

## Human Life Threats and Analysis of Defense Mechanism in “Waiting for Godot”

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### Abstract

*Defense Mechanism is a technique used at the end of all conflicts to reduce internal crises of the characters, suggested by Freud, whereas Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" is a post-war play that portrays the Fear, anxiety, and uncertainty of human life. The four central characters of the play, Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, and Lucky, develop major psychological issues, such as complex nature and perplexed minds. These characters seem normal, but they have some psychological fears and conflicts in their unconscious. The primary aim of this work is to explore the notion of human actions in the modern drama, "Waiting for Godot", through the spectacles of Freud's theory of Defense Mechanism "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense". The research is based on a qualitative approach due to its literary nature, excavating the four central characters of "Waiting for Godot" to perceive and analyze the intended thinking of Beckett's mind. This research intricate that 'how such sort of human defense control or drive human's actions and behaviors by obscured forces in their unconscious,' which are shown in the study. In contrast, all characters of the play are consistent. The research suggests conducting future investigations in the same literary genres to present human problems, a journey from art for art's sake to art for life, and the findings as reported that every human being has some fears and defense which keep him attentive and away from different situations, to be implicated further on other literary works.*

**Keywords:** Neuro-Psychoses of Defense, Symbiosis, Regression, Theatre of the Absurd, Hysteria., Fears, Conflicts, Unconscious.

### Introduction

In Psychoanalytic Theory, defense mechanism is a mental phenomenon that makes the mind capable of resolving the clashes by compromising even if they are. The unconscious is responsible for this process. This idea comes from the psychoanalytic hypothesis is that some forces contradict and fight each other in the human mind. Sigmund Freud first used this term in his paper, "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense", in 1894. Sigmund Freud (6 May 1856 – 23 September 1939) originates the psychodynamic approach to psychology and tries to probe the unconscious for interpreting and explaining human behaviors. His notable works are *On Aphasia* (1889), *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1915–17), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). He argues that our mind is liable for making both conscious and unconscious decisions on the grounds of psychological impulses. According to Freud, the Id, the ego and the Superego make up the personality of all human beings, and people are merely performers in the drama of their minds. Their desires drive them and coincidentally influence them. Beneath the surface of our minds, our struggles are working with us deeply and showed by our personalities. Tyson (2014) states in his book, *Critical Theory Today*, that procedure that keep

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the substances of our unconscious in it are known as defenses. Some primary defenses described by Freud are Selective memory {forgetting painful events totally, and we modify our memories so we don't become overwhelmed}, selective perception {we hear and see only what we like or simply can handle}, denial {deny the existence of painful incident or it never happened at all}, repression {the pushing down of unwanted ideas and desires}, projection {when we make liable others and displace our feelings and desires onto other}, rationalization {finding a safe and reasonable argument to avoid our desires}, regression {a complex defense involves returning to a pleasant or painful situation}, avoidance {when we stay away from bitter situations and people who make us uncomfortable and are annoying}. These defenses are the usual components of our personalities and are not considered disorders by the psychoanalysts. Some psychological experiences work as defenses e.g., fear of intimacy, fear of abandonment, fear of betrayal, low self-esteem. And if they occur usually or repeatedly, then they become core issues.

Samuel Barclay Beckett (1906—1989) is a short story writer, playwright, novelist, poet, theatre director and literary translator. His works are full of gloomy, inhuman and tragicomic elements, and experiences of life with overlapping features of nonsense and black comedy. As his career headway, these features further increased with aesthetic beauty and the experimentation in linguistic techniques with repetition and self-reference. According to Martin Esslin, he is the key figure in the Theater of the Absurd and the final modernist writer. In Beckett's well-known play, he deals with the philosophy of existentialism in great harmony with the World War II. There are some allusions from the Bible and slight criticism on Christian dogmas. (Toksöz, 2017). There's an endless despair in the characters.' lives; their dialogues are incomplete, having contradictory statements. Also, some ridiculous repetitions found with no meaning, but still, one can discover a profound philosophy of life.

A tragicomedy consisting of two acts, *Waiting for Godot* (1952), is written by Samuel Beckett, an Irish writer. He is generally known as the father of absurdism. The play, published in 1952, was translated from French into English, with the French title *En Attendant Godot*. The space is an innovative production in drama; it was the initial theatrical success of the Theater of Absurd. It consists of the incomplete discussion between Estragon, Vladimir, Lucky, Pozzo and the boy

who, throughout the play, waits and talks about Godot's arrival, suffers different problems and shares different life experiences. Godot successively sends messages about his arrival but never comes. Estragon and Vladimir, both characters try to hang themselves and sometimes talk about death.

They are not aware of their purpose in life, and why they live on this planet is also unfathomable. They have gentle supposition that there's reason for their existence. Godot is their hope in despair because they expect explanation and direction. This study will reveal the defense and fears of Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot*, especially four characters: Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo and Lucky. They all show their fears and defense, un-removable parts of their personalities.

Defense mechanisms are behaviors that people use to separate themselves from unpleasant events, actions, or thoughts. "Waiting for Godot" raises many questions about human personality and behaviors. As it is a war play, it represents the fears and anxieties of human beings and the uncertainty of human life. Beckett has presented his characters, who have complex natures and perplexed minds. These aspects explored by Freud's concept of "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense". Many studies have been done on this play using the Freudian Theory of personality, but only some studies deal with Freud's theory of Defense Mechanism. These fears are also present in the author's mind, and he uses them in his work. This study helps us understand what is hidden in Beckett's mind, which revealed by analyzing the four central characters of *Waiting for Godot*. This study explores how the actions and behaviors of the four

main characters, Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky are drawn by the hidden forces present in their unconscious.

### Literature Review

According to Tyson (2014), we can see the world psychoanalytically in a simple way without being simplistic. It is easy to understand if we analyze how these concepts work profoundly in the lives of human beings every day despite superficially. Using our time can help us comprehend these human behaviors that seem to be problematic. That is why psychoanalysis assists to comprehend the human behaviors, then surely it can help decipher the literary texts related to the human Psyche.

So, the concepts under discussion consist of psychoanalytic rules, which have been taken by Sigmund Freud's theory of Psyche, now generally known as classical psychoanalysis. His ideas evolved with the passage of time, and there were also, many changes in his views as well. Moreover, his studies were primarily theoretical, and he anticipated that others may continue to improve his ideas and make corrections in his studies. According to İsmet Toksoz (2017), Sigmund Freud declares that people's behaviors are guided by the portion of the mind known as unconscious. Sigmund Freud was the pioneer in introducing psychoanalysis theory and is considered the father of psychoanalysis. Keeping in mind his classical psychoanalytic approach, one may understand the hidden fears and anxieties of a human man. Beckett's play principally concentrates on the characters' Psyche, especially the post-war community.

Tyson states that each human has a psychological history that starts from his childhood experiences and the patterns of youth and adult behaviors are also the results of early childhood experiences. For Beckett, waiting for Godot is symbiosis. The close Psychoanalytic study of the text describes that the chief characters represent three tines of personality: Go-go, being more rational, is the incomplete Ego; Didi, is more irrational, having an impulsive aspect, means the Id. While Godot is a Superego. Here, the Superego has control over the ego and the id. It follows morality principles learned by society. So, if Vladimir and Estragon represent the ego and the id, Godot represents the Superego, having perfect control over both. (Babbleon) Paul E. Corcoran states in his text on 'Waiting with Godot' that in this century, for the students of mind and human values, the most peculiar questions have to do with consciousness. Corcoran further says that we all are waiting in one way or another. Calderwood states that waiting for the future means waiting for the unknown. Psychoanalytic literary criticism is not in a unified field. Nonetheless, all forms support, to a specific extent, the concept that literature interlinks with the Psyche. Celine Surprenant (2006) where Freud believes that literature is the manifestation of the author's repressed desires and conflicts, Carl Jung is of the view that literature manifests collective unconscious as it gives an approach to archetypal images that lay in the racial memories and also helps readers to reinvigorate the whole cultural psyche.

Both Freud and Jung (1974) believe in the conscious but differ in its function and nature. Freud believes that the memories present in the unconscious are usually from our past, especially one's childhood, but Jung believes that these memories also come from our future and current situations.

Our mind is where all unconscious and conscious feelings originate, and there is a strong bond between literature and dreams. For this reason, we call it Psychoanalytical criticism. He further states that Freud believes individuals can only apprehend and admire if they are aware of Human psychology. The term that describes the background and the author's relation to the text is called psycho-biography, which can give much information about that literary text. Psychoanalytical can be used as a great tool to explain and depict the characters accurately present in any academic work. Moreover, with this theory's help, the audience's appeal and inspiration are motivated, and we can scrutinize the function of language and symbolism in the text (Niaz et al, 2019).

In *Hamlet*, a psychoanalytical study explains the character of Hamlet as he suffers from the Oedipus Complex. Every infant desire to possess their mother. And creates a rivalry with his father. Hamlet is also jealous of his uncle Claudius marriage with his mother. He also has some fears and anxieties. He wants to commit suicide but hesitates. This thing shows his Fear of death and Fear of abandonment.

In Julius Caesar and Aulia Putri (2015) analyses how Brutus experiences inner Conflicts that are his idealism and his blindness to the real world. These conflicts do not provide him good and have negative impacts at the end of Brutus' life after he kills Caesar. The writer's analysis shows that the id of Brutus is more dominant than the superego. By using a psychological approach, the writer uses Freud's "Human Psycho Zone."

According to Makhfuddin and Kurnia, in this play, Vladimir and Estragon are portrayed as people who have no purpose in life, and they repeat the same acts every day to make their lives meaningful. Their silly activities show the meaninglessness of their lives. They take off their shoes and look inside, take off hats, think of abusing each other, and try to commit suicide. All these activities show they have nothing to do and are just trying to find hope and meaning in life. Meanwhile, this meaninglessness and nothingness create disunity among them and influence them to kill themselves.

### Research Methodology

The play "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett has been read and carefully researched to pinpoint its essential characteristics. Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky, and Pozzo, the play's four main characters, have been thoroughly examined to highlight the author's mind, behavior, and society, such as the origins and ramifications of mental agony conflicts and societal issues. The evidence from this research study encompasses a wide range of psychological facets. The prime journals and published literature are structured to emphasize the core ideas of neuro-psychoses of defense and human Fear. The play served as the cardinal reference for this study, and the following techniques were used to evaluate the quantitative data: meticulous reading, interpretations of the information, recognition of the central themes, and deciphering the symbols

used by the author. The periodicals, narrative analyses, editorials, and journal articles are considered secondary sources. The strategy of Qualitative study is used in this research work because of its literary nature. The play "Waiting for Godot" is examined with the help of "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense" to reveal the impact of psychological issues on a person's mind as the play paints a precise portrait of an affected person with mental illness. Additionally, it is the leading cause of their deterioration. This article concludes with "how mental conflicts and the portrayed agony in the original context and how it damages the person's life" after evaluating the play.

### Theoretical Framework

The foundation of any research study is its theoretical framework, which assesses the theories employed. It effectively considers and evaluates the complete collection of the data. This study is going to examine the play *Waiting for Godot* (1952) by Irish playwright Samuel Beckett with the help of Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Freud's theory of defense mechanism has been utilized to analyses the defense of Beckett's characters. It is a critical theory to understand the text's psyche and hidden emotions and desires. It is also helpful to reveal the author's personality, interests, and hidden agendas. This process is also a part of the unconscious, and all these defense occur in this portion of the mind.

## Analysis

The whole explanation of the actual context about the topic under consideration is provided through textual analysis. Dating each character's activity allows a complete analysis of the case and play. The following textual analysis of "Waiting for Godot" is used in the research project to illustrate the characters' psychological issues. For thousands of years, people have been afraid of real-world challenges and problems. They always were afraid of nature and the universe. It would not be wrong to say that humans have fears from the beginning of their species. The first man, Adam, had fears like Fear of his survival and the consequences of disobeying God's commandments. After the murder of his son Abel, probably the Fear of abandonment would have been aroused in his mind. Because it's hard for any person to leave their kith and kin. It is believed that man is a social animal and likes the company of other human beings to make society live in it. Because they have fears in their personality. But also, some people avoid others' presence and prefer to avoid having the company of other people. They do not indulge in relationships and friendships. These human beings also suffer from mental fears of intimacy.

When Freud studied these human behaviors; he concluded that human beings have a lot of fears, which further lead them towards defense. These defense are part of human personality and primarily reside in our unconscious. He explains many reasons in his paper on *psychoses of protection* in 1894. These defense protect us from harsh realities and painful situations. And sometimes they become our core issues as well. To fill the gap, the aim of the study is towards the four characters of the play: Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo and Lucky using the Freudian theory of Defenses, anxiety and core issues.

The characters in *Waiting for Godot* (1952) are also the victims of these mental defense. They also suffer from painful situations and try their best to keep them in their comfort zone. A psychoanalysis study is also helpful to understand the mental conflicts of the author and his repressed desires revealed by the text so one can understand the fears and defense of Beckett's personality. In the beginning of the play, two significant characters, Vladimir and Estragon struggles with their hidden fears and tries to avoid the unhappy situation. In their conversation, they are expressing their idleness because they are free and do not know what to do, but soon after this, Vladimir is expressing his Fear of Estragon's departure forever. Vladimir is having Fear of abandonment, while Estragon has a Fear of intimacy. Fear of abandonment is when one is afraid of his friends and loved ones that they will leave him forever or betray him. Fear of intimacy is when a person fear building close relationships with others to avoid being hurt.

Vladimir requests Estragon to embrace him, but he refuses. And when Vladimir asks Estragon about the people who beat him, he usually does not want to remember the painful incident. Hence, this is the defense of selective memory that, which is how a man tries to forget the previous painful incidents. Then they talk about the Bible, but Estragon is not ready to remember the gospels. Instead, he talks about the maps because these things satisfy him more than the scriptures. The writing makes him uncomfortable, so he uses a defense of selective perception. And proceeding further, Vladimir talks about the story of the two thieves, but Estragon does not want to hear it, nor he remembers it. There, we can find his defense of avoidance and selective memory.

We see the projection used by Estragon when he calls other people' ignorant apes. Projection is also a defense when we blame others and displace our beliefs and thoughts on others. From the beginning, we can see in Vladimir's character that he fears loneliness. He does not want Estragon to leave him. This is his Fear of abandonment. When Estragon tries to tell him his nightmare, he stops him by saying that we should keep these things private. This behavior shows that Vladimir cannot handle this kind of nightmare and avoids these situations. Here, we can see the defense in their personalities. Selective perception and Fear of abandonment keep them away from difficult conditions. When Estragon insists on hearing the story of an

Englishman in a brothel, Vladimir does not want to remember that story. This defense of selective perception shows that he does not want to remember those stories and situations that can trouble him. He is uncomfortable at remembering this story. Furthermore, when they talk about hanging themselves, Vladimir calls Estragon his only hope and Estragon also reminds him that he will become alone if Estragon dies. This again shows Vladimir's Fear of abandonment. But they do not hang themselves, and Estragon expresses his defense of avoidance. He believes they should not do anything because it is safe for them to do nothing. As the play is being proceeded, the characters are revealing their hidden fears. For example, Estragon forgets some old memories because they annoy him. The same is true with Vladimir, as he has no problem eating carrots regularly. He is in this habit and does not want to struggle with it.

The defense of selective perception and regression can be found by analyzing their dialogues. Vladimir wants to relive his situation. He does not change the vegetable because he is used to it. This is what we call regression. Similar is the case with Lucky, as he stays in his position and actions. He is used to lifting the unnecessary things of Pozzo. This situation has become so bad that he keeps Pozzo's bag and coat in both his hands and takes the whip in his mouth. He takes up the basket and stool as well. He is unable to give relief to himself. This is the perfect example of regression. He cannot get out of his psychological state. Instead, he relives in it. This intrigues Estragon as he asks Vladimir about Lucky's habit of not putting down the bag.

Fear of low self-esteem is also present in Pozzo's unconscious. He considers himself not a particular human and blames people as they do not care about him. Then, we learn the psychological state of Lucky by Pozzo's remarks. It is not Lucky's job to always carry things. And when Estragon tries to wipe out Lucky's tears, he kicks him. This thing shows he is fond of his sad situation. Another fear that haunts Pozzo's mind is the Fear of an unstable sense of self. He cannot bear his remarks of Vladimir when he scorns and criticizes Pozzo for his harsh behavior with Lucky. He is afraid of being mad and tries to leave them. He screams and collapses his head in his hands. But after a few moments, he cannot remember what he has done and requests them to forget everything and forgive him for his behavior. He does not believe in speaking truth to Vladimir and Estragon.

Defence of avoidance can be seen in Estragon's personality. He is not ready to return Lucky's hat. Vladimir forces him to do so, but he denies him and says he will never return Lucky's hat because Lucky has kicked him on the shins. So, Estragon is in a defensive position and avoids going near Lucky. And then Vladimir returns it to Lucky. Talking about Lucky's defence of regression, he cannot hold bags and stools, but as soon as Lucky's fingers touch the bag, his senses are recovered, and he holds it tightly. This is how we can analyze his state of mind. He relives his former state of mind. When the play goes further, Pozzo is also suffering from Fear of abandonment. Although he is not a friend of Vladimir and Estragon are afraid of their departure. He requests Vladimir not to leave him alone. He is unable to depart. This is the reality of human personality. They face difficulty in passing and becoming lonely. We are unable to remain alone. We need a company of friends and relatives.

Selective memory is also seen in Estragon's dialogues. When Vladimir reminds him about Pozzo and Lucky he becomes confused and unable to remember them. Vladimir is of the view that we both know them, and if we forget people, we are likely overlooked by them. And when Estragon holds the boy and becomes rude, Vladimir refrains him, but he is unhappy and has forgotten since when he was disgusted. This shows he is still trying to remember his old depressing times and events. He is very selective in his memories because he fears they may disturb him and cause him mental agony. Estragon also has a fear of low self-esteem. When he looks at the moon in the sky, he says it is becoming pale because of weariness. And this is happening because he climbs into the sky and has to gaze at people like Estragon and Vladimir.

He considers himself a low and mean creature on the earth. Then they talk about their friendship about grape harvesting, but Vladimir stops him to remind him of the past events. These events disturb his mind, so here is the defense of selective memory. Estragon is also afraid of their close friendship, which raises the question of why they are together. "Wait! I wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself. We weren't made for the same road. They should depart and live alone because he believes it will be better for both. So, he is also suffering from Fear of intimacy. And when Vladimir says we can depart now, the Fear of abandonment haunts his mind, and he quickly abstains from doing so and considers it not worthwhile. "Estragon: Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me! Vladimir: Did i ever leave you? Estragon: You let me go".

It is worthwhile to say that Estragon, throughout the play, is haunted by the Fear of abandonment. He does not want to live alone or to be parted from Vladimir. And when they talk about Cackon and Macon countries, Estragon says he does not remember anything. He did not notice anything there. This is his defense of selective perception. He can also not see the tree present there, and they have tried to hang themselves with it. But Estragon says he sees nothing. He neither remembers nor wants to see it anymore, so this thing shows the tree is disturbing his mind, making him anxious and depressed. He cannot remember Pozzo and Lucky, whom he met at the beginning of the play. He is tormented by past incidents, which is why he has a defense of selective memory. Estragon is unsatisfied with his existence, so he calls it impression, not reality. His Fear of low self-esteem is depicted. "We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?"

Estragon avoids Pozzo and Lucky's company, and when he comes to know about their arrival, he tries to hide. He does not want to face them because of the terrible incident with him. He avoids Lucky because he kicks him on his shins. Thus, he uses a defense of avoidance. He wants to disappear. And when Vladimir reminds him about Lucky, he does not recall it. This shows his defense of selective memory. Pozzo is also afraid of loneliness. He requests Vladimir to stay with him. His Fear of abandonment is at its peak. Furthermore, he is not able to remember his past. He cannot recall the events of yesterday. Vladimir tries to remind him, but he cannot remember. He has forgotten memories, which is called selective memory. And later on, Vladimir himself has a fear of abandonment. He feels lonely. And when Estragon tries to talk about his dream, he stops him. This shows his defense of selective perception.

## Conclusion

Becket's play 'Waiting for Godot' has been studied on different grounds. It has been analyzed using the three mental zones: id, ego and superego. The method of psychoanalysis helps dive deep into the minds of the characters and also about the author's behaviors and tendencies. However, there needs to be more studies on Freud's defense mechanism and its applications in literary texts. Every human has fears and defenses that keep him attentive and away from different situations. Thus, these defense and fears have been successfully explored in this particular study. It becomes straightforward for the readers to understand the actions of the characters and the force that is present behind these actions. This force is the force of human defenses. The four characters of the play, Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo and Lucky, are also driven by them. These defenses remain unconscious, and we can understand them through their actions and dialogues. However, it is just one aspect of the psychoanalytical study of the mind that has been explored. Many aspects should be explored to understand the human psyche and the author's mentality. Future studies can be done on dreams, dreams symbol the interpretation of dreams, and Freud's concept of the meaning of death.

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