

## Chapter 1

### Beckett's Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* and Marquez's Colonel in *No One Writes to the Colonel*

The concept of hero has changed if we follow the trends from the classical times to the post-modern era. Definition and roles of heroes in the past and modern times stand almost in contrast to each other when we place them face to face for comparison. Following the trend in changes, Samuel Beckett and Gabriel Garcia Marquez portray their heroes to represent absurdity of post-modern man in contrast to sensibility of those as portrayed in the classical literature. Vladimir in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Colonel in Marquez's *No One writes to the Colonel* are such characters who represent the real absurdity of human life and the universe. They are born to expect something meaningful but their expectation goes in vain as they cannot find the expected meaning. However, they continue to survive. In this sense they are absurd heroes and give a message that life should continue in spite of such failure to find meaning. The main argument of this research is that absurd heroes do not represent meaninglessness but they inspire man to live.

The main problem of the thesis is to explain how the major characters of *Waiting for Godot* and *No One Writes to the Colonel*, namely, Vladimir and Colonel, are absurd heroes and why they inspire humankind to live in spite of meaninglessness of life and the universe itself. These queries have baffled many critical writers and common readers. A lot of critical analyses have been produced about these books and characters through various perspectives, but no critic has explained why these characters inspire humankind to continue life. Therefore, the main objective of this endeavor is to explain the reason behind their label absurd heroes and to describe the way how they act to inspire life.

The problems thus formulated have given rise to the hypothesis that in spite of the frustration caused by the failure to find meaning, these characters do not become the victims of pessimism and refuse to surrender to meaninglessness of life but continue to survive, trying to give meaning to life and its activities.

Absurdist theory seems to be the most fitting tool to analyze the issue under discussion. Especially, the theory propounded by Albert Camus will be extensively applied to reach the conclusion.

*No One Writes to the Colonel* is a deeply moving tale of an old couple's painful memories and false hopes. It describes the dire existence of two unnamed characters. This is the work about the hope sustained in the face of dashed expectations, about the survival of human dignity in the face of grinding poverty about the triumph of love in the face of hunger, illness, age and profound loss. 'My agents write to me frequently, saying not to get impatient.' Colonel adds 'It's been that way for 15 years' (25). Finding the hope within hopelessness yet a miserable life he is going through, colonel projected as the absurd hero.

The colonel patiently waits for the letter carrying the message for pension and his rooster's victory in cockfight that will provide him with some money. But his wait bears no fruit. Therefore, because of financial crisis, colonel and his wife sell all their sellable items they possess. His wife is insistent in selling the rooster too, but he is against the idea thinking that one day, it will win the battle and bring in money. The wife complains a lot pointing out the domestic problem created by the scarcity of money, but he does not take any notice of it. He goes on waiting, hiding every problem just to save his dignity.

Similar situation in *Waiting for Godot*. Vladimir accompanied by Estragon is seen by a sickly tree standing on a road side. They wait for Mr. Godot to arrive. But

they do not know who he is and when he will come. They go on waiting even if the date of his arrival is put off over and over again. They devise different games to pass time and avoid boredom while waiting. As with the colonel, the tramps' wait bears no fruit, but keep waiting.

In fact, the absurdist, existentialist or nihilist literature is notoriously difficult to read. Critics have produced countless different theories to explain the significance of any absurd literary creation because they carry the diversity of interpretive meaning. During and aftermath of the second world war the literary creation on 'Absurdism' seems a fertile era. Human beings do not possess the ability to say or know for certain what, if anything has meaning of value objectively. This causes us to comprehend the absurd nature of our existence. So the study will be limited to the signature achievement of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Marquez's *No One Writes to the Colonel* absurd vision and their character's nature within.

### **Literature Review**

A lot of critical writings have been produced on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Marquez's *No One Writes to the Colonel* since their first publication. Most of these writings have been focused on absurdity of life regarding the former one and on hopeless endeavors made by a character in the latter. James R. Frakes writes in *The New York Times*:

Marquez was not wise to make what James called "The anecdote concossim" to this subject in *No one writes to the colonel*". Surely tempted by the character of his 75 year old ex-revolutionary hero to sentimentality, and by the imitative fallacy to tedium of style, this Colombian virtuoso avoids both traps by a rare combination of grace and vibrancy. Every scene or every gesture sings life and denies death.

Life is the best thing that's ever been invented. We cannot eat hope but it sustains us. (42)

Such a scenario allows the roles given by absurd world, except actions and logic played well by Marquez's characters. As a metaphor for the human condition and the absurdity of our experience, these characters are the epitome of the heroes because they are able to recognize the absurdity of human condition. These characters do not abandon hope and find the meaning in the struggling itself. This is the struggle of the absurd human to exist in an apathetic, incorrect universe while longing for meaning.

One might feel despaired that suffering renders life not worth living. The absurd hero embraces the struggle and the contradiction of living without purpose. Camus defines there is no truth or coherence in the universe, the absurd man cannot hold values. The passionate heroes stand as Beckett's and Marquez's who show the dedication to the present.

In the sudden loss of inherent meaning and purpose in life, the absurd heroes transcend their condition. Both characters thus, become absurd heroes through their traits.

Besides showing these physical and psychological absurdities of human condition the characters from both works, that is, Vladimir and Colonel are reassured from absurdities. Similarly, most interpretations of absurdist characters deny the very reassurance of the heroes behind their current plight. In fact both of the characters from the gloomy world embody the strand of hope from the middle of the postmodernist situation.

In connection with the modern generation's acceptance of the absurdity, Bob Corbett writes in *Grove Press*:

Our generation has come to accept and embrace objective

meaninglessness and finds that no big deal. We are in any objectives sense we mean nothing. We live we die, we return to the earth and our bodies decompose into the other things. There is no objective meaning while on earth and absolute disintegration and nothingness after death. Big ideas of life is the living of it, and the awesome marvelous and even wondrous meaning of life is the giving it the meaning we choose to give it and then living that life with conviction and courage. (11)

As Corbett opines, we embrace our existence and look for the meanings. It makes a sense to us, changed those views when evidence and existence suggested to, we are mistaken and continue to go on living, choosing our existence each day of our life though it is on the verge of outdated situation. What a joy of life it has all been and continues to be.

Both the works have witnessed a lot more critical assessment in various perspectives. There is no doubt that *Waiting for Godot* has earned a lot of criticism from absurdist point of view but *No one Writes to the Colonel* has not been interpreted in this line.

*No One Writes to the Colonel* is a deeply moving tale of an old couple's painful memories and false hopes. It describes the dire existence of two unnamed characters. This is the work about the hope sustained in the face of dashed expectations, about the survival of human dignity in the face of grinding poverty about the triumph of love in the face of hunger, illness, age and profound loss. 'My agents write to me frequently, saying not to get impatient.' Colonel adds 'It's been that way for 15 years. Finding the hope within hopelessness yet a miserable life he is going through, colonel projected as the absurd hero.

Martin Esslin, in his *The Theatre of Absurd* (1960), argues that *Waiting for*

*Godot* is part of a broader literary movement that he calls the Theatre of Absurd.

Vladimir and Estragon appear as agents of free will; regardless their doubts and despair about the future, they choose to live rather than the alternative.

Vladimir will never have anyone to answer his philosophical inquires, just as

Estragon will never have anyone to listen to his dreams. Thus, he awaits Godot;

unsure of who or what 'he' is and entirely unsure of the outcome of their awaited

meeting. He along with Estragon is not disheartened over the possibility that Godot

may be a brute: they know, after all, that Godot beats the young messenger boy, yet

they still wait. It would be worthwhile if he came, even if he abused them, so intense

is their need for direction.

### **Organization of the Study**

The present study has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter introduces the thesis title and incorporates research problem, objectives, hypothesis and the significance of the study. The second chapter is about the theoretical

discussion employed for analysis of the text. The theoretical framework is Esslin's

The Theatre of The Absurd and Camus's The Absurd Hero. Discussion on the theory

has been given in detail. The third chapter is the textual analysis. In this chapter

attempts are made to find out the features of Absurdism and Absurd Hero in the texts

under analysis. The fourth chapter is about the conclusive remarks and gives the

summary of the whole study.

## Chapter 2

### Features of Absurdist Literature and Absurd Heroes

The word absurd literally means unreasonable, illogical or inappropriate.

Absurdism is the belief that human beings exist in a meaningless, chaotic universe.

Therefore, when it is connected with literature, it always refers to the type of literary work that does not usually sound so reasonable, or logical. It deals with the aspects of life that makes no sense. Absurd literature departs from the traditional form of literature in matters of form and content. It means the work of literature tends to violate many or all of the traditional logic, or purpose.

Different scholars have defined the absurd in various ways. About this literary trend, Rob Pope puts his views:

**The Absurd**, following Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd*, refers a group of mid-twentieth-century playwrights, notably Ionesco, Beckett, Pinter and Albee. These writers exploit silence as much as speech, absence as much as presence and incoherence rather more than coherence. Esslin emphasizes the ways in which they all explore kinds of il/logic and non/character, actionless plot and indeterminate setting, especially by comparison with the then-dominant form of 'well-made-play.' (194)

Pope especially focuses on the features of absurd literature that depart from the standard form of literature like coherence, logic, action, determinate setting, etc. a well-made genre of literature has clear beginning, middle and end, and such literature gives recognizable theme. On the contrary the absurd literature blur the structure of the plot and consequently it is very difficult to dig out the theme of a work.

Connecting Absurd literature with other forms of literature, Pope further comments:

But explorations of the absurd generally conceived, extend much wider and much further back than certain kinds of mid-century drama. The movement has closed **Aesthetic** links with Surrealism and Expressionism (notably Kafka) and philosophical links with existentialism of Camus and Satre. All these movements can be characterized by their scepticism, about conventional reason and their attempts to embrace and sometimes celebrate, 'meaninglessness' as a condition.

Pope tries to point out link of absurdist literature with the modern movements of literature like surrealism, expressionism and existentialism on the basis of its aesthetic or philosophical features.

Absurdist literature often presents illogic nature of modernism which presents the togetherness into parts or isolated features to piece together. Connecting this view Pope again talks about this movement of literature as, "In fact. We can readily see absurdism as part of the general il/logic of modernism where the supposed certainties of family, state and religion are crumbling and isolated individuals are trying to piece together some sense against and ostensibly nonsensical background" (194).

The concept of the theatre of the absurd brought a revolutionary stir in the field of literature. It became interestingly noticeable because of its features that go in counterpart to traditional literature. In this context Mario Klarer remarks:

The Theatre of the Absurd, like its counterpart in fiction, consciously does away with traditional plot structures and leads the spectator into complicated situations which often seem absurd or illogical. The complication often does not lead to a climax, resolution, or a logical ending. In this manner, the theatre of the absurd, like many postmodern



novels or films, attempts artistically to portray the general feeling of uncertainty of the post-war era. (45)

The moral of the absurdist literature is not explicit as the author often rejects, and the structure of absurdist stories differs from traditional story structure. Thus, writers have great freedom to create unique works of art.

The value lies in the exploration of human existence and the universal philosophical questions that the majority of individuals ask themselves. The major question pertaining to absurdist philosophy is whether the universe and human life have meanings. Absurdist literature tries to represent human condition as it is today.

Martin Esslin defines the absurd as a phenomenon of life and universe without harmony, "'Absurd' originally means 'out of harmony', in a musical context.... In common uses absurd may simply mean ridiculous but this is not the sense in which Camus uses the word and in which it is used when we speak of the theatre of the absurd" (23). In the absurd situation, Camus was calmly putting the question why, since life had lost all meaning, man should not seek escape in suicide. In *Myth of Sisyphus* he tried to diagnose the human situation in a world of shattered beliefs:

A world that can be explained by reasoning however faulty is a familiar world. But in universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels stranger. He is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. Thus divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity. (20)

In 1957, when the Nobel Prize for literature was awarded to Albert Camus, the award recognized him for "illuminating the problems of the human conscience in our time" (3). That shed a light upon Camus's portrayal of human condition through the

absurdism. For Camus the relationship between man and his world is absurd because man is searching for the logic in an irrational universe.

Absurdist fiction, a genre of literature, made famous by Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Kurt Vonnegut and Paul Auster who focus on experiences of characters unable to find an intrinsic purpose in life, are presented through meaningless actions and events. In this regard, the absurdist philosopher Camus states “Individual should embrace absurd condition of human existence while also defiantly continuing to explore and search for the meaning” (2). Thus, absurd arises out of the fundamental disharmony between the individual’s search for meaning and the meaninglessness of the universe.

In another point, Kierkegaard in his *The Leap of Faith* writes a person acts according to his/her reason, power and reflection to find meaning of life but all in vain:

It is as may quite easily be seen, that I, a rational being, must act in a case where my reason, my powers of reflection, tell me: you can just as well do the one thing as the other, that is to say where my reason and reflection say: you cannot act and here is where I have to act... The Absurd, or to act by virtue of the absurd, is to act upon faith... I must act, but reflection has closed to the road so I take one of the possibilities and say: this is what I do, I cannot do otherwise because I am brought to a standstill by my powers of reflection. (13)

Kierkegaard tries to say feeling helpless and depressed is often unavoidable. But contrary to what society tells, there’s no need to be ashamed of negativity to be encountered with. They are catalyst that keep human alive and choosing.

The premise based on most traditional or conventional literature is that life has

meaning, a goal, order or structure. The literature of the absurd has its origin with the view of absurdity of life created by the first and second world wars, which also eroded morality, order and humanity down to zero, resulting in moral decay and social disorder. Talking about the unusual features of absurd literature Esslin remarks:

The Theatre of the Absurd is thus part of the 'anti-literary' movement of our time, which has found its expression in abstract painting, with its rejection of 'literary' elements in pictures; or in the 'new novel' in France, with its reliance on the description of objects and its rejection of empathy and anthropomorphism. It is no coincident that like all other movements and so many of the efforts to create new forms of expression in all the arts, the theatre of the absurd should be centered in Paris. (26)

The text clearly accepts that absurd literature is anti-literary genre in a traditional sense.

Camus's *the Myth of Sisyphus*, is one of the best works that exemplifies the life of the absurd. Camus says, "There is only one really serious philosophical problem and that is suicide" (7). He was haunted by the question of whether suicide could be the only rational response to the absurdity of life. But one may question why he thought life was inherently without meaning.

### **Acceptance of the Absurd**

If humans surrender to absurdity, there will be no life on earth. So acceptance is a solution in which one accepts the absurd and continues to live in spite of it.

Camus once famously said, "you will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life" (23). When the truth is accepted, the life is easier that way. Living in the reality,

saving the dignity, acting accordingly but no lamenting while looking for and not getting the meaning of life in that chaos gives the impression that the acceptance is bliss.

The absurdist philosopher Albert Camus stated that “individuals should embrace the absurd condition of human existence while also defiantly continuing to explore and search for meaning” (2). He opines, these aspects of life change a person completely. Something that obliterates the expectations squashes the goals of life or undermines the existence. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, regards this solution as “demonic madness.” “He rages most of all the thought that eternity might get into its head to take his misery from him” (6). Nihilism, existentialism and absurdism all these arose from the human experience of anguish and confusion stemming from the absurd: the apparent meaninglessness in a world in which humans are so compelled to find or create meaning.

### **The Absurd Heroes**

About the absurd hero, the existentialist writer Ernest Hemingway’s fiction is marked by the overwhelming courage of a hero who continues to search for a solution to the problem that all men are trapped biologically by themselves and ultimately by death. Yet, despite the hostility and meaninglessness of his existence, his hero acts with strength and conviction. Failure cannot discourage an absurd hero. He tries to go ahead leaving behind the failures he has gone through.

The absurd hero takes no refuge in the illusion of art or religion. Such character does not get depressed by absurdity, neither does he give up his struggle to make meaning of life, but instead he openly embraces the absurdity of his condition. Sisyphus, condemned eternity when he was given the job to push a boulder up a mountain only to have it roll to the bottom again and again. He finally recognizes

the futility and pointlessness of his task. But he willingly pushes the boulder up the mountain every time it rolls down. So, he is an absurdist hero.

Like Hemingway, Camus acutely felt the futility of an existence that must end in death. His fictional heroes are also men who simultaneously experience the agony of the meaninglessness of everything. Yet he vigorously acts to combat it. *The Myth of Sisyphus* describes how Camus arrives at his personal philosophy that life is not only worth living, but can also be a meaningful experience despite death. Camus' strict adherence to his own personal truths was simply one example of the need for all people to face up to the truth of the human condition and it was to this end that Camus wrote fiction.

To David Galloway the "absurd hero" is that man who is aware of the disorder of the universe but who "persists in his demand for truth in a universe that says truths are impossible" (7). As he urges, an absurd hero shatters every common notion of heroism. Glamour, flawlessness or doing anything remarkable at first glance is no more there. But the absurd hero's persistent struggle is much more realistic way to seek the truth though he finds no desired meaning of the truth.

Galloway has further pointed out that for the absurd hero the emphasis "is shifted from attainment to performance, and in the process of sustaining his performance, of defending his passion for the absurd, the absurd hero achieves fulfillment simply by defending a truth" (11). In spite of meaninglessness, the absurd hero bravely defends his notion of survival. He does not have to be useless or hopeless either. Rather he can grow, learn and thrive against all odds and that makes victory even sweeter by defending the truth of life.

Camus has called for "the maintenance of the tension which derived from the divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints" (14). On the

basis of his statement, it can be confusing, torturing, or simply unpleasant.

Regardless, it ends in choice. Once becoming conscious of a dilemma, some choice is inevitable, even if one chooses inaction.

Camus stands with hope that Sisyphus' life and torment are transformed into a victory by concentrating on his freedom, his refusal to hope, and his knowledge of the absurdity of his situation "as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the Gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing" (89). Even though no one ever wants to face things like uncertainty, being miserable and losing hope; the absurdity of life forces one to undergo such situation though it might not be accepted. Everything just belongs to a blurry time frame, still to accomplish a meaning in living one must continue to fight against the meaninglessness despite the wasted attempts.

In the same way, Defoe's Dr. Rieux is an absurd hero in *The Plague* for he too is under the sentence of death, and is trapped by a seemingly unending torment, and like Sisyphus, he continues to perform his duty no matter how useless or how insignificant his actions are. In both cases it matters little for what reason they testify to man's allegiance to man and not to abstractions or 'absolutes.'

An absurd man is often preoccupied by the notion of present, which he finds ideal for life. "The present and the succession of presents before an ever conscious mind, this is the ideal of the Absurd man" ( Camus 81). People must realize that the feeling of the absurd exists and can happen to them at any time. The absurd person must demand to live solely with what is known and to bring in nothing that is not certain. This means that all I know is that I exist that the world exists, and that I m mortal.

Though the notion of the 'absurd' pervades all Albert Camus's writing, "*The Myth of Sisyphus*" is his chief work on the subject. In it, Camus considers absurdity as a confrontation, an opposition, a conflict or a 'divorce' between two ideals.

Specifically he defines the human conditions as absurd as the confrontation between men's desire for significant meaning and clarity on the one hand, and the silent cold universe on the other. He continues that there is specific human existence evoking notions of absurdity. Such as realization or encounter with the absurd lives of the individual with a choice: suicide, a leap of faith or recognition. He concludes that recognition is the only defensible option (2).

According to Camus, one's freedom and the opportunity to give life meaning lies in the recognition of absurdity. If the absurd experience is truly the realization that the universe is fundamentally devoid of absolutes, then we as individuals are truly free, "to live without appeal" (19). He puts it as a philosophical move to define the absolutes and universal subjectively rather than objectively. The freedom of human is thus established in a human's natural ability and opportunity to create their own meaning and purpose.

Camus states in '*The Myth of Sisyphus*' "thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are revolt, my freedom and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was as invitation to death and I refused suicide" (20). Revolt here refers to the refusal of suicide and search for meanings despite the revelation of the absurd. Freedom refers to the lack of imprisonment by religious devotion or other's moral codes. Passion refers to the most whole treated experience of life, since hope has been rejected, and so he concludes that every moment must be believed fully.

We are told that Sisyphus is the absurd hero "as much through his passions as

through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing” (Camus 89). Sisyphus is conscious of his plight and therein lies the tragedy. For if, during the moments of descent, he nourished the hope that he would get succeed then his labor would lose its torment. But Sisyphus is clearly conscious of the extent of his own misery. It is this lucid recognition of his destiny that transforms his torment into his victory.

Camus clearly describes the situation of Sisyphus and how he should be regarded in this world of absurdity:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one’s burden again. But Sisyphus reaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe hence and forth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (91)

Whatever is the condition of Sisyphus, he does not cease to do his routine work even at the cost of negating gods. Camus opines that he should be a happy man.

The absurd is not in man or in the world, but in their presence together... it is the only bond uniting them (21) because we are aware of the absurd, we can find value in this life. The value is in our freedom, our passion, and our revolt.

My experience, my passions, my ideas, my images and memories are all that I know of this world and they are enough. The absurd person can finally say “all is well.” I understand then why the doctrines that explain everything to me also



debilitate me at the same time. They relieve me of the weight of my own life, and yet I must carry it alone” ( Camus 41). The absurd is a revolt against tomorrow as such comes to terms with the present moment. All is not chaos: the experience of the absurd is the proof of man’s uniqueness and the foundation of dignity and freedom.

Finally, Camus defines an absurd hero as:

One that realizes and accepts the absurd, one that is guided by his passions and who values life above all. Then, I use these heroes to analyze the absurdist perspective of human’s freedom from the bias of false truth. As a metaphor for the human condition and the absurdity of our experience, Sisyphus is the epitome of the absurd hero because he is able to recognize the absurdity of the human condition, abandon hope, find happiness in material reality, and ultimately find meaning in the struggle itself. (72)

As he opines, from the perspective of the universe, our labor is meaningless, so it falls upon our shoulders to find meaning in what we do. This is the struggle of the absurd man to exist in an apathetic, incoherent universe while longing for meaning. Thus, both humanity and Sisyphus face the absurd. According to him, action against anguish is necessary in order to become the absurd hero because result defines him. Absurd heroes rise above their environment and accept the absurdity of human condition while still rebelling.

### Chapter 3

#### Revisiting Beckett's Vladimir and Marquez's Colonel as Absurdist Heroes

The thesis is an attempt to affirm that the main characters of two books, Vladimir from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Colonel from Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *No One Writes to the Colonel* are absurd heroes. These characters from these great writers blur the very concept of heroism. Vladimir is absurdist because he cannot find the expected meaning in life which he is seeking for all the time. So is the Colonel because he cannot find what he expects, that is, pension, rooster's victory and his son's revival. However, they are heroes as they defy Camus's absurdist philosophy of suicide, and continue to live defying the meaninglessness of the universe they live in. However, their wills cannot defy fear; their duty cannot challenge fate; and neither does their honor scorn to compromise with death. In these sense, they are heroes through absurdist point of view. But, at the same time, they lack the qualities of an ideal hero such as courage, selflessness, humility, patience, care for others, noble spirit and sense of sacrifice for the welfare of others. So they do not possess the features of heroism in the traditional sense. Therefore, despite lacks of heroism of the conventional belief, they are heroes because unlike other absurdist characters they go on living without surrendering to meaninglessness of life.

Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* is an elaboration of the title. In the play, there are two tramps, namely Vladimir and Estragon, who are waiting by a sickly looking tree on a road side for the arrival of Mr. Godot but without having any knowledge about him. They display queer behavior; they quarrel, make something nonsense up, show meaningless movements and talk almost nonsense. Similarly, they also contemplate suicide, try to sleep, eat a carrot, play with hat and boots and gnaw on some chicken bones. At the same time, two other characters appear - a master and

a slave, who perform an abnormal scene in the middle of the play. A young boy arrives to say that Mr. Godot will not come today, but that he will come tomorrow. He does not come but the two tramps resume their waiting as on the previous day. No significant changes are seen in their activities except with the tree, which has sprouted a few leaves, the only symbol of a possible change in an alienated world.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *No One Writes to the Colonel* is also the elaboration of the title in its literal sense. Published in 1961, the events in the story revolve around a retired colonel, a veteran of the Thousand-Day War, and his wife. The old man has been waiting for a pension promised to him by the government fifteen years ago, but all in vain as he has not got it yet. However, he is still optimistic about it and assures his wife with its possibility. He lives in some village with his wife who suffers asthma. Their condition today is miserable as they have lived through the situation when martial law and censorship were taking over the country.

They have been forced to suffer utter poverty, and try to survive by selling whatever they have and can be sold to make two ends meet. Their son was killed for some political repression and chaos, and the only thing of consolation for them is a rooster left by their son in their care. The colonel trains it to make it skillful in a cockfight so that it may turn to be winner and bring some money to support their survival. But ironically, the rooster is causing them a financial burden as they have to manage something to feed it in that scarcity.

### ***Waiting for Godot* and *No One Writes to the Colonel* as the Reflection of Absurd Works of Literature**

Absurd literature, like many postmodern novels or films, attempts artistically to portray the general feeling of uncertainty. The same type of situation is clearly perceived in these works. In *Waiting for Godot* we find a lot of features of absurd

literature. For example, it does not follow the traditional plot structure with exposition, complication, climax and denouement. Similarly the main characters Vladimir and Estragon go through uncertain mentality. They wait for Mr. Godot but they don't have any knowledge who he is. A messenger tells them Godot cannot come on that particular day but may come the next day. However he does not come the next day either.

The tramps just pass time by devising different games like chatting, insulting each other, keeping silent or playing with hat and boots. Finally, they decide to leave but they do not move because they are not sure where to go and what to do, so they continue waiting. The characters do not give any certain conclusion of their activities. Neither does the play come to a definite end. In both content and form the play violates traditional norms of dramatic theory, plot structure and the mentality of the characters. In fact the play gives uncertain meaning which is indicated at the very beginning of it:

ESTRAGON. nothing to be done.

VLADIMIR. I am beginning to come round to that opinion. (1)

This conversation of these characters indicating uncertainty pervades throughout the play.

As these characters suffer from uncertainty, their main concern is just to pass the time. It is interesting to quote their expressions after Pozzo and Lucky disappear from the scene. Vladimir and Estragon comment on it:

VLADIMIR. That passed the time.

ESTRAGON. It would have passed in any case. (41)

The conversation sounds as if the characters want to go away for a relief but they cannot go away as they are bound to wait for Godot.

Similar type of uncertainty is seen in *No one Writes to the Colonel*. The war veteran, Colonel, who is an old man also happens to wait something for his relief. He has been waiting for his pension to arrive, his rooster to win the cockfight and his son to come. The Colonel's wife is insistent about selling the rooster to support their lives because of financial crisis but he does not agree with her. He still hopes that his pension will come or the rooster will win the next battle in the cockfight to bring them some prize. But he is not sure. He goes on waiting for these outcomes but he is not sure when they happen, however, he always assures his wife about their possibility. In this sense uncertainty plays major role in this fiction and this feature of the work makes it a work of absurd literature.

Colonel is both idealistic and ironic, a combination that makes him memorable in contemporary fiction. When his wife says that he is only skin and bones, he replies that he is taking care of himself so he can sell himself. When his wife laments that the mush they are getting comes from corn leftover to be fed to the rooster, and says "that's life," the colonel replies, "Life is the best thing that is ever been invented" (42). The colonel resembles the absurdist hero as described by Camus, who cherishes life no matter what circumstances one should go through.

The Colonel, holding out no hope for transcendent value but maintaining a kind of stoic acceptance of struggle regardless of the outcome seems to lead the life accepting the troubles. In modern fiction, his closest parallel is Earnest Hemingway's Fisherman for the characteristics he resembles.

The colonel and his wife, who lost their son in a political repression, are struggling with poverty and financial instability. After rendering a long-time service to the military force, the colonel is now living a retired life, but he is not given pension. He awaits with the hope that he will get it one day, but it all goes in vain.

However, he does not give up his hope and with this hope he struggles with his situations and continues his life. In this regard conversing with his wife he says:

It doesn't matter. If you wait for the big thing, you can wait for the little ones. (28)

In fact this is the story about hope for scratching the new moment of living out of the paws of wearisome existence. Despite the wasted waiting in previous he does not mind to continue the same. He does not complain and he does not break.

*Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett also presents characters, who are comparable to the Colonel of Marquez. Vladimir is one of the major characters representing absurdity of life but inspiring human race. He is assertive and the most hopeful character. "...but that is not the question. What are we doing here, that the question and we are blessed in this that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear, we are waiting for Godot to come." (75)

He often seems to ponder upon what is fair and unfair. In the play, he sounds like a philosopher as he voices and displays the features of existentialist character. In the play, he is presented as a tramp, which gives us the impression that he is from lower social status, however, he aims high and thinks noble. Vladimir displays kind nature to others and this is the weakness he suffers all the time.

Vladimir always tries to be alert about the situation around him. He also seems to be reasonable as he always tries to convince people with reason but at the same time he is equally gullible too. For example, he readily believes in the existence of Godot and keeps waiting for him. This is the humor and irony that we find in *Waiting for Godot* as with Colonel in *No One writes to the Colonel*.

Besides showing these physical and psychological absurdities of human condition the characters from both works that is Vladimir and Colonel are reassured

from absurdities. Similarly, most interpretations of absurdist characters deny the very reassurance of the heroes behind their current plight. In fact both of the characters from the gloomy world embody the strand of hope from the middle of the postmodernist situation.

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Marquez's *No One Writes to the Colonel* are the literary works on Absurdism. But their main characters though they might not be fitted in the conventional definition of heroism, have shown the absurdity in existence.

Both of the works present an absurd situation where all humans are only waiting for their deaths. In the face of this, the only thing human can do is to live with this awareness, live life even more fully by acting heroically with the consciousness of death. But this heroism in the characters does not take the form of what would conventionally be constructed as heroic.

When they do not have any purposeful task, still they try to make some meaning for existence. It is very interesting to quote their expression assuring the readers of their existence:

ESTRAGON. We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?

VLADIMIR. Yes, yes, we're magicians. (23)

When they have nothing to do while waiting for Godot, they devise different games to pass time and show their existence. Also do not lament the ruthlessness of the universe towards them.

We consider Absurd to be a lack of sense, logic and rational thought. Vladimir's heroic actions occur because they are past institutions of extreme stress, in situations where death is always near. The constant state of uncertainty is the only

consistent, objective truth in *Waiting for Godot*. In the play they converse:

VLADIMIR. Never neglect the little things of life

ESTRAGON. What do you expect, you always wait still the last moment. (3)

These adverse conditions first enable him to see all life as an irrational series of facts, that is, as absurd; but secondly, they force him into a decision to fight back even though the only real victory that can be achieved is to fight well.

Like Camus's Sisyphus, the Colonel is the absurd hero for excellence as he rebels against the situation, that is, scarcity torturing his family despite the sureness of their death coming. "The only thing that comes for sure is death," the Colonel says (41). If we refuse this truth, we're going to face off the Sisyphus work. Here is the link between the everyday man and the hero.

The absurd narrative focuses on the dilemma whether it is possible to avoid inevitable end by abandoning all hopes. This is the most essential question in the novel *No One Writes to the Colonel*, and the response to it, unlike other absurdist fictions, with some variations, is chiefly it shows a way out. Placed in different repressive and oppressive situations, Colonel seems making an effort to ignore adversity and obstacles.

### **Vladimir and Colonel as the Absurd Heroes**

Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* is assertive and most hopeful character. He often seems to ponder upon what is fair and unfair. In the play he sounds like a philosopher as he voices and displays the features of existentialist character. The play labels him as a tramp and it gives us the impression that he is from the lower social status. However, he aims high and thinks noble. In this play he has been described to be sickly and having bad breath. Vladimir displays kind nature to others and it is the cause behind his fall.



Temperamentally Vladimir is a tolerant character and doesn't react violently. He tries to convince people with reason. He is thoughtful and kindhearted man. He appears to be idealist and thinks that a person should be treated on the basis of his deeds.

Vladimir always seems to have some meaningful results from life itself. Though he is waiting for Godot, his inner heart gives importance to life. This notion of this character is clearly reflected in the following quote:

VLADIMIR. What do they say?

ESTRAGON. They talk about their lives.

VLADIMIR. To have lived is not enough for them?

ESTRAGON. they have to talk about it." (56)

Other characters enjoy talking about other aspects of life but Vladimir seems to live life at any cost. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons behind his struggle for life against hope of anything else.

In both works, what is more important than the story itself is the 'atmosphere', a veil of mystery that surrounds the characters. The plot is secondary. Absurdity is reflected in their conversation in the text. One of the examples of this is the following expression, "Nothing happens, nobody arrives, nobody goes, it's terrible" (8), and the same sensation is felt in the village in *No One writes to the Colonel*. Beckett's masterpiece develops in a universal and abstract setting. Two roamers, following any path, wait for Godot. The symbol is open to interpretation: it could be God, a supernatural force, social change, a person, even death. In any case what stands out is the concept of existence as a process of waiting.

Godot represents the objective, trivial or transcendent, of this wait. And through waiting, the characters experiment the flow of time. The Colonel has its own

Godot: the arrival of the letter which will guarantee his pension or the possible victory of the rooster. The character is always moving towards these goals without any certainty of success.

In *No One writes to the Colonel*, the wife plays a pragmatic role, She never ceases to repeat to her husband the unfulfilled promises made to him by the politicians of the Liberal Party and the frustration of waiting endlessly for the letter: 'We've waited long enough ... One must have the patience of an ox, as you do, to wait for a letter for fifteen years' (8). But like an absurdist hero, the colonel does not surrender to hopelessness.

The first area of similarity for both authors lies in the absence of a traditional religious belief for the hero. Vladimir and Colonel have evidence of what life is and that it encompasses suffering and death. The protagonists of both authors are men who are responding to the world and attempting to live responsibly despite their intellectual awareness that every act seems futile without a belief in an afterlife.

Both authors have the characters ask themselves the question about the way of living their lives. They do this because they have no extent framework which dictates the way they should live, and so they are forced to turn inward and rely on themselves.

As Camus explains in *The Rebel* man is searching for answers to life, but it is a search for clarity that begins in the human heart. Man's desire to understand life is more than a purely philosophical endeavor it is also an attempt to establish an emotional basis for life through human contact. One can never escape the ultimate death that awaits everyone, but one can escape the despair by living for the present.

The theatre of the Absurd tends towards a radical devaluation of language. The element of language still plays an important part in human conception, but what

happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts. The words spoken by the characters as in *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *Waiting for Godot* do not go ahead in a coherent way.

The literary work in absurdism, *Waiting for Godot* presents two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon-Both tramps, both standing on a road next to a tree, both waiting for something to happen. They do not talk about any vital aspects of life but trivial things as they are the absurdist characters:

VLADIMIR. Charming evening we're having.

ESTRAGON. Unforgettable

VLADIMIR. And it's not over.

ESTRAGON. Apparently not.

VLADIMIR. It's only the beginning.

ESTRAGON. It's awful.

VLADIMIR. Worse than the pantomime (28).

The conversation does not give any sensible expression related to their lives. While talking about charming evening, they compare it with pantomime. Like their activities their conversations do not have clear cut meanings either.

Laced with bitter humor that only highlights its gathering sense of despair, *Godot* is the play where nothing happens, twice, and is all the finer for it. Deliberately confronting the reality of a godless (or God-less) universe, it is a brilliant improvisation on the absurdity of theatre, in which actors stand around waiting to be told what to do. But the play has also proved itself hugely adaptable and reinterpretable-as its extensive history suggests.

*Waiting for Godot* does not tell a story; it explores a static situation of the absurd characters 'Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes. It's awful.' (1) On

a country road, by a tree, two old tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, are waiting. That is the opening situation at the beginning of act first. At the end of act first they are informed that Mr Godot, with whom they believe they have an appointment, cannot come, but that he will surely come tomorrow. Act II repeats precisely the same pattern. The same boy arrives and delivers the same message. Act I ends:

ESTRAGON. Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR. Yes, let's go (49).

(They don't move)

This is one of the examples of to show how absurdist characters cannot do what they try to. Vladimir and Estragon decide to leave but they cannot. They have been bound by the absurdity of life and go on waiting for nothing special. It is the expectation of the fulfillment of a mission which never takes place in this universe.

The sequence of events and the dialogue in each act are different. Each time the two tramps encounter another pair of characters, Pozzo and Lucky, master and slave, under differing circumstances; in each act Vladimir and Estragon attempt suicide and fail, for differing reasons; but these variations merely serve to emphasize the essential sameness of the situation.

As the members of a cross talk act, Vladimir and Estragon have complementary personalities. Vladimir is more practical of the two. He remembers past events, Estragon tends to forget them as soon as they have happened. It is mainly Vladimir who voices the hope that Godot will come and that his coming will change their situation, while Estragon remains skeptical throughout and at times even forgets the name of Godot. It is Vladimir who conducts the conversation with the boy who is Godot's messenger and to whom the boy's messages are addressed. Estragon is weaker of the two; he is beaten up by mysterious strangers every night. Vladimir at

times acts as his protector, sings him to sleep with a lullaby, and covers him with his coat. The opposition of their temperament is the cause of endless bickering between them and often leads to the suggestion that they should part. Yet, having complementary natures, they are also dependent on each other and have to stay together.

Vladimir has relied upon Estragon to wait for Godot. The subject of the play is not Godot but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. Throughout our lives we always wait for something and Godot simply represents the objective of our waiting, an event, a thing, a person, death. Moreover, it is in the act of waiting that we experience the flow of the time in its purest, most evident form.

If Godot is the object of Vladimir's desire, he seems naturally ever beyond his reach.

VLADIMIR. Yes you do know them.

ESTRAGON. No, I don't know them

VLADIMIR. We know them, I tell you. You forget everything.

(Pause. To himself) unless they're not the same...

ESTRAGON. Why didn't they recognize us then?

VLADIMIR. That means nothing. I too pretended not to recognize them. And then nobody ever recognizes us. (50)

The dialogue shows that there is a crisis of identity of humans as they pretend as if they do not know each other. This is one aspect of absurdity of life.

In the second act, when Pozzo and Lucky appear, cruelly deformed by the action of time, Vladimir and Estragon again have their doubts whatever they are the same people they met on the previous day. Nor does Pozzo remember them: 'I don't

remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won't remember having met anyone today' (2). Again the same crisis of identity and the functionless of the human brain corrupted by forgetfulness.

In *Waiting for Godot*, waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change in itself in illusion. Vladimir does not surrender to hopelessness, but instead he continues hoping something unknown and goes on waiting as an absurd hero, who does not find it unusual to repeat things even without significance:

ESTRAGON. He should be here.

VLADIMIR. He didn't say for sure he'd come.

ESTRAGON. And if he doesn't come?

VLADIMIR. We will come back tomorrow. (7)

Accepting this reality he continues to wait in search of better tomorrow. Godot's coming is not sure still he finds solace in believing that he will come some other day even if not now. That is not merely an illusion it could be named anything, but his purpose in life though it seems purposeless.

In Marquez's *No One Writes to the Colonel* the Colonel who is the retired military officer is a war veteran and is waiting for his pension to arrive. To get a letter with the message of his pension, he visits the postman every Friday but he finds his visit futile every time. His hope of getting the letter is crossed every Friday by the post-master's reply to him:

"It was supposed to come today for sure," The Colonel said (43). The post master shrugged and said, "The only thing that comes for sure is death, Colonel," (43). What an irony. One is hoping for the support for life but the gift he gets is the despair. In such situation common people would have been dejected or disappointed

but the Colonel does not lose his heart because he is an absurd hero, and he still waits for the pension.

In *No One Writes to the Colonel* political violence is not described in detail. Step by step we discover that the Colonel's only son, Agustín, had been assassinated because of political reasons. A summary of events in the country is distributed in the village for clandestine circulation. The tailor's shop is identified as the centre of revolutionary activities, supported by the friends of the Colonel's dead son.

Poverty haunts the daily life of the Colonel and his wife. It is present from the first page of the fiction: "The Colonel took the top of the coffee and saw that there was only one little spoonful left. He removed the pot from the fire and scraped inside of the can with a knife until the last scrapings of the ground coffee, mixed with bits of rust fell into the pot" (1). The desperate story of the starving Colonel and his pragmatic wife, who takes care of the household in times of hardship, originated in this period of deprivation.

Every Friday, the Colonel goes to the harbor hoping to receive the letter acknowledging his right to a pension as a veteran of the civil war, but no result comes to him as expected. This frustrating repeated ceremony and existential ritual between the postman and the Colonel, takes place week after week in the presence of the town's doctor who receives the national newspapers on the same day. The postmaster delivered his mail. He put the rest in the bag and closed it again. The doctor got ready to read two personal letters, but before tearing open the envelopes he looked at the colonel. Then he looked at the colonel. Then he looked at the postmaster.

The colonel was terrified. The postmaster tossed his bag onto his shoulder, got off the platform, and replied without turning his head 'No one writes to the colonel' (12).

Because, he faced up to his life, he lived heroically, yet his heroism did not consist of anything dramatically outstanding or noteworthy. As in *The Old Man and the Sea* is Hemingway's best example of heroic acts which arises from non-heroic situations. Santiago is an old fisherman whose physical endurance at sea goes beyond human limitations. He caught a magnificent fish and is determined to bring in yet ends up with only the skeleton. Santiago's spirit is shattered but he refuses to give in. The same courage and aspiration does the colonel gather and expresses his views:

COLONEL. Nobody dies in three years.

WIFE. And what do we eat in the meantime?

COLONEL. I don't know but if we are going to die of hunger, we would have died already. (33)

The colonel seems to have the courage to fight death though he knows he cannot. In spite of grave pangs of poverty, he does not want to lose his dignity by surrendering to the situation though it is all the time torturing him.

Although the expectations of the Colonel are more concise, he nevertheless experiments fluctuations between trust and despair. The dialogues with his wife become every day more exasperating. The woman, who has a pragmatic approach to life, poses the obvious and unavoidable down to earth question. She tells him: "you can't eat hope." In response the old man says, "You can't eat it, but it sustains you (43)."

Sometimes Colonel loses his temper even for a practical issue. When his wife complains about her difficulties, he feels offended and feels humiliated, "Men don't understand problems of the households. Several times I have had to put stones on to boil so the neighbors wouldn't know that we often go for many days without putting on the pot." This complaint of the old woman really offends him and replies, "That's



really a humiliation” (42-43). The Colonel is much concerned about his dignity and does not notice what his wife tells him about the scarcity of food and money in the house, “You should realize that you can’t eat dignity” the Colonel’s reply comes straight forward as, “That’s what happens to you for not holding your tongue....’ I’ve always said that God is on my Side” (46).

The woman seems to ignore the moral issue, by forcing her husband to sell an old clock together with other treasured objects, part of the family heritage. The Colonel is concerned, following the Spanish tradition of, “honour”, about keeping up appearances. He does not want to reveal his needs and wishes to maintain his image at all costs. He is even ashamed of acknowledging that he is waiting for the letter. He does not want to expose his dire economic situation. When the woman goes around town trying to sell the clock and a painting, the Colonel feels bitter. “So now everybody knows that we are starving" (45).

The cruelty of the woman reaches a climax when she implacably refers to the failure of their lives, by listing the rights that the State did not safeguard and of the services that nobody ever took care of acknowledging. “You were also entitled to a job when they made you break your back for them at the elections. You were also entitled to the veteran’s pension after risking your neck in the civil war. Now everybody has his future assured, and you’re dying of hunger, completely alone” (11). Despite his wife’s opposition, the Colonel has his humor and irony, his pride and courage against the inexplicable adversity of poverty and political repression that give the novel dignity and structure.

The rupture of habits and the end of expectations in Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon will not break the endless process of waiting for Godot. In Marquez, the stubborn Colonel sometimes seems to break the habit of waiting for the letter that

never arrives. Ariel Dorfmann writer and critic, confirms the analogy we have been trying to establish between *Waiting for Godot* and *No One Writes to the Colonel*, in his *Essays on Contemporary Latin American Fiction*, and affirms that while Beckett's characters are slaves of their expectations, the Colonel sets a barrier when he replaces his routine trip to the post office by trust on the victory of the rooster at the cockpit.

(12)

Bureaucracy proves to be the insurmountable obstacle for the recognition of the Colonel's right to a pension. He tries to look for solutions by changing the lawyer in charge of his case. But hopes are scarce, as the lawyer points out. The scene between the lawyer and the Colonel reminds us of Kafka. He tries to trace the proof of claim and the lawyer says that would be impossible. ... 'I agree', said the lawyer. 'But those documents have passed through thousands and thousands of hands, in thousands and thousands of offices, before they reached God knows which department in the War Ministry' (28).

"No official could fail to notice documents like those", the Colonel said. "But the officials have changed many times in the last fifteen years", the lawyer pointed out." Just think about it; there have been seven Presidents, and each President changed his cabinet at least ten times, and each minister changed his staff at least a hundred times..."

(28)

After this discouraging episode with the lawyer, the Colonel decides to assume the case personally and writes a petition to the capital. But under the pressure of the alarming economic circumstances, he abandons the issue of the pension which, as Ariel Dorfmann points out, might be inside the drawer of an anonymous bureaucrat in the capital and deposits his destiny in the victory of the rooster. The Colonel needs to

test his illusion in a real battle. The possible victory of the rooster becomes a symbol of personal dignity and even of collective vindication for the whole town.

While in *Waiting for Godot* we see two desolate characters, crippled by anxiety and fear, in the story of the Colonel, a moving and unforgettable character tries to find a reason to survive, a feeling of belonging, a certificate of existence, through the arrival of a letter, or the victory of the rooster. Like every one of us, he holds to an illusion, a possibility of change, a better tomorrow.

The exhausted old man has managed to fall asleep but his exasperated wife, almost beside herself, shakes him violently and wakes him up. She wants to know what they will live on now that he has finally decided not to sell the fighting rooster but to prepare him for combat:

‘What will we eat?’

The Colonel had taken seventy five years –the seventy five years of his life, minute by minute-to arrive at that instant. He felt pure, explicit, invincible, at the moment he replied: ‘Shit’ (69).

Both authors project the human freedom to determine what one’s life will be. Will it be an acceptance of thing as they are with the belief that nothing will after life, or will it be a determination to act to change what one can change even though nothing can ever prevent deaths. The heroes have chosen a course of action which sets them apart from other men, and in doing so, they have determined that it is the only valid response to an irrational universe. The hero is arguing the need of an aggressive determination to fight the world.

Both Colonel and Vladimir are the characters who are responding to hostile worlds. For Camus, “the absurd depends as much upon man as much upon the world” (177). It occurs because of the “clash between our demand for explanation and the

essential mystery of all existence” (8). They are both in ultimate situations where death causes them to realize something about the world they live in. What these characters perceive the world to be and how they react to it varies, but for all, the desperate confrontation of man and his world in an extreme situation is an integral part of the process that the heroes must go through if they are to discover that life is the absurd attempt to live logically in an illogical world.

Technically Becket and Marquez place their heroes in a situation where they must explain something to someone, and the need of explanation is very real. This gives the hero the opportunity to express his knowledge about life in a plausible way, since the hero's ideas are integrated into the exigencies of the narrative. They both have nothing to lose because life is already lost to death. When faced with the absurd condition of all life, they cannot accept it, and so they decide to do something positive, to negate the situation of their particular lives, they stand with hopes. These heroes make valiant attempts at heroic accomplishments, yet remain throughout lonely and fearful that life is absurd.

If life is absurd, then once the absurdity is accepted as the only thing possible, humans can achieve meaning in the midst of it. Unremarkable men who work for something of value in their quiet, private way, are not vigorous and demonstrative in their actions, but in their convictions as projected through Vladimir and Colonel.

Esslin forcefully puts his view of victory and defeat for an absurd hero. “The absurd hero holds out the message that though victory is questionable, defeat is not final” (223). To define this, Vladimir has prevailed upon Estragon to wait for Godot whereas Colonel upon letter for his pension. The act of waiting is an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. Throughout the lives everyone always waits for something though at the end of the day, it seems wasted.

It has been seen in Becket's and Marquez's the same. In *Waiting for Godot* At times, Vladimir and Estragon, they reveal the true subjects of their game:

VLADIMIR. now what did we do yesterday?

ESTRAGON. yesterday evening we spent blathering about nothing.

(39)

In between nothingness and struggle of a man to grab some meaning in life, Vladimir has been seen as the absurd hero of Becket.

Lacking practical concerns, he still distributes the clandestine political literature of which his son was killed. Liked by most of the townspeople, who know his true state, he lives in a dream world and on hope. He realizes that he is ageing; he is 75 years old, but he keeps living by appearances. To the very end, he feels unbeatable, believing that even though he is starving, his rooster will win and feed. In the same fashion, Vladimir lives in hope: he waits for Godot whose coming will bring the flow of time to stop. "Tonight perhaps we shall sleep in his place, in the warmth, dry, our bellies full, on the straw. It is worth waiting for that, is it not" (18)? This passage, clearly suggests the need of peace, the rest from waiting. They are hoping to be saved from the instability of the illusion of time and to find peace and permanence outside it. They will no longer be the wanderers, but will have arrived home in bliss.

The feeling of unfulfilled expectations leads to a comparison between the characters created by Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* and Marquez in *No One Writes to the Colonel*. In both works, 'waiting' as a characteristic of existence, becomes a prevailing feature of human life.

Vladimir is absurdist heroes because he defies the idea of suicide and continues to live accepting the challenges of life posed by this meaningless universe, but he cannot display heroism as he lacks courage, nobility, humility, sense of caring

and readiness for sacrifice for the welfare of others.

Vladimir and Estragon are still hopeful about the arrival of Godot, but the problem is how to pass time. That is why, they struggle to pass the time. They do different things to pass time. One of the main reasons that they remain together is that they need one another to pass the time. When Pozzo and Lucky leave, they converse:

VLADIMIR. That passed the time.

ESTRAGON. It would have passed in any case.

And later when Estragon finds his boots again:

VLADIMIR. What about trying them.

ESTRAGON. I've tried everything.

VLADIMIR. No, I mean the boots.

ESTRAGON. Would that be a good thing?

VLADIMIR. It'd pass the time. I assure you, it'd be an occupation. (63)

Since passing the time is their mutual occupation, Estragon struggles to find games to help them accomplish their goal. Thus they engage in insulting one another and in asking each other questions. As absurd heroes, these characters do not give up their hope, rather they go on living and waiting killing time this way or that way.

In *No One Writes to the Colonel* the unnamed colonel has been waiting for his pension to arrive for 15 years. His money and other options to support survival have run out. He has nothing left to sell except the fighting rooster his son has left in his care before the young man was killed by government soldiers. If he can keep the chicken fighting for a few months, until it has a chance to win the big fight, he can sell it for 900 pesos and that will be enough to support his wife and himself while they wait for his long promised pension to arrive.

With the expectation of gaining enough, the colonel takes great care of the

fowl and keeps it alive with love. Meanwhile, he takes his pension for a special meaning beyond the mere fact of eating. He has a dream of making life more comfortable and exciting with the pension. The story projects, retired colonel, a veteran of a thousand-day war as the protagonist, who still hopes to receive the pension he was promised some 15 years ago. As the couple is struggling financially, the expectation of the pension has been a consoling factor for them though they are not sure to get it. He is a bit disappointed as money does not seem to come to him, however, he is still optimistic.

Every Friday the colonel goes to post office expecting his letter, but the postmaster replies in negation with some amusing remarks about his endless routine. When he arrives home empty-handed, he comforts his wife with the assurance that the letter did not arrive that Friday, but it is sure to arrive next Friday, or the Friday after that. Thus, the protagonist's dual roles with his pride and courage against the adversity of poverty and political repression and the novel itself have the humor and irony that give the novel dignity and structure. This wise yet childlike man assumes a sort of tragicomic stature in the course of the narrative. He does not stop celebrating the life in dignity and pride despite the struggle to fulfill the basic needs.

## Chapter 4

### Vladimir and Colonel as the Agents to Inspire Life to Live

Beckett's famous drama *Waiting for Godot* and Marquez's novel *No One writes to the Colonel* have parallels in many aspects. Most of the noticeable parallel is the absurdist features in both works. In both works the main characters try their best to find meanings in life but all their struggle for meaning goes in vain. Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon endlessly wait for Godot, who never comes but they go on waiting. They do not find any purposeful result of their effort. The same type of situation is found with Marquez's colonel, who waits for a letter offering the promised pension to arrive on Friday, for his rooster to be victorious in a cockfight, and for his supposedly dead son to come back to him. Neither of his expectations come to materialize; however, the colonel goes on waiting. In spite of serious financial crisis and his wife's forceful insistence to sell the bird, he does not surrender, but instead he continues hoping his pension and his rooster's win. In this sense, the characters from both works do not surrender to meaninglessness, and this is the worth mentioning correspondence between these works.

Started with the problem how Vladimir from *Waiting for Godot* and the Colonel from *No One writes to the Colonel* are absurd heroes and how they inspire humans to continue life in opposition to other options demanded the theoretical modality of absurdism and absurd heroes, and the analysis proceeded with the same modality. The problem thus formulated gave rise to the hypothesis that the characters are absurd heroes as they opt for life ruling out suicide and leap of faith in spite of their acknowledgement of meaninglessness of life and the universe they itself and their struggle to make meaning out of meaninglessness is the point of their vision that inspire hope for life. They believe in their struggle to make meaning in life and refuse



hope, admitting that struggle gives meaning but not hope, to live in the present with passion thus absurd heroes. In this sense the research has come to the conclusion in the line of hypothesis devised.

Vladimir and Estragon go on waiting for a long time expecting the arrival of Mr. Godot who will save them from death or will make their lives better relieving them from their sins. But he never comes. They are almost hopeless. In this situation one may think that they must be utterly depressed and dejected and should have committed a suicide, but they do not go for that. Instead they still hope for something good in life and continue to live as a struggle to find meaning. They are absurd heroes in the sense that they do not surrender to death and religious faith but decide to live. If they were not absurd heroes they would opt for suicide or leap of faith.

Clearly, these characters are left in a very hopeless situation as humans are in their real world. Considering the waiting of Vladimir and Estragon even if they know there will not be any fruit of waiting, they continue their work enjoying what they have at present. Therefore, they give the message to common people that this universe is not favorable for this life to make it comfortable however, life should continue at any cost.

The final scene of the drama carries the summary of the whole story of these absurd characters. They decide to leave but they do not move for they have to wait for Godot. Being hopeless and fed up with life, they contemplate suicide but the situation is not favorable for them to do it either. Rather, they put off the date for suicide for the next day this way or that the aim of their life seems to delay death at the cost of any inconvenience to life. They clearly give a message that once life is created, it should live to its fullest extent though this universe cannot give any meaning to it.

The similar type of situation is perceived in *No One Writes to the Colonel*. The

protagonist, the retired military officer, is waiting for his pension to arrive and his rooster to win the fight. But his hope for the both has been almost crossed as he does not reach that day. Like Godot in *Waiting for Godot*, Colonel's Friday is very unlikely to come. Godot symbolizes the source of salvation and that Friday a source of solace or happiness with life support, but they will never happen. In both works, none of the expected events take place but as the heroes, these characters do not lose their heart but go on struggling to continue their lives. These characters accept and even embrace the absurd and continue to live in spite of it. Following Camus's philosophy of opting for life, these characters have given meaning through its struggle against the absurd and meaninglessness.

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