with the death of Pozzo, the lucky master which causes Lucky to feel that he has no purpose in life. Until the end of the story Estragon and Vladimir cannot meet Godot at all. But without the hope of Godot's presence, of course, this story will not work.

a. Existence and ex-absentia

Deconstruction as a method of critical reading of literary texts is then used as a technique in translating complexity in the absurd story *Waiting for Godot*. One of the stages of reading the deconstruction is to determine the binary position in the story. Binary position places something that is privileged while others are absent or marginalized (Barry, 2014). This can be traced from the following short excerpt from the story *Waiting for Godot*:

| | |
|----------|--|
| Estragon | : Let's go! |
| Vladimir | : We can not. |
| Estragon | : Why not? |
| Vladimir | : We are waiting for Godot. |
| Estragon | : (desperate) Ah! |
| Estragon | : Nothing to be done, nothing came, nothing went, it was terrible! |

(Beckett, 1995:15)

The arbitrary that appeared in the quotation above reflected the existence and non-existence. An existence is an area of normality desired by every human being. The figure of Godot represents the entity of that existence. Godot is the hope awaited by Estragon and Vladimir as the giver of happiness. But repeatedly, they came to the place, only to be given hope to despair. *Nothing to be done* implied an absurd entity's existence. If it is reversed, this arbitrary hierarchy of existence showed a reality of life that every human being is currently pursuing. Humans live on that hope. Humans work, get hurt, and get up again because of the existence of that happiness.

b. Hope and Despair

Hope is a hierarchy of ideals that is a condition of normality for humans in general. This reference is the basis for the binary opposition formulated by the researcher in the deconstruction reading strategy step in this drama. Hope, of course, is reflected in a spirit that continues to surge within Vladimir and Estragon as they wait for Godot's arrival. Even though they don't know what the expectations are from Godot's arrival, hope is a glimmer that keeps the existence of the two alive. This can be seen from the quote from the conversation between Vladimir and Godot who continue to talk about how valuable hope is to fill his days:

| | |
|----------|--------------------------------|
| Estragon | : He should be here |
| Vladimir | : He didn't say he would come. |
| Estragon | : So what if He didn't come? |

Vladimir : Tomorrow we will come back here again.
 Estragon : Also the next day
 Vladimir : Maybe
 Estragon : So on to the next.
 Vladimir : What matters is _____
 Estragon : Until he really came?

(Beckett, 1995:20)

The uncertainty or ex-absentia that has been described above becomes a reality of the narrative outlined by the author in the story. It is this uncertainty that makes hope never reach zero. But whether that hope will continue to incarnate in humans into an ideal. For Vladimir and Estragon, of course, this is not entirely true. There was a point of doubt when the question mark symbol appeared as they questioned how long they would wait for Godot to appear. The deconstruction method tries to reverse the hierarchy of ideals into despair, making life meaningless as Craig, W. L. (2000) ideas talking about absurdity without God. On the contrary, despair makes self-awareness that hope is only a void that continues to be filled so that humans remain drifting in a state that is actually nil. On the other hand, ideality arises when despair comes, humans will realize their true nature. Even humans will wake up from the euphoria of hope that never gives an answer about certainty. The big question is how the question of the truth of hope becomes something that is taboo to talk about. So that it increasingly reinforces that despair is an anomalous condition that must be avoided in humans.

c. Loyalty and Betrayal

Slaves and loyalty become complementary narratives in the story which are also interesting to deconstruct. This binary opposition happens not to be focused on the main character, but through supporting characters who help build the story. The story is getting more absurd with the arrival of the characters Pozzo and Lucky in the story. Pozzo was a lord on a journey and happened to cross the road where Vladimir and Estragon were waiting for Godot. Lucky is a slave who is treated like an animal by Pozzo. His neck is tied with a rope and he even calls Lucky a dog. Pozzo also carried a whip as a weapon to give instructions to Lucky. The hierarchy of loyalty and slave phenomena in the story can be shown in the following conversation:

Estragon : Wouldn't it, Didi, be more fun?
 Vladimir : I'd like well to hear him think.
 Estragon : Perhaps he could dance first and think afterwards, if it isn't too much to ask him
 Vladimir : (to Pozzo). Would that be possible?
 Pozzo : By all means, nothing simpler. It's the natural order.
 (He laughs briefly)
 Vladimir : Then let him dance. Silence.
 Pozzo : Do you hear, hog?
 Estragon : He never refuses?
 Pozzo : He refused once. (Silence.) Dance, misery! Lucky puts down bag and basket,
 advances towards front, turns to Pozzo. Lucky dances. He stops.

(Beckett, 1995:61)

As a normality hierarchy, slaves are not justified in terms of human actions. But in the drama *Waiting for Godot* is that suffering present in Lucky when he is enslaved and treated inhumanely. The answer to ideal normality turned out to be different from what was narrated. The next question that will arise is of course whether loyalty is the basis for humans to get an existence? The answer is of course most humans do that, but in this narrative, it turns out to be the opposite. According to the researcher, this phenomenon is presented metaphorically through the characters of Pozzo and Lucky. The perspective of human loyalty to the actions of others who obey the leader becomes a method to reach a safe stage in life. Lucky did whatever Pozzo told him to do, but only to Pozzo. On the other hand, if you look at Lucky's perspective, slaves are not a reflection of inhumanity but are a place for him to find the only person who has an existence. What is he doing as a form of loyalty. Of course, not and different from the narrative he expressed. Lucky does and accepts what he does because he feels he only gets a definite existence with it. In contrast to Vladimir and Estragon who try to get an existence with false hopes and imaginations. Lucky had obtained that happiness without any intervention from anywhere and with self-awareness. In fact, he would feel a sense of loss and nihilism when Pozzo was gone.

d. Friendship and Slavery

The next binary opposition is friendship and slavery, which scale of ideality. It has the existence of a hierarchy of existence in the absurdity drama, waiting for Godot. In this context, of course, the expression of meaning will be reflected in the comparison of two warring characters. In the hierarchy of normality in the initial reading, friendship is reflected through the characters of Vladimir and Estragon, while slavery is reflected in the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. The deconstruction reading strategy was taken by the researcher by analyzing the quotes described in the following conversation:

Estragon : (Snorts) Suitcase. (He looks at Lucky) Why? Always carried. (He pretends to be limp, panting) Never put down. (He spreads his arms, lifting them lightly.) Why?
 Pozzo : Ah! Why didn't you say that earlier? Why didn't he try to make himself comfortable? Let's discuss it clearly. Is it true that he can't do that? The question followed: didn't he want that? Well, there is an explanation for you regarding this. Why wouldn't he want that? (Pause) Gentlemen, here is the explanation.
 Valdimir : (To Estragon). Make a note of it.
 Pozzo : He wants to take my heart, So that I can keep him.

(Beckett, 1995:69)

Lucky's action of always carrying a bag filled with stones and never dropping them made Vladimir and Estragon wonder. Pozzo also replied by saying that he did this to win Pozzo's heart. This is literally true. However, it has been explained in the previous analysis that Lucky did this because that is how he feels that he has a self-existence. In the next narration, it is told that Lucky cried when Pozzo was about to leave him. Even at the end of the story it is told that Lucky must accept the bitter thing because Pozzo has left him because of death. Comparison of their relationship is different with Estragon and Vladimir, both of them claim to be comrades in arms even until the end of the story he continues to wait together for Godot's arrival. However, there are several interesting things that become points in the story, one of which is when Estragon is busy with the problem of having difficulty taking off his shoes, Vladimir continues to be lost in his imagination waiting for Godot's certainty and does not provide loyal assistance to his friend's difficulties. Until the end of the story, a similar incident occurred again when Estragon again had difficulty with his shoes, both of them argued with each other and blamed each other for the problems they were experiencing.

e. Perfection and Suffering

Perfection is certainly a wish that is desired to become a reality from a dream that continues to manifest in Vladimir and Estragon mind, namely meeting Godot. This expectation of perfection was forces them to always feel that they are happy. This is indicated in the following conversation:

Estragon : So what do you think?
 Vladimir : You should too, even if it's not true
 Estragon : What should I think?
 Vladimir : Say I'm happy, I'm happy.

 Vladimir : Waiting for Godot. (Estragon groans, silent.) Things have changed since yesterday.
 Estragon : and if he doesn't come?
 Vladimir : (After a moment of confusion) we'll see when the time comes. (Pauses) I said earlier here everything has changed since yesterday.

(Beckett, 1995:149)

The quotation above told about the conditions that are still experienced by Vladimir and Estragon, namely waiting for uncertainty and hoping for that uncertainty. Many people decided to take life for granted as an effort to entertain themselves to feel themselves happy. Until days, weeks, and even years waiting for Godot's arrival, Godot is never present in the story but they continue to force themselves so that they remain happy in order to continue to wait for Godot's arrival. The imposition of my happy diction in the story seems to be a self impulse to build a positive thinking attitude from yourself, but on the other hand it is a reflection of being taken for granted. On the other hand, thinking and contemplating suffering will become a burden on himself that makes him weak and stop to have hope waiting for Godot. In this binary opposition, of course, the reversal of the text will automatically show that normality becomes an anomaly when perfection is used as a doctrine of waiting for uncertainty. On the other hand, suffering is trying to be avoided even though it is with suffering that they should be able to wake up from a state of waiting for uncertainty.

f. Reality and Imagination

The next point is the relation between reality and imagination. From the beginning of the story to the end of the *Waiting for Godot* narration, what is being contested is reality and imagination which continue to haunt the two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon. The researchers took one of them from the following quotation :

Vladimir : I don't know what else to think about
 Estragon : My feet! (He sits trying to take off his boots) Help me Didi. Vladimir. Do I fall asleep when others suffer? I woke up one sunny day blind like the Goddess of Fortune. Am I asleep right now? Tomorrow, I wake up pensive, what can I say about today? That I and my friend Estragon, in this place from day to night, waiting for Godot to come?

(Beckett, 1995:251)

Imagination burying reality in the story becomes the theme of absurdity in *Waiting for Godot*. Until the end of the story, they also do not meet the figure of Godot. Several characters are present as a complement to the story. The presence of Pozzo and Lucky and the little boy giving information. In the story, besides Pozzo and Lucky, there is a little boy who also gives hope to Vladimir and Estragon that Godot will arrive soon. That hope even manifested in Estragon's dream as if he had met and found happiness from Godot. But in reality, both of them still wake up in the same condition and in the same place. Estragon still struggles to take off his boots, and Vladimir still struggles to walk because of his stooped shoulders and crippled legs.

From the results of the analysis that has been carried out from in this study it could be explained that binary opposition as a result of deconstruction reveals the meaning of absurdity in the story. Deconstruction denies that a literary work has one function, but that it has many functions. From this hierarchy of those binary opposition deconstruction, it can be seen that Vladimir and Estragon as the main characters of this drama are representatives of the lower class which have been the victims of the Second World War who both have physical disabilities. Absurdity is again present in the relationship between their reality and hope. The reality that is faced as a hope reflects an ex-absentee self as depicted in the two main characters.

Research that focused on examining deconstruction in the drama "*Waiting for Godot*" has not to be found yet. However, there are several related articles that can be used as previous research comparisons. The first research was written by Pormouzeh & Nilchian (2019) with the theme of existentialism in waiting for Godot. Through the theoretical concepts of Sartre and Kierkegaard, researchers explored the nature of existentialism in the complex narratives in the story. The researchers find that there is an implied phenomenon of the characters in the drama that shows the inability to endure life and then looks for a savior who is different between being and not being. Further research was conducted by Edeh (2019) in his doctoral dissertation by taking themes related to existentialism and alienation. According to him, there is an absurdity in the narrative of the story contained in the two scripts, which then produces a nihilistic concept and alienation from the characters in the story. Asker (2007) also glances at the drama "*Waiting for Godot*" by showing an existentialistic representation through setting, context, and language. This research uncovers the fact that Vladimir and Estragon, the main characters in the drama *Waiting for Godot*, suffer from existential suffering and basically explores how existential suffering is reflected through the analysis of the characters' language through dialogue.

The next research was written by Ghanbari (2008), who also did a comparative study between "*Notion of Waiting for a Savior in Religion*" and "*Waiting for Godot*". Ghanbari's research lies in the process of waiting for the story play to function as a sedative and give people hope for the future. According to him, human nature must think of a way out of this painful condition. Rakwal (2013) describes research on waiting for Godot in psychological elements that looks at the fear of life. According to him, the character in *Waiting for Godot* has an identity crisis, so that the character is filled with anxiety that haunts his life. Akhter et al. (2015) which looks at the dimensions of Marxism in the story "*Waiting for Godot*." This study used the theoretical concept of structuralism Althusserian decentralized text to reveal elements of social class involvement in the story. This study sees significant gaps, silence, absence, and non-words in the text "*Waiting for Godot*," reflecting the presence of late modernist bourgeois ideology in the text "*Waiting for Godot*," reflecting the presence of modernist bourgeois ideology. Aprilia & Arianto (2021) implemented the Derrida's Deconstruction concept in the novel *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt. This research found out various arbitrary relationships that contrast between good and bad, valuable and worthless, honest and dishonest, caring and ignorant, then crowded and silent. Ghofur, A. (2014) also implements deconstruction theory in Kenzaburo Oe's novel *Silent Cry*. This research also dismantles the main character, Takashi, who has the figure of a rebel, a sex deviant and others. It turns out that people are aware of the existence of a political monopoly on trade by the authorities.

All the studies described in the previous research above certainly have differences in many aspect including the use of object material or object formal of the studies. The theoretical concepts in the analysis in

the research above looks at the diversity, including the concepts of existentialism, structuralism, alienation, psychology, and also Marxism whereas analyzing the same of data source. This studies focused on another dimension by using the concept of deconstruction by leaving the text and connecting the binary oppositions between the narratives in the text. The researcher also looks at a concept of absurdity that needs to be dismantled to produce the meaning of instability. This research becomes a new dimension, which, of course, will move on and be inspired by previous studies.

4. CONCLUSION

The drama "Waiting for Godot" is the most absurd literary work that could not be easy to interpreted by a heuristic reading to get an in-depth interpretation. This study presented a conception of deconstruction by disassembling and rebuilding the text using the binary opposition method. The strategy used is to determine the binary opposition obtained through narrative story, setting, circumstances, conversation, characterization, and other story-forming elements. There are 6 binary oppositions determined in this deconstruction strategy, namely Existence and ex-absentia, Hope and Despair, Loyalty and betrayal, Friendship and slavery, Perfection and Suffering, Reality and Imagination. Binary opposition is intended to see the relation that has been considered as a single meaning centered on a text. Deconstruction denies that a literary work has one function, but that it has many functions. From this hierarchy of those binary opposition deconstruction could be seen that Vladimir and Estragon as the main characters of this drama are representation of the lower class which have been the victims of the Second World War who both have physical disabilities. Absurdity is again present in the relationship between reality and hope. Normality has its value in reality, of course. However, the world offers something different. Humans are presented with a hope that never ends. This hopes then leads to a construction of identity that is realized through the narrative character of Godot. The study of absurdity in the drama "Waiting for Godot" is never ending. The narrative of absurdity could be explored in various criticisms and still related with the contemporary life. Researchers suggest that this research could be more developed further with various theoretical approaches and critics to enrich the repertoire of literary research

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