U

Waiting for The Godot

Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett—Life and Works

Birth and Education

Samuel Beckett was born on a Good Friday, the 13th April 1906, at Foxrock, near Dublin. That he was born on a Good Friday seems singularly appropriate for a man who subsequently became obsessed both with the Crucifixion and with the sheer bad luck of human existence. Beckett's family was Protestant. He was educated in Ulster atPortora Royal School and then proceeded toTrinity College, Dublin, where he studied the modern languages and where he eventually took his M.A. degree. From 1928 to 1930 Beckett lectured in English at the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, and in French at T.C.D. from 1930 to 1932. Then he gave up university life, moved for some time toLondon, wandered around Europe, and finally settled in Paris in 1937.

His Devotion to James Joyce

Beckett first appeared on the literary scene as a relatively conventional member of the highbrow experimental group that surrounded James Joyce in Paris. He had much in common with Joyce, both socially and intellectually. Joyce was considerably impressed by Beckett's essay on "Dante……Bruno……Vico…… Joyce," and

The Natural Bond Between Joyce and Beckett

There was, too, a natural bond between the two men. Their backgrounds and their intellectual tastes were similar; but, more than that, both were chronic victims of depression, though in very different ways. Joyce suffered from an older man's depression which grew from a life-time of private dedication to his own genius and the public rejection of it. Beckett's gloom, on the contrary, seems a condition he was born to. Depression has also been Beckett's constant theme, emerging more and more powerfully as his age and authority increased, until he reached the climax of despair.

The Nobel Prize

Beckett has never been a prolific writer. He remained quite obscure till almost the age of 47 when *Waiting for Godot*made him famous. Till 1953 (the date of the first production of this play), Beckett had published just a few books which included a short study of *Proust,* two slim volumes of poetry, a book of short stories called *More Pricks than Kicks,* and some novels *(Murphy, Molloy, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnamable).* In fact, up to 1950 Beckett was known only to the most devoted, followers of the *avant garde*. Yet only 16 years after the first performance of *Waiting of Godot* (which took place in Paris) Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Not only that; he was one of the few Nobel choices about whom nobody argued. His right to this honour was unquestioned and obvious. He was a recognised world figure, an authority, a major influence.

His Role in the French Resistance

Samuel Beckett took an active part in the French Resistance for nearly two years, during World War II, and for the next two-and-a-half years he had to hide himself from the Gestapo. The

circumstances under which he joined the Resistance throw much light on his character. At the end of 1931, Beckett, then; lecturer in French at Trinity College,Dublin, suddenly resigned, left Ireland and spent the next five years moving aboutEurope, sometimes in Germany sometimes in Austria, sometimes in England, finally settling in Paris in 1937. When the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, Beckett happened to be in Ireland spending a month's holiday with his mother. He hurried back to his flat in Montparnasse, but at first he refused to involve himself in a war which, as he insisted, was of no concern to a neutral Irishman like himself. Once the Germans occupied Paris in 1940, however, his attitude of unconcern did not continue for long. He felt soon very annoyed with the Nazi treatment of the Jews among whom he had many close friends. His anger led to action. By the end of 1940 he had become actively involved with a Resistance group with agents all over France gathering details of the movements of German troops. In August 1942, the group was betrayed, and out of 80 members, fewer than 20 survived. Beckett and his wife Suzanne were alerted and got away barely half an hour before the Gestapo came for them. For the next four months they were on the run, making their way through enemy territory, liable at any moment to be recognised, executed then and there, or sent to be tortured in a concentration camp. At last they were able to cross into unoccupied France, reaching a village high in the mountains behindAvignon. There they remained in semi-hiding until the German collapse, Beckett working as a farm labourer during the day-time, while in the evenings he wrote his fantastic, comic novel called *Watt*. His writing helped to take his mind off the war and the German Occupation. For these two-and-a-half years Beckett's life and Suzanne's depended wholly on his ability to pass himself off as a French peasant, and to earn enough money for a living. As soon as he could move about freely again, he hurried back to Ireland to see his mother, but he was now so reduced physically that many of his old friends failed to recognise him. These are facts which we should remember when we find Beckett described as an intellectual leading an isolated existence. More than most people Beckett had this experience of living close to death every minute of the day, and saw those around him butchered suddenly and ruthlessly. He has had personal experience of fear, suffering, hardship, and always he showed a firm determination to stay alive and go on, a determination which we find again and again in the characters that he has created.

Most Productive Period

Late in the winter of 1945 Beckett returned to his old apartment in Paris, finding it intact and waiting for him. This home-coming marked the beginning of the most productive period in Beckett's life. Seized by a powerful and sustained creative impulse he wrote in the next five years a series of important works: the plays—*Eleutheria, Waiting for Godot,* and *Endgame;*the novels—*Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable,* and the unpublished *Mercier et Gamier;* the short stories and fragments of prose published under the title *Nouvelles et Textes pour Rien*. All these works, some of which have become the basis of Beckett's reputation as one of the major literary forces and influences of his time, were written in French.

The Probable Reason for Beckett's writing in French

Beckett's writing a large number of his works in French, seems rather strange. There are many writers who have risen to fame with works written in a language other than their own, but usually they are compelled by circumstances to write in a foreign language: the necessities of exile; a desire to break the connection with their country of origin for political or ideological reasons; or the wish to reach a world audience, which might induce the citizen of a small language community, a Rumanian, or a Dutchman, to write in French or English. But Beckett was certainly not in exile in that sense, and his mother-tongue is the accepted *lingua franca* of the twentieth century. He chose to write his masterpieces in French because he felt that he needed the discipline which the

use of an acquired language would impose upon him. While in his own language a writer may be tempted to indulge in virtuosity of style for its own sake, the use of a foreign language may force him to divert his ingenuity to the utmost clarity and economy of expression instead of spending it on mere embellishments of style. Works like Beckett's, which have their source in the deepest levels of the mind and which probe the darkest wells of anxiety, would be destroyed by the slightest suggestion of glibness or facility; they must be the outcome of a painful struggle with the medium of their expression. By writing in a foreign language, Beckett perhaps wanted to ensure that his writing remained a constant struggle, a painful wrestling with the spirit of language itself.

Beckett's Great Triumph

The works published by Beckett up to 1950 hardly attracted any attention. However, when *Molloy* was published in 1951, it created a stir. But Beckett's real triumph came when *Waiting for Godot,*which had appeared in book form in 1952, was first produced on 5th January 1933 at the little Theatre de Babylone (now no longer in existence) in Paris. Against all expectations, this strange tragic farce, in which nothing happens and which had been scorned as undramatic by a number of managements, became one of the greatest successes of the post-war theatre. It ran for four hundred performances at the Theatre de Babylone and was later transferred to another Parisian theatre. Subsequently the play was translated into more than twenty languages and performed in Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Spain, Belgium, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Israel, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Japan, West Germany, Great Britain, the U.S.A., being seen in the first five years after its original production in Paris by more than a million spectators—a truly astonishing reception for a play so enigmatic, so exasperating, so complex, and so uncompromising in its refusal to conform to any of the accepted ideas of dramatic construction.

The Principal Works of Samuel Beckett

NOVELS

1. *Murphy.*
2. *Watt.*
3. The trilogy comprising *Molloy, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnamable.*

PLAYS

1. *Waiting for Godot.*
2. *Endgame.*
3. *Krapp's Last Tape.*
4. *Happy Days.*
5. *Play.*
6. *Breath.*
7. *Not I.*

For Radio, Television and Cinema

1. *All That Fall.*

2. *Embers.*
3. *Eh Joe.*
4. *Film.*
5. *Words and Music.*
6. *Cascando.*
7. *Come and Go.*

The Major Plays of Samuel Beckett

1. ENDGAME (1958)

Synopsis

Hamm and Clov

In a wheel-chair sits Hamm, who is blind. Hamm's parents, Nell and Nagg, both legless as the result of a cycling accident are in two ashbins. The only character who can walk is Hamm's servant Clov who, however, cannot sit down.

Clov is trying to leave Hamm who persistently bullies him, making him push his chair round, open and shut the ashbins, and look through the windows with a telescope. Hamm's mother, Nell, probably dies but this is not made clear. Hammcontinues a story, the one he has been telling himself all his days. Clov retires to change into travelling clothes while Hamm discards his possessions one by one and settles back in his chair, covering his face with a blood-stained handkerchief. Clov appears at the door, with umbrella and bag, ready to leave, but as the curtain falls he is still standing on the threshold watching Hamm.

Critical Comments

Clov's First Action, a Metaphor For Waking Up

Endgame is played out in a single room. Of the four characters, only Clov can move. He has a stiff-legged gait and is unable to sit down. His master, Hamm, is blind and paralysed in a wheel-chair. Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, are legless and dumped in dust-bins. When the curtain rises bothHamm and the dust-bins are covered with dust-sheets and the curtains are drawn across the windows. Clov's first act is to draw back the curtains, look mockingly at the world outside, and then take off the dust-sheets. This is so plainly a metaphor for waking up that we imagine the stage to be the inside of an immense skull.

A Tragi-Farce

In this play there is no mysterious Mr. Godot who might, if he ever turned up, solve the problems of the protagonists. There is, in fact, no one at all waiting in the wings; all the ingredients of the tragi-farce are present when the curtain goes up.

The Lost World of Feeling Versus the Devastated Present

Although all the four characters are even further gone along Beckett's usual road to ultimate deprivation than Vladimir and Estragon, they remain in touch with what they have left behind. Vladimir and Estragon remembered almost nothing: even yesterday was too far off for Estragon. By comparison,Hamm and the others in this play are sharply aware of what they have already lost. Nell reminds Nagg of their amorous youth when they rowed on Lake Como. Nagg reminds his son of how he used to cry for him in the night. Clov recalls the livelier days when he used to plead with Hamm for a bicycle. Hamm himself remembers "all those I might have helped." In short, they all remain vaguely in touch with the lost time when things still happened and when their emotions still stirred. The poignancy of the play depends on this continual tension between the lost world of feeling and the devastated present. Because of this, *Endgame*becomes, in its small way, genuinely tragic, in spite of its elements of farce, and in spite of its limitless negation.

The Reason for the Play's Great Appeal

The play represents what goes on in the internal world of a man like Hammsuffering from chronic depression. That is why the work survives, on even less plot than we get in *Waiting for Godot,* It is simply a day in the life of a man at the end of his tether, a man with only his pain-killer to look forward to, and his memories to look back upon. Once again, Beckett has created an image of the apalled, motionless world of catatonia. What starts as solipsism ends with those vague intimations of nuclear disaster which add to everyone's anxieties in our times. So Hamm speaks of his desolate room as a "shelter" and says, "Outside of here it's death", a statement which holds as true for a nuclear survivor as for a chronic sufferer from depression. Perhaps this is one reason why the play has exerted such a powerful grip on the imagination of large audiences.

A New Kind of Experience With Beckett's Old Material

The title of the play suggests a game of chess and Hamm prefaces each development of what is a "non-plot" by announcing, "Me to play." The play is an astonishing achievement, making use of elements the author has employed before in his work: the chess game, the man in the chair, the man telling himself a lifetime story, the master and servant relationship, the ritual cruelty on which no one comments because no one expects better. In spite of the similarities between this play and Beckett's previous work, *Endgame* is something new, offering a new kind of experience.

"Endgame" as a Monodrama, and as a Morality Play

In a bare room with two small windows, a blind old man, Hamm, sits in a wheel-chair. Hamm is paralysed, and can no longer stand. His servant, Clov, is unable to sit down. In two ash cans by the wall areHamm's legless parents, Nagg and Nell. The world outside is dead. Some great catasirophe, of which the four characters in the play are, or believe themselves, to be the sole survivors, has killed all living beings. A suggestion has been made that *Endgame*may be a monodrama. There is much to support this suggestion. The dustbins that hold the suppressed and despised parents; Hamm, blind and emotional; Clov, performing the function of the senses for him—all these might well represent different aspects of a single personality, repressed memories in the sub-conscious mind, the emotional and the intellectual selves. Is Clov then the intellect, bound, to serve the emotions, instincts, and appetites, and trying to free himself from such disorderly and tyrannical masters, yet doomed to die when its connection with the animal side of the personality is cut off? Is the death of the outside world the gradual weakening of the links to reality that takes place in the process of ageing and dying? Is*Endgame* a monodrama

depicting the dissolution of a personality in the hour of death? It is difficult to answer these questions with any certainty. The play was not, of course, planned as a sustained allegory of this kind. But there are indications that there is an element of monodrama in the play. Beckett's plays can be interpreted on many levels. *Endgame* may well be a monodrama on one level, and a morality play about the death of a rich man on another level.

2. KRAPP'S LAST TAPE (1953)

Synopsis

Past Experiences Recalled by Playing the Tape-Recorder

Krapp is an old man, grey-haired-, short-sighted, hard of hearing, and has a cracked voice. He begins by eating two bananas and drinking some liquor. Then he plays a tape on a tape-recorder, this tape having been recorded when he was thirty-nine. He omits certain passages, replays others and, finally, after another drink, starts recording another tape on this, his sixty-ninth, birthday. He begins briskly enough, but soon tires of the task, and sinks back into memories of the past. In fact, three tapes are involved in the play: Tape I is not played but is mentioned as having been made when Krapp was twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. In this tape, there is a reference to an unhappy love-affair and to certain resolutions such as drinking less and leading a less engrossing sexual life. This tape also contains a description of Krapp's father's last illness, Krapp's constipation, and his *magnum opus* which was yet to come. Tape II is played on the stage by Krapp (who is now sixty-nine) and it was made thirty years before when he was sound as a bell, except for his constipation, and when intellectually he was most alert. On this tape we hear an account of how Krapp waited for his mother's death, of a love scene in a boat, and the termination of another love-affair. Tape III, which Krapp now attempts to make, tells us about the past one year of Krapp's life.

Critical Comments

The Old Misery, and "The Suffering Of Being,"

By the time Beckett came to write*Krapp's Last Tape,* his only themes were memory and the contrast between a lost past and the sour present. The stage and the action in this play are, therefore, correspondingly bare. We find an old man, sitting alone, listening to a tape of himself talking thirty years before. It is a tape he had recorded when he was thirty-nine. The tape is a retrospect of a year just past and records the death of Krapp's mother, mixed with memories of a dutiful nursemaid, a dog and a rubber ball. There is also a moment of revelation at night by the seashore during a storm, the storm and darkness apparently reflecting some truth of Krapp's inner life. But what that "never to be forgotten" vision was we are not told. The old man keeps skipping the tape forward in an effort to find a scene which he has described in his ledger as "Farewell to Love."' Having found it, the old man then goes on to record his latest retrospect of the year that has just ended. His present style of recording lacks the fluency and precision of his youth, and befits a life failing to bits with old age and failure. In place of the young man's vision, he reports a bleaker, deprived reality: "What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool." He now lives a life of total obscurity. Only seventeen copies of his book, his "opus magnum", have been sold and he scarcely leaves his darkened room. As for his love-life, an old sweet-heart did come in a couple of times but he could not do, much. His only comfort is to lie in bed and dream

about his remote past: “Be again, be again. All that old misery. Once wasn’t enough for you.” He sounds like the voices perpetually rustling in the ears of Vladimir and Estragon:

Vladimir. What do they say?

Estragon. They talk about their lives.

Vladimir. To have lived is not enough for them.

Estragon. They have to talk about it.

Vladimir. To be dead is not enough for them.

Estragon. It is not sufficient.

(Waiting for Godot, Page 63)

Apparently, one really was not enough for Krapp, for he then plays again the portion of the tape which he has described as “Farewell to Love”, picking it up in the middle of the account of his girl and himself drifting in a boat on a summer’s day. Near the end of this account he hears the following words with which the incident closes: “Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn’t want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn’t want them back.” The play ends there, with Krapp sitting motionless staring before him, and the tape running on in silence. The last sentence of the tape is the key to the play. For the young man who made the recording it is an affirmation of strength: he has had his vision, the fire is in him, and he knows what he must do even if it involves a farewell to love. But for the old man listening motionless in the darkness it is an ambiguous echo of his own past renunciation: “Once wasn’t enough for you.” In the end, “all that old misery” is in fact too much for him; it is again “the suffering of being.”

Comparatively a More Human Play

This play shows a new direction for Beckett’s writing. All his earlier work was about depression in its various manifestations, from mere boredom to near catatonia, with appropriate attendant symptoms. In comparison, *Krapp’s Last Tape*is far more human. Its subject is not depression but grief and it shows precisely what has been lost. Here Beckett for once put aside the defences of habitt and allows memory its due, becoming vulnerable to the malignant disease of Time.

The Elusiveness of the Human Personality

In *Krapp’s Last Tape,* a one-act play, Beckett makes use of the tape-recorder to show the elusiveness of the human personality. Krapp is a very old man who throughout his adult life has annually recorded an account of the past year’s impressions and events on a tape. We see him old, decrepit, and a failure as a writer (only seventeen copies of his book have been sold in the current year), listening to his own voice recorded thirty years earlier. But his voice has become the voice of a stranger to him. Through the brilliant device of the autobiographical library of annual recorded statements, Beckett has found a graphic expression for the problem of the ever-changing identity of the self, which he had already described in his essay on Proust. In*Krapp’s Last Tape,* the self at one moment in time is confronted with its earlier incarnation only to find it utterly strange.

HAPPY DAYS (1961)

One Long Monologue

Happy Days has only two characters, a middle-aged couple called Winnie and Willie. Winnie is buried in sand and is unable to move; Willie does not appear fully until the end. Willie has very little to say and, as a result, Winnie has to hold the audience on her own, by her voice and her facial expressions, in one long wandering monolgue.

Winnie, Not a Dissatisfied or Grumbling Person

The play is intended to give us a sour view of a cosy marriage. We are introduced to a monosyllablic, gently bullied husband, with his straw hat, newspaper, and dirty postcard and a wife who wakes and sleeps to order, prays, and speaks ceaselessly about the happy days she has known. The woman consoles herself, while she still has the use of her arms, by searching her shopping bag which is full of miscellaneous articles, from a tooth-brush to a revolver. Her favourite phrase is "That's what I find so wonderful". She is the opposite of all those dissatisfied and grumbling characters on whom Beckett elsewhere lavishes so much sympathy.

Winnie, an Optimistic and Talkative Person

As though to prove that cheerfulness is no better rewarded than despair, Beckett gives Winnie the full standard treatment to which we are accustomed in his work. In Act I she is buried to the waist in earth. By Act II she gets buried up to the neck, unable to move her head in any direction. Yet she remains, to the bitterest end, firmly optimistic and talkative. We have here a comic version of the final anguish of the Unnamable who had said: "I can't go on, I must go on, I'll go on". Winnie does not, till the end, find anything to complain of and she sees no reason for ceasing to talk. She too hears voices but her reaction to them is different: "Sometimes I hear sounds. But not often. They are a boon, sounds are a boon, they help me. Yes, those are happy days, when there are sounds". In spite of Winnie's cheerfulness, Beckett here seems to be telling us that "blessed are the optimists for they shall be buried alive".

A Tragic and Funny Situation

In *Happy Days,* Beckett portrays the human condition in the image of a cheerful, plump woman, Winnie, who is slowly sinking into a mound of earth. On the one hand it is tragic that Winnie should be so cheerful in her terrible and hopeless predicament; on the other hand it is funny. In one sense her cheerfulness is sheer folly and the author seems to make a deeply pessimistic comment on human life; in another sense, however, Winnie's cheerfulness in the face of death and nothingness is an expression of man's courage and nobility, and thus the play provide a kind of catharsis. Winnie's life does consist of happy days because she refuses to be dismayed.

PLAY (1963)

The Torment of the Characters

On one level, *Play* is a dramatic version of Beckett's novel, *The Unnamable*.The story is set in some kind of after-life where the characters— a man, his wife, and his mistress—are encased in urns, their heads fixed immovably, their faces "so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost apart of urns". As usual all they can do is talk, and what the characters say constitutes their torment. If

they were allowed to stop talking, they would find the silence and the darkness they long for. But they are compelled to tell their sordid little story endlessly and literally so, because the play is repeated a second time without variation. Most likely, all the three characters are expiating without end the guilt of having lived.

The Theme of Adultery

The plot itself is conventional. Adultery, after all, has been the great theme of the European novel from *La Princesse de Cleves* and *Adolphe,* through *Le Rouge et le Noir, Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*down to *Le Diable au Corps* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In *Play,* Beckett used that tradition and extends it into his own particular preoccupation with hell and despair. The mixture of angry contempt and disgusting sexuality is the real, substance and theme of the play which is one of Beckett's most powerful pieces of writing. The first of all Beckett's heroes was named Belacqua, after an amiable and passive inhabitant of Dante's purgatory. In contrast, the characters in *Play* are in real hell: their sin is lust and hatred, not sloth, and their torment is proportionately agonising.

Characters in Urns

The characters in *Play* are placed in urns because they are shown to us after they have died and departed from this earth. The neck of each of these characters is "held, fast in the urn's mouth" so that there can be no change of position and no movement which might bring relaxation to the actors or distraction to the audience. Their faces seem "almost part of urns" and therefore make it impossible for us to imagine any definite identity regarding them. On these three faces the entire attention of the audience is to be fixed throughout the play since, apart from the urns, there is nothing else for the audience to look at. By a complete sacrifice of movement and change, Beckett achieves a fantastic degree of concentration inducing a heightened awareness, which is the very essence of the dramatic experience.

The Shifting Beam of Light

The speeches of these three characters are provoked by a spotlight moving from one face to the other. The source of light is single but the stage directions specified by Beckett make it clear that he is using the spotlight not just to illumine the faces of the actors; the spotlight is a character as much as those whom it illumines. In performance this device is tremendously effective, even though the audience is never tempted to try to find any explanation for the light. The constantly shifting beam of light produces the sense of movement which the actors in their urns cannot produce; at the same time the beam intensifies the concentration, giving rise to a strong sense of claustrophobia.

Widely Differing Reactions to the Play

It has been said that the situations presented by *Play* exist at such a level of simplicity that there is nothing which leaves the slightest margin for argument over its interpretation. Yet, for all its simplicity, *Play*has been known to produce widely differing reactions among spectators and critics. To one critic, it brought an agony of heightening awareness, accompanied by a heightened understanding. Another critic thus commented on it: "These three suffering heads conjure up not only three whole lives, but also awaken the reverberations that transform them from the trivial to the universal. Here are people in all their funny, disgraceful, pitiable fragility, and all the touchingness, in spite of everything, of their efforts to love one another, and endure." Yet another critic pointed out that *Play* "invited an audience to undergo an experience". This experience might

be a strange one, an unusual one, even a nerve-racking one, but it was a dramatic one. The comments of one more critic deserve notice: "Each time a Samuel Beckett play has a world premiere, the world turns a deeper shade of black. Once his people were hopeful, waiting for Godot; later they crouched in garbage cans in *Endgame;* Krapp was moribund while listening to his last tape; then, in *Happy Days,* the female lead kept sinking deeper and deeper into a mound. Now Beckett's characters have gone all the way to hell in a play called *Play*. Only the heads of the three actors could be seen. Their bodies were inside giant clay urns. Spotlights kept picking out the appropriate urn as the dialogue developed..... The second half of the play is a verbatim recapitulation of the first half." Such would be the reaction of the large majority of theatre-goers also. Until Beckett's dramatic methods and purposes are clearly understood, until an audience makes the necessary mental adjustment to see his plays performed on the stage or even to read his plays, the audience is likely to experience bewilderment, incredulity, anger, or contempt.

Release From Consciousness

The attainment of the release from consciousness, from the need to tell oneself the tale of one's own life, seems impossible. For the true release would lie in one's knowing that one is no longer conscious. Yet with death consciousness ceases, so we can never know that we no longer exist. Hence the last moment of a dying man's consciousness can be imagined as remaining suspended for ever in the limbo of an eternal unawareness of its cessation. This is the situation dramatised by Beckett in *Play*.Here are the three dead characters—the husband, the wife and the mistress, unaware of one another's presence, only dimly aware that they are dead, endlessly repeating the contents of their last moments of consciousness. How can eternity itself be put on to the stage within the confines of a text that runs to barely half an hour? Beckett has attempted to achieve the impossible by having the entire text of *Play* spoken twice, identically, except that the words become faster and softer.

5. ALL THAT FALL (1956)

Mrs. Rooney's Journey to the Railway Station

Maddy Rooney, a fat, talkative, old woman, is going to a country railway station to meet her blind husband, Dan, who is returning from his office in the city. On the way she meets her old admirer, Mr. Slocum, who offers her a lift in his car. It is with great difficulty that she gets into the car because of her huge bulk. On her arrival at the station, she has an equal difficulty in getting out of the vehicle. She is assisted up the steps to the station by a woman called Miss Fill. The train is late, though the station-master is unable to say why.

The Reason for the Train's Late Arrival

On the way home, Maddy asks her husband why the train was late. Dan gives a dramatised account of the journey but does not explain the reason for the late arrival of the train. His account is interspersed with all kinds of talk about various matters, including a recollection by Maddy of a psychology lecture. At one point, Dan admits to a desire to murder a child, confessing that he had often contemplated attacking Jerry, the boy who usually leads him home from the station. Presently Jerry comes running with an object like a ball, which Dan had dropped. Dan takes it, without explaining what it is beyond saying that it is a thing which he carries about him. Jerry also tells Maddy that the train was late because a child had fallen from it under the wheels and been killed.

The Characters in the Play

All That Fall was Beckett's first radio play, and it shows his obvious boredom and impatience with the demands of conventional narrative and plot. There are, besides Mr. and Mrs. quite a number of characters in this play—Christy, a carter; Tyler, a retired bill-broker; Slocum, a clerk in the race-course; Tommy, a porter at the railway station; Barrel, the station-master; Miss Fill, a lady in her thirties. All these persons serve, in their different ways, as foils to Mrs. Maddy Rooney's grumbling. Mrs. Rooney is hardly in a condition to travel, being in her seventies and being too fat; and Mr. Rooney, in turn, is decrepit and also blind. Mrs. Rooney is portrayed as a woman whose only satisfaction lies in the sickness, operations, and bereavements she has endured. Her talk is expressive of a death-wish: "It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home. Mr. Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution". In their different ways, both husband and wife are still mourning the loss of their daughter, Minnie, who died as a child. For both of them, that first death has changed their lives into nothing more than a long day's dying. However, at its start the play is a delectable comedy.

Cause of Depression in Beckett's Plays.

All Beckett's characters are depressed not for any particular reason but because they are alive, which, in turn, means that they will eventually die. If the human psyche be regarded as a battleground for a ceaseless struggle between the pleasure-principle and the death-instinct, in Beckett's work the death-instinct wins.

"Christ What a Planet"!

The play ends with Jerry's explanation to Maddy about the train's late arrival. The boy's explanation shows that grief is springing up in another part of this universe for another couple much like the Rooneys. Earlier in the play Mrs. Mooney had cried out in despair, when finding it difficult to climb up the station-steps: "Christ what a planet!" At that time it was just another exaggeration which had a comic effect on us. By the end of the play it seems the only appropriate response. Did Dan Rooney push the child down the train ? We are not sure but the possibility is there because this man is a killer at heart.

The Title

The title of the play is taken from the text of a sermon that was to be preached at the village church. "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down". According to the stage directions, the Rooneys' reaction to this text was an outburst of "wild laughter".

The Unanswered Questions

All That Fall shows a very fat Irish woman, Maddy Rooney, on her way to the railway station of Boghill to meet her blind husband, Dan Rooney, who is due to arrive by the 12-30 train. She meets a number of people with whom she wants to establish contact but fails. "I estrange them all", she says. Mrs. Rooney lost a daughter more than forty years ago. The train arrives late. On the way home Dan Rooney tells his wife that often in winter he is tempted to attack the boy who leads him home from the station. When they are almost home, the same little boy runs after them; he is carrying an object Mr. Rooney is believed to have left in his compartment on the train. It is a child's ball. The boy also knows why the train had to stop on the way: a child had fallen out of the train and been killed on the tracks. Did Dan Rooney push the child out of the train? Did his impulse to destroy young lives overcome him during the journey? And has his hatred of children something to do with Maddy's childlessness? Maddy Rooney stands for the forces of life and procreation, Dan for the death wish. Does the Biblical quotation of the title support Dan Rooney's

point of view? Was the child who was killed and redeemed from existence saved the troubles of life and old age and thus upheld by the Lord? When the text from the psalm is mentioned as the subject of next Sunday's sermon, both Maddy and Dan break out in wild laughter.*All That Fall* touches many of the chords that are sounded in *Waiting for Godot* and*Endgame,* but in a somewhat lighter and less searching manner.

6. EMBERS (1959)

The Hero's Compulsive Need to Talk

The radio-play *Embers* resembles*Krapp's Last Tape* in that its hero is also an old man musing on the past. The old man, Henry, resembles the heroes of Beckett's later novels in his recall of memories in the form of "stories" and in his compulsive need to talk. As the voice of his (dead) wife tells him: "You should see a doctor about your talking. What must it be like for Addie (the daughter)? Do you know what she said to me once, when she was quite small? She said, Mummy, why does Daddy keep on talking all the time? She heard you in the lavatory. I didn't know what to answer."

The Hero's Defence Against the Intolerable Reality of Other People and of the Sea

Embers takes the first necessary leap into a thorough-going solipsism. It concerns a man called Henry wandering alone on a beach, talking and talking, to drown out the impossible sound of the sea. He summons up ghosts—of his father who does not speak, of his wife who does. He tells stories, commands sounds (for instance, the noise of hooves which begin and end at his wish), listens to brief flashbacks from the bullied life of his daughter whom he never liked. In short, he tries everything to suppress the sea's eternal complaint. As his wife points out in the course of their imaginary conversation, this is an old obsession of his. He has spent a lifetime talking, loudly and like a maniac, to himself. Like many of Beckett's heroes, Henry's main defence against the intolerable reality of other people and of the sea is to tell stories. One Story that he tells on and off concerns the old man, Bolton, and his doctor-friend, Holloway, both standing before the fading embers of a fire in a darkened house.

Beckett's Devotion to the Principle of Contraction

Beckett, who had been writing stories about men shut in their rooms writing stories, has reached, with this play, a point of contraction where solitude and the inner spiritual depths are no longer bearable. Beckett's devotion to the principle of contraction had been unwavering. Each work was stripped more and more of its inessentials until all that remains is a kind of shorthand expressing despair. Henry, however, remains a solipsist, beyond friendship and help; the people he summons, like the hooves, have no existence outside his own head. The only external reality is the sound of the sea, which he can neither tolerate nor escape, and which is a tormenting accompaniment to his deprived life burning, like the fire in Bolton's house, down to its embers.

Difficulties of Being a Writer

Embers is a condensed dramatic statement of the difficulties of being a writer. Two subsequent radio plays deal with a similar subject, though from a different angle. They deal, not with the enormous human cost of creating a work of art, but with the process of creation.

7. WORDS AND MUSIC (1962)

The Process of Composition

In *Words and Music* there are three characters—Croak, a poet; and his two servants. Words and Music, whom he calls Joe and Bob. One evening, while waiting to perform for him, Joe rehearses a piece of prose composition on the subject of "sloth". When Croak arrives, he announces that the theme for the evening is "love". Joe recites his composition, substituting the word "love" for "sloth", but not always even remembering to do that. Croak feels distressed, and calls upon Bob to try something more appropriate. Bob's efforts are equally disappointing. Croak suggests another theme, "age", but feels even more distressed by the paltry attempts of his two servants. Gradually, however, the efforts of Joe and Bob lead to the emergence of two lyrics which are sung rather badly by Joe, Finally, Croak can stand no more of it and goes away, leaving the other two still unreconciled.

The Labour and Frustration of Creation

Words and Music is a brilliant, witty, entirely original dramatisation of the labour and frustrations of creation—the poet alternately bullying and despairing, with his instruments inept, unwieldy, and only slowly becoming usable. The play also illustrates vividly the distance between the music which a poet hears in his head and the words at his command, and the slow, unwilling process of controlling these two elements until they finally unite in a single work of art. Many poets have described the different ways in which they build up poems line by line, and Beckett's play represents one such attempt.

8. CASCANDO (1963)

Drowning the Voice of Verbal Consciousness

The compulsion to talk, to tell oneself stories, which is the thread that runs through the three novels of Beckett's great trilogy, also forms the subject of his radio play *Cascando*. Here the drowning of the voice, of verbal consciousness, which is for ever compelled to fill the void with words,*i.e.* compelled to tell itself stories, is accompanied by surges of non-verbal consciousness, the swell of emotion expressed in the music. The play ends inconclusively. As in *Endgame,* as in *Waiting for Godot,* we are left uncertain whether the final consummation, the attainment of salvation, of the cessation of suffering through consciousness has in fact been, or can ever be, reached. In the radio play*Words and Music* we find a tyrannical master: Croak, issuing orders to his two servants. Words and Music, to fill the time, with improvisations on such subjects as Sloth, Age, and Love. Always unsatisfied, he savagely clouts his servants and calls for more. The parallel between Croak and the "Opener" of *Cascando* is thus quite clear. And so is the yearning for peace from consciousness which emerges from Words's final improvisation. In the *Film,* the same flight from self-perception is put into a visual form. The flight from self-perception in an attempt to reach the positive nothingness of non-being is an important theme of all Beckett's work. In *Film* this theme is concretized as the flight of the hero from a pursuer, who eventually is revealed to be none other than himself.

The Opener and the Voice

Cascando deals with the same theme as *Words and* Music, though from a slightly different point of view. Instead of Croak, we have an Opener; instead of Words or Joe, there is the Voice, striving to tell a story. If he can tell the right story, then the Voice will be allowed to rest in silence for ever. The Opener can bring in the Voice and the Music separately or together. The Opener denies that the sounds are, as some say, in his head. "It's my life," he says, "I live on that." And he adds, "There is nothing in my head." Sometimes Voice describes the movements and actions of a

man called Woburn.Woburn, a derelict, staggers on his motiveless way to the sea, continually collapsing in the mud and raising himself up again, till he finally drifts out to sea in an open boat. The Voice stumbles on likeWoburn, sustained by Music, gradually weakening, urged violently on by the Opener: "Come on! Come on!" The Opener himself ponders on why he bothers, what makes him blunder on opening and closing stories which are never quite what he is after.

The Artist's "Fidelity to Failure"

Cascando is a dramatization of the artist's 'fidelity to failure". So the Opener, driven on by the hope of resting after a last "right" story, is faithful in the end not to his inner voices, but simply to his function, "I open and close."

9. FILM (1964)

Film begins with a human eye opening very slowly. Then with the camera we pursue a man who enters a house and then a room in the house. Here, the man draws the curtains, puts out the dog and cat, tears down from the wall a picture of a god with protruding eyes, covers a cage containing a watchful parrot, and a bowl in which swims a staring goldfish. Settling himself in a rocking chair he looks through a number of photographs of himself from infancy to middle age. He tears these up one by one and then rocks himself into a sleep or oblivion. When he wakes up, he is brought face to face with his tireless pursuer—now seen to be himself. Confronted with this self-perception, he sinks back into the chair, with his head between his hands.

Film, Samuel Beckett's only venture into the medium of the cinema, was made inNew York, directed by Alan Schneider, and starring Buster Keaton.

10. IMAGINATION DEAD IMAGINE (1965)

The subject of *Imagination Dead Imagine* is precisely what its title says: imagine a world in which the imagination is dead. The narrowness of Beckett's range, the way the same themes are repeated, transfigured, from work to work until the whole thing seems like a single block of marble, is unusual in a writer of his stature. He began depressed, worked his way through to an art which expressed that depression poignantly and in a multitude of ways, and he rarely deviated from his logic of denial. He began depressed and has been true to his depression. It took unusual courage and determination, as well as great talent, to follow this logic of denial through to its desolate end.

11. COME AND GO (1965)

In *Come and Go,* three women sit in a circle of light on a dark stage. Their ages are "undeterminable". They are joined by a shared, distant past. But between past and present a life-time of desolation has intervened and death now is imminent for all the three. When each in turn moves out of the circle of light, the remaining two come together on their bench:

Flo. Ru.

Ru. Yes.

Flo. What do you think of Vi?

Ru. I see little change. *(Flo moves to centre seat, whispers in Ru's ear. Appalled).*Oh ! *(They look at each other. Flo puts her anger to her lips).* Does she not realise?

Flo. God grant not.

This dialogue is repeated with variations three times, as each of the three women comes and goes from the light to the shadows. All are doomed, but each is determined to protect the others from the destructive knowledge. So they sit unspeaking, "dreaming of love", "of the old days", and "of what came after". Silence is the one means of preserving the illusions by which they all survive. In the end, they join hands, all three linked together as in a childhood game.

In *Come and Go* we have the opposite of the vicious circle of *Play,* where each of the three protagonists was tormented by thoughts of the others' secret pleasures. Here we have only a remote protectiveness and mutual illusion, a ritual coming and going from light to dark and a mutually tender suppression of the knowledge of evil, the pang for what is lost and gone, excluding the dread of what is to come.

The miniature playlet *Come and Go*also deals with the theme of our reluctance to face our own predicament, while we are only too eager to gossip about that of our fellow men. We are confronted with three female characters each of whom leaves in turn, allowing the two others to inform each other of some impending disaster (perhaps death) which is about to descend on the absent woman.

12. EH JOE (1966)

The same economy and terseness characterise Beckett's first television play, *Eh Joe*. Here a lonely, elderly man listens, without speaking and with increasing horror, to a woman's voice reproaching him with his hardness of heart towards her which drove her to suicide. This is a theme, Beckett has often dealt with before—regret about love not given, love refused in the past. What is astonishing is his mastery of the new medium. This is a television play which could not exist in any other medium. In a sense the woman's voice which Joe hears is his own voice; it is his compulsion to tell himself his own story. For to be alive is to be aware of oneself; to be aware of oneself is to hear one's thoughts, the endless, relentless stream of words. (In the radio plays *Embers*and *All that Fall,* this compulsive talking blends into a background of natural sound—the sound of the sea in *Embers,* the sound of the road in *All that Fall.*

In *Eh Joe,* a television play, a man called Joe is assailed by a woman's voice. Voices have assailed this man before, and he has vanquished them all: his father's, for instance, and his mother's. But this woman persists. The woman reminds Joe of the other voices he has heard in his head and his method of strangling them, "mental thuggee", as he calls the process. The woman's voice goes on to describe in great detail the suicide of a girl whom Joe had loved and rejected. The special poignancy is that the girl died not out of rage but out of loneliness, not turned away from a memory of Joe but toward it.

Eh Joe has the bare bones of a narrative and employs a language reduced to its essentials, each detail working precisely in its place. It is *Krapp's Last Tape*turned inside out, telling a similar story but from the girl's point of view. It is also a dramatic version of all those voices which so haunted Beckett's other heroes, the voices described by Vladimir and Estragon, but never before heard speaking for themselves. Joe himself does not speak. Indeed, after the opening moments, he does not even move. We just hear a woman's voice, low, distinct, remote, relentlessly accusing Joe. The theme of her, speech is Joe's guilt, and perhaps what she says is a clue to the negation and depression of Beckett's other works. The woman's voice reminds Joe of how he had killed all those who loved him once. Now, as it were, he kills them a second time, this time in his head.

There is no escape from the sense of guilt. This play is Beckett's most intimate and precise image of the anguish which is the theme of his work; it shows a man shut off on his own in a sealed room, tortured by a multitude of painful memories.

13. BREATH

Come and Go has a duration of about three minutes on the stage, and it employs just 121 spoken words. Obviously, even this seemed excessive to Beckett. The play called*Breath* lasts precisely thirty-five seconds and dispenses altogether with actors and words. This reduction seems inevitable in the context of what Beckett had been trying to do all his life. Beckett had been writing throughout his career about deprivation in all its forms—material and emotional. It was therefore only consistent that he should ultimately create a work of art deprived of art. Perhaps Beckett in this play is saying: "Beware, have no illusions; life is only a breath between the birth-cry and the death-cry. But he may also be saying that life is simply a cosmic yawn. After all, he laboured devotedly to express his depression in a multitude of ways and the one symptom of depression he never shirked was boredom—chronic, paralysing boredom, engulfing everything, particularly the weary profession of writing. From the beginning, Beckett had created characters who, in their different ways and at different intensities, had been at their last gasp. *Breath* is, literally, that last grasp.

14. NOT I

Not I focuses in one final, unanswerable image all Beckett's life-long obsessions. In a way it is the final dramatic expression of the Unnamable's last words and Beckett's own pessimistic statement of his vocation as a writer:

> The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.

But with this difference: instead of will-power and obligation there is now an absolute, immediate, irresistible need to express.

Not 1 perhaps states the predicament of Beckett himself as an artist who has gone on telling stories despite his distaste, disinterest, and minimal gift for narrative, forced both by the nature of the forms he employs and by his own unwavering preference for anonymity to continue with the fiction of making fictions out of what is, in fact, personal anguish. In a way, the whole gallery of his invented characters, from Belacqua Shuah through all the heroes of his novels and plays, are variations of his own "vehement refusal to relinquish third person"; they are ways of affirming in the teeth of experience the two words which will keep the anguish at bay "Not I".

Miscellaneous Comments on the Plays

"Beckett's plays stay in the bones. They haunt me sleeping and waking, coming upon me when I am least aware. Sometimes a stray bit of conversation heard by accident on a bus or in a restaurant brings home one of Vladimir's and Estragon's little canters. Sometimes I find myself actually reacting like Clov or like Hamm or, more often, like both simultaneously. Sam's

characters seem to me always more alive and more truly lasting than those in the slice-of-life realistic dramas with which our stages today abound." *(Alan Schneider)*

"The farther he goes the more good it does me. I don't want philosophy, tracts, dogmas, creeds, way-outs, truths, answers,*nothing from the bargain basement.* He is the most courageous remorseless writer going…….. *(Harold Printer)*

"I do not know what Beckett thinks of women, but I know that he understands them profoundly from the inside. If his plays manage to affect us and move us, it is because Beckett, inspite of his modesty, manages to express his immense compassion for all human life and because he is one of those exceptional men to whom love and lucidity are on the same level." *(Madeleine Renaud)*

"For everyone Beckett is the artist of deprivation and terminal depression, and he has expressed his vision of desolation with unique power. He has pushed all the way through to the end logically, emotionally, artistically; one does not need to read every word he has written to admire the courage and purity of his effort, to identify with it, and to recognise the cost." *(A. Alvarez)*

Waiting for Godot, according to Beckett, is a "play that is striving all the time to avoid definition". Beckett also said about this play: "One Act would have been too little and three Acts would have been too much." Vivian Mercier thus commented upon this play: A play in which nothing happens,*twice*.

"It is the peculiar richness of a play like *Waiting for Godot* that it opens vistas on so many different perspectives. It is open to philosophical, religious, and psychological interpretations, yet above all it is a poem on time, evanescence, and the mysteriousness of existence, the paradox of change and stability, necessity and absurdity. In watching *Waiting for Godot* we feel like Watt contemplating the organization of Mr. Knott's world: 'But he had hardly felt the absurdity of those things, on the one hand, and the necessity of those others, on the other, (for it is rare that the feeling of absurdity is not followed by the feeling of necessity), when he felt the absurdity of those things of which he had just felt the necessity (for it is rare that the feeling of necessity is not followed by the feeling of absurdity).'" *(Martin Esslin)*

Beckett made the following comments on his*Endgame:*

(1) "Rather difficult and elliptical, mostly depending on the power of the text to claw, more inhuman than *Waiting for Godot"*

(2) "In *Waiting for Godot,* the audience wonders if Godot will ever come, in*Endgame* it wonders if Clov will ever leave."

Michael Robinson expressed the following opinion about *Endgame:* "It has a lautness and power which makes its brevity as exhausting as many three-act dramas. A masterpiece of contraction it is probably Beckelt's most individual work; it is also his finest play."

Says Martin Esslin: *"If Waiting for Godot* shows its two heroes whiling away the time in a succession of desultory and never-ending games, Beckett's second play deals with an 'endgame', the final game in the hour of death. *Waiting for Godot* takes place on a terrifyingly empty open road. *Endgame*in a claustrophobic interior. *Waiting for Godot* consists of two symmetrical movements that balance each other;*Endgame* has only one Act that shows the running down of a

mechanism until it comes to a stop. Yet *Endgame,* like *Waiting for Godot,* groups its characters in symmetrical pairs."

"In *Krapp's Last Tape* the soliloquy has found, for the first and .probably the last time, a form which combines the immobile mask and the mobile face, mime and speech, monologue and dialogue, and offers all their various resources to one performer."
(Roy Walker)

"In Act I, buried to her waist in the exact centre of the mound stands Winnie, a woman of about fifty, well preserved, blonde for preference. In Act II, she is embedded to the neck and cannot even move her head." (Alec Reid on *Happy Days)*

"The actress moreover is given a hundred chances to show what a voice can do, to transform simple words into poetry. It's a splendid virtuoso part, though an immobilized one like Hamm's, and her (Winnie's) simple love, largely unrequited, for Willie, lifts the tedium to crescendos of chirpy pathos."
(Hugh Kenner on *Happy Days).*

"The three characters of *Play* are fixed in three identical grey urns about one yard high, their necks held fast by the mouth of the urn. Unable to turn their heads they stare into the auditorium throughout the play, their aged faces almost part of the urns, expressionless like their faint, toneless voices. The three voices speak their separate versions of a mutual obsession as mechanically as a fugue, each impervious to the presence of the other two. They have no names, simply the designations M, W_1 and W_2 which aim at anonymity but also stand for all men and women who have, like them, been caught in a three part love-affair." *(Michael Robinson)*

Alec Reid thus introduces us to Beckett's *Embers, Words and Music,* and*Cascando:* "These three works, a play written especially for broadcasting and two short pieces for radio, are conceived in terms of sound without sight. No certain line divides the exterior world from that within the skulls of the characters. In *Embers,* for example, we hear the voice of a woman,Ada, Henry's wife. We are not told, however, whether she is actually present sitting beside Henry, or whether she is an abstraction in his mind like his dead father whom he also imagines sitting beside him, but whose voice is never heard. Ambiguity, abstraction, these are the possibilities peculiar to sound radio which Beckett is exploiting here to the full. Thus, we have impact, not argument."

"Embers may be taken as the paradigm, for once explicit, of everything Beckett has done since the last 1950s. It is unusual in presenting so explicitly, albeit enigmatically, the elements of the past situation, the past happenings, from which the present agony is a recoiling, of which it is a product, and around which it obsessively revolves.....*Words and Music* and *Cascando*differ radically from all these other works in having no realistic content whatever. Abandoning the order of "plot" which makes*Embers* so difficult, they open themselves to the unspecifying quality of broadcast sound, to the documentary uses of which they are related as to a newspaper report a Symbolist*poem.....Words and Music* is the most profound, the most original use to which Beckett has put radio." ***(Hugh Kenner)***

Beckett as a Playwright

I

Beckett's Total Theatre

Samuel Beckett was an innovator. He created a completely new kind of play, and in doing so he greatly enlarged the scope of the theatre. In order to get the best out of the experience of seeing his plays on the stage, an audience has to make an adjustment in themselves and their attitude.

In this connection an important point is that Beckett deliberately designed his plays to be performed by actors for an audience sitting in a theatre or beside a radio. He meant these plays to be experienced immediately, as the sounds came across the footlights or out of the loudspeaker. These plays are not intended to be read from the silent and stiff pages of a book. They are pieces of theatre, needing to be performed if they are to make their full impact. In fact, Beckett's plays cry out to be acted on a stage, and this is a sure sign of authentic drama. They produce in an audience an effect peculiar to the theatre, an immediacy of *something experienced directly*as distinct from the more remote impact of*something described*. To secure this, Beckett makes use of every means at the disposal of the dramatist—words, movements, costumes, scenery, sound effects, lighting, and so on. But he goes on to blend and mix these ingredients into a new, complex unity. It is not the words, the movements, the sights, which separately produce the impact; it is the new experience which the audience undergoes from the combination of all these elements on the stage. This process involving the eyes, the ears, the intellect, the emotions, all at once, may be described as "total theatre".

An Example of Beckett's Art

As a rule, Beckett's characters use ordinary words and short sentences. They do not indulge in philosophical or moral arguments; they seldom soliloquise: and they never preach. Movement as much as speech is one of the essentials of drama, and so Beckett keeps his characters busy. Their actions may not be spectacular, but every move is part of the total experience, as eloquent as any words. The dialogue in Act II (Pages 88—89) between Pozzo and Vladimir is a fair example of Beckett's art. On stage are four characters, two friends calledVladimir and Estragon, a blind man Pozzo whom they have just helped to his feet and a servant Lucky still lying on the ground. In Act I, Pozzo, then in full possession of his sight, had talked to Vladimir and Estragon, and had made Lucky do some pathetic tricks, before taking him to a fair with the intention of selling him. Now twenty-four hours later, Pozzo is blind and no longer answers to his name though he responds to the names of both Cain and Abel. Vladimirand Estragon, always unsure of everything, begin to doubt whether the first meeting has ever taken place. Estragon aims a savage kick at Lucky, hurts his own toe, and howls with pain. Then follows the dialogue referred to. Behind the words of this dialogue is a progression, an ebb and flow of action reflected in the tempo of the speeches. Something is taking its course but we could never perceive it unless we were actually present at what is going on. Considered in isolation, the actions, the ideas, the speeches, the stage "business", the scenery, are all commonplace and unexciting. When these elements are fused together in the theatre, however, we can experience the totality which Beckett has made from them, and we feel spell-bound. Such impact closely resembles that of music rather than that of language. Beckett himself spoke of his work as "a matter of fundamental sounds made as fully as possible." He uses words not only as vehicles to convey ideas, but always for the effect they produce in a theatre during a performance. In his own phrase, they are one form of "dramatic ammunition". Like music, Beckett's work must be *heard* to be effective. The voice is as important as an orchestra; the silences are as important as the sounds, and the sounds as important as the meaning.

The Manifold Appeal of His Plays

It is pointless to look for a logical, universal "message" behind Beckett's work. Beckett presents an experience not an argument, truth not a statement, and each spectator or listener must respond in his own terms. Thus, one critic described a performance of *Waiting for Godot* in the following words: "It was an expression, symbolic in order to avoid all personal error, by an author who expects each member of his audience to draw his own conclusions, make his own errors. It asked nothing in point, it forced no dramatised moral on the viewer, it held out no specific hope." This is the essence of Beckett's theatrical technique. Not only *Waiting for Godot,* but each of his plays is an experience from which Beckett expects every member of the audience to draw his own conclusions. As another critic remarked of *Endgame:* "The play contains whatever ideas we discern inside it; no idea contains the play." Thus, one critic described *Waiting for Godot* as a statement in dramatic terms of the wretchedness of man without God; while another sees it as a "general expression of the futility of human existence when man pins his hope on a force outside of himself." Both these interpretations, the first by a devout Roman Catholic, and the other by a firm Existentialist, are equally valid and equally irrelevant since Beckett is not concerned with any religious or philosophical beliefs. ("I'm not interested any system", he once said). He is writing about *waiting,* about *helplessness* and about human *frustration,* all of which interest him deeply and all of which he makes us experience directly.

Difficult to State his Meaning in a few Words

If we seek some non-existent meaning in Beckett's plays, we are likely to miss the experience that is actually there. In approaching Beckett we must give up asking what any of his plays is intended to mean. The only possible reply to such a question would be that it means what it says Beckett himself, when asked what a play of his meant, replied: "If I could tell you in a sentence I wouldn't have written the play." When asked what Godot represented, Beckett answered quite simply, "If I knew, I would have said so in the play." Had he done so, the play would have been something absolutely different.

Avoidance of Definition

To insist on interpreting *Waiting for Godot* in allegorical or symbolical terms is a wrong approach to this play because it is a play which strives all the time to avoid definition. Its avoidance of definition is implicit in Beckett's work. Each member of an audience has to respond to his plays out of himself, and so he must not be arbitrarily inhibited or restricted by the dramatist. For instance, had Beckett specifically said that the scene in *Waiting for Godot* is a deserted country road in the County of Dublin, he would have been restricting us by making us think of one particular place. A Frenchman, knowing nothing of Ireland, might become uneasy, fearing that he was missing some vital allusion, while a man from the County of Dublin might concentrate excessively on the accuracy of Beckett's local colour. In each of these men, the freedom of response would have been restricted. In fact, it makes no difference where the action is set and, therefore, Beckett merely says: "A country road." What matters is not the setting but the waiting. The place could be anywhere. Thus Beckett leaves us complete freedom of reaction.

The Minimum of Plot and Characterisation

By their very nature, Beckett's plays have no single, definite meaning. He reduces the specific to a minimum. His plays also have the minimum of plot and characterisation. When a dramatist tells us what happens next, he is inhibiting our response in exactly the same way as he does when he specifies the setting. While the conventional dramatist shows us a sequence of

events or the resolution of some problem, Beckett presents us with situations as static as he can make them. It is vain to look for any story in his work just as it is vain to expect any specific message from him. As Winnie says in *Happy Days:* "Yes, something seems to have occurred, something has seemed to occur, and nothing has occurred, nothing at all." *Waiting for Godot* begins and ends with two men waiting for nightfall or for Godot to come. The utmost we can say of the action is that time has moved imperceptibly forward. In *Endgame* there is waiting also: a blind tyrant, Hamm, spins an endless story as he waits, perhaps, for death or for his servant, Clov, to leave him. When the play ends, the tyrant is still alive while the servant stands watching him from the threshold which he has not crossed. WithHamm and Clov, as with Vladimir and Estragon, tomorrow may well be this same day. *Krapp's Last Tape* shows us an old man failing to achieve a statement, or to be more precise, failing to make a tape-recording; we leave him motionless staring in front of him as the tape runs on in silence. In *Happy Days*Winnie is trying to pass the time between waking and sleeping as pleasantly as possible in a world where the opportunities for physical movement are steadily diminishing. In *Play* the characters, two women and a man, each imprisoned up to the neck in an urn, soliloquise in a dim light.

Changes Between the Acts

Occasionally we may discover some obvious change on the stage. In *Waiting for Godot,* for example, a tree sprouts leaves overnight and, in *Happy Days,* Winnie, at first buried to her waist, is later found embedded to her neck. These changes take place between the Acts and no explanation for them is ever offered. They do not produce a new situation; they simply emphasise the old one. The tree may sprout but Godot has not come although he has promised to do so tonight. Winnie can no longer count on external objects to help her pass the time; she must draw more and more upon herself. The changes are stage facts, important only in the way in which the characters react to them. Of themselves they have no other meaning or significance, and Beckett has no other interest in them. We shall be wrong if we try to read into them anything more than we are told.

Characters Without a Past

Another distinctive feature of Beckett's plays is that his characters exist and can exist only for as long as the play lasts, indeed only for as long as they are before our eyes. Beckett gives us no hint as to how they have come to the situation in which we find them. They have no past except for what they may tell us, and no future. At the end of the play, they will be practically unchanged.

Beckett's Drama of the Non-Specific

It is thus obvious that an audience, new to Beckett's plays, has to make a certain adjustment in its attitude to the performance in order to be able to appreciate a play. Many people complain that Beckett's plays are sordid, repetitive, meaningless, have no story, have none of the glitter which is associated with the word "theatrical", and above all that they have no relation to life as we know it. This last objection is to a certain extent justified. We do not normally come across people in real life who keep their parents in dustbins as in *Endgame,* nor do we find in real life ladies buried to their waists or to their necks in mounds of earth under a blazing sky as in *Happy Days*. But we must not forget the essential point that Beckett is not concerned with reproducing life as we know it. Beckett's effort is 'to chart a whole zone of being in the individual, hitherto left absolutely alone by the artist. To conduct these explorations, as Beckett calls them,

he has evolved his special kind of play, based on impact not argument, striving all the time to avoid definition, a kind of play which may be described as "the drama of the non-specific."

II

A Revolutionary Play

Samuel Beckett is an artist of great originality and even greater purity who has always refused to make any concessions whatsoever to his public. He is the man who wrote a play *(Waiting for Godot)* which changed the whole of the contemporary theatre: this play was about two tramps waiting nowhere in particular for someone who never turns up.

A Unique Author

Beckett's plays, *Waiting for Godot and Endgame,* have become standard theatre classics. His works include not only plays for the theatre but for the radio and television. He has also written a number of novels and some poetry. His writings have provoked an enormous amount of literary criticism. The publisher John Calder is reported to have remarked: "More books have been written on Christ, Napoleon, and Wagner, in that order, than on anyone else. I predict that by 2000 A.D., Beckett may well rank fourth if the present flood of Beckett literature keeps up." Most readers acquainted with Beckett's work are aware of the fact that he has written plays without actors, acts without words, and novels without plot or punctuation. His play called *Breath* staged just before his Nobel Prize requires no actors and lasts for 35 seconds; his novel, called*Lessness,* runs to 14 small pages of bold print and presents one immobile figure in a landscape of ruins. But, although he is one of the world's famous writers, he is not the most successful from the commercial point of view. Plays by more popular dramatists whom he has influenced, like Harold Pinter, have done better at the box-office. But Beckett's importance has never been denied. For everyone, including the Nobel Prize Committee, Beckett is the artist of deprivation and terminal depression, and he has expressed his vision of desolation with unique power. He has pushed all the way through to the end logically, emotionally, artistically.

Beckett and Ionesco

Samuel Beckett has often been regarded, like Ionesco, as a dramatist of the Absurd. The comparison between Beckett and Ionesco is, however, misleading. Ionesco was the Grand Master of the Theatre of the Absurd, the word "absurdity" meaning what it usually means: raging hilarious farce. But Beckett is an Absurdist in the sense in which Camus talked of the "Absurd". By the "Absurd" Camus meant a life lived solely for its own sake in a universe which no longer made sense because there was no God to resolve the contradictions. In other words, what Camus called "Absurd", Kierkegaard (who was more Christian and even less optimistic) had called Despair. Beckett has created a world in which Godot never comes, in which Mr. Knott lives up to his name, in which it seems perfectly natural, to pass one's time in an urn or a dustbin, up to the neck in sand or face down in the mud, a world which, seen from the skull-like room of *Endgame,* is devastated, post-atomic, and so empty that even a solitary human being seems like a monstrous intrusion. Absurdity in Ionesco's more obvious sense appears in Beckett only to a small and limited extent.

The Nature of Beckett's World

Ionesco's dream-world is unpredictable, irrational, and abrupt. Beckett's is the opposite of all that: it is the world of chess, meticulous, and utterly rational. Appropriately, one of his finest

plays is called *Endgame* and the hero begins each stage of the play's development by announcing. "Me to play". It is also a world of such acute self-consciousness that the characters are continually puncturing the illusion of art. "This is what is called making an exit," says Clov. After a particularly tedious interchange, Hamm appropriates the audience's response by remarking: "This is deadly." Malone[4] writing in bed becomes indistinguishable from Beckett writing in his study, for ever breaking off to ensure that the reader is aware that the words he is reading are those that Malone is writing. And so on.

Beckett's Revolutionary Drama

Beckett may be said to have assassinated both the novel and the drama in their received conventional forms. Of course, Beckett's experiments like Ionesco's are finally a matter of temperament. Ionesco developed his special form of anti-theatre, because like many intellectuals, he was contemptuous of the stage: "I started writing for the theatre," he once remarked, "because I hated it". Beckett's peculiar revolution seems rooted even deeper. The whole of his writing-career seems to have been a search for an adequate artistic expression for his depression and his distaste for art. His literary career has been a slow but inevitable progress from manic high style through obsessionality to the latest minimal works, which are as close to silence as a man can get while still remaining a practising author. He himself summed up his attitude in a 1949 dialogue when he described the fate of the artist as being resigned to "the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express." It is like the last words of novel *The Unnamable:"*You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on."

III

His Work, a Closed Circuit

Beckett stated at the outset of his career that the only possible spiritual development could take place was in depth and that "the artistic tendency is not expansive but a contraction". This belief supports his recurrent endeavour in an apparently limited area of experience. His novels and plays form a closed circuit, each one being an attempt to descend to a slightly deeper level than the one before. His works can be seen as a series of which each is a continuation and a growth from its predecessors. There is a beginning, and then each successive book is a fresh development. His works represent an urge to remove all that is extraneous. From the bustle and sterility of *More Pricks than Kicks* they descend to the mathematical conclusion of*Imagination Dead Imagine*. They revolve round certain given objects-bicycles, boots, stub-ends of pencils—and a limited group of memories. Just as the hero may decay from a reluctantly active young Dubliner to a legless and anonymous figure confined to a pot, so the memories become briefer and the bicycles disappear, leaving behind only a rusty bell to be regarded with a nostalgic feeling. A character from an earlier work may reappear in one of the later books, and each individual, whether he be Watt, Molloy, or the Unnamable, can call upon the experiences of his predecessors. Malone, as he lies waiting for death, is aware of this kinship. He even wonders if he may not be the last: "Then it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans, and Malones, unless it goes on beyond the grave." They form a gallery of moribunds involved in Beckett's writing of stories.

The Hero in Beckett's Novels

The narrative which these books successfully tell is that of a rootless, detached, and ineffectual young man atTrinity College who, after failing miserably in human intercourse (in the stories) turns his back on his place of birth *(Echo's Bones)*.He wanders for some time on the continent and in London *(Murphy),* and looking back on Ireland, discovers within himself a series of mental preoccupations which are to concern him for the rest of his days *(Watt)*.He travels for a while with a friend *(Mercier et Camier),* but leaves him to go in search of his mother *(Molloy)*. He does not find her but makes his way, in a condition of ever-increasing decay, to a room where he settles down to die *(Malone Dies)*. Shortly after arriving at the impasse of a death which his consciousness survives *(The Unnamable)* he discovers a need for companionship, and there is a slight shift in the direction of the writing towards the plays and *How it is*. All these different works offer to us a study of a journey in contraction.

IV

His Books Not Tracts

To try to extract some general philosophy from the works of Beckett is not only impossible but an affront to the works themselves. His books are not tracts: they are a testimony to the integrity of Beckett's vision, and his vision is one that has spared itself nothing in the attempt to state what it sees and not what it thinks it ought to see. This is the source of the remarkable unity of Beckett's works, and also of the aesthetic cause of any "pleasure" we may receive from them.

Beckett's Pessimism and his Complexity

Beckett is generally attacked on two grounds: *(i)* that he is a perverse messenger of gloom, and *(ii)* that he writes only of the extra-ordinary in terms of unnecessary complexity. To these attacks one may reply by asking why Beckett should be cheerful and reassuring, and why he should be easy. Beckett himself asked, in his essay on Joyce, why art should be without difficulty. Art, according to Beckett, has nothing to do with clarity; it does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear. The purpose of his art is not to explain but to contemplate. This art does not attempt to solve and to make plain but to discover, and perhaps to comprehend—by perception and intuition, not by the intelligence. And if the subject of this art does not yield a meaning then the duty of this art is to remain in doubt and not impose a meaning. Arriving at a solution amounts to believing that all is well with the world, which obviously is not the case. Beckett cannot accept either the dogmas of belief or the reasons of science. Denied a certainty he refuses to take an irrational leap into faith. He refuses, in fact, to commit what Camus called "philosophical suicide". In Beckett we remain with an ignorance that does not pretend to be anything else, and it is this which is generally taken for obscurity and which irritates some readers.

His Concern with Cruelty and Helplessness in the World

If Beckett's art does not apparently concern itself with the social or political circumstances of the time, it does not mean that his art is irresponsible; Beckett sees that the destructive forces of the 20th century have given the lie to progress, reason, stability, perfectibility, and simplicity. He does not write of the hydrogen bomb but he does portray with a unique truthfulness the cruelty, suffering, and helplessness which is the human climate of a world in which the bomb exists.

His Realism

The one fundamental behind all of Beckett's work is the ancient tragic knowledge of man's solitude, imprisonment, and pain in an intolerable universe which is indifferent to his suffering. Beckett is a pessimist, which means that he writes what he considers to be true and not what he knows is diverting. The world in which Beckett begins to write is one without unity, clarity, rationality, or hope, and where man feels himself alone and a stranger in a place which itself will one day cease to exist. From this confrontation between the unreasonable silence of the universe and the human need to be, there arises that futile revolt against existence; the painful rebellion of the spirit against three necessities—the abject necessity of being born, the hard necessity of living, and the sharp necessity of dying—which is constant throughout Beckett's works.

His Persistence

The man who, like Beckett, continues to create despite his awareness of these conditions is, as Camus writes. "the most absurd character." The conflict between the world's irrationality and man's hopeless desire for unity is most acute in the artist who, having once believed in his near-omnipotence, is now forced to recognise his almost total impotence. Yet there remains, Beckett is almost alone in recognising, the right to fail. If he persists in his endeavours, which he knows to be futile, he will have sustained his consciousness in the face of the universe and its absurdity. For the artist his perseverance is his dignity, and his failure the symbol of his unextinguished revolt. For Beckett, it is the writing, not the writer or reader, that ultimately matters.

Beckett's Chief Concern

Samuel Beckett has confessed his special concern with human impotence. His early discipleship of James Joyce left him, artistically, with a vast over-shadowing literary achievement against which he had to assert himself. He had to break away from the Joycean abundance and the Joycean omniscience, and he sought out the extreme limits of economy, ignorance, and inhibition. From the packed world of *Ulysses* he turned to create the bare world of *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett takes away man's property, family, place in society, function in society, and then begins to strip him of the normal human equipment (legs and mobility, for instance). At the same time his characters go through the motions of reasoning and planning and use the vocabulary of experiencing the emotions of failure and success. It is not just that Estragon andVladimir, the two tramps in *Waiting for Godot,* have no home and no locale; but they seem unaware that they have no home and no locale. They do not expect the normally expectable. Just as their continuing bewilderment and uncertainty are punctuated by moments of comic confidence, so, in the case of Pozzo, the pantomimic representative of power and possessions, continuing confidence and assurance are punctuated by moments in which the sense of precariousness intrudes. The servitude of his roped, human beast of burden, Lucky, is grotesquely unreal and idiotic; yet the idiocy is the basis of Pozzo's "security". Moreover Pozzo's assurance is related to a vocabulary that pre-supposes a civilisation and a placing in it: such a vocabulary is irrelevant in the "world" which the idiom of the tramps has established and into which Pozzo intrudes.

The Issue in Beckett's Plays

Man's identity, his limitations, and his place in the universe are at issue in Beckett's plays. In *Happy Days* we find a woman, Winnie, buried waist-deep in sand against a background that

suggests the aftermath of an atomic holocaust. Her companion, Willie, is barely visible behind the mound. The conversation of the two (which is mostly a monologue by Winnie) is outrageously out of keeping with their situation. Our familiar postures and verbal habits, the standard poses of human wisdom and consolation, are subjected to a ruthless scrutiny in being adopted by the half-buried woman. The counters of contemporary discourse—pretentious and unpretentious—are employed in a situation of impotence and near-total negation in which they bear the weight of sheer tragedy and comedy at the same time. *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame*continue the same pre-occupations, the latter with Nagg and Nell in dustbins and their blind son chair-bound. Against paralysis and powerlessness of this kind, Beckett brilliantly employs, a dialogue that is at once tragically and farcically at loggerheads with the immediate. It moves to tears and to laughter, yet compassion persists through nightmares of negation and absurdity.

Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd

Absurd Drama, Not a Regular "Movement"

The phrase "Absurd Drama" or "The Theatre of the Absurd" gained currency as a result of Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of the Absurd* published in 1961. Esslin points out that there is no such thing as a regular "movement" of Absurd dramatists; the term is useful as "a device to make certain fundamental traits which seem to be present in the works of a number of dramatists accessible to discussion by tracing features they have in common." Esslin's book deals with a group of plays which incorporate certain beliefs and use certain methods and which, briefly and as a kind of intellectual shorthand, we call Absurd Drama.

Successful Inspite of the Violation of all Dramatic Conventions

The most surprising thing about plays of this group is that inspite of their breaking of the rules they are successful. Says Esslin: "If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterisation and motivation, these are often without recognisable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings."

The Major "Absurd" Dramatists

This kind of play, according to Esslin, arises from the disillusionment and loss of "certitude characteristic of our times and reflected in works like The *Myth of Sisyphus*(1942) by Albert Camus—where the word "Absurd" appears. The major dramatists of the School of the Absurd, in Esslin's view, are Beckett, Adamov, lonesco, and Genet. The senselessness of life and loss of ideals had, of course, been reflected in dramatists like Giraudoux, Anouilh, Sartre, and Camus, but, whereas they had presented irrationality in terms of the old conventions, dramatists in the Theatre of the Absurd sought a more appropriate form. They do not argue about absurdity; they "present it in being." Like the Poetic Theatre, the Absurd Theatre relies heavily on dream and fantasy, but unlike that theatre it rejects consciously "poetic" dialogue in favour of the banal. Although centred on Paris, the Theatre of the Absurd is distinctly international in flavour, as is emphasised by the four leading exponents chosen by Esslin—the Irish Beckett, the Russian

Adamov, the Rumanian lonesco, and the Frenchman Genet. These dramatists are followed, in Esslin's book, by about eighteen contemporary playwrights of whom Pinter and Simpson are the British representatives. All these dramatists partake, in one form or another, of the tradition of the Absurd which is described by Esslin as very far-flung indeed, incorporating devices from the circus, mime, clowning, verbal nonsense, and the literature of dream and fantasy which often has a strong allegorical component. Esslin seems to have overstated his case by including many dramatists whose mention in the category of the Theatre of the Absurd surprises us. But the tradition is more obviously pertinent when Esslin approaches such persons as Jarry, Apollinaire, and Dada. In his attempt to show in what way the Absurd Theatre produces something really new, Esslin suggests that it is "the unusual way in which various familiar attitudes of mind and literary idioms are interwoven", and the fact that this approach has met with "a wide response from a broadly based public."

Facing a Universe Without God and Without Meaning or Purpose

Esslin makes certain important suggestions when discussing the significance of the Absurd. According to him, the number of people for whom God is dead has greatly increased in the present century. The Theatre of the Absurd is one of the ways of facing up to a universe that has lost its meaning and purpose. As such it fulfils a double role. Its first and more obvious role is satirical when it criticises a society that is petty and dishonest. Its second and more positive aspect is shown when it faces up to Absurdity in plays where man is "stripped of the accidental circumstances .of social position or historical context, confronted with basic choices, the basic situations of his existence."

The Artist's Individual Vision of the World

Such a theatre is involved in the relatively few problems that remain: life, death, isolation and communication, and it can, by its nature, only communicate "one poet's most intimate and personal intuition of the human situation, his own sense of being, his individual vision of the world." This vision receives a form which Esslin sees as similar to a Symbolist or Imagist poem in which, however, language is only one component, and not necessarily the dominant one. For language has suffered its own devaluation, a fact which is very contemporary from the point of view of either the philosopher or the mass media.

The Effect of Alienation

The resulting play, ironically, produces the effect of alienation. We find it very difficult to identify ourselves with the characters in Absurd drama: thus though their situation is often painful and violent, we can laugh at them. This drama speaks, says Esslin, "to a deeper level of the audience's mind." It challenges the audience to make sense of nonsense, to face the situation consciously rather than feel it vaguely, and perceive, with laughter, the fundamental absurdity.

Tests of this Theatre

What tests should be applied to assess the quality of such works in the theatre? These tests, according to Esslin, are invention, the complexity of the poetic images invoked, and the skill with which these images are combined and sustained, besides the reality and truth of the vision which these images embody.

The Need to Face Reality

The Theatre of the Absurd presents anxiety, despair, and a sense of loss at the disappearance of solutions, illusions, and purposefulness. Facing up to this loss means that we face up to reality itself. Thus Absurd drama becomes a kind of modern mystical experience. Says Esslin: "Today, when death and old age are increasingly concealed behind euphemism and comforting baby talk, and life is threatened with being smothered in the mass consumption of hypnotic mechanised vulgarity, the need to confront man with the reality of his situation is greater than ever. For the dignity of man lies in his ability to face *reality* in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusion—and to laugh at it."

The Inclusion of Almost all Important Dramatists in the Category of "Absurdists"

In this connection the following adverse comment on Esslin's survey of what he has called the Theatre of the Absurd is noteworthy: "Tracing the forebears of the Absurd, Mr. Esslin leads us back to the mime plays of antiquity; to the Commedia dell" Arte; to Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll: to Jarry, Strindberg, and the young, Rimbaud-impregnated Brecht; to the Dadaists and Tristan Tzara; to the Surrealists and Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty; to Kafka, and to Joyce. All this is helpful and credible. But when Mr. Esslin ropes in Shakespeare, Goethe, and Ibsen as harbingers of the Absurd, one begins to feel that the whole history of dramatic literature has been nothing but a prelude to the glorious emergence of Beckett and lonesco." The point of this comment by Kenneth Tynan is that Esslin has included almost every important dramatist in his category of the Absurd playwrights and has thus cast his net too wide.

Lack of Plot and Characterisation, and Limitations of Language

In *Waiting for Godot* two characters pass the time by playing games on the open road. In his second play *Endgame,* two characters play the final game shut up in a room. Here a blind old man, Hamm, sits in a wheel-chair (he cannot stand) waited on by a servant Clov (who cannot sit down); in the room also in dust-bins are Hamm's legless parents, Nagg and Nell. The world outside is dead, or at least these four people believe that they are the last survivors of the race after some great catastrophe. Although Clov hates Hamm, he must obey his orders, and the basic question of the play is whether or not Clov will muster enough will-power to leave Hamm, who will then die. Like *Waiting for Godot* this play has been variously interpreted, even as a biographical document embodying the relationship between Joyce and Beckett. Both these plays show a lack of plot and also in the conventional sense, of character, for character presumes that personality matters, just as plot assumes that, events in time have significance—and both these postulates are questioned in the plays. In his subsequent plays for stage and radio, Beckett does not probe quite so deeply, but the themes persist: the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to incessant change, and the limitations of language as a means of arriving at or communicating valid truths. Pronko has pointed out that stichomythia suggests here a lack of communication—each man following his own thoughts, while the silences and pauses isolate words and phrases, and the repetitions remind us how monotonous, repetitive, and tedious life is. Yet, if Beckett devalues language, he continues to use it bilingually and to show a mastery of it. For want of a better tool, language has been moulded into an instrument for naming the unnamable; and this recognition of absurdity is once more the starting point of exhilaration and freedom.

Waiting for Godot—An Introduction

A Great Commercial Success

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* has proved the most commercially successful "experimental" play since Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). First produced in Paris in 1952, *Wailing for Godot* has since been translated into eighteen languages and performed all over the world.

Nothing Happens; No Female Character

In the play practically nothing happens. There is nothing done in it; no development is to be found; and there is no beginning and no end. The entire action boils down to this: on a country road, near a tree, two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, idle away their time waiting for Godot, who never comes. Two strangers, a cruel master and his half-crazy slave, cross their path, and soon depart. At the end of the first Act, a messenger from Godot arrives and says that he will come tomorrow. In the second Act the waiting goes on; the other pair pass by once more, but the master is now blind and the slave is dumb. The master and slave stumble and fall and are helped on their way by the tramps. The messenger appears again with the same promise, namely that Godot will come on the following day. Everything remains as it was in the beginning. There is no female character in the play. The spectator or the reader is fascinated by the strangeness of what he witnesses, hoping for a turn in the situation or a solution, which never comes. Beckett denies satisfaction to his audience. He wants the audience to suffer extreme despair.

Funny and Sad

The immediate appeal of Waiting *for Godot* is due to the fact that, even though nothing much happens, it is intensely theatrical. The endless crosstalk act of the two tramps is always funny and at the same time sad—funny because good cross-talk acts are very funny, and sad because their main reason for talking at all is just to pass the time, to fill in the void. Under the farcical ripple of the dialogue lies a serious concern.

Serious Subject-Matter Under a Farcical Surface

To take only one example of Beckett's technique, the dialogue between the tramps about only one of the four Evangelists having recorded the incident of a thief being saved by Christ presents serious subject-matter in music-hall form. The genuine concern of one tramp with the possibility of salvation is constantly broken into by the other with remarks like "I find this most extraordinarily interesting," and the discussion follows a carefully constructed comic pattern, with Vladimir's logic steadily tightening only to be punctured by Estragon's final "People are bloody ignorant apes." This tug between subject-matter and form runs through the whole play. Much of the surface is taken up with farcical satire of conventional social behaviour. Pozzo, for example, is unable to take a simple action like sitting down without an attendant paraphernalia of ceremony; and the two tramps are always trying to strike up what will pass for a polite conversation, using . catch-phrases like Vladimir's "This is not boring you, I hope ?" But the satire is not mere incidental comedy. The emphasis on the surface aspects of life has its part in the meaning of the play. At one point, fat Pozzo is lying on the ground, unable to get up. Spasmodically he shouts "Help"! Vladimir, glad of this chance to be useful for once, says: "Let us not waste our time in idle discourse" and launches into a long speech. This is a typical Beckett scene. The situation itself is farcical and yet has serious implications; and Vladimir's speech, though mock-pompous in tone, contains the real meaning of the play. He says:

> What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come. (Page 80)

and later he says:

> All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which—how shall I say—which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. (Page 80)

The surface "proceedings" of life, of which the play is made up, keep mankind's attention off the despair beneath it all. For Beckett it is a relief because he does not have an optimistic Christian faith in a redemption beyond the despair.

A Picture of the Human Condition

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was one of the very best plays of the decade (1950—60). Its two tramps, with their boredom, their fear of pain, their shreds of love and hate, are a surprisingly effective version of the whole human condition—a condition for which action is no answer, chiefly because there is no obvious action to be taken, 'nothing to be done'. Beckett comes to a nihilistic conclusion.

A Synopsis of the Play

One evening, on a lonely country road near a tree, two elderly men—half-tramp, half-clown—are waiting for someone of the name of Godot who, they hope, will do something for them. The two men, Estragon ("Gogo") and Vladimir ("Didi") are not sure what exactly Godot will do for them, any more than they know for certain whether they have come to the right place on the appointed day. They occupy the time as best they can until the arrival there of Pozzo, a local landowner, on his way to the fair to sell his slave Lucky. Pozzo halts a while with Estragon and Vladimir, eats a meal in their presence, even granting them the bones which his slave rejects, and then in gratitude for their society makes Lucky dance and next think aloud for their entertainment. The three become so agitated by Lucky's intellectual performance that they all set upon him and silence him. Soon Pozzo takes his leave, driving Lucky before him. Estragon and Vladimir have not been alone many moments together before a small boy appears with the news that Mr. Godot "won't come this evening but surely tomorrow". The boy departs; night falls, abruptly; and after briefly contemplating suicide by hanging themselves from the tree, the two men decide to leave but, despite their decision to go, do not move as the curtain falls.

The curtain rises the next day on a scene identical except for the fact that the tree has put forth a few leaves. Vladimir is joined on the stage by Estragon and much the same things happen, except that when Pozzo and Lucky appear (from the side they made their exit in Act I), Pozzo happens to have gone blind and Lucky dumb. All four collapse on top of one another and then somehow manage to get up again. Pozzo becomes exasperated at Vladimir's questions about time, saying furiously that life itself is only a brief instant. Pozzo leaves, driving Lucky before him, from the side he had entered in Act I. After another brief interval the boy comes again and delivers the same message as before. The sun sets; the moon rises abruptly; the two men again contemplate suicide; and then, despite their agreement to leave, make no movement as the curtain falls. So ends the play in which, as one critic has wittily put it, nothing happens, twice.

Waiting for Godot and The Critics

Waiting for Godot has given rise to a lot of controversy. Critics have not been able to reach any kind of agreement about this play. Beckett himself did not offer much help to critics so far as their efforts to interpret the play were concerned. There have been plenty of both favourable and unfavourable commentaries on this work.

The majority of commentators have been concerned with the religious problems suggested by the play, and many have offered an existential interpretation of it. One critic, for instance, urges a distinction between "nihilistic existentialism" and Christian existentialism, and asserts that the latter offers one of the essential keys to Beckett's play. Kierkegaard has been pointed out as a shaping influence on Beckett. But most other critics who have acknowledged the existentialist in the play seem to favour the Sartrean interpretation. The vision of man in this play, it has been said, is similar to the Sartrean analysis of the "others", namely the view that life is a perpetual series of rebounds, in which man is constantly thrown back into his solitude. Another critic, agreeing with this view, speaks of the "existentialist comedy", in the play. Another critic observes: *"Waiting for Godot* exactly fulfils Sartre's definition of an existentialist play as one which sets out to present the contemporary situation in its full horror so that the audience, finding it unendurable, may feel forced to remedy it."

The supposed existentialism in the play is somewhat qualified by a critic according to whom Beckett's characters, unlike Sartre's, are never "en situation." This critic also introduces the word, "absurdity." Two other critics, in their essay "To Wait or Not to Wait," begin their discussion by defining the absurd in convincing detail and relating the notion to this play. This view is indebted to Martin Esslin's book called*Theatre of the Absurd*. Esslin accepts the philosophies of Sartre and Camus as being basic to *Waiting for Godot,* but is careful to indicate that the plays of these two French dramatists are markedly different from Beckett's play: the difference is in *the form*.The texture of *Waiting for Godot,* with all its dramatic irregularities, mirrors its ideological base, whereas the plays of Sartre and Camus remain formally very staid and traditional. Esslin's position has been further qualified by Ruby Conn who refers to the presence in the play of "the absurdly Absurd": "In this play form and content, absurdity and Absurdity, are organically interrelated; in this play there is coalescence of the Absurd, being-in-the world, and the human condition."

The critics who have adopted the existentialist or "absurdist" interpretation have raised some of the questions with which the "New Theologians" have been involved. One ecclesiastic brought to the fore a controversy in the church about God's divinity, thus emphasising a revolutionary position already maintained by a few others. The secularised waste-land of Beckett's play, with its theme of futile waiting, offers a convincing metaphor for this revolution in the church. If we read Beckett's play as a farce about God's absence from this world, we shall find ourselves in the secularised climate described by the ecclesiastic referred to above.

According to one of the critics, the suggestions of a remote theological being fail to attract the inhabitants of Beckett's world. This view is carried further by Ruby Cohn who says that Beckett mocks the whole classico-Christian tradition in this play. A yet more aggressive view is that those who profess to see in Beckett signs of a Christian approach or signs of compassion are simply refusing to see what is there. The view of critics of this category may be summed up in the words: "God is dead."

The critics holding the opposite view are represented by G.S Fraser who took the unpopular position of reading *Waiting for Godot* as a modern morality play on permanent Christian themes. In Eraser's opinion, Godot stands for an anthropomorphic image of God. The symbols of the tree and the rags worn by the tramps have a distinctly Christian relevance for Fraser. He mentions *Waiting for Godot* in the same breath as *Everyman* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Another critic, agreeing essentially with Fraser's position, has suggested that Godot does indeed come in the shape of Pozzo (and Lucky). Yet another critic restates the Christian basis of the play, insisting on its Biblical aspects. He agrees with Fraser that the tree, which puts forth leaves in Act II of the play, represents the Cross. He also goes a little further by saying: "That for which Gogo and Didi wait does arrive. It is they who missed the appointment." Another critic of this category calls the play "a religious allegory"; another thinks of the play as a parable, calling it "the anti-mystery play of our time, one of the few experimental dramas in which Christ has won out over Oedipus as well as Priapus and Narcissus". Even Martin Esslin, after stating the Sartrean position, comes around to admit the play's "basically religious quality". Several other critics reinforce the critical stand which gives the play a religious or Biblical reading. It has even been said that "to a reader completely ignorant of the Gospels and the Mass a heavy proportion of Beckett would be totally lost". The two extreme views—one advocating, and the other rejecting, a Christian or religious approach—are typical of the range of interpretation possible in treating this play.

The source of the title of the play has aroused a greater controversy than anything else connected with it. An earlier version of the play was simply called "Waiting". Martin Esslin holds the view that the subject of the play is not *Godot* but *waiting*. There is a general agreement that Godot is of less importance in the play than waiting, but the source of the word Godot has excited much curiosity. Beckett himself was of little help and, when asked about the meaning of Godot, he replied. "If I knew, I would have said so in the play." One of the critics, wishing to pinpoint the foolishness of trying to identify Godot too closely, said: "Godot is that character for whom two tramps are waiting at the edge of a road, and who does not come". Yet those hunting for the meaning of "Godot" have ignored the advice offered by this critic and by Beckett himself, and have displayed much ingenuity in interpreting the word "Godot". It has been said, for instance, that the word has been formed from the English "God" and the French "eau" (which means "water"). It has also been said that "Godo" is spoken-Irish for God. Hugh Kenner has connected the name with his famous theory of the "Cartesian centaur" by mentioning the name of a French racing cyclist whose last name was Godeau.

The source for the full title of the play has caused similar anxiety. The most convincing suggestion in this case comes from Eric Bentley who traces the title to Balzac's play *Mercadet*. In Balzac's play, the return of a person named Godeau is anxiously awaited; the frustration of waiting is as much a part of Balzac's play as it is of Beckett's. Martin Esslin has heartily endorsed Bentley's suggestion and so have several other commentators. According to another suggestion, the title of Beckett's play comes from Simone Weil's play *Waiting for God*. It has been pointed out that Beckett and Simone Weil knew each other well and that Beckett's play appeared a year after the publication of Simone Weil's. The influence of Weil on Beckett is thus a distinct possibility. If this view be accepted, then *Waiting for Godot* can be understood as a religious allegory with the catechism provided by Simone Weil. According to yet another view, the source of the title for Beckett's play was Odets's *Waiting for Lefty*.It is believed that the name "Odets" might itself have suggested to Beckett the name "Godot". There is still another possibility Beckett's title may have its source in Tom Kromer's book called *Waiting for Nothing*.There are some striking similarities

between Beckett's play and Chapter 11 of Kromer's book. Here are some of Kromer's remarks: "Where are they going? I do not know. They do not know". "We are here. We are here because we have no other place to go." "What is a day to us, or a month or a year? We are not going to any place". "I can still walk. That is something". Beckett's play seems to have caught something of the tone of these remarks.

Robbe-Grillet in his book discards the various critical interpretations that had been current among the critics: the root word "God" concealed in "Godot"; Godot as the "earthly ideal of a better social order"; Pozzo as the dictator or exploiter "who keeps thought enslaved"; Godot as death or as silence; and Godot as "that inaccessible self that Beckett pursues in all his works. After this inventory of rejected views, Robbe-Grillet develops what remains: the "less than nothing", the "regression beyond nothing", whose stages are identified. "What little had been given to us from the start—and which seemed to be nothing—is soon corrupted before our eyes, degraded further, like Pozzo who returns deprived of sight, dragged on by Lucky deprived of speech." In this general disintegration, the climax occurs when the three or four characters, having all fallen to the ground upon each other, create a formless mass from which Vladimir's voice emerges, saying: "We are men !"

Nothing, continues Robbe-Grillet, escapes the destructive force of this *regression:*neither speech—torn to pieces in the rhetoric of Pozzo's monologue on twilight—nor thought which is undermined and destroyed by a whole series of absurd reasonings as well as by such passages as the "explanation given by Pozzo when Estragon asks why Lucky does not put down his bags, or the great monologue of Lucky "thinking." (In this speech by Lucky not only does logic mock itself but it proves that the only honest logic that can be applied nowadays to serious problems merely succeeds in causing a still further regression of that feeble support of contemporary man, his *thinking*intelligence).

Another matter of concern for the critics has been the structure of *Waiting for Godot*. Eric Bentley has spoken of its being "undramatic but highly theatrical". Bentley somewhat modifies this view when he says subsequently that he would speak of it "not as undramatic, but as a parody of the dramatic". ("Parody" is an apt word in a discussion of Beckett because most of his work represents an -elaborate mixture of every variety of intellectual exercise—from philosophical systems to music-hall comedy).

Another critic, Ruby Cohn, is particularly interested in Beckett's notion of "symmetry to suggest a static design". This critic skilfully shows how Beckett's dramatic method eventually ends "in the destruction of the very symmetries he has created". Ruby Cohn dismisses the possibility of dividing this play into Aristotle's beginning, middle, and end. Another critic feels that it is the "asymmetrical structure" of this play which accounts for all its power.

The Unities specified by Aristotle have engaged the attention of a number of critics who have commented on *Waiting for Godot*.One critic points out that the close adherence of this play to the three Unities is a clue to the play's dramaturgy. According to another critic, Greek drama is one of the forerunners of this play. Yet another critic says: "The form of the play is rigorous and classical, observing all Unities". However, the voice of dissent is not wanting in this respect. According to one such voice, the Unities in this play are more apparent than real.

The nature of this play also calls for comment. Beckett himself described the play as a tragi-comedy. Several critics have accepted this label for the play and have pointed out the "constant simultaneity of tragedy and comedy" in this play. One critic speaks of it as being "part

tragedy, part comedy. Its barrenness situates the tragedy. The construct makes possible the comedy". Ruby Cohn connects Beckett's use of the label with Sir Philip Sidney's "mongrel tragi-comedy" mentioned in his famous defence of poetry.

Very little has been said by critics about the modest play-within-a-play in*Waiting for Godot*. When Estragon and Vladimir decide, in the midst of an oppressive time of boredom to play at being Pozzo and Lucky, we are not far from Act II of *Henry IV* (Part I), when Prince Hal and Falstaff decide to have a mock conversation in the royal manner of King Henry addressing the wayward Hal, who is heir to the throne.

Much attention has been given to the difference between Vladimir and Estragon. The most common solution is to regardVladimir as the soul and Estragon as the body (in good Cartesian fashion). Ruby Cohn partly rejects this too-simple interpretation and shows that the mental Vladimir (with his hat and bad breath) and the physical Estragon (with his boots and stinking feet) keep their identities fairly separate in Act I but tend to merge in Act II. This critic points to the increasing "disintegration of the dichotomy" as the play develops.

Critics differ widely on Pozzo and Lucky. According to one interpretation, these two men represent master and slave. According to other interpretations, Pozzo and Lucky symbolise the relationship between capital and labour, or between wealth and the artist. Another view, stated by Lionel Abel, is that Pozzo represents James Joyce while Lucky represents Samuel Beckett. One of the critics says that Pozzo is no other than Godot himself. According to this view, "Godot is God, Pozzo is Godot, Pozzo is therefore God, and since Pozzo is nothing but a tyrant and a slave-driver so too is God". Another critic convincingly characterises Pozzo as the God of the Old Testament, the tyrant-divinity in Act I, and the New Testament God, injured, crucified, helpless, in Act II. On the other extreme from this view is the opinion that Pozzo is a kind of anti-Godot. One critic is convinced that Pozzo cannot possibly be Godot; this critic speaks of "this Pozzo who is precisely nor Godot".

One commentator has expressed the curious view that *Waiting for Godot* is all about impotence, and he feels that Lucky holds the key to this play, especially in his long monologue. This critic is convinced thatVladimir and Estragon have destroyed their chances of finding Godot because "they have abused the link which is Lucky". He even suggests the possibility that Lucky himself may be Godot. Another critic comes close to this view by saying: "Pozzo's menial, Lucky, in some ways suggests the Biblical figure of the Christ."

Themes of Waiting, Ignorance, Impotence, Boredom—A New Kind of Play

The Striking Success of the Play

Waiting for Godot achieved a conspicuous success on the stage. Since its first performance in Paris in 1953, it has been performed by all sorts of actors in all sorts of places in many different countries, and it has been translated into many different languages. Obviously it is not a play with only a limited appeal; nor can it be called, as some do call it, an elaborate intellectual "hoax".

Waiting for Godot has proved itself to be world theatre. However, its tremendous success is a matter for surprise because, for one thing, it is an uneventful play." As a critic has said, it is a play in which "nothing happens, *twice* There is in it no story and no message. Besides, the play has no spectacle, no star-part, no sex, not even a woman in the cast. The question why it has

achieved such a striking success is not easy to answer. The main reason for its success perhaps is that it depicts a situation which has a general human application.

The Essence of Boredom Depicted

At first sight this play does not appear to have any particular relationship with the human predicament. For instance, we feel hardly any inclination to identify ourselves with the two garrulous tramps who are indifferent to all the concerns of civilised life. Godot sounds as if he might have some significance; but he does not even appear on the stage. However, watching the play on the stage we do realise that Vladimir and Estragon are waiting and that the waiting is of a particular kind. Although they may say that they are waiting for Godot, they cannot say who or what Godot is, nor can they be sure that they are waiting at the right place or on the right day, or what will happen when Godot comes, or what would happen if they stopped waiting. They have no watches, no time-tables, and there is no one from whom they can get much information. They cannot get the essential knowledge, and they are ignorant. Without the essential knowledge they cannot act, and so they are impotent. They produce in us a sense of baffled helplessness which we experience when forced to remain in a situation which we do not understand and over which we have no control. All that Estragon andVladimir do is to seek ways to pass the time in the situation in which they find themselves. They tell stories, sing songs, play verbal games, pretend to be Pozzo and Lucky, do physical exercises. But all these activities are mere stop-gaps, valuable only to pass the time. They understand this perfectly. "Come on, Gogo", pleads Didi, breaking off a reflection on the two thieves crucified with Christ, "return the ball, can't you, once in a way?" and Estragon does; as he says later, "We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us,"....."We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist" Here we have the very essence of boredom—actions repeated long after the reason for them has been forgotten, and talk purposeless in itself but valuable as a way to kill time.

A Presentation of Waiting, Ignorance, Impotence, Etc.

Waiting for Godot is not about Godot or even *about* waiting. It is waiting, ignorance, impotence and boredom, all made visible and audible on the stage before us. In his dramas, Beckett does not write about things; he presents the things themselves. In other words, a play by Beckett is a direct expression or presentation of the thing itself as distinct from any description of it or statement about it. The result is that the audience responds directly to what is directly expressed or presented, because the audience recognises in it its own experience. We may never have waited by a tree on a deserted country road for nightfall or for a distant acquaintance to keep his appointment, but we have certainly experienced other situations in which we have waited and waited. So, after all, we can discover a common ground between ourselves and the two tramps who are waiting for Godot; we feel with them and with millions of others who have known ignorance, impotence and boredom. Here is, then, a situation of general human application which gives to this play a recognisable significance and accounts for its widespread appeal.

A New Concept of Drama Represented by this Play

No one in the theatre had, before Beckett, dealt with this experience, the experience of someone ignorant and therefore impotent. Nor could anyone do so as long as the dramatist and the public thought along the traditional lines of a well-made play with a strong story involving conflict, character-development, and a final solution. Impotence cannot produce action, and without action there can be neither conflict nor solution. The only possible character-development for a "non-knower" (that is, ignorant man) would be to turn him into a "knower", thereby

destroying his character altogether. Movement, therefore, would be clearly impossible under these circumstances. But, according to the traditional view, a static drama was a contradiction in terms. Beckett solved the difficulty by substituting situation for story, and direct impact for logical, indirect description. But he did more than solve one particular artistic problem. He created in effect the whole new concept of drama much as the Impressionists[4] created a whole new concept of painting. The dramatist who grasps this concept of direct expression through total theatre would not be confined to working with ignorance and impotence. Beckett himself has applied it to time (in at least three different ways), and to awareness.

Beckett Belongs to no "School"

Beckett belongs to no school of dramatists. Labels like the "theatre of cruelty" or the "theatre of the absurd" bear no relation to his work. Nor did he relate his discovery to any overall system of belief as a Marxist, an Existentialist, a Nihilist or any other "ist" might do. The new kind of play which he evolved directly serves his individual needs as a creative artist. He sees no evidence of any system anywhere; he has no message to give. Yet he cannot escape a pressing urge to try to say the unsayable.

The Dramatist's Own Agony

Beckett does not describe ignorance and impotence with clinical detachment, standing back as a doctor might, noting symptoms; he does not deal with his subject in that manner, going into the probable causes, effects, and possible cures. As he struggles to capture ignorance and impotence, he is tortured by these emotions himself. He has rightly described himself as a man whose world has no outside. "It is impossible for me to talk about my writing because I am constantly working in the dark", he once explained. "It would be like an insect leaving his cocoon. I can only estimate my work from within."

The Response of the Audience; Vladimir's Lament for all Mankind

The thing itself, not something about the thing, creation not description, first-hand not second, this is what makes *Waiting for Godot* a great original play. It is not just a technical *tour deforce*. We are made to feel it through our own experience. The play springs directly from Beckett's own anguish, and we respond to it directly because we too are human beings who must feel as well as season. Here is Vladimir musing after Pozzo's final, terrible departure:

> Was I sleeping while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today ?.....! can't go on. What have I said? *(He goes feverishly to and fro, halts finally at extreme left, broods)*.
>
> *(Pages 90-91)*

Here the dramatist and his character are one. We are here reminded of Beckett having written in his essay on Proust about "the perilous zones in the life of the individual, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment, the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being." Now, before our eyes,Vladimir enters one such zone, changing from a clown into a poet. He no longer feels any misery or anger on his own account. A few minutes earlier he had wakened Estragon because he felt bored and frightened; but now as his awareness increases, Vladimir's concern goes beyond himself, beyond his friend, to include all kinds of people. Here is a penetrating consciousness of the human condition, of the sadness implicit in being a living mortal. But there is nothing deadening or paralysing about the suffering. Quite the opposite, for, as

Beckett says, "it is the free play of every faculty." With this free play there comes an end of self-deception. Vladimir had earlier admitted quite cheerfully that "the hours are long under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which—how shall I say—may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit;" and as he says later, "habit is a great deadener." Now habit can no longer keep him away from the truth because with every faculty he feels the happenings of the day for what they are, a series of pathetic attempts to pass the time: "But in all that, what truth will there be?" Estragon too has suffered, and in the end what has he learned? "He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot."[3]Ignorance and impotence remain unassailable; only time has passed imperceptibly. Vladimir now knows and accepts that life can be no more than the distance between birth and death: "Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old."[3]The lament is for all mankind, arising from a union of compassion and anguish as fundamental to Beckett's work as the sense of impotence and ignorance which directly inspires it. This anguish is not a thing of the intellect or the body in isolation; it permeates the whole being (as Beckett had already described in his study of Proust). This kind of anguish or suffering transcends the immediate and thus makes Beckett's work, for all its savagery and irony, an art of goodwill or an art of love.

Themes of Habit, the Suffering of Being, How to Get Through Life

How to Pass the Time

Waiting for Godot begins bleakly enough: "A country road. A tree. Evening." That is to say, the stage is bare except for a tree, and the light is subdued. The opening words fit the setting and are, it so happens, the theme of the play:

Estragon. Nothing to be done.

Vladimir. I' m beginning to come round to that opinion.

Estragon is, in fact, referring to his boots. A little later Vladimir repeats the phrase twice, first referring to his hat, then to the uselessness of mirth. But essentially they are both talking about their lives. The subject of the play is how to pass the time, given the fact that the situation is hopeless. In other words, the play is a dramatisation of the themes first touched upon in Beckett's essay on Proust and then repeated continually throughout Beckett's novels—the themes of habit, boredom, and "the suffering of being." Towards the close of the play, for instance,Vladimir says: "Habit is a great deadener," By then he and Estragon have had two hours on the stage to prove it. Although there are moments in the play when "the suffering of being" has pierced them both, neither of them comments on those moments. WhenVladimir tries to laugh, he stops immediately, "his face convulsed"; when the little boy comes to tell them Godot will not appear that evening, Estragon attacks him, then relapses, covering his face with his hands; when he drops his hands, "his face is convulsed;" all that he can manage to say is "I'm unhappy." The rest is mostly ritual, filling the emptiness and silence. "It'll pass the time," exclaims Vladimir, offering to tell the story of the Crucifixion: In fact, passing the time is their mutual obsession. When Pozzo and Lucky go off after their first appearance, there is a long silence. Then:

Vladimir. That passed the time.

Estragon. It would have passed in any case.

Vladimir. Yes, but not so rapidly.

Yet immediately Estragon, too, joins in the game: "That's the idea, let's make a little conversation." Estragon keeps at it fervently at the beginning of the second Act: "That's the idea, let's contradict each other;" "That's the idea' let's ask each other questions;" "That wasn't such a bad little canter." To thisVladimir replies, "Yes, but now we'll have to find something else." No one understands as pointedly and clearly as the tramps themselves that this is a play in which "nothing happens, twice. "Nothingness is what the tramps are fighting against, and nothingness is the reason why they are talking.

Deficiency of Plot, Characterization, Etc.

Since Beckett's subject in this play was habit and boredom, he could dispense with plot. Since his characters were, like the characters in his novels, without history, he could dispense with background. All that was left was a skeleton language, logic, and wit. The dialogue is maintained even though there is nothing to say, and it is maintained by the simple device of instant forgetfulness. Estragon, who quotes poetry, claiming to be a poet and pointing to his rags to prove it, is unable or unwilling to recognise the evidence of his senses until Vladimirpatiently explains it to him detail by detail. More important, he can remember nothing for two minutes together and can refer back no further than to the last phrase uttered:

Estragon. That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget.

Vladimir. And Pozzo and Lucky, have you forgotten them too?

Estragon. Pozzo and Lucky?

Vladimir. He's forgotten everything!

It is as if a thick fog of boredom surrounded every event and every word the moment it occurs or is spoken. Estragon's reply to each appeal to his common sense and experience is a variation of "Don't ask me. I'm not a historian." Vladimir's despairing refrain is: "Try and remember," and, "Do you not remember?" But perhaps Estragon's forgetfulness is the cement binding their relationship together. He continually forgets, and Vladimir continually reminds him; between them they pass the time. This forgetfulness also keeps them talking, which is essential to their minimal sanity.

No Certainty in the Play

The sound of their own voices reassures them of their own existence, of which they are not otherwise always certain since the evidence of their senses is so dubious. They are, in fact, in constant need of a re-assurance they never get. When Pozzo re-appears in Act II he cannot remember having met them, the day before. The little boy who is Godot's messenger flatly denies ever having seen them before. Just before the boy makes his first exit Vladimirasks him anxiously, "You did see us, didn't you?" as if he, too, were not certain, and with reason too, because the boy remembers nothing of them on his next appearance. And again, Vladimir asks him as he is leaving, "You're sure you saw me, eh, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me before?" But it is a question without hope, like all the others.

Towards Poetic Drama

The tramps have another reason also to keep talking. They are drowning out those voices that assail them in the silence, just as they assailed nearly all Beckett's heroes in the novels. These are "the dead voices," which, according to Vladimir, make a noise like leaves. Vladimir says that these voices "all speak together," and Estragon adds: "Each one to itself." Vladimir says that these voices "whisper" and "murmur," while Estragon says that they "rustle." Vladimirasks what the voices say, and Estragon replies: "They talk about their lives." And thus the talk goes on till Estragon says: "What do we do now ?" and Vladimirreplies: "Wait for Godot[7]." This conversation of the tramps on "all the dead voices" is a brilliant and wholly original piece of theatrical writing. The combination of austerity straining against imaginative wealth would make this dialogue, isolated from the rest of the play, as good a poem in its own right as anything written at the time this play was produced. And this is another facet of Beckett's importance in modern literature: he has forced a way through to authentic poetic drama.

Two Great Speeches

There are two great speeches, both at the end of the play, both variations on the same theme and both focusing on the same image:

> **Pozzo.** Have you not been tormenting me with your accursed time? It's abominable. When? When? One day, is not that enough for you……? They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. *(Page 89)*

Moments later Vladimir echoes Pozzo's words as he broods over the sleeping Estragon:

> Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole,….But habit is a great deadener. *(Pages 90-91)*

Both are speeches of great conviction, and show Beckett at his most powerful. Yet they also repeat the same theme and the same image as Beckett had earlier expanded:

> The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day. Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects. The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations (because by no expedient of macabre transubstantiation can the grave-sheets serve as swaddling-clothes) represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being.[8]

Apparently, the only real change in Beckett's thinking over all those years is in understanding that the "macabre transubstantiation of swaddling-clothes into grave-sheets" does, in fact, take place. Otherwise it is the same image and the same predicament: Pozzo and Vladimir have both entered "the perilous zone when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being." Neither of them likes what he sees, but both know that there is nothing to be done. "On!" cries Pozzo to Lucky as they make their last exit. "You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on," says the Unnamable. "I can't go on," repeatsVladimir. "I can't go on," says Estragon in his turn. And Vladimir answers, "That's what you think."

Two Kinds of Human Relationships Depicted

Beckett's habit of repeating the same themes and images and even characters from work to work is a strong way of emphasising that this is how it is in his world. Whoever the characters, whatever the situation there is nothing beyond habit, boredom, forgetfulness, and suffering. In other words, "no symbols where none intended." This is why the many and elaborate interpretations that have been offered of *Wailing for Godot* seem superfluous. Pozzo and Lucky may be Body and Intellect, Master and Slave, Capitalist and Proletarian, Coloniser and Colonised, Cain and Abel, Sadist and Masochist, even Joyce and Beckett. But essentially, and more simply, they represent one way of getting through life with someone else, just asVladimir and Estragon more sympathetically represent another way of doing so. "At this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not[9]," saysVladimir, and like many of his comments it is two-edged, "this place" meaning also the stage on which he is acting. A little later Estragon pays Pozzo a similar compliment "He's all humanity[10]." It is a gloomy thought, considering Pozzo's blind and intense obstinacy and Estragon's ironical language. But in the situation on stage at that moment he is speaking the truth. In the same way, the mysterious Godot is what he sounds like; he is just another diminutive god like all the other little gods—some divine, some political, some intellectual, some personal—for whom men wait, hopefully and in fear, to solve their problems and bring point to their pointless lives, and for whose sake they sacrifice the only real gift they have, namely, their free will. "We've lost our rights asks Estragon. "We got rid of them," Vladimir replies.

How to Get Through Life ?

Waiting for Godct is the fullest statement of the problem that afflicted Beckett. The problem is: how do you get through life? Beckett's answer is simple and not encouraging: by force of habit, by going on in spite of boredom and pain, by talking, by not listening to the silence, absurdly and without hope. On these terms Christ was lucky because "where he lived, it was warm and dry, and they crucified quick." Beckett and his characters in northern Europe have a longer, chillier wait. That is why the tramps continually flirt with the idea of suicide and look back wistfully, almost tenderly, to the time when Estragon jumped into a river to kill himself. They know now that such quick and easy solutions are no longer available to them. When they try to hang themselves the rope breaks and Estragon's trousers fall down. All they can do is to continue: "We are not saints but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?" And how many dramatists have stated such a simple truth so powerfully and so wittily.

Who Is Godot?

The Mysterious Godot

What baffles us most in reading this play is the identity of Godot. Godot is a mysterious personality. The two tramps wait for him in a state of twilight, occasionally lit up by a fleeting vision of a rescuer. They have vague notions that they will be taken to his farm where they will be able to "sleep, warm and dry, with a full stomach, on straw."

But Godot seems to be a kind of distant mirage. At the end of each day, a messenger-boy arrives in his stead with the promise that Godot will come tomorrow. In Act I, we hear that he does not beat the messenger-boy, who is a goat-herd, but that lie beats his brother, who is a shepherd. The two tramps feel uneasy about Godot. When the time comes to meet him, they will have to approach him "on their hands and knees", and if they stopped waiting for him he would punish

them. At the end of Act II, we learn that Godot does nothing and that his beard is probably white.

The Image of God as Depicted in the Bible

From all this we may gather that Godot has several traits in common with the image of God as depicted in the Old and the New Testaments. His white beard reminds us of the image of the old-father aspect of God. His irrational preference for one of the two brothers recalls Jehovah's treatment of Cain and Abel; so does his power to punish those who would dare to ignore him. The discrimination between the goat-herd and the shepherd is reminiscent of the Son of God as the ultimate judge: as a saviour for whom men wait and wait; he might well be meant as a cynical comment on the second coming of Christ, while his doing nothing might be an equally cynical reflection concerning man's forlorn state. This last feature seems to show that Beckett points to the sterility of a consciousness that expects and waits for the old activity of God or gods. Whereas St. Matthew says: "And he shall seat the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left," in the play it is the shepherd who is beaten and the goat-herd who is favoured. What Vladimir and Estragon expect from Godot is food and shelter, and goats are motherly, milk-providing animals.

Godot, an Empty Promise

We hear that, once, Vladimir and Estragon had *seen* Godot. But they do not remember him quite clearly, and the vague promises he seems to have given them are treated with a light-heartedness born of doubt. In fact, it seems to them as if God, Godot, and Pozzo were sometimes merging into one blurred picture. When, in Act II, they talk of God, Pozzo appears and is mistaken by Estragon for Godot. Here the implication perhaps is that religion altogether is based on indistinct desires in which spiritual and material needs remain mixed. Godot is explicity vague, merely an empty promise, corresponding to lukewarm piety and absence of suffering in the tramps. Waiting for Godot has become a habit with them, a habit which is a "guarantee of dull inviolability", and an adaptation to the meaninglessness of life.

Pozzo's Utterance, and Vladimir's Speculations

In one of his more lucid moments,Vladimir tries to make Estragon participate in his own fears about the question of salvation, damnation, or mere death, but Estragon remains unmoved. Vladimir talks about the two thieves who were crucified beside Christ and he ponders the fact that only one of the four Evangelists mentions that one of the thieves was going to be saved: "One out of four. Of the other three two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him.....And only one speaks of a thief being saved". Passages like the one where Vladimirdiscusses this problem with the uncomprehending Estragon show why Beckett is presenting us with a state in modern man in which fear and resort, to some recognised deity of the past are mixed with doubt and bitterness on the one hand, and with tired indifference on the other. This becomes highly probable when we remember that a deeper awareness of the spiritual void of our time is a central issue in the works of the existentialists. This fear of the void behind the feelings of doubt and bitterness alternating with resignation, is the realm of existence where the "suffering of being" might lead to transition. In one of his speeches Pozzo says to Vladimir:

> Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall

> die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you ? They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. *(Page 89)*

This passage might be called Pozzo's lietmotif. The hopeless vision of life as a brilliant moment between the womb and the tomb is stressed and explained by the words, "one day like any other". If one day is like any other, there is nothing but fruitless repetition, and no transition can take place. Pozzo only deteriorates. But, towards the end of the play, Vladimir sinks into a reverie in which Pozzo's vision re-emerges with important additions. Vladimir asks himself:

> Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I have waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot. Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. But hope is a great deadener. At me too, someone is looking, of me too someone is saying: he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. I can't go on! What have I said? *(Page 91)*

Here, most movingly, Vladimir becomes aware of a difference between two possible ways of living: one in a state of wakefulness, and the other in a state of twilight. And he even realises that he cannot go on with an existence in which the womb and the tomb seem to fit together like two halves of one whole. But at this very moment, whenVladimir is about to wake up, Godot's messenger-boy appears and destroys the process that was about to take place inVladimir. Godot's function seems to be to keep his dependants unconscious. His messenger-boy does not know anything either: he does not know whether he is unhappy or not, or why Godot is kinder to him than to his brother, or, for certain, whether Godot's beard is white. He even fails to recognise the tramps he had seen the day before.

The hopelessness of Vladimir's situation, after the coming of the messenger, is as terrible as that of Pozzo's vision of life as a flash between the womb and the tomb.Vladimir's flash of consciousness dies between his question "what have I said?" and his relapse into his reliance upon the coming of Godot.

No Female Character

This episode probably explains why there is no woman in this play, woman on the human level, that is. There is, of course, the reference to the mother-goddess, who is both the womb and the tomb, and who envelops all and everything with her dread power.

Godot's Ambiguity

Godot is merely ambiguous. As a farmer who promises food and shelter, he is obviously of the earth. As one who reminds us of the God of the Old and the New Testaments, he seems to be inclined to rule from above. Furthermore, he beats the guardian of the sheep, that is, of the submissive, gentle creatures, and prefers the guardian of the goats, of the wayward, self-willed animals; and yet he obviously expects unconditional patience and obedience from those who depend upon him and prevents their waking up to an awareness of their own centre. In this duplicity of his nature, Godot is the counterpart of her who envelops the world of living beings as womb and tomb.

Regression of the Human Mind

It seems, then, that Beckett in this play leads us into a deep regression from all civilised tradition; he leads us into a state in which consciousness sinks back into an earlier state of its development. Such a regression is compared by Jung to a descent into Hades, a descent which is connected with the dissolution of the conscious personality into its functional components. Accordingly, many people have remarked that the play strikes them as a product of schizophrenia and as lacking in all coherence, (and Beckett himself is reported to have said that his play was about nothing).

II

Godot's Non-arrival

Although the name Godot undoubtedly intrudes the word, "God", the play does not deal with God but merely with the concept of God. No wonder therefore that God's image is left vague. The theological passages in the play tell us that what God does is unknown. It appears that he does nothing at all; and the only information conveyed by the messenger-boy is that, alas, Godot will not be coming today but tomorrow. Beckett clearly indicates that it is precisely Godot's non-arrival which keeps the two tramps waiting for him, and their faith in him alive. "Let's go."—We can't."—"Why not?"—"We're waiting for Godot."—"Ah!" According to some philosophers, the proof of God's existence lies in His very absence. This is the *proof ex absentia*. Beckett is not such a philosopher. Beckett puts the conclusion (about the non-arrival of Godot as being a proof of Godot's existence) into the mouths of his characters, and does not himself share this belief; in fact, Beckett even derides this belief. Beckett's play is therefore certainly not a religious play; at most it deals with religion.

III

Godot Powerful and Possibly Hostile

It hardly matters in what sense Godot stands for God, but it is difficult to interpret him in any other way. He is the external figure who can bring a change in the immobility of the two tramps for whom he certainly exists. The idea of grace—the possibility of salvation—is prominent in the play, from the moment when Vladimir expresses his puzzlement over the different accounts given in the four Gospels of the late of the two thieves crucified with Christ. According to one evangelist, one of the two thieves was saved and the other damned. AsVladimir remarks: "It's a reasonable percentage." A religious, indeed theological, motif runs through this near-static farce, and it is not surprising that critics should have found some similarity between Beckett and Pascal. The Pascalian picture of the misery of man abandoned to himself is Beckett's picture in this play, and one has only to develop Anouilh's description of the play as "a music-hall sketch of the *Pensees*performed by the Fratellini clowns," in order to perceive the similarity of their views on the human condition. But there are some differences. Pascal's God was the Supreme Good or at least included the Supreme Good. There was no doubt at all that union with God would mean total happiness and solve every problem. There was little doubt either of God's goodwill towards men. Waiting for him was very likely to be rewarded. Godot, on the other hand, inspires much less confidence. Apart from his refusal to make a definite promise to do anything, there is also doubt about the nature of his offer. Will it be advantageous and, if not, are the tramps free to "take it or leave it," as Vladimir suggests? They feel uneasily that they may not be. Whoever Godot may

be, he is a powerful and possibly hostile person. He has some hold over the tramps which prevents them from cancelling their appointment with him. They must wait, on purely compulsive grounds:

Estragon. And if we dropped him?

Vladimir. He'd punish us.

If he comes, he may bring a change in their present meaningless condition, although they are not sure that it will be a change for the better. The last few lines of the play suggest salvation:

Vladimir. We'll hang ourselves tomorrow unless Godot comes.

Estragon. And if he comes?

Vladimir. We'll be saved.

But, in view of all that has gone before, this can hardly be accepted as a firm conclusion.Vladimir's tendency is to look on the bright side, mainly because he cannot quite accept the alternative. His remark is hardly inspired by the man of conviction which Pascal called "faith".

Godot's Image Not Really Acceptable

Godot bears a sinister resemblance to Nobodaddy. He may in fact be Nobodaddy—for the tramps, if not for some other department of the universe—and this is the shadow which haunts the play from the religious point of view. Beckett's characters grope to construct an acceptable image of Godot/God. One of them appears in Lucky's celebrated monologue (a "think-piece") in Act I: "Given the existence…….of a personal God with a white beard outside time…….who from the heights of divine apathia…….loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell……." If Godot is like this there is not much left to hope for, and it must be admitted that the description given by the second messenger-boy is not reassuring. What if he is the old Jehovah-daddy all over again? When the messenger-boy tells Vladimir that Mr. Godot does nothing and that he has a white beard,Vladimir exclaims: "Christ have mercy on us!" Vladimir's exclamation of horror arises from the obvious truth that a twentieth century mentality can draw little comfort from the image of God of the Old Testament type. The kind of salvation which a white-bearded Godot is likely to offer will hardly satisfy even Vladimir and Estragon, impoverished though they are. From the religious point of view, this play might well have been given the sub-title: "Nobodaddy's Revenge".

Godot As Seen By The Tramps

Although Godot fails to appear in the play, he is as real a character as any of those whom we actually see. Godot very much exists for the tramps, and he directs the course of the evening for them. The tramps need Godot to give a meaning to their universe: they depend on his arrival; and so long as Godot does not come to resolve their waiting (and he does not come at all), everything that happens is only provisional. Godot's very absence demonstrates his presence, and he dominates the play in which he fails to appear. Although he is, at best, a dimiy remembered acquaintance and Estragon says that he would not even know him if he saw him, a general image of Godot does emerge during the evening. To the tramps he lives in the capitalist world of "family", "agents", "correspondents", and a "bank account". They identify his power with what is most familiar to them in the only world they have experience of authority. But to the boy who brings his message, Godot has a white beard and his life is occupied by his mastery over the sheep and the goats. In another of the contradictory divisions of punishment and grace which occur in this

play Godot beats the brother who cares for the sheep and favours the goat-herd. His behaviour, though not strictly accurate, has a precedent: "And he shall seat the sheep on his right hand but the goats on his left."

Godot as God

This, among other allusions, suggests an interpretation of Godot in terms of the first three letters (G-o-d) of his name. (The name "Godot" is a bilingual pun on God and water, the two needs of the hero in his isolation and spiritual thirst. But though the play is rich in Christian imagery and symbolism it is not more prevalent than, for example in Beckett's novels, *Molloy* or *The Unnamable*. If Godot is God then Beckett's irony is unusually happy and besides, Beckett's characters are all certain that God, as such, does not exist. The proof of Godot's existence is another mockery of the rational determination to find a meaning. He is because he is not:

Estragon. Let's go.

Vladimir. We can't.

Estragon. Why not?

Vladimir. We're waiting for Godot.

Vladimir and Estragon

Two Distinct Individuals

Within the limits which the situation in the play creates, the tramps are two distinct individuals, each with his own character and interests. Their shared condition is the ground on which their fundamentally opposed natures enter into the conflict, or tension, which is necessary to drama. At no time is the skilfully balanced dialogue interchangeable from one to the other. Estragon explains one essential difference when he tells Pozzo: "He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet."Vladimir's preoccupation is mental, and Estragon's is physical; and these two preoccupations are reflected in the distinct smells which disgust Pozzo.

Vladimir, the Stronger of the Two

Of the two, Vladimir thinks more and is therefore more eloquent: his anguish is intellectual. Consequently he appears to be the stronger of the two. It is Vladimir who implies that he once dealt with Godot: it is he who assures Estragon that they are in the right place; it is he who dispenses the food—turnips, carrots, and radishes. Vladimir is more cultured than Estragon; he quotes Latin and searches his memory for the correct word, unlike Estragon who is content with the first word that occurs. It is Vladimir, again, who tries to make polite conversation with Pozzo while Estragon listens or follows his own thoughts.

Vladimir's Thinking Fallible

But Vladimir's thinking is fallible and exposes him to greater anguish than Estragon. When they discuss the idea of hanging themselves, Estragon sees at once that Vladimir who is the heavier of the two, may break the branch of the tree, butVladimir needs to have this fact explained to him as if he were a child and then says, "I didn't think of that." Vladimir's head is a "charnel house" of dead ideas and when he needs to think he takes off his hat and peers inside as if looking

for something. When Lucky leaves his hat behind, Vladimirexchanges it for his, perhaps preferring other men's ideas to his own. Above all he lives according to the rationalist principle which urges him to "be reasonable, you haven't tried everything yet. And I resumed the struggle."

Vladimir More Sympathetic; Estragon's Spontaneous Imagination

Vladimir is also capable of thinking of others whereas Estragon is only concerned with his own pain. Vladimir is outraged by the sores which the rope has made on Lucky's neck and protests to Pozzo when the latter says that he is on his way to sell his servant at the fair: "And now you turn him away? Such an old and faithful servant……. After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like a banana skin." But this intellectual compassion has its limits:Vladimir's sympathy is for the suffering of the moment. When a few lines later, Pozzo gives way to grief, Vladimir rebukes Lucky in a similar manner: "How dare you! Such a good master! Crucify him like that! After so many years! Really!" Estragon meanwhile is more interested in Pozzo's discarded chicken bones. He is more irritable, obstinate, and selfish than Vladimir. He has a fit of bad temper like a child, sitting passively on the mound while Vladimir walks restlessly about with his eyes searching the horizon as if the answer to his agony might be found there. Estragon's imagination is spontaneous, and he habitually personalises the universe; thus when he talks of Christ it is not surprising to find him identifying himself with him or that he claims, looking at his rags, to have been a poet. When Pozzo asks his name, he replies, "Adam". Vladimir reads the Bible for instruction, Estragon reads it for the coloured maps of the Holy Land: "The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty." Estragon's suffering is physical, as with his boats, or emotional, but he still delights in the body and in physical coarseness as when Vladimir has to relieve himself. (Vladimir of course despises physical coarseness). Estragon is also more naturally a victim—he is the one who is kicked by Lucky and beaten by the unknown persons who are referred to as "they"— and in his innocence of thought seems to be more beloved by whoever it is who introduces the several mysterious acts of grace into the evening. In Act the struggles to get his feet into his boots; after the interval they are replaced by a pair a little too large. Finally, Estragon is closer to timelessness than Vladimir. All landscapes are now the same to him and his memory is incapable of reaching back even to the previous day. "I'm not a historian," he says. Once completed an event is forgotten; "day" means nothing to him any longer; and in his mind his thoughts belong to the repeated present moments in which they are spoken; he makes no distinction between events in time.

The Nature of the Friendship Between the Two

The dialogue in which the two tramps demand and reject each other, or possess and elude each other, or attract and repel each other, expresses a friendship which is situated "somewhere between fatigue and ennui." They have been together many years and their past was more promising than their present condition suggests. Vladimirrecalls a time when they still belonged to society:

> In the nineties, hand in hand, from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were presentable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up.
>
> *(Page 10)*

On another occasion they were grape-harvesting when Estragon threw himself into the Rhone. Vladimir rescued him. Now, however, their friendship is the Proustian desert of habit, loneliness, and recrimination:

Vladimir *(Joyous)*. There you are again. *(Indifferent)*. There we are again. *(Gloomy)*. There I am again.
(Page 59)

The words destroy Vladimir's original innocent pleasure in Estragon's presence, reducing him first to the boredom in which they were last together and then to a sudden understanding of the unsolvable question. "You see," Estragon tells him, "you feel worse, when I'm with you. I feel better alone, too" *(Page 59)*. Each feels closer to his own self without the other who reminds him of his imprisonment in time. They remain unknown and unknowable to one another but prefer to continue a relationship which emphasises their isolation, rather than separate and endure the self-perception, of life alone. Both feel pain and call on each other to recognise their suffering, but neither is capable of penetrating to the other's being. Vladimir suffering intellectually is a spectacle for Estragon. Estragon suffering physically is beyondVladimir's comprehension.

Estragon (feebly). Help me!

Vladimir. It hurts?

Estragon. Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

Vladimir *(angrily)*. Nobody ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have.

Estragon. It hurts?

Vladimir. Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts! (Page 10)

Suffering does not ennoble or create a human solidarity; it is something that cannot be shared, and it has therefore a brutalising effect. When kicked by Lucky, Estragon spits at him and later, when Lucky lies helplessly on the ground, beats him with his fists and feet. Again, when Estragon calls on God for pity, Vladimir, his friend, is excluded from the prayer:

Estragon. God have pity on me!

Vladimir *(vexed)*. And me?

Estragon. On me! On me! Pity! On me! *(Page 77)*

Like all who love, these two are adept at hurting each other. Rejection is followed by counter-rejection and Estragon's selfish wants encourage Vladimir to taunts and bitterness.

Each Needs the Other

It seems desirable perhaps that they should part company. Estragon considers it many times which in itself woundsVladimir's feelings. "You see, you feel worse when I'm with you. I feel better alone, too," Estragon says; and Vladimir replies, "Then why do you always come crawling back?" To this Estragon says, "I don't know". But, despite the suffering which sets a distance between them, and each other's presence which emphasises the essential loneliness of both, there is also a profound need which each feels for the other. This need sometimes transforms their irritation of hatred into tenderness, and anger into a compassion which is close to love. Vladimir needs someone to listen to him explaining the conflicting evidence in his head. "Go on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a way ?" says he to Estragon. As for Estragon, he needs protection against himself and against others. This is made clear byVladimir when he says, "When

I think of it…….all these years…….but for me…….where would you be ? You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute". It is always Vladimir who makes the initial advance, and Estragon who at first repels him. But Estragon's need is in no way less just because it is more difficult for him to express it. Indeed on two occasions he manages adequately. In Act I when Estragon falls asleep, Vladimir is left alone and lonely, and he wakes Estragon up:

Estragon. Why will you never let me sleep?

Vladimir. I felt lonely.

Estragon. I had a dream.

Vladimir. Don't tell me!

Estragon. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you? (Pages 15-10)

The need is everyone's, but Vladimir cannot bear another's nightmares in addition to his own. (However, in Act II when Estragon sleeps again, Vladimir sings a pathetic lullaby, takes off his coat and puts it over Estragon's shoulders, and runs to comfort him when he wakes up terrified by the visions which pursue him even in sleep). When, at the opening of Act II, Estragon utters a cry, the conflicting nature of their life together finds a clear expression. "Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!"

II

The Contrast Between Vladimir and Estragon

As the members of a cross-talk act,Vladimir and Estragon have complementary personalities. Vladimir is the more practical of the two, and Estragon claims to have been a poet. In eating his carrot, Estragon finds that the more he eats of it the less he likes it, while Vladimir reacts the opposite way—he likes things as he gets used to them. Estragon is volatile, Vladimir persistent; Estragon dreams, Vladimir cannot stand hearing about dreams. Vladimir has stinking breath, Estragon has stinking feet. Vladimirremembers past events, Estragon tends to forget them as soon as they have happened. Estragon likes telling funny stories, Vladimiris upset by them. It is mainly Vladimir who voices the hope that Godot will come and that his coming will change their situation, while Estragon remains sceptical throughout and at times even forgets the name of Godot. It is Vladimir who conducts the conversation, with the boy who is Godot's messenger and to whom the boy's messages are addressed. Estragon is the weaker of the two; he is beaten up by mysterious strangers every night. Vladimir at times acts as his protector, sings him to sleep with a lullaby, and covers him with his coat. The opposition of their temperaments is the cause of endless bickering between them and often leads to the suggestion that they should part. Yet, being complementary natures, they also are dependent on each other and have to stay together.

Pozzo and Lucky

I

A Contrast Between Two Pairs of Characters

In Ecclesiastes we read:

> Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.
>
> For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.
>
> Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?

Waiting for Godot is structured upon the contrast of the two races of men. In contrast to Gogo and Didi, the fraternal pair, we have the Pozzo-Lucky couple. Gogo and Didi choose to stay together, but Pozzo and Lucky are visibly tied to one another.

Lucky, the Biblical Ass

In the beginning, Lucky the slave is driven by Pozzo by means of a rope tied round his neck. More dog-like than human, he responds to the cracking of a whip he himself carries between his teeth till his master has need of it. He has also to carry upon his shoulders the weight of Pozzo's belongings. Bent under the weight of his burden, Lucky resembles a mule, or, perhaps that most humble and useful of creatures, the Biblical ass. He is also a caricature of Atlas, a name by which Pozzo calls him at a moment of fear and anger. (As to his name, it is as ironical as the name "Felicite" which Flaubert gives to his patient, selfless servant in *A Simple Heart)*.

Lucky's Glorious Past

At some time in the distant past, we are told by Pozzo, his slave radiated "beauty, grace, truth of the first water". Pozzo admits that, being overwhelmed with professional worries, he had no time for finer things such as dancing, singing, and thinking. Besides, such pursuits do not befit a master. (Even the great rulers of ancient Rome left many decisions of state to their slaves, raised to the posts of ministers or councillors). Now Lucky's intellectual baggage contains only sand, but once "he used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the fandango, and even the hornpipe. He capered. For joy." Looking at Lucky's dance, Gogo wonders whether this strange jerky movement could be called "The Scapegoat's Agony." Didi, at the sight of these strange movements, calls them "The Hard Stool". But the master corrects both of them, describing the movements as "The Net", adding: "He thinks he's entangled in a net". Entertaining though it might be to watch the wretched Lucky struggle in an invisible net, Vladimir, the intellectual one of the pair, expresses a preference for hearing Lucky think. Pozzo is willing to offer this entertainment but warns his new acquaintances that his slave cannot do any thinking without putting on his hat. Hatted, Lucky begins his thinking and his thoughts prove a strange mixture.

Lucky's Monologue

The form of Lucky's monologue is an unfinished question which begins with a postulate of the existence of a personal God and ends with the image of an empty, fossilized skull. Thomism, Cartesianism, Hegelianism are all strangely mixed in Lucky's head. (His clownish raving represents that crisis of intelligibility which was already the concern of the Sophists and rhetoricians of the fifth century). What Lucky seems to be saying is that man has been unable to make a place for himself in this universe. Divorced from the intelligible world of essences, from God's world, man "wastes and pines" and eventually "fades away". As to God, of the little God (Godot), asleep or absent, he is the victim of "apathia……athambia…….aphasia". It is a God who leaves man to his sports: "dying…….flying…….penicillin". Scientific progress will unmake man.

From Essentialism to Existentialism

Lucky experiences much physical agitation as he delivers his "anti-soliloquy". Clearly, that perfect mechanism—the human body made by the hand of God—has suffered the same deterioration as the questioning mind. Lucky's consciousness moves from essentialism to existentialism. By watching this movement of his consciousness we participate in the ritual dismemberment of the cultivated mind. It croaks out its*quaquaquas*[1] (What? What? What?) which must remain unanswered. The personal God with the white beard evoked in the opening lines of Lucky's monologue will not appear to settle the debate of the conscience with the void. Nor will Puncher[2] and Wattman[3](Whatman?), Testew[4] and Cunard[5] (Test, stew, *cut,* and testicules), Fartov[6] and Belcher[7], whose names suggest the difficult digestion which follows the ingestion of philosophical matter, Steinweg and Peterman (stone and sick), nor any member of the Acacacacademy of Anthropopopometry" provide the answer. These philosophers and scholars will be unable to halt the regressive motion by which the human creature will revert to its primitive condition. Man will "uncreate" himself to the point of becoming "the empty skull in Connemara".

The Decline in Lucky's Thinking Powers

Lucky's denunciation of the human race and his own condition of near-idiocy show that man's endeavours constitute a mass which is superfluous as is the creature that generated them. Thought is reduced by Beckett to a circus-act or a variety entertainment which can be stopped only by having Didi seize Lucky's hat. When Lucky begins to rave, it can be assumed that the condition is due to the presence of the bowler hat on his head. It is as though the mechanism of repressed thought had suddenly slipped out of control. The torrent of words coming from Lucky's foaming lips reminds one of the endless buckets of water carried by a magician's apprentice. In this the magician Pozzo is equally horrified by his creation. This once gifted creature (Lucky) has been transformed though centuries of slavery into a mindless parrot. When his hat is taken away, it is as if the man of thought had lost his crown. Having demonstrated the uselessness of his achievements, Lucky can no longer be hatted. Taking the hat away from Vladimir, Pozzo filings it on the ground, tramples on it, and shouts triumphantly: "There's an end to his thinking!" Tyranny is at last firmly established, but he restoration of peace and order signifies the restoration of the idiot. When next we see the master and his slave, now dumb, Lucky still carries his burden, but Pozzo has lost his sight and his strength. It is a case of the dumb leading the blind. The rope which links the two is shorter, symbolising the increasing dependence of the master on the servant. Clearly Pozzo has not carried out his original intention of selling his slave. The two wretched creatures are now joined together, and the result is a monstrous indivisible, mass of humanity.

Pozzo's Blindness

Frightened and utterly dependent on his slave, Pozzo is nevertheless the man who cannot stay in one place. Once the whip-cracking master of men and worldly possessions, Pozzo is yet unable to give up the myth of action even when his powers fail him. Through blindness he has entered the shadowy world of indeterminate space and time, a universe which is "like nothing". His sightlessness, as he himself states, is that of Fortune, an absurd blindness. Unlike Tiresias, he does not possess a third eye which would allow him to look into the future. A grotesque Oedipus at the crosssroads, led by an idiotic slave, Pozzo, is as cut off from any future as from his past. He does not recall, having met Estragon andVladimir before, perhaps because they were of no importance to him except as a temporary and accidental audience; nor will he remember them the next day.

A Caricature of God

In the portrayal of Pozzo, Beckett has given us a caricature of God, the absolute monarch. Pozzo is the living symbol of the Establishment. Nothing must discourage him. When Vladimir asks him: "What do you do when you fall far from help?" he answers unhesitatingly, using the royal "we", or perhaps including his slave, "We wait till we can get up. Then we go on. On!" Were Pozzo to stop for one moment he would be faced with the clear and unbearable image of his gradual disintegration. We know this for it is Pozzo who formulates a striking definition of the human condition when he says: "They give birth astride of a grave" *(Page 89)*.

Pozzo, the Egotist

Despite such knowledge, Pozzo belongs to that class of men who do not learn by suffering. He is an egotist, full of self-love. He is fond of hearing his own voice and the ready flow of his rhetoric. He is convinced that he owns not only the land around the road, but the road as well and all the people on it. His stool which Lucky sets up for him whenever he wishes to rest is a portable throne. Having eaten the chicken, he throws, with the grand gesture of an emperor, the bones in the direction of his slave who, too weak to eat, lets Estragon chew them. Pozzo's greatest concern is his dignity. Once he has risen from his stool, he will not stay unless begged to do so. If he condescends to speak to Estragon andVladimir, it is only because "from the meanest creature one departs wiser, richer, more conscious of one's blessings." But when, these two dare question him, he sees in it a sign of future rebellion: "A moment ago you were calling me sir, in fear and trembling. Now you're asking me questions. No good will come of this!" Pozzo's absolute mastery, his divinely delegated powers, must remain unchallenged.

Pozzo's Arrogance Towards Lucky

As to his slave, Pozzo would like to get rid of him, but "the truth is you can't drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill them". One recognises here the tone of a superlord. Pretentious, but only half-educated, Pozzo curses Lucky, calling him "Atlas, son of Jupiter."' Though he does not know that Atlas was not Jupiter's son, he must recall that the brother of Prometheus was a foe of the gods, and that they punished him for having taken part in the rebellion of the Titans. Not that Lucky at all looks like a Titan—this is another example of Beckett's irony—but Pozzo fears a possible revolt by the slaves. In Act II, reduced to a pitiable condition, Pozzo still calls his servant "pig" and encourages Estragon "to give him a taste of his boot, in the

face and the privates as far as possible"*(Page 87)*. Although he himself cries for pity, Pozzo feels no pity for anyone else.

Pozzo's Philosophic Utterance

Paradoxically this grotesque man of action, a doer who has outlived the moment of his greatest power, formulates the tragedy of man's brief existence on this earth: "One day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second." *(Page 89)*.

The Difference Between the Two Pairs

It has often been said that Pozzo and Lucky are one man, that they represent the duality of mind and body. Estragon andVladimir have likewise been supposed to represent one man. If these suppositions are correct, the difference between the two pairs may be noted. The oneness of Pozzo and Lucky is degrading to both and is indeed shown as profoundly harmful; the connection of the other two is a warm, life-sustaining relationship. Estragon andVladimir are aware that one cannot be warm alone. The situation of Pozzo and Lucky is different. Neither of them is able to help the other in Act II when they fall down. In fact, when Vladimir attempts to help Pozzo to his feet, he falls next to the blind man, and, in turn, when Estragon comes to his friend's rescue, he is dragged down on the heap on the floor. Thus, Estragon andVladimir try to lift up their fellow-man, but if they are unable to do so it is because Pozzo is beyond human reach. Pozzo manages to extricate himself from the pile and to crawl away. Estragon and Vladimir lie on the ground, as though forgotten. After a while, however, they manage to rise. "Simple, question of will-power", states Vladimir, unaware that he could not exercise his will-power while Pozzo was close. Contact with Pozzo has a weakening effect on others. Nothing illustrates so clearly as this scene the Demoralising and weakening effect of tyrannical rule *(Pages 81-86)*. Once Estragon and Vladimir have succeeded in shaking off the paralysing influence of the tyrant, they try to help him. By having him place his arms round their necks, they manage to help him up, but in this position he is only a deadweight that they are forced to drag.

Godot's Arbitrariness

Devaluation is not the only feature of Beckett's bitter irony here. Pozzo might be a blind divinity (like the Hamm of *Endgame),* a cruel god, powerless, unknowing, unjust. If so, why wait for the Second Coming of Godot? And in fact what justice can be expected from Godot? The information supplied by the messenger-boy indicates that Godot's rewards and arrangements are perfectly arbitrary. Godot is good to the goat-herd but beats the shepherd. Is Godot then an anti-Jehovah as Pozzo seems to be an anti-Christ? The goat is traditionally a symbol of lust, and we learn from St. Matthew that, if the sheep are to be on God's right hand, the goats will be placed on the left. Godot's sense of justice seems then to be absurd or inverted. Yet Beckett seems to suggest that Jehovah's decisions are equally inscrutable, such as allowing Cain to kill the kind-hearted Abel. Perhaps Godot is only a human being, a lost, suffering creature because, when in pain, Pozzo responds to the names of both Abel and Cain. "He's all humanity", comments Gogo.

II

Lucky's Bondage to Pozzo, an Alternative to the Tramps' Unbearable Waiting

Pozzo and Lucky are representatives of the ordinary world from which the tramps are excluded. "We've lost our rights?" Estragon asks, and Vladimir says, "We got rid of them" Even

the tramps wish to assert their importance as free agents by insisting that their exclusion is voluntary. By contrast with Pozzo and Lucky, however, it is the life of the tramps which appears normal. Pozzo and Lucky create a metaphor of society, not as it is but as the tramps might see it, with the social structure reduced to an essential distinction between master and slave. In a world like that of this play where man awaits a revelation, Pozzo the master is the nearest approach to what is absent. He appears all-powerful, dominating the stage by his gestures and his inflated language. Life, for Pozzo, is important. When he enters he still values the body (and has brought ample provisions with him for his journey); he is capable of enjoying sensual delights and depends upon a collection of cherished possessions (his watch, his vaporizer, etc.). He reminds us of a feudal lord, self-consciously magnanimous in his disposal of time and charity. He condescends to recognise Vladimir and Estragon, who are on his land, as fellow-men though he regrets that the road is open to all. Pozzo's is a fixed and well-regulated world in contrast to the confusion of the tramps where everything is in flux, and Pozzo's behaviour echoes the image which the tramps have of Godot. Not surprisingly they at first mistake his identity:

> **Estragon.** Is that him?
>
> **Vladimir.** Who?
>
> **Estragon** *(trying to remember the name).* Er.....
>
> **Vladimir.** Godot?
>
> **Estragon.** Yes.
>
> **Pozzo.** I present myself: Pozzo.
>
> **Vladimir** (to *Estragon).* Not at all! (Page 22)

Pozzo, in fact, is a temporal substitute for Godot. He is the man who has taken it upon himself to behave as if the answers are known, who lives wholly in terms of power, and whose existence is restricted by time. Lucky, it seems, is fortunate in having found this substitute. His bondage is an alternative to the unbearable waiting of the tramps.

Pozzo's Inward Emptiness

However, Pozzo's power is hollow. He does not accord much recognition to his servant whom he calls "pig" or "hog". "The road seems long when one journeys alone", he says, attaching no importance to Lucky, and again, "I can't talk in a vacuum." His speech reveals his inward emptiness. In Act I he speaks in platitudes: "From the meanest creature one departs wiser, richer, more conscious of one's blessings." Or, he elevates the simplest remark into an exaggerated performance. Thus, when Vladimir asks him a question, Pozzo prepares his answer like a teacher or a priest. He twice sprays his throat with the vaporizer, then groups the audience about him in anticipation, and finally spells out the answer with pedantic logic. If Lucky has found a substitute Godot, Pozzo avoids the tramps' waiting by filling his life with illusion. Pozzo, on his journey, clings to his condition; the tramps, who remain where they are, are always seeking to change theirs.

Lucky, a Source of Culture for Pozzo

It is Lucky who has transformed the world of his master and given Pozzo what intelligence and culture he now possesses. "But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings would have been of

common things. Beauty, grace, truth of the first water, I knew they were all beyond me", he says, referring to Lucky. The rope which binds Lucky and Pozzo also ties the master to his slave, and in Act II Pozzo no longer drives but follows him.

Lucky, Now a Puppet

Lucky is a puppet who obeys Pozzo's commands. He dances, sings, recites, and thinks for Pozzo, and his personal life has been reduced to basic animal reflexes: he cries, and he kicks. But once, we have Pozzo's word for it, he was a better dancer and capable of giving his master moments of great illumination and joy: "He used to be so kind.....so helpful and entertaining.....my good angel....." However, this has changed: "now.....he's killing me." Pozzo has Lucky not only to act as a carrier but also to emphasise his own reality. Lucky's thinking is now not the rationalist consolation it once was but total scepticism which illuminates the agony beneath appearances. When he speaks he is Pozzo's tormentor; he reminds Pozzo of the reality which it is Pozzo's earnest endeavour to avoid.

Lucky's Terrifying Speech

This becomes clear in Lucky's great speech which terrifies the hearers because it foretells the extinction of the world. Lucky presumes the existence of a personal God with a white beard, a God who "loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown and suffers like divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown to time but time will tell are plunged in torment." (The phrase "for reasons unknown" occurs again and again in the course of Lucky's speech). Despite God's presence and the labours of all the authorities, it is discovered "that man in spite, of progress.....man in short.....man in brief.....wastes and pines and for reasons unknown continues to shrink and dwindle." The authorities quoted by Lucky find that, in spite of the researches of science, the intuition of the artist, the physical culture of sport, and the endurance of the earth, everything is condemned to waste into the great dark of nothing. This is the only certainty which Lucky's intelligence has discovered. Lucky's knowledge of this ends in despair, and his thinking in this speech, with its devaluation of art, progress, religion, and science, anticipates the extinguished world of Beckett's play*Endgame*.

Beckett's Treatment of Man in Time

The change which overtakes Pozzo and Lucky by Act II is not, however, simply a comment on the decline of the master-slave society. Rather it belongs to the larger context of Beckett's treatment of man in time. When he first appears, Pozzo is still firmly immersed in normal time. He even carries a watch and checks the length of his journey by it: time is valuable to him and he would not like to waste it by waiting under a tree for the night to fall: "But I must really be getting along if I am to observe my schedule." When Vladimir says: "Time has stopped", Pozzo says: "Don't you believe it, sir, don't you believe it," For the tramps nothing noticeable is taking place, but for Pozzo "night is charging and will burst upon us." However, he has not been long in the tramps' presence before a change takes place. At first he observes that "All subsides. A great calm descends" and then he starts losing his possessions, first his pipe, then his vaporizer, and finally his watch. When this happens he experiences difficulties in remembering what he has just said, and his hold on things begins, to weaken. During the interval between Act I and Act II, the process is completed. In this interval since yesterday Pozzo goes blind and Lucky becomes dumb; and their miserable journey across the stage introduces a new meaning into an established image: "'Tis the time's plague when mad men lead the blind." Even Estragon is surprised at the rapidity of the change. It is Estragon, not Pozzo, who now seeks to establish some reason into time. Pozzo's

reply contains all of Beckett's pent-up anguish over man in time: in our conception is our end, and yet we have to live it out to this dreadful conclusion which human beings are powerless to alter. Pozzo's reply runs as follows:

> Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time? It's abominable. When? When? One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day he went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you ? *(Page 89)*

III

Their Inter-dependence

Pozzo and Lucky represent the two complementary sides of society. (On both of the entrances of Pozzo, Estragon believes for a moment that Godot has arrived, but the mistake is soon realised). They are totally interdependent. Without Lucky, Pozzo cannot move forward, sit down to eat or get up. Lucky cannot move either, except in response to Pozzo's shouted orders and whip-cracks. Together they compose a functioning from which the two tramps are excluded, or have opted out. Vladimir and Estragon lack any such organisational framework and cannot function as isolated individuals either. Their "exercises", whether physical or verbal, are strictly non-functional, being unrelated to any necessity or purpose. These exercises surely serve to pass the time, but time "would have passed in any case."

The Intention to Sell Lucky

Society, however, is in no better shape than those who are outside it. Its functioning is largely mechanical and the only defined purpose of Pozzo and Lucky's laborious journey is to reach the market where Lucky will be sold. The objective result of this would be to break their society up, but Pozzo does not see so far and lightly boasts that he is not short of slaves. He only sees that Lucky has grown sour and tiresome so that he has, no more pleasure in the slave's company.

A Caricature of Feudalism

This could well be interpresed as a caricature of feudalism in decline. In English productions of the play Pozzo thunders awfully in the manner of Colonel Blimp and at the same time is a slave to formality. In his punctiliousness of the sharp use of sarcasm he possesses the two most resented qualities of the old governing class. He can unbend towards the two tramps with a condescension which smells of superiority and which gradually gives way to his overwhelming need of an audience to talk to: "Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes even when the likeness is an imperfect one." He suggests the capitalism of the third or fourth generation. But although Pozzo wears an outward image of the country gentleman, it would be absurd to read Brechtian implications into this play. It is not an attack on senile capitalism, but a more general image of society as a whole. It does not correspond precisely to any division into haves and have-nots. Pozzo owns and commands, Lucky produces and obeys. He is equally the beast of burden and the artist and intellectual.

Physical as Well as Mental Decline

In the past Lucky has taught Pozzo all he knows of "beauty, grace, truth of the first water." He can still manage a tottering dance to entertain them. He can still be made to think—so long as he is wearing his hat. And like the professional intellectual in any organized society, his thinking

leads by its own momentum to conclusions so discomforting that the others jump on him and try to shut his mouth. This is the effect of Lucky's breathlessly spoken and confused monologue which ends in a seeming incoherence that is nevertheless quite clear. Even while still thinking, Lucky was drawing near to the eternal immobility of bed-rock. Deprived of his hat, his thinking stops finnally "unfinished". When he and his master reappear in Act II, Pozzo has gone blind; and Lucky dumb. They fall flat on their faces and are unable to get up without help. Thus their physical run-down is fast catching up with their mental run-down. Society, so far as these two represent it, is nearing the point where it ceases to function altogether.

Pozzo a Representative of a Stagnant Upper Class Despite His Memorable Utterances

But Pozzo, though now stripped of arrogance, is still very articulate. It is he who first utters the memorable phrase, "They (humanity) give birth astride of a grave", to express the brevity of life. Lines such as these show that no precise parallel can be drawn between the Pozzo-Lucky combination and a two-tiered social order. Some of Pozzo's speeches go beyond what seems dramatically plausible in a decaying boss-figure. But, whatever language he uses (and we may suppose that it was Lucky who originally taught him to utter "these beautiful things"), his thoughts are always platitudes, so that on a wider view he can still be equated with a stagnant upper class.

IV

Representatives of "Body" and "Mind"

Pozzo and Lucky are complementary individuals, as are Estragon and Vladimir; but the relationship between the first two men is on a more primitive level: Pozzo is the sadistic master, Lucky the submissive slave. In Act I Pozzo is rich, powerful, certain of himself; he represents worldly man in all his facile and short-sighted optimism and illusory feeling of power and permanence. Lucky not only carries his heavy luggage, and even the whip with which Pozzo beats him; he also dances and thinks for him, or did so in his prime. In fact, Lucky taught Pozzo all the higher values of life: "beauty, grace, truth of the first water." Pozzo and Lucky represent the relationship between body and mind, the material and spiritual sides of man, with the intellect subordinate to the appetites of the body. Now that Lucky's powers are failing, Pozzo complains that they cause him untold suffering. He wants to get rid of Lucky and sell him at the fair. But in Act II, when they appear again, they are still tied together. Pozzo has gone blind, Lucky has become dumb. (While Pozzo drives Lucky on a journey without an apparent goal, Vladimir has prevailed upon Estragon to wait for Godot).

The Theme of Regression and Disintegration in Waiting for Godot

ACT I

The Two Tramps

The scene is a country road with a tree growing nearby, a skeleton tree stunted and without a single leaf. The two men who appear on the stage are without age, or profession, or family background. These men have no home to go to. They are tramps, in short. One takes off his boots,

and the other talks of the Gospels. One eats a carrot which the other offers. They have nothing substantial to say to each other. They address each other by two diminutives, Gogo and Didi.

Waiting for Someone Called Godot

The two men pretend to go away, and to leave each other, but always they come back to each other. They cannot go away, because they are waiting for someone called Godot, about whom we know nothing except that he will not come. So we are not surprised when eventually a boy "arrives (Vladimir thinks that the boy is the same who had come yesterday) with a message: "Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow." Then daylight "Suddenly fades and it is night. The two tramps decide to go away and come back again the next day. But they do not move and the curtain falls.

Pozzo and Lucky

Earlier, two other characters have appeared to create a diversion: Pozzo, having a flourishing look, and Lucky, his decrepit servant whom he drives before him by means of a rope tied round his neck. Ppzzo sits down on a camp stool, eats a leg of cold chicken, and smokes a pipe. Then he delivers a highly coloured description of the twilight. Lucky, on a word of command from Pozzo, executes a few steps by way of a dance, and delivers an incomprehensible speech made up of disconnected fragments.

ACT II

It is the next day. The setting is the same except for the fact that the tree now has four or five leaves. Vladimir or Didi sings a song about a dog that comes into the kitchen and steals a crust of bread. The dog is killed and buried and on its tomb is written: a dog came into the kitchen and stole a crust of bread……and so on *ad lib*.Gogo puts on his boots and eats a radish. He does not remember having been here before.

Godot's Non-arrival

Pozzo and Lucky return. Lucky is dumb; Pozzo is blind and remembers nothing. The same boy comes back with the same message, namely that Mr. Godot will not come this evening but that he will come tomorrow. The boy does not recognise the two tramps and says that he has never seen them before.

Attempted Suicide

Once more it is night. Gogo and Didi would like to try to hang themselves. Unfortunately they have not got a suitable rope. They decide to go away and come back again the next day. But they do not move and the curtain falls.

A Gripping Play

The play is called *Waiting for Godot*and it lasts nearly one-and-a-half hours. This in itself is astonishing. The play is made up out of nothingness, but the audience is caught from beginning to end and remains riveted to the two tramps who do nothing and say practically nothing.

Various Interpretations

Various interpretations of the play have been offered. For instance, it has been said that Godot is God. It has also been suggested that Godot is the earthly ideal of a better social order. Or else Godot is death, and the tramps will hang themselves on the next day. Or Godot is silence: the tramps have to speak while waiting for it in order to have the right to be still at last. Or Godot is the inaccessible self that Beckett pursues through all his work, always with the ultimate hope that "this time, perhaps, at last, it will be I." At any rate Godot is the person the two tramps are waiting for and he does not come.

Not Much of a Plot

There had been in the past some attempts to do away with theatrical conventions regarding action on the stage. But this play marks a sort of climax. No dramatist had ever taken so great a risk before, because what this play deals with is the essential, without any beating about the bush, the means employed to deal with it being the minimum conceivable. It had seemed reasonable to suppose, before Samuel Beckett appeared on the scene, that a play should have a plot necessitating certain situations and actions, and characters who perform those actions and who are caught up in the tangles of a plot. But *Waiting for Godot* hardly offers a plot. In fact, less than nothing happens here. It is as if we were watching a sort of regression beyond nothing. The little we are given to begin with soon disintegrates like Pozzo, who comes back bereft of sight, dragged by Lucky bereft of speech; like the carrot, which as if in mockery has dwindled by Act II into a radish. "This is becoming really insignificant," says one of the two tramps at this point. "Not enough," replies the other. His answer is followed by a long silence. From beginning to end the dialogue is dying. It stands always on those frontiers of dissolution inhabited by all Beckett's heroes. In the midst of the silences, the repetitions, the ready-made phrases, one or the other of the two tramps suggests something to pass the time—making conversation, repenting, hanging themselves, telling stories, insulting one another, playing at Pozzo and Lucky. But each time the attempt fails; after a few uncertain exchanges they peter out, give up, admit failure.

Waiting Without Purpose

As for the plot, it is summed up in four words which occur again and again like a refrain. "We're waiting for Godot." But it is a senseless and tiresome refrain: no one is interested in this waiting: as such it has no theatrical value. It represents neither hope nor longing nor even despair. It is merely an excuse.

Falling to the Ground

In all this disintegration there is a climax or rather the lowest point, a nadir. Lucky and Pozzo, now both crippled, have fallen in a heap in the middle of the road and cannot get up. After haggling about it for some time Vladimir comes to their rescue, but he too stumbles and falls. It is his turn now to call for help. Estragon stretches out his hand but stumbles and falls likewise. Now there is no one left standing upright. There is nothing on the stage but this struggling, groaning, helpless heap, from which Vladimir's face emerges to pronounce: "We are men."

Neither Eloquence Nor Thought in the Play

We cannot put this play in the category of the theatre of ideas nor can it be claimed that there is any eloquence of speech in this play. Both thought and eloquence are conspicuous by their

absence; both figure in the play only in the form of parody. The kind of eloquence we get in the play is illustrated by Pozzo's speech describing twilight, a speech larded with choice expressions and dramatic gestures, but ruined by sudden interruptions, vulgar exclamations, and grotesque failures of inspiration, a speech which ends with the remark: "That's how it is on this bitch of an earth." As for thoughts we may select as an example a question that one of the tramps asks Pozzo. None of the three characters—Pozzo, Vladimir, and Estragon—can remember what the question was. All three take off their hats simultaneously, press their hands to their foreheads and strain their minds. There is a long silence. Suddenly Estragon cries "Ah!" He remembers the question that he had put: "Why doesn't he (Lucky) put down his bags?" But in the meanwhile Lucky *has* put down the bags, and everyone is quite satisfied when Vladimir argues: "Since he has put down the bags it is impossible that we should have asked why he did not do so". What logic! In this universe where time stands still, the words before and after have no meaning. All that counts is the present: the bags have been put down on the ground, and it is as if they had always been lying on the ground. Another example of thought is provided by Lucky who indulges in a monologue that is absolutely incoherent. To stop him the others have to knock him down and beat and kick him, and finally to seize his hat.

Even the Conversation Not Continuous

The two secondary, characters, Pozzo and Lucky, disintegrate from one Act to the next (like Beckett's heroes in his novels—Murphy, Malloy, Malone, and the rest). Carrots are reduced to radishes. Vladimir even ends by losing the thread of the circular song about the dog. And the same is the case with all the other elements in the play. This tendency, which is contagious regression, is visible in all Beckett's work. The two tramps themselves appear on the stage without a part to play. Their conversation has no continuous thread to sustain it and is therefore reduced to absurd fragments: automatic exchanges, word-play, mock-arguments leading to no conclusion. The two men try everything at random. The only thing they cannot do is to go away: they have to stay because they are waiting for Godot. They are there from beginning to end of Act I and, when the curtain falls, the two men are still waiting in spite of their announced departure. There they are again in Act II, which adds nothing new; and again, in spite of the announcement about their going, they are still on the stage when the curtain falls. They will be there again the next day, and the next, and the day after that: "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow"—standing on the stage, superfluous, without a future, without a past, irremediably there.

Waiting for Godot—A Parable of the Pointlessness of Existence

The Play, a Fable

Waiting for Godot is undoubtedly a parable, a parable that has variously been interpreted. What Godot stands for is not quite clear. He may stand for "death," or "the meaning of life," or "God," or something else.

The play is a fable about a kind of life that has no longer any point which could be presented in the form of a fable. The very weakness and failure of the fable here becomes its point. In order to present a fable about a kind of existence, which has lost both form and principle and in which life no longer goes forward, Beckett destroys both the form and the principle which have always been characteristic of fables. The *destroyed* fable, the fable which does not go forward, becomes the adequate representation of stagnant life; the meaningless parable about man stands for the parable of meaningless man. If this fable suffers from lack of cohesion, it is so because lack of

cohesion is its subject matter. If this fable does not relate an action, it is so because the action it relates is life without action. If this fable defies convention by no longer offering a story, it is so because it describes man eliminated from, and deprived of history. The apparent lack of motivation here is motivated by the subject matter; and this subject matter is a form of life without a motive principle and without motivation.

The Two Tramps as Representative Figures

Waiting for Godot represents formlessness as such. Not only is this formlessness, which is its subject matter, an abstraction; the characters are also abstractions: the play's "heroes," Vladimir and Estragon, are clearly *men in general;* they are abstract in the most literal sense of the word. The characters have been pulled out of the world, and they no longer have anything to do with it. The world too has, for them, become empty. Hence the world of the play too is an abstraction: an empty stage, empty except for one prop necessary to the meaning of the fable. That prop is the tree, which defines the world as a permanent instrument for suicide, or life as the non-committing of suicide. The two heroes thus are merely alive, but no longer living in a world. And this concept is carried through, with a merciless consequence. The two heroes are alive in a non-world. Where a world no longer exists, there can no longer be a possibility of a collision with the world, and therefore the very possibility of tragedy has been forfeited. Or to put it more precisely: the tragedy of this kind of existence lies in the fact that it does not even have a chance of tragedy, that it must always, at the same time, in its totality be farce. But Beckett produces his farcical effects, not by placing people in a world or a situation which they do not want to accept and with which they therefore clash, but by placing them in a place that is no place at all. This turns them into clowns, for the metaphysical comicality of clowns does, after all, consist in their being unable to distinguish between being and non-being, by falling down non-existent stairs, or by treating real stairs as though they did not exist. But in contrast to such clowns, Beckett's heroes are indolent or paralysed clowns because, for them, it is not just this or that object (such as stairs) but the world itself that does not exist. These clowns no longer concern themselves with the world. Thus the persons whom Beckett selects as representatives of today's mind can only be*clochards,* creatures who have nothing to do any longer. In our world today millions of people have begun increasingly to feel that they live in a world in which they do not act but are acted upon, that they are active without themselves deciding on the purpose of their action, without even being able to perceive the nature of that purpose. In other words action has lost so much of its independence that it itself has become a form of passivity, and even where action is deadly strenuous or actually deadly, it has assumed the character of futile action or inaction. Obviously Estragon and Vladimir, who do absolutely nothing, are representatives of millions of such people.

A Pointless Existence

Inspite of their inaction and the pointlessness of their existence, these two men still want *to go on*. Millions of people today do not after all give up living even when their life becomes pointless; even the nihilists wish to go on living. And it is not *in spite* of the pointlessness of their life that the Estragons and Viadimirs of the world wish to go on living but, on the contrary, just*because* their life has become pointless. Ruined by their habit of inaction or of acting without their own initiative, they have lost their will-power to decide not to go on. Or ultimately, they go on living merely because they happen to exist, and because existence does not know of any other alternative but to exist.

The Theme of Despair

Beckett's play then deals with this kind of life; it deals with man who continues existing because he happens to exist. But it deals with this theme in a manner which is different from all previous treatments of despair in literature. The attitude of the traditional desperate character might be stated thus: "I have no more to expect; therefore I shall not remain." Estragon andVladimir, on the other hand, represent an inversion of this formula. They seem to say: "We remain; therefore we must be waiting for something. We are waiting; therefore there must be something we are waiting for."

Waiting for Nothing in Particular

It cannot be said that the two tramps are waiting for anything in particular. They even have to remind each other of the very fact that they are waiting and of what they are waiting for. Thus, actually, they are not waiting for anything. But, exposed as they are to the daily continuation of their existence, they cannot help concluding that they must be waiting; and, exposed to their continued waiting, they cannot help assuming that they are waiting for*something*. It is meaningless to ask who or what the expected Godot is. Godot is nothing but the name for the fact that life which goes on pointlessly is wrongly interpreted to mean as "waiting", or as "waiting for something." What appears to be a positive attitude of the two tramps amounts to a double negation: their existence is pointless, and they are incapable of recognising the pointlessness of their existence. (Beckett himself said that he was not so much concerned with "Godot", as with "waiting".)

Not Nihilists, But Incurable, Funny Optimists

The two heroes of this play neither recognise their own existence as contingent, nor think of transforming it into something positive with which they can identify themselves. They are incapable of doing without "the concept of meaning". From the fact of their existence they conclude that there must be something for which they are waiting. They are champions of the view that life must have a meaning even in an evidently meaningless situation. We cannot say that they represent "nihilists". Since they do not lose hope, and are even incapable of losing hope, they are incurably optimistic ideologists. What Beckett presents is not nihilism, but the inability of a man to be a nihilist even in a situation of utter hopelessness. The compassionate sadness of this play is due not so much to its hopeless situation as to another fact: the two heroes, through their waiting, show that they are not able to cope with this situation; they are not nihilists. It is this defect which makes them so very funny. Nothing is funnier than utterly unjustified total confidence. The cuckold remains, despite all evidence to the contrary, incapable of distrust. Vladimir and Estragon may be regarded as brothers to the traditional cuckold. They are like men who, despite living on a desert island and never having been married, continuously expect the return of their wives. And in Beckett's eyes we are all like them.

The Breakdown of Language as a Theme in Waiting for Godot

The Breakdown of Language

Beckett's plays are concerned with expressing the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to change. His use of language probes the limitations of language both as a means of communication and as a vehicle for the expression of valid statements, an instrument of thought.

His use of the dramatic medium shows that he has tried to find means of expression beyond language. On the stage one can dispense with words altogether (for instance, in his mime-plays), or at least one can reveal the reality behind the words, as when the actions of the characters contradict their verbal expression. "Let's go", say the two tramps at the end of each Act of*Waiting for Godot,* but the stage directions inform us that "they don't move". On the stage language can be put into such a relationship with action that facts behind the language can be revealed. Hence the importance of mine, knockabout comedy, and silence in Beckett's plays—Krapp's eating of bananas, the pratfalls of Vladimir and Estragon, the variety turn with Lucky's hat, Clov's immobility at the close of*Endgame,* which puts his verbally expressed desire to leave in question. Beckett's use of the stage is an attempt to reduce the gap between the limitations of language and the sense of the human situation he seeks to express in spite of his strong feeling that words are inadequate to formulate it. The concreteness and three dimensional nature of the stage can be used to add new resources to language as an instrument of thought and exploration of being. Language in Beckett's plays serves to express the break-down of language. Where there is no certainty, there can be no definite meanings—and the impossibility of ever attaining certainty is one of the main themes of Beckett's plays. Godot's promises are vague and uncertain.
In *Endgame,* Hamm asks, "We're not beginning to mean something?" Clov merely laughs and says: "Mean something! You and I mean something!"

Language Ineffective as a Means of Communication

Ten different modes of the breakdown (or disintegration) of language have been noted in *Waiting for Godot*. They range from simple misunderstandings and *double-entendres* to monologues (as signs of inability to communicate), cliches, repetitions of synonyms, inability to find the right words, and telegraphic style (loss of grammatical structure, communication by shouted commands) to Lucky's farrago of chaotic nonsense and the dropping of punctuation marks, such as question marks, as an indication that language has lost its function as a means of communication, that questions have turned into statements not really requiring an answer. A whole list of passages drawn up by a

critic from *Waiting for Godot* shows that the assertions made by one of the characters are gradually qualified, weakened, and hedged in with reservations until they are completely taken back. In a meaningless universe, it is always foolhardy to make a positive statement.

The Breakdown of Dialogue

But more important than any merely formal signs of the disintegration of language and meaning in Beckett's plays is the nature of the dialogue itself, which again and again breaks down because no truly logical discussion or exchange of thoughts occurs in it either through loss of meaning of single words or through the inability of characters to remember what has just been said. In a purposeless world that has lost its ultimate objectives, dialogue, like all action, becomes a mere game to pass the time.

Devaluation of Language

Beckett's use of language is thus designed to devalue language as a vehicle of conceptual thought or as an instrument for the communication of ready-made answers to the problems of the human condition. And yet his continued use of language must, paradoxically, be regarded as an attempt to communicate the incommunicable. Such an undertaking attacks the cheap, and facile complacency of the view that to name a problem is to solve it or that the world can be mastered by neat classification and formulations.

Beckett, a Great Master of Language

Beckett's entire work can be seen as a search for the reality that lies behind mere reasoning in conceptual terms. He may have devalued language as an instrument for the communication of ultimate truths, but he has shown himself a great master of language as an artistic medium. He has moulded words into a superb instrument for his purpose. In the theatre he has been able to add a new dimension to language—the counterpoint of action, concrete, many-faceted, not to be explained away, but making a direct impact on an audience. In Beckett's theatre it is possible to bypass the stage of conceptual thinking altogether, as an abstract painting bypasses the stage of the recognition of natural objects. In *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame,* plays drained of character, plot, and meaningful dialogue, Beckett has shown that such a seemingly impossible feat can in fact be accomplished.

Laughter in Waiting for Godot

Samuel Beckett's plays do not contain much laughter. Most of the laughter that we do get in his plays is excited by cruelty and suffering. The kind of laughter that results from scenes of cruelty and suffering must necessarily be either mirthless or bitter.

In *Waiting for Godot* there are eight laughs in all. Four of the laughs belong to Pozzo, two to Vladimir and two to Estragon. Lucky never laughs, and this fact emphasises the irony of his name. Of the eight laughs, seven occur in Act I, and only one in Act II. Numerically this contrasts with Beckett's use of the phrase: "We're waiting for Godot," which occurs only three times in Act I and ten times in Act II. Just as a repetition of the waiting phrase emphasises the long, long duration of that wait, so the gradual disappearance of laughter contributes to the dull desolation of that wait. Moreover, this reduction of laughter in the play as a whole is reflected in the reduction of the laughter of the principal laughter, Pozzo.

Pozzo's first laugh, on questioning the two tramps, is an "enormous laugh". The next two times, the stage directions merely state: "He laughs," and the last time, "He laughs briefly." All four laughs of Pozzo occur in Act I, because by Act II, with the loss of his eyesight, he has lost the power to laugh, 'and perhaps even the memory of laughter.

In contrast to this evident decline of laughter in Pozzo, the limited laughter of the two tramps is constant, and it is a constancy which can perhaps be linked with the constancy of their waiting for Godot.Vladimir's two laughs are hearty and those of Estragon are noisy. As he suffers from a bladder weakness, Vladimir's two laughs are painful to him; and he laughs no more after the first few minutes of the play. Estragon, on the other hand, delays his one-laugh-per-Act until the entrance of Pozzo and Lucky. Like many of the laughs which the two friends excite in the theatre-audience, their own stage laughter is problematic in origin though not problematic in its quality or nature.

Quite early in the play, before Godot is mentioned, Vladimir has the bright idea that the two friends should repent, but cannot answer Estragon's question what they should repent of. Then Estragon suggests that they might repent of having been born, and Vladimir breaks into a hearty laugh which, however, he has to suppress because of his pubic pain, complaining: "One daren't even laugh any more". Vladimir's first laugh is thus bounded by suffering—the fact of being born and the fact of his pubic trouble. Although Vladimir tries to substitute a painless smile for the painful laugh, he says: "It's not the same things."

Beckett's stage directions attachVladimir's second laugh to his first, since it is "stifled as before, less the smile". This second laugh, which follows the first after a few minutes of the start of the play, punctuates the friends' conversation about Godot, through which their anxiety about their own situation is clearly perceptible. "Where do we come in?" Estragon wants to know.Vladimir replies: "On our hands and knees." Estragon asks innocently, "We've no rights any more?" Thereupon Vladimir explodes into his last laugh of the play. This laugh borders on both the intellectual or hollow laugh (which laughs at that which is not true) and the mirthless laugh, for the truth of their rights seems absurd, and their unhappiness is evident, deprived of rights as they are. Even the right to laugh seems to have disappeared for Vladimir who declares: "You'd make me laugh if it wasn't prohibited."

Though Estragon's laughter does not seem to be prohibited, it too is ambiguous. In Act II Estragon laughs noisily when Pozzo asks whether the two bums are friends. There is some doubt about whether Estragon is laughing because he thinks that they are friends, or are not friends. But he apparently knows the truth that arouses his intellectual laugh. And even as Estragon indulges in his intellectual laugh, the theatre-audience is indulging in a different intellectual laugh, for, as Vladimir points out, Pozzo is not in the least interested whether or not the two bums are friends. What he wants to know is whether they are friends of *his:* Estragon laughs at the truth which he misunderstands in Pozzo's question, and we laugh at his misunderstanding.

Estragon's first laugh—evidently a series of laughs embraced by the stage directions "laughs noisily" and "convulsed with merriment"[1]—is also inspired by Pozzo, since he "laughs noisily" when Pozzo cannot find his pipe. Estragon's laugh at Pozzo's loss is an example of pure laughter, and that purity is emphasised when Pozzo is on the point of tears while Estragon is "convulsed with merriment" at the off-stage urination of Vladimir, which also involves suffering. Estragon's laugh begins at the unhappiness of Pozzo, and continues at the unhappiness of Vladimir.

Although both tramps laugh, and Lucky weeps, Pozzo alone indulges in both tears and laughter, and he includes both reactions, in a philosophical pronouncement: "The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh" *(He laughs)*. Within his tightly closed system, then, he has just deprived someone of laughter by laughing himself.

The Concept of Time in Waiting for Godot

Circular Movement

A life, which is characterised by a complete aimlessness, may be said to have become a "life without time." What we call time springs from man's needs and from his attempts to satisfy them. Life is temporal only because needs are either not yet satisfied, or goals have already been reached, or objectives are still at one's disposal. Now, in Estragon's and Vladimir's lives, objectives no longer exist. For this reason in the play time does not exist either; and it is for this reason, and quite legitimately, that events and conversations are going in circles; after a while this circular movement gives the impression of being stationary, and time appears to be standing still.

Nothing New in Act II

Beckett carries this concept through with such complete consistency that he presents a second Act which is but a slightly varied version of the first, (and this is probably without precedent in the history of drama). In the second Act he offers to our startled eyes nothing new or startling. Accustomed as we are to witness new situations in the course of a play, we are deeply surprised by this lack of surprise, by the fact that scenes repeat themselves, and we are filled with the horror which we feel in the presence of people who are suffering from a complete loss of memory. For, with one exception, none of the characters is aware of this repetition; and, even

when reminded of it, they remain incapable of recognising that their experiences or conversations are merely repetitions of yesterday's events or talk.

"Killing" Time

If time still survives here, it is due to the fact that the activity of "killing time" has not died out yet. The two tramps try to produce merely the sequence of time. When they decide to leave, they remain; when they wish to help, they hardly lift a finger. Even their impulses of goodness or indignation stop so suddenly that their sudden disappearance gives the effect of a *negative*explosion. And yet they resume their "activity" time and again, because this kind of activity keeps time moving, pushes a few inches of time behind them, and bring them a few inches closer to the supposed Godot.

The Tramps Indispensable to Each Other

This goes so far that the two tramps even propose to act out feelings and emotions, that they actually embrace each other, because, after all, emotions too are motions. If again and again Vladimir and Estragon rack their brains what to do next, they do so because "it helps to pass the time", or because whatever they do, will reduce the distance which separates them from Godot. The best way to overcome the difficulty is through the activation of their being together, through their taking advantage of the chance that it is at least as a pair that they have to bear their senseless existence. If they did not cling to each other, if they had not their quarrels, if they did not leave each other or re-unite, they would actually be lost, and these are actions which, after all, cannot take place without taking up time. That Beckett presents us with a pair is, thus, not only motivated by his technical insight but also by his wish to show that everyone is the other's pastime, that company facilitates endurance of the pointlessness of existence.

The Modern Worker's Work,—A Sham Activity

The pitiful struggle, which the two tramps wage to keep up some sort of action, is so impressive only because it mirrors our own fate, the fate of multitudes of modern men. Through the mechanisation of labour, the worker today is deprived of the chance to recognise what he is actually doing, and of the chance to see the objectives of his work. His work has therefore become something like a sham activity. Real work and the most absurd pseudo-work (for instance digging ditches and filling them again just in order to keep busy) differ in no way, neither structurally nor psychologically. On the other hand, the modern worker has, because of his mechanical work, become so thoroughly imbalanced that he now feels the urge to restore his equilibrium during his leisure time by engaging in substitute activities and hobbies, and by inventing pseudo-objectives with which he can identify himself. Thus it is precisely during his leisure time and while "playing" that he seems to be doing real work—for instance, by resuming obsolete forms of production, such as cultivating his balcony garden or do-it-yourself carpentering. The modern worker has today become deprived so completely of his initiative and of the ability to shape his leisure time himself that he now depends upon the ceaseless radio and television programmes to make time pass. The best proof, however, of the affinity which exists today between working time and leisure time is the fact that there are already situations in which the two occur simultaneously, for instance in millions of homes and factories where the flow of work and the flow of the radio transmission are becoming one single stream. If the silly seriousness with which Estragon and Vladimir struggle to produce a semblance of activity strikes us as being so symptomatic for our time, it is only because today working time and leisure time, activity and indolence, real life and playing, have become so closely inter-twined.

Our Existence, A Mere Playing of Games

The two tramps improvise and invent games to pass the time. They borrow activities from the vast store of everyday actions and transform them into play in order to pass the time. In those situations in which we play a game like football, and, having finished it, can start playing it all over again, Estragon plays the game of taking his shoes off and putting them on; by doing so he does not exhibit himself as a fool but exhibits us as fools: he demonstrates through the device of inversion that our playing of games has no more meaning than his. Our playing of games is similar to taking off shoes and putting them on again: a ghostly activity meant only to produce the false appearance of activity. Our everyday existence too is nothing but playing of games, clown-like, without real consequences, springing solely from the vain hope that it will make time pass. We are brothers to the two tramps; only these two know that they are playing, while we do not. Thus it is not they but we who are the actors in the farce.

Pozzo and Lucky as Champions of Time

However shy Vladimir and Estragon may feel when first facing Pozzo and Lucky, there is one thing they cannot conceal: that they regard the new pair as enviable. Themselves sentenced to "being without time," Vladimir and Estragon look upon Pozzo and Lucky as privileged beings because they are the champions of time. Pozzo, the master, is enviable because he has no need to "make time" by himself, or to advance by himself, not to speak of waiting for Godot, for Lucky drags him forward anyway. And Lucky, the servant, is enviable because he not only can march on but actually must do so, for Pozzo is behind him and sees to it that he does. And even though they pass the two timeless tramps by without knowing that they have already done so the day before, they nevertheless are already in motion and therefore, in Estragon's and Vladimir's eyes, fortunate creatures. It is therefore quite understandable that they suspect Pozzo of being Godot himself; for behind Pozzo's whip, they feel, their waiting might find an end. Nor is it a coincidence that Lucky is called by that name. For although he is to bear everything and spend his life carrying sacks filled with sand, he is totally freed from all burdens of initiative and if the two tramps could stand in his place they would no longer be compelled to wait at one and the same place but could move on, because they would be forced to move on and their hell would thus lose its sting.

The Sadness of the Play

To try to find in this image of man and his world any positive or consoling features is in vain. And yet in one respect Beckett's play differs from all those nihilistic writings which mirror our age: it Differs from them in its tone. The tone of those writings is usually one of a beastly seriousness or one of cynicism—inhuman in either case; but the tone of this play is neither beastly serious nor cynical. This play has a sadness which reflects the sadness of all human fate, and which therefore can create a feeling of solidarity among men, and by doing so make this fate a little less unbearable.

Comic and Farcical Elements in Waiting for Godot

I

Music-hall Comedy

Vladimir and Estragon—who call each other Gogo and Didi—are clearly derived from the pairs of cross-talk comedians of English music-halls. Their dialogue has the peculiar repetitive quality of the cross-talk of comedians' patter:

Estragon. So long as one knows.

Vladimir. One can bide one's time.

Estragon. One knows what to expect.

Vladimir. No further need to worry. *(Page 38)*

And the parallel to the music-hall and the circus is even explicitly stated:

Vladimir. It's worse than being at the theatre.

Estragon. The circus.

Vladimir. The music-hall.

Estragon. The circus. *(Page 35)*

In accordance with the traditions of the music-hall or the circus, there is an element of crudely physical humour: Estragon loses his trousers; there is a prolonged gag involving three hats that are put on and off and handed on in a sequence of seemingly unending confusion *(Pages 71-2);* and there is an abundance of pratfalls (one critic having listed as many as forty-five stage-directions indicating that one of the characters leaves the upright position which symbolises the dignity of man.)

II

Comparison With the Comedians—Laurel and Hardy

According to an eminent critic, Estragon and Vladimir in their bowler hats, one of them marvellously incompetent, the other an ineffective man of the world devoted to his friend's care, greatly resemble the two famous cinema comedians of the 1930s: Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, whose troubles with such things as hats, and boots were notorious, and whose dialogue was spoken very slowly on the assumption that the human understanding could not be expected to work at lightning speed. Those two comedians journeyed, undertook quests, had adventures; their friendship, tried by fits of irritation and annoyance, never really collapsed. They seemed not to become older or wiser; they were always in a state of nervous agitation. Neither of them was especially competent, but Hardy invariably made a show of being competent. Laurelwas defeated by the most trifling requirements. In one of their pictures occurred the following bit of dialogue:

Hardy. Get on the mule.

Laurel. What ?

Hardy. Get on the mule.

This dialogue comes quite close to the following exchange towards the end of Beckett's play:

Vladimir. Pull on your trousers.

Estragon. What?

Vladimir. Pull on your trousers.

Estragon. You want me to pull off my trousers?

Vladimir. Pull ON your trousers. *(Page 94)*

In the same film there was much fuss withLaurel's boots the holes in which he patched with rotten meat, thus attracting unwanted dogs. Beckett's play begins with Estragon struggling to take off his boots and saying: "Nothing to be done". Indeed, insofar as the play has a message, it is more or less contained in these words: "Nothing to be done". And yet the two tramps go on *doing* if we can use the word "doing" for their activities.

Boots At Last Pulled Off

We also learn that if Estragon has chronic foot trouble, Vladimir has chronic bladder trouble. The dialogue comes round again to the theme words: "Nothing to be done", this time spoken by Vladimir; and, as he speaks, these words, the action also comes round to where it started, with Estragon by a supreme effort falsifying the words and managing to pull off his boots. That is one thing accomplished anyhow.

III

Verbal Antics

The dialogue in *Waiting for Godot*shows certain features which are characteristic of Beckett's manner. One of the verbal antics employed is the device of cancellation or qualification. On two occasions, for instance, Vladimir qualifies his admission of ignorance about the nature of the tree:

Estragon. What is it?

Vladimir. I don't know. A willow. *(Page 14)*

Again:

Estragon. *(Looking at the tree).*What is it?

Vladimir. It's the tree.

Estragon. Yes, but what kind?

Vladimir. I don't know. A willow. *(Page 93)*

On both occasions, after saying that he does not know what tree it is, he adds-"A willow". (A similar hesitation perhaps explains why some of the play's many questions terminate in a full-stop rather than a question-mark).

Comic Misunderstandings

Much of the dialogue follows the inconsequential spontaneity of everyday speech in which the different participants tend to pursue a line of thought independently of one another. Many comic misunderstandings result from this kind of technique. There is, for instance, the exchange preceding Lucky's monologue, where Pozzo asks what he can do for these honest fellows, the tramps. Estragon would be satisfied with ten francs, while Vladimirremarks: "We are not beggars" *(Page 39)*.Such comic misunderstandings are pure vaudeville. Here is another example:

Vladimir. Where are your boots?

Estragon. I must have thrown them away.

Vladimir. When?

Estragon I don't know.

Vladimir. Why?

Estragon *(Exasperated)*. I don'tknow why I don't know!

Vladimir. No, I mean why did you throw them away? *(Page 67)*

In such bits of dialogue time is lost through confusion over the precise meaning of words. "Are you friends?" blind Pozzo asks in Act II, provoking Estragon to noisy laughter: "He wants to know if we are friends!" Vladimir mediates here as on other occasions by pointing out, "No, he means friends of his" *(Page 85)*

Music-hall Cross-talk

The dialogue owes a great deal in fact to the well-established music-hall cross-talk in which two characters—a "straight" man and a "funny" man—become entangled in complexities. Estragon tries to explain toVladimir that since the latter is the heavier of the two he should logically try hanging himself from the bough first. "If it hangs you it'll hang anything", Estragon concludes. The comedy of this is reinforced when the initial basis of the argument is itself brought into question. "But am I heavier than you?" asksVladimir. Another familiar music-hall joke is that of mirrored repetition. Both Estragon and Vladimir, for example, almost simultaneously shake, and look closely into, a favourite object (Vladimir his hat, and Estragon his boot), and both men exclaim: "Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!" within a minute of each other *(Pages 10-11)*. Here is another bit of comic cross-talk of the music-hall variety.

Estragon. And we?

Vladimir. I beg your pardon?

Estragon. I said, And we?

Vladimir. I don't understand.

Estragon. Where do we come in?

Vladimir. Come in?

Estragon. Take your time. *(Page 19)*

Another form of music-hall comedy was the monologue. In this play it is Pozzo who makes use of it, in his discourse on the twilight which ends gloomily: "That's how it is on this bitch of an earth" *(Page 38)* and also in his speech in Act II about life taking up but an instant as "they give birth astride of a grave" *(Page 89),* though the latter piece is rather sombre. But Vladimir too provides an example in the comic banter which begins, "Let us not waste our time in idle discourse", and proceeds to do just that*(Pages 79-80)*.

Circus Humour

The circus is another source of the unique brand of the humour of *Waiting for Godot*. (Jean Anouilh compared this play to the *Thoughts of Pascal* performed as a comedy sketch for clowns). The totters, the pratfalls, the tumbles, Estragon's trouser-dropping, Vladimir's clumsy gait, Lucky's palsy and Pozzo's cracking of the whip—these are all lifted straight from the clowning in a circus. The amount of gesture in a play supposed to be devoid of action is in fact extraordinary. Estragon and Vladimir, for instance, entertain themselves (and their audience) at one moment by exchanging hats in a complex routine which leavesVladimir significantly in possession of Lucky's, the source of the slave's eloquence. The hats themselves are a direct tribute to the masters of silent-film comedy—Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton—and their talkie successors—Laurel and Hardy. All of this—music-hall patter, circus-clowning, and movie costume—is taken, even down to the round song and the lullaby from the most popular and elementary forms of entertainment. This is the comedy which resides in a work unjustly thought of as gloomy and boring. How can a play like this be dull, if Estragon's priceless howler (in asking a question answered pages earlier) is delivered as it should be, with an exact sense of timing? Or if Pozzo's words and actions are exploited by an actor with the requisite presence and physique? Far from weakening the play, a director who brings out its comic elements accurately enables the play's serious meditation on the vanity of human wishes to be made all the more effectively and forcefully.

The Structure of Waiting for Godot

Different Views About the Play's Structure

The structure of *Waiting for Godot,*like its meaning, has intrigued critics. One critic has spoken of its being'"undramatic but highly theatrical." But this critic modifies his own view by suggesting that we should speak of the play "not as undramatic, but as a parody of the dramatic". Another critic speaks of Beckett's notion of "symmetry to suggest a static design", and he dismisses the possibility of dividing this play into Aristotle's beginning, middle, and end. Yet another critic feels that it is the "asymmetrical structure" of the play which accounts for all its power.

A Firm Structure Based on Repetition and Balance

Waiting for Godot is not constructed along traditional lines, with exposition, development, reversal *(i.e.,* sudden change of fortune), and denouement; but it has a firm structure, though of a different kind, a structure based on repetition, the return of the leading motifs, and on the exact balancing of variable elements. The use of repetition may be illustrated with an example. Pozzo, having eaten his meal and lit his pipe, says with evident satisfaction: "Ah! That's better". Two pages later Estragon makes precisely the same comment, having just gnawed the remaining flesh off Pozzo's discarded chicken bones. But the circumstances, though similar, are not identical: Pozzo has eaten to his fill, while Estragon has had a meagre something. The repetition of the words is therefore an ironical device for pointing a contrast like that between Pozzo's selfish order to Lucky to give him his coat in Act I and Vladimir's selfless spreading of his own coat around Estragon's shoulders in Act II.

Repetition With a Difference

The entire movement of the play, therefore, depends on balance. "It is the shape that matters", Beckett, once remarked with reference to the Augustinian saying which underlies so much of the play's symbolism: "Do not despair—one of the thieves was saved; do not presume—one of the thieves was damned". It is certainly the shape that matters here. The movement of the play relies heavily on asymmetry, or repetition-with-a-difference. In both Acts, for instance, Pozzo's arrival is curiously foreshadowed by one of the men imagining he hears sounds of people approaching. And whereas in Act I the two men prop Lucky up, in Act II they serve as pillars of support ("caryatids") to Pozzo. But the most poignant example is the ending of the two Acts, where the wording is identical, the punctuation varied only slightly to slow down delivery the second time, but the roles reversed: in Act I Estragon asks the question, but in Act II the question is asked by Vladimir:

Vladimir. Well? Shall we go?

Estragon. Yes, let's go. *(Page 94)*

The first time, these two sentences can be delivered at more or less normal speed, but on the second occasion they should be drawn out, with a slight pause between the phrases. When this is done, the intense emotion generated among the audience is suggestive of great sadness.

Contrasted Characterisation

Another feature of the play is Act-structure being reflected in the contrasted characterisation. Estragon's name is composed of the same number of letters asVladimir's name; the same applies to Pozzo and Lucky. Hence they find themselves associated, and have been joined in a complex sado-masochistic relationship for many years. But their natures obviously come into conflict: Vladimir is the neurotic intellectual type, Estragon the placid intuitive type; Pozzo is the bullying extrovert, Lucky the timid introvert.Vladimir instinctively sympathises with Lucky, while Estragon experiences a degree of fellow-feeling for Pozzo. Vladimir and Pozzo, like Lucky and Estragon who kick each other, are at the extremes of the poised poles. Estragon is afraid of being "tied" *(Page 20),* Lucky is tied in effect; Vladimir is humble towards authority, Pozzo asserts it forcibly. The characters, in fact, like the occurrences, are held in uneasy equilibrium within the play.

The Change In Tone From One Extreme To Another

Yet another of the play's structural features is the way the writing modulates continually from one tone to its opposite. Pozzo's declamation on the subject of "night", for instance, shifts almost violently from the false sublime to the prosaically ridiculous, and after rising to vibrant heights lapses to gloomy depths, and ultimately to inevitable silence *(Pages 37-8)*. After a long pause, Estragon and Vladimir strike up and exchange vaudeville remarks:

Estragon. So long as one knows,

Vladimir. One can bide one's time.

Estragon. One knows what to expect.

Vladimir. No further need to worry.

Estragon. Simply wait.

Vladimir. We're used to it. *(Page 38)*

The transition is masterly, almost musical in subtlety. Similar modulation occurs between the boisterousness around. Lucky in Act I and the high grief of Vladimir's cross-examination of the Boy in Act II, culminating in the cry: "Christ have mercy on us!" Farce and pathos are closely mingled throughout, but perhaps most obviously at the start of Act II in the clowns' loving embrace which ends, appropriately, in a grotesque pratfall.

Act II Slightly Different in Tone From Act I

The whole of Act II, in fact, shows a slightly different tone from Act I. The cross-talk is of a more "intellectual" and less strikingly music-hall kind; the confident Pozzo of Act I is changed into the blind decrepit of Act II; and the words of the Boy, delivered in a rush in Act I, have to be dragged out of him by Vladimir in Act II. The entire Act II is less naturalistic, and assumes familiarity with the two tramps and their ways which permits a briefer restatement of the theme. In Act II Pozzo enters later, and is sooner gone. Lucky's monologue of Act I, despite its repetitious jargon, made a point, but no statement from him can recur in Act II because he has gone dumb.

The Dialogue About the Dead Voices, A Symmetrical Structure

The substance of *Waiting for Godot* is waiting, waiting amid uncertainty. There had never been a play about waiting before, because waiting seemed contrary to the grain of the theatre where the normal unit is the event, and where intervals between events are cleverly filled so as to persuade us that forces are at work to produce the next event. To wait and to make the audience share the waiting, and to bring out the quality of the waiting—this is not to be done with a plot in the conventional sense. Beckett fills the time with beautifully symmetrical structures. For instance, there is that dialogue in which the two tramps discuss "the dead voices". In a beautiful economy of phrasing, the two tramps ask and answer, evoking those strange dead voices that speak, it may be, only in the waiting mind, and the spaced and measured pauses in the dialogue are as much a part of the dialogue as the words. And the special qualities of the speakers are never ignored. Estragon insists that the voices rustle like leaves. Vladimir, less enslaved by idiom, says that the voices murmur "like wings", "like sand", "like feathers", "like ashes". However, Estragon's simple simile is, by its very stubbornness, in each case the last word. And the utterances are gradually reduced from several words to only two, and the ritual exchange about waiting for Godot has its ritual termination like "Amen", being the shortest utterance in the play: "Ah!" It is a splendid duet, in which, contrary to theatrical custom, neither part dominates.

Symmetrically Constructed Acts I and II

As the speeches are symmetrically assigned, so the two Acts are symmetrically constructed, the Pozzo-Lucky incident in each Act preceding each time the appearance of the boy who brings the news that Godot will not come today but surely tomorrow. The molecule of the play, its unit of effect, is symmetry, a symmetrical structure. The stage is divided into two halves by the tree; the human race is divided into two (Estragon and Vladimir), then into four, (Estragon-Vladimir and Pozzo-Lucky), then, with the boy's arrival, into two again. And symmetries encompass opposites as well: Lucky's long speech in Act I, and Lucky's utter silence in Act II. And symmetries govern the units of dialogue: at one extreme, the intricate fugue-like structure about the dead voices and at the other extreme an exchange as short as this:

We could do our exercises.

Our movements.

Our relaxations.

Our elongations.

Our relaxations.

To warm us up.

To calm us down.

Verbal Symmetries

Indeed nothing satisfies the mind like balance; nothing has so convincing a look of being substantial. It is rather from Act II of the play than from Act I that its finest verbal symmetric can be obtained, for the play converges on symmetry:

Say, I am happy.

I am happy.

So am I.

So am I.

We are happy.

We are happy. *(Silence)*. What do we do, now that we are happy?

Wait for Godot. *(Estragon groans. Silence)*.

The play also converges on certain stark statements, the eloquence of which has sometimes created an impression that they convey the "meaning" of the play. When, for instance, Pozzo says: "They give birth astride of a grave," etc., his remark has the appearance of a proverbial statement. Pozzo is provoked to make this statement byVladimir's irksome questioning, and the statement is the culmination of the speech which begins with the following sentence: "Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time!" This speech of Pozzo's is like saying that there are many days like those two on which Pozzo has met the two tramps, that all waiting is endless and all journeying too. The striking metaphor is characteristic of Pozzo: "They give birth astride of a grave." The metaphor sticks in Vladimir's mind and, a few minutes later, alone with the sleeping Estragon, he reflects that he too may be sleeping, so dream-like is the tedium. Then he repeats Pozzo's metaphor saying: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth.....But habit is a great deadener. At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on." In other words, Vladimir is watching Estragon, while someone else is watching Vladimir; someone invisible watches us all in turn: this evokes not so much a Deity as an infinite series. Like music, Beckett's language is shaped into phrases, orchestrated, cunningly repeated.

"Waiting for Godot is not about Godot or even about waiting. It is waiting." Discuss.

A Situation Having a General Human Application

The two key words in the title are "waiting" and "Godot". What Godot exactly means has been the subject of much controversy. It has been suggested that Godot is a weakened or diminutive form of the word "God." Godot may therefore suggest the intervention of a supernatural agency. Or perhaps Godot stands for a mythical human being whose arrival is expected to change the situation. We may presume, too, that both these possibilities (a supernatural agency and a supposed human being) may be implied through the use of the name "Godot". Furthermore, although Godot fails to appear in the play, he is as real a character as any of those whom we actually see. However, the subject of the play is not Godot; the subject is "waiting", the act of waiting as an essential characteristic aspect of the human condition. Throughout their lives, human beings always wait for something; and Godot simply represents the objective of their waiting—an event, a thing, a person, death. Beckett has thus depicted in this play a situation which has a general human application.

The Play, a Direct Presentation of Waiting, Ignorance, Impotence, Boredom

At first sight this play does not appear to have any particular relationship with the human predicament. For instance, we feel hardly any inclination to identify ourselves with the two garrulous tramps who are indifferent to all the concerns of civilised life. Godot sounds as if he might have some significance; but he does not even appear on the stage. However, soon we are made to realise that Vladimir and Estragon are waiting and that their waiting is of a particular kind. Although they may say that they are waiting for Godot, they cannot say who or what Godot is, nor can they be sure that they are waiting at the right place or on the right day, or what would happen when Godot comes, or what would happen if they stopped waiting. They have no watches, no time-tables, and there is no one from whom they can get much information. They cannot get the essential knowledge, and they are ignorant. Without the essential knowledge they cannot act, and so they are impotent. They produce in us a sense of baffled helplessness which we experience when forced to remain in a situation which we do not understand and over which we have no control. All that they do is to seek ways to pass the time in the situation in which they find themselves. They tell stories, sing songs, play verbal games, pretend to be Pozzo and Lucky, do physical exercises. But all these activities are mere stop-gaps serving only to pass the time. They understand this perfectly. "Come on, Gogo," pleads Didi, breaking off a rejection on the two thieves crucified with Christ, "return the ball, can't you, once in a way?" and Estragon does. As Estragon says later, "We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between, the two of us.....We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist" Here we have the very essence of boredom—actions repeated long after the reason for them has been forgotten, and talk purposeless in itself but valuable as a way to kill time. We could appropriately say that the play is not about Godot or even about waiting; the play puts "waiting" on the stage. The play is waiting, ignorance, impotence, boredom, all these having been made visible on the stage before us. As a critic says, Beckett in his dramas does not write about things but presents the things themselves. In other words, a play by Beckett is a direct expression or presentation of the thing itself as distinct from any description of it or statement about it. In the waiting of the two tramps we, the audience, recognise our own experience. We may never have waited by a tree on a deserted country road for a distant acquaintance to keep his appointment, but we have certainly experienced other

situations in which we have waited and waited. We may have waited and waited for a communication offering a job, or for the arrival of a train, or for a love-letter, or for something to turn up. In other words we can discover a common ground between ourselves and the two tramps who are waiting for Godot. We feel with them and with millions of others who have known ignorance, impotence, and boredom. Here is then the recognisable significance of the play and it is this which accounts for the play's widespread appeal.

The Mood of Vain Expectancy

Vladimir and Estragon, have travelled far towards total nihilism, but they have not fully achieved it. They still retain enough remnants of hope to be tormented by despair. And in place of hope as a dynamic, they have expectancy. This is the main motif of the play, spelt out in the title which in an earlier version was imply: Waiting. The two tramps are in a place and in a mental state in which nothing happened and time stands still. Their main preoccupation is to pass the time as well as they can until night comes and they can go. They realise the futility of their exercises and that they are merely filling up the hours with pointless activity. In this sense their waiting is mechanical; it is the same thing as not moving. In another sense, it is an obligation. They have to remain where they are, though they resent doing so and would like to leave. This might be called a moral obligation, since it involves the possibilities of punishment and reward. If Godot comes, a new factor may be introduced into their existence, whereas if they leave they will certainly miss him. Their waiting therefore contains a certain element of hope, no matter how cynical they may be about it. This mood of expectancy has also a universal validity, because whenever we wait we are expectant even though we are almost certain that our waiting will not be rewarded.

"Waiting" and The Flow of Time

It is in the act of waiting that we experience the flow of time in its purest, most evident form. When we are active, we tend to forget the passage of time; but if we are waiting passively, we are confronted with the action of time itself. Being subject to the flux of time, human beings are, at no single moment, identical with themselves. We can never be sure that the human beings we meet are the same today as they were yesterday. When Pozzo and Lucky first appear, neither Vladimir nor Estragon seems to recognise them; Estragon even takes Pozzo for Godot. But after they have gone,Vladimir comments that they have changed since their last appearance. Estragon insists that he did not know them while Vladimirinsists: "We know them, I tell you. You forget everything." In Act II, when Pozzo and Lucky re-appear, cruelly deformed by the action of time, the tramps again have their doubts whether these are the same people whom they met on the previous day. Nor does Pozzo remember them. Here, then, is another aspect of "waiting" which is conveyed to us: the act of waiting makes us experience the flow of time. To wait means to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change is in itself an illusion. The more things change, the more they are the same. That is the terrible stability of the world. "The tears of the world are a constant quantity," says Pozzo, "For each one who begins to weep somewhere else another stops." One day is like another, and when we die, we might never have existed. As Pozzo exclaims in his great final outburst: "Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time? They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." StillVladimir and Estragon live in hope: they wait for Godot whose coming will bring the flow of time to a stop. Godot represents to the two tramps, peace and rest from waiting. They are hoping to be saved from the fleetingness and instability of the illusion

of time, and to find peace and permanence outside it. Then they will no longer be tramps or homeless wanderers, but will have arrived home.

Themes of Habit and "The Suffering of Being"

Waiting for Godot is a dramatisation of the themes of habit, boredom, and "the suffering of being". Habit is a great deadener, says Vladimir; and, by the time he says so, he and Estragon have had about ninety, minutes on the stage to prove it. It is the sound of their own voices that re-assures the two tramps of their own existence, of which they are not otherwise always certain because the evidence of their senses is so dubious. The tramps have another reason also to keep talking. They are drowning out those voices that assail them in the silence, just as they assailed nearly all Beckett's heroes in the novels.

The Pointlessness of Existence

This play is a parable, Godot may stand for God, or for a mythical human being, or for the meaning of life, or for death, or for something else. The play is a fable about a kind of life that has no longer any point. This fable is a representation of stagnant life. It is a fable that suffers from a lack of cohesion because a lack of cohesion is its very subject-matter. This fable does not relate an action because the action it relates is life without action. This fable offers no story, because it describes man eliminated from, and deprived of history. The characters in this play have been pulled out of the world, and they no longer have anything to do with it. The world has become empty for them. The two heroes, or anti-heroes, are merely alive, but no longer living in a world. And this concept is carried through with a merciless consequence. Where a world no longer exists, there can no longer be a possibility of a collision with the world. In our world today millions of people have begun increasingly to feel that they live in a world in which they do not act but are acted upon. The two tramps, inspite of their inaction and the pointlessness of their existence, still want to go on. The millions of people today do not after all give up living when their life becomes pointless. The tramps are waiting for nothing in particular. They even have to remind each other of the very fact that they are waiting and of what they are waiting for. Thus, actually they are not waiting for anything. But, exposed as they are to the daily continuation of their existence, they cannot help concluding that they must be waiting. And, exposed to their continued waiting, they cannot help assuming that they are waiting for*something*. It is meaningless to ask who or what the expected Godot is. Godot is nothing but the name for the fact that the life which goes on pointlessly is wrongly interpreted to mean waiting, or as waiting for something. What appears to be a positive attitude of the two tramps amounts to a double negation: their existence is pointless and they are incapable of recognising the pointlessness of their existence. (Beckett himself said that he was not so much concerned with Godot as with waiting).

Write a note on the religious significance, if any, of Waiting for Godot.

St. Augustine's Remark

When asked about the theme of*Waiting for Godot,* Beckett is reported to have referred to the following sentence in the writings of St. Augustine "Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned."

Theme of the Uncertainty of Salvation

The theme of the two thieves on the cross, the theme of the uncertainty of the hope of salvation and the chance bestowal of divine grace, does indeed pervade the whole play. Vladimir states it right at the beginnings, when he says: "One of the thieves was saved. It's a reasonable percentage." Later he enlarges on the subject. One of the two thieves is supposed to have been saved and the other damned, says Vladimir. But he asks why only one of the four Evangelists speaks of a thief being saved. Of the other three Evangelists, two do not mention any thieves at all, and the third says that both of them, abused Christ. In other words, there is a fifty-fifty chance of salvation but, as only one out of four witnesses (the Evangelists) reports it, the chances are considerably reduced. AsVladimir points out, it is a curious fact that everybody seems to believe that one witness: "It is the only version they know." Estragon, whose attitude has been one of scepticism throughout, merely comments "People are bloody ignorant apes."

The Chance Remarks Made By the Two Thieves

It is the shape of the idea that fascinated Beckett. Out of all the evildoers, out of all the millions and millions of criminals that have been, executed in the course of history, only two had the chance of salvation in so unique a manner. One happened to make a hostile remark; he was damned. The other happened to contradict that hostile remark; and he was saved. How easily could the roles have been reversed! These, after all, were not well-considered judgments, but chance exclamations uttered at a moment of supreme suffering and stress. As Pozzo says about Lucky: "Remark that I might easily have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed it otherwise. To each one his due."

Godot's Unpredictability in Bestowing Grace

Godot himself is unpredictable in bestowing kindness and punishment. The boy who is his messenger looks after the goats, and Godot treats him well. But the boy's brother, who looks after the sheep, is beaten by Godot. "And why doesn't he beat you?" asks Vladimir. "I don't know, sir," the boy replies. The parallel to Cain and Abel is evident: there too the Lord's grace fell on one rather than on the other without any rational explanation. Here Godot also acts contrary to Jesus Christ at the Last Judgment: "And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." But if Godot's kindness is bestowed as a matter of pure chance, his coming is not a source of pure joy; it can also mean damnation. When in Act II Estragon believes Godot to be approaching, his first thought is that he is accursed. And as Vladimir triumphantly exclaims "It's Godot! At last ! Let's go and meet him," Estragon runs away, shouting: "I'm in hell."

Two Divisions of Mankind

The chance bestowal of grace, which human beings cannot comprehend, divides mankind into those who will be saved and those who will be damned. When in Act II, Pozzo and Lucky return, and the two tramps try to identify them, Estragon calls out: "Abel! Abel!" Pozzo immediately responds. But when Estragon calls out: "Cain! Cain!" Pozzo responds again. "He's all humanity," concludes Estragon.

Pozzo's Effort to Attain Salvation

There is even a suggestion that Pozzo's activity is concerned with his frantic attempt to draw that fifty-fifty chance of salvation upon himself. In Act I, Pozzo is on his way to sell Lucky at

the fair. The French version of the play, however, specifies that it is the Market of the Holy Saviour to which he is taking Lucky. Is Pozzo trying to sell Lucky to redeem himself? Is he trying to divert the fifty-fifty chance of redemption from Lucky to Pozzo? He certainly complains that Lucky is causing him great pain, that he is killing him with his mere presence—perhaps because his mere presence reminds Pozzo that it might be Lucky who will be redeemed. When Lucky gives his famous demonstration of his thinking, the thin thread of sense that underlies the opening lines seems to be concerned with the accidental nature of salvation: "Given the existence of a personal God outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia, divine athambia, divine aphasia, loves us dearly with some exception for reasons unknown and suffers with those who are plunged in torment...." Here we have a description of a personal God, with his divine apathy, his speechlessness ("aphasia"), and his lack of the capacity for terror or amazement ("athambia"), in other words, a God who does not communicate with us, cannot feel for us, and condemns us for reasons unknown.

Pozzo's Failure

When Pozzo and Lucky reappear the next day, Pozzo blind and Lucky dumb, no more is heard of the fair. Pozzo has failed to sell Lucky; his blindness in thinking that he could thus influence the action of grace has been made evident in concrete physical form.

A Religious or Christian Play

Waiting for Godot then seems to be concerned with the hope of salvation through the workings of grace. And this view supports the belief that it is a Christian or a religious play. Vladimir's and Estragon's "waiting" might be explained as signifying their steadfast faith and hope, while Vladimir's kindness to his friend, and the two tramps' mutual interdependence might be seen as symbols of Christian charity.

Evidence Against this Conclusion

But these religious interpretations overlook a number of essential features of the play. These features arc the play's constant stress on the uncertainty of the appointment with Godot; Godot's unreliability and irrationality, and the repeated demonstration of the futility of the hopes pinned on him. The act of waiting for Godot is shown as essentially absurd and therefore devoid of any religious significance.

Thought of Suicide

There is one feature of the play that leads us to assume that there is a better solution to the tramps' predicament, a solution which the tramps themselves consider preferable to waiting for Godot. That solution is suicide. "We should have thought of it when the world was young, in the nineties", says Vladimir at the outset. Suicide remains their favourite solution, unattainable owing to their own incompetence and their lack of the practical tools to achieve it.

Not Tied to Godot

Estragon, far less convinced of Godot's promises than Vladimir, is anxious to reassure himself that they are not "tied" to Godot. Vladimir gives him the necessary assurance: "Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it. For the moment". When, later,Vladimir falls into a sort of complacency about their waiting, Estragon immediately punctures it. And Vladimir is quite ready to admit that they are waiting only from irrational habit.

The Tramps' Faith

In support of the Christian interpretation, it might be argued that Vladimir and Estragon, who are waiting for Godot, are shown as clearly superior to Pozzo and Lucky, who have no appointment, no objective, and are wholly egocentric, wholly wrapped up in their sado-masochistic relationship. It is their faith that puts the two tramps on a higher plane. It is evident that Pozzo is overconfident and self-centred. "Do I look like a man that can be made to suffer"? he boasts. Even when he gives a melancholy and moving description of the sunset and the sudden failings of the night, we know he does not believe the night will ever fall on him; he is not concerned with the meaning of what he recites, but only with its effect on his listeners. Hence he is taken completely unawares when night does fall on him and he goes blind. Likewise Lucky, in accepting Pozzo as his master and in teaching him his ideas, seems to have been naively convinced of the power of reason, beauty, and truth. Estragon andVladimir are clearly superior to both Pozzo and Lucky—not because they pin their faith on Godot but because they are less naive. They do not believe in action, wealth, or reason. They are aware that all we do in this life is as nothing when seen against the senseless action of time, which is in itself an illusion. They are aware that suicide would be the best solution. They are thus superior to Pozzo and Lucky because they are less self-centred and have fewer illusions. The hope, the habit of hoping, that Godot might come after all is the last illusion that keepsVladimir and Estragon from facing the human condition in the harsh light of fully conscious awareness. For a brief moment,Vladimir is aware of the full horror of the human condition: "The air is full of our cries……At me too someone is looking……" But the routine of waiting, which has become a habit, prevents an awareness of the full reality of being.

The Dead Voices

Vladimir's and Estragon's pastimes are designed to stop them from thinking. "We're in no danger of thinking any more….Thinking is not the worst……What is terrible is to have thought", says Vladimir.Vladimir and Estragon talk incessantly because they wish to hear the "dead voices" which explore the mysteries of being and the self to the limits of anguish and suffering. The long silence that follows the cross-talk about those voices is broken byVladimir in "anguish", with the cry "Say anything at all!"

Conclusion

The hope of salvation may be merely an evasion of the suffering and anguish that spring from facing the reality of the human condition. But this does not invalidate the religious implications of the play. It is possible, however, to believe *either* that the play visualizes the possibility of salvation or that it negates such a possibility. Which alternative a reader adopts will depend upon his mental make-up because each reader will respond to the play in his own way.

"In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!" How far do you agree that these lines of the play "Waiting for Godot" reflect the intellectual climate of Beckett's time? (P.U. 2007)

An Unconventional Play

When *Waiting for Godot* was first presented on the stage, it offered to theatre-audiences an experience unknown before. It was a new kind of play, a play which broke entirely fresh ground. It was a wholly unconventional dramatic composition. It was unconventional in respect of its character-portrayal as well as its plot-construction. It was unconventional also in not depicting any dramatic conflict in the accepted sense of the word. In fact there was an all-round deficiency of action, characterisation, and emotion in this play. And yet the play proved immensely popular, and its popularity has never declined.

The Action of the Play Devoid of Incidents

The critic who said that *Waiting for Godot* was a play in which "nothing happens, twice", was not far wrong. The keynote to this play is to be found in the memorable words which Estragon utters with regard to his own life and the life of his friend, Vladimir. Those words are: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" Because of the strange paucity of action and situation in the play, a critic in sheer desperation has remarked that practically nothing happens in it: "There is nothing done in it; no development is to be found; and there is no beginning and no end." Indeed, the entire action boils down to this: On a country-road, near a tree, two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, idle away their time waiting for Godot. One takes off his boots, and the other talks of the Gospels. One eats a carrot which the other offers. They have nothing substantial to say to each other. They address each other by two diminutives, Gogo and Didi. They cannot go away, because they are waiting for someone called Godot. Eventually a boy arrives with a message that Godot will not come this evening but surely tomorrow. The two tramps decide to go away and come back again the next day. But they do not move and the curtain falls. Earlier, two other character's, a cruel master called Pozzo and his half-crazy slave called Lucky, have appeared to create a diversion, and Lucky has delivered an incomprehensible speech made up of disconnected fragments. In Act II the waiting goes on; Pozzo and Lucky pass by once more, but the master is now blind and the slave is dumb. The master and the slave stumble and fall and are helped on their way by the tramps. The same boy comes back with the same message, namely that Godot will not come this evening but that he will come on the following day. Everything remains as it was in the beginning. The two tramps would like to hang themselves, but they have not got a suitable rope. They decide to go away and come back again the next day. But they do not move and the curtain falls.

The Twilight-State in Which the Tramps Live

Waiting for Godot is a play made up out of nothingness. The spectator or the reader is fascinated by the strangeness of what he witnesses, hoping for a turn in the situation or a solution,

which never comes. The play holds the audience from beginning to end, and the audience remains riveted to the two tramps who do nothing and say practically nothing. The two tramps are incapable of anything more than mere beginnings of impulses, desires, thoughts, moods, memories, and impressions. Everything that arises in them sinks back into forgetfulness before it arrives anywhere. They both live, to a large extent, in a twilight-state and though one of them, Vladimir, is more aware than his companion, complete physical listlessness prevails throughout. Their incapacity to live or to end life (and this is the opening and concluding theme of the play) is intimately linked with their love of helplessness and of wish-dreams. They are full of frustrations and resentments, and they cling to each other with a mixture of inter-dependence and affection.

Dealing With the Essential, Without Beating About the Bush

There had been in the past some attempts to do away with theatrical conventions regarding action on the stage. But this play marks a sort of climax. No dramatist had ever taken so great a risk before, because what this play deals with is the essential, without any beating about the bush, the means employed to deal with it being the minimum conceivable.

Plot Minimal; Dialogue Dying

Waiting for Godot does not tell a story; it explores a static situation. Act II precisely repeats the pattern of Act I. Act I ends thus:

Estragon. Well, shall we go?

Vladimir. Yes, let's go. *(They do not move)*

Act II ends with the same lines of dialogue, but spoken by the same characters in reversed order. No dramatist had ever taken such an extreme position. Not only have conventions been done away with, but even some necessary information has been withheld from the reader. According to the conventional view, a play was to have a certain plot necessitating certain situations and actions, and characters who performed those actions and who were caught up in the tangles of the plot. But *Waiting for Godot*hardly offers a plot. It is as if we were watching a sort of regression beyond nothing. The little we are given to begin with soon disintegrates like Pozzo, who comes back bereft of sight, dragged by Lucky bereft of speech. "This is becoming really insignificant," says one of the two tramps at this point. "Not enough[1]," replies the other. This answer is followed by a long silence. From beginning to end the dialogue seems to be dying. At various stages one or the other of the two tramps suggests something to pass the time—making conversation, repenting, hanging themselves, telling stories, abusing one another, playing at Pozzo and Lucky. But each time the attempt fails; after a few uncertain exchanges they peter out, give up, admit failure. The words "We're waiting for Godot" occur again and again like a refrain. But it is a senseless and tiresome refrain; it 'has no theatrical values; it represents neither hope nor longing. A typical situation in the play is Pozzo and Lucky falling down, followed by the two tramps, and all of them lying on the ground in a helpless heap, from which one tramp's face emerges to pronounce: "We are men."

Everything Uncertain, Incomplete, and Collapsing

Waiting for Godot is based on Beckett's dual obsession with journey and stasis. No doubt a number of adjustments are made during the interval between the two Acts: Pozzo goes blind and Lucky becomes dumb; the tree puts forth some leaves, Estragon's boots are changed, and Lucky gets a new hat. These changes serve to show that something is still taking its course in time.

The tree's movement from winter to spring, apparently in a single night, is not something believable. The tree moves fast in relation to the tramps, reminding us that objective time proceeds, indifferent to their anguish. But otherwise there is very little movement. Sentences remain unfinished; stories are interrupted (for example, that of the Englishman in the brothel); Lucky is not allowed to complete his terrible speech; thoughts, like the speculation on the two thieves, do not reach a conclusion; actions, like the two attempts of the tramps to hang themselves, do not take complete shape; indeed, thoughts and actions fade into a helpless uncertainty, confusion, and silence. All the devices of the tramps to pass their time eventually collapse into nothing.

Habit and Boredom

As Beckett's subject in this play was habit and boredom, he could dispense with plot. As his characters were without history, he could dispense with background. All that was left was a skeleton of language, logic, and wit. The dialogue is maintained even though there is nothing to say, and it is maintained by the single device of instant forgetfulness. (Estragon can remember nothing for two minutes together and can refer back no further than to the last phrase uttered.) It is as if a thick fog of boredom surrounded every event and every word the moment it occurred or was spoken.

A New Theme; and a New Concept of Drama

No one in the theatre had, before Beckett, dealt with the experience of ignorance and impotence. Nor could anyone do so as long as the dramatist and the public thought along the traditional lines of a well-made play with a strong story involving conflict, character-development, and a final solution. Impotence cannot produce action, and without action there can be neither conflict nor solution. Movement would therefore be clearly impossible under these circumstances. But, according to the traditional view, a static drama was a contradiction in terms. Beckett solved the difficulty by substituting situation for story, and direct impact for logical, indirect description. But he did more than solve one particular artistic problem. He created in effect the whole new concept of drama much as the Impressionists created a whole new concept of painting.

The Lack of Incident a Necessary Consequence of the Theme and the Persons

The principal theme of this play is waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. Throughout their lives, human beings always wait for something, an event, a thing, a person, death. Moreover, it is in the act of waiting that people experience the flow of time in its most evident form. To wait means to experience the action of time.*Waiting for Godot* is a dramatic statement of the human situation itself. It lacks both characters and plot in the conventional sense because it tackles its subject matter at a level where neither characters nor plot exist. Characters pre-suppose that human nature, the diversity of personality and individuality, is real and matters; plot can exist only on the assumption that events in time are significant. These are precisely the assumptions that this play puts in question.Vladimir and Estragon are not characters but embodiments of basic human attitudes. And what passes in this play are not events with a definite beginning and a definite end, but types of situation that will for ever repent themselves. That is why the pattern of Act I is repeated with variations in Act II. The two tramps have no ambition, no special purpose, no place to go to, only a place to wait at. Instead of feeling discouraged, they claim that they are blessed in their waiting that provides them with an answer to the question of what they are doing here. Heroes are defeated by time and the process of history, but anti-heroes go on living, thinking, biding their

time. Although they sometimes speak of suicide, there is always a good excuse to postpone this project. It is better to endure, to be. "Let's not do anything. It's safer", Estragon suggests at the beginning of the play. Patience, passive resistance, the silent rebellion of the spirit seemed greater virtues to generation that had known concentration camps, slave-labour camps, and nightmares created by the men of action of the contemporary world. The predicaments of the two tramps are the common, human ones: aching feet, stinking breath, the pangs of hunger, and the sensations of fear.

The Stripping-down Process

Thus to a very large extent Beckett has stripped down action, situation, emotion, and characterisation. It may be noted, however, that the stripping down process can go much further as Beckett himself went on to prove in *Endgame* and *Happy Days*. The extreme in this respect is reached in Beckett's novel *How It Is* in which the crippled characters crawl painfully along face downward in the mud and communicate by jabs with a tin-opener. Compared to any of these, Vladimir and Estragon are highly articulate persons possessing a sharp sensitivity. It is to be noted, also, that despite the paucity of incident, the play achieves, with conspicuous success, its purpose of communicating the experience of waiting, of boredom, of helplessness, of impotence, and of ignorance to the audience.

How would you interpret Godot? What purpose does he serve in Beckett's play?

A Mysterious Personage, Variously Interpreted

Godot is one of the riddles of Beckett's play called *Waiting for Godot*. Godot is a mysterious personality, and it is nowhere made clear to us who or what he is, so that at the end of the play we are left guessing or speculating as to who he is and what exactly he represents. When Beckett was asked who or what was meant by Godot, his reply was equally puzzling. "If I knew," he said, "I would have said so in the play." Does this reply mean that Beckett himself was not aware of the meaning or significance of Godot? It is hard to believe that it was so. All that Beckett meant by his reply was that Godot should be interpreted in any way that suited the readers or spectators in the context of the play as a whole. The result is that critics have offered many interpretations of the identity and role of Godot.

Godot May Be God, Or A Mythical Human Being

Much ingenuity has been shown in establishing at least the origin for Godot's name, so that some clue could be found to Beckett's conscious or subconscious intention regarding his purpose in making the two tramps wait for Godot. It has been suggested that Godot is a weakened or diminutive form of the word "God", with the added association of the Charlie Chaplin character of the little man, who is called Chariot in France and whose bowler hat is worn by all the four main characters in the play. It has also been noted that the French title of the play, *En Attendant Godot,*seems to contain an allusion to a book called*Attente de Dieu,* which would supply further evidence that "Godot" stands for "God". Yet the name "Godot" may have something to do with the character called "Godeau" in Balzac's play *Mercadet*. In Beckett's play, as in Balzac's, the arrival of Godot is the eagerly awaited event that will miraculously save the situation. According to these

theories, then, the name "Godot" either suggests intervention of a supernatural agency, or stands for a mythical human being whose arrival is expected to change the situation. It is also possible that both these meanings are implied through the use of the name "Godot".

Hope of Peace and Rest

To the two tramps, Godot represents peace, rest from waiting, a sense of having arrived in a place; that provides shelter and comfort. His coming means that they will no longer be tramps, homeless wanderers, but will have arrived home. They wait for him even though his coming is by no means certain.

The Tramps' Need of Godot

Although Godot fails to appear in the play, he is as real a character as any of those whom we actually see. Godot very much exists for the tramps, and he directs the course of the evening for them. The tramps need Godot, to give a meaning to their universe: they depend on his arrival; so long as Godot does not come (and he does not come at all), everything that happens is only provisional. Indeed, Godot dominates the play even though he does not appear at all. Although he is, at best, a dimly remembered acquaintance, a general image of Godot does emerge in the play so that we are able to form at least a vague picture of him in our minds,

God of the Old and The New Testament

From the conversation of the tramps we learn that he lives in the capitalistic world of "family", "agents", "correspondents", and a "bank account". The tramps identify him with power and authority. To the boy who brings his message, Godot has a white beard and his life is occupied by his mastery over the sheep and the goats. Godot favours this boy who is a goat-herd but beats the boy's brother who is a shepherd. The two tramps feel uneasy about Godot. When the time comes to meet him, they will have to approach him "on their hands and knees", and if they stopped waiting for him he would punish them. Thus Godot has several traits in common with the image of God as depicted in the Old and the New Testament. (The name "Godot" is a bilingual pun on God and water, the two needs, of the hero in his isolation and spiritual thirst). Godot's white beard reminds us of the image of the old-father aspect of Godot. His irrational preference for one of the two brothers recalls Jehovah's treatment of Cain and Abel; so does his power to punish those who would dare to ignore him. The discrimination between the goat-herd and the shepherd is reminiscent of the Son of God as the ultimate judge; as a saviour for whom men wait and wait; he might well be meant as a cynical comment on the second coming of Christ; while his doing nothing might be a cynical reflection concerning, man's forlorn state. (In answer to a question, the boy-messenger tells the tramps that Godot does "nothing"). Thus it would seem that Beckett wishes to draw our attention to the barrenness of a mind that expects and waits for the old activity of God or gods. Whereas, St. Matthew says: "And he shall seat the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left," in the play it is the shepherd who is beaten and the goat-herd who is favoured. What the tramps expect from God is food and shelter, and goats are motherly, milk-providing animals.

Godot, an Empty Promise in a Meaningless Life

We hear that, once, Vladimir and Estragon had seen Godot. But they do not remember him quite clearly, and the vague promises he gave them are treated by them with a light-heartedness born of doubt. In fact, it seems to them as if God, Godot and Pozzo were sometimes merging into one blurred picture. When, in Act II, they talk of God, Pozzo appears and is mistaken by Estragon for Godot. Godot is explicitly vague, merely an empty promise, corresponding to luke-

warm piety and absence of suffering in the tramps. Waiting for Godot has become a habit with them, a habit which is an adaptation to the meaninglessness of life.

Keeping His Dependants Unconscious

Godot's function in the play seems to be to keep his dependants unconscious. His boy-messenger, for instance, does not have much of an awareness or knowledge: he does not know whether he is unhappy or not; he does not know why Godot is kinder to him than to his brother; he is not certain whether Godot's beard is white; he even fails to recognise the tramps he has seen on the previous day. The uncertainty and unreliability with which Godot surrounds himself reveal him as highly ambivalent. The unconsciousness and ambivalence appear in his promise to rescue the tramps and in his preventing them from becoming conscious.

Godot's Ambiguity

Godot is surely ambiguous. As a farmer who promised food and shelter, he is obviously of the earth. As one who reminds us of the God of the Old and the New Testament, he seems to rule from above. Furthermore, he beats the guardian of the sheep which are gentle and submissive creatures, and prefers the guardian of the goats which are wayward and self willed animals; and yet he obviously expects unconditional patience and obedience from those who depend upon him and prevents their becoming aware of their own centre. It is quite possible, then, that Beckett in this play leads us into a deep regression from all civilised tradition; he leads us into a stage in which consciousness sinks back into an earlier state of its development.

Other Interpretations of Godot

The theory that Godot symbolises God has found a wide acceptance. But other interpretations have been offered too. It has been suggested that Godot is the earthly ideal of a better social order. It has also been suggested that Godot is death and that the tramps will hang themselves on the next day. Another view is that Godot represents silence: the tramps have to speak while waiting for it in order to have the right to be still at last. Or Godot may be the inaccessible self that Beckett pursues through all his work, always with the ultimate hope that "This time, perhaps at last it will be I." Several critics advise us not to bother too much to know who or what Godot is. This advice is based on the view that the play is not about "Godot" but about "waiting". Now it is true that the play is about "waiting", but one naturally asks waiting for *what*? If the tramps are waiting for Godot, we should know what or who Godot is, especially because Godot seems to be a descriptive name. One of the critics, wishing to emphasise the foolishness of trying to identify Godot too closely said: "Godot is that character for whom two tramps are waiting at the edge of a road, and who does not come." Perhaps Godot means only something for which one waits vainly, some promise that remains unfulfilled, some development that does not occur, some hope that does not materialise. In other words, waiting for Godot means waiting for something to turn up which does not really turn up.

Elucidate the description of Waiting for Godot as a tragi-comedy.

A Curious Blend of Comic and Tragic Elements

Waiting for Godot has appropriately been called a tragi-comedy. It is a play which combines comic elements with tragic elements. It is true that the dominant, over-all impression of the play is serious and tragic, but the comic elements occupy a considerable position in the play. There is much in the play to move us, but there is much to amuse us also. And then there are certain situations and remarks that simultaneously move and amuse us. Indeed, it is a curious play in which it becomes really difficult to demarcate the serious and tragic elements from the light and comic ones. Even apart from the situations and the dialogue, the characters themselves are partly comic and partly tragic: we commiserate with them and at the same time we laugh at them.

Boots and Hats; Circus Acts

The very opening of the play is funny. Estragon's vain efforts to take off one of his boots are amusing, even though his remark "Nothing to be done" proves to have serious implications in the light of later developments. If Estragon amuses us by his struggle with his boot, Vladimir amuses us by taking off his hat, peering inside it, putting it on again, taking it off again, peering inside it again, and then echoing Estragon's words: "Nothing to be done".Vladimir taunting remark that Estragon is true to his character in "blaming on his boots the faults of his feet" is also amusing. Soon afterwards Estragon begins to tell the funny story of an Englishman going to a brothel, but is stopped by Vladimir from completing it. When Vladimir and Estragon embrace as a mark of their mutual friendship, Estragon recoils saying: "You stink of garlic", and Vladimir explains that he has to take garlic as a treatment for his weak kidneys. Later in the play there is a situation when Estragon and Vladimir put on different hats one after the other: they "permute" hats. This is a comic act that is bound to evoke peals of laughter from the audience. The act is obviously borrowed from the circus. Estragon's trousers falling about his ankles when he loosens the cord holding them up is also a funny sight.

Cross-talk, Borrowed From the Music-hall

Much of the dialogue betweenVladimir and Estragon is amusing, though it should be remembered that the two tramps are not consciously humorous and that it is not their object to produce fun. What they say is integral to the situation in which they find themselves, and much of what they say is funny from our point of view. Early in the play, for instance, Estragon says that "it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes," thus giving a twist to the familiar proverb: "Strike when the iron is hot." Some of the dialogues between the two friends consist of very brief remarks or comments or suggestions, and these exchanges, by their very swiftness and conciseness, acquire a humorous quality. For instance when they refer to Godot's commitment to them to think over what he can do for them,Vladimir says that Godot will "consult his family." Thereupon we have the following exchange:

Estragon. His friends.

Vladimir. His agents.

Estragon. His correspondents.

Vladimir. His books.

Estragon. His bank account.

Vladimir. Before taking a decision.

A little later, Vladimir remarks that a man's reaction to eating (a carrot) is a "question of temperament." Thereupon we have the following conversation:

Estragon. Of character.

Vladimir. Nothing you can do about it.

Estragon. No use struggling.

Vladimir. One is what one is.

Estragon. No use wriggling.

Vladimir. The essential doesn't change.

Estragon. Nothing to be done.

Yet another example of this kind of humour in the play is the conversation in which the two friends call each other names just to pass time. They call each other by such names as "ceremonious ape", "punctilious pig", "moron", "vermin", "abortion", "morpion", "sewer-rat", "curate", "cretin", the climax coming with the word "critic". At the end of this exchange Estragon suggests that they should make up the quarrel whereupon they address each other affectionately as "Gogo" and "Didi" and then embrace each other. This way of passing time is followed by a suggestion fromVladimir that they should do their exercises for which the two friends then use the following descriptive epithets: "our movements", "our elevations", "our relaxations", our elongations". And, "of course there are several other bits of dialogue of this variety. This kind of conversation, known as crosstalk, is borrowed from the music-hall comedy.

The Tragic Plight of Lucky; Pozzo's Moving Speech

The tragic element in the play is chiefly provided by the treatment which Lucky receives from his master Pozzo. Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed round his neck. Lucky carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket, and a great coat. Pozzo uses his whip upon Lucy mercilessly, and to each crack of the whip, Lucky has quickly to respond in order to minister to some or other need of Pozzo. The two tramps comment pitifully upon the plight of Lucky. The rope has caused a running sore on Lucky's neck, the two tramps observe Lucky looks a "half-wit" to them. Vladimir says that Lucky is "panting" and Estragon says that Lucky seems to be "at his last gasp". Lucky's condition becomes all the more poignant in our eyes when Pozzo informs us that there was a time when Lucky used to be a source of great pleasure to him, and when he used to teach him all the beautiful things of life. "Beauty, grace, truth of the first water", were all beyond Pozzo in those days, and Lucky provided these to him. And yet this same man is now being taken by Pozzo to be sold at a fair. "The truth is you can't drive such creatures away. The best thing

would be to kill them," says Pozzo; and Lucky, on hearing this callous remark, begins to weep. The Pozzo-Lucky situation gains even more pathos if we interpret it as representing the master-slave relationship or the exploitation of the have-nots by the haves. In Act II the situation becomes even more poignant. Now Pozzo, the tyrant, also becomes a pathetic character, having gone blind while Lucky has become dumb. Now whenever the two of them stumble and fall, they have to be helped by others to rise to their feet. At this point Pozzo makes what is one of the most moving speeches in the play. The word "when", he says, is meaningless. One day is like any other day. One day he went blind, and one day Lucky went dumb. One day they were born, and one day they would die, and he goes on to say: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant; then it's night once more." This remark refers, of course, to the brevity of human life, the word "they" denoting mankind. Shortly afterwards Vladimir echoes Pozzo's words, saying: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth....We have time to grow old.....But habit is a great deadener," and Vladimir's words are moving also.

The Tragic Effect of the Ordeal of Waiting; the Night-Mares: the Attempted Suicide

A tragic effect is produced also by the constant repetition by Vladimir of the fact that he and Estragon are "waiting for Godot." The first time we learn that the tramps are waiting for Godot, Vladimir's remark hardly produces any effect on us. But thereafter whenever Vladimir says that they cannot leave because they are waiting for Godot, the effect is one of pathos becauseVladimir's wards are a repeated reminder to us of the two tramps' state of hopelessness or vain expectancy. Estragon's nightmares and his fear of the "Others" add to the poignancy of the situation. The "Others" are the unknown, mysterious persons who have been beating Estragon and of whom he feels terribly afraid, with Vladimir being the only one to provide him consolation and protection. In fact, we learn this fact about the beatings at the very opening of the play when Estragon says that he spent the night in a ditch and was beaten by the same lot of persons. On three occasions—at the outset, at the end of Act I, and at the close of Act II—the tramps plan suicide. The attempted suicide proves abortive, but their very thought of it makes them pathetic characters. We are also informed that once, in days gone by, Estragon had jumped into the Rhone to drown himself and that he had been rescued by Vladimir. Vladimir's speculations about the thief who was "damned" and the one who was "saved" have also an ominous ring. There is something pathetic about Estragon's lament: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful," and "All my lousy life I'have crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery."

The Boredom, the Hopelessness, the Despair

The general or over-all impression that the play produces in us is one of helplessness and the boredom which human beings have to experience in life. The author effectively conveys to us the pointlessness of human life in our times. Human existence is devoid of meaning and purpose. Thus a feeling of despair dominates the play, and this is in itself tragic even though farcical situations are employed to suit the author's design of a tragi-comedy.

Elements that are Both Tragic and Comic

Certain elements in the play have a dual character: they are simultaneously tragic and comic. Such is the attempted suicide of the tramps. The possibility of their deaths is tragic, but their failure to commit suicide is comic: on one occasion they feel that the tree is not strong enough; on another occasion they do not have a suitable rope for the purpose. Then there is the monologue of Lucky—horrifying because it foretells mankind's extinction but funny because of its

incoherence and disconnectedness. It is amusing also to find that Lucky can "think" only when he puts on his hat, so that when he has to be stopped from continuing his rhetoric, his hat has to be snatched away from him. The decision of the tramps to go away at the end of both Act I and Act II and their immobility inspite of this decision are likewise tragic and comic at the same time.

In what way do Vladimir and Estragon illustrate the main theme of Waiting for Godot?

Two Anti-heroes

Vladimir and Estragon are the two heroes of the play *Waiting for Godot*.However, it would be more appropriate to call, them "anti-heroes" because there is little that is heroic about them. Estragon seems to be a cowardly person who suffers from nightmares and who is terribly afraid of the mysterious persons who regularly beat him. Estragon needs the care and guardianship of his friend and really cannot do without him. Once he had thrown himself into a river and had been rescued byVladimir.

Vladimir is certainly more intelligent and more alert mentally than Estragon; he understands the situation in which the two men find themselves better. But even he is a more or less pathetic character, finding himself quite helpless and feeling compelled indefinitely to wait for Godot who is likely to bring about a change in the present situation but whose arrival seems to be very doubtful.Vladimir's feeling of helplessness is clearly proved by the fact that he accepts the proposal that the two men should hang themselves.

Illustrative of the Central Image of the Play

The purpose which these two men serve in the play is obvious. In the first place, they serve to focus our attention on the central image of the play which is "waiting". The two tramps represent the ordeal of waiting, and this ordeal is one which is experienced by almost every human being at one time or the other and, in many cases, all through life. In addition to the ordeal of waiting, these men represent ignorance, helplessness, impotence, and boredom. They do not have the essential knowledge: they do not know who exactly Godot is; they do not know what Godot will do for them; they do not know what would happen if they stopped waiting for Godot. Thus they are ignorant. Being ignorant they are unable to act. Being unable to act they find themselves helpless and impotent. This leads to the feeling of boredom and the difficulty of passing time. They are forced to resort to various devices to pass time, but each attempt in this direction fizzles out. The entire experience of Vladimir and Estragon has a universal application, and it is this fact which lends to the play a wide appeal.

Illustrative of the Themes of Habit, Boredom, and "The Suffering of Being."

Although the conversation of these two men is discontinuous and fragmentary, essentially they are both talking about their lives. A dominant theme of the play is how to pass the time, given the fact that the situation is hopeless. In other words, the play is a dramatisation of the themes first touched upon in Beckett's essay on *Proust*and then repeated continually throughout Beckett's novels—the themes of habit, boredom and "the suffering of being." Towards the close of the play, for instance,Vladimir says: "Habit is a great deadener." Passing the time is a mutual obsession with the two men. When they have finished talking of one thing, they have to think of something else. When they have ceased one meaningless activity, they have to devise another. The

dialogue is maintained even though there is nothing to say. Nothingness is what these tramps are fighting against, and nothingness is the reason why they keep talking. The plight of the two men arouses in us a deep feeling of sympathy; our attitude towards them is one of compassion because in them we recognise ourselves. Thus it is the state— both physical and mental—of the two tramps upon which our attention is concentrated. The condition of the two helpless individuals, whose expectation that Godot will come remains unfulfilled, lends to the play its serious and tragic quality.

Source of Comedy

But the play is not wholly a tragedy. Beckett called it a tragi-comedy, and a tragi-comedy it is. The comic and farcical elements in the play are also provided byVladimir and Estragon. These two men are clearly derived from the pairs of cross-talk comedians of English music-halls. Their dialogue has the peculiar repetitive quality of the cross-talk of comedians' patter. Many of the gestures and actions (permuting hats, embracing and shrinking from each other, stumbling and falling, etc.) are borrowed from the circus clowns. In accordance with the traditions of the music-hall or the circus there is an element of crude physical humour: Estragon's vain efforts to take off his boots, for instance; Vladimir's peering into his hat as if he were looking for something; Estragon's trousers falling when he loosens the cord, which holds them up. These two men have rightly been compared to the two famous Hollywood comedians of the 1930's: Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy whose troubles with such things as hats and boots were notorious, and whose dialogue was spoken very slowly on the assumption that the human understanding could not be expected to work at lightning speed. But for the comedy provided by the two tramps, *Waiting for Godot* would have been a play of unrelieved gloom and would have been unbearably depressing.

A Warm Human Relationship

The tramps serve another purpose also. They offer one way of going through life just as Pozzo and Lucky offer another way. The mutual relationship of the two tramps is to be distinguished from the mutual relationship of Pozzo and Lucky. While Pozzo and Lucky symbolise a master-slave relationship (dominating and being dominated), the other two are bound to each other with natural ties. There is a major contrast between the cold formality of Pozzo and Lucky, and the warm though haphazard conversation of the tramps. Occasionally the two tramps speak of parting, but neither takes this suggestion seriously. At the end of Act I, Vladimir says: "We can still part, if you think it be better." But Estragon replies: "It's not worthwhile now." Since nothing is certain, the two friends prefer the greater certainty of staying together. At the beginning of Act II, after a brief separation, they are extremely happy to see each other. Estragon cries out: "Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with rue Vladimir asks: "Did I ever leave you?" And the other replies "You let me go." This brief exchange between the two tramps could also be a love-scene, a conversation between a husband and a wife on meeting after a separation. Estragon is feeling hurt by the thought that his friend allowed him to go. His words provide a key to the contrast in this play between the bonds of tyranny (Pozzo-Lucky) and those of understanding (Vladimir-Estragon). They are full of frustrations and resentments, but they cling to each other with a mixture of inter-dependence and affection, deriving comfort from calling each other childish names, "Gogo" and "Didi". In these, and other respects they are like an old married couple who always want to separate but never do.

Physical Listlessness

A noteworthy point about the two tramps is that they are incapable of anything more than mere beginnings of impulses, desires, thoughts, moods, memories, and impressions. Everything that arises in them sinks back into forgetfulness, especially in the case of Estragon. They both live, to a large extent, in a twilight state and though one of them, namely Vladimir, is more aware than his companion, inertia or complete physical listlessness prevails throughout. They belong to a category of people well-known in Paris as *clochards,*people who have known better times and originally been cultured and educated. At the beginning of Act I, Vladimir compares their proud past with their gloomy present. Their incapacity to live or to end life is intimately linked with their helplessness and their love of wish-dreams which they make no attempt to realise.

Reinforcing the Theme of Regression

The two tramps serve also to reinforce the theme of disintegration and regression mainly symbolised by Pozzo and Lucky. The past of these two tramps was much happier than their present is; they were "presentable" in the good old days. Now their conversation has no continuous thread to sustain it and is therefore reduced to absurd fragments: automatic exchanges, wordplay, mock-arguments leading to no conclusion. The two men try everything at random. The only thing they cannot do is to go away: they have to stay because they are "waiting for Godot". They are there from beginning to end of Act I, and when the curtain falls they are still waiting inspite of their announced departure. They are there again in Act II which adds nothing new and again inspite of the announcement about their going, they are still on the stage when the curtain falls. They will be there again, the next day, and the next day, and the day after that—superfluous, and without a future. These two men are merely alive but no longer living in a world. They are alive in a non-world. Inspite of their inaction and the pointlessness of their existence, these two men still want to go on like millions of people today, who want to go on even when their life becomes pointless. (Even the nihilists wish to go on living).

Two Distinct Individuals

Within the limits which the situation in the play creates, the tramps are two distinct individuals, each with his own character and interests. Estragon explains one essential difference when he tells Pozzo: "He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet." Vladimir's preoccupation is mental, and Estragon's physical; and these two preoccupations are reflected in the distinct smells which disgust Pozzo. Of the two,Vladimir thinks more and is therefore more eloquent: his anguish is intellectual.Vladimir is more cultured: he quotes Latin and searches his memory for the correct word. Vladimir is capable of thinking of others whereas Estragon is only concerned with his own pain. Estragon is more irritable, obstinate, and selfish thanVladimir. He has a fit of bad temper like a child. But Estragon has a spontaneous imagination: when he talks of Christ he identifies himself with him; looking at his rags he claims to have been a poet. When Pozzo asks his name, he replies: "Adam".Vladimir reads the Bible for instruction, Estragon reads it for the coloured maps of the Holy Land. Finally, Estragon is closer to timelessness than Vladimir. All landscapes are now the same to him and his memory is incapable of reaching back even to the previous day. "I'm not a historian," he says. Once completed an event is forgotten; day means nothing to him any longer; and in his mind his thoughts belong to the repeated present moments in which they are spoken; he makes no distinction between events in time.

What, do you think, is the symbolic significance of the Pozzo-Lucky relationship?

Various Interpretations of Pozzo and Lucky as Symbols

Various interpretations of the Pozzo-Lucky relationship and its significance have been offered by critics. According to one interpretation, these two men represent a master and a slave. According to other interpretations, Pozzo and Lucky symbolise the relationship between capital and labour, or between wealth and the artist. Another view, which seems to be very far-fetched, is that this relationship has an autobiographical origin, Pozzo representing James Joyce and Lucky representing Samuel Beckett.

(It is a well-known fact that, in the initial stages of his literary career, Beckett was deeply attached to James Joyce and was almost like a disciple to him.) One of the critics tells us that Pozzo is no other than Godot himself. According to this view, Godot is God, Pozzo is Godot, Pozzo is therefore God; and since Pozzo is nothing but a tyrant and a slave-driver, so too is God. Another critic characterises Pozzo as the God of the Old Testament, the tyrant-divinity in Act I and the New Testament God, injured, helpless, crucified, in Act II. On the other extreme from this view is the opinion that Pozzo is a kind of anti-Godot. It has even been said that Lucky may be Godot. Yet another view is that Lucky suggests the Biblical figure of Christ.

One Way of Getting Through Life with Someone Else

Thus we have almost as many interpretations as there are critics. One of the critics says that, while Pozzo and Lucky may be body and intellect, master and slave, capitalist and proletarian, coloniser and colonised, Cain and Abel, sadist and masochist, Joyce and Beckett, they represent essentially, and more simply, one way of getting through life with someone else, just as Vladimir and Estragon more sympathetically represent another way of doing so.

A Metaphor of Society

It is possible to treat Pozzo and Lucky as representatives of the ordinary world from which the two tramps are excluded. Pozzo and Lucky create a metaphor of society, not as it is but as the tramps might see it, with the social structure reduced to an essential distinction between master and slave. Pozzo appears all-powerful, dominating the stage by his gestures and his inflated language. By virtue of his capacity to enjoy sensual delights and his wealth, he reminds us of a feudal lord, self-consciously magnanimous in his disposal of time and charity. His is a well-regulated world in contrast to the confusion of the tramps where everything is in flux. It was Lucky who gave Pozzo what refinement and culture Pozzo now possesses. But for Lucky, all Pozzo's thoughts, and all his feelings would have been of common things. "Beauty, grace, truth of the first water"—these were originally all beyond Pozzo. But Lucky is now a puppet who obeys Pozzo's commands. He dances, sings, recites, and thinks for Pozzo, and his personal life has been reduced to basic animal reflexes: he cries and he kicks. But once he was a better dancer and capable of giving his master moments of great illumination and joy; he was kind, helpful, entertaining, Pozzo's good angel. But now he is "killing" Pozzo, or so Pozzo believes. Lucky's thinking is now not the rationalist consolation which once it was, but a total scepticism which illuminates the agony beneath appearances. When he speaks he is Pozzo's tormentor; he reminds Pozzo of the reality which it is Pozzo's earnest endeavour to avoid. This becomes clear in Lucky's great speech which terrifies the hearers because it foretells the extinction of the world. The change which

overtakes Pozzo and Lucky in Act II may be treated as a comment on the decline of the master-slave society.

Pozzo, the Egotist and Absolute Monarch

There is another way of approaching this curious pair of characters. Perhaps, in the portrayal of Pozzo, Beckett has given us a caricature of God, the absolute monarch. Pozzo is the living symbol of the Establishment. He is an egotist, full of self-love. He is fond of hearing his own voice and the ready flow of his rhetoric. The stool which Lucky carries for him is a kind of portable throne for the monarch. Pozzo's greatest concern is his dignity. He rebukes the tramps for asking him a question: "A moment ago you were calling me sir, in fear and trembling. Now you're asking me questions. No good will come of this!" Pozzo's absolute mastery, his divinely delegated powers, must remain unchallenged. As to his slave, Pozzo would like to get rid of him, but "the truth is you can't drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill them." One recognises here the tone of a super-lord. In Act II, reduced to a pitiable condition, Pozzo still calls his servant "pig" and encourages Estragon "to give him a taste of his boot, in the face and the privates as far as possible." Although he himself cries for pity, Pozzo feels no pity for anyone else. Paradoxically this grotesque man formulates the tragedy of man's brief existence on this earth: "One day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die……They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." In Act I, Pozzo becomes furious on hearing Lucky's offensive rhetoric. He tramples on Lucky's hat and shouts triumphantly: "There's an end to his thinking!" Tyranny is here firmly established. In Act II the master is blind, and the slave dumb. The rope which links the two is shorter, symbolism the increasing dependence of the master on the servant. Clearly Pozzo has not carried out his original intention of selling his slave. The two wretched creatures are still joined together, the result being a monstrous indivisible mass of humanity.

The Material and Spiritual Sides of Man; Contrasted Pairs

It has often been said that Pozzo and Lucky are one man. According to this view, they represent the duality of body and mind; they represent the relationship between the material and spiritual sides of man, with the intellect subordinate to the appetites of the body. Estragon and Vladimir have likewise been supposed to represent one man. If these assumptions are correct, the difference between the two pairs may be noted. The oneness of Pozzo and Lucky is degrading to both and is shown as harmful; the connection of the other two is a warm, life-sustaining relationship. In fact, mere contact with Pozzo has a weakening effect on others. This shows the demoralising consequences of tyrannical rule. Pozzo and Lucky belong to a formal world and have an orthodox social relationship: dominating and being dominated. They are tied to each other not by their natures but by their external conditions. The slave is tied but the master is also tied because he must hold the rope. In Act II, this is the rope leading the blind.Vladimir and Estragon have a different relationship: informal and outside society; wanting to break away yet still anxiously returning to each other; a voluntary relationship but with binding natural ties. Thus there is a major contrast between the Pozzo-Lucky and the Estragon-Vladimir relationship. Pozzo and Lucky are complementary individuals, as are the other two; but the relationship between the first two men is on a more primitive level: Pozzo is the sadist master, Lucky the submissive slave.

The Mutual Inter-dependence of Pozzo and Lucky

Although Pozzo and Lucky present an obvious and sharp contrast to each other, they have one thing in common: they are both driven by a desperate attempt to evade panic which would

grip them if they lost their belief in what Pozzo stands for. Pozzo lives by brief orders which he flings at Lucky. No other will than his own exists. Lucky, in a way, deserves his name because he has a master who organises his life for him, cruelly though he may do so. It becomes more and more evident in the course of the play that Lucky believes that his safety lies only within the pattern of a mutual sadomasochistic relationship between himself and Pozzo. (In Act I, Pozzo reveals this mutual torture in one of his speeches) For this mutual fixation Lucky has sacrificed everything, even his soul and his creativeness. And he accepts his present abject misery and slavery as a matter which concerns nobody but Pozzo and himself. When Estragon tries to wipe away Lucky's tears after Lucky has received a cruel reproach from Pozzo, Lucky kicks Estragon in the leg. It would seem that the relationship of master to slave is of the unbreakable kind. The tyrant strives to make the victim totally dependent on him, whereas the victim sees the basis of his own security in the authority of the tyrant. The following opinion is also noteworthy: "The pozzo-Lucky pair may be compared to the collective pseudo-ego. The two tramps, on the other hand, reveal features of the lost value hidden in those who have something above the average, an overplus for which there is no adequate outlet."

Mankind Versus Christ

There is also the view that Pozzo represents mankind, and Lucky represents Christ. If this view is accepted, what takes place before the tramps is the re-acting of the Redemption. The tramps, of course, do not recognise it as such, find it unpleasant, and prefer to continue waiting for the mysterious Godot. Another possible interpretation, already indicated above, is that Pozzo and Lucky represent human life, Pozzo representing the physical aspect of the human personality and Lucky the spiritual, which is in time brutalised by the treatment it receives and is reduced to the incoherence represented by Lucky's monologue. Pozzo himself in the course of the play turns blind, this perhaps being an indication of the transience of human power and domination.

Waiting for Godot has variously been interpreted. Indicate some of the principal approaches to the play.

A Puzzling Play

Waiting for Godot is a very puzzling play. Its essential meaning is not quite clear, with the result that different critics have approached it differently and interpreted it in various ways. Unfortunately Beckett himself did not throw much light on the meaning of the play. Under the circumstances each one of us is left to respond to the play in his own way. Each member of the audience is free to pick up the echoes to which he is most attuned. It is noteworthy also that the play has had a widespread appeal and has found acceptance with not only intellectuals but also with average theatre-goers. There is something in the play for almost everybody.

A Picture of Human Attempts to Fiddle Through Life

According to one interpretation of the play, the two tramps are two parts of a person or of a community seen subjectively, with Vladimir representing the more spiritual part and Estragon the animal; and Pozzo and Lucky make up a person or a community viewed objectively, Pozzo being the exploiter and the user of ideas, Lucky the exploited and the creator of ideas. In other words, we suffer with Estragon andVladimir, their fears, their hopes, their hatreds, and their

loves; but we view Pozzo and Lucky through the eyes of the tramps and therefore see in them only the social surface of life. Thus these four characters add up to a picture of humanity at large, and the play is, more than anything else, about the attempts of human beings to fiddle their way through life, setting up a wall of hopes and pretences between themselves and despair. Godot symbolises the greatest of these hopes, namely that there is some point to existence, that we are keeping some mysterious appointment on earth, and are therefore not random scraps of life. It does not matter much who Godot is because the play is not about Godot but, as its title states, about the waiting for him. The play is about life on earth, not hereafter.

A Picture of the Pointlessness of Human Life

Different from this somewhat positive approach is another which is entirely negative. According to this other interpretation, the play is a fable about a kind of life that has no longer any point. The dramatist wishes to convey to us that life is devoid of action and that human beings have been pulled out of the world and have no longer anything to do with it. The two heroes, or anti-heroes, are merely alive, but no longer Jiving in the world. The world has become empty for them. Where a world no longer exists, there can no longer be a possibility of a collision with the world. In our world today many people have begun increasingly to feel that they live in a world in which they do not or cannot act but are simply acted upon. The play seeks to capture the mood of such people and has therefore a more or less general application. The two tramps are dimly aware of the want of action in their lives and of the pointlessness of their existence. It is another matter that they still want to go on in life. The majority of people in today's world do not after all give up living when their life becomes pointless. The tramps are waiting for nothing in particular. They have even to remind each other of the fact that they are waiting and of what they are waiting for. Thus actually they are not waiting for anything. We need not make much fuss about who or what the expected Godot is. Godot is nothing but a name for the fact that the life which goes on pointlessly is wrongly interpreted to mean waiting for something. May be, the tramps are totally unaware of the pointlessness of their existence, though there are indications to show at least a dim awareness.

A Presentation of the Ordeal of Waiting, Ignorance, Impotence, Boredom

A more convincing interpretation of the play is that it presents the human experience of futile waiting, the act of waiting as an essential, characteristic aspect of the human condition. Most often people wait for something which does not materialise just as Godot does not materialise. A man may vainly wait for a job, or promotion, or the return of a long-lost child or friend, or a love-letter, or a reunion with a divorced wife, and so on. Vladimirand Estragon by their waiting indefinitely and without any tangible result thus symbolise the millions of human beings who wait for something or other without attaining it. In this sense too the play has a general validity. But the ordeal of waiting is not the only subject of the play. The two tramps do not know who or what Godot is; nor are they sure that they are waiting at the right place or on the right day, or what could happen if they stopped waiting. In other words, the two tramps are lacking in the essential knowledge; they are ignorant. Being ignorant they cannot act and so they are impotent also. Thus the tramps produce in us a sense of baffled helplessness which we experience when forced to remain in a situation which we do not understand and over which we have no control. All that they do is to seek ways to pass the time in the situation in which they find themselves. They tell stories, sing songs, play verbal games, pretend to be Pozzo and Lucky, do physical exercises. But all these activities are mere stop-gaps serving only to pass the time. Here then we have the very essence of boredom. Thus the play represents not just waiting but also ignorance, impotence, and

boredom. Vladimir and Estragon have travelled far towards total nihilism, though they have not fully achieved it. They are in a place and in a mental state in which nothing happens and time stands still. If Godot comes, a new factor may be introduced into their existence, whereas if they leave they will certainly miss him. Their waiting therefore contains an element of vague hope.

The Problem of How to Get Through Life

Beckett had the habit of repeating the same themes and images and even characters from work to work in order perhaps to emphasise the nature of the world as he saw it. In his works, whoever the characters and whatever the situations, there is nothing beyond habit, boredom, forgetfulness and suffering. This is why the many and elaborate interpretations that have been offered of this play seem superfluous. Pozzo and Lucky, for instance, have variously been described as body and intellect, master and slave, capitalist and proletarian, coloniser and colonised, Cain and Abel, sadist and masochist, even Joyce and Beckett. But essentially and more simply, they represent one way of getting through life with someone else, just asVladimir and Estragon more sympathetically represent another way of doing so. The mysterious Godot is just some diminutive god like all the other little gods—some divine, some political, some intellectual, some personal—for whom men wait, hopefully and in fear, to solve their problems and bring point to their pointless lives, and for whose sake they sacrifice the only real gift they have, namely their free will. When Estragon asks whether he and Vladimir have lost their rights, Vladimirreplies that they have got rid of them (the rights). *Waiting for Godot* is thus the fullest statement of the problem that troubled Beckett. The problem is: how do you get through life? Beckett's answer is simple and depressing: we get through life by force of habit, by going on inspite of boredom and pain, by talking, by not listening to the "silence", absurdly and without hope. The two tramps in this play, with their boredom, their fear of pain, their shreds of love and hate, are a surprisingly effective version of the whole human condition—a condition for which action is no answer, chiefly because there is no obvious action to be taken: "Nothing to be done." In other words Beckett comes to a nihilistic conclusion. The play also conveys the idea that our everyday existence is nothing but playing of games, clown-like, without real consequence, springing solely from the vain hope that it will make time pass. Our daily activities are similar to Estragon's meaningless action in taking off his shoes and putting them on.

The Religious Theme

Some critics have found a religious meaning in the play and it is not difficult to see why. Vladimir raises, and seriously too, the issue of human salvation early in the play. He feels worried at the thought that one of the two thieves was damned. Estragon has all his life compared himself to Christ and says rather enviously that "they crucified (him) quick." The tramps wait for Godot who may represent God, and their persistence in waiting for Godot shows their faith in God. The mutual attachment of the two tramps and Vladimir's protective attitude towards his friend have been interpreted as Christian virtues. Pozzo's being mistaken for Godot to begin with may also be linked with this religious interpretation. However, it is difficult to read in the play a consistent and elaborate religious allegory.

Disintegration and Regression of Man

Among the depressing interpretations of the play is yet another. According to this interpretation, the play represents a disintegration of human beings, the climax in the play occurring when all the four characters fall to the ground upon one another, creating a formless mass from which Vladimir's voice emerges, saying: "We are men!" Nothing escapes the

destructive force of this regression: neither speech—torn to pieces in the rhetoric of Pozzo's monologue on twilight—nor thought, which is undermined and destroyed by a whole series of absurd reasonings as well as by such passages as the incoherent speech delivered by Lucky. Lucky's speech effectively represents the regression of man's thinking intelligence.

The Nullity Of Human Achievement

One critic urges us not to feel perplexed by the play's meaning. Beckett, he tells us, is no didactic writer concerned to communicate a "message" in dramatic form. Even the many Christian echoes in the play do not add up to any coherent religions statement, but rather to a meditation upon a world governed by no other divinity than some sort of malignant fate, a world in which man waits and hopes for something to give value to his life and distract him from the absurdity of his death. *Waiting for Godot*is a meditative rhapsody on the nullity of human attainment.

A Suggestion of the German Occupation of France

According to yet another view, the world represented in this play resembles France occupied by the Germans during World War II when Beckett lived first in the occupied zone and then escaped to the unoccupied region. Thus viewed, the play reminds us of the French Resistance organized by underground workers. How much waiting must have gone on in that bleak world! How many times must Resistance organisers have kept appointments with many who did not turn up and who may have had good reasons for not turning up ! We can imagine why the arrival of Pozzo would have an unnerving effect on those who waited. Pozzo could be a Gestapo official clumsily disguised. The German occupation of France should not of course be regarded as the "key" to the play; the play simply suggests the German occupation and thus acquires a certain historical value.

Minor Themes

Into this wonderfully suggestive and subtle play, Beckett incorporates such minor themes as the inadequacy of human language as a means of communication and the illusory nature of such concepts as past and future.

Different Meanings for Different People

In approaching Beckett we must give up asking what any of his plays is intended to mean. Beckett himself, when asked what a play of his meant, replied: "If I could tell you in a sentence I wouldn't have written the play." *Waiting for Godot* means different things for different people.

"Yet, if Beckett devalues language, he continues to use it and, bilingually, to show a mastery of it". How far do you agree with this view? (P.U. 2004)

Nothing Happens, Twice

Waiting for Godot does not, indeed, contain any sensational or gripping or even moderately interesting story; the element of love is completely absent from it; there is no female interest in it whatever. As a critic remarked, in this play "nothing happens, twice." In fact, so far as plot-construction is concerned, a remark by Estragon provides the keynote to it. Says Estragon at one point: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" According to one of the

critics, "There is nothing done in it; no development is to be found; and there is no beginning and no end." In spite of these deficiencies, however, *Waiting for Godot* has proved immensely successful on the stage. The play has appealed to the common people as well as to intellectuals.

The Play, World-Theatre

Since its performance in Paris in 1953, this play has been performed by all sorts of actors in all sorts of places in many different countries, and it has been translated into many different languages. It is not a play with only a limited appeal. Nor can it be called, as some do call it, an elaborate intellectual hoax. *Waiting for Godot* has proved itself to be world-theatre in spite of the fact that it has no spectacle, no star-part, no sex, not even a woman in the cast. The question why it has achieved such a striking success is not easy to answer. The immediate appeal of the play is due perhaps to the fact that, even though nothing much happens, it is intensely theatrical. The dialogue is always funny, and at the same time sad. Under the farcical ripple of the dialogue lies a serious concern.

A Situation Having a General Human Application

One reason for the wide popularity of this play is that it depicts a situation which has a general human application. The main subject of the play is "waiting", and the act of waiting is an essential aspect of the human condition. The words "We're waiting for Godot" are repeated in the course of the play like a refrain. Different interpretations of what is meant by Godot have been offered, but it does not really matter who or what Godot is. The tramps themselves have only a vague idea of who Godot is. They wait for him in a state of ignorance and helplessness. They have no control over the situation in which they find themselves. The play thus depicts, *waiting, ignorance, impotence,* and*boredom;* and all these are things, of which every one of us has a direct personal experience in life. Every one of us has waited and waited for something or the other—the offer of a job, the possibility of promotion, the return of a long-lost friend or relation, a love-letter, etc. Thus we can discover a common ground between ourselves and the two tramps who are waiting for Godot

The General Feeling of the Pointlessness of Existence Reflected in the Plight of the Tramps

It is not only the mood of expectancy in the play which has a general validity. While the play dramatises the themes of habit, boredom, and "the suffering of being," it also conveys to us the pointlessness of existence. The play is a fable about a kind of life that has no longer any point. Godot may stand for God, or for a mythical human being, or for the meaning of life, or for death; but the play is a representation of stagnant life. The two heroes, or anti-heroes, are merely alive, but no longer living in a world. Theirs is a life without action, and all their attempts to pass the time peter out. In our world today millions of people have begun increasingly to feel that they live in a world in which they do not act but are acted upon. The two tramps, in spite of their inaction and the pointlessness of their existence, still want to go on. The millions of people today do not after all give up living when their life becomes pointless. Thus the plight of the two tramps is something which most people can easily recognise and understand, and that is why they are able to respond to the play. People can also understand Estragon's misery symbolised by his nightmares and by the mysterious persons who regularly give him a beating. It is not without reason that Estragon suggests hanging as a remedy for the tramps' predicament. Under the

conditions in which we live most of us have subconsciously thought of hanging ourselves even though we may not confess this thought. The mood of despair is not limited only to a small minority of people in the modern world; it is more or less a general attitude.

The Appeal of Lucky's Monologue for the Thinking Mind

There is something to appeal to most people even in Lucky's incoherent and disconnected monologue. It is undoubtedly a long speech which puzzles and even irritates us. But there is much in it to appeal to the thinking mind. Lucky's speech should not be dismissed as so much nonsense. Lucky speaks first of all of a personal God who loves human beings dearly with some exceptions, but Lucky also speaks of those who for reasons unknown are plunged in torment. Lucky speaks too of the great deterioration in man's thinking intelligence. In other words the theme of Lucky's speech is regression in a world in which the inventions of science will bring about a catastrophe. Man's mind is moving back to a primitive condition. This is certainly a depressing thought but, for the modern intellectual it has a certain plausibility and credibility.

The Appeal of the Tramps' Mutual Relationship

Another reason for the wide appeal of this play is the manner in which the Pozzo-Lucky and the Estragon- Vladimir relationships are depicted. Pozzo and Lucky represent the tyrant-slave relationship. Pozzo reminds us of a feudal lord who dominates by his gestures and his inflated language. Pozzo and Lucky are tied to each other, both ways, not by their natures but by their external conditions. The slave is tied but the master is tied also, because he must hold the rope. Vladimir and Estragon have a different relationship: they are at once loving, suspicious, and resentful, wanting to break away yet still anxiously returning to each other; theirs is a voluntary relationship, with binding natural ties. Pozzo and Lucky represent one way of getting through life with someone else; Vladimirand Estragon represent another way of doing so, a more sympathetic and a more acceptable way. Thus through Vladimir and Estragon we come to a clearer knowledge of ourselves, to an increased capacity for living fully, and so to a spiritual liberation. The play is valid for all those who can assimilate the general anguish into their particular experience and thus translate it into their own terms. To such an experience we might apply Aristotle's term "catharsis". The contrast between the relationships of the two pairs of characters thus becomes an important clue to-the understanding of the play and produces certain echoes in us.

The Religious Appeal of the Play

Some people respond to what may be regarded as the religious appeal of the play. Godot is the external figure who can bring a change in the immobility of the two tramps for whom he certainly exists. The idea of grace or the possibility of salvation is prominent in the play, from the moment when Vladimir expresses his puzzlement over the different accounts given in the four Gospels of the fate of the two thieves curcified with Christ. According to one version, one of the two thieves was saved and the other damned. As Vladimir remarks "It's a reasonable percentage." A religious, indeed theological, motif runs through this near-static play, and it is not surprising that critics should have found some similarity between Beckett and Pascal. The Pascalian picture of the misery of man abandoned to himself is Beckett's picture in this play. Vladimir's and Estragon's "waiting" might be explained as signifying their steadfast faith and hope, while Vladimir's kindness to his friend, and the two tramps' mutual inter-dependence might be seen as symbols of Christian charity. The tramps, who are waiting for Godot, may be regarded as superior to Pozzo and Lucky who have no appointment and no objective, and who are wholly egocentric, wholly wrapped up in their sado-masochistic relationship. The two tramps are less self-centred

and have fewer illusions. The hope, the habit of hoping, that Godot might come after all may be an illusion but it is an illusion that sustains them and keeps them going. Godot lends to their pointless existence a certain meaning even though Godot himself is an ambiguous, unpredictable person.

The Appeal of the Comic Elements in the Play

Thus we see that a play, which seems to be made up out of nothingness, has a manifold appeal; and that is the reason why the audience is caught from beginning to end and remains riveted to the two tramps who do nothing and say practically nothing. But it is not only thematic variety that accounts for the popularity of this play. There are a couple of other ingredients too.*Waiting for Godot,* despite its serious and tragic implications, is a funny play which contains a number of comic and farcical elements. Estragon and Vladimir have rightly been compared to the famousHollywood comedians of the nineteen-thirties, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. They give rise to a lot of mirth by their gestures, actions, movements, and by their conversation. Many of their actions are borrowed from the circus, such as Estragon's amusing efforts to take off his boots, Vladimir's repeatedly peering into his hat, the two tramps permuting hats, the futile attempts of the tramps to hang themselves, and the immobility of the tramps even after they have decided to move away. The amusing cross-talk of the tramps is borrowed from the English music-hall comedy. To take only a couple of examples, they indulge in the pastime of calling each other names: "moron", "vermin", "abortion", "sewer rat", "curate", "critic". At the end of this game of abusing each other, the two tramps make up the mock-quarrel and call each other "Gogo" and "Didi". Towards the end of the play we have the following bit of dialogue which illustrates the kind of humour that occurs again and again:

Vladimir. Pull on your trousers.

Estragon. What?

Vladimir. Pull on your trousers.

Estragon. You want me to pull off my trousers?

Vladimir. Pull ON your trousers.

Estragon. *(Realising his trousers are down).* "True. *(He pulls up his trousers).*

Memorable Remarks and Utterances

Finally, there are a number of memorable remarks and utterances which have an instantaneous appeal for the audience. For instance, in one of his speeches Pozzo says that the tears of the world are a constant quantity, and that for each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops weeping,. This remark is like an aphorism. Then there is Pozzo's lament, symptomatic of many human misfortunes: "I woke up one fine day as blind as Fortune." But Pozzo's great contribution to this play is the speech in which he points out the brevity of human life: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." Vladimir too makes a few remarks that appeal to us greatly. In one of his speeches he refers to Pozzo's repeated cries for help and says that these cries were addressed to all mankind. At this place and at this moment of time, Vladimir and Estragon are "all mankind". They should therefore do something; "The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflection, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, that is the question.....We are waiting for Godot to come." Soon afterwards Vladimir makes

the following philosophic remark: "In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness." Yet another remark worthy of note by Vladimir is: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth.....We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. But habit is a great deadener." One of the highlights of this play is the poetic dialogue in which the two tramps describe "the dead voices" which make a noise like wings, like leaves, like sand; which whisper, rustle, murmur: which make a noise like feathers, like leaves, like ashes. This dialogue ends with a long pause at the end of which Vladimir entreats his friend to "say something".

Conclusion

If the prisoners of San Quentin responded to *Waiting for Godot,* it was because they were confronted with their own experience of time, waiting, hope, and despair; because they recognised the truth about their own human relationships in the sado-masochistic inter-dependence of Pozzo and Lucky and in the bickering love-hate between Vladimir and Estragon. This is also the key to the wide success of Beckett's plays: to be confronted with concrete projections of the deepest fears and anxieties, which have been only vaguely experienced at a half-conscious level, constitutes a process of catharsis and liberation (a process similar to the curative effect in psycho-analysis of confronting the subconscious contents of the mind). This is the moment of release from deadening habit, through facing up to the suffering of existence, that Vladimir almost attains in *Waiting for Godot*.

How far is it appropriate to call Waiting for Godot a tragedy?

Tragic But Not in the Traditional Sense

Waiting for Godot is certainly a funny play in parts: it has a number of comic elements which include some clowning acts borrowed from the circus and amusing cross-talk borrowed from the music-hall. But essentially it is a serious, even tragic play.

Of course, it is not a tragedy in the traditional sense: we are far from Aristotle's conception of tragedy and we are very far indeed from Shakespearean tragedy. This play does not bring about that "catharsis" of the feelings of pity and fear about which Aristotle spoke, and it does not have an inspiring effect on us of the kind that Shakespearean tragedy has. The impact of this play is certainly not as powerful as that of a tragedy by Shakespeare. Yet it is appropriate to describe *Waiting for Godot* as a tragic play. It is tragic in the sense that it makes us keenly aware of the human predicament and human misery; it also produces in us the feelings of mystery, fear, pity, and even awe. However, instead of giving rise to any exhilaration that comes through catharsis, this play fills us with sheer despair. Life is presented as bleak and hopeless, even though it has its funny side. The play is a dramatisation of the themes of habit, boredom, and the "suffering of being". Towards the close of the play, for instance,Vladimir says: "Habit is a great deadener." By then he and Estragon have had more than ninety minutes on the stage to prove it. The play is also about waiting, ignorance and impotence. The two tramps produce in us a sense of baffled helplessness which we experience when forced to remain in a situation which we do not understand and over which we have no control. All that Estragon and Vladimir do is to seek ways to pass the time in a situation in which they find themselves. They tell stories, sing songs, play verbal games, pretend to be Pozzo and Lucky, do physical exercises. But all these activities are mere stop-gaps valuable only to pass the time. Here we have the very essence of boredom. It has to be noted that the play itself is by no means boring; it is a fascinating play which depicts boredom, besides, of course, helplessness, ignorance, and impotence. The effect of this

dramatisation of boredom and impotence on us is depressing and saddening. There lies the tragic essence of this play which is different from traditional tragedies. Here we come across no heroic endurance of misfortune and no magnificent portrayal of the greatness and glory of human nature. The only endurance here is an endurance of sheer helplessness.

The Feeling of Despair

Despair is the keynote of this tragic play, and the keynote is struck in the very opening words of Estragon: "Nothing to be done" which he speaks with reference chiefly to his failure to pull off his boots and which are echoed soon afterwards byVladimir. The feeling of helplessness is also conveyed to us in the very opening dialogue when we are told that Estragon has been beaten as usual by "the same lot" of unknown persons during the night which he felt compelled to spend in a ditch. The two men are evidently in a miserable condition.Vladimir resents Estragon's behaving as if he were the only one to suffer and as ifVladimir did not count. Vladimir also recalls better times when he and his friend were presentable and when they used to come down hand in hand from the top of the EiffelTower among the first. Vladimir then introduces the theme of salvation, and it worries him to think that one of the two thieves was damned. Then follows a reference to Estragon's nightmares whichVladimir would not like to hear about. The condition of these two friends must, indeed, be hopeless because Estragon suddenly offers the suggestion: "Let's hang ourselves immediately!" The suggestion has obvious tragic implications and, even though the suggestion fizzles out because the tree nearby does not have a bough strong enough for a successful hanging, it is revived later in the play—towards the end of Act I and again at the end of Act II.

The Agony of Waiting for Godot

The ordeal of having to wait for that mysterious person, Godot, is in itself tragic enough. Early in the play we learn fromVladimir that the two friends *must* wait for Godot, but a hint is dropped at this very point that Godot might not come on this particular day or even on the following day. Thereafter the words "we're waiting for Godot" occur in the course of the play several times like a refrain and they acquire a more and more depressing quality each time they are repeated because Godot alone, it would appear, can save these two men from their sad fate and Godot is nowhere in sight. Thus the two friends are waiting to no purpose at all. The boy who brings Godot's message holds out the faint hope that Godot will come on the following day, but we can see that this hope is not likely to be fulfilled. If the audience identify themselves with the characters on the stage, as they usually do during a theatrical performance, they will fully share this agony of futile waiting. This agony is experienced by us even when we are reading the play by ourselves in the study. The meagre information that is provided by the messenger boy about Godot is not very heartening either. Godot does not beat this boy, but he beats his brother who is a shepherd; Godot has a white beard; Godot does nothing. Perhaps, Godot represents the Old Testament God, but we are not given a cheering image of the Almighty. Or Godot may be a mythical human being, in which case waiting for him is bound to prove a frustrating experience.

The Pozzo-Lucky Scenes

The tragic quality of the play is deepened by the Pozzo-Lucky interludes. Lucky's plight is indeed, pitiable. He is no better than a beast of burden, and there are sores on his neck. Pozzo treats him worse than an animal. It is true that Lucky's past was glorious. There was a time when he was a source of beauty, grace and truth for his master, but the contrast between what he was and what he has been reduced to is very painful, indeed. Pozzo is now taking him to the fair where

he hopes to get a good price for him, though Pozzo thinks that the best thing would be to kill creatures like Lucky. When Lucky begins to weep, Pozzo says, "Old dogs have more dignity." The incoherent monologue that emanates from Lucky shows how gravely his mental powers, have deteriorated and declined. There is still much sense in what he says—and his theme is the regression of the entire human race in a universe which is not looked after by an exactly benevolent God—but the signs of mental decay in him are unmistakable. If the Pozzo-Lucky relationship represents a master-servant relationship, as it most probably does, the tyranny of the master arouses deep resentment in us, and the abject surrender of the slave arouses mingled feelings of pity and disgust. Pozzo's going blind soon afterwards and Lucky's going dumb deepen the tragic situation. Pozzo now feels almost as helpless as Lucky and when the two stumble and fall they cannot get up without external help.

Tragic Utterances

Some of the utterances in the course of the play produce a deeply tragic effect on us. To take only a few examples, Estragon at one point says, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" At another point Estragon thus expresses his misery: "All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! You and your landscapes! Tell me about the worms!" Again, we have the following bit of dialogue:

Estragon. Ah! What'll we do, what'll we do!

Vladimir. There's nothing we can do.

Estragon. But I can't go on like this!

But perhaps the most tragic words are uttered by Pozzo when he says: "One day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die.....They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." Some of the words of this utterance are subsequently echoed by Vladimir: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps." Remarks like these heighten, deepen, and intensify the tragic quality of this hopeless play.

No Sublime Picture of Human Dignity

A genuine tragedy produces in us a sense of the grandeur of human nature. Oedipus, Hamlet, the Duchess of Malfi, Tess,Santiago (in Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea)* are only a few examples of tragic heroes who offer an edifying spectacle of human suffering, human endurance, and human dignity. But we do not have any such character in *Waiting for Godot*. The two tramps are poor specimens of humanity: Estragon, fearful, timid, forgetful, devoid of self-respect; Vladimir certainly brave, mentally alert, and determined (to "wait", if nothing else) but otherwise not much above the average in any respect. pozzo is a hateful tyrant in Act I, and a contemptible, pathetic character in Act II. Lucky is an abject, helpless slave. The entire behaviour of these men is either funny or disgusting; we feel no admiration for anyone, and very little pity. There is neither a tragic conflict (all characters except the tyrannical Pozzo being passive), nor a tragic "flaw". Only once or twice (in the description of the twilight sky and statement of the brevity of human life) does the play attain any dignity. But, though not a genuine tragedy in the accepted

sense, the play is not devoid of its value as a graphic and powerful presentation of the boredom and emptiness of human life, and of the inevitability and futility of waiting.

Anguish and Catharsis

However, according to one view, Beckett's characters experience Beckett's own anguish, and that anguish then becomes our anguish. If we assimilate this anguish into our particular experience, we shall have the catharsis Aristotle talked about. Besides, the mutual attachment of the two main protagonists in this play is something which raises them in our estimation and makes them truly tragic.