

## Beckett's Metatheatrical Philosophy: A postmodern Tendency Regarding *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*

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Doi: 10.5901/mjss.2012.v3n3p137

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**Abstract:** *There are so many controversial debates over the features of Beckett's dramatic works that surpass the previous models of literary plays. Andrew K. Kennedy (1991) asserts that "what is unique is the supreme fiction that turns so many disparate ideas, impulses, beliefs, and unbeliefs into a new and personal mythology" (3). Thus, the main concern of this paper concentrates on Beckett's philosophy that breaks with the conventional principles of theatre in order to promote a new view of dramatic form which Lionel Abel coins as metatheatre. Abel constructs his notion of metatheatre on two famous phrases which are 'the world is a stage' and 'life is a dream' that justify the dreamlike atmosphere of Beckett's plays. Beckett's plays that at the first glance seem nonsense or meaningless, demand a deeper awareness and should be evaluated by destructing the conceptual boundaries as they are constructed upon the deviation from the standard norms. His plays insist that the ultimate reality of one's mind is beyond the limits of logical mind. Hence the word meta-theatre is suitable for his plays, because the basic idea of meta-theatre is that of multiple layers of meaning. Beckett's theatrical masterpieces, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are among the best examples of falling away from the accepted standards. Still, the loose structure of the plays with little or no action in which a few anti-heroes play out their roles in a nightmarish world of motionless time does not make it pessimistic. As Brook (1990) says, "Beckett's dark plays are plays full of light" (65). *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* in particular will lead us to advance the central argument and achieve a more comprehensible analysis of Beckett's major plays.*

**Key Terms:** *anti-theatrical metatheatre, metatheatre, postmodernism, protheatrical metatheatre, self-reflexion, postmodern tendency*

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### 1. Introduction

Samuel Beckett (1906-89) is the most eminent playwright of the anti-formal drama who tried to show the condition of human beings in a world of shattered beliefs and uncertainties through his meta-theatrical plays. He throws away the standards of traditional western theatre and invents a kind of anti-traditional play that goes beyond the restricted boundaries of classical and modern drama. Lionel Abel (2003) asserts that meta-theater "marks those frames and boundaries that conventional dramatic realism would hide" (133). William S. Haney, in his essay, *Beckett out of His Mind: The Theater of the Absurd* believes that Beckett goes beyond "the linguistic and cultural boundaries by dispensing with narrative sequence, character development, and psychology in the conventional sense" (40). In fact, Beckett has uprooted the conventions to show the absurdity and lack of meaning in modern life. To achieve this aim, he replaces the logical world of the conventional plays by such a fragmented world full of nonsense words uttered by the characters to confirm the dreamlike atmosphere of absurdity that encompasses the whole play. His innovation embraces all the elements of conventional elements of theater including plot, characterization, language, and time. This defamiliarization of the familiar notions establishes the basis of meta-theatre that "may present actions that we are forced to acknowledge the estranging frame that encloses a whole play" (Abel, 2003, 134).

Beckett's promotion of meta-theatre leads his drama to a rediscovery of realities beyond the grasp of rational mind. Therefore, it is less concerned with meaning and in order to understand such plays, one must suspend his mind and empty it from all its accepted notions so that he may surpass "the psychic structures that select, organize, interpret, and limit our knowledge about the world around us" (Haney, 2003, 42). Thus, as a skillful subversive of conventions, Beckett tries to use meta-theatre as a device for taking the spectator's attention beyond the restriction of thought and meaning. At times, he stops the flow of thought to lead the spectator's attention toward his "pure conscious mind: "What emerges is a state of pure consciousness -- 'pure' in the sense that it is not the consciousness of any empirical content. It has no content except itself" (Stace, 1960, 86).

## 2. The Origin of Metatheatre

The word 'metatheatre' was used for the first time in 1963 by Lionel Abel who introduces a new way of looking at drama. Abel believes that "metatheatre at the very least, has added a word to the language with which we talk of theatre" (Abel, 2003, v). According to Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'meta' means besides, after or above, upon or about. Thus, metatheatre is a theatre about theatre. Abel tried to suggest the nature of a philosophical form of drama that broke with the classicist and modernist techniques and conventions. Martin Esslin (1976) says that "metateatre outstrips other dramas as a form of philosophizing, not in abstract but in concrete term" (4). This literary term coined by Abel is so indispensable that it has acquired a life of its own. It is a powerful tool for understanding modern theatre. Abel's definition of metatheatre is based on two basic beliefs that "the world is a stage" and "life is a dream".

John Collens (1998) hesitates to call 'metatheatre' a "genre" and says that "it is misleading to include 'metatheatre' under the heading of genre and form" (211). In his *Dictionnaire du Theatre* (1984), Patric Pavis also affirms that "metatheatricality is a fundamental characteristic of any theatrical communication." But to Abel, this word was only a device and a definite form for plays with a philosophic self-consciousness. He claims that this style of playwriting existed long before his description of metatheatre. In his book *Tragedy and Metatheatre: Essays on Dramatic Form* Abel treats a range of authors from Moliere and Calderon to Genet and finally Beckett as authors of metatheatre. But, he asserts that all the works categorized under the term 'metatheatre' have one common characteristic: "all of them are theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized" by which he means that characters appearing on the stage are there simply because "they are caught by the playwright in dramatic postures", while they themselves are aware of their own theatricality (Abel, 2003, 135). Pavis' dictionary (1998) refers to Abel to provide the following definition of metatheatre:

This phenomenon does not necessarily involve an autonomous play contained within another, as in the "play within the play". All that is required is that the represented reality appears to be one that is already theatrical, as in plays in which the main theme is life as theatre . . . Metatheatre, thus, defined becomes a form of antitheatre, where the dividing line between play and real life is erased. (210)

Metatheatre shows a fictional illusion that self-consciously reflects upon itself. In order to show the artificiality and illusionary of life, this dramatic form of theatre breaks the boundaries and goes beyond the framework of realism. Therefore, metatheatre is a quality that diminishes the idea of theatre to be nothing but a mirror of reality. Instead, it brings forth the theatricality of life. The term 'theatricality' coined by Ruby Chon (1980) in his *Just Play* is a distinctive form of drama that emerges in the moment when "the stage reality synchronizes with fiction" (99) or when "the fiction is literalized" (101). He says that always in theatricality "the actual and fictional only nearly converge" (103). Howard Barker (1989) believes that metatheatre, which is in fact a drama on drama, "imaginatively speculate[s] about life as it is lived" (qtd. in *Discovering Utopia*, 1998, 219). Considering Beckett's theatre as metatheatre, Kennedy (1989) points to *Endgame* as a play that "enacts a diminished theatre, along with the diminished humor and physical universe it evolves" (66). That is why Beckett's theatre causes the audience "since its first humiliated appearance to think about the theatre with the most appalling doubt" (Blau, 1990, 181). Indeed, metatheatre focuses on the understanding of the world as the theatre of life which has been theatricalized.

Beckett glorifies an age that no longer regards the realistic world of drama and shows tendency toward anti-norms of writing. He puts away the popular literary forms of drama and implies a careful blend of the two desperate forms of comedy and tragedy. Merivale (1978) explains that "the king of tragedy and the fool of comedy are brought together by Beckett to exemplify theatricality itself" (121). His innovation in dramatic form causes the movement in modern European drama. As a result, instead of tragedy, we have metaplay, a dramatic form for revealing characters whose self-consciousness create their dramatic situation. Abel (2003) believes that "metaplay has occupied the dramatic imagination of the west to the same degree that the Greek dramatic imagination was occupied with tragedy". What playwrights such as Shakespeare, Calderon, Genet, Brecht, and Beckett have written are new types of drama "with very different assumptions from those of Greek tragedy, and with very different effects" (151). Retreating from realism in recent dramas lead such plays toward interpreting and understanding the ultimate reality.

Lack of concern for reality and self-awareness are two basic characteristics of metaplay which show that theatre no longer deals with ethical or political manners of the society. Instead, it celebrates itself as the essence of theatre. The metatheatrical moments, then, is constituted by "combining the representation with a simultaneous auto- or self-reflexion on the representation, a running commentary organically fusing staging with self-staging" (Collens, 1998, 211). Analysis of the theatrical self-representation shows that using metatheatrical techniques transforms the plays into a kind of dramatized perception of specific dramas such as Beckett's anti-traditional dramas. Schwab (1992) believes that

Beckett's plays expand the "boundaries of our consciousness in two directions toward the unconscious and toward self-reflection" (97). This self-referenced dramatic form indicates that the theatre reflects on itself and delights itself. It also means that the theatre might be rather self-critical that is the feature of much of modernist metatheatre. For instance, in *Waiting for Godot* when Estragon says: "Nothing to be done" about his boots, Vladimir comments on his life:

I'm beginning to come round to that position. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resume the struggle. (1)

Therefore, the modernist theatre engages in self-critiques and this self-critique is enacted through various modes of interpretation. Modern theatre becomes metatheatre when the action of the play does not progress. In this sense, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* becomes waiting for an event that will never occur. The characters are immobile and out of energy. Interruptions, moments of hesitation and non-activity in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are Beckett's dramaturgy. The structure of such plays is loose in a stop-and-go manner. Beckett never wants his audience to get involved in the play. His plays are an invitation to the world of play which acknowledges the audience's part in creating that world. Therefore, a variety of interpretations are inevitable. Davies (2002) asserts that "yet, the metatheatrical nature of the work also makes the aesthetic criticism personal" (88).

Abel categorizes metatheatre into "protheatrical metatheatre" and "anti-theatrical metatheatre". By protheatrical metatheatre he means a theatre "reflecting endlessly upon itself in a half of mirrors" and by "anti-theatrical metatheatre" he means a theatre "permanently interrupted". He points to Calderon's *Life is a Dream* as a protheatrical metatheatre which takes the confusion between life and dream. It leads to the belief that the world is indeed a theatre. Abel mentions that Hamlet is an anti-theatrical metaphor since its action is endlessly postponed and interrupted. (Abel, 2003, 19-20). Beckett owes his innovation to the same inaction and postponement which has dominated Hamlet. In *Waiting for Godot*, at times we witness that Godot's arriving is postponed and in *Endgame* we see Clov's hesitation in leaving Hamm at every moment of the play.

The incidents and characters in a metaplay are the playwright's inventions which "are found by the playwright's imagining rather by his observing the world" (Abel, 2003, 133). These plays are able to "instill a grave sadness-- a speculative sadness-- at their close", though there might be some humor in them (Abel, 2003, 133). If so, the word 'tragicomedy' is a proper name. Here, metatheatre becomes a form of drama which is "aware of its nature as a medium and capable of exploiting its own conventions and devices for comic and occasionally pathetic effect" (Slater, 1985, 13-14). When we read Beckett, we are confronting a new theatrical form which demands a more sophisticated meditation about the story of the play in order to discover its genres. He has created moments that we often do not know whether to laugh or to cry. Kennedy says that "Beckett's plays get nearer to pure theatre in the sense that they could not function in any other genre or medium" (23). The relationship between Beckett's "creatures of illusion on stage" and the audience is, in Duckworth's words, "a confused one" (Duckworth, 1972, 49). At first Beckett announces a comedy and then he pretends to change the nature of the play toward a tragedy. Therefore, the audience's first expectation as a comedy disturbs as he witnesses the tragic underlying meaning of the play. Since the comic and tragic are brought together, the audience's feelings "are moved and disturbed by ostensibly comic as well as the play's more overtly tragic moments" (Foster, 2004, 169). Foster declares that though we laugh at what is unhappy, it is not "mirthless laughter but genuine engagement of the surprising wit with which Vladimir and Estragon acknowledge their existence" (169). In this regard, Abel affirms that the real usage of metatheatre is that it can convey both the comic and tragic while it can keep them separate. He believes that metatheatre is a clearer term than 'tragicomedy' since it "suggests a restrained comicality together with a serious painfulness, one not pushed to the point of tragedy" (Abel, 2003, 172). Thus, Abel considers metatheatre as a mixed genre. In fact, in Beckett, it is the concept of metatheatre that allows us to see how he places a tragic underlying meaning beneath the comic surface of the play. Beckett has skillfully created the situation of his plays to show us that his characters are innocent enough to sympathize with them while they are unwillingly trapped in a world of sufferings. Davies mentions that Beckettian characters are "not mean or vicious by nature; they are made so by life" (81).

Clov: That's friendship, yes, no question, you've found it . . . Then one day, suddenly it ends. (*Endgame* 82)

In fact, Beckett tries to take the tragic aspect of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* into the power of comic theatre. Beckett uses the metatheatrical devices in his lines to draw the audience into his characters' play experience. Foster points to Beckett's play as 'tragicomedy' since Beckett has created "simultaneous engagement and detachment in his audience by playing colloquialism and artifice against one another. . ." (173). He adds that the language of tragicomedy "typically blends emotional realism with self-conscious artifice" while the audience is "drawn, almost mesmerized, into the

characters' experience of the horror of silence, of an emptiness filled only with dead voices" (173). The metatheatrical elements in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* often serve to detach the action by reminding us that we are in a theatre in a more profound and surprised way. For instance, while watching *Waiting for Godot*, the audience participates in Vladimir's and Estragon's experience of waiting for a Mr. Godot as they themselves experience the action of waiting.

In order to join the comic to the tragic in a unified dramatic work, Abel appeals to Bakhtin's distinction of 'architectonic form' from the 'compositional form' in a literary work that has been mentioned in his essay on form and content. 'Architectonic form' would tell us whether the play is a romance, a tragedy, a metadrama, a comedy, or a farce. The compositional form describes the work conventionally; it distinguishes a play from a novel, but it cannot distinguish a comedy from a tragedy. The values of comedy and tragedy can be brought together in a unified literary work but not certainly by mixing the two. The comic and the tragic may "appear harmoniously in a single work if confronting to the metatheatrical cannon". Abel points out that "*there is no form, no nonconventional, architectonic form for tragicomedy*" (171-173). Therefore, comedy and tragedy can come together under a single architectonic form: "this can be achieved when the effects of comedy and tragedy are both subordinate to the theatrical, and this becomes possible in a *play about play* theatre." (173)

Collens affirms that metatheatre should be considered as a "specific heightening of the theatre's inherent doubleness, as fiction and reality, showing and telling, as a mind-broadening serving public and private interest" (219). Today, some still enjoy metatheatre, others find it as a kind of outdated play. By the way, this form still persists. Historically, the form has had at least one common purpose: To expose that life is a dream, all the world is a stage and finally celebrating the theatricality of theatre.

### 3. Beckett's Philosophy

Traditional drama went through many changes in the hands of Samuel Beckett which shows his dissatisfaction of the previous dramatists. Samuel Beckett, most obviously, is a postwar Irish dramatist who upsides down the realistic representation of the conventional playwrights. He departs from the standard ways of representing theatre in order to construct a new culture. Thus, he violates the traditional continuity of the action and coherence of the narrative language while maintaining "an underlying consistency/an inner coherence" artistically in his plays (Kennedy 155). Beckett believes that continuity in the formation of events is nothing but illusion imposed on the audience. Therefore, his world is "a bundle of broken images" (Lane, 1996, 3). Matthew Davies points to Beckett's text as "a mosaic of broken or incomplete metaphors and mythologies that defy interpretation, baffling audience and performer alike" (79):

Hamm: We're not beginning to . . . to . . . mean something!

Clov: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (*Brief laugh*) Ah, that's a great one! (*Endgame* 34)

All of this may seem tedious to a reader eager to get on with a narrative, but in the theatre, in performance, it builds a framework through which the play is interpreted. His deconstruction of language, form and some well-known norms in art and literature makes him create an illusionary world of metatheatre. In this respect, he resonates with Jean Francois Lyotard's notion of postmodern artist. Lyotard (1992) puts the postmodern artist in the position of a "philosopher":

The text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. (124)

Beckett's works can be interpreted on several different levels in order to make any sense of his multi-dimensional works. They challenge the audience to make sense of nonsense and perceive with laughter the life's fundamental absurdity, life as a fantasy or dream. Therefore, the audiences impose their own meaning on the play through the power of their imagination by means of which they experience the existence of each character. He used a whole rang of intertextual devices and challenged the privileged mode of drama through various metatheatrical strategies. The destruction of referentiality and meaningfulness of language caused Beckett create a system of specific rules for the performance of nonsense plays. Collens asserts that, "indeed Beckett tried to dissolve and distinct between reality and illusion, self and role to destroy the referentiality of language"(217).

Beckett was interested in mundane situations. In describing *Endgame* Haney says that Beckettian characters "live in the aftermath of a great calamity and seem to be the sole survivor in a world Clov describe as "corpsed"" (*Endgame* 45) (Haney 47). Beckett's metatheatre is very special. His plays almost never present a play-within-a-play sequence. The

characters have a kind of sad naturalness. They fail in making communication; still they find it hard to stop talking. His characters come in symmetrical pairs and play a waiting game. According to Essif, their essential characteristics include:

The relative immobility (instead of either dynamic acrobatics or normal social or biological motion and gesture); its central detached and highlighted presence on the stage (instead of an interactive relationship with other characters); and the consequently; its focus on head as a metaphorical empty space (instead of the mimetic---ideological or psychological---focus on the whole play). (184)

Statements in Beckett's metatheatrical play are very specific, not revealing or withholding any special meaning and because of the lack of traditional cause and effect relations between them, it is difficult to say what the play as a whole mean.

Considering these strategies in Beckett leads us to a practical philosophy in which Beckett depicts his views and ideas in his anti-formal dramatic works. Beckett confronted the audience with characters whose subjectivity is implicitly self-aware. He tries to place the audience between the actual world of the play and the play-like qualities of the actual as he believes in the metatheatrical notion of 'all the world is a stage'. He persuades the audience to become a character on the stage of theatre and experience the same fate as the characters they observe. In order to achieve this aim, he completely ruptures the 'fourth-wall' conventions of theatre which was used in nineteenth-century with the advent of realistic plays. Davies points out:

In a period dominated by naturalistic theatre and an adherence to the suspension of disbelief, Beckett's assaults on the fourth wall create metatheatrical fractures that undermine the egoistical nature of preference and spectating. (79-80)

Destroying the notion of fourth wall as an imaginary wall at the front of the stage in theatre through which the audience sees the action in the world of the stage, Beckett moves away from the theatrical realism which separates the audience from the stage. He creates fractures that confuse the boundary between representation and reality:

"Estragon: charming spot. (*He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.*) Inspiring prospects. (*He turns to Vladimir.*) Let's go." (*Godot* 8)

Thus, he draws the audience into the realm of theatre and in this regard, the claim that Beckett has rescued "the centuries old mimetic stage by abolishing the pretence of the fourthwall as a pseudo natural space into formal artistic space" is a power potential toward a metatheatrical performance (Licastro 211). Blurring the boundary between audience and his characters, Beckett makes the action of the play more powerful. This adds a metatheatrical feature to the play as the characters are aware of their own theatricality while implicating the audience in their actions at the same time. The highly self-conscious nature of the play makes his play become a play about the nature of the play. *Endgame* constantly concerns itself with roles, role-playing and the nature of waiting and hesitation. Having totally ruptured the usual stage/audience relationship and reestablished the normal conditions of performance, he tried to present his audience with those dramatical aspects of theatre that is usually kept hidden by realistic performance. He destroys the fabric of theatre representation in the hope of metaheathrical promotion.

Beckett tries to present what is absent by the limitation of thought. Indeed, he is the master of metatheatrical devices that stop the flow of thought and move the attention toward self-awareness. Haney points to "the lack of logical movement, the digression of nonsense . . . his repetition of endless cycles of action-in-non-action" as some features of metatheatre (43). Therefore, many of Beckett's plays rely on repetition or looping. In the world of the play each day the characters begin again, attempt again and repeat again in the failure of the previous day. In *Waiting for Godot*, the protagonists decide to move and then do not move again and again. The circularity of the non-closure of the plot in his works push the audience in a loop as if the action of the play is supposed to be seen over and over again as a kind of hallucination. The open-ending of such plays is the anti-theatre's denial of the boundaries of the actions. The plays disregard any kind of ending or resolution. So in the end, his plays suggest no certainty. In order to create a circular plot Beckett has to remove the time: "A 'timeless' or circular structure of action has entered spectrum of dramatic forms, against the long dominance of the logic of time in various plot-central versions" (Kennedy 19).

So the past, present, and future mingle together. The immediate experience of the play is shown to be the same as past experiences and memories of the past are constantly recurring in the present which shows Beckett's tendency to merge all the tense in the present time. He uses the technique of alienation in his anti-theatres to stop the audience from

experiencing the dramatic time. When time is arrested in anti-plays, the effect is unavoidably paradoxical. Time stops or conveys the sense that nothing is happening. *Waiting for Godot* dramatizes such experience that has been constructed on non-movement in which nothing ever happens:

Estragon: Let's go.

Vladimir: we can't.

Estragon: why not?

Vladimir: we are waiting for Godot. (50)

James Calderwood believes that, "the act of waiting, although indiscernible to an outside observer, disturbs the illusion of time by erasing the past, diminishing the present, and aggrandizing the future when that which is waited for is expected to appear" (33). Observing Beckett's philosophy in creating his metatheatres shows that he uses and subverts the fundamental elements of the theatre including plot, characterization, language, and time in an innovative way. However, his metatheatrical strategies change our very idea of the dramatic, of what is possible with the limits of a dramatic performance.

#### 4. Metatheatre: A Postmodern Tendency

The postmodern tendency of metatheatre deconstructs every facet of the process through which the conventional plays were performed for the audience. Thus, postmodernism, the dominant culture of late modernity can be read through a set of metatheatrical process that subverts the complete set of rules and conventions. Lyotard (1984), an influential critic of postmodernism, asserts that the postmodernist artists' literary works "stand outside the rules of its time". He believes that "those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done" (81). Thus, the postmodern dramatists use self-conscious dramatic techniques in their plays to comment on the play itself.

According to Hutcheon (1985), the postmodern "facticious mode" complete modernism's break with traditional realism and challenges the "romantic self-transcendence" (51). In fact, the antiplays of the post-war period appeared to be moving away from modernism in its claims of realism toward a new entity, called postmodernism. Therefore, postmodernism is a literary category with which we describe the important innovation after World War II which in the realm of theatre has been manifested in metaplays. Modern conventions impact the rules of dramatic narrative structures in such a way that the metadrama they produce becomes a critique of those conventions. Metadrama produces structures with characteristics Hutcheon identifies as a "postmodern tendency." She believes that those structures "implicated in the notions of center they attempt to subvert" recreate our interpretation of the structure these texts present (14). Thus, modern theatre has taken the postmodern turn: it is now metatheatre. In other words, metatheatre has become a frequent feature of postmodernist literature.

Metatheatre engages the audience in the process of meaning-making in order to shape their interpretation of the dramatic scene. Therefore, dealing with the interpretive power of the audience is one of the main concerns behind the metadramatic production in any era. Jean Baudrillard (1983) believes that postmodernism is a "technical simulation . . . to which is attached an aesthetic pleasure . . . of reading and of the rules of the game" (147) which is an aesthetic approach to artistic definitions.

Metadrama, very often questions the boundaries between the real and the artificial. Therefore, postmodernism's question "What can be said to be art?" leads to a metadramatic question of "where does art-- in this case dramatic-- begin and end?" which is nourished by the conception of the dramatical nature of life from Shakespeare's "[a]ll the world's a stage" to Elizabeth's "[w]e princess are set upon stags in the sight and view of the world" (Mullaney, 1997, 44).

Postmodernism's self-conscious tendencies and styles juxtapose and compare reality and fiction in a way that distinction between the two cannot be felt. So, Postmodernism attempts to destroy modernist potential that separates theatre from life. Waugh (1993) believes that postmodernism's sense of art is not only an "ontologically distinct from the world, but also a fundamental aspect of existence in it" (11). Therefore, one must destroy any established rules and reconstruct them in order to grasp the depth of a metaplay. Beckett achieves this aim by using the very technique of parody. But what makes him innovative was the way he used this technique. Unlike other writers, he parodies no particular dramatic work; instead, he parodies the traditional rules of theatre. Moses (1985) points to Beckett's aim as the "complement, revise, or correct" the previous literary authorities and conventions. He says: "This virulent new strain of destructive parody is Beckett's self-conscious use of literary conventions without conviction and with the clear aim to subvert those conventions" (662). In fact, Beckett's destructive ironical parody is a literary strategy, for, unlike the

traditional parody, Beckett's postmodernist form is not constructed against any specific work, style, or author. Beckett's engagement in parodying the conventions and elements of theatre through self-conscious or self-referential techniques designates the metadramatic or metatheatrical nature of his plays. Therefore, Beckett makes the theatre itself reflect the incomplete and fictitious essence of its theatrical conventions by creating a sense of confusion in his audience.

Beckett's anti-literary talent for applying and then violating theatrical traditions overshadows almost all elements of conventional theatre. In this respect, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* have been chosen as literary works that rupture the dominant dramatic realism and open up a space that was filled by the postmodern concern for metatheatrical plays. These masterpieces contain metatheatrical elements of self-observation and self-commentary, which are some of the postmodernist prominent features. Thus, Beckett's plays are constructed in a way to question the conventional norms of theatre. For instance, Schlueter (1979) points out that Hamm and Clov are simultaneously "participants in life (in the play world) and participate in theatre" (54). Thus, Beckettian characters are noticeably both characters and actors. The actors seem to inform and to stand apart from their characters, and the audience's task is to recognize this double aspect of the characters to become part of the play. Beckett's plays are self-reflexive; they constantly draw attention to the greater reality upon which they are constructed: an audience in a theatre watching actors perform as characters. They challenge the audience, then, persuade him to remain consciously complicit in order to submit to the fiction even while being aware that it is a fiction. It is one of several instances of metatheatricality in Beckett.

As a result, Beckett sought to explore the mechanics of representation in a manner that laid the way for its deconstruction. His works seek to resist and remake many of the assumptions and, therefore, empower the postmodernist tendency in his metatheatricality.

## 5. Conclusion

Therefore, this study emphasizes the historical background of metatheatricality with an overview of Beckett's philosophy. It sheds light on the new strategies that Beckett has used in shaping his metatheatrical plays. In this way, he goes beyond the limits of traditional norms of theater and invents such a metatheatricality that makes him the pioneer of a new cult. This deviation from standards questions the validity and authority of the main elements of theater such as characterization, plot, language, and time. Paradoxically, Beckett announces a comedy and then pretends to shift the nature of the play toward tragedy. In this sense, Beckett separates metatheatricality from tragedy in that it deals with reality while metatheatricality shows its tendency toward the artificiality of life. Thus, as a new genre, metatheatricality replaces tragedy because its self-consciousness makes tragedy impossible as "in nature tragedy is beyond thought" (Able, 2003, 180). Besides, the self-reflexivity of metatheatricality reveals significant contiguities with that of postmodernism. In this respect, metatheatricality is a postmodern genre that moves beyond the textual boundaries in order to challenge the traditional authorities. Therefore, modern theatre has taken the postmodern turn which is now metatheatricality.

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