

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the thesis writer explains her reasons why she chooses drama for the genre, Samuel Beckett as the particular author and his drama *Happy Days* in the background of the study. The thesis writer also states her problem and purpose in writing the thesis. Then, she will discuss the significance of the study, the scope and limitation, and the methods that she uses to analyze my problem, also the organization of the study.

### 1.1. Background of the Study.

According to Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs (1986) in their book, *Literature, an Introduction to Reading and Writing*, the word “drama” is derived from the Greek word “*dran*”, which means “to do” or “to act. In many ways, this “doing” or “acting” is “the definitive quality of drama” (p. 1033). While plays share many things in common with prose fiction or poetry, the single most important difference is that they are designed to be presented by actors on a stage before the audience or “the acting or staging of the play”, also “the text of play is basically dialogue, monologue and stage directions” (pp. 1033-1034). ). Moreover in drama, the thesis writer can feel the actors’ expression clearly through the acts and dialogues. The live performance makes it easier to understand. The same feeling cannot be felt when reading a novel or poetry. In reading a novel, the thesis writer must imagine the settings, characters and situations to understand the story well. In poetry, she must interpret the words, which are not easy to understand. That is why she likes drama better than novel or poetry.

Samuel Beckett writes at least 65 works that include novels, plays, and poems. He is one of modern time playwrights, because his kind of drama performance includes the modern theatre which has a modern trait of theatre which is stated by Paul. C. Holmes and Anita. J. Lehman (1970) in their book *Keys to Understanding: Receiving and Sending/ Drama*, such as “ no curtain, audience involvement on stage and off stage, the playwrights are trying to involve audiences

physically as well as emotionally” (p. xvi) and the modern theatre “shows man as he sees himself in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, often in an absurd world.” (p. xvi). Also the playwright’s “thing” is to express “his perception of the world that he is acting out” (p.xi). Therefore, the thesis writer intends to discuss Samuel Beckett’s work since he writes many of literary works that describe a true human condition.

Samuel Beckett himself has a fascinating life. When he was in Paris, he met his fellow Irishman, James Joyce an outstanding novelist in modern time. Because Joyce's eyesight was so bad that he could not see and could not write then Beckett helped him and soon began to be known as Joyce's secretary (Esslin, 1968, p. 12). He was making words do the absolute maximum of work. This meeting was to have a profound effect on Beckett. At the age of 24, Beckett returned to Dublin in 1930 and he was appointed a lector in French at Trinity College. In January after having spent there four terms, Beckett resigned this academic post and after that he suffered from serious depression. For the result, he spent all his time in a dark room and missed Paris where he had possessed more personal freedom. On his doctor's recommendation, Beckett left for Germany, and after six months he returned back to Paris. He lived in a Paris hotel and realised that he needed to earn money to be able to stay there. As a consequence, he started to write poems, stories, and the novel “*Dream of Fair to Middling Women*”, which has never been published, but the portions of which he used in the collection of stories “*More Pricks Than Kicks*”. In 1933 when Hitler took power, Beckett was in Dublin. This was the beginning of very hard period of Beckett's mental breakdown. His great love “Peggy” died from tuberculosis that year, and soon Beckett's father had a massive heart attack, which totally overwhelmed him. (Esslin, 1968, p. 13)

After spending several months in Ireland, Beckett headed for London where he spent two miserable years because he is depressed and confused about the quality of his writing and having no idea how great his talent really was. Nevertheless, Beckett began to write furiously, the result of which was the collection of poems “*Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates*” in 1935. He never gave up reaching his dream as a writer and a playwright, also he makes the thesis writer admire him and choose him as the writer. In addition, he started to write a novel, for which London became the setting of “*Murphy*” in 1938. During World War II, Beckett joined the French

Resistance and fled from the Nazis. While hiding from the Nazis, he wrote another novel *Watt* in 1942 until 1944, which is considered "an important bridge from the pre-war to the post-war writings" (Esslin, 1968, p. 15) and where the basic Beckettian themes as the alienation from the world appear. Furthermore, Beckett has a greater range of literary career compared to his contemporaries. He is involved in many kinds of literary activities. Besides being a playwright, he is also a poet. He writes poetry and as a proof his poem, "*Whoroscope*", which won a Nancy Cunard Prize in 1930. After the war he returned back to Ireland again to be with his mother, Mary Roe Beckett. At that time, she was dying from Parkinson's disease and throughout her final illness, Beckett cared for her. About his mother's death he later wrote in *Krapp's Last Tape*. Therefore Beckett continued his writing career until he became an Irish novelist and playwright who was the one of the great names of Absurd Theatre with Eugene Ionesco. His plays are concerned with human suffering and survival, and his characters are struggling with meaninglessness and the world of the nothing. "Samuel Beckett's minimalist, bleak writings about alienation, death, and language made him as one of the 20th-century's most influential playwrights and one of the founders of the Theatre of the Absurd and a favorite of academic" (Esslin, 1969, p. 16). That is why, the thesis writer chooses him because he is a great and amazing writer and he never gives up to be a good writer.

He is also well known as a novelist. Even, he still considers himself as a novelist not dramatist. In the 1950, Beckett wrote three more novels in French and his first novel is *the Trilogy Molloy* in 1951, *Malone Meurt* in 1949 until 1951, and *L'innommable* in 1953, which he later translated into English as *Molloy*, *Mallone Dies*, and the last is *Unnameable*. Beckett's novels were not successful among French publishers (Esslin, 1969, p.16). Due to Beckett's total resignation, it was "Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil" his companion, who took the manuscripts from one publisher to the other and although she was rejected many times finally she made a contract with "Lindon", who published the works of Beckett. From writing the novels, Beckett turned to writing drama, which gave him the new possibilities for expressing his ideas. In 1972 Beckett confessed how and why he started to write plays: "I turned to writing plays to relieve myself of the awful depression the prose led me into. Life at that time was too demanding, too terrible, and I thought the

theatre would be a diversion.” (Esslin, 1968, p. 56). Beckett found in theatre a new way of making public as his private world and these dramatic writings were the works, which made him successful and famous across the world. Several of his great works including *Waiting for Godot* become “the foundation of Beckett’s reputation as one of the major literary forces and influences of his time” (p. 8). Beckett also considered himself separate from the French Existentialist playwrights, such as Jean Paul Sartre and Eugène Ionesco. They shared themes and technical innovations united them under the umbrella of the “Theatre of the Absurd” (p. 6), which is taken from an essay of French philosopher Albert Camus with his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The Absurdist believe that the world is beyond rational explanation that the universe is chaotic and that man has to commit himself to something important to make life meaningful. They employ new techniques to communicate their ideas. While the static, stripped action and dialogue of Beckett's plays may now seem like a bad performance art but at the time they were revolutionary. The thesis writer chooses Samuel Beckett as the author, because of so many great achievements he had, as the thesis writer already mentioned before, and he was one of the great absurdist in the world of play.

Her other reasons for choosing Samuel Beckett are because he focuses especially on silences and the unspoken desires of humans, and the way death dominates human thoughts also “he presents the reader with four different images of the same, unforeseeable, sudden, fatal, life feeling. In the same way a painter transforms his visions into colorful spots, he transforms his mind into the symbolic language of an imaginary life situation” (Hoffman, 1967, p 16) and these make him different from the other writers. He develops his work in the successful plays *Endgame* in 1957, *Krapp's Last Tape* in 1958, and *Happy Days*, which was first performed in 1961, though he never regains the startling success that he has with his early plays. Finally, the peak of his literary career came when he was bestowed Nobel Prize for literature in 1969. In his writings for the theater, Beckett shows the influence of “parody, variety show, the music hall, commedia dell'arte, and the silent-film style of such figures as Keaton and Chaplin” (*Samuel Beckett 1906-1989*, n.d). In general, the plays of this period reflect the same themes as the novels, which are despair and the will to survive in the face of an uncomprehending world. In all the works of this

period, it is also possible to see the working out of Beckett's faith in writing as a process of self-revelation and dealing with the space between the self and the world of objects. In most, if not all, of these writings there are also prominent comedic elements in the handling of the themes.

Stanley Hochman (1984) in *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama I* says that *Happy Days* is "Beckett's most pessimistic play, it is in many ways and exposition of the resourcefulness of the human spirit in the face of hopelessness" (p. 286). Based on James Knowlson (1985), in his book *Happy Days: The Production Notebook of Samuel Beckett* says that *Happy Days* is known as one of "Beckett's more cheerful plays than the other works, due in large part to Winnie's nearly unflagging optimism. She praises not only the happiness of the day, but is grateful for what is not bad in her world" (p. 256). *Happy Days* is also a difficult play to read for the numerous stage directions, but this is a necessary "tactic of Beckett". Beckett emphasizes the states in "Winnie's life with her literal paralysis below the waist and the stage directions mark the ways she frenetically keeps herself busy with rituals" (p. 257). He defies a traditional theatrical rule of using motion to keep the audience engaged, and thus draws us into "Winnie's own struggle", we also, may be bored watching her being bored. (p. 257). Finally, the rude comedy often happens in Beckett's absurd humor and his plays contain a philosophical drama that is evident here. There is an implication when Winnie tells Willie in his hidden place to work in "that stuff," presumably it is a "sunscreen" and presumably onto "his buttocks" (p. 259). Because of that information, the thesis writer is curious to discuss this play.

Moreover, in *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*, Hugh Kenner (1980) says that "anyone who suspects that Beckett's way of writing is simply to project his own moods should study his portrait of Winnie-no doubt drawn from memories of his London years, a quarter-century before he wrote the play" (p.11). *Happy Days* is one of Beckett's famous plays besides *Waiting for Godot*. *Happy Days* has complete forms of dramatic expression that the other works do not have. From all of this information, the thesis writer is interested in choosing this play, besides this play is never discussed by other literary students, and the main character has the similar name to the thesis writer.

*Happy Days* contains the Theater of the Absurd. Based on Martin Esslin (1969) in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd*, “the theatre of the absurd however, can be seen as the reflection of what seems to be the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time” and this is a standard to judge the plays that differ from the conventional play (p. 4). Because *Happy Days* is not a conventional play, the thesis writer uses the concept of the Theatre of the Absurd to help her in analyzing and understanding this play. The Theatre of the Absurd is totally lyrical theatre which uses abstract scenic effects, many of which have been taken over and modified from the popular theatre arts: mime, ballet, acrobatics, conjuring, music-hall clowning. Martin Esslin, one of the Absurd writers said that “Absurd” originally means “out of harmony” (p. 5). Hence its dictionary definition: “out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical” (p. 5). In common usage, “absurd” may simply mean “ridiculous” (p. 5), but this is not the sense in which Albert Camus uses the word, and in which it is used when people speak of the Theatre of the Absurd. In an essay on Kafka, Eugene Ionesco defined his understanding of the term as follows:

“Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose [...] Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless. This sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is, broadly speaking, the theme of the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet, and other writers discussed in this book.” (Esslin, 1969, p. 5).

In short, the meaning of the term “Absurd” is “devoid of purpose” (Esslin, 1969, p. xiv). In other words, absurdity talks about a feeling of the purposelessness of life. In other words, The Theatre of the Absurd departs from realistic characters, situations and all of the associated theatrical conventions. In an absurd drama usually:

“Time, place and identity are ambiguous and fluid and even basic causality frequently breaks down. Meaningless plots, repetitive or nonsensical dialogue and dramatic non-sequiturs are often used to create dream-like or even nightmare-like moods” (*Theatre of The Absurd*, n.d, p.2).

That means in absurd word, everything is ambiguous and strange, and sometimes the characters make their illusion so that they live in a delusion and it is not real. *Happy Days* also has the same problems like in the previous statements. Therefore the thesis writer is interested in discussing and analyzing absurdity in this thesis.

Thus, the thesis writer will discuss and focus on absurdity because it is an important element in this play. In this play the main character Winnie is a monologue character and a woman in her 50s who is buried waist-deep in the center of a mound of scorched earth, with little else around other than a large, black shopping bag and a collapsed parasol. Behind her and hidden from view sleeps Willie, her husband. Winnie runs through a monotonous ritual each morning, praying and cleaning herself and combing her hair. Winnie regrets for not letting Willie sleep and wishes she could tolerate being alone or does not need anyone to listen to her, although she knows Willie often does not. She always thinks that tomorrow will be better than today and everything will come back as before. Anxiously, she wonders if she combs her hair and brushes her teeth, and locates the brush and comb in her bag again. Since she normally puts them back at the end of the day, she thinks she does not use either, but then resolves to "brush and comb them later". From the main character's behavior, thought, and speech, the thesis writer could know the absurdity. Therefore, the thesis writer wants to prove and reveal the absurdity.

## **1.2. Statement of the Study.**

The thesis writer is interested in analyzing what the absurdity is and how the absurdity is revealed in Beckett's *Happy Days*.

## **1.3. Purpose of the Study.**

The main purpose of this study is to analyze what behavior, thought, speech of the characters can be categorized as absurdity and to find out the ways it is expressed through the characters.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study.**

Through this thesis, the thesis writer has a great expectation that by writing a study on Samuel Beckett's work, the readers especially the students will become familiar with Beckett's works, especially *Happy Days*. In her observation, most students avoid and refuse reading Beckett's works like *Waiting for Godot*, *End Game*, *Happy Days*, because Theatre of Absurd is complicated and hard to be understand. As a result they are not familiar with Beckett's works, and usually they dispose them from their literary reading list. The thesis writer also hopes this thesis can become a work of appreciation. What she means is that this thesis can help the readers appreciate Beckett's works more and can understand more about the traits of Beckett's writing.

By working on this thesis, the thesis writer can reveal how remarkable Samuel Beckett's works are. Moreover, the thesis writer hopes that this thesis will help the students who want to know and to study more about Beckett's works and the concept of the Theater of the Absurd.

#### **1.5. Scope and Limitation.**

In this study, the scope is the absurdity of this play. The limit for this study is analyzing the setting, thoughts, speeches, and actions of the main character. Because this play ends in two acts, there are only two characters that appear in this play, but the majority of the thesis writer's focus is on the main character, Winnie, and about Willie, the thesis writer also analyzes him as the supporting character.

#### **1.6. Methodology.**

In writing this paper, the thesis writer gathers data and information by using library research to do this study. The library research includes the use of the Internet sources, the biography of the writer, his other works, review, criticism and opinion toward this play to support my analysis. As for the approach, the thesis writer uses literary approach. In applying this approach, the thesis writer uses the literary theories commonly related with this approach, namely characterization. She chooses characterization because characterization can describe the absurdity by analyzing the dialogues and actions of the characters. From the analysis of the characterization, the



thesis writer tries to show the kinds of absurdity and the way of absurdity is expressed. The last in this thesis, the thesis writer uses the supporting concept of the Theater of the Absurd. The thesis writer uses that supporting concept in order to help her in understanding deeply and analyzing the absurdity in this play.

### **1.7. Organization of the Study.**

The thesis writer organizes this thesis into four chapters. In the first chapter, the thesis writer writes about the introduction that explains the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, scope and limitation, methodology, and organization of the study. The second part of this thesis discusses the theoretical basis related to the topic. The third part talks about the analysis of the problem and provides quotations or examples from the play, and discusses about the absurdity. While in the last chapter is finding and closing of this thesis that concludes the whole discussion. Appendix is also given to complete the work, which consists of the summary of the play and the biography of the author.