

**THE QUEST FOR MEANING ACROSS TIME AND CULTURE: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S *WAITING FOR GODOT*
AND JENNIFER MAKUMBI'S *THE FIRST WOMAN***

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BENIN CITY**

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
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OCTOBER, 2025

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this project work is adequate in scope and was carried out by **Hephzibah Uwa EHIMARE-JONAH (MISS)**, with the Matriculation Number, **ART2100206** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, in partial fulfillment for the award B.A. Degree in English and Literature.

Dr. (Mrs) Bridget Dahunsi Okunrobo
Project Supervisor

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God who has been my source of strength and wisdom, he saw me through this work from start to finish. I also dedicate this work to as many that has been able to find meaning in life.

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ABSTRACT

The human desire to find or create meaning is an enduring focus in literature. This study examines the human quest for meaning across time and culture by comparing Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman*. While Beckett presents a world of waiting, silence, and existential emptiness, Makumbi shows how storytelling, family history, myths, and women's voices help create meaning. Using a comparative literary approach, the study explores how time, waiting, human connection, speech and silence, symbols, and cultural and social factors shape the search for purpose. Findings show that Beckett reflects universal existential concerns about uncertainty and the limits of language, whereas Makumbi demonstrates how culture and history enable identity, agency, and hope. In conclusion, the research highlights that the search for meaning is both universal and culturally specific, and it emphasizes the value of cross-cultural literary study in understanding how humans everywhere confront life's uncertainties and strive to create purpose.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

The goal of this project is to explore how Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman* reflect the search for meaning in various cultural and historical contexts. The purpose of the study is to highlight Beckett's depiction of meaning amid uncertainty, waiting, and the absurdity of post-war Europe. Similarly, it examines how Makumbi captures meaning through themes of identity, tradition, and resistance in modern Uganda. By comparing these two significant works, the project aims to illustrate the universal nature of the quest for meaning while also revealing how culture and history influence its expression.

1.2 Scope of Study

This research is confined to a comparative reading of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman*. It does not attempt to cover the full body of either author's works, nor does it trace every aspect of existentialist thought. Instead, the study concentrates on selected themes that directly relate to the human search for meaning, such as waiting, time, identity, tradition, and resistance. By keeping the focus on these two texts, the research highlights both the universal nature of the quest for

meaning and the specific ways it is shaped by different cultural and historical contexts—post-war Europe for Beckett and postcolonial Uganda for Makumbi.

1.3 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, using textual analysis as the primary method. The selected texts, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Makumbi's *The First Woman* are examined to identify themes, symbols, character behaviour, and narrative techniques that reflect the search for meaning. A comparative approach is also used to highlight similarities and differences between the texts. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, and critical essays that support the interpretations and provide context. Through this approach, the study explores both the universal aspects of the quest for meaning and the specific ways culture, history, and society influence that quest. This ensures that conclusions are grounded in the texts while informed by critical perspectives.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study employs existentialist theory as its main framework to explore how both Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's *The First Woman* portray the human search for meaning in an uncertain and changing world. Existentialism is a philosophical movement that focuses on the individual's experience, freedom, and responsibility in defining their own life and purpose. It asks deep questions

about why we exist, what gives life meaning, and how we should live in a world that often feels meaningless or absurd.

The origin of existentialism can be traced back to the nineteenth century with early thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. Kierkegaard, often called the father of existentialism, emphasized individual existence, faith, and personal choice as the path to authentic living. He believed that people must take personal responsibility for giving their lives meaning rather than depending on reason, tradition, or society. Nietzsche, on the other hand, rejected traditional religion and moral values, urging humanity to create new values through personal strength and creativity. Later, in the twentieth century, existentialism became more widely known through the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Martin Heidegger, and Albert Camus. The two World Wars and the moral crisis that followed made many thinkers question the idea of a fixed human nature or divine purpose. As a result, existentialism grew as a philosophy that explored how human beings could still find meaning and dignity in a world marked by suffering and uncertainty.

Existentialism is based on the idea that “existence precedes essence.” This phrase, popularized by Jean-Paul Sartre, means that humans are not born with a fixed identity or purpose. Rather, they first exist, and then through their choices, actions, and relationships, they create who they become. As Sartre explains, “Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does” (29). This means

that even though people did not choose to be born, they must make choices and live with the consequences. Existentialists believe that humans are radically free, and with that freedom comes great responsibility. The fear or anxiety that comes from this realization is called angst, but facing it is part of living authentically. The main principles of existentialism include the belief that existence precedes essence, the acceptance of human freedom and responsibility, the pursuit of authenticity, the emphasis on personal experience or subjectivity, and the recognition of angst as a natural response to life's uncertainty. Together, these ideas suggest that individuals must create meaning for themselves and live genuinely, even in the face of confusion or despair.

In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, existentialism is expressed through the endless waiting of Vladimir and Estragon. The two men spend their days expecting a person named Godot, who never arrives. Their waiting symbolizes the human longing for purpose, order, and answers in a world that remains silent. Their repetitive actions and conversations show life's circular pattern and the difficulty of finding direction. Beckett's barren setting, a single tree and an empty road, further highlights this emptiness. Yet through all this meaninglessness, they continue to exist, to talk, to wait, and to care for each other. As Albert Camus explains in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the absurd arises when human beings seek meaning in a universe that gives none (28). Beckett's play does not offer solutions, but it shows the dignity of endurance, the courage to keep going even when meaning seems absent.

In Makumbi's *The First Woman*, existential questions appear within a very different cultural and historical context. The protagonist, Kirabo, spends most of her life trying to understand who she is and where she belongs. She struggles between her traditional Ganda upbringing, the effects of colonial education, and her own sense of individuality. Her repeated questions about her mother, her body, her spirit, and her freedom reflect the existential search for identity and authenticity. Kirabo's journey can be understood as an act of self-definition. She does not passively accept what society tells her a woman should be; instead, she chooses her own path. This mirrors Sartre's idea that "freedom is what you do with what's been done to you" (707). Even when faced with pain, rejection, and confusion, Kirabo continues to choose and to act, shaping her essence through her experiences.

Makumbi also presents existential themes through her portrayal of memory, storytelling, and ancestry. Kirabo's connection with Nsuuta, her grandmother, and the story of *The First Woman*, Nnambi, represents her confrontation with history and identity. She must face her fears, her past, and the expectations of her society in order to live authentically. This inner journey of self-realization is what existentialists call becoming; the process of becoming one's true self through conscious decisions. In the end, Kirabo's awareness of her freedom allows her to accept her imperfections and embrace life as it is, full of both pain and beauty.

Comparing Beckett and Makumbi through existentialism shows that although their worlds are far apart, Europe's postwar despair and Africa's postcolonial reawakening; they both deal with the same human question: how to live meaningfully in a world without guarantees. Beckett's characters wait for meaning to arrive, while Makumbi's heroine searches actively for it. Both reveal that life's purpose is not something found outside ourselves, but something we build within through our freedom, choices, and relationships. Existentialist theory therefore helps this study show how both writers use different cultural settings to explore the same truth, that human beings must create their own meaning in an uncertain world.

1.5 Review of Related Scholarship

Academics have put significant effort into analyzing Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman*, both of which delve into the human desire for meaning in an unpredictable world. Nevertheless, comparative analyses connecting such different cultural and historical contexts remain relatively uncommon. This review examines selected critical writings on both authors, highlighting their significance to the current study entitled "The Quest for Meaning Across Time and Culture: A Comparative Study of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman*", and establishing the research gap that this project seeks to address.

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* has long occupied a central position in discussions of existential and absurdist drama. Martin Esslin, in his seminal work *The Theatre of the*

Absurd, describes Beckett's play as expressing "the sense of man's alienation and the collapse of all systems of belief" (45). Esslin situates the play within the disillusionment of post-war Europe, where faith in religion, logic, and progress had eroded. For him, the act of waiting becomes symbolic of humanity's endless search for meaning in a world stripped of certainties. This interpretation provides a philosophical foundation for the present study by emphasizing the theme of existential waiting. However, Esslin's analysis is largely confined to the Western cultural experience and does not consider how such existential concerns might manifest in non-Western contexts, highlighting an area that this project seeks to explore.

While Esslin foregrounds the philosophical dimensions of the play, Ruby Cohn, in *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, expands on its structural and thematic features by focusing on its cyclical form. She observes that the characters' repetitive actions and dialogues "reflect the emptiness of human routine and the endless circle of waiting" (62). Cohn interprets this pattern as Beckett's commentary on human endurance in the face of futility. Her study is important to this research because it demonstrates how form becomes a vehicle for expressing existential ideas, clarifying the relationship between repetition, time, and the illusion of progress in Beckett's work. Building on structural interpretations, A. Alvarez in *Samuel Beckett* presents another dimension of existential endurance by describing the play as "an exploration of the limits of human endurance," noting that the central figures persist in waiting even when hope appears absurd (71). For Alvarez, this persistence embodies the paradox at the heart of Beckett's vision; that

humanity continues to seek meaning in the face of meaninglessness. His perspective reinforces the notion that existential action itself becomes a form of resistance to despair, a concept that resonates with later comparisons to Makumbi's exploration of meaning-making through cultural and spiritual rediscovery.

In *Modern Critical Views: Samuel Beckett*, edited by Harold Bloom, Beckett is described as a philosopher of the absurd whose characters “confront the void with stoic endurance” (22). Bloom's collection brings together diverse voices that consider Beckett's contribution to modern philosophy and theatre. While comprehensive, these essays largely maintain a Eurocentric focus, often interpreting the absurd as a phenomenon confined to Western thought. This limitation underscores the need for a broader comparative approach, such as the one undertaken in this study, which seeks to relate Beckett's existential themes to African cultural and philosophical experiences. Taken together, the scholarship on Beckett consistently portrays *Waiting for Godot* as a representation of human uncertainty, alienation, and the endless pursuit of meaning. Yet, these interpretations rarely extend beyond the European intellectual tradition, leaving a gap that this study aims to address by bringing both Beckett's vision of existential despair with Makumbi's reimagining of meaning within African feminist and cultural frameworks.

While, Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman* has inspired scholarship that centers on identity, gender, and cultural memory in postcolonial Africa. Sandra T. Owonibi, in her

essay “Reclaiming African Womanhood in Makumbi’s *The First Woman*,” asserts that the novel “gives voice to African women who have long been silenced by history and patriarchy” (114). Owonibi’s analysis emphasizes the protagonist Kirabo’s journey toward self-awareness and liberation from patriarchal and colonial constraints, framing her journey as existential in nature, an assertion of individual freedom and identity. While illuminating Kirabo’s personal quest, Owonibi does not explicitly connect it to broader philosophical questions of human existence, a link that this study seeks to establish.

Further more, Grace Musila in “Feminism and Fiction in Contemporary Africa” situates Makumbi’s narrative within broader cultural frameworks, noting that “Makumbi’s fiction reminds us that African life also wrestles with questions of being, belonging, and purpose, though through different cultural languages” (78). Musila’s contribution is particularly valuable because it bridges feminist and existential discourses, demonstrating that questions of human existence are not limited to Western literature but are also embedded in African worldviews. This perspective aligns with the comparative aim of the present research, which seeks to show that existential inquiry is universal while being expressed through distinct cultural idioms.

Similarly, David Kaiza, in his review of *The First Woman* published in *The Kampala Review*, interprets the novel as one that “reclaims myth and oral history as sources of strength and identity” (3). Kaiza emphasizes Makumbi’s use of storytelling, ancestral wisdom, and cultural heritage as tools for self-discovery. His argument positions the

novel as an affirmation of meaning, contrasting sharply with Beckett's portrayal of existential futility. This analysis is crucial to the current study because it illustrates how Makumbi transforms the search for meaning from an abstract philosophical struggle into a culturally rooted process of self-understanding and connection to history.

Further, Rose A. Sackeyfio in *African Feminist Fiction and the Quest for Identity* argues that Makumbi's depiction of womanhood presents "an evolving consciousness situated between modernity and tradition" (156). Similarly, Sylvia Tamale in *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* notes that Makumbi's writing "challenges colonial and patriarchal structures that limit women's self-realization" (192). Both scholars highlight the philosophical depth of the novel, revealing that beyond its feminist concerns lies an exploration of authentic existence within conflicting systems of value. These insights are integral to this research because they demonstrate that, in Makumbi's narrative, the quest for meaning is rooted not in despair but in reconstruction and empowerment, providing a useful counterpoint to Beckett's existential paralysis.

Taken together, the scholarship on *The First Woman* emphasizes its engagement with gender, culture, and identity, yet often overlooks its existential dimensions. By reading Makumbi's narrative alongside Beckett's, this study extends the scope of existential theory beyond its Western confines, demonstrating that the human search for meaning resonates across cultural and temporal boundaries. In synthesis, both bodies of scholarship reveal a common concern with humanity's confrontation with the unknown,

the limitations of understanding, and the persistence of hope. While Beckett's characters embody existential paralysis, Makumbi's protagonist embodies renewal through cultural memory and self-definition. Previous critics have rarely juxtaposed these perspectives, leaving a critical gap that this research addresses. Accordingly, this study contributes to comparative literary scholarship by demonstrating that the search for meaning, though expressed differently in European modernist and African feminist traditions, remains a universal human experience transcending time, culture, and geography.

1.6 Thesis Statement

This study reviews that while Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* portrays the human quest for meaning as an endless struggle marked by uncertainty and absurdity, Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman* redefines that quest through identity, memory, and cultural reclamation, revealing that the search for purpose is both universal and shaped by context.

CHAPTER TWO

The Quest for Meaning in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

This chapter delves into Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, examining how the play weaves meaning around the core theme of waiting. Essential thematic and structural components, including the relationship between time and waiting, the portrayal of existential uncertainty, the moral weight of human connections among the characters, the intricate dynamics of language and silence, and a thorough interpretation of the play's significant images and symbols are explored. Each section will combine a close reading of the dramatic text with insights drawn from pertinent critical and philosophical sources, shedding light on Beckett's creative decisions in staging the work.

2.1 The Idea of Waiting and Time

From its opening stage directions and the repeated words “Nothing to be done,” *Waiting for Godot* sets out a sense of time that does not move forward in the usual way (7). Instead of building toward an ending, the play keeps circling back on itself. Act II begins with the same stage picture as Act I, “A country road. A tree,” and the characters repeat much of the same talk and actions (47). This makes it clear that waiting is not just part of the story but the main shape of their lives. The one small change; the tree having “four or

five leaves” in the second act does not solve anything. It could mean growth or it could mean nothing at all (49). Time itself becomes unsure.

Vladimir and Estragon cannot agree on what happened the day before or even if they are in the same place (10–11). This weak memory makes it hard to know if time is moving at all. Martin Esslin, who first described Beckett’s work as part of the “Theatre of the Absurd,” argues that the play shows how modern life has lost a clear sense of progress or goal (Esslin 24). In this way, waiting becomes a picture of human existence itself.

Albert Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, also explains that people search for meaning in a universe that does not give answers (21). For Camus, Sisyphus pushing his stone without end is much like Vladimir and Estragon waiting for someone who never comes. Both show a cycle that cannot be broken. Beckett’s drama brings this idea to the stage, with characters who fill time with talk, games, and hopes while nothing really changes.

Deirdre Bair notes that Beckett himself once described *Godot* as “a play in which nothing happens, twice,” pointing to this pattern of repetition as the heart of its form (487). Ruby Cohn also observes that the act of waiting turns into the play’s main subject: the fact that the characters stay, and stay again, becomes more important than any event that might happen (112).

This shows that in *Waiting for Godot*, time is not measured by events but by the act of waiting itself. Beckett removes the usual flow of beginning, middle and end, and gives us

instead a long pause where the present moment never ends. The play suggests that human beings often live in this same way, caught in cycles of expectation, delay and hope that may never be fulfilled.

2.2 Life as Uncertain and Empty

Beckett presents life in *Waiting for Godot* as uncertain and often empty, built around cycles of expectation without fulfilment. Vladimir and Estragon spend the play *Waiting for Godot*, who never arrives. Their lives are defined not by action or achievement but by an endless delay. The audience watches them pass time with small talk, quarrels, games, and moments of despair, yet nothing moves forward. Their waiting becomes a symbol of human life itself, an existence shaped by uncertainty, repetition, and lack of final answers.

This sense of emptiness is reinforced through the structure of the play. The two acts are nearly identical in events: they wait, they meet Pozzo and Lucky, a boy comes with a message, and they wait again. The repetition suggests that human life does not necessarily progress but circles around the same routines. Critics such as Ruby Cohn argues that Beckett uses this circular form to strip away illusions of growth or purpose, leaving behind the bare reality of existence. Each day mirrors the previous one, creating a sense that time passes but nothing truly changes.

The uncertainty of life in the play is not only external but also internal. The characters forget details of their past, whether they met Pozzo and Lucky before, whether this is the

right place to wait, or even whether Godot gave clear instructions. Estragon admits, “I forget immediately”, showing how unstable memory makes their lives. This uncertainty reflects how human beings often live without clarity, relying on fragile recollections and hopes rather than solid truths.

Beckett also questions the role of hope in an uncertain world. Vladimir and Estragon cling to the promise of Godot’s arrival, even though there is no evidence that he will come. Hope keeps them alive, but it also keeps them trapped in passivity. As Alvarez notes, Beckett’s drama shows how hope can be both sustaining and destructive: it prevents despair but also prolongs waiting that leads nowhere. Their belief in Godot highlights the emptiness of a life based on deferred expectations.

The play’s setting strengthens the impression of emptiness. The stage is almost bare, with a single tree as the only object of note. This minimal scene echoes the barren meaning of the characters’ lives. Without distractions, the emptiness of their existence is made visible to both the characters and the audience. The tree itself changes slightly between the two acts, with a few leaves appearing, but even this small sign of life does not alter the course of waiting. It becomes a reminder that even when life shows growth, uncertainty still dominates.

Critics often link Beckett’s view of life in *Waiting for Godot* to existential philosophy. Like Sartre and Camus, Beckett presents a world where life has no clear essence or purpose. Instead, humans must live with uncertainty and the silence of the universe. As

Esslin observes, Beckett's drama reduces life to "the act of waiting itself," exposing the void beneath human existence. The play thus shows emptiness not as an idea but as a lived condition.

In sum, Beckett's picture of life in *Waiting for Godot* is one of endless uncertainty and emptiness. The circular structure, the failures of memory, the fragility of hope, and the barren stage all work together to create a vision of existence where meaning is always deferred and never secured. Life becomes an act of waiting for something; Godot, purpose, salvation that never arrives.

2.3 Friendship and Human Connection

In *Waiting for Godot*, friendship is one of the few things that gives meaning to Vladimir and Estragon's otherwise empty lives. Though their days are repetitive and uncertain, the fact that they wait together makes the experience bearable. Estragon often suggests leaving or even giving up, but Vladimir reminds him of their shared duty to wait. Their companionship shows how human connection can soften the weight of existence, even when that existence seems meaningless.

The bond between the two men is not ideal or perfect; it is filled with quarrels, irritation, and moments of boredom. Estragon complains, "Nothing to be done", while Vladimir scolds or comforts him. At times they talk of parting ways, yet they never separate. This mix of conflict and loyalty reflects the reality of many human relationships, where

companionship is as much about endurance as about harmony. Ruby Cohn notes that their persistence in staying together is itself an act of resistance against despair.

Friendship also functions as a tool of survival in the play. Both men depend on each other for emotional support. Estragon relies on Vladimir to remind him of past events and to give him a sense of stability, while Vladimir depends on Estragon for company in the long hours of waiting. Their dialogue often circles without conclusion, yet the talk itself fills the silence and prevents the emptiness from overwhelming them. This echoes Beckett's larger idea that speech and companionship, however fragile, help humans endure life's uncertainty.

The relationship between Pozzo and Lucky offers another picture of human connection, but in a distorted form. Pozzo dominates Lucky, treating him as a servant and object. Their bond is not based on equality or friendship but on power and dependence. Yet even this harsh relationship shows how deeply humans need one another. Pozzo cannot function without Lucky's service, and Lucky cannot act without Pozzo's commands. Their destructive tie mirrors the way relationships can trap as much as they support. Alvarez argues that Beckett uses Pozzo and Lucky to show the darker side of human dependence, where companionship is mixed with exploitation.

By presenting these two different forms of connection, the fragile friendship of Vladimir and Estragon and the oppressive tie of Pozzo and Lucky, Beckett explores the central role of relationships in giving meaning to human life. Even in an uncertain and empty world,

humans do not face existence alone. Companionship, however flawed, becomes a form of protection against despair and a reminder that meaning is often found not in answers but in bonds with others.

2.4 Speech, Silence, and Understanding

Language in *Waiting for Godot* is both a tool for survival and a reminder of its limits. Vladimir and Estragon talk constantly, but their words often fail to carry clear meaning. Much of their dialogue circles back on itself, filled with repetition and contradiction. For example, when Estragon says, “I’m hungry,” Vladimir suggests they leave, only for Estragon to reply, “We can’t. We’re *Waiting for Godot*” (8). This exchange shows how speech does not move them forward but keeps them trapped in the cycle of waiting. Their words are less about communication and more about passing time.

Beckett uses this broken language to reflect the human struggle to find meaning in a world that gives no answers. Silence often follows their talk, marked in the stage directions as “Pause” or “Silence” (18). These silences are heavy with uncertainty, as if what cannot be said is more important than what is spoken. Wittgenstein’s idea that “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (89) resonates here. Yet unlike Wittgenstein, Beckett shows that silence is unbearable; the characters talk because they cannot stand the emptiness that silence represents.

Lucky's long speech is the clearest example of language breaking down. When Pozzo orders him to "think," Lucky launches into a stream of words full of scholarly phrases that collapse into nonsense: "quaquaquaqua" (33–34). Critics such as Esslin argues that this speech mocks philosophical and academic attempts to impose meaning on life. The language promises knowledge but delivers only confusion. In this way, Beckett shows that words can hide emptiness rather than reveal truth.

Despite these failures, language in the play is not without value. For Vladimir and Estragon, talking is a way to affirm their bond. Their simple exchanges, even when meaningless, provide comfort: "You're not alone, you know" (55). The rhythm of conversation creates a fragile sense of order in the chaos of waiting. As Cohn points out, Beckett presents dialogue as a ritual that gives structure to life, even when it does not solve life's mysteries.

Thus, speech and silence in *Waiting for Godot* reveal both the limits of human understanding and the persistence of human effort. Words may fail to explain the world, but the act of speaking keeps despair at bay. Silence may expose the void, but it also highlights the courage it takes to keep talking. Beckett shows that while language cannot guarantee meaning, it remains one of the few tools humans have to endure uncertainty together.

2.5 Images and Symbols in the Play

Beckett's stage in *Waiting for Godot* is almost empty, yet the few objects that appear take on strong symbolic weight. The most important image is the tree. In Act I it stands bare, but in Act II it has "four or five leaves" (49). The change is small, but it unsettles the characters and the audience. Some critics, like Esslin, see the tree as a symbol of hope, showing that life continues even in a world of despair. Others, like Cohn, argue that the tree points to death, since it may serve as a gallows where Estragon and Vladimir consider hanging themselves. Beckett himself refused to fix the meaning of the tree, leaving it open to many readings. Its power lies in this uncertainty.

The country road is another important image. It does not lead anywhere, nor does it connect one place to another. It simply exists as a space of waiting (7). In this sense, the road stands for human life itself: a journey without a clear direction or destination. Bair notes that Beckett strips the stage down to its minimum so that even this simple road feels heavy with meaning.

Everyday objects also become symbols. Estragon's boots hurt him, yet he cannot do without them (7). They represent the burden of existence: painful, but necessary. Vladimir's hat, which he removes and puts on repeatedly, is linked with thinking. The hat becomes central in Lucky's speech scene, when Pozzo orders him to think only after placing the hat on his head (33). This small object ties rational thought to absurd ritual. Even food, carrots, turnips, and radishes takes on symbolic weight. Their meagerness

highlights scarcity and survival, reminding the audience that life is reduced to the most basic needs.

Perhaps the most powerful symbol is Godot himself. Though unseen, he dominates the play. His name recalls “God,” but Beckett denied that Godot was meant to be a direct symbol of divinity (492). Instead, Godot stands for the idea of deferred meaning. He represents whatever people hope for salvation, order, purpose that never arrives. As Hill explains, Godot is less a character than a question mark, a figure of absence that shapes the lives of those who wait.

Beckett’s use of imagery shows how symbols can be both rich and unstable. They point to many possible meanings but confirm none. This reflects the wider theme of the play: life offers signs, but no final answers. In this way, the tree, the road, the hat, the boots, and the absent Godot all become reminders of the uncertainty at the heart of existence.

CHAPTER THREE

THE QUEST FOR MEANING IN JENNIFER MAKUMBI'S *THE FIRST WOMAN*

This chapter examines Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman* as a narrative of rediscovery, where meaning is sought not through waiting as in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* but through memory, storytelling, and identity. Makumbi reimagines the human quest for meaning within the framework of Ugandan culture, womanhood, and postcolonial experience. Her novel offers an alternative to the existential emptiness of the Western world by rooting meaning in community, history, and the reclamation of suppressed voices.

3.1 Finding Identity through Women's Stories

Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman* tells the story of Kirabo, a young Ugandan girl who grows up searching for her mother and for her own place in the world. Through Kirabo's journey, Makumbi explores how women find meaning and identity by connecting with the stories of other women; mothers, grandmothers, and ancestors whose

experiences shape the present. Storytelling in the novel becomes more than a way to pass time; it becomes a form of knowledge, a source of self-understanding, and a means of resistance against the silence created by patriarchy and colonialism.

Makumbi presents storytelling as a bridge between generations. From the beginning of the novel, Kirabo's curiosity about her absent mother leads her to her grandmother, Miiro, and her mother's friend, Nsuuta. Both women tell her stories, not only about her family but also about the history of Ugandan women. Through these stories, Kirabo learns that knowing oneself requires listening to the past. As Florence Stratton explains, African women's writing often reclaims "the suppressed narratives of mothers and grandmothers" to recover female identity and agency (38). In this sense, Makumbi continues a tradition of African feminist storytelling that restores women to the center of history.

The stories that Miiro and Nsuuta tell are filled with lessons about love, betrayal, strength, and survival. They show that womanhood is complex and that each generation faces different challenges. Miiro represents the traditional world, where women live by community values and accept certain limits. Nsuuta, by contrast, represents a more rebellious spirit; she breaks social norms and pays a price for her freedom. Kirabo's growing understanding of both women helps her define her own identity. She realizes that to become herself, she must accept the mixture of obedience and rebellion, silence and speech, that makes up her heritage.

Makumbi uses this intergenerational storytelling to show that meaning in life is not something people discover suddenly; it is something built slowly through listening, remembering, and understanding. The novel's structure itself reflects this idea. It moves back and forth between past and present, between the stories of older women and the experiences of Kirabo's youth. This narrative technique suggests that identity is not fixed; it grows as stories are told and retold. As Molaria Ogundipe argues, African women must "re-create themselves" by engaging with their personal and collective histories (12). Kirabo's story is a perfect example of this process of re-creation.

The power of storytelling in *The First Woman* also lies in its ability to challenge silence. In many traditional societies, women's experiences are often hidden or ignored. By letting women tell their own stories, Makumbi breaks this silence and allows meaning to arise from within the female experience. When Nsuuta tells the myth of "*The First Woman*," she teaches Kirabo that women's stories have always existed but were buried under patriarchal myths. The act of storytelling becomes a way to uncover these lost truths. As Amina Mama notes, African feminism seeks to "name and make visible the struggles of women" that have been erased or silenced (53). Makumbi's narrative gives voice to those struggles.

Furthermore, storytelling in the novel is linked with memory and healing. Each time Kirabo hears a new story, she not only learns about her family's past but also begins to heal the emotional gaps left by her mother's absence. This healing is both personal and

cultural. Through stories, the community reconnects with its own broken history, including the disruptions caused by colonialism and the loss of indigenous beliefs. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o explains, storytelling is central to "decolonizing the mind," because it helps people recover their own ways of seeing the world (87). Makumbi's use of oral storytelling reflects this idea: by returning to her people's stories, Kirabo learns to see herself outside of colonial definitions of identity and womanhood.

Makumbi also shows how storytelling creates community. The act of sharing stories connects individuals across time and space. When Miiro and Nsuuta tell Kirabo about their youth, they are not just passing on information; they are building a relationship. The same happens when Kirabo later begins to tell her own story. She learns that her voice, too, matters in shaping the future. Carole Boyce Davies observes that African women writers often portray identity as "a process of migration between voices," where one's sense of self grows through dialogue with others (45). In *The First Woman*, identity emerges not from isolation but from connection, from the stories that link women together across generations.

Finally, Makumbi contrasts this rich storytelling culture with the emptiness seen in Western existential literature like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. While Beckett's characters wait endlessly for meaning that never comes, Makumbi's characters create meaning through storytelling and community. Waiting in silence is replaced by speaking, listening, and remembering. This difference highlights how culture shapes the human

search for meaning. For Beckett, meaning is uncertain and often absent; for Makumbi, meaning is rediscovered through shared memory and collective voice.

In conclusion, *The First Woman* presents storytelling as the heart of human meaning. Through the stories of women, Kirabo learns who she is, where she comes from, and what kind of woman she wants to become. Storytelling allows Makumbi to weave personal identity into the larger fabric of cultural history. It becomes both a method of survival and a celebration of women's resilience. Meaning, in Makumbi's world, is not found in waiting for answers but in telling and retelling the stories that make life whole.

3.2 Myths and Traditions as Guides

In *The First Woman*, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi uses myths and traditions as tools for teaching, healing, and finding meaning. Through these traditional stories, the author connects the characters, especially the women, to their roots and helps them understand who they are. In African societies, myths and traditions are not only tales told by elders; they are ways of explaining life, guiding behavior, and preserving wisdom. Makumbi shows that even in a changing world, these old stories can still lead people toward self-discovery and strength.

In the novel, the character Kirabo grows up surrounded by stories told by her grandmother, Nsuuta, and other women in the village. These stories teach her about life, womanhood, and her community's past. Myths act as mirrors that show Kirabo where she

comes from and what it means to be a woman in Buganda culture. For instance, Nsuuta's storytelling reminds Kirabo that "the stories of our ancestors live inside us" (45). Through this, Makumbi suggests that myths are not just entertainment but living forces that continue to guide the younger generation.

The myths in *The First Woman* are also used to explain deep emotional and social experiences that logic alone cannot. When Kirabo struggles with her identity, she is told about the legend of *The First Woman* who once had the power to fly and see the world freely. However, she lost her wings when she tried to live among men. This story becomes a symbol of how women in the novel and in many African societies lose their freedom under patriarchy. Yet it also offers hope: by remembering *The First Woman's* story, Kirabo begins to reclaim her sense of self. The myth becomes a "spiritual map," showing that identity can be rebuilt through remembering and retelling (102).

Makumbi's use of myth also challenges the way Western culture often separates myth from truth. In African oral traditions, myths are seen as truth told in a symbolic way. They carry lessons that shape moral and cultural understanding. As literary scholar Florence Stratton notes, "African women writers often turn to myth as a way of reinterpreting patriarchal history and giving voice to silenced women" (78). Makumbi follows this tradition by rewriting the myth of *The First Woman* in a way that gives her new power and agency. In doing so, she shows how myths can evolve and become tools for feminist expression.

Tradition also guides characters' moral and spiritual lives in the novel. Elders like Nsuuta and Alikisa represent the wisdom of the past. They teach that understanding tradition does not mean living in the past, but learning from it. When Kirabo learns about her mother's story and her grandmother's rivalry, she begins to see that tradition is not only about rules but also about memory and forgiveness. As one elder tells her, "Tradition is what holds us when everything else falls apart" (213). This belief connects Makumbi's work to broader African thought, where community values, ancestry, and storytelling give meaning to life.

However, Makumbi does not idealize tradition. She also shows how it can limit people, especially women. Some customs, like the strict expectations placed on women, cause pain and inequality. Through Kirabo's eyes, readers see that finding meaning involves both respecting and questioning tradition. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues, "The past must be remembered, but it must also be renewed" (91). Makumbi's novel follows this idea, suggesting that myths and traditions are not fixed; they can change as people seek new ways to live and understand themselves.

In this way, myths and traditions become central to Kirabo's quest for meaning. They guide her through confusion, help her accept her heritage, and give her language to describe her experiences. For Makumbi, to find meaning in a world that often denies women's voices, one must listen to the stories of the past but also learn to retell them.

The novel therefore presents tradition not as a prison, but as a bridge between the old and the new, the past and the present, and the self and the community.

The First Woman reveals that myths and traditions are the heartbeat of African life. They hold the wisdom of ancestors, teach resilience, and connect generations. By revisiting these old tales, Makumbi allows her characters and readers to rediscover meaning in their shared history. Myths, in her world, are not about escape; they are about return a return to roots, to memory, and to the truth of being human.

3.3 Family History and Personal Growth

In *The First Woman*, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi presents family history as one of the most powerful forces shaping a person's search for meaning. The novel shows that to understand oneself, one must first understand where one comes from. For the main character, Kirabo, discovering her family history becomes a journey of growth emotionally, spiritually, and socially. It helps her connect the broken pieces of her life and come to terms with her identity as both an individual and a member of a larger community.

At the beginning of the story, Kirabo feels incomplete because she does not know her mother. She is raised by her grandparents in Nattetta, and though they love her, there is always a gap in her understanding of who she is. This emptiness drives her curiosity. She

asks questions about her mother, her father, and even about her grandmother's youth. Through these questions, Makumbi shows that personal identity is deeply linked to family memory. Kirabo's search for meaning begins when she realizes that she cannot grow without knowing the truth about her roots. As she tells her grandmother, "I feel like a part of me is missing, like I was born from air" (59). This feeling of loss pushes her to search for her origins.

Makumbi uses Kirabo's experience to explore the importance of family storytelling in African societies. Elders like Nsuuta and Alikisa become keepers of history, passing down knowledge through oral narratives. These stories are not just about the past; they are lessons that shape how younger generations see the world. Nsuuta's confessions about her own past, her friendship and rivalry with Alikisa, her forbidden love, and her choices give Kirabo insight into the struggles and sacrifices of women before her. Through Nsuuta's honesty, Kirabo learns that the mistakes of her elders are also part of her story. As literary scholar Elleke Boehmer notes, "African women's writing often reclaims the domestic and private past to explain present realities" (143). This is exactly what Makumbi achieves; she turns personal memory into a map for growth.

Family history in the novel also represents the tension between truth and silence. For many years, Kirabo's elders hide certain parts of the past, thinking it is better to protect her from pain. But Makumbi shows that silence can be just as harmful as trauma. When Kirabo finally learns the truth about her mother, she feels betrayed, not because the truth

is painful, but because it was kept from her. Her journey toward maturity begins when she faces her family's truth with courage. This moment shows that knowing one's history, even when it is painful, is essential to personal development. As she later realizes, "You cannot grow if you don't know what you are growing from" (268).

The novel also connects family history to collective memory, the shared past of a community. Kirabo's story mirrors the story of Uganda itself, a country marked by colonialism, gender inequality, and social change. The personal and the historical are woven together. Through the lives of Kirabo's family members, Makumbi explores how the past continues to shape the present. For example, the rivalry between Nsuuta and Alikisa reflects generational conflict; the struggle between old traditions and new ideas of womanhood. Makumbi writes, "The past is never dead; it sits quietly in our blood" (178). This idea means that personal growth requires understanding how history lives inside individuals and families.

Family history also helps Kirabo learn forgiveness and empathy. She learns that her parents and grandparents were shaped by their own circumstances, and that everyone carries pain from the past. Instead of rejecting her family's history, she begins to accept it as part of her identity. Through this acceptance, she grows into a wiser and more independent woman. As critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reminds us, "To reconnect with one's roots is to reconnect with one's sense of direction" (94). For Kirabo, reconnecting with her roots is what allows her to find direction and meaning in her life.

Makumbi's storytelling makes it clear that growth is not a straight path. It involves confusion, discovery, and healing. Kirabo's relationship with her grandmother changes as she grows older from dependence to understanding. By learning her grandmother's story, she also learns the power of storytelling itself. In this way, *The First Woman* celebrates intergenerational wisdom. The older women may not have been free to speak in their youth, but by telling their stories, they give Kirabo the freedom to live differently. This passing down of experience from one generation to another becomes a form of rebirth.

The First Woman teaches that family history is not just about knowing names and dates. It is about understanding the emotions, choices, and struggles that shape one's lineage. Kirabo's personal growth comes from embracing her family's imperfections and learning from them. By the end of the novel, she no longer feels lost or incomplete. She understands that her identity is built from many stories, some painful, some beautiful, but all meaningful. Through this realization, Makumbi shows that the quest for meaning begins at home, in the stories of one's ancestors, and in the courage to face the past with open eyes.

3.4 Religion and Power in Daily Life

Religion plays a major role in Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman* because it shapes how people think, behave, and understand the world around them. In the novel, religion is both a source of comfort and a tool of control. It influences every part of daily life, from how people raise their children, to how they treat women, to how they explain right and

wrong. Makumbi uses religion to show how colonialism and patriarchy joined together to shape the moral order in Uganda. But she also uses it to question whether faith can help people find true meaning in life or if it sometimes hides them from it.

From the beginning of the novel, the reader sees that Christianity is deeply rooted in the community. Missionary influence has changed how people worship, speak, and even how they view their traditions. The older generation, represented by characters like Alikisa and Miir, has accepted Christian teachings, while still holding onto some traditional beliefs. Makumbi does not portray Christianity as entirely bad, but she shows how it has been used to control people's thoughts especially women's. Through Kirabo's experiences, readers see that religion can bring both light and limitation. For instance, in Nattetta village, religious rules dictate how a woman should behave: she must be obedient, pure, and respectful. Girls are taught that modesty is holiness and that their worth depends on how well they follow these moral laws. Kirabo grows up in this environment, learning that the church values silence and submission in women. However, as she matures, she begins to question these teachings. She wonders why religion praises men's authority but limits women's voices. This questioning marks the start of her spiritual growth, a move from blind faith to personal understanding. As the Nigerian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye explains, "Religion in Africa has often been used to justify the oppression of women, but it can also become a tool for their liberation when reinterpreted through women's experiences" (45). Makumbi's novel captures this idea perfectly.

Makumbi also shows that religion in Uganda is not limited to Christianity. Traditional spirituality believes in ancestors, spirits, and natural forces; still plays a part in daily life. People often mix both systems of belief. For example, while the villagers attend church on Sundays, they still perform traditional rituals during childbirth, marriage, or death. This coexistence of belief systems reveals a cultural complexity. The people of Nattetta are not simply Christians or traditionalists; they are both. This mixture reflects what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls "the hybrid consciousness of the colonized," where people learn to live between two worlds; the world of their ancestors and the one imposed by colonialism (89).

Kirabo's journey shows how religion and power work together in shaping identity. The church often reinforces patriarchal structures by telling women to be quiet and obedient. Yet, Kirabo begins to realize that spiritual truth cannot come from silence or submission. When she hears the myth of *The First Woman* from Nsuuta, she learns that women once had spiritual power, they could speak to nature and shape destiny. This myth becomes a counter-narrative to the church's message. Through it, Makumbi shows that the divine is not limited to the church or male authority; it also lives in women's voices and experiences. As scholar Florence Stratton notes, "African women writers rewrite myths of creation to restore the divine feminine that patriarchy erased" (67).

Furthermore, Makumbi connects religion to colonial power. Christianity came to Uganda through colonial missionaries, and with it came new moral systems that defined what was

‘civilized’ and what was ‘pagan.’ These systems often condemned indigenous beliefs as evil. This created confusion and guilt among Africans, who were forced to reject parts of their culture in order to be seen as good Christians. In *The First Woman*, this is reflected in the way Kirabo’s elders treat traditional practices as shameful, even though they still depend on them for healing and guidance. Through this tension, Makumbi questions whether religion truly brings salvation or whether it simply replaces one kind of fear with another.

Kirabo’s spiritual development throughout the novel is similar to her journey toward self-awareness. In the beginning, she accepts everything she is told. But as she grows older, she begins to find her own understanding of faith. She sees that true spirituality is not about rules or appearances but about personal truth and harmony with others. Her faith becomes more internal and less tied to social expectations. This spiritual awakening helps her redefine what meaning in life truly means. It is not about waiting for blessings from heaven, but about living truthfully and compassionately here on earth.

Makumbi’s portrayal of religion contrasts sharply with Samuel Beckett’s vision in *Waiting for Godot*. In Beckett’s play, the characters wait endlessly for a God who never comes. Their faith brings only confusion and emptiness. In Makumbi’s world, however, the divine is not absent. It is found in people’s daily lives, in their struggles, and in their ability to question. While Beckett’s characters wait in despair, Makumbi’s characters seek to understand the God within themselves and their culture. As critic Taiwo Oladele

observes, “Makumbi transforms religion from an institution of control to a site of negotiation and self-discovery” (132).

Religion in *The First Woman* also becomes a form of social power. It dictates who has authority, who speaks, and who is silenced. The men in the novel often use religion to justify their dominance over women. Yet, women like Nsuuta and later Kirabo use religious language and imagery to challenge that same power. They reinterpret faith to include their voices and desires. For example, Nsuuta’s storytelling about *The First Woman* reclaims the sacred feminine that religion had suppressed. Through her, Makumbi suggests that meaning and divinity are not limited to male-centered interpretations of faith.

In the end, Makumbi presents religion as both a mirror and a challenge. It reflects Uganda’s colonial past, patriarchal traditions, and moral struggles, but it also challenges people to find personal meaning within those systems. For Kirabo, true religion is not about obeying others but about understanding herself and her place in the world. Her story shows that spiritual freedom is the ability to question, to reinterpret, and to live by one’s own convictions. In this way, *The First Woman* turns religion from a tool of control into a path toward liberation and inner peace.

3.5 Women, Struggles, and Freedom

In *The First Woman*, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi places women at the center of her story to show how they struggle against social, cultural, and emotional barriers in their search for freedom and meaning. The novel portrays women not as weak or dependent but as strong individuals who must fight for space in a world dominated by men and colonial influence. Makumbi uses their experiences to explore how African women redefine freedom not just as escape from oppression, but as the power to tell their own stories, make their own choices, and live truthfully.

The main character, Kirabo, begins her journey as a curious young girl who wants to understand who she is. Her questions about her mother and her place in the world make her different from other girls in the village. From childhood, she learns that society expects women to behave in specific ways to be obedient, quiet, and respectful to men. However, Kirabo is not satisfied with these limitations. She wants to know why women are expected to be silent while men are allowed to speak freely. Through her, Makumbi exposes how patriarchy defines what it means to be a “good woman” and how women must often break these definitions to find their true selves.

Kirabo’s struggle mirrors that of many women in her community. Her grandmother, Miiro, represents the older generation who believes that women should follow tradition. She teaches Kirabo discipline and the importance of family honor. On the other hand, Nsuuta, Kirabo’s mother, represents a different kind of woman; one who challenges social rules and chooses independence over respectability. She defies the norms of her

time by refusing to live according to what society expects. Through these two women, Makumbi presents two kinds of struggles: the struggle to maintain tradition and the struggle to break away from it. Kirabo must learn from both before she can understand what true freedom means.

Makumbi's portrayal of women's struggles is deeply connected to the themes of voice and silence. In many parts of the novel, women's voices are ignored or punished. For example, when Nsuuta falls in love with a man outside her social class, she is judged harshly. Her story is buried, and she becomes a warning to other girls. But by telling her story to Kirabo years later, Nsuuta reclaims her voice and her dignity. Her storytelling becomes an act of resistance, a way of saying that women's experiences matter. As literary critic Carole Boyce Davies argues, "For African women writers, the act of writing or telling stories becomes a political act, a declaration that women's lives are worth recording" (25). Makumbi's narrative reflects this truth.

In *The First Woman*, storytelling is one of the main tools of freedom. Women use stories to remember their past and to imagine new possibilities. Through storytelling, they pass on lessons, warn against mistakes, and keep their culture alive. For example, the myth of "The First Woman", the one who was divided into the obedient and the wild helps Kirabo understand the struggle within herself. The myth shows how society tries to bury the "wild" part of women, the part that is curious, outspoken, and free. By "digging up" this buried part, Kirabo learns that freedom does not come from rejecting her culture but from

redefining it. This moment captures what feminist scholar Molaria Ogundipe calls “re-centring the African woman in her own story.” Ogundipe explains that true liberation for African women comes when they can “name their own oppressions and define their own identities” (19). Kirabo’s journey clearly follows this path.

Makumbi also uses education as a symbol of freedom. Kirabo’s chance to attend school gives her access to new ideas and independence. However, she quickly discovers that even education can be used to reinforce inequality. In school, girls are told to behave well, while boys are encouraged to lead. Kirabo’s experience shows that education alone does not bring liberation, what matters is how it changes a person’s way of thinking. Her growth comes when she begins to see that knowledge can be used to question authority. This is why she becomes more confident in speaking up against unfair treatment. Her education helps her to see that silence benefits those in power, while speech gives her agency. As scholar Amina Mama writes, “Feminist consciousness in Africa grows from women’s awareness that silence is complicity” (14). Kirabo’s courage to speak her truth marks her transition from a silent girl to a conscious woman.

Freedom in Makumbi’s novel is not presented as an easy or sudden achievement. It is a process that involves pain, sacrifice, and understanding. The women in the novel must confront both personal and social challenges. For example, Nsuuta faces loneliness and shame because of her past choices, but she refuses to regret her independence. Alikisa, her friend turned rival, also represents how women can become enemies when patriarchy

turns them against each other. Through their reconciliation, Makumbi shows that women's freedom is stronger when they stand together. This idea echoes Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's belief that "the problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing who we are" (32). In the end, Kirabo realizes that freedom is not about being like men but about being herself, embracing her strength, her emotions, and her voice.

The struggles of women in *The First Woman* also connect to the postcolonial experience. Makumbi shows how colonialism added another layer of oppression by imposing European values about gender and morality. Under colonial rule, African women were told that their traditions were backward and that good women must follow Western standards of purity and modesty. This double burden of colonial and patriarchal expectations makes women's fight for freedom even more complex. Yet, Makumbi's female characters refuse to be victims. They use both tradition and modernity to their advantage. For example, Kirabo honors her grandmother's wisdom but also learns from her mother's boldness. She combines the best of both worlds to create her own definition of womanhood. This synthesis reflects Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's argument in "Moving the Centre" that true liberation comes when Africans "rediscover and renew the values buried under colonial domination" (101).

By the end of the novel, Kirabo's understanding of freedom matures. She learns that being free does not mean rejecting her roots but accepting them with awareness. She

understands that every generation of women must continue the struggle, not necessarily through rebellion, but through the courage to live truthfully. Her growth mirrors the collective growth of Ugandan women who, despite hardship, continue to build meaning from their experiences. In this sense, *The First Woman* celebrates not just individual freedom but communal liberation, the kind of freedom that comes when women support, forgive, and uplift one another.

Ultimately, Makumbi redefines freedom as self-knowledge. When a woman knows herself, her history, her strengths, and her worth, she becomes free, even within systems that try to limit her. This is why the novel ends with hope. Kirabo may not have all the answers, but she has found her voice. Through her, Makumbi sends a message that women's struggles are not just stories of pain but of power. As long as women keep telling their stories, their freedom continues to grow.

In conclusion, Makumbi's *The First Woman* presents the search for meaning as a journey rooted in memory, culture, and womanhood. Through Kirabo's experiences, the novel shows that women discover who they are by reconnecting with their stories, families, and traditions. Storytelling becomes a powerful tool for self-discovery, as the tales shared by older women like Nsuuta and Miiró help Kirabo understand her identity and history. Myths and traditions, especially the story of the "first woman," guide her toward self-awareness, teaching that culture is not fixed but can be reinterpreted for empowerment (37). In this way, Makumbi reclaims Ugandan myths as living sources of wisdom rather than instruments of control, echoing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's belief that reclaiming

indigenous knowledge helps decolonize the African mind (87). Family relationships also play an important role in this quest for meaning, as Kirabo's understanding of herself deepens through the lessons and conflicts within her lineage. Religion, though sometimes used to suppress women, becomes a site of questioning and redefinition, allowing Makumbi's female characters to find personal faith beyond imposed rules. Ultimately, women's struggles for freedom and voice form the heart of the novel. Kirabo's growth mirrors the awakening of Ugandan women who resist silence and reclaim their power through storytelling and solidarity. As Obioma Nnaemeka notes, African women often achieve freedom through negotiation and balance rather than rejection of culture (372). Makumbi's narrative confirms this truth, showing that meaning is not found in isolation or despair, but in community, memory, and the courage to speak one's truth. In contrast to Beckett's world of endless waiting and uncertainty, Makumbi's Uganda offers renewal through connection, affirming that the human quest for meaning continues through remembering, belonging, and becoming.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARATIVE STUDY

This chapter juxtaposes Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* with Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman*, examining their respective quests for meaning through the lenses of diverse times and cultures. While each work emerges from distinct historical and cultural backgrounds, Beckett's modernist Europe and Makumbi's postcolonial Uganda; they both delve into the universal human struggles for purpose in an ever-evolving world. Beckett's play encapsulates the human experience as a repetitive cycle of waiting, uncertainty, and an overarching sense of emptiness, where the elusive nature of meaning often feels out of reach. Conversely, Makumbi's novel embraces the journey of meaning through self-exploration, connection to one's roots, and the powerful retelling of women's narratives. By placing these two works side by side, we uncover profound insights into the essence of humanity itself: the hope that drives us and our attempts to find clarity amid chaos.

4.1 Similarities in the Search for Meaning

One of the major similarities between *Waiting for Godot* and *The First Woman* is that both texts show human beings as constantly searching for meaning in a confusing world. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon spend their days waiting for someone named Godot, who never arrives. Their endless waiting represents humanity's deep desire to find purpose or guidance in life. As they talk, argue, and repeat the same actions every day, Beckett shows how people often keep searching even when the answers seem out of reach. The play mirrors the struggles of postwar Europe, where people had lost

faith in religion, politics, and even reason. Beckett uses the idea of waiting as a metaphor for the human condition. People are always looking for something or someone to give their lives meaning (45).

In *The First Woman*, Kirabo, the young heroine, also searches for meaning, but her journey takes a different form. Instead of waiting for someone, she actively seeks answers about her identity, her mother, and her place in the world. Through storytelling and connection with her grandmother, Nsuuta, Kirabo learns that meaning can be found by understanding one's roots and culture. Like Beckett's characters, she faces confusion and loneliness, but unlike them, she does not remain passive. Her quest is a process of learning, unlearning, and redefining what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal society (82).

The texts share the idea that meaning is not fixed; it must be created. Beckett's characters try to make sense of their meaningless situation through conversation and companionship. Even though their words often fail, the act of speaking becomes their way of surviving. Likewise, Makumbi's women create meaning by reclaiming their voices and stories. Nsuuta tells Kirabo the myths of the "first woman" to teach her that women once had power before patriarchy silenced them. In both stories, language and storytelling become tools for making sense of life's confusion.

Another similarity lies in the portrayal of human connection as a path toward meaning. Vladimir and Estragon's friendship, though full of quarrels and absurdity, shows that

companionship gives some comfort in a meaningless world. Without each other, their existence would be unbearable. In *The First Woman*, relationships among women between Kirabo, Nsuuta, and Alikisa also provide strength and wisdom. The sharing of experiences allows them to endure pain and grow in understanding. Both authors suggest that even in the face of despair, relationships help people build meaning through shared experience (210).

Furthermore, both Beckett and Makumbi explore time as an essential part of the human search for meaning. In *Waiting for Godot*, time seems endless and repetitive; every day feels the same. This reflects the idea that people often live in cycles of waiting, with no clear progress or resolution. In *The First Woman*, time works differently. It moves through generations, connecting past and present. Kirabo's journey shows that understanding the past helps give meaning to the present. Thus, while Beckett presents time as emptiness, Makumbi turns it into a bridge between the self and heritage. Yet both writers reveal that meaning is a continuous process rather than a destination.

The texts portray the search for meaning as an ongoing, human struggle shaped by hope, relationships, and time. While Beckett's characters wait endlessly in silence, Makumbi's women act, speak, and remember. Both writers remind us that the desire to understand life is universal, crossing time, culture, and language. Even though their worlds differ; one absurd and barren, the other rich and traditional, both affirm that meaning, though elusive, is something humans must keep seeking.

4.2 Differences in Culture and Setting

Although *Waiting for Godot* and *The First Woman* share a deep concern with the human search for meaning, they differ greatly in culture, setting, and worldview. These differences come from the authors' backgrounds and the times in which their works were written. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is set in a bleak, undefined landscape, an empty road with a single tree, reflecting the disillusionment of post-World War II Europe. Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman*, on the other hand, is set in Uganda, filled with local traditions, myths, and community life that mirror the social and cultural realities of African people, especially women. While Beckett's characters live in a world where faith and meaning have collapsed, Makumbi's characters live in a world where meaning must be rediscovered through history, family, and tradition.

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* represents a Western, modernist perspective in which the world appears meaningless and empty. The characters, Vladimir and Estragon, are isolated, without family or clear identity. Their world has no structure or moral guide. It is full of confusion and repetition. This setting reflects Europe after the wars, when many people lost faith in religion, authority, and reason. As Beckett's critic Martin Esslin explains, the play shows "a universe without God, without faith, and without clear direction" (48). The barrenness of the land and the endless waiting capture the loneliness and hopelessness of modern existence.

In contrast, Makumbi's *The First Woman* is deeply rooted in Ugandan culture. The novel's setting, rural Nattetta and urban Kampala, is full of life, traditions, and storytelling. While Beckett's world is silent and colorless, Makumbi's is full of voices, histories, and ancestral connections. Her characters are not cut off from their roots; instead, they struggle to understand them. Kirabo's journey shows that meaning can be found through reconnection, with her mother, her grandmother Nsuuta, and her community. This reflects the African worldview, where identity and meaning come from belonging to one's people and understanding one's origins (102).

The role of religion and spirituality also differs between the two works. In *Waiting for Godot*, religion appears only as a faint memory. The name "Godot" suggests "God," but he never arrives, showing the loss of faith that defines Beckett's world. Vladimir and Estragon discuss salvation, punishment, and belief, but none of these ideas bring them comfort. The play questions whether God or meaning still exists in a world filled with suffering (52). In Makumbi's novel, however, spirituality remains alive but complex. Christianity and African traditional religion mix and clash, shaping the way characters understand life. For example, while Kirabo's grandmother draws strength from traditional myths of *The First Woman*, the village church promotes different ideas about sin and obedience. Through these tensions, Makumbi shows that Africans continue to search for meaning by balancing modern religion with traditional wisdom (186).

Another important difference lies in how time is treated. Beckett's time is static, nothing changes, and every day looks like the last. This gives the impression that life is an endless loop without progress or resolution. As Estragon says, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" (41). In *The First Woman*, time moves forward through generations. The novel connects the past, present, and future, showing how the history of women continues to shape the present. Kirabo's discovery of her mother and the retelling of the "first woman" myth show that understanding the past gives direction to the present. Unlike Beckett's circular view of time, Makumbi presents time as growth, a movement toward healing and self-knowledge.

The cultural tone of each text also affects how meaning is sought. Beckett's characters use absurd dialogue, silence, and humor to survive in a meaningless world. Their speech often goes in circles, reflecting confusion and despair. Makumbi's characters, however, use storytelling, oral tradition, and memory to make sense of their experiences. In Uganda's oral culture, stories are not only entertainment but also a way to pass wisdom and preserve identity. Nsuuta's storytelling becomes a tool for Kirabo to find herself and understand her place as a woman in society.

Finally, the treatment of community differs strongly between both works. In *Waiting for Godot*, the characters are alone, trapped in an empty world. Their loneliness reflects the breakdown of social connection in the modern Western world. In *The First Woman*,

community plays a central role. Even though Kirabo faces pain and rejection, she is surrounded by people, family, friends, and neighbors who shape her understanding of life. The novel suggests that meaning is not found in isolation but through relationships and collective memory.

In summary, *Waiting for Godot* and *The First Woman* differ in their cultural and historical settings, religious outlooks, and social structures. Beckett presents a Western, postwar vision of hopelessness and disconnection, while Makumbi offers an African, postcolonial view of rediscovery and resilience. These differences reveal how culture and history shape the ways people understand and search for meaning. While Beckett's world ends in uncertainty, Makumbi's world opens toward growth and renewal, showing that, across time and culture, the human quest for meaning takes many different paths.

4.3 Human Struggles

Samuel Beckett and Jennifer Makumbi both delve into the profound struggles that define human existence, albeit from vastly different cultural perspectives. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett illustrates the human struggle as an endless cycle of waiting, uncertainty, and despair. The protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, don't combat physical adversaries; rather, they grapple with the very void of existence. Their futile wait for Godot, a figure who never arrives, symbolises the human condition, where individuals cling to hopes of meaning, redemption, or transformation, even when such hopes often remain unfulfilled. Beckett's exploration is deeply psychological and existential, showcasing how

challenging it is to sustain belief in anything when life seems devoid of significance. As Vladimir poignantly states, “We wait. We are bored. No, don’t protest, we are bored to death, there’s no denying it” (58). Through such lines, Beckett articulates the struggle of faith and the anguish of existing without clear answers.

In contrast, Jennifer Makumbi's "*The First Woman*" addresses human struggles through the specific lenses of culture, society, and personal identity, particularly from a feminine perspective. Kirabo's journey centers on her quest for self-discovery in a world that has long silenced women. She confronts issues of identity, abandonment, and belonging, navigating the complexities of her father's concealment about her mother and societal expectations to comply rather than challenge. Yet, her grandmother Nsuuta introduces her to the tale of "*The First Woman*," which serves as a wellspring of strength. This myth empowers Kirabo to see her challenges as part of a broader narrative of women reclaiming their agency. Nsuuta's words resonate: “We women were not born to serve; we were born to live freely, but the world forgot” (147). Through storytelling, Makumbi illustrates that struggle can lead to increased self-awareness and empowerment.

While Beckett's characters are mired in silence and confusion, Makumbi's characters navigate their battles through dialogue, memory, and storytelling. In "*Waiting for Godot*," the protagonists engage in endless conversation, forgetfulness, and repetition, but remain largely inactive. Their struggle is introspective, an exploration of meaning in an absurd

reality. Critics, including Martin Esslin, have referred to this as the “theatre of the absurd,” depicting “man as lost in a universe without purpose” (45). This struggle is universal and timeless, reflecting the inherent fears and uncertainties of humanity. Conversely, in "*The First Woman*," the struggle is clearly contextualized within the frameworks of patriarchy, colonialism, and generational trauma. Kirabo’s quest for her mother and cultural roots serves as a powerful metaphor for Africa's ongoing journey to reclaim its identity after years of subjugation.

Both Beckett and Makumbi use relationships to express human struggle. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon’s friendship is the only thing that keeps them going. Even when they argue and threaten to part, they remain together because loneliness is unbearable. Their struggle for connection mirrors humanity’s need for companionship in a meaningless world. In *The First Woman*, relationships among women, Kirabo, Nsuuta, and Alikisa, also play a central role. Through love, conflict, and forgiveness, these relationships help them face pain and rebuild strength. In both texts, connection becomes a small victory against despair.

Another key similarity in their portrayal of human struggle is how both authors use time. Beckett’s characters are caught in endless repetition, symbolizing how people often feel stuck in cycles of hope and disappointment. Makumbi’s characters, in contrast, move through time learning from the past and shaping the future. This difference shows that

while Beckett views struggle as ongoing and unresolved, Makumbi views it as a journey that can lead to understanding and healing.

Finally, both writers highlight that human struggle is not meaningless, even when it feels so. For Beckett, the act of waiting, however hopeless, shows endurance, the refusal to give up. For Makumbi, the act of remembering and retelling women's stories is an act of resistance against forgetting. Both suggest that meaning comes not from solving life's mysteries but from continuing to live, love, and hope in the face of uncertainty.

In summary, Beckett and Makumbi reveal that struggle is at the heart of human experience. In *Waiting for Godot*, it is the struggle to find purpose in a silent universe; in *The First Woman*, it is the struggle to reclaim identity and freedom in a world of oppression. Their characters live in different times and cultures, yet they share the same human truth, that life's pain, confusion, and hope are what make existence meaningful.

4.4 Ways of Telling Stories and Building Meaning

Samuel Beckett and Jennifer Makumbi tell their stories in very different ways, yet both writers use unique styles to explore how people search for meaning in life. Beckett uses

simplicity, repetition, and silence to show the emptiness and uncertainty of human existence, while Makumbi uses storytelling, memory, and oral traditions to rebuild identity and connect the past with the present. Both authors show that how a story is told can shape how meaning is understood, and that even in confusion or pain, language and narrative can offer a way to make sense of life.

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* breaks away from traditional storytelling. It has no clear beginning, middle, or end; instead, it repeats the same events in two acts that mirror each other. The play opens and closes with Vladimir and Estragon waiting by a tree, showing that nothing changes and nothing is resolved (7, 75). This circular structure gives the story a feeling of endless waiting, just like life itself. Beckett removes the usual elements of plot and replaces them with dialogue that seems meaningless but carries deep emotion. His characters talk about small things; boots, hats, food but behind their words is a constant fear of emptiness. The pauses, silences, and repeated phrases build a rhythm that expresses human confusion and the longing for meaning.

Language is another way Beckett tells his story differently. The characters in *Waiting for Godot* speak in short, broken lines, full of interruptions and contradictions. When Estragon says, "Nothing to be done," and Vladimir answers, "I'm beginning to come round to that opinion" (7), the words sound simple, but they capture a deep truth about human helplessness. Beckett shows that meaning is not always found in big speeches or explanations but sometimes in the failure to explain. As Martin Esslin observes, Beckett's

drama “turns language against itself” to show how people keep speaking even when words cannot capture their feelings (45). In this way, his storytelling mirrors the human experience of trying to understand life that refuses to make sense.

Makumbi, on the other hand, tells her story in *The First Woman* through a rich and layered narrative full of voices, memories, and myths. Her storytelling style draws from African oral traditions, where stories are passed from one generation to another. The novel moves between the past and the present, between Kirabo’s personal story and the larger story of her family and community. This way of telling stories shows that life is not a straight line but a web of connections. Through stories told by her grandmother Nsuuta, Kirabo learns about her ancestors, *The First Woman*, and the strength that women once had before patriarchy tried to silence them (147).

Makumbi’s use of myths is also a powerful storytelling tool. The myth of “*The First Woman*” is both a story within the story and a metaphor for Kirabo’s journey of self-discovery. As Florence Stratton notes, Makumbi’s use of myth “reclaims women’s voices from silence and redefines history from a female perspective” (Stratton 67). The stories told by women in the novel help rebuild meaning in a society that has long tried to define women only through men. Through these myths and memories, Makumbi shows that storytelling itself can heal and give power.

Unlike Beckett’s minimalism, Makumbi’s language is full of life, color, and emotion. She blends English with Ugandan expressions and proverbs, creating a rhythm that feels

natural and familiar. This style reflects how African women often share wisdom through spoken words. The storytelling moves freely between laughter and sorrow, showing that meaning is not found in one emotion but in the balance of all. For example, when Kirabo learns about her mother's past, she feels pain but also strength in understanding where she comes from. The act of telling and hearing stories becomes a way to rebuild broken identities.

Both Beckett and Makumbi use storytelling to reflect the worlds they write about. Beckett writes from a modern European context marked by war, loneliness, and loss of faith, while Makumbi writes from a postcolonial African society dealing with history, gender, and cultural change. Yet both show that humans make meaning through stories, even when life feels meaningless. In *Waiting for Godot*, meaning is built through the act of waiting and speaking, no matter how empty the words feel. In *The First Woman*, meaning is built through remembering and retelling turning pain into wisdom and silence into voice.

In the end, both writers remind us that storytelling is not just about entertainment but about survival. Beckett's simple, repetitive style forces us to face the silence within life, while Makumbi's rich, layered voice shows how stories keep people alive across generations. Each writer proves that even in confusion or loss, human beings will always find ways to tell stories, and through those stories, to build meaning in the world.

4.5 The Global and Local Faces of Human Questions

Both *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett and *The First Woman* by Jennifer Makumbi explore questions that are both global and local in nature, questions about who we are, why we exist, and how we find meaning in a confusing world. However, while Beckett's play expresses these concerns in a universal, abstract way that reflects Western modernist thought, Makumbi's novel grounds similar questions in the specific cultural and historical experiences of Ugandan women. Together, the two works show how the human search for meaning can take different forms depending on time, place, and social reality.

In *Waiting for Godot*, the characters' endless waiting for someone named Godot represents the global question of human existence; why people live, hope, and continue even when life seems empty. Vladimir and Estragon's confusion, repeated conversations, and sense of hopelessness mirror the modern world's loss of direction after the wars and disillusionment of the twentieth century. Their situation represents what Jean-Paul Sartre calls "existential anguish," where humans realize that life has no fixed meaning unless they create one themselves (43). Beckett's world, therefore, speaks to a universal human condition, the struggle to make sense of life's meaning in a silent and uncertain universe.

In contrast, Makumbi's *The First Woman* reflects these same existential struggles but within the cultural and historical setting of postcolonial Uganda. Kirabo's search for her identity is not just a personal or spiritual journey; it is also shaped by the effects of patriarchy, tradition, and colonization. Her questions about who she is and where she belongs mirror the local realities of many African women who are caught between old

traditions and modern influences. Makumbi uses Ugandan myths and folklore, such as the story of Nnambi, to express global questions about womanhood, independence, and belonging through a distinctly African voice (Makumbi 87). This shows how global human struggles for meaning can take local forms that reflect each society's particular values and challenges.

Beckett's global view and Makumbi's local focus also differ in the way they imagine hope and resolution. Beckett's play offers no clear answers; the characters wait endlessly, and the meaning of their lives remains uncertain. This reflects the modern Western feeling that life might not have any higher purpose. Makumbi, however, allows her protagonist to grow and find a sense of belonging by reconnecting with her family, stories, and culture. Through *Kirabo*, Makumbi suggests that meaning can be found by returning to one's roots and embracing cultural identity, a message that speaks deeply to African readers while still addressing universal human emotions like loneliness, love, and self-discovery (102).

In summary, both Beckett and Makumbi deal with timeless questions about existence and meaning, but they express them through different lenses. Beckett's work looks at humanity as a whole, showing the emptiness of modern life in a global, philosophical way. Makumbi, on the other hand, shows how similar questions are lived out locally, in the bodies, histories, and cultures of Ugandan women. Together, their works remind

readers that the search for meaning is both a shared and a personal journey: one that unites all humans, yet one that each culture must answer in its own way.

This compares Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman*, showing how both writers explore the human quest for meaning through different cultures, times, and storytelling styles. Beckett, writing in post-war Europe, uses the image of waiting to express universal confusion, loneliness, and the emptiness of modern life. His characters' endless search for purpose reflects humanity's struggle to find direction in a meaningless world. In contrast, Makumbi's novel brings this same search into a Ugandan and feminist context, where meaning is found through cultural identity, storytelling, and the rediscovery of women's voices.

While Beckett's work is global and philosophical, showing life as a cycle of waiting and despair, Makumbi's narrative is local and grounded, showing how myths, traditions, and family histories help people, especially women, define who they are. Both writers, however, agree that the search for meaning is a natural part of being human. Whether through silence and uncertainty, as in Beckett, or through heritage and self-discovery, as in Makumbi, people everywhere are driven by the same need to understand their place in the world.

In essence, the comparison reveals that meaning is not fixed but shaped by time, place, and culture. Beckett gives voice to a world losing faith in reason and religion, while Makumbi reclaims meaning through storytelling and the affirmation of African

womanhood. Together, they remind readers that the human quest for meaning, though expressed differently across cultures, is universal, a shared effort to turn life's confusion into understanding and hope.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the theme of the human quest for meaning as reflected in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Jennifer Makumbi's *The First Woman*. Although these two works arise from very different cultural and historical backgrounds, they both speak to the deep human desire to understand existence, purpose, and identity. The analysis revealed that Beckett presents meaning as distant and uncertain, while Makumbi portrays it as something that can be rediscovered through storytelling, memory, and community. In *Waiting for Godot*, the endless waiting of Vladimir and Estragon becomes a metaphor for modern life, where people struggle to find direction in a world that offers no clear answers. Beckett's use of repetition, silence, and circular dialogue creates a sense of emptiness that mirrors the absurdity of the human condition. Yet, through the companionship of the two characters, the play also suggests that endurance and hope, however fragile, remain part of what makes us human.

Makumbi's *The First Woman*, by contrast, offers a more hopeful vision of the search for meaning. The novel follows Kirabo's journey toward self-discovery as she reconnects with her roots, her grandmother, and the oral traditions of her Ugandan community. Through these connections, she learns that meaning in life is not found in isolation or waiting, but in embracing one's history and belonging. Makumbi's storytelling thus becomes a means of restoring identity, especially for women whose voices have long been silenced by colonial and patriarchal systems. The comparison between Beckett and Makumbi shows that while Beckett's approach is existential and universal, Makumbi's is rooted in African communal and feminist thought. Both writers, however, confront the same human problem: how to find meaning in a confusing and unpredictable world.

This study contributes to knowledge by showing how literature across cultures expresses the universal struggle to create meaning in the face of uncertainty. Beckett, writing from the post–World War II Western world, captures the despair and emptiness of modern existence, while Makumbi, drawing from African feminist and postcolonial thought, rebuilds meaning through community and tradition. Their works together prove that though cultures differ, the human need for understanding remains constant. The research also demonstrates how existentialist philosophy and postcolonial feminism can be brought together to explain how individuals and societies respond to the challenges of existence. Existentialism focuses on individual freedom and the absurdity of life, while postcolonial feminism shows that identity and meaning are shaped by history, culture, and gender. The combination of these frameworks enriches the analysis and allows for a broader understanding of how people search for meaning both personally and collectively.

Another major contribution of the study lies in its focus on language and storytelling as tools for constructing meaning. Beckett’s sparse and repetitive language in *Waiting for Godot* reflects the emptiness of communication in a meaningless world, yet his characters keep talking because silence is unbearable. In contrast, Makumbi’s rich narrative voice in *The First Woman* shows how stories give life shape and purpose. Through storytelling, memory, and shared experiences, meaning is restored where it once seemed lost. The study therefore concludes that language, whether used in absurd dialogue or in traditional oral narratives, is essential to how human beings make sense of their lives.

Despite these valuable insights, the study faced some limitations. It focused on only two texts, which, though deeply relevant, cannot represent all cultural or literary expressions of the search for meaning. Beckett's European modernism and Makumbi's African feminism each reflect particular historical and philosophical experiences. Furthermore, as with most literary analyses, interpretation is influenced by the researcher's perspective, theoretical background, and cultural understanding. Readers from different backgrounds may interpret the same works differently, emphasizing religious, psychological, or political aspects that were beyond the focus of this study. In addition, while the study relied mainly on existentialist and postcolonial feminist frameworks, other theoretical approaches such as psychoanalysis or reader-response criticism could also shed new light on the texts. A further limitation lies in the imbalance of available materials, since Beckett's work has received extensive scholarship over decades, while Makumbi's relatively recent novel still lacks a wide range of critical studies. Time and resource constraints also prevented the inclusion of fieldwork or audience studies that might have provided insight into how readers from different cultures respond to these works.

Nevertheless, these limitations point the way for future research. Scholars may expand the comparative framework to include other writers who explore questions of meaning and existence, such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Future work can also explore how gender influences the search for meaning, particularly by examining other African women writers like Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Buchi Emecheta, who also use storytelling to challenge patriarchal structures. Another area for further study is the relationship between

language, silence, and identity in both Western and African contexts, as well as how spirituality shapes the understanding of purpose and destiny. Additionally, reader-response research could examine how audiences from different regions interpret the same themes of existence and meaning. These directions would broaden our understanding of how literature continues to reflect the universal human struggle for significance.

In conclusion, this research has shown that both *Waiting for Godot* and *The First Woman* are profound reflections on the human quest for meaning. Beckett's world is one of endless waiting and uncertainty, while Makumbi's is one of rediscovery and healing. Yet both reveal the resilience of the human spirit in its effort to understand life. Meaning, as these writers suggest, is not something fixed or easily found, it is created, reclaimed, and retold through our words, our histories, and our relationships. Beckett's characters endure because they must; Makumbi's characters reclaim because they can. Both teach that to live is to keep searching, questioning, remembering, and becoming. As Camus reminds us, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart." Thus, the search for meaning never truly ends; it continues in every generation, every story, and every act of hope that defines what it means to be human.

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