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Artificial Intelligence and the Crisis of Human Agency: A Posthumanist Study of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in the Digital Age



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Abstract

This study examined the crisis of human agency in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* through the theoretical lens of posthumanism, with particular emphasis on the implications of artificial intelligence in the digital age. The primary objective was to explore how Beckett's dramatic representation of waiting, repetition, dependence, and fragmented subjectivity anticipates contemporary concerns regarding technologically mediated human existence. The study adopted a qualitative research design and employed textual analysis to examine selected dialogues, stage directions, characterisation, and symbolic elements in the play. Posthumanist theories and contemporary scholarship on artificial intelligence guided the analysis. The findings revealed that *Waiting for Godot* challenges the traditional humanist conception of the autonomous individual by portraying agency as relational, distributed, and shaped by external forces. The characters' persistent waiting, repetitive actions, and dependence on absent or dominant authorities reflect the erosion of autonomous decision-making and parallel the growing influence of artificial intelligence, algorithmic systems, and digital technologies on contemporary human behaviour. Furthermore, the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky illustrates technologically mediated power relations, while the symbolic dependence on external objects anticipates the integration of human cognition with technological systems. The study concludes that Beckett's play extends beyond existential concerns to offer a compelling posthumanist critique of the changing relationship between humans and intelligent technologies. It demonstrates that *Waiting for Godot* remains highly relevant for understanding the ethical and philosophical challenges posed by artificial intelligence and the transformation of human agency in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Posthumanism, Human Agency, Waiting For Godot, Digital Age

Introduction

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed contemporary society by reshaping communication, decision-making, labour, and human relationships. As intelligent systems increasingly perform tasks once considered uniquely human, scholars have begun questioning the future of human agency, autonomy, and identity. The growing dependence on algorithmic technologies has created concerns that human beings are gradually surrendering their capacity for independent judgment to automated systems. This technological transformation has generated renewed interest in posthumanist theory, which challenges the traditional human-centred worldview by examining how humans coexist with machines, algorithms, and other non-human actors within interconnected technological environments. Rather than viewing intelligence as an exclusively human attribute, posthumanism conceptualizes agency as distributed across complex networks of human and technological actors (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999). Recent scholarship further argues that artificial intelligence has fundamentally altered understandings of agency by redistributing decision-making across human and technological systems,

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thereby challenging conventional notions of autonomy and responsibility (Brusseau, 2025).

Although Samuel Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot* during the mid-twentieth century, its themes of uncertainty, passivity, repetitive existence, and deferred action remain remarkably relevant to the dilemmas of the digital age (Beckett, 2011). Vladimir and Estragon remain trapped in an endless cycle of waiting for an absent figure whose arrival never materialises. Their inability to make meaningful decisions reflects a profound crisis of agency that extends beyond existential philosophy into contemporary technological culture. In the twenty-first century, this condition can be interpreted in light of the growing influence of artificial intelligence, in which algorithmic systems increasingly shape human choices, behaviours, and expectations. Beckett's portrayal of suspended action therefore provides an important literary framework for understanding the psychological and philosophical consequences of technological dependence.

Posthumanism offers an appropriate theoretical framework for examining these concerns because it challenges the privileged position of the autonomous human subject while emphasizing the distributed nature of agency among humans, technologies, and material environments (Braidotti, 2013). Rather than treating technology merely as a passive tool, posthumanist scholars argue that technological systems actively shape human cognition, identity, and social relationships (Hayles, 1999). The emergence of artificial intelligence therefore requires a reconsideration of what it means to act, choose, and exercise free will within increasingly automated societies. Beckett's dramatic world, characterised by fragmented identities, repetitive actions, uncertainty, and deferred decision-making, anticipates many of these posthumanist concerns by depicting characters whose agency is continually destabilized and mediated through external forces.

Recent literary criticism has expanded beyond existential interpretations of *Waiting for Godot* by examining the play through posthumanist, object-oriented, and materialist perspectives. Panicker and Nair (2024) argue that Beckett decentralises human subjectivity by emphasising the significance of objects, absence, and material relations, demonstrating that agency extends beyond human consciousness into broader networks of material existence. Their object-oriented ontological reading shows that non-human entities play an essential role in shaping meaning within the play, thereby challenging anthropocentric assumptions. Such interpretations provide a strong foundation for connecting Beckett's dramatic universe with contemporary debates concerning artificial intelligence, technological mediation, and the redistribution of agency between humans and intelligent systems. Nevertheless, despite the growing body of posthumanist scholarship, relatively little research has specifically examined *Waiting for Godot* in relation to AI-driven digital culture and the crisis of human agency.

This study therefore examines *Waiting for Godot* from a posthumanist perspective to investigate how the play anticipates contemporary concerns regarding artificial intelligence and the erosion of human agency in the digital age. By integrating the posthumanist theories of Braidotti (2013) and Hayles (1999) with recent discussions of artificial intelligence (Brusseau, 2025) and contemporary Beckett scholarship (Panicker and Nair, 2024), the research explores how Beckett's representation of waiting, uncertainty, repetition, and dependence reflects the condition of individuals living within technologically mediated societies. The study contributes to both

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Beckett scholarship and digital humanities by demonstrating that *Waiting for Godot* remains highly relevant for understanding the ethical, philosophical, and cultural implications of artificial intelligence and the changing nature of human agency in the twenty-first century.

Research Objectives

To examine the representation of human agency in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* through the theoretical lens of posthumanism.

To investigate how the themes of waiting, passivity, and indecision in *Waiting for Godot* reflect the crisis of human agency in the age of artificial intelligence.

To explore the relevance of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* to contemporary debates on artificial intelligence, posthumanism, and the changing relationship between humans and intelligent technologies.

Research Questions

How is human agency represented in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* from a posthumanist perspective?

In what ways do the themes of waiting, passivity, and repetitive existence in *Waiting for Godot* reflect the crisis of human agency in the digital age shaped by artificial intelligence?

How does a posthumanist reading of *Waiting for Godot* contribute to understanding the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence in contemporary society?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to contemporary literary criticism by offering a posthumanist interpretation of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in the context of artificial intelligence and the digital age. While the play has traditionally been examined through existentialist and absurdist perspectives, this research extends existing scholarship by investigating how Beckett's depiction of waiting, uncertainty, and diminished agency anticipates present-day concerns about human dependence on intelligent technologies. The study also enriches posthumanist scholarship by connecting literary analysis with current debates on artificial intelligence, algorithmic decision-making, and the evolving concept of human agency. It demonstrates how literature can provide valuable insights into the philosophical and ethical implications of emerging technologies and their influence on human autonomy and identity. Furthermore, the research contributes to the interdisciplinary fields of digital humanities, literary studies, and technology studies by demonstrating the enduring relevance of Beckett's work for understanding the complexities of human-machine relationships. The findings may serve as a useful resource for researchers, students, and scholars interested in posthumanism, artificial intelligence, modern drama, and contemporary literary theory. Finally, the study encourages readers to critically reflect on the growing influence of artificial intelligence in everyday life. It highlights the importance of preserving human agency, ethical responsibility, and independent decision-making within increasingly technology-mediated societies.

Literature Review

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally transformed contemporary understandings of human agency, identity, and subjectivity. As

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intelligent technologies increasingly participate in decision-making processes, scholars across philosophy, literary studies, media studies, and digital humanities have questioned whether human autonomy is being redefined within technologically mediated societies. These debates have given rise to renewed interest in posthumanism. This theoretical framework challenges the traditional humanist conception of the autonomous individual by emphasising the interconnectedness of humans, machines, animals, and technological systems (Braidotti, 2013). Rather than viewing technology as a passive instrument controlled by humans, posthumanist scholars argue that technological entities actively shape human experience, cognition, and social relations (Hayles, 1999). This theoretical shift provides an important framework for reinterpreting literary texts that explore uncertainty, dependence, and the instability of human agency, particularly Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

Posthumanism emerged as a critique of Enlightenment humanism, which privileged rationality, individuality, and human exceptionalism. Haraway's (1985/2016) influential concept of the cyborg challenged rigid distinctions between humans and machines, arguing that technological integration had already transformed human identity. Building upon this perspective, Hayles (1999) demonstrated how cybernetics and information technologies blurred the boundaries between biological bodies and digital systems, replacing the stable human subject with distributed networks of information. Braidotti (2013) further expanded posthumanist theory by arguing that contemporary subjectivity should be understood as relational, dynamic, and embedded within ecological and technological assemblages rather than as an isolated human consciousness. These foundational contributions have significantly influenced literary criticism by encouraging scholars to reconsider canonical texts through the lens of technological transformation and distributed agency.

Recent scholarship has extended posthumanist inquiry to the field of artificial intelligence. Coeckelbergh (2020) argues that AI should not merely be evaluated as a technological innovation but as a cultural phenomenon that reshapes moral responsibility, human interaction, and decision-making. Similarly, Floridi (2014) suggests that digital technologies have created an "infosphere" in which human beings and intelligent systems coexist as interconnected informational agents. This perspective challenges traditional assumptions that agency belongs exclusively to human individuals. Instead, agency becomes distributed across complex technological environments in which algorithms, databases, and intelligent systems influence human choices and behaviours.

The increasing influence of AI has also generated philosophical concerns regarding the erosion of human autonomy. Russell (2019) argues that while artificial intelligence offers remarkable benefits, excessive dependence on intelligent systems may gradually reduce human capacity for independent reasoning and ethical judgment. Crawford (2021) similarly demonstrates that AI systems are deeply embedded within social, economic, and political structures rather than functioning as neutral computational tools. Consequently, human agency becomes increasingly mediated by technological infrastructures that influence perception, communication, and decision-making. These concerns resonate with posthumanist critiques of human exceptionalism by illustrating that contemporary agency is produced through interactions between humans and technological systems rather than through isolated individual action.

Literary scholars have increasingly adopted posthumanist approaches to examine

modern and contemporary literature. According to Nayar (2014), posthumanist literary criticism investigates how texts question anthropocentric assumptions and represent relationships between humans, technology, materiality, and non-human actors. Such criticism shifts attention away from individual psychological interpretation toward broader networks of interaction involving objects, environments, and technological systems. This perspective has proven particularly valuable in analysing works characterised by fragmented identities, unstable subjectivities, and uncertain forms of action.

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* has traditionally been interpreted through existentialist and absurdist frameworks. Early critics emphasised the play's depiction of meaninglessness, alienation, and existential uncertainty within the context of postwar Europe (Esslin, 1961). Beckett's characters, Vladimir and Estragon, endlessly wait for the mysterious Godot while remaining incapable of decisive action. Their repetitive conversations, fragmented memories, and deferred decisions have long been interpreted as expressions of existential anxiety and the absurdity of the human condition (Cohn, 2001). From this perspective, the play dramatises humanity's search for meaning in an indifferent universe where certainty remains permanently unattainable.

While existentialism remains an influential framework, recent scholarship has argued that *Waiting for Godot* also anticipates concerns associated with posthumanism. Scholars increasingly suggest that Beckett destabilises traditional notions of autonomous human subjectivity by emphasising the relationships among bodies, objects, environments, and material conditions. Panicker and Nair (2024), drawing on object-oriented ontology, argue that Beckett's play decentralises the human subject by conferring philosophical significance on non-human entities such as the tree, the road, and the surrounding landscape. These material elements are not merely symbolic backgrounds but active participants within the dramatic world, challenging anthropocentric assumptions about agency and meaning.

Similarly, Gontarski (2015) argues that Beckett's dramatic universe consistently undermines the stability of the autonomous self through fragmented language, repetitive actions, and embodied vulnerability. Rather than presenting coherent psychological individuals, Beckett portrays characters whose identities emerge through unstable interactions with their environments. This interpretation aligns closely with posthumanist theory, which rejects fixed conceptions of identity in favour of relational and distributed subjectivities. From this perspective, Vladimir and Estragon are not isolated existential heroes but participants within broader material and relational networks that continually shape their experiences.

Scholars have also examined Beckett's treatment of waiting as a philosophical condition rather than merely a dramatic device. According to Caselli (2005), waiting in Beckett represents a mode of suspended existence characterised by uncertainty, repetition, and the continual postponement of meaningful action. This condition reflects a diminished capacity for autonomous decision-making, closely resembling contemporary concerns about algorithmic dependence and technological mediation. In digital societies, individuals increasingly rely upon recommendation systems, predictive algorithms, and automated decision-support technologies that influence choices ranging from entertainment preferences to financial decisions. Although Beckett could not have anticipated artificial intelligence in its contemporary form, his dramatic representation of deferred agency provides a remarkably relevant framework

for understanding these technological transformations.

Recent discussions concerning artificial intelligence have further emphasised the changing nature of human agency. Brusseau (2025) argues that AI challenges traditional philosophical understandings of intentionality by redistributing agency across human and computational systems. Rather than replacing humans entirely, intelligent technologies participate in increasingly complex networks of decision-making where responsibility becomes difficult to assign to individual actors. This interpretation closely parallels posthumanist theories of distributed agency proposed by Hayles (1999) and Braidotti (2013), suggesting that contemporary technological environments require new conceptualisations of autonomy, responsibility, and identity. Within literary studies, the intersection of AI and posthumanism has encouraged scholars to revisit canonical texts from innovative theoretical perspectives. Herbrechter (2013) argues that posthumanist literary criticism should investigate how literature anticipates technological transformations that challenge conventional definitions of humanity. Literary texts become valuable sites for examining cultural anxieties surrounding technological change because they often explore questions of dependence, embodiment, agency, and identity long before such concerns emerge within scientific discourse. Beckett's dramatic exploration of passivity, uncertainty, and deferred action therefore acquires renewed significance in an era increasingly shaped by intelligent technologies and automated systems.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on posthumanism, artificial intelligence, and Beckett's drama, significant gaps remain. Existing studies primarily focus on existential philosophy, absurdism, object-oriented ontology, disability studies, or materialist interpretations of *Waiting for Godot*. Comparatively little research has examined how Beckett's representation of suspended agency can be interpreted in relation to artificial intelligence and algorithmically mediated decision-making. Moreover, few scholars have integrated contemporary AI ethics with posthumanist literary criticism to investigate how Beckett's dramatic vision anticipates current debates concerning technological dependence and the redistribution of human agency. Addressing this gap enables a richer understanding of *Waiting for Godot* as a text that not only reflects twentieth-century existential concerns but also illuminates the philosophical challenges of the digital age.

The philosophical implications of artificial intelligence have attracted increasing attention within contemporary humanities research because intelligent technologies not only automate human labour but also transform the nature of cognition, responsibility, and agency. Rather than functioning merely as computational tools, AI systems increasingly participate in decision-making processes that influence healthcare, education, finance, governance, and everyday social interaction (Floridi & Cowls, 2019). This transformation has prompted scholars to reconsider traditional assumptions regarding human autonomy and free will. Danaher (2019) argues that algorithmic governance has gradually shifted authority from human judgment to computational systems, creating new forms of technological dependence that reshape human decision-making. Such developments strengthen posthumanist arguments that agency is no longer exclusively human but distributed across networks of humans and intelligent technologies.

Within literary studies, posthumanism has become an influential critical framework for reinterpreting twentieth-century texts in light of technological change. Wolfe (2010) argues that posthumanism is not simply concerned with advanced technologies

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but with challenging anthropocentric assumptions embedded within Western philosophy and literary criticism. Instead of positioning humans as independent rational subjects, posthumanist criticism emphasises relationality, materiality, and interdependence. Literature, therefore, becomes an important medium for examining how identities and agency are negotiated within complex technological and ecological systems.

Samuel Beckett's dramatic works are particularly compatible with this theoretical perspective because they consistently question stable notions of identity, language, and consciousness. Connor (1988) observes that Beckett's characters exist within fragmented realities where language repeatedly fails to establish certainty or coherent selfhood. Their inability to communicate effectively reflects broader philosophical doubts concerning the autonomy of the individual subject. Similarly, Kennedy (1991) argues that Beckett dismantles conventional dramatic structures by replacing purposeful action with repetition, hesitation, and uncertainty. These characteristics resonate strongly with posthumanist concerns regarding the instability of the autonomous human subject in technologically mediated environments.

The concept of waiting occupies a central position in Beckett scholarship. Traditionally interpreted as an existential metaphor, waiting has increasingly been understood as a condition of suspended agency. McMullan (2021) suggests that Beckett's characters inhabit temporal spaces where action is endlessly deferred, creating an experience of perpetual anticipation without meaningful resolution. This state of suspension mirrors contemporary digital culture, in which individuals frequently rely on algorithmic predictions, automated recommendations, and machine-generated information before making decisions. Consequently, waiting in Beckett may be interpreted not only as an existential predicament but also as a metaphor for technological dependence in the age of artificial intelligence.

Another important aspect of posthumanist criticism concerns the relationship between bodies and technology. Hayles (1999) argues that digital technologies challenge traditional distinctions between embodiment and information by redefining the body as part of larger informational networks. Braidotti (2019) similarly contends that technological developments require new ethical frameworks capable of recognising the interconnectedness of humans, machines, and ecological systems. These perspectives are particularly relevant to *Waiting for Godot*, where physical exhaustion, bodily vulnerability, and repetitive movement continually shape the characters' experiences. Rather than emphasising heroic autonomy, Beckett foregrounds human limitation and dependence, themes that anticipate contemporary discussions of technologically mediated existence.

Artificial intelligence also raises significant ethical questions regarding responsibility and accountability. Mittelstadt et al. (2016) identify challenges associated with algorithmic bias, transparency, and fairness, arguing that AI systems increasingly influence decisions without adequate human oversight. Likewise, Jobin et al. (2019) demonstrate that ethical guidelines for AI consistently emphasise human responsibility despite growing technological autonomy. These discussions reinforce concerns regarding the erosion of human agency, particularly when individuals become overly dependent on automated systems for decision-making. Beckett's dramatic representation of passive waiting provides an illuminating literary analogy for these contemporary ethical dilemmas.

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship has increasingly connected literature with AI

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studies. Cave et al. (2020) argue that literary narratives provide valuable conceptual frameworks for understanding cultural responses to emerging technologies. Fiction frequently anticipates ethical and philosophical questions before they become central public concerns. Beckett's portrayal of uncertainty, deferred action, and fragmented subjectivity therefore acquires renewed relevance in contemporary AI discourse, as it illustrates the psychological consequences of diminished autonomy. Although *Waiting for Godot* predates digital technologies by several decades, its representation of suspended agency resonates with present-day experiences of algorithmic mediation and technological dependence.

Scholars have also highlighted Beckett's resistance to fixed interpretations. Pilling (2011) argues that the openness of Beckett's texts enables continual reinterpretation across changing historical contexts. This interpretive flexibility explains why *Waiting for Godot* continues to generate new theoretical readings, including feminist, ecological, disability, materialist, and posthumanist approaches. As technological environments continue to evolve, Beckett's exploration of uncertainty becomes increasingly applicable to questions concerning artificial intelligence, machine learning, and digital subjectivity.

Despite these important developments, a noticeable gap remains within existing scholarship. Studies of Beckett generally emphasise existentialism, absurdism, language, memory, trauma, or materiality, while research on artificial intelligence largely focuses on ethics, philosophy, computer science, or media studies. Very few studies integrate these fields by examining how Beckett's representation of waiting and diminished agency anticipates contemporary concerns regarding algorithmic decision-making and AI-assisted human existence. Furthermore, although posthumanism provides a productive theoretical bridge between literary criticism and technological philosophy, its application to *Waiting for Godot* remains comparatively underdeveloped.

The present study addresses this gap by bringing together Beckett studies, posthumanist theory, and contemporary AI discourse. It argues that *Waiting for Godot* offers more than an existential meditation on meaninglessness; it also anticipates the conditions of technological dependence that characterise the digital age. Vladimir and Estragon's inability to exercise decisive agency reflects broader philosophical questions concerning autonomy, responsibility, and the human condition within increasingly complex technological networks. Through a posthumanist analysis, this study demonstrates that Beckett's drama remains remarkably relevant for understanding how artificial intelligence reshapes concepts of identity, agency, and human existence in the twenty-first century.

Overall, the reviewed literature establishes three important conclusions. First, posthumanism has fundamentally redefined traditional understandings of human identity by emphasising relationality, technological mediation, and distributed agency (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999; Wolfe, 2010). Second, contemporary AI scholarship demonstrates that intelligent technologies increasingly influence human decision-making, creating new philosophical and ethical questions concerning autonomy and responsibility (Floridi & Cowls, 2019; Jobin et al., 2019; Russell, 2019). Third, Beckett scholarship increasingly recognises that *Waiting for Godot* extends beyond existentialism to engage broader questions of materiality, relationality, and the instability of human subjectivity (Gontarski, 2015; McMullan, 2021; Panicker and Nair, 2024). By integrating these three strands of scholarship, the present research

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contributes an original posthumanist interpretation of *Waiting for Godot* that examines the crisis of human agency in the digital age shaped by artificial intelligence.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to examine the crisis of human agency in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* through the theoretical lens of posthumanism in the context of artificial intelligence and the digital age. A qualitative textual analysis was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting literary themes, characters, dialogues, and symbolic representations rather than collecting numerical data. The research emphasised close reading and critical interpretation to explore how Beckett's dramatic text anticipated contemporary concerns regarding technological dependence, distributed agency, and the changing relationship between humans and intelligent technologies.

Research Approach

The study employed an interpretive and descriptive research approach. This approach enabled the researcher to examine the philosophical dimensions of the selected play by relating its themes to contemporary debates on artificial intelligence and posthumanism. The interpretive approach facilitated an in-depth understanding of the literary text while enabling the systematic application of theoretical concepts throughout the analysis.

Research Method

The research used qualitative textual analysis as its primary method. Textual analysis involved the systematic examination of dialogue, dramatic action, characterisation, symbolism, and recurring themes in *Waiting for Godot*. Particular attention was given to passages that illustrated waiting, passivity, uncertainty, repetitive behaviour, dependence, and the inability to exercise independent agency. These textual elements were analysed using posthumanist concepts to assess their relevance to contemporary discussions of artificial intelligence and digital technologies.

Primary Source

The primary source of data consisted of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The study analysed the English version of the play published by Faber & Faber. Dialogues, stage directions, character interactions, and symbolic elements were selected as textual evidence for critical interpretation.

Secondary Sources

Secondary data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, book chapters, conference proceedings, and reputable academic databases. Relevant literature on posthumanism, artificial intelligence, digital humanities, literary theory, and Beckett studies was reviewed to establish the study's theoretical and critical framework. Databases such as JSTOR, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, Wiley Online Library, and Sage Journals were consulted to obtain authentic scholarly sources.

Theoretical Framework

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The study was grounded in posthumanist theory, primarily drawing upon the works of Braidotti (2013, 2019), Hayles (1999), Haraway (1985/2016), and Wolfe (2010). Posthumanism challenges the humanist assumption that humans possess complete autonomy and occupy the highest position within the world. Instead, it emphasises the interconnectedness of humans, technologies, environments, and non-human entities. The theoretical framework was further enriched by contemporary scholarship on artificial intelligence, particularly the works of Floridi (2014), Coeckelbergh (2020), Russell (2019), and Crawford (2021). These scholars argue that intelligent technologies increasingly participate in decision-making processes, thereby reshaping traditional understandings of agency, autonomy, ethics, and responsibility. Their perspectives provided the conceptual foundation for interpreting Beckett's representation of waiting, passivity, and deferred action in relation to contemporary digital culture.

Data Collection

Data were collected through close reading of the selected play. Relevant dialogues, dramatic situations, character interactions, and symbolic representations associated with human agency, technological dependence, waiting, uncertainty, and identity were identified and categorised. Supporting evidence from scholarly publications was incorporated to strengthen the interpretation of the selected textual passages.

Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analysed using qualitative thematic textual analysis. The analysis followed these stages:

A comprehensive reading of *Waiting for Godot* was conducted to identify passages related to agency, waiting, passivity, repetition, and decision-making.

Relevant textual extracts were selected and organised according to recurring themes.

The selected passages were interpreted using key concepts of posthumanism, including distributed agency, technological mediation, relational subjectivity, and the decentering of the autonomous human subject.

The findings were compared with contemporary scholarship on artificial intelligence to explore how Beckett's dramatic representation anticipated current debates concerning digital technologies and human agency.

The interpreted findings were synthesised to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study.

Data Analysis

Theme 1: Crisis of Human Agency Through Waiting and Inaction

One of the central themes in *Waiting for Godot* is the paralysis of human agency. Throughout the play, Vladimir and Estragon repeatedly postpone action because they believe they must wait for Godot. Their inability to make independent decisions demonstrates a crisis of agency that can be interpreted through posthumanist theory. Instead of acting according to their own will, they surrender their autonomy to an absent authority.

Beckett presents this through the famous exchange:

ESTRAGON: "Let us go."

VLADIMIR: "We cannot."

ESTRAGON: "Why not?"

VLADIMIR: “We are waiting for Godot.”

(Beckett, 2011, p. 6)

This short dialogue immediately establishes that the characters’ actions are governed not by personal choice but by obedience to an external expectation. Although no physical force prevents them from leaving, they voluntarily abandon their freedom because of the possibility that Godot may arrive. Their agency is therefore suspended. From a posthumanist perspective, this illustrates distributed agency, in which decision-making no longer belongs solely to autonomous individuals but is also influenced by external systems. In the digital age, artificial intelligence operates similarly. Recommendation algorithms, navigation systems, predictive technologies, and automated decision-making increasingly shape human choices. Individuals often wait for technological confirmation before acting, just as Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot.

The characters repeatedly express the desire to leave but never do so. Instead, they decide:

VLADIMIR: “Let us wait and see what he says.”

ESTRAGON: “Who?”

VLADIMIR: “Godot.”

(Beckett, 2011, p. 11)

This moment demonstrates how agency becomes immobilised through dependence on an external authority.

Theme 2: Repetition and Mechanical Existence

Another important feature of the play is repetition. Vladimir and Estragon repeat the same conversations, routines, and questions throughout both acts.

For example, Estragon repeatedly suggests leaving:

ESTRAGON: “Let's go.”

VLADIMIR: “We cannot.”

ESTRAGON: “Why not?”

VLADIMIR: “We are waiting for Godot.”

(Beckett, 2011, p. 6)

This dialogue appears in different forms throughout the play. Their repetitive behaviour resembles a programmed routine rather than conscious decision-making.

Hayles (1999) argues that posthumanism questions the idea of the autonomous human by emphasising informational systems and repetitive processes. Similarly, Braidotti (2013) argues that subjectivity is produced through networks and repeated interactions rather than through independent individuality.

The repetitive structure of *Waiting for Godot*, therefore, resembles algorithmic behaviour. Like artificial intelligence systems that execute programmed instructions repeatedly, Vladimir and Estragon follow an endless behavioural loop from which they cannot escape.

Theme 3: Technological Mediation and Distributed Agency Through Pozzo and Lucky

The relationship between Pozzo and Lucky provides another example of diminished agency.

Pozzo continuously commands Lucky:

“Up pig!”

“Back!”

“Closer!”

“Stop!”

(Beckett, 2011, p. 18)

Lucky never questions these commands. Instead, he obeys automatically, carrying heavy luggage and performing actions without exercising personal choice.

When Vladimir asks why Lucky never puts down his bags, Pozzo explains:

“He wants to impress me so that I will keep him.”

(Beckett, 2011, p. 24)

Another authority entirely controls Lucky’s actions. His identity depends upon fulfilling externally assigned commands.

This relationship closely resembles the human experience with AI. Intelligent technologies operate according to instructions provided by programmers, while users increasingly organise their lives around technological systems. Posthumanist theory suggests that agency becomes distributed between humans and non-human actors. In Beckett’s play, Lucky loses individual agency because Pozzo’s commands completely mediate his behaviour.

Theme 4: Waiting as a Metaphor for Algorithmic Dependence

Throughout the play, waiting becomes a permanent condition rather than a temporary activity.

Pozzo asks:

“Waiting? So you were waiting for him?”

(Beckett, 2011, p. 18)

Later, Vladimir states:

“Will night never come?”

(Beckett, 2011, p. 26)

These expressions reveal that time itself has become suspended. The characters no longer control the progression of events but merely anticipate external change.

This condition resembles digital dependence in the AI era, where people increasingly wait for notifications, algorithmic recommendations, predictive analyses, or automated responses before acting. Human initiative gradually gives way to technological mediation.

Beckett further reinforces this idea through the dialogue:

VLADIMIR: “Time has stopped.”

(Beckett, 2011, p. 30)

And later:

ESTRAGON: “Simply wait.”

VLADIMIR: “We’re used to it.”

(Beckett, 2011, p. 31)

From a posthumanist perspective, Beckett’s waiting symbolises the erosion of autonomous agency. Rather than acting independently, the characters exist within a network of expectation controlled by an absent authority. In the digital age, intelligent technologies often occupy a comparable position by shaping human choices without direct coercion.

Table 4.1

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Summary of the Posthumanist Analysis of *Waiting for Godot*

Theme	Textual Evidence (Beckett, 2011)	Posthumanist Concept	AI/Digital Interpretation	Age	Findings
Theme 1: Crisis of Human Agency Through Waiting and Inaction	“Let’s go.” “We cannot.” “Why not?” “We are waiting for Godot.” (p. 6); “Let us wait and see what he says.” (p. 11)	Distributed agency; Decentering of the autonomous human subject	Like Vladimir and Estragon, contemporary individuals increasingly depend on AI systems, recommendation algorithms, and automated technologies before making decisions.		Human agency becomes suspended because decision-making is transferred to an external authority rather than exercised independently.
Theme 2: Repetition and Mechanical Existence	“Let’s go.” “We cannot.” “We are waiting for Godot.” (p. 6)	Algorithmic repetition; Relational subjectivity	The characters’ repetitive routines resemble algorithmic cycles in which actions are repeated without meaningful change, akin to automated digital systems.		Beckett presents repetitive behaviour as a symbol of diminished autonomy and mechanical existence.
Theme 3: Technological Mediation and Distributed Agency Through Pozzo and Lucky	“Up pig!” “Back!” “Closer!” “Stop!” (p. 18); “He wants to impress me, so that I will keep him.” (p. 24)	Technological mediation; Distributed agency	Lucky’s obedience resembles AI systems executing programmed commands, while humans increasingly adapt their behaviour according to intelligent technologies.		Authority and agency become relational rather than individual, demonstrating the redistribution of human autonomy.
Theme 4: Waiting as a Metaphor for Algorithmic Dependence	“Waiting? So you were waiting for him?” (p. 18); “Will night never come?” (p. 26); “Time has	Technological dependence; Deferred agency	Waiting symbolises dependence on algorithmic recommendations, AI-generated responses, and digital technologies that increasingly mediate human actions.		Beckett illustrates how prolonged dependence on external systems weakens autonomous decision-making and

stopped.”
(p. 30);
“Simply
wait.” “We
are used to
it.” (p. 31);
“Nothing
happens,
nobody
comes,
nobody
goes, it is
awful!” (p.
35)

creates a crisis
of human
agency.

Note. Adapted from *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett (2011) and interpreted through the posthumanist theories of Braidotti (2013), Hayles (1999), Haraway (2016), Wolfe (2010), and contemporary scholarship on artificial intelligence.

Theme 5: Distributed Agency and the Decentering of the Autonomous Human Subject

One of the most significant posthumanist concepts represented in *Waiting for Godot* is the decentering of the autonomous human subject. Human agency in the play is never completely self-directed; instead, it is constantly shaped by relationships with other characters, social expectations, memory, language, and the absent figure of Godot. Posthumanist theory rejects the humanist assumption that individuals exercise complete autonomy. Rather, agency is understood as relational and distributed across networks of human and non-human actors (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999).

This concept is particularly evident in the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo repeatedly issues commands while Lucky responds mechanically:

POZZO: “Think, pig!... Stop!... Back!... Stop!... Turn!... Think!” (Beckett, 2011, p. 36).

Lucky immediately obeys every instruction without questioning Pozzo’s authority. His movements, speech, and even his ability to think are activated only when he receives commands. The play, therefore, presents agency as externally controlled rather than internally generated. Lucky’s identity becomes inseparable from the authority that directs him.

From a posthumanist perspective, this scene demonstrates distributed agency. Lucky does not function as an independent individual but as one component within a relational network dominated by Pozzo. His actions emerge through interaction rather than personal autonomy. This interpretation supports Braidotti’s (2013) argument that subjectivity is produced through relations instead of existing as an independent human essence.

The relationship also reflects contemporary debates surrounding artificial intelligence. Modern AI systems execute commands generated by users or algorithms, while humans increasingly organise their own behaviour in response to technological systems. Recommendation engines, predictive software, navigation technologies, and automated assistants influence decisions that were previously regarded as expressions of individual autonomy. Beckett’s dramatic representation, therefore, anticipates the

redistribution of agency that characterises contemporary digital culture.

Theme 6: Technological Mediation and Relational Subjectivity

Another important posthumanist concept represented in the play is relational subjectivity. Rather than existing as isolated individuals, Beckett's characters continuously define themselves through their dependence upon others. Vladimir depends on Estragon for companionship, Estragon depends on Vladimir for reassurance, and Lucky depends on Pozzo for survival. At the same time, all four characters remain psychologically dependent upon the anticipated arrival of Godot.

This dependence is illustrated during Pozzo's performance when he asks whether Lucky should dance or think:

POZZO: "Well, would you like him to think something for us?" (Beckett, 2011, p. 32).

Later, Pozzo explains that thinking requires Lucky's hat:

POZZO: "He cannot think without his hat" (Beckett, 2011, p. 35).

Thinking itself becomes technologically mediated through an external object. The hat serves as more than a theatrical prop; it symbolises the dependence of cognition on external mechanisms. Human intelligence is no longer presented as an entirely internal capacity but as something activated through material objects.

Hayles (1999) argues that posthumanism challenges the separation between mind and technology by demonstrating that cognition increasingly occurs through interactions with external informational systems. Beckett anticipates this insight by portraying thought as dependent upon material conditions rather than existing independently within the human subject.

The symbolism closely resembles contemporary artificial intelligence. In digital societies, individuals routinely extend memory, calculation, communication, and decision-making through smartphones, search engines, virtual assistants, and AI-based applications. Human cognition, therefore, becomes increasingly distributed across technological systems. Beckett's representation of mediated thinking foreshadows this posthuman condition.

Theme 7: Artificial Intelligence and the Crisis of Human Agency

Although *Waiting for Godot* was written decades before the emergence of artificial intelligence, its representation of waiting, dependence, and deferred decision-making remarkably anticipates present debates concerning digital technologies.

Estragon expresses frustration with their condition by declaring:

ESTRAGON: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it is awful!" (Beckett, 2011, p. 35).

The statement captures the repetitive stagnation that dominates the play. The characters remain trapped in an endless cycle of expectation rather than exercising meaningful agency.

Similarly, Estragon asks:

ESTRAGON: "What is he waiting for?" (Beckett, 2011, p. 36).

The question reveals that waiting itself has become normalised. Rather than taking action independently, the characters continually postpone decisions, expecting external intervention.

Posthumanist scholars argue that agency in technologically mediated societies increasingly operates through interactions among humans, algorithms, digital platforms, and intelligent machines. Contemporary AI systems recommend what

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people read, watch, purchase, and even whom they communicate with. Although these technologies provide efficiency, they also redistribute human agency by influencing choices that once depended primarily upon individual judgment.

Viewed through this perspective, Godot symbolises an external authority whose anticipated arrival continually postpones autonomous action. Just as Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot before making decisions, contemporary individuals frequently rely upon intelligent technologies to guide everyday choices. Beckett's dramatic vision therefore acquires renewed significance in the digital age because it exposes the philosophical consequences of dependence upon external systems of authority.

Table 4.2

Summary of the Posthumanist Analysis of *Waiting for Godot*: Distributed Agency, Technological Mediation, and Artificial Intelligence

Theme	Textual Evidence (Beckett, 2011)	Posthumanist Concept	Interpretation in Relation to AI and the Digital Age	Major Findings
Theme 5: Distributed Agency and the Decentering of the Autonomous Human Subject	POZZO: “ <i>Think, pig!... Stop!... Back!... Stop!... Turn!... Think!</i> ” (p. 36)	Distributed agency; Decentering of the autonomous human subject	Lucky performs actions only after receiving commands from Pozzo, illustrating that agency is externally controlled rather than self-generated. This resembles contemporary AI systems that operate through programmed instructions while simultaneously influencing human decision-making through intelligent technologies.	Human agency is represented as relational and distributed rather than autonomous. Beckett anticipates the redistribution of agency that characterises AI-mediated societies.
Theme 6: Technological Mediation and Relational Subjectivity	POZZO: “ <i>Well, would you like him to think something for us?</i> ” (p. 32); POZZO: “ <i>He cannot think</i> ”	Technological mediation; Relational subjectivity	Lucky’s ability to think depends on an external object (his hat), symbolising cognition mediated by material or	Beckett demonstrates that cognition is not entirely internal but emerges through interactions

	<i>without his hat.</i> " (p. 35)		technological systems. This parallels the contemporary dependence on AI technologies, smartphones, digital assistants, and computational tools that extend human memory and intelligence.	with external objects, anticipating posthumanist understandings of technologically mediated intelligence.
Theme 7: Artificial Intelligence and the Crisis of Human Agency	ESTRAGON: <i>"Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it is awful!"</i> (p. 35); ESTRAGON: <i>"What is he waiting for?"</i> (p. 36)	Distributed agency; Technological dependence; Crisis of human agency	The characters remain trapped in a state of perpetual waiting, repeatedly postponing action while expecting external intervention. Their dependence mirrors the growing reliance on AI systems, algorithmic recommendations, predictive technologies, and automated decision-making in contemporary society.	Beckett's representation of waiting anticipates the crisis of human agency in the digital age, where technological systems increasingly influence human choices, autonomy, and responsibility.

Note. Adapted from *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett, 2011) and interpreted through the posthumanist theories of Braidotti (2013) and Hayles (1999), together with contemporary scholarship on artificial intelligence.

Relationship between humans and artificial intelligence in contemporary society

A posthumanist reading of *Waiting for Godot* demonstrates that Samuel Beckett's play extends beyond its traditional existential interpretation and offers valuable insights into the evolving relationship between humans and artificial intelligence in contemporary society. Although the play was written long before the emergence of digital technologies and AI, its representation of waiting, dependence, fragmented identity, and diminished agency closely parallels the conditions of technologically mediated life. Through the concepts of distributed agency, technological mediation, relational subjectivity, and the decentering of the autonomous human subject, Beckett's drama anticipates many philosophical concerns surrounding artificial intelligence.

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One of the most significant contributions of a posthumanist reading is the rejection of the humanist belief that individuals possess complete autonomy. Instead, the play illustrates that human actions are shaped through interactions with external forces. Vladimir and Estragon continually postpone their decisions because they expect Godot to arrive. Their dependence on an absent authority demonstrates that their agency is no longer self-governed but mediated by an external presence. Beckett reinforces this condition through the recurring dialogue:

ESTRAGON: "Let us go."

VLADIMIR: "We cannot."

ESTRAGON: "Why not?"

VLADIMIR: "We are waiting for Godot." (Beckett, 2011, p. 15).

Although the characters repeatedly express the desire to leave, they remain trapped in endless waiting. From a posthumanist perspective, this reflects distributed agency because forces beyond themselves influence their decisions. Similarly, in contemporary society, artificial intelligence increasingly mediates human choices through recommendation systems, predictive algorithms, virtual assistants, navigation technologies, and automated decision-support systems. Human decision-making, therefore, becomes shared between individuals and intelligent technologies rather than remaining entirely autonomous.

The play also demonstrates how technological mediation reshapes cognition and behaviour. Pozzo's statement regarding Lucky's thinking is particularly significant:

POZZO: "He cannot think without his hat" (Beckett, 2011, p. 35).

The hat serves as an external mechanism that facilitates thought, suggesting that cognition is mediated by material objects rather than existing solely within the individual mind. This symbolism resonates strongly with posthumanist theory, which argues that human cognition increasingly extends beyond biological boundaries through interactions with technological systems (Hayles, 1999). In the digital age, smartphones, search engines, cloud computing, and AI-powered assistants perform similar functions by extending memory, problem-solving, and decision-making capacities. Beckett's dramatic symbolism therefore anticipates the contemporary integration of human intelligence with technological systems.

The relationship between Pozzo and Lucky further illustrates how authority becomes distributed within relational networks. Pozzo repeatedly commands Lucky:

POZZO: "Think, pig!... Stop!... Back!... Stop!... Turn!... Think!" (Beckett, 2011, p. 36).

Lucky never questions these commands but immediately performs each action. His identity and agency are determined by another authority rather than by personal choice. This relationship resembles the interaction between humans and intelligent technologies in contemporary society. While artificial intelligence operates according to programmed instructions, humans increasingly adapt their own behaviour to technological systems. Recommendation algorithms influence consumer behaviour, navigation systems determine travel routes, and automated platforms shape communication and access to information. Consequently, agency becomes relational and distributed rather than purely individual.

Another important contribution of the play concerns the normalisation of dependence. Estragon's observation,

"Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it is awful!" (Beckett, 2011, p. 35),

Captures the psychological condition of continuous waiting and inactivity. Rather

than exercising initiative, the characters remain suspended in anticipation of external intervention. This condition closely resembles the digital culture of artificial intelligence, in which individuals increasingly rely on algorithmic recommendations, automated responses, predictive analyses, and machine-generated solutions before making decisions. Beckett suggests that the greatest limitation on human freedom is not physical oppression but voluntary dependence upon external systems of authority. The play also challenges the notion of fixed human identity. Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, and Lucky continuously redefine themselves through their relationships with one another. Their identities emerge through interaction, memory, language, and dependence rather than through independent individuality. This relational understanding of subjectivity aligns with posthumanist theory, which rejects the isolated rational subject and instead conceptualises identity as dynamic, relational, and continuously reconstructed through interactions with human and non-human entities (Braidotti, 2013). Artificial intelligence similarly transforms contemporary identity by influencing how individuals communicate, acquire knowledge, form relationships, and construct digital selves.

Furthermore, Beckett's dramatic representation of uncertainty provides a philosophical framework for understanding contemporary AI ethics. The characters never know whether Godot will arrive, yet they continue organising their lives around that expectation. Likewise, modern societies increasingly rely on intelligent technologies whose decisions often remain opaque or difficult to explain. Machine learning algorithms frequently produce recommendations without revealing the reasoning behind them, creating new ethical questions concerning transparency, accountability, and human responsibility. Beckett's exploration of uncertainty, therefore, remains highly relevant for understanding the philosophical consequences of algorithmic decision-making.

A posthumanist reading of *Waiting for Godot* demonstrates that the play anticipates many defining characteristics of the digital age. Beckett challenges the traditional image of the autonomous individual by portraying agency as relational, technologically mediated, and continually influenced by external systems. His dramatic representation of waiting, dependence, fragmented subjectivity, and deferred action provides an important literary framework for understanding how artificial intelligence reshapes human autonomy and decision-making in contemporary society. The analysis therefore answers the research question by showing that *Waiting for Godot* remains remarkably relevant to interpreting the changing relationship between humans and artificial intelligence from a posthumanist theoretical perspective.

Conclusion

This study concludes that a posthumanist reading of *Waiting for Godot* offers a significant perspective on the crisis of human agency in the digital age. Through the analysis of waiting, repetition, dependence, and the relationships between Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, and Lucky, the study demonstrates that Beckett challenges the humanist notion of the autonomous individual and instead presents agency as relational, distributed, and mediated by external forces. The concepts of distributed agency, technological mediation, relational subjectivity, and the decentering of the human subject reveal striking parallels between the play and contemporary concerns surrounding artificial intelligence. Although written long before the emergence of AI, *Waiting for Godot* anticipates many of the ethical and philosophical questions

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associated with algorithmic decision-making, technological dependence, and the transformation of human autonomy. The study therefore establishes that Beckett's play extends beyond its existential framework to offer a compelling critique of the changing relationship between humans and intelligent technologies, demonstrating its enduring relevance to posthumanist discourse and contemporary digital society.

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