Contents;

Biography of Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)

20th century Irish novelist, playwright and poet Samuel Beckett penned the play 'Waiting for Godot.' In 1969, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Who Was Samuel Beckett?

During the 1930s and 1940s, Samuel Beckett wrote his first novels and short stories. He wrote a trilogy of novels in the 1950s as well as famous plays like Waiting for Godot. In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. His later works included poetry and short story collections and novellas.

Early Life In Ireland

Samuel Beckett was born in Dublin, Ireland, on April 13, 1906, to middle-class parents, William and Mary Beckett. Mary Beckett was a devoted wife and mother, who spent good times with her two sons in both training and hobbies. His father shared his love of nature, fishing, and golf with his children. Both parents were strict and devoted Protestants.

Beckett's tenth year came at the same time as the Easter Uprising in 1916 (the beginning of the Irish civil war for independence from British rule). Beckett's father took him to see Dublin in flames. Meanwhile, World War I (1914–18) had already involved his uncle, who was fighting with the British army. Here was the pairing of opposites at an early age: Beckett wrote of his childhood as a happy one, yet spoke of "unhappiness around me."

He was a quick study, taking on the French language at age six. He attended the Portora Royal boarding school in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, Ireland, where he continued to excel in academics and became the light-heavyweight boxing champion. He also contributed writings to the school paper. His early doodles were of beggar women, hoboes, and tramps. Schoolmasters often labeled him moody and withdrawn.

In 1923 he entered Trinity College in Dublin to specialize in French and Italian. His academic record was so distinguished that upon receiving his degree in 1927, he was awarded a two-year post as lecteur (assistant) in English at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, France.

Career Beginnings

In 1928, Beckett found a welcome home in Paris where he met and became a devoted student of James Joyce. In 1931, he embarked on a restless sojourn through Britain, France and Germany. He wrote poems and stories and did odd jobs to support himself. On his journey, he came across many individuals who would inspire some of his most interesting

characters.

In 1937, Beckett settled in Paris. Shortly thereafter, he was stabbed by a pimp after refusing his solicitations. While recovering in the hospital, he met Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnuil, a piano student in Paris. The two would become life-long companions and eventually marry. After meeting with his attacker, Beckett dropped the charges, partly to avoid the publicity.

Resistance Fighter in World War II

During World War II, Beckett's Irish citizenship allowed him to remain in Paris as a citizen of a neutral country. He fought in the resistance movement until 1942 when members of his group were arrested by the Gestapo. He and Suzanne fled to the unoccupied zone until the end of the war.

After the war, Beckett was awarded the Croix de Guerre for bravery during his time in the French resistance. He settled in Paris and began his most prolific period as a writer. In five years, he wrote Eleutheria, Waiting for Godot, Endgame, the novels Malloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, and Mercier et Camier, two books of short stories, and a book of criticism.

Literary apprenticeship

In France Beckett soon joined the informal group surrounding the Irish writer James Joyce (1882–1941) and was invited to contribute the opening essay to a defense and explanation of Joyce's still unfinished Finnegans Wake (1939). Beckett also moved in French literary circles. During this first stay in Paris he won a prize for the best poem on the subject of time. Whoroscope (1930) was his first separately published work and marked the beginning of his lifelong interest in the theme of time.

Beckett returned to Dublin in 1930 to teach French at Trinity College. During the year he earned a Master of Arts degree. After several years of wandering through Europe writing short stories and poems and being employed at odd jobs, he finally settled in Paris in 1937.

First novels and short stories

More Pricks than Kicks (1934), a volume of short stories derived, in part, from the then unpublished novel Dream of Fair to Middling Women (1993), recounts episodes from the life of Belacqua. Belacqua, similar in character to all of Beckett's future heroes, lives what he calls "a Beethoven pause," the moments of nothingness between the music. But since what comes before and what follows man's earthly life (that is, eternity) are nothing, then life also (if there is to be continuity) must be a nothingness from which there can be no escape.

Beckett's first novel, Murphy (1938), is a comic tale complete with a philosophical (the search for meaning in one's life) problem that Beckett was trying to solve. As Murphy turns from the ugly world of outer reality to his own inner world, Beckett reflects upon the relationship between mind and body, the self and the outer world, and the meaning of freedom and love.

During World War II (1939–45; a war in which France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States fought against and defeated the combined powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan) Beckett served in the French Resistance movement (a secret organization of Jews and non-Jews who worked against the Nazis, the political party in control of Germany from 1933 until 1945). In 1953 he wrote another novel, Watt. Like each of his novels, it carries Beckett's search for meaning a step further than the preceding one, or, as several critics have said, nearer the center of his thought. In many respects Watt's world is everyone's world and he resembles everyone. Gradually Watt discovers that the words men invent may have no relation to the real meaning of the thing, nor can the logical use of language ever reveal

what is illogical or unreasonable, the unknown and the self.

Writings in French

By 1957 the works that finally established his reputation as one of the most important literary forces on the international scene were published, and, surprisingly, all were written in French. Presumably Beckett had sought the discipline of this foreign language to help him resist the temptation of using a style that was too personally suggestive or too hard to grasp. In trying to express the inexpressible, the pure anguish (causing great pain) of existence, he felt he must abandon "literature" or "style" in the conventional sense and attempt to reproduce the voice of this anguish. These works were translated into an English that does not betray the effect of the original French.

The trilogy of novels: Molloy (1951), Malone Dies (1951), and The Unnamable (1953) deals with the subject of death; Beckett, however, makes life the source of horror. To all the characters life represents a separation from the continuing reality of themselves. Since freedom can exist only outside time and since death occurs only in time, the characters try to rise above or "kill" time, which imprisons them. Recognizing the impossibility of the task, they are finally reduced to silence and waiting as the only way to endure the anguish of living. Another novel, How It Is, first published in French in 1961, emphasizes the loneliness of the individual and at the same time the need for others, for only through the proof of another can one be sure that one exists. The last of his French novels to be published was Mercier and Camier.

Literary Style and Themes

Beckett claimed that his most formative literary influences were Joyce and Dante, and saw himself as part of a pan-European literary tradition. He was close friends with Irish writers including Joyce and Yeats, which influenced his style and their encouragement bolstered his commitment to artistic rather than critical output. He also befriended and was influenced by visual artists including Michel Duchamp and Alberto Giacometti. While critics often view Beckett's dramatic works as central contributions to the 20th century movement, Theater of the Absurd, Beckett himself rejected all labels on his work.

For Beckett, language is both an embodiment of the ideas of what it represents, and a corporal meaty experience of vocal production, auditory understanding, and neuronal comprehension. It cannot be static or even completely understood by the parties exchanging it. His minimalist absurdism explores both the formal concerns of literary arts—linguistic and narrative fallibilities—and the human concerns of meaning-making in the face of these dissonances.

Plays and later works

Beckett reached a much wider public through his plays than through his novels. The most famous plays are Waiting for Godot (1953), Endgame (1957), Krapp's Last Tape (1958), and Happy Days (1961). The same themes found in the novels appear in these plays in a more condensed and accessible form. Later Beckett experimented successfully with other media: the radio play, film, pantomime, and the television play.

Beckett maintained a large quantity of output throughout his life, publishing the poetry collection, Mirlitonades (1978); the extended prose (writing that has no rhyme and is closest to the spoken word) piece, Worstward Ho (1983); and numerous novellas (stories with a complex and pointed plot) and short stories in his later years. Many of these pieces were concerned with the failure of language to express the inner being. His first novel, Dreams of Fair to Middling Women, was finally published after his death in 1993.

Works

Beckett's career as a writer can be roughly divided into three periods: his early works, up until the end of World War II in 1945; his middle period, stretching from 1945 until the early 1960s, during which period he wrote what are probably his most well-known works; and his late period, from the early 1960s until Beckett's death in 1989, during which his works tended to become shorter and shorter and his style more and more minimalist.

Early works

Beckett's earliest works are generally considered to have been strongly under the influence of the work of his friend James Joyce in that they are very erudite, sometimes seeming to display the author's learning merely for the sake of displaying it. As a result, they can, in places, be quite obscure. The opening phrases of the short-story collection More Pricks than Kicks (1934) can serve as an example of this style:

> It was morning and Belacqua was stuck in the first of the canti in the moon. He was so bogged that he could move neither backward nor forward. Blissful Beatrice was there, Dante also, and she explained the spots on the moon to him. She shewed him in the first place where he was at fault, then she put up her own explanation. She had it from God, therefore he could rely on its being accurate in every particular.

The passage is rife with references to Dante Alighieri's Commedia, which can serve to confuse readers not familiar with that work. At the same time, however, there are many portents of Beckett's later work: the physical inactivity of the character Belacqua; the character's immersion in his own head and thoughts; the somewhat irreverent comedy of the final sentence.

Similar elements are present in Beckett's first published novel, Murphy (1938), which also to some extent explores the themes of insanity and chess, both of which would be recurrent elements in Beckett's later works. The novel's opening sentence also hints at the somewhat pessimistic undertones and black humour that animate many of Beckett's works: 'The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new'. Watt, written while Beckett was in hiding in Roussillon during World War II, is similar in terms of themes, but less exuberant in its style. This novel also, at certain points, explores human movement as if it were a mathematical permutation, presaging Beckett's later preoccupation—in both his novels and dramatic works—with precise movement.

It was also during this early period that Beckett first began to write creatively in the French language. In the late 1930s, he wrote a number of short poems in that language, and these poems' spareness—in contrast to the density of his English poems of roughly the same period, collected in Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates (1935)—seems to show that Beckett, albeit through the medium of another language, was in process of simplifying his style somewhat, a change also evidenced in Watt.

Middle period

After World War II, Beckett turned definitively to the French language as a vehicle. It was this, together with the aforementioned "revelation" experienced in his mother's room in Dublin—in which, basically, he realized that his art must be subjective and drawn wholly from his own inner world—that would result in the works for which Beckett is probably best remembered today.

During the 15 years subsequent to the war, Beckett produced four major full-length stage plays: En attendant Godot (written 1948–1949; Waiting for Godot), Fin de partie (1955–1957; Endgame), Krapp's Last Tape (1958), and Happy Days (1960). These plays—which are often

considered, rightly or wrongly, to have been instrumental in the so-called " Theatre of the Absurd"—deal in a very blackly humorous way with themes similar to those of the roughly contemporary existentialist thinkers, though Beckett himself cannot be pigeonholed as an existentialist. Broadly speaking, the plays deal with the subject of despair and the will to survive in spite of that despair, in the face of an uncomprehending and, indeed, incomprehensible world. The words of Nell—one of the two characters in Endgame who are trapped in ashbins, from which they occasionally peek their heads to speak—can best summarize the themes of the plays of Beckett's middle period:

“Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that. ... Yes, yes, it's the most comical thing in the world. And we laugh, we laugh, with a will, in the beginning. But it's always the same thing. Yes, it's like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh any more.”

Beckett's outstanding achievements in prose during the period were the three novels Molloy (1951), Malone meurt (1951; Malone Dies) and L'innommable (1953; The Unnamable). In these novels—sometimes referred to as a "trilogy", though this is against the author's own explicit wishes—the reader can trace the development of Beckett's mature style and themes, as the novels become more and more stripped down, barer and barer. Molloy, for instance, still retains many of the characteristics of a conventional novel—time, place, movement and plot—and is indeed, on one level, a detective novel. In Malone Dies, however, movement and plot are largely dispensed with, though there is still some indication of place and the passage of time; the "action" of the book takes the form of an interior monologue. Finally, in The Unnamable, all sense of place and time are done away with, and the essential theme seems to be the conflict between the voice's drive to continue speaking so as to continue existing and its almost equally strong urge to find silence and oblivion. It is tempting to see in this a reflection of Beckett's experience and understanding of what the war had done to the world. Despite the widely-held view that Beckett's work, as exemplified by the novels of this period, is essentially pessimistic, the will to live seems to win out in the end; witness, for instance, the famous final phrase of The Unnamable: 'I can't go on, I'll go on'.

Subsequent to these three novels, Beckett struggled for many years to produce a sustained work of prose, a struggle evidenced by the brief "stories" later collected as Texts for Nothing. In the late 1950s, however, he managed to create one of his most radical prose works, Comment c'est (1961; How It Is). This work relates the adventures of an unnamed narrator crawling through the mud whilst dragging a sack of canned food, and was written as a sequence of unpunctuated paragraphs in a style approaching telegraphese:

“You are there somewhere alive somewhere vast stretch of time then it's over you are there no more alive no more then again you are there again alive again it wasn't over an error you begin again all over more or less in the same place or in another as when another image above in the light you come to in hospital in the dark.”

Following this work, it would be almost another decade before Beckett produced a work of non-dramatic prose, and indeed How It Is is generally considered to mark the end of his middle period as a writer.

Late works

Throughout the 1960s and on into the 1970s, Beckett's works exhibited an increasing tendency—already evident in much of his work of the 1950s—towards compactness that has led to his work sometimes being described as minimalist. The extreme example of this, among his dramatic works, is the 1969 piece Breath, which lasts for only 40 seconds and has no characters (though it was likely intended to offer ironic comment on Oh! Calcutta!, the

theatrical revue for which it served as an introductory piece).

In the dramas of the late period, Beckett's characters—already few in number in the earlier plays—are whittled down to essential elements. The ironically titled 1962 Play, for instance, consists of three characters stuck to their necks in large funeral urns, while the 1963 television drama Eh Joe—written for the actor Jack MacGowran—is animated by a camera that steadily closes in to a tight focus upon the face of the title character, and the 1972 play Not I consists almost solely of, in Beckett's words, 'a moving mouth with the rest of the stage in darkness'. Many of these late plays, taking a cue from Krapp's Last Tape, were concerned to a great extent with memory, or more particularly, with the often forced recollection of haunting past events in a moment of stillness in the present; it is in this treatment of a species of involuntary memory that Beckett most clearly reveals his debt to the French novelist Marcel Proust, about whom Beckett had written a monograph in 1931. Moreover, as often as not these late plays dealt with the theme of the self confined and observed insofar as a voice either comes from outside into the protagonist's head, as in Eh Joe, or else the protagonist is silently commented upon by another character, as in Not I. Such themes also led to Beckett's most politically charged play, 1982's Catastrophe, dedicated to Václav Havel, which dealt relatively explicitly with the idea of dictatorship. After a long period of inactivity, Beckett's poetry experienced a revival during this period in the ultra-terse French poems of mirlitonnades, some as short as six words long. These defied Beckett's usual scrupulous concern to translate his work from its original into the other of his two languages; several writers, including Derek Mahon, have attempted translations, but no complete version of the sequence has been published in English.

Though Beckett's writing of prose during the late period was not so prolific as his writing of drama—as hinted at by the title of the 1976 collection of short texts entitled Fizzles, which was illustrated by American artist Jasper Johns—he did experience something of a renaissance in this regard beginning with the 1979 novella Company, and continuing on through 1982's Ill Seen Ill Said and 1984's Worstward Ho. In the prose medium of these three so-called '"closed space" stories', Beckett continued his preoccupation with memory and its effect on the confined and observed self, as well as with the positioning of bodies in space, as the opening phrases of Company make clear:

A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.

To one on his back in the dark. This he can tell by the pressure on his hind parts and by how the dark changes when he shuts his eyes and again when he opens them again. Only a small part of what is said can be verified. As for example when he hears, You are on your back in the dark. Then he must acknowledge the truth of what is said.

Beckett's final work, the 1988 poem "What is the Word", was written in bed in the nursing home where he spent the last days of his life, and also exists in a French version, comment dire.

Later Years

The 1960s were a period of change for Beckett. He found great success with this plays across the world. Invitations came to attend rehearsals and performances which led to a career as a theater director. In 1961, he secretly married Suzanne who took care of his business affairs. A commission from the BBC in 1956 led to offers to write for radio and cinema through the 1960s.

Beckett continued to write throughout the 1970s and 80s mostly in a small house outside Paris. There he could give total dedication to his art evading publicity. In 1969, he was

awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, though he declined accepting it personally to avoid making a speech at the ceremonies. However, he should not be considered a recluse. He often times met with other artists, scholars and admirers to talk about his work.

Death

Beckett moved into a Parisian nursing home with Deschevaux-Dumesnil, who passed away in August, 1989. Beckett stayed in good health until he had difficulty breathing and entered a hospital shortly before his death on December 22, 1989.

Beckett's New York Times obituary described his personality as ultimately empathetic: "Though his name in the adjectival form, Beckettian, entered the English language as a synonym for bleakness, he was a man of great humor and compassion, in his life as in his work. He was a tragicomic playwright whose art was consistently instilled with mordant wit."

Legacy

Samuel Beckett is considered one of the most impactful 20th century writers. His work revolutionized theater making and minimalism, influencing countless philosophical and literary greats including Paul Auster, Michel Foucault, and Sol LeWitt.

Samuel Beckett's Works In Biographical And Historical Context

A Stellar Student Beckett was born in Dublin, Ireland, on April 13, 1906, to middle-class Protestant parents. He attended the Portora Royal boarding school in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, where he excelled in both academics and sports. In 1923, he entered Trinity College in Dublin to specialize in French and Italian. His academic record was so distinguished that upon receiving his baccalaureate degree in 1927, he was awarded a two-year post as lecteur (assistant) in English at theÉcoleNormale Supérieure in Paris.

James Joyce In France, Beckett soon joined the informal group surrounding the great Irish writer James Joyce and was invited to contribute the opening essay to the book Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress, a collection of twelve articles written as a defense and explanation of Joyce's still-unfinished Finnegans Wake by a group of Joyce's disciples. Beckett also moved in French literary circles. During this first stay in Paris he won a prize for the best poem on the subject of time in a competition sponsored by the Hours Press. His poem Whoroscope (1930) was his first separately published work and marked the beginning of his lifelong interest in the subject of time.

Beckett returned to Dublin in 1930 to teach French at Trinity College but submitted his resignation after only four terms, saying that he could not teach others what he did not know himself. During the year he had obtained a master of arts degree. His penetrating essay on novelist Marcel Proust, published in 1931, indicates how many of his subsequent themes Beckett was already beginning to consider at this time. After several years of wandering through Europe writing short stories and poems and working odd jobs, he finally settled in Paris in 1937.

First Attempt at Playwriting At the beginning of his career, Beckett spent his time in Dublin reading, in his own word, "wildly." From Johann Goethe to Franz Grillparzer to Giovanni Guarini, he finally settled into a single-minded concentration upon the life and work of Samuel Johnson. He began to collect information about Johnson, filling page after page in a large three-ring notebook with miscellaneous facts and quotations. Quite possibly this exercise was a means to keep his mind off Murphy, his first novel, which had recently been refused by the twenty-fifth publisher to see it, but also it represented a means to engage in a form of agreeable activity that counterbalanced his unpleasant circumstances.

Something convinced Beckett that he must turn all the material he had collected about Dr. Johnson into a play, and by early summer 1936, he was calling it his “Johnson Fantasy.” He claimed to have the entire play outlined in his head and that he only needed to commit it to paper. His original idea was to write a long four-act play to be called “Human Wishes,” after Johnson's poem, “The Vanity of Human Wishes.”

Beckett wrote a ten-page scene of the play, but the rest of the material remains unwritten and the notes are unedited. His work was halted by the realization that he could not accurately capture the eighteenth-century English language as Johnson and his contemporaries spoke it.

Despite his early failures at playwriting, Beckett would later return to the art form to create some of his best-received work, including the play Waiting for Godot.

World War II: Writing in French When World War II broke out in 1939, Beckett was in Ireland. He returned immediately to Paris, where, as a citizen of a neutral country, he was permitted to remain even after Nazi German occupation. He served in the Resistance movement until 1942, when he was obliged to flee from the German Gestapo, the Nazi secret state police, into unoccupied France, where he worked as a farmhand until the liberation of Paris by Allied troops in 1944. During these years he wrote another novel, Watt, published in 1953. By 1957, the works that finally established Beckett's reputation as one of the most important literary forces on the international scene were published. Surprisingly, all were written in French.

Other Media Beckett reached a much wider public through his plays than through his difficult, obscure novels. The most famous plays are Waiting for Godot (En Attendant Godot) (1953), Endgame (Fin de partie) (1957), Krapp's Last Tape (1958), and Happy Days (1961). The same themes found in the novels appear in these plays in more condensed and accessible form. Later, Beckett experimented successfully with other media: the radio play, film, pantomime, and the television play.

Works In Literary Context

Beckett's work is best seen as a refinement of the French existentialist thinkers who were his contemporaries. Existentialists primarily concern themselves with the problem of the meaning of life, specifically as it is viewed in terms of its inevitable ending. That is, existentialists are perplexed by the problem of enjoying life while knowing that death is just around the corner. Beckett's own take on this problem forces him down roads that other existentialists had not traveled—for example, into a discussion of the disconnect between the language one uses and the world one tries to describe with it and how this disconnect reflects the absurdity of life.

French and the Absurd: Beckett's work often tries to express the pure anguish of existence. In order to do this, he felt he must abandon “literature” or “style” in the conventional sense and attempt to reproduce the voice of this anguish. Indeed, these concepts—that existence is a kind of anguish—was widely expressed in French by authors Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. These philosophers were called “existentialists,” and concerned themselves with the evaluation of the quality of human life, about whether life had meaning at all, and if so what that meaning was. Like Beckett, Camus felt that there was something essentially “absurd” about the lives humans live, in which they hope for so much but ultimately know that they must and will die, a reality that, in a way, diminishes the joy of life itself. Not surprisingly, then, Beckett utilized the French language to express his own feelings about the absurd.

Language and Meaning: Watt, like each of his novels, carries Beckett's search for meaning a step further than the preceding one, or, as several critics have said, nearer the center of his thought. In many respects, Watt's world is everyone's world, and he resembles everyone. And yet his strange adventure in the house of the mysterious Mr. Knott—whose name may signify: not, knot, naught, or the German Not (need, anxiety), or all of them—is Beckett's attempt to clarify the relationship between language and meaning. Watt, like most people, feels comfort when he is able to call things by their names; a name gives a thing reality. Gradually, Watt discovers that the words men invent may have no relation to the real meaning of the thing, which would imply that the language one uses cannot help one in communicating truth. Language is separate from the world it tries to describe, an idea that feeds into the concept of the "absurd." After all, what kind of meaning can one's life have if one cannot even express one's experiences accurately?

A Play with No Action ? When Beckett worked on his Samuel Johnson play, he tried to conform his talents to the traditional form of the play—including the use of five acts to tell his story. Waiting for Godot, however, broke the tradition. Additionally, in this relatively short play, Beckett throws action out the window. Unlike the plays of Shakespeare in which action is as crucial to the telling of the story as the words of the play, in Waiting for Godot, audiences are asked to watch two characters wait for a third person, Godot, whom they were each supposed to meet. Aside from the dialogue, very little happens. This minimalist approach to playwriting paved the way for so-called one-man acts, in which a single character does little more than talk to the audience.

Lasting Legacy: A vast range of contemporary authors have expressed their admiration of the work of Beckett, including seminal Beat Generation writer William S. Burroughs and Nobel Prize-winner J. M. Coetzee, whose Waiting on the Barbarians is an homage in form to Waiting for Godot. Coetzee has also spent a good part of his career writing essays about the work of Beckett.

Beckett's Literary Contemporaries

Beckett's famous contemporaries include:
James Joyce (1882–1941): By far the most popular of Irish authors. Until Ireland switched over to the euro, Joyce's portrait appeared on the country's currency—evidence of the important role the author played in his home country.

Albert Camus (1913–1960): This French author is credited with examining the "absurdity" of life in his novels and plays.

Margaret Thatcher (1925–): Thatcher was the first female Prime Minister in the United Kingdom. She held the office from 1979 until 1990.

Fidel Castro (1926–): Castro led Cuba, either as president or prime minister, for the better part of fifty years. He held the office of president from 1976 to 2008.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): American novelist whose dense and complex work, like Beckett's, has been applauded by scholars but has yet to find a popular readership.

Irmgard Keun (1905–1982): German novelist whose works were banned by the Nazis in 1932.

Influences: A close examination of Beckett's work reveals several literary influences. There is a likeness to James Joyce, especially in Beckett's use of language; with Franz Kafka in Beckett's portrayal of terror; and with Fyodor Dostoyevsky in the author's tendency to probe the darker side of the human spirit. The author was also obviously inspired by a range of

literary figures as different as Dante; the French philosophers René Descartes and Blaise Pascal; and the French novelist Marcel Proust. Regarding Beckett's influence on literary tradition, his work opened new possibilities for both the novel and the theater.

Works In Critical Context

Critical and popular response to Beckett has always been divided. Some find Beckett's unique plays and complicated novels fascinating and brilliant, while others find them simply frustrating. Although Beckett's plays will probably never qualify as long-running Broadway hits, his reputation remains strong while his works have become staples of literature classes.

The critical response to Beckett's most famous play, Waiting for Godot, perhaps best exemplifies the way the author has been reviewed through the years.

Waiting for Godot: Waiting for Godot contains two acts in which two men, Vladimir and Estragon, both down-and-out, wait for someone named Godot, who is supposed to keep an appointment with them. Critical attitudes toward the play were positive from the premiere, when Sylvain Zegel wrote in the very first review that "The audience understood this much: Paris had just recognized in Samuel Beckett one of today's best playwrights." Armand Salacrou wrote, "An author has appeared who has taken us by the hand to lead us into his universe." More than a decade later, however, author Martin Esslin described the "succes de scandale" the play had become: "Was it not an outrage that people could be asked to come and see a play that could not be anything but a hoax, a play in which nothing whatever happened! People went to see the play just to be able to see that scandalous impertinence with their own eyes and to be in a position to say at the next party that they had actually been the victims of that outrage."

Dramatic works

Theater

Eleutheria (1940s; published 1995)
Waiting for Godot (1952)
Act Without Words I (1956)
Act Without Words II (1956)
Endgame (1957)
Krapp's Last Tape (1958)
Rough for Theatre I (late 1950s)
Rough for Theatre II (late 1950s)
Happy Days (1960)
Play (1963)
Come and Go (1965)
Breath (1969)
Not I (1972)
That Time (1975)
Footfalls (1975)
A Piece of Monologue (1980)
Rockaby (1981)
Ohio Impromptu (1981)
Catastrophe (1982)
What Where (1983)

Radio

All That Fall (1956)
Embers (1959)

Rough for Radio I (1961)
Rough for Radio II (1961)
Words and Music (1961)
Cascando (1962)

Television
Eh Joe (1965)
Ghost Trio (1975)
... but the clouds ... (1976)
Quad I + II (1981)
Nacht und Träume (1982)

Cinema
Film (film)|Film (1965)

Prose

Novels
Dream of Fair to Middling Women (1932; published 1992)
Murphy (1938)
Watt (1945; published 1953)
Mercier and Camier (1946; published 1974)
Molloy (1951)
Malone Dies (1951)
The Unnamable (1953)
How It Is (1961)

Novellas
The Lost Ones (1971)
Company (1979)
Ill Seen Ill Said (1981)
Worstward Ho (1984)

Stories
More Pricks Than Kicks (1934)
Stories and Texts for Nothing (1954)
First Love (1973)
Fizzles (1976)
Stirrings Still (1988)

Non-fiction
Proust (1931)
Three Dialogues (with Georges Duthuit and Jacques Putnam)(1958)
Disjecta (1983)

Poetry
Whoroscope (1930)
Echo's Bones and other Precipitates (1935)
Collected Poems in English (1961)
Collected Poems in English and French (1977)
What is the Word (1989)

Works in French

1951 Molloy (novel)
1951 Malone Meurt (novel)
1952 En attendant Godot/Waiting for Godot (play in two acts)
1953 L'innommable/The Unnamable (novel)
1955 Nouvelles et Textes Pour Rien/Stories and Texts for Nothing
1957 Fin de Partie/Endgame (one-act play) followed by: Acte sans Paroles I/Act without Words I
1961 Comment C'est/How It Is (novel)
1967 Têtes Mortes (D'un ouvrage abandonné/From an Abandoned Work, Imagination Morte Imaginez/Imagination Dead Imagine, Bing/Ping)
1970 Premier amour/First Love (novel)
1978 Pas, suivi de Quatre Esquisses/Steps, followed by Four Sketches (plays)
1979 Poèmes/Poems

Works in English
1977 Ends and Odds: Plays and Sketches
1979 All Strange Gone Away (short prose)
1980 Company (short prose)
1980 The Expelled and Other Novellas
1981 Rockaby and Other Pieces (plays and prose)
1982 Three Occasional Pieces (plays)
1983 Worstward Ho (short prose)
1983 Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writing and a Dramatic Fragment
1984 Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1980
1986 Collected Poems 1930-1979
1989 Nohow On (short stories)
1990 As the Story Was Told: Uncollected and Late Prose

French translations by the author
1953 Murphy (novel)
1957 Tous Ceux qui Tombent/All that Fall (radio play)
1960 La dernière bande/Krapp's Last Tape (one-act play) followed by Cendres/Embers (play)
1963 Oh Les Beaux Jours/Happy Days (play in two acts)
1966 Comédie et Actes Divers/Play and Sundry Acts (Comédie/Play, Va-et-Vient/Come and Go, Cascando, Paroles et Musique/Words and Music, Dis Joe/Eh! Joe, Acte sans Paroles II/Act without Words II)
1968 Poèmes/Poems
1969 Watt (novel – translated by Ludovic and Agnès Janvier in collaboration with the author)

Works in English translated from French by the author
1972 The Lost Ones (short prose)
1973 First Love (short prose)
1974 Mercier and Camier (novel)
1975 Malone Dies (novel)
1975 The Unnamable (novel)
1976 For to End Yet Again and Other Fizzles (short prose)
1978 Six Residua (short prose)

Samuel Beckett's Writing Style

Samuel Beckett as a Dramatist

Samuel Becket is known for his innovation of new types of plays. Beckett blew a new soul in

the theatre by experimenting with it. His plays are highly unconventional. The dramatist of his time mostly focused on the action of the play. Therefore, the action was considered as a crucial element in every drama. However, in his plays, Beckett overlooks the concept of action in his plays. He showed that drama/play is possible without action. Even though the action lacks in the plays of Beckett, the audience takes an interest in his place and watch it till the end without getting bored.

In his plays, Becket added the subject of boredom. The audience not only watches his play but also feels it. His every dialogue and word is full of meaning and symbols. Intense knowledge of things is required to understand the plays of Becket. Moreover, the readers/audience has to feel the play rather than simply watching it.

For the audience, it was an entirely new experience to watch this sort of drama on stage, which lacked actions. This lack of action and focus on the internal complexities of the character of the play makes Samuel Beckett a renowned dramatist of his time. Because of his innovative contribution to the theatre, he is still known in the world of dramatists. With his contributions, Beckett enlarges the concept of theatre, and therefore, it can never be underestimated.

Lack of Characterization and Plot in Beckett's Plays

The plays of Samuel Beckett lack characterization and basic plot. In his plays, Beckett does not seem intent to tell a story. His plays lack the story, as well as he does not have any experience in sketching his characters. During his time, the audience mainly focuses on the story and characters of the play. In Beckett's play, these two main characteristics are missing.

The audience or readers hardly knows any characters in Beckett's plays. Beckett does not disclose the real identity of his characters. Furthermore, the plot in the plays of Beckett does not develop at all. He plays opens and ends with the same problem.

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Coleridge is the best example of a lack of characterization and plot. The main characters of the play, Estragon, and Vladimir, appear to do nothing but talk and converse about useless things. There is nothing else happening in the play but waiting for Godot, who never appears. The overall meaning and interest of the play lie in the delivery of dialogues and the deep meaning inside it.

There is no story, but a repetition of certain events, therefore there is no plot. The background of any characters in the play is unknown. The characters are not introduced completely. Therefore, the style adopted by Beckett in writing the pay was entirely new.

Language in the Works of Beckett

The language employed by Beckett in his plays and other works is very interesting. Beckett employed a very simple language in his play. There is hardly any line in the plays which appears to be useful. Even though there are symbolic and rational dialogues in the play, however, apparently this does not appear to be significant. Every word he used is symbolic. Therefore, to dig a deep meaning out of it requires great attention.

Beckett employed absurdity in his use of language. He never gives meaning to dialogues. He rather leaves it on readers to extract whatever meaning they perceive from it. Moreover, apart from speeches, the dialogues of the play are small in words. Apparently, the dialogues appear to be a source for the characters to pass the time and do not give any meaning. Beckett's dialogues in the plays are argumentative.

For example, the major characters in the play Waiting for Godot pass the ball and hat. Though they talk, their conversation is meaningless. There are many dialogues in the play that appear to be unnecessary. Beckett even creates words by himself.

Therefore, one can say that the language Becket employed in his plays is unique. Overall, his plays are rational. However, the language and the behavior of his characters seem too irrational.

Realism in Beckett's Works

Beckett based his plays on reality. He does not show any fancy world in his plays. He prefers to illustrate life in his work, which is truly based on reality. One can say that one of the fundamental elements in his plays is realism. While describing any situations in his works, he remains close to reality. For example, his play Waiting for Godot is entirely based on reality. The characters come on and leave the stage to portray real-life situations. Even the themes of his plays are based on reality. Pessimism, boredom, life, death, and hope are the parts of reality. Thus one can say that the works of Beckett are based on reality.

Pessimism in Beckett's Works

Beckett focuses on the pessimistic themes of his works. His works have little or no hope. His plays that belong to the Theatre of Absurd have a common theme of pessimism. The approach of Beckett to live and consequently, in his plays is pessimistic.

Elements of Complexity in Beckett's Works

In the works of Beckett, there is complexity. Beckett does not make anything clear in his works. For example, in his play Waiting for Godot, Beckett does not make it clear who Godot is. Beckett, in his almost all works, overlooks the notion of clarity. There is no lucidity in his plays. It entirely depends upon the audience and readers how they interpret the meaning of his works.

The Nature of Beckett's World

The dream world of Eugene Ionesco is irrational, abrupt, and unpredictable. However, the nature of Becket's world is completely opposite to it. Becket's world is like chess, utterly rational, and careful. One of the finest plays written by Beckett is Endgame. At the beginning of the development of each stage in the play, the protagonist announces that "Me to Play."

The world of Beckett is also self-conscious. The characters in the play are continuously piercing the illusion of art. For example, in the play, the clove says, "This is what is called making an exit."

Beckett's Work, a Closed Circuit

The works of Beckett cover limited areas of experience. When he started his literary career, he said that spiritual development is only possible when the tendency or art is not expensive but contractive. His plays and novels create a close circuit. Each work is designed in a way that it focuses on a slightly deeper level than before. His works appear to be in series, each growing up in the form of continuation from the previous works.

Apparently, his works appear to be composed of irrational and unnecessary things. He starts his works from the sterility and bustles of More Pricks than Kicks and continues it to the mathematical conclusion of Imagination Dead Imagine. These works revolve around certain objects and a limited group of recollections.

A character described in earlier work also reappears in his later works. Even the characters also have the same experiences as the characters in the predecessors.

The Protagonists in Beckett's Novels

The novels of Samuel Beckett are based on the narratives of a young man who is detached, ineffectual, and rootless at Trinity college. In the stories, these young men are failing miserably in human discourse. In his novel, Echo's Bones, he turns his back to the place where he was born. In the novel Murphy, the young man wanders on the continent in London for some time. And in the novel Watt, he looks back at life in Ireland and also discovers some mental preoccupations which become his major concerns for the rest of his life.

In the novel Mercier et Camier, he travels for some time with his friend; however, in novel Molly, he leaves his friend and searches for his mother. In the novel Malone Dies, the young man could not find his mother and, in the condition of increasing decay, makes his way to settle down in a room to die. In the novel The Unnamable, he survives death and feels the need for a companion. Afterward, there is the slightest change in direction, and the story moves to plays and prose fiction How it is.

All these novels offer a journey and experiences of Samuel Becket in contraction.

Beckett's Concern with Cruelty and Helplessness in his Works

Though the works of Beckett do not directly focus on the cruelty and helplessness prevailing in the world. However, it does not mean that they are devoid of it. According to Samuel Beckett, the destructive forces prevailing in the 20th century have paved the way for the lie in reason, progress, simplicity, and perfectibility. Though Beckett does not write about the wars and suffering of the world; however, he does illustrate the helplessness, sufferings, and cruelty with a unique truthfulness caused by the wars and bombs.

Beckett's Chief Concern for Human Ineffectiveness

The works of Samuel Beckett focuses on the ineffectiveness of humans. Under the influence of James Joyce, Beckett develops artistically with wide literary achievements. However, Beckett broke away with the omniscience and abundance that Joyce portrays in his works. Instead of that, Beckett searched out the extreme limits of ignorance, economy, and inhibition. Beckett does not portray the packed world of Ulysses but creates his own bare world in Waiting for Godot.

Beckett does not talk about the man's property, family, his position in society, and his function in society. He also takes away the normal human equipment, for example, mobility, etc. He focuses more on the intellect and emotions of his characters outside these things.

Conclusion

To conclude, one can say that the works of Becket are mostly focused on the insight of an individual. He introduces a new form of drama in English theater that has no action and plot. The language employed by Beckett is simple; there are internal complexities that make it impossible for the readers to understand it on the surface level.

Samuel Beckett as Dramatist/Playwright

Samuel Beckett is famous for creating new kind of plays. He experimented with the stage and blew new soul in it. His plays are completely different from the tradition. Mostly, dramatist of his era focused on the action of play. Thus, action was the vital element of every drama. Samuel Beckett ignored the concept of action. He proved that there can be a drama without action. There is no action in his play even then audience feels pleasure in watching them. He added the theme of boredom in his plays. His plays are not just watched but experienced. Audience needs to know the deep meaning of every dialogue of the play. Every

word and dialogue is full of symbols, therefore, more knowledge is required to understand them. Moreover, audience has to feel his plays instead of just watching them. It was a new experience for the audience to watch such type of dramas on stage. Samuel Beckett got fame by doing so. He is still remembered because of his contribution to theater. He enlarged the scope of theater, therefore, his contribution, in this context, can never be underestimated.

Samuel Beckett's plays lack plot and characterization; there is no story in them. He is not a storyteller nor has he has any experience in sketching characters. Focus of the audience remains on characters and story of the play but Samuel Beckett skips these two important ingredients of a play. Hardly, we know any character of Beckett's play, whom we identify by his actions. He does not reveal their real identity. Many playwrights have gotten fame due to their art of characterization but Beckett is famous for hiding identity of his characters. Moreover, there is no plot development in Beckett's plays. They start with a problem and ends with the same. "Waiting for Godot" is remarkable example of it. We see Estragon and Vladimir standing and talking on the stage without doing anything. Only delivery of dialogues can be seen on the stage. Nothing else is available in the play. The meaning and interest of the play lies in its dialogues. In act-I we find them standing near a tree; in act-ii we find no movement in their position; the play goes on like this and ultimately ends with the same situation. Hence, there is no plot in the play. No one can figure out the story of "Waiting for Godot". It is just about a situation. Similarly, we don't know the background of Estragon and Vladimir. Both are not completely introduced to us; very less introduction of these characters has been given in this play. Thus, it is an entirely new concept of writing plays without plot and characterization.

Becket's language is very much interesting. He uses simple language in his plays. Hardly, any useful line can be found in them. There may be very rational and symbolic dialogues yet they apparently do not seem useful. Every word is a symbol, therefore, great attention is required to dig their meaning. Beckett's use of language is absurd. He does not define meanings of dialogues; rather it depends on the audience how it perceives the meaning of a dialogue. Furthermore, except speeches, dialogues of the play are short. It seems that characters are not giving any message to audience but passing time while talking to each other. Dialogues of the plays are argumentative. In "Waiting for Godot" both major characters pass the ball. They talk but most of the time their dialogues have no meaning in them. Most of the time, dialogues do not serve any purpose. Numerous dialogues are there in the play that were not necessary. Some words of the play have been created by the dramatist himself; there are some words in the play which are not available even in dictionary. Hence, Beckett's language is somewhat unique. His plays are rational but language and behavior of characters is irrational. Moreover, Samuel Beckett uses uncivilized language as evident from "Waiting for Godot".

He presents reality in his plays. There is no fancy word in them. He likes to depict life, which is reality. In fact, realism is the fundamental ingredient of his plays. He remains close to reality while describing any situation. Again, example of "Waiting for Godot" is in front of us. Entire play shows the reality of life. It shows a situation viz. waiting. Characters come on stage and portray the reality of life. Even themes of the play are real. Hope, death, boredom and pessimism are part of life. Thus, Beckett's plays are entirely about reality.

Beckett presents pessimistic themes; there is very less hope in his plays. In fact, every play that belongs to theater of absurd has this common theme in it. As mentioned above, Beckett presents reality; pessimism is also a reality; it is part of life; therefore, Beckett's approach in most of his plays is pessimistic. For instance, every act of "Waiting for Godot" ends with despair. Eventually, the play itself ends with hopelessness.

There is also an element of complexity in his plays. He does not make anything clear. In “Waiting for Godot”, we don’t know who is Godot. From start of the play, the audience along with the characters waits for Godot but till end they cannot see him. Samuel Beckett ignores the concept of clarity. He has nothing to do with lucidity. Meanings of his plays are entirely dependent on rationality of the audience. In “Waiting for Godot”, it depends on audience how it perceives the meaning of Godot. Samuel Beckett himself has also no acquaintance with Godot. In an interview, when he was asked; “who is Godot”. He replied; if I knew I would have told it in my play. Thus, element of complexity is also there in Samuel Beckett’s plays.

In a nutshell, Samuel Beckett is an innovator. He wrote dramas which could not even be imagined by a prudent mind. He did not only write them but made them successful. The audience witnesses a lesson on the stage instead of a story. His plays involve the eyes, the ears, the intellect, the emotions, all at once, may be described as “total theater”.

Characteristics of Samuel Beckett's Plays

Samuel Beckett wrote at the time when the world was suffering from a lot of modern problems that it did not see before like the horror of the Great World Wars. Beckett is said to have revolutionized the theatre through his innovative dramas. His innovative dramas extended the scope of already established theatre. His plays are not meant to be read, but to be performed so that the ideas within a play can be transmitted nicely to the intended audience. Beckett used the essential dramatic machinery to establish a modern and complex unity that could not be found in the plays written before him. Such a tremendous use of dramatic machinery can be called a "Total Theatre" that involves the ears, eyes, emotions and Intellect simultaneously. Let's discuss the chief features of Beckett's plays:

An Exhibition of Beckett's Art

The plays sketched by Beckett show his distinct art. For instance, the characters drawn in his plays do not indulge in philosophical discourse. Neither they use elevated diction to heighten the effect. His characters use simple and colloquial language that can be easily understood by a layman. They are seldom noticed soliloquizing. They do not preach something. Their action may not be elegant but it is a part of the experience of the whole play. For instance, in Act 2, we see Pozzo turned blind and is begging for help. The same Pozzo that was the master of (the unfortunate) Lucky and the one who gave Estragon a bone to "relish" is unrecognizable by one tramp. Thus, the present condition of a character like Pozzo can be linked to his personality in Act 1 to get the most out of the symbolic significance of the play. This is the art of Beckett that is spell-bounding.

Minimal Characterization and Plot

A striking but different feature of Beckett's plays is the occurrence of plot and characterization to a minimum. It is not suitable for a reader or the audience to look for a story in his plays. The time, as well as characters, are static. They do not move from one place to the other. So, the setting is almost static. The time does seem moving but it is static. The plays end at their beginning. Of course, there are problems in his plays but those problems remain unsolved in the end as if they were in the beginning. Winnie, a character from Happy Days asserts the concept of plots in Beckett's plays as thus,

Yes, something seems to be occurred, something has seemed to occur, and nothing occurred, nothing at all.

We see the same phenomenon in Waiting for Godot in which two tramps wait for a mystical figure, Godot to solve their problems but he does not arrive. In Endgame, a blind tyrant tells a story to "wait" for his servant to leave or for death. So, the plot (and characterization) in

Beckett's Plays is non-existent.

Speaking of characterization, the characters in Beckett's plays are presented without their past. It will be correct to say that the characters live as long as the play is performed. Although they may tell the audience bits and pieces of their past. Their future is uncertain. They remain unchanged throughout the play. For instance, the stage direction of Waiting for Godot during its ending reads as thus,

Viladmir: Well, shall we go?
Estragon: Yes, let's go.
(They do not move)

Chief Topics of his Plays

Beckett's plays centre around Man. While the topics revolve around the role of man in the universe, his limitations and his identity. In Waiting for Godot, we find the pair of tramps as well as Pozzo, Lucky pair, suffering from an identity crisis. Estragon and Vladimir are uncertain about the identity of Godot. Lucky has lost his identity completely. Through Beckett's plays, we assume that the role of man in the universe can be as insignificant as it can get. For example, in the same play, we see tramps associating their hopes to a being they are not acquainted with, instead of doing work on their own.

Beckett as an Absurdist

Beckett is misleadingly compared with Ionesco for being a dramatist of the Absurd. Ionesco is the Romanian champion of the Absurd Plays which are farcical in nature, only meant for spreading laughter. But Beckett is an Absurdist through the declaration of what Camus had said. By "Absurd", Camus meant a life spent completely for its own sake in a universe that made no sense because there was no God to resolve the contradictions. The waiting is also absurd in the sense the tramps' expectations make no sense unless they begin searching for Godot.

Another thing that separates Beckett's absurdism from Ionesco's is his rational world as compared to the abrupt and unpredictable world of Ionesco. A fine example can be given from Waiting for Godot in which a tramp questions that why can they throw the idea of waiting?

Estragon: Let's go.
VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.

This is a rational questioning and a rational answer that is in accordance with the title as well as the expectations of the readers

Conclusion

Conclusively speaking, Samuel Beckett, as a playwright, has introduced plenty of themes as well as concepts to inspire more writers through his minimal caricaturing of meaninglessness and meaningfulness of life.

Samuel Beckett's Philosophy

Beckett’s writing reveals his own immense learning. It is full of subtle allusions to a multitude of literary sources as well as to a number of philosophical and theological writers. The dominating influences on Beckett’s thought were undoubtedly the Italian poet Dante, the French philosopher René Descartes, the 17th-century Dutch philosopher Arnold

Geulincx—a pupil of Descartes who dealt with the question of how the physical and the spiritual sides of man interact—and, finally, his fellow Irishman and revered friend, James Joyce. But it is by no means essential for the understanding of Beckett's work that one be aware of all the literary, philosophical, and theological allusions.

The widespread idea, fostered by the popular press, that Beckett's work is concerned primarily with the sordid side of human existence, with tramps and with cripples who inhabit trash cans, is a fundamental misconception. He dealt with human beings in such extreme situations not because he was interested in the sordid and diseased aspects of life but because he concentrated on the essential aspects of human experience. The subject matter of so much of the world's literature—the social relations between individuals, their manners and possessions, their struggles for rank and position, or the conquest of sexual objects—appeared to Beckett as mere external trappings of existence, the accidental and superficial aspects that mask the basic problems and the basic anguish of the human condition. The basic questions for Beckett seemed to be these: How can we come to terms with the fact that, without ever having asked for it, we have been thrown into the world, into being? And who are we; what is the true nature of our self? What does a human being mean when he says "I"?

What appears to the superficial view as a concentration on the sordid thus emerges as an attempt to grapple with the most essential aspects of the human condition. The two heroes of Waiting for Godot, for instance, are frequently referred to by critics as tramps, yet they were never described as such by Beckett. They are merely two human beings in the most basic human situation of being in the world and not knowing what they are there for. Since man is a rational being and cannot imagine that his being thrown into any situation should or could be entirely pointless, the two vaguely assume that their presence in the world, represented by an empty stage with a solitary tree, must be due to the fact that they are waiting for someone. But they have no positive evidence that this person, whom they call Godot, ever made such an appointment—or, indeed, that he actually exists. Their patient and passive waiting is contrasted by Beckett with the mindless and equally purposeless journeyings that fill the existence of a second pair of characters. In most dramatic literature the characters pursue well-defined objectives, seeking power, wealth, marriage with a desirable partner, or something of the sort. Yet, once they have attained these objectives, are they or the audience any nearer answering the basic questions that Beckett poses? Does the hero, having won his lady, really live with her happily ever after? That is apparently why Beckett chose to discard what he regarded as the inessential questions and began where other writing left off.

This stripping of reality to its naked bones is the reason that Beckett's development as a writer was toward an ever greater concentration, sparseness, and brevity. His two earliest works of narrative fiction, More Pricks Than Kicks and Murphy, abound in descriptive detail. In Watt, the last of Beckett's novels written in English, the milieu is still recognizably Irish, but most of the action takes place in a highly abstract, unreal world. Watt, the hero, takes service with a mysterious employer, Mr. Knott, works for a time for this master without ever meeting him face to face, and then is dismissed. The allegory of man's life in the midst of mystery is plain.

Most of Beckett's plays also take place on a similar level of abstraction. Fin de partie (one-act, 1957; Endgame) describes the dissolution of the relation between a master, Hamm, and his servant, Clov. They inhabit a circular structure with two high windows—perhaps the image of the inside of a human skull. The action might be seen as a symbol of the dissolution of a human personality in the hour of death, the breaking of the bond between the spiritual and the physical sides of man. In Krapp's Last Tape (one-act, first performed 1958), an old man

listens to the confessions he recorded in earlier and happier years. This becomes an image of the mystery of the self, for to the old Krapp the voice of the younger Krapp is that of a total stranger. In what sense, then, can the two Krapps be regarded as the same human being? In Happy Days (1961), a woman, literally sinking continually deeper into the ground, nonetheless continues to prattle about the trivialities of life. In other words, perhaps, as one gets nearer and nearer death, one still pretends that life will go on normally forever.

In his trilogy of narrative prose works—they are not, strictly speaking, novels as usually understood—Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable, as well as in the collection Stories and Texts for Nothing (1967), Beckett raised the problem of the identity of the human self from, as it were, the inside. This basic problem, simply stated, is that when I say "I am writing," I am talking about myself, one part of me describing what another part of me is doing. I am both the observer and the object I observe. Which of the two is the real "I"? In his prose narratives, Beckett tried to pursue this elusive essence of the self, which, to him, manifested itself as a constant stream of thought and of observations about the self. One's entire existence, one's consciousness of oneself as being in the world, can be seen as a stream of thought. Cogito ergo sum is the starting point of Beckett's favourite philosopher, Descartes: "I think; therefore, I am." To catch the essence of being, therefore, Beckett tried to capture the essence of the stream of consciousness that is one's being. And what he found was a constantly receding chorus of observers, or storytellers, who, immediately on being observed, became, in turn, objects of observation by a new observer. Molloy and Moran, for example, the pursued and the pursuer in the first part of the trilogy, are just such a pair of observer and observed. Malone, in the second part, spends his time while dying in making up stories about people who clearly are aspects of himself. The third part reaches down to bedrock. The voice is that of someone who is unnamable, and it is not clear whether it is a voice that comes from beyond the grave or from a limbo before birth. As we cannot conceive of our consciousness not being there—"I cannot be conscious that I have ceased to exist"—therefore consciousness is at either side open-ended to infinity. This is the subject also of the play Play (first performed 1963), which shows the dying moments of consciousness of three characters, who have been linked in a trivial amorous triangle in life, lingering on into eternity.

The Humour and Mastery

In spite of Beckett's courageous tackling of the ultimate mystery and despair of human existence, he was essentially a comic writer. In a French farce, laughter will arise from seeing the frantic and usually unsuccessful pursuit of trivial sexual gratifications. In Beckett's work, as well, a recognition of the triviality and ultimate pointlessness of most human strivings, by freeing the viewer from his concern with senseless and futile objectives, should also have a liberating effect. The laughter will arise from a view of pompous and self-important preoccupation with illusory ambitions and futile desires. Far from being gloomy and depressing, the ultimate effect of seeing or reading Beckett is one of cathartic release, an objective as old as theatre itself.

Technically, Beckett was a master craftsman, and his sense of form is impeccable. Molloy and Waiting for Godot, for example, are constructed symmetrically, in two parts that are mirror images of one another. In his work for the mass media, Beckett also showed himself able to grasp intuitively and brilliantly the essential character of their techniques. His radio plays, such as All That Fall (1957), are models in the combined use of sound, music, and speech. The short television play Eh Joe! (1967) exploits the television camera's ability to move in on a face and the particular character of small-screen drama. Finally, his film script Film (1967) creates an unforgettable sequence of images of the observed self trying to escape the eye of its own observer.

Beckett's later works tended toward extreme concentration and brevity. Come and Go (1967), a playlet, or "dramaticule," as he called it, contains only 121 words that are spoken by the three characters. The prose fragment "Lessness" consists of but 60 sentences, each of which occurs twice. His series Acts Without Words are exactly what the title denotes, and one of his last plays, Rockaby, lasts for 15 minutes. Such brevity is merely an expression of Beckett's determination to pare his writing to essentials, to waste no words on trivia.

Analysis of Samuel Beckett's Plays

The dramatic works of Samuel Beckett (13 April 1906 – 22 December 1989) reflect the evolution of his interests in various means of artistic expression, as he composed plays for stage, radio, cinema, and television. In his stage plays, he parodies traditional dramatic action and borrows the techniques used in other modes of entertainment. His themes are not constant, but they are grimly developed through a steady mood of ironic laughter if not outright sarcasm. Like the character "O" who runs from the camera's eye ("E") in Film, Beckett's art finds its form in a flight from conventional expectations and traditional observations. What seems meaningless and absurd is shown to be the only meaning possible in a universe where the human experience of consciousness (as subject) seems trapped by a nature and body (as object) without consciousness. Laughter is an intellectual triumph over material absurdity, and self-denial is self-affirmation. Beckett's plays are made of such paradoxes.

Whether it is in the nameless characters in Play, the lone and aging Krapp awaiting imminent death in Krapp's Last Tape, the pathetic Winnie sinking in her grave in Happy Days, the dying family in the masochistic Endgame, the monotonous life of waiting of Estragon and Vladimir in Waiting for Godot, or the down-and-outers in other dramatic works, Beckett demonstrates a preference for passive characters who attempt to make sense of an increasingly absurd existence and who struggle to survive in a universe that lacks love and meaningful relationships.

As a critic, a transitional thinker, an innovator, and a postmodernist who probed the human condition and sensed the absurdity of the modern world, Beckett tried to link art and life into unusual theatrical images in order to etch human beings' inner world and the human experience of consciousness. Even though his vision of life and the human predicament is discouraging, his plays are rich with clownish characters, slapstick humor, word games, irony, and sarcasm, allowing laughter to triumph over material absurdity.

Beckett is best known as the author of four intriguingly powerful stage plays; Waiting for Godot, Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape, and Happy Days. His later work has begun to receive critical attention, particularly those plays that focus on women, such as Play and especially Not I. With his first stunningly successful stage play, however, there is not a woman to be seen. Only two tramps, two strangely united male travelers, and a boy are on the stage of Waiting for Godot.

Waiting for Godot

In this play, Beckett established his major tone of comic despair, with his characters resigned to waiting for something to happen that never happens. He also created his major dramatic style out of vaudevillian and silent-film skits by clownish characters who are determined to endure without understanding why they must. In two acts that mirror each other in language and action, Waiting for Godot mocks audience desire for significant form and visionary comprehension of human experience. The two protagonists are tramps by the name of Estragon (called Gogo) and Vladimir (called Didi). They seem doomed to repeat forever the experiences played out in the two acts, as they wait for the arrival of a mysterious person known to them only as Godot. This Godot never does arrive. Instead, a

lordly fellow named Pozzo appears in the first act, leading his servant Lucky by a rope; in the second act, these two reappear, though Pozzo is now blind and Lucky is dumb.

Analysis of Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot

The spareness of plot and scarcity of characters are reinforced by the stark setting. Only a tree (leafless in act 1, bearing a few leaves in act 2) and a lonely country road mark the location of this play's action through a day of trivial concerns by the two tramps. The interruption by Pozzo and Lucky of their monotonous life of waiting is dramatic, but it is drained of its significance by the incomprehension of the characters who participate in it. The dialogue of the four characters is, in its variety, a counterpoint to the monotony of the slapstick action: The tramps talk in short, quick bursts of verbal response to each other, Pozzo exclaims himself in bombastic rhetoric, and Lucky overflows once in a stream-of-consciousness monologue called "thinking." When they reappear in act 2, Pozzo's pomposity has been deflated into whining, and Lucky cannot speak at all. Thus does this play illustrate Beckett's intense concern for the nature and function of language itself in a world where there is so little worth communicating.

At the end of each act, Vladimir and Estragon threaten to separate, to leave—but in each act, they do not move as the curtain descends on them. The two tramps play word games to pass the time, and they entertain themselves with strategies for suicide, but they cannot kill themselves. Waiting is a part of their fate. Each act ends with the arrival of a boy to announce that Godot will not arrive this evening, but that he will come another time. The boy's claim that he is not the same boy who appeared in the first act, that he tends sheep and that the other boy is his brother, a goatherd, constitutes allusions hinting at some religious mystery in the identity of Godot, the god who will separate sheep from goats on the day of judgment. If Didi and Gogo are denied their meeting with Godot, they are no less heroic for their waiting.

Endgame

Endgame is one act of waiting also, not for an arrival but rather for a departure. The servant of this play, called Clov, threatens to leave his master, Hamm, when a boy is sighted through one of the two windows in the room, or "shelter," that makes the setting for this play's action. The curtain drops without a definite commitment by Clov to move outside, and the boy is never seen by anyone except Clov. The title refers to the last phase of a game of chess, and two of the four characters move as if they were pieces in such a game. Hamm is unable to leave his chair, and Clov is unable to sit; Hamm orders Clov about, and Clov moves Hamm around. A blind ruler of his household, Hamm is a modern King Lear, blind and helpless to tend to his bodily needs. He wants his painkiller, and Clov tells him it is depleted. Hamm wants the ultimate painkiller of death but that seems elusive as well. Both Hamm and Clov wait for the end of the game of life, as all life outside their room seems at an end, except for the mysterious arrival of the boy.

On the stage are two other characters, Nagg and Nell, Hamm's parents. They have lost their legs in an accident and are as immobile as their son. They are kept by Hamm inside ash bins, pathetically reminiscing about their lives until the mother, Nell, dies and Nagg is sealed in his bin by Clov on orders from Hamm. Family values are far from the traditional ones of conventional domestic plots. Hamm tortures his father, or what remains of him, and Nagg torments his son exactly as he did when Hamm was a child. There is some remnant of affection in this play, though, just as there was in Waiting for Godot. The emotional tie between Gogo and Didi is repeated between Hamm and Clov, whose past binds them together even while they express a wish to separate. There is also a tie of romance holding the two parents together, though they cannot now reach each other for a kiss, and one of their most romantic adventures led to their helplessness—they lost their legs in a bicycle

accident.

This play hints, through various allusions, at a meaning that transcends its apparent lack of meaning. Hamm is both an acting ham and a Prince Hamlet, calling attention to his role as a mockery of art in a meaningless universe; Hamm is also a piece of meat spiced by Clov in a world where human dignity no longer exists. The words and postures of both Hamm and Clov sometimes suggest that they are parodies of Christ on the Cross (where flesh is hammered with nails, puns on the names of the four characters), but there is no salvation for anyone in this play's world, unless it is to be in the boy waiting, perhaps contemplating his navel, beside a rock outside.

Analysis of Samuel Beckett's Endgame

Hamm is anxious for all life to end, even including that of a louse, so that the absurdity of human consciousness will cease. That boy outside is a threat, and so Hamm wants his life. Will life go on despite Hamm and evolve again, or will it finally wind down into nothingness? The play does not provide a clear sign of the answer as it concludes: Hamm replaces a bloody handkerchief over his blind eyes, and Clov, dressed as if for traveling, stands immobile watching the last pathetic moves of his master. Pathos is not the essence, however, of Endgame, though it may threaten to become so, as in the relationship of the tramps in Waiting for Godot. At the point of revealing a depth of passion that might pass for pathos, Beckett's plays pull back and laugh at the pointlessness of the possibility. Everything falls into nothing, everything dies, everything comes to a stop, though not quite, and that is the wild absurdity of it all.

Krapp's Last Tape

If the drama of entropy cannot quite come to a complete stop, that is not the fault of desire for it. In Krapp's Last Tape, where an ingenious use of recording tapes creates a dimension of time always present in its absence, the protagonist (and only character onstage) listens to recordings of his own voice from many years past, especially one when he was thirty-nine years old, some thirty years before.

Krapp's wait for death, for an end to entropy, is supported by his ironic dismissal of all that was meaningful at the time that he recorded the most important events of his life. In the present time of the play, Krapp is about to record the fact that the sound of the word "spool" is important, but he is drawn back to listen again and again to his recording of thirty years ago, when he described a lovemaking scene on a boat. His lust has declined, but his hunger for bananas and his thirst for wine have not, as he records his last tape.

Krapp's sense of himself, however, is threatened by the fragmented voices from his past; indeed, there is no continuous identity in this character, whose self-recording is a figure for the author's work itself. There is an irony of similarity here, for Beckett's own work may be reflected by the "plot" of Krapp's Last Tape. Voices are separated from the body, memories are mixed by mechanical forms, and the self is a stranger to itself. The drama of this discovery is in the encounter of one self with another, of silence yielding to voice, and voice subsiding into silence. These features increasingly preoccupied Beckett, as he moved his wit more and more into the regions of radio (all sound and voice) and mimes (no sound or voice).

Happy Days

More pathetic than all is the situation of Winnie in Happy Days. Entropy is visually represented by the intensifying imprisonment of Winnie, who appears in act 1 buried in a mound up to her waist and then, in act 2, up to her neck; she has become increasingly immobilized, and through it all she maintains her view of life as one of "happy days." She is

happily stupid or courageously optimistic as she recounts her life's pleasures against the background of an unresponsive husband,Willie. At the end, dressed fit to kill, Willie calls his wife "Win" and seems prepared to shoot her with a pistol that she cannot seize for herself. She may be happy because she expects now to end it all with her death at last.

Winnie's immobility is unchosen, and her waiting is absurdly imposed by the earth itself. As a ridiculous version of the earth-mother,Winnie is the opposite of her lethargic though "free" husband, and so she reflects the social condition of all women as well as the exploitation of that condition by men. Happy Days, like Krapp's Last Tape, develops through monologue rather than dialogue, though in both plays the possibility for dialogue is kept alive for the sake of its ironic futility.

Play

The futility of dialogue, of communication, even perhaps of drama itself seems to direct the shape of the play called Play, which appears to have three characters who talk to one another, but in fact has three characters who talk without regard for, or awareness of, one another. The ash bins of Nell and Nagg in Endgame have become three gray urns in Play, and these contain the three characters—rather, they contain the heads of three characters who stare straight ahead, as if at the audience, but in fact only into a fiercely interrogating spotlight. Their predicament, like that of Winnie in Happy Days, is more frustrating for communication and self-dignity than that ofWinnie or Nell and Nagg, whose memories are functional for some modicum of dialogue with another who shares those memories with them. The nameless characters of Play are two women and one man, once involved in a shabby conventional love tryst of a married couple and "another woman."

The drama of Play is a hell of isolation, regrets, emotional ignorance, and intellectual darkness. The play proceeds from a chorus of three voices in counterpoint, interrupted reminiscences without self-understanding, and a concluding chorus that repeats the opening, as if about to begin again. The urns are funereal wombs for talking heads. The emptiness of meaning from the lives of these characters is the utmost meaning they can express, and their lack of relationship is a judgment by the play on the failure of relationships in modern life generally. As in other Beckett plays of this period, the women of Play have a particularly painful message to deliver: Love and marriage do not exist as real possibilities for meaning for anyone anymore, especially for women, who have depended on them far more than men. The refusal to accept this predicament without a protest is dramatized in Not I, a play in which an apparently female character is divided between a Mouth of denial and an Auditor of silent protest. Here, Beckett has combined mime with radiolike monologue, and he has done it through a sexual pun on "ad-libbing."

All That Fall

To his achievements in stage plays, Beckett added successful accomplishments in radio and television drama, as well as one interesting script for motion pictures, Film. The radio plays of note are All That Fall and Embers; the teleplay deserving attention is Eh Joe. Communication, its failure or its emptiness, is a common theme running through Beckett's writing, and his experiments in various modes of artistic expression illustrate his search for success in communication. Radio was a challenging medium, using voice and other sounds to create imaginative shapes for audiences. All That Fall uses the muttering voice of an overweight old woman, Mrs. (Maddy) Rooney, making her way to a train station to meet her blind husband, Mr. (Dan) Rooney; her innermost thoughts and feelings are easily expressed in this medium, as are the concerns of those she meets along her way.

Like Beckett's other women, Mrs. Rooney has little to report that is fulfilling in her marriage; indeed, she mourns the loss of her one child, a daughter who would have been forty had she

lived. Mrs. Rooney's real character is in her voice, not in her body; she can feel her self through her peculiar choice of words and sentence arrangements. This attention to vocabulary reveals Beckett's profound interest in the power of language as shaped and shaping sound. Of lesser interest is the terrible deed that lies at the center of this play's plot, the death of a child beneath the wheels of a train. Whether Mr. Rooney killed the child or not is less important than whether the audience can be moved by the mere articulation of sound to feel the horror of such a life-denying deed. All That Fall takes its title from a biblical verse that praises the power of a deity who protects "all that fall." The Rooneys hoot at this notion, though the child that fell beneath the train may, for all they can know, be better off than all those who, like the Rooneys, merely endure as they slowly decay with the rest of the universe.

Embers and Eh Joe

Like them, the narrating speaker of Embers, Henry, endures through a failing nature, but he uses language to explain rather than affirm failure and death. Like the waves of the sea beside which he sits while he speaks, Henry returns again and again to the same scenes of his life, trying to make them acceptable, especially his father's death and his wife's love. They are not yet coherent for him because they were experiences of futility rather than fulfillment, and so he goes on telling his story, revising as he composes, and composing as he speaks. Henry's regrets are motives for his narratives, and in Eh Joe, Joe's refusal to feel regret is a motive for the teleplay. As the television camera moves, like an interrogator or conscience, for an ultimate close-up of Joe's face, a voice interrupts, or propels, the camera's movement to tell a tale of suicide by a woman condemning Joe.

Film

This technique is similar to that of Film, in which a male figure (played by Buster Keaton) fails to avoid self-perception, self-condemnation. In the movement of the film's narrative, the male figure is an Object ("O") for the subject of the camera's Eye ("E"); the whole action is a movement by the object of avoidance of becoming a subject. The drama of the story ends with the failure of avoidance. Art exists because of the duality narrated by the action of the film, and when the duality approaches unity, as self recognizes itself, the art ends and the object fades into a rocking subject. All that man the object, or the male figure, seems to be is an attempt to escape his consciousness of himself, including his destruction of photographs (apparently of himself) from his past. Ironically, however, in that final desperate attempt to remove images of himself, he is most fully brought to recognize himself as a subject.

The destructive deed turns out to be a constructive act, as if Beckett's film were commenting on the nature of his own art as a successful communication about failures of communication, an integration of disintegrating forms, and a discovery of meaning in meaninglessness.

Analysis of Samuel Beckett's Novels

It was a matter of some pleasure to Samuel Beckett (13 April 1906 – 22 December 1989) that his work resists explication. His most important novels and plays are artfully constructed contemplations on their own form rather than commentaries on the familiar world of causal relationships and social contingencies. His most important novels abandon progressive narrative for the more difficult and subtle suggestiveness of haunting images, deliberate enigmas, and complexly ironic epigrams.

Although Beckett's work defies criticism, the author issued critical statements and congenially submitted to interviews with critics, managing to transform both sorts of critical occasions into intellectual performances as provocative, and occasionally as humorous, as his fiction. Two particular comments by Beckett, out of many stimulating ones, may serve as

instructive introductions to the body of his prose works. In his first published book, Proust, Beckett wrote that artistic creation is essentially an excavatory process, comparable to an attempt to reach an ideal, impossibly minuscule, core of an onion. Beckett's novels relentlessly pursue this sort of process, stripping away layers of assumptions about the self and the world, peeling away conventional modes of thought to reach a pure essence of existence free of the inevitably distorting effects of intellect, logical structure, and analytic order. This image of the onion is a rich one because it communicates the sense in Beckett's work that this excavatory process is unending, that disposal of each mode of thought reveals yet another, even more resistant, habit of mind. Beckett himself often spoke of his novels as a series, and it is this progressive penetration through one form of thought to another that marks the stages in the series.

Thirty years after Proust, Beckett submitted to an unusually provocative interview with Tom Driver that was published in Columbia University Forum in the summer of 1961. In this interview, he dwelled specifically on form. After contrasting the orderly form of most art to the intransigently chaotic nature of existence, he said: "The Form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. . . . to find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now." Beckett's novels reveal three stages in this attempt to discover a literary form that will accommodate the chaotic nature of existence. In the first stage, represented by Murphy and Watt, the process is a destructive one of ridiculing literary convention by parody and satire to suggest an as yet undiscovered alternative form of expression. In the second stage, represented by the trilogy, the attempt to give voice to that alternative takes the form of the disordered and at times deliberately incoherent monologues of individual narrators. In the third stage, represented by How It Is and the subsequent short prose pieces, the process takes the form of presenting metaphorical worlds that accommodate their own chaos.

This last stage, especially, is marked by the unpleasant emphasis on miserable degradation and the recurring private images that have given Beckett an undeserved reputation for misanthropy and deliberate obscurity. These charges are effectively rebutted by his own stated sense of "the task of the artist now." Beckett's works do not provide relaxing reading experiences. They are designed to disorient, to dislocate, and to thwart intellectual complacency. The formidable difficulties they present to the reader, however, are essential records of the intellectual ambience of advanced mid-twentieth century thought.

Murphy

Beckett's earliest fiction, the stories in More Pricks than Kicks, describes the passive resistance to social conformity and death under anesthesia of a protagonist named Belacqua (an allusion to Dante). Beckett's first novel, Murphy, presents the same resistance and senseless death in the story of Murphy, given the most common surname in Ireland. Murphy is the first of numerous Beckett protagonists who seek to relinquish all ties to their environment and their compulsion to make sense of it. The centerpiece of Murphy is an analysis of the discrete zones of the character's mind in the sixth chapter. The third and last of these zones is a darkness of selflessness in which mind itself is obviated. It is this zone beyond consciousness that most Beckett protagonists seek; it is their failure to reach it that creates the tension in most of Beckett's fiction.

Murphy is surrounded by representatives of two frames of reference that prevent his withdrawal from the world. The first is nationality, represented here by character types such as the drunken Irish poet Austin Ticklepenny and monuments to national ideals such as the statue of Cuchulain in the Dublin General Post Office. The second frame of reference is erudition, represented here by a plethora of arcane references to astronomy, astrology, philosophy, and mathematics. Assaulted by these adjuncts of identity, Murphy remains

unable to disengage himself fully from the world, to withdraw completely into the third zone of his mind.

The problem that Beckett confronts in Murphy is central to all of his novels: to define consciousness in a novel without the usual novelistic apparatus of recognizable environment, nationality, and psychology. The novel only approaches such a definition in the chapter on Murphy's mind and in the image of an eerily withdrawn character named Mr. Endon. Elsewhere, Beckett is able to suggest an alternative only by destructive means: by heaping scorn on things Irish, by deflating intellectual pretensions, and by parodying novelistic conventions. These forms of ridicule make Murphy Beckett's most humorous and accessible novel. The same reliance on ridicule, however, ensures that Murphy remains derivative of the very forms of thought and literature it intends to challenge.

Watt

Although it was not published until 1953, after Molloy and Malone Dies, Watt was written a decade earlier and properly belongs among Beckett's early novels. It is a transitional work, written in English, in which one can observe intimations of the central concerns of the trilogy of novels written in French.

Like Murphy, Watt is an alienated vagabond seeking succor from the complexities of existence. In the opening and closing sections of this four-part novel, Watt's world is a recognizably Irish one populated with middleclass characters with small social pretensions. In the central two sections, however, Watt works as a servant on the surreal country estate of a Mr. Knott. Watt most resembles Beckett's later fiction in these central sections. In them, Watt ineffectually attempts to master simpler and simpler problems without the benefit of reliable contingencies of cause and effect or even the assurance of a reliable system of language. The structure of the novel is ultimately dislocated by the gradual revelation that the four parts are not in fact presented in chronological order and that they have been narrated by a character named Sam rather than by an omniscient narrator. Sam's account proves unreliable in particulars, thus completing the process by which the novel undermines any illusion of certainty concerning the interaction of the characters Watt ("What?") and Knott ("Not!").

Watt, like Murphy, relies on satire of literary precedents and disruption of novelistic conventions. There are allusions in the novel to the work of William Butler Yeats and James Jones and to the poet Æ (George William Russell), to cite only the Irish precedents. The great disruption of novelistic conventions is effected by "Addenda" of unincorporated material at the end of the text and by pedantic annotations throughout the novel. Nevertheless, Watt does look ahead to Molloy in its central sections, dominated by episodic problems such as the removal of Knott's slops and the attempt of the wretched Lynch family to have the ages of its living members total exactly one thousand. The full emergence of this sort of episodic narrative in Beckett's fiction, however, seems to have required the focus of attention on language itself (rather than on literary conventions). That was one important effect of Beckett's decision to begin to compose novels in French rather than in English.

Mercier and Camier

Mercier and Camier, although published in 1970, was written in French in 1946, soon after Beckett returned to Paris at the end of the war. Like Watt, it is best placed among Beckett's works by date of composition rather than publication. Written at the outset of the "siege in the room" that produced Beckett's major novels, it illuminates the process by which the style of the trilogy emerged from concentration on elements of composition rather than on the social concerns that dominate most conventional novels.

Mercier and Camier is an account of an aimless journey by two decrepit characters out of and back into a city that resembles Dublin.Awitness-narrator announces his presence in the opening sentence but remains otherwise inconspicuous. The descriptions of the two characters' generally enigmatic encounters with others, however, are periodically interrupted by subtly disported tabular synopses that call attention to the arbitrary features of the narrator's accounts. The novel is thus a shrewdly selfconscious narrative performance, with the emphasis falling on the telling rather than on the meaning of the tale.

The belated publication of Mercier and Camier was a welcome event because the work represents what must have seemed to Beckett an unsatisfactory attempt to open the novel form to accommodate the "mess" he finds dominant in the world. His composition of the novel in French produced a spare prose style and calculated use of language that would prove essential to his later fiction. Like Watt, however, the novel retained a peripheral witness-narrator; this may have been one of the sources of Beckett's dissatisfaction with the novel, for immediately after Mercier and Camier he shifted to the monologue essential to the three works that followed.

Beckett's major accomplishment in prose fiction is the trilogy of novels begun with Molloy, written in French in 1947 and 1948. All three are narrative monologues, all seek to explain origins, and all expose various forms of self-knowledge as delusions. Thus, they approach that ideal core of the onion in their quest for explanations, and they assert the governing "mess" of incoherence, which continues to resist artificial, if comforting, intellectual fabrications.

Molloy

In structure, Molloy, translated into English by Beckett in collaboration with Patrick Bowles, is the most complex work in the trilogy. The first part of the novel is the narrative of the derelict Molloy, who discovers himself in his mother's room and attempts unsuccessfully to reconstruct his arrival there. The second part is the narrative of the Catholic and bourgeois detective Jacques Moran, who has been commissioned by an authority named Youdi to write a report on Molloy. As Moran's report proceeds, he gradually begins to resemble Molloy. His narrative ends with the composition of the sentence with which it began, now exposed as pure falsehood.

Molloy and Moran are counterparts whose narratives expose the alternative fallacies, respectively, of inward and outward ways of organizing experience. Molloy's self-involved preoccupations, such as his chronic flatulence, function as counterparts of Moran's more social preoccupations, such as Catholic liturgy and his profession. Both are left in unresolved confrontation with the likelihood that the ways they have attempted to make sense of their origins and present circumstances are pure sham. The special brilliance of Molloy is the manner in which this confrontation is brought about by the terms of each narrator's monologue. The prose style of the novel is dominated by hilarious deflations of momentary pretensions, ironic undercutting of reassuring truisms, and criticism of its own assertions. It is in this manner that Molloy manages to admit the "mess" Beckett seeks to accommodate in the novel form: Its compelling and humorous narratives effectively expose the limits rather than the fruits of self-knowledge.

Malone Dies

Malone Dies is the purest of the narrative performances of Beckett's storytellers. In it, a bedridden man awaits death in his room and tells stories to pass the time. His environment is limited to the room, the view from a window, and a meager inventory of possessions he periodically recounts with inconsistent results. Beyond these, he is limited to the world of his stories about a boy named Sapo, an old man named MacMann, an employee in an insane

asylum named Lemuel, and others. All are apparently fictions based on different periods in Malone's own life. At the end of the novel, Malone's narrative simply degenerates and ends inconclusively in brief phrases that may suggest death itself or simply the end of his willingness to pursue the stories further.

It is essential to the novel that Malone criticize his own stories, revise them, abandon them, and rehearse them once again. His predicament is that he knows the stories to be false in many respects, but he has no alternative approach to the truth of his own origins. Like Beckett, Malone is a compulsive composer of fictions who is perpetually dissatisfied with them. As a result, Malone Dies is one of the most completely self-critical and self-involved novels in the twentieth century stream of metafictions, or novels about the nature of the novel. It demonstrates, with bitter humor and relentless selfexamination, the limits of fiction, the pleasure of fiction, and the lack of an acceptable substitute for fiction.

The Unnamable

In The Unnamable, Beckett pursues the preoccupations of Molloy and Malone Dies to an extreme that puts formidable difficulties before even the most devoted reader of the modern novel. In Molloy the focus is on two long narrative accounts, in Malone Dies it narrows to concentrate on briefer stories, and in The Unnamable it shrinks further to probe the limits of language itself, of words and names. As the title suggests, these smaller units of literary discourse prove to be just as false and unreliable as those longer literary units have proven to be in Beckett's previous two novels. In The Unnamable, there is no character in the ordinary sense of the term. Instead, there are only bursts of language, at first organized into paragraphs, then only into continuous sentences, and finally into pages of a single sentence broken only by commas.

The premise of the novel is that a paralyzed and apparently androgynous creature suspended in a jar outside a Paris restaurant speaks of himself and versions of himself labeled with temporary names such as Mahood and Worm. As he speaks, however, he is diverted from the content of his speech by disgust with its elements, its words. The names of Murphy, Molloy, and Malone are all evoked with complete disgust at the complacent acceptance of language inherent in the creation of such literary characters. The Unnamable thus attempts to challenge assumptions of literary discourse by diverting attention from plot and character to phrase and word. It is tortuous reading because it calls into question the means by which any reading process proceeds.

The preoccupation with speaking in the novel leads naturally to a corollary preoccupation with silence, and The Unnamable ends with a paradoxical assertion of the equal impossibility of either ending or continuing. At this point, Beckett had exhausted the means by which he attempted to admit the "mess" into the form of the novels in his trilogy. He managed to proceed, to extend the series of his novels, by exploring the richness of metaphorical and generally horrific environments like that of the unnamable one suspended, weeping, in his jar.

How It Is

Beckett's critics commonly refer to the series of prose fictions begun with How It Is as "post-trilogy prose." The term is useful because it draws attention to the methods of Beckett's works as well as their chronology. Even in the midst of the incoherence of The Unnamable, there are references to the familiar world, such as the fact that the narrator is located in Paris. In How It Is and the works that followed, however, the environment is an entirely metaphorical and distinctly surreal one. Without reference to a familiar world, these works are governed by an interior system of recurrent images and memories. How It Is marks the beginning of this final stage in the series of Beckett's works, and so its French title, Comment

c'est, is an appropriate phonetic pun meaning both "how it is" and commencer, or "to begin."

In How It Is, the speaker, named Bom, is a creature crawling in darkness through endless mire, dragging with him a sack of canned provisions, and torturing and being tortured by other creatures with their indispensable can openers. His narrative takes the form of brief, unpunctuated fragments separated by spaces on the page. Each fragment is of a length that can be spoken aloud, as it ideally should be, and the style may be in part a product of Beckett's experience in the production of plays. There is a second character, named Pim, against whom the narrator tends to define his own status. The novel, which many prefer to term a prose poem, is thus broken into three parts: before Pim, with Pim, and after Pim..

The Bom and Pim interaction is an excruciating account of misery in a netherworld of darkness and slime. It is related entirely in retrospect, however, and the changing relationships of domination and subordination are less important than the manner in which the language of the fragments creates its own system of repetitions and alterations of phrases. How It Is dramatizes, in fact, how it was for Bom, and in place of clear references to the familiar world, it offers a verbal model for the mechanics of memory. This remains a consistent, if extraordinarily complex, extension of Beckett's attempt to accommodate the "mess" of chaos in the novel form. Its extremely calculated prose creates a sense of the consistent, but inexplicable and ultimately uninformative, impingement of the past on the present.

The Lost Ones

The Lost Ones is a representative example of Beckett's prose fiction immediately following How It Is. He composed many brief prose pieces in this period, abandoned most of them, and resurrected them for publication at the urging of enthusiastic friends. Most are published in collections of his short works. The Lost Ones, however, is a more sustained narrative performance (sixty-three pages in the American edition). It was abandoned in an incomplete form in 1966 but retrieved and supplemented with an effective conclusion in 1970. It has also gained greater attention than most of Beckett's works from this period because of an innovative stage adaptation by the Mabou Mines Company in New York City in 1973.

The Lost Ones is unique among Beckett's works because it focuses on a group rather than on an individual. In fifteen unnumbered passages of prose, it describes the workings of a huge cylinder populated by male and female figures who maneuver throughout its various areas by means of ladders. The prose style is remarkably understated in comparison to the painful, if metaphorical, imagery of How It Is, and the primary action is the continual reorganization of this closed set of persons according to an entropic process of diminishing energies. Mathematical computation, a motif in many of Beckett's novels, is a primary feature in The Lost Ones. As language does in so many of Beckett's earlier novels, numerical calculations prove an inadequate means of organizing experience in this work, and the crucial final paragraph added in 1970 is a fatalistic exposure of the worthlessness of these computations as indications of the past, present, or future of this surreal environment. As in many of Beckett's later prose pieces, the metaphorical environment created by the prose is open to many interpretive referents. The text is subtly allusive— the French title, for example, evokes Alphonse de Lamartine—and the viability of literature as an effective indication of past, present, or future is among the possible subjects of this spare and immensely suggestive text.

Company

With the exceptions of The Lost Ones and other aborted works, nearly twenty years elapsed between the writing of How It Is and the next of Beckett's prose fictions to approach the

novel in form if not in length. Company ended this relative silence, during which Beckett produced a variety of works in other genres. Like How It Is and the intervening works, Company presents a generally metaphorical environment and a consistent emphasis on the workings of memory. Unlike Beckett's other late works, however, it was composed in English and apparently generated out of contemplation of distinctly autobiographical images.

In an early essay on the Irish poet Denis Devlin published in Transition in 1938, Beckett offered this dictum: "Art has always been this—pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric." Like so many of his statements on other writers, this has a special relevance to Beckett's own literary career. Over a period of a half century, he produced fictions that relentlessly question assumptions of intellectual and literary order. He did so with a single-minded devotion to what he took to be "the task of the artist now" and so compiled an oeuvre that is unique in the twentieth century in its concentration on a central purpose and in its literary expression of the great philosophical preoccupations of its time. Beckett's work has been discussed by critics in reference to other innovative thinkers of the century as disparate as Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and Jean-Paul Sartre. In addition to fueling the literary debates of his time, Beckett's work may be said to have created, in part, contemporary literary theories such as structuralism and deconstruction. Despite their formidable difficulties, then, Beckett's novels have an indisputable importance to anyone seriously interested in the intellectual climate of the twentieth century.

Theatre of The Absurd | Definition, Examples, Characteristics, History

What is Theatre of the Absurd?

The Theatre of the Absurd is a term coined by Critic Martin Esslin in his essay "Theatre of the Absurd." The term is used for the work of a number of playwrights, mostly written in the 1950s and 1960s, which were written by a number of primarily European playwrights in the late 1950s. Their work simply expressed the thought of human existence that has no meaning or purpose. If a trouble comes, some logic is given on a matter, it simply makes the situation worse and further leads to silence.

Theatre of the Absurd Definition

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the term as

'Theater that seeks to represent the absurdity of human existence in a meaningless universe by bizarre or fantastic means.'

Theatre of the Absurd Examples

Theater of absurd illustrates the philosophy of Albert Camus in The Myth of Sysiphus that speaks of life with no inherent meaning in it. For him, world was beyond the understanding of man, so it will always remain absurd and we should accept this fact. Martin Esslin considered four playwrights: Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov and Jean Genet as leaders of the movement. After sometimes, Harold Pinter was also included to this group and some of the works of Tom Stoppard, Edward Albee and Jean Tardieu were also classified as belonging to Absurdist Theater. But strangely, these writers were not always comfortable with the label and sometimes preferred to use terms such as "Anti-Theater" or "New Theater".

Besides these, other playwrights like Tom Stoppard, Arthur Kopit, Friedrich Durrenmatt, Fernando Arrabal, Edward Albee, N.E Simpson, Boris Vian, Peter Weiss, Vaclav Havel, and Jean Tardieu were also associated with this theatre. These playwrights formally grouped under the label of the absurd attempted to convey their sense of bewilderment, anxiety, and wonder before the inexplicable universe.

Theatre of The Absurd History

This movement influenced by existentialism, began in the form of experimental theater in Paris and resultantly, after the spread of the absurd form in other country, absurdist plays were written in French. Absurd elements first came into existence after the rise of Greek drama in the plays of Aristophanes in the form of wild humor and buffoonery of old comedy.

Then, morality plays of the Middle Ages can also be called a precursor of the Theatre of the Absurd dealing with common man's struggle with allegorical and existential problems. During Elizabethan period, dramatists like John Webster, Cyril Tourneur, Jakob Biederman and Calderon pictured the world as mythological archetype.

In 19th century, Ibsen and Strindberg also included some elements of absurd theater in their plays, but real precursor of the present Theater of Absurd is Alfred Jerry's monstrous puppet play Ubu Roi (1896). A glimpse of Theater of Absurd can be seen in the dream novels of James Joyce, Franz Kafka who created archetype by delving deep into their own consciousness and attempting to explore the universe.

World War II finally brought the Theater of Absurd to life because the chaotic atmosphere during that time was compelling them to think about their absurd existence.

Theatre of the Absurd Characteristics

Following are the chief characteristics of the Theater of Absurd, but it must be noted here that all these characteristics cannot necessarily be found in all the absurdist plays because it is not necessary that the playwright must have used all the characteristics of Absurd plays:

Questions of Existence

Absurd plays raise some basic questions of existence like- why we are alive why we have to die and why there is injustice and suffering.

Illogical Speeches and Meaningless Plots

By illogical speeches and meaningless plots, they wish to establish a feeling of freedom to make their own worlds. Dr. Culik says,

"Rationalist thought, like language, only deals with the superficial aspects of things, Nonsense, on the other hand, opens up a glimpse of the infinite."

Re-establishment of man's communion with Universe

They attempt to restore the importance of myth and rituals in the life of man and make them aware of the ultimate realities of their life.

Emphasize on Abstract Values of Life

Absurdists force us to look at our abstract values of life like love and family. Thus, we may hope to accept the absurdity of life and try to find values in a world devoid of them.

Vagueness about Time, Place and Character

Absurdists have no time, place and character in their plays as they feel that there is no past or future, only the repetition of the present.

Lack of communication amid characters

Each character lives an egoistic life and attempts to get another character to understand him and this results in more alienation.

Characters in Theater of the Absurd

Characters in the Theater of Absurd range from one-dimension to multi-dimensions and without feeling but still with a very sensitive feeling. Most of the characters are floating, stereotype, archetype and flat because they have to deal with the absurd universe and often discard rational and logical devices. The characters speak in clichés and realism is their chief basis but often they are distorted at many points.

Complex characters cannot go with this theater because ultimately they have to deal with incomprehensive universe. Characters in Pinter's plays are trapped in an enclosed space menaced by some force and that force is incomprehensible to them. For example, In The Room, Rose, the main character is menaced by Riley where the real source of menace remains a mystery.

The characters in Absurd Drama face the chaos of a world that science and logic have abandoned completely. They find themselves trapped in a routine or, in a metafictional conceit, trapped in a story. For example, the titular characters in Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, find themselves in a story (Hamlet) in which the outcome has already been decided.

The absurdists form their characters in interdependent pairs, often either two males or a male and a female. Beckett scholars term it as "pseudo couple" They may be outwardly equal or have a begrudging interdependence (like Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot). Here, one active character may dominate the other passive characters in the play and the relationship of characters also shift dramatically.

Plot

Theater of Absurd discards the traditional pattern of plot construction. It consists of repetition of clichés and routine as in Waiting for Godot. There is always a menacing outside force that remains a mystery throughout the play. Absence, emptiness, nothingness, and unresolved mysteries are central features of many Absurdist plots.

Features of Absurdist Plot

Absence
Emptiness
Nothingness
Unresolved
Mysteries

For example, the action in Waiting for Godot centers round the absence of a character Godot who is long awaited. The plot also revolves round unexplained metamorphosis, a shift in the laws of physics, or a supernatural change. For example, in Ionesco's How to Get Rid of It, a couple is dealing with a corpse that is growing large steadily, but Ionesco never discloses the identity of the corpse and ultimately, the corpse floats away unidentified in the unknown. The plots are frequently cyclical too as occurs in Endgame, the play begins where it ends and the theme of routine and repetition keeps on moving.

Influences

Absurdist Theatre was heavily influenced by Existential philosophy. It aligned best with the philosophy in Albert Camus' essay The Myth of Sisyphus (1942). In this essay, Camus attempts to present a reasonable answer as to why man should not commit suicide in face of a meaningless, absurd existence. To do so, he uses the Greek mythological figure, Sisyphus, who was condemned to push a boulder up a mountain, only to have it roll back

down. He repeats this futile cycle for all of eternity. At the end of the essay, Camus concludes that, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus 123). He means that the struggle of life alone should bring one happiness. Essentially, we can find meaning in living even without knowing why we exist.

The absurd dramatists, however, did not resolve the problem of man's meaningless existence quite as positively as Camus. In fact, they typically offered no solution to the problem whatsoever, thus suggesting that the question is ultimately unanswerable.

Themes

While absurdist plays feature a wide variety of subject matter, there are certain themes, or ideas, which reoccur frequently within the movement. These themes are the product of a new attitude that swept post-World War II Europe. It consisted primarily of the acknowledgement that the "certitudes" and "assumptions" of prior generations had "been tested and found wanting, that they [were] discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions" (Esslin 23). Two themes that reoccur frequently throughout absurdist dramas are a meaningless world and the isolation of the individual.

A World Without Meaning

The decline of religious faith in the Twentieth Century is partly responsible for the growing notion that life had no identifiable purpose. Whereas one who believes in the afterlife sees life as a means of getting there, one who does not believe is left to either conclude that there is no purpose or to find an alternative justification for his/her life. Esslin notes that this decline was "masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies" (23). Yet these approaches also appeared flawed, leaving the other option–the assertion that there is no meaning behind human life. In his play, The Chairs, Ionesco capitalizes on this meaninglessness. Throughout the play, the two main characters prepare chairs for invisible guests who are all coming to hear the meaning of life as declared by an orator. The main characters kill themselves just before he speaks and then the audience discovers that the orator is a deaf-mute. Ionesco himself described the subject of the play as, "not the message, nor the failures of life, nor the moral disaster of the two old people, but the chairs themselves; that is to say, the absence of people, the absence of the emperor, the absence of God, the absence of matter, the unreality of the world, metaphysical emptiness" (qtd. in Esslin 152). This kind of world view is characteristic of the Theatre of the Absurd.

The Isolation of the Individual

The playwrights involved with the Theatre of the Absurd were not conscious of belonging to a movement while writing their plays. Ironically, they each thought of himself as "a lone outsider, cut off and isolated in [his own] private world" (Esslin 22). This perspective clearly penetrates their work, as most of the plays emphasize the isolation of the individual, or man's inability to connect with others. Samuel Beckett's //Waiting for Godot// (1952), the most well-known play from the absurdist movement, features this idea. The two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, are both tramps who spend the entirety of the play on the outskirts of society. Though they have each other, they are at the same time isolated from one another. One indication of this is that they are never able to adequately communicate; their conversation goes in circles.

Form

The form of a piece of art is often neglected in favor of its subject matter. More specifically, drama is often studied in terms of what it is saying rather than in how it is saying it. (At least this is so in most academic settings because students typically read a play rather than see it performed.) Form, however, is arguably the most important aspect of absurdist plays. It is

what separates them from other similarly themed movements, mainly existential drama. Esslin claims that "the Theatre of the Absurd goes one step further [than existential drama] in trying to achieve a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed" (24). Essentially, these playwrights were reacting against realism because it did not align with their objectives. They did not want to show life as it really was, but rather, the inner-life of man–what was going on inside his head. Esslin explains that "the Theatre of the Absurd merely communicates one poet's most intimate and personal intuition of the human situation, his own sense of being, his individual vision of the world" (402-403). In order to portray this "personal intuition" the playwrights had to abandon conventional methods and adopt a more poetic, or lyrical, form.

Devaluation of Language

One characteristic of this poetic form was the devaluation of language. The absurd dramatists felt that conventional language had failed man–it was an inadequate means of communication. As a result, the movement of the characters on stage often contradicts their words or dialogue. For example, both acts of Waiting for Godot conclude with the line "Yes, let's go," only to be followed by the stage direction, "They do not move" (Beckett 6). Essentially, the dramatists are trying to emphasize a disconnect between "word and object, meaning and reality, consciousness and the world" (Blocker 1). Moreover, in doing so they expose how unreliable language is; one can easily say one thing and do the opposite.

Another common way in which they presented the uselessness of language was by having their characters constantly speak in cliches, or overused, tired expressions. One prime example of this is from Ionesco's The Bald Soprano:

Mrs. Martin: How curious it is, good Lord, how bizarre!...

Mr. Martin [musing]: How curious it is, how curious it is, how curious it is, and what a coincidence!
(Ionesco 14).

The phrase "how curious it is" has been said so many times, even outside of this play, that it has lost its meaning. Therefore, their repetition of it is empty–they are speaking without actually communicating. Essentially, the dramatists are claiming that language has become a means of occupying time and space rather than a way to effectively communicate with one another.

Lack of Plot

Another poetic aspect of absurdist plays is that they lack a plot or a clear beginning and end with a purposeful development in between. There is usually a great deal of repetition in both language and action, which suggests that the play isn't actually "going anywhere." In Waiting for Godot, the stage directions indicate that Vladimir and Estragon are constantly moving. For example, they repeatedly "rummage" through their pockets and "peer" into their hats (Beckett 4-9). These actions are so frequent, however, that the audience begins to feel as if they are watching the same thing over and over again. They could even be called static actions as they contribute nothing to the flow of the play. Yet this lack of purposeful movement in Waiting for Godot and most other absurdist dramas is intentional. As discussed above, the plays are attempting to portray an intuition which by definition should be an instantaneous or immediate insight. It is "only because it is physically impossible to present so complex an image in an instant [that] it has to be spread over a period of time" (Esslin 404). Therefore, if one does not view the play as a story, but rather as a single idea being acted out, this supposed lack of plot becomes irrelevant.

Technique

The techniques these absurdists use are meta-theatrical techniques which explore role fulfillment, fate, and the theatricality of theatre. For example, in The Balcony, brothel patrons take up elevated positions in role-playing games, but the line between theatre and reality starts to blur. Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead is yet another example where two minor characters of Hamlet are major role players who encounter with actors who performed 'Mousetrap in Hamlet. Thus, the techniques of illustrating the theme are so new that people are often confused at the time of production of some of these plays.

Theatre of the Absurd Plays

The first large major production of an absurdist play was Jean Genet's The Maids in 1947. Ionesco's The Bald Soprana was first performed in 1950, and Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Gadot is probably the best known of all absurdist plays and it was premiered in January 1953. Waiting for Godot is the most controversial absurdist play. Rest of the Absurdist plays are:

Waiting for Godot, Endgame by Samuel Beckett
Rhinoceros, The Bald Soprano and Other Plays, How to Get Rid of It by Eugene lonesco
The Balcony by Jean Genet
Tango by Slawomir Mrozek
Three Plays of the Absurd by Walter Wykes
Le Ping-Pong by Arthur Adamov
The Dumb Waiter, The Birthday Party, The Homecoming by Harold Pinter
Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead by Tom Stoppard
Fuddy Meers by David Lindsay
The Marriage by Witold Gombrowicz
The Other Shore by Gao Xingjian
Reading the Apocalypse in Bed by Tadeusz Rozewicz

Conclusion

Thus, The Absurd Theatre is not a positive play as it never tries to prove that man can still live in the futile world. It only demonstrates the absurdity and illogicality of the world in which we live but does not provide any solution to the problem. By these play, man is again and again reminded that his existence in the world is in fact absurd and meaningless. The countdown of The Absurd Theatre began in the mid-1960s. Although it shocked the audiences when it first appeared, many of its characteristic features were transferred in mainstream theatre when the Theater of Absurd ended. Those techniques are now commonly being used in modern theatre.

The Absurdist Theatre of Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett (1906-89) was an Irish playwright, theatre director, novelist and poet who has been credited with changing the course of post-war theatre. He has been referred to as one of the last modernist writers and a key figure associated with the 'Theatre of the Absurd' – a form of theatre concerned with existential ideas of the absurdity of the human condition. Beckett's plays offered an alternative to theatre's naturalistic tradition by creating theatre without conventional plot or time and place references that explored the human condition in dark and humorous ways.

The critic Kenneth Tynan wrote of Waiting for Godot, Beckett's most famous play, that it 'frankly jettisons everything by which we recognise theatre'. Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969: 'For his writing which—in new forms for the novel and drama—in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation'.

The item featured here is the one-act play That time, reproduced in both English and German. In That time the only presence on stage is an old man's head suspended in darkness, listening to his own voice from different stages of his life repeating and re-telling memories. In this play, as in Beckett's other short late plays, the staging is stark and minimalistic and the character's monologues are, as one critic notes, concerned with 'sifting the past and enduring the continuum of life'.

Introduction to the Play "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Becket

Waiting for Godot qualifies as one of Samuel Beckett's most famous works. Originally written in French in 1948, Beckett personally translated the play into English. The world premiere was held on January 5, 1953, in the Left Bank Theater of Babylon in Paris. The play's reputation spread slowly through word of mouth and it soon became quite famous. Other productions around the world rapidly followed. The play initially failed in the United States, likely as a result of being misbilled as "the laugh of four continents." A subsequent production in New York City was more carefully advertised and garnered some success.

Waiting for Godot incorporates many of the themes and ideas that Beckett had previously discussed in his other writings. The use of the play format allowed Beckett to dramatize his ideas more forcefully than before, and is one of the reasons that the play is so intense.

Beckett often focused on the idea of "the suffering of being." Most of the play deals with the fact that Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for something to alleviate their boredom. Godot can be understood as one of the many things in life that people wait for.

The play has often been viewed as fundamentally existentialist in its take on life. The fact that none of the characters retain a clear mental history means that they are constantly struggling to prove their existence. Thus the boy who consistently fails to remember either of the two protagonists casts doubt on their very existence. This is why Vladimir demands to know that the boy will in fact remember them the next day.

Waiting for Godot is part of the Theater of the Absurd. This implies that it is meant to be irrational. Absurd theater does away with the concepts of drama, chronological plot, logical language, themes, and recognizable settings. There is also a split between the intellect and the body within the work. Thus Vladimir represents the intellect and Estragon the body, both of whom cannot exist without the other.

The reason for its popularity lies in the fact that the play has no plot but we can find many meaningful lessons in it.

Next to the characters Vladimir, Lucky, Pozzo and Estragon there is a boy who is a messenger but he only has about two lines so he can't even be stated as a character.

Even though it seems that the play has a plot it actually represents many other boring, tragic, real life events that have no plot.

There is not exciting moments in the play and the only thing existing are the episodes of waiting. The author tries to break the monotony by putting in dialogues and some events just to keep the reader reading.

The characters, every now and then, seem funny so some call this a tragicomedy.

Absurdism is a philosophical movement that started in the 19th century in Europe.

Absurdism deals with the human search for meaning that often fails and reveals that life is illogical and absurd. One of the main absurdist philosophers was Albert Camus (1913-1960).

The Theatre of the Absurd (or Absurdist drama) is a genre of drama that explores ideas connected to absurdism.

Tragicomedy is a genre of drama that uses both comic and tragic elements. Plays that fall under the tragicomedy genre are neither comedies nor tragedies but a combination of both genres.

The play consists of conversations between Vladimir and Estragon, who are waiting for the arrival of the mysterious Godot, who continually sends word that he will appear but who never does. They encounter Lucky and Pozzo, they discuss their miseries and their lots in life, they consider hanging themselves, and yet they wait. Often perceived as being tramps, Vladimir and Estragon are a pair of human beings who do not know why they were put on earth; they make the tenuous assumption that there must be some point to their existence, and they look to Godot for enlightenment. Because they hold out hope for meaning and direction, they acquire a kind of nobility that enables them to rise above their futile existence.

Historical and Literary Context of Waiting for Godot

The play is set in a strange, unspecified time, and does not take place in the context of any historical events, but many have seen the widespread suffering and disillusionment caused by World War II in the background of the play's pessimistic, nihilistic conception of the world.

Waiting for Godot, like most of Samuel Beckett's works, contains little in the way of historical context. He wanted his audience to experience the play without the expectations and assumptions attached to a particular people, place, or time. The play is not entirely free from cultural context, however, containing references to the Bible, Shakespeare, and ancient Greek mythology, as well as a number of allusions to Christianity.

World War II

Beckett wrote Waiting for Godot shortly after World War II ended, and the conflicts and horrors of the war were fresh in his memory. He lived in occupied Paris, working with the French Resistance until he and his companion, Suzanne Déschevaux-Dumesnil, had to flee to avoid being arrested by the Germans. He and Déschevaux-Dumesnil spent the remainder of the war in a region of the French countryside not under German control. After the Allied victory in Europe, Beckett volunteered for the Red Cross, witnessing firsthand the consequences of war and the results of Nazi brutality.

Modernism and Postmodernism

Waiting for Godot displays characteristics of both modernism and postmodernism. The modernist period in literature, which began around the turn of the 20th century, saw writers respond negatively to the Industrial Revolution and the horrors of World War I. Modernism's goal—to create something completely new—sparked much experimentation by merging psychological theory with the creation of many new forms and styles. Characteristics of modernism include the following:

focus on the inner self or consciousness
concern with the decline of civilization and the effects of capitalism
characterization of technology as cold and unfeeing
alienation and loneliness of the individual
first-person narrators

stream of consciousness style
deviation from traditional plot structures

Postmodernism, which arose after World War II, turned away from modernism's insistence on entirely new literary forms. Instead, postmodern art, including literature, often reflected numerous traditional styles within one work. Characteristics of postmodernism include the following:

parody, paradox, or pastiche (imitation of another work)
fragmentation
interest in flattened emotions
focus on an anonymous or collective experience
self-reference or recursion (the use of repeating elements)
unreliable narrators

Both modernist and postmodernist works reject traditional values and generally accepted meanings for texts.

The Theater of the Absurd

Waiting for Godot was a defining work in what came to be known as the Theater of the Absurd, plays in which a lack of purpose and logic create uncertainty, hopelessness, ridiculousness, and humor. The absurdity of characters' words and actions reveals the absurdity of human existence. The characters may call one another by childish, almost clownish, nicknames and engage in conversations and interactions straight out of slapstick comedy. Though not a formal movement, the absurdist plays of Beckett, along with those of Eugène Ionesco, Harold Pinter, and some other playwrights of the mid-20th century had in common a pessimistic view of an essentially purposeless human existence. As in Waiting for Godot, absurdist plays break with traditional structures and use of language to convey images and ideas that have no clearly defined meaning or resolution.

In Waiting for Godot, the human condition is depicted as ridiculous and without purpose. Beckett labeled the play a "tragicomedy," emphasizing both the humor to be seen in the absurdity of existence and the anxiety and hopelessness resulting from a lack of purpose. Many also see the play as an illustration of the views of existentialism, especially the philosophy of French writer Jean-Paul Sartre, whose proposition that humankind "first surges up in the world—and defines [itself] afterwards," argues that there is no inherent meaning in human existence. Beckett warned audiences, however, against making religious or philosophical deductions, saying, "the key to the play was the literal relations among its surface features not any presumed meanings that could be deduced from them."

Indeterminate Time and Place in Beckett's Play

More importantly for Beckett's art, however, is that Waiting for Godot, on the whole, clearly detaches itself from particular aspects of the historical and cultural context in which Beckett wrote in order to universalize the experience of Vladimir and Estragon. And it achieves this universal quality initially by placing the two figures in an indeterminate setting and time. As the play opens, the setting and time is simply described as "A country road. A tree. Evening." In the second act, the description is simply, "Next day. Same Time. Same Place." This backdrop is left unspecified in order to emphasize that the action of the play is a universal "situation" rather than a particular series of events that happened to a particular set of characters.

At one time in our century this waiting could have stood for South Africans waiting for apartheid to end in their native land. More than a half century after the unleashing of atomic

energy, this waiting could still represent our fears of nuclear catastrophe. On a more personal level, many know what it is like to wait for news of a test for cancer. But all of these specific situations reveal how specificity can reduce the poetic evocativeness of Beckett's waiting to a mundane flatness. The unspecified nature of what Vladimir and Estragon wait for is what gives Beckett's play its extraordinary power.

The peculiar quality of Vladimir and Estragon's waiting, of course, is that they wait with only the vaguest sense of what they are waiting for and that they wait without much hope while still clinging to hope as their only ballast in an existential storm. But even this narrower description of the play's "waiting" leaves many possibilities for corresponding situations. For example, one of the most famous productions of Waiting for Godot perhaps reveals most clearly how the indeterminate time and place of the play permits it to speak to a wide variety of audience experiences. In The Theatre of the Absurd Martin Esslin examined the famous 1957 production of Waiting for Godot at San Quentin penitentiary. Prison officials had chosen Beckett's play largely because it had no women in it to distract the prisoners, but the San Francisco Actors' Workshop group that was performing the play was obviously concerned that such an arcane theatrical experience might baffle an audience of fourteen hundred convicts. Much to their surprise, however, the convicts understood the play immediately. One prisoner said, "Godot is society." Another said, "he's the outside." As Esslin reported, "a teacher at the prison was quoted as saying, 'they know what is meant by waiting . . . and they knew if Godot finally came, he would only be a disappointment.';" An article in the prison newspaper summarized the prisoners' response by saying, "We're still waiting for Godot, and shall continue to wait. When the scenery gets too drab and the action too slow, we'll call each other names and swear to part forever—but then, there's no place to go!" Esslin concluded that "it is said that Godot himself, as well as turns of phrase and characters from the play, have since become a permanent part of the private language, the institutional mythology of San Quentin." In 1961, one member of that convict audience, Rick Cluchey, helped form a group that produced seven productions of Beckett's plays for San Quentin audiences from 1961 to 1964. Cluchey later earned his release from San Quentin and had a distinguished career acting on stage and in films, especially as an interpreter of Beckett roles.

Other Books Related to Waiting for Godot

While the play generally does not allude to other pieces of literature, Beckett was likely influenced by Bérénice, a 17th-century play by the French playwright Jean Racine (whom Beckett studied), in which Racine stressed the importance of making an interesting play out of little action. Beckett was also probably influenced by Sartre's play No Exit, in which characters are trapped in one location. Waiting for Godot has also been seen as being an influence for Tom Stoppard's play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.

Key Facts

Full Title: Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts
Author: Samuel Beckett
When Written: 1948-1949
Where Written: Paris
When Published: 1954
Literary Period: Modernism, Postmodernism
Genre: Drama, Tragicomedy (a mixture of tragedy and comedy), Theater of the Absurd

Setting: The side of an unidentified road, near a tree, at an unspecified time.

Climax: Beckett's play essentially lacks a climax. Vladimir and Estragon spend both acts waiting for the arrival of Godot, but Godot never comes.

Antagonist: While Vladimir and Estragon speak of an anonymous "they" who threaten to beat them and from whom they must hide, there is no real antagonist in the play. Part of the characters' predicament is that there is no precise cause or origin of the suffering and alienation they feel.

Places

(1) Macon country

The region where Estragon and Vladimir used to work in the past.

(2) Cackon country

The region where the events of the play are supposed to take place.

(3) Rhone

A river flowing through Germany etc. Estragon tried to commit suicide by throwing himself into it.

(4) Eiffel Tower

A steel monument in Paris. The tramps think that they ought to have committed suicide by throwing themselves down from it.

(5) Pyrenees

A mountain range in France. The tramps think of going there.

Style

Black Humor

Perhaps the easiest and also the most difficult thing to experience clearly in Waiting for Godot is its sense of humor. It's the easiest thing to experience because once one accepts the play on its own terms Waiting for Godot is wildly funny. But the play's humor is also the hardest thing to experience because the reputation of Beckett's play has created another set of expectations—that its dark vision must be taken with utmost seriousness.

However, a quick look at the subtitle of the play reveals that Beckett called it "a tragi-comedy in two acts," and this delicate balance between tragedy and comedy is probably the most essential ingredient in the play. Numerous critics have pointed out that Waiting for Godot is full of pratfalls, classic vaudeville "bits" like the wild swapping of hats in Act II, and the patter of comedians such as this from Act I:

Estragon: [Anxious.] 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. Vladimir: Come in? On our hands and knees. Estragon: As bad as that?

Hugh Kenner has even discovered what appears to be a "source" for the farcical dropping of trousers that ends the play. He pointed out that in Laurel and Hardy's film Way Out West (1937) this dialogue occurs:

Hardy: Get on the mule. Laurel: What? Hardy: Get on the mule.

At the end of Waiting for Godot we have:

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: [Realizing his trousers are down.] True. [He pulls up his trousers.]

Black Comedy is laughter that is generated by something truly painful. When we are led to laugh at tragedy or real suffering like death or the genuinely horrific, we are in the world of Black Comedy. In Endgame Nell says, “nothing is funnier than un-happiness.” Beckett leads us to laugh because it may be the only viable response to extreme anxiety. In Waiting for Godot, of course, what follows the “trouser” passage above is the quite serious and even solemn concluding lines of the play—“they do not move.”

Extra Credit for Waiting for Godot

En Attendant Godot. Beckett originally wrote Waiting for Godot in French (under the equivalent title, En Attendant Godot). He said that writing in French made it easier to write in the blank, plain style for which the play is famous. Beckett later personally translated the play into English.

Waiting for Whom? : While Godot is such an important part of the play, there is widespread disagreement over the correct pronunciation of his name. Some opt for stressing the first syllable ("GOD-oh"), which emphasizes the name's link to God, while others choose to stress the second ("god-OH").

10 Things You Didn't Know

Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, which premiered in 1953, is one of the most enigmatic theatrical works ever composed. Featuring an ensemble of only five characters, the play is a cornerstone of absurdist theater. The titular Godot, though heavily discussed throughout the play, never appears onstage. It is his absence that has has led audiences to interpretations of the play as everything from a Cold War commentary to a Christian allegory.

Beckett was very straightforward regarding how he wanted Waiting for Godot to be staged. The only scenery of note in the stage directions is a tree and a stone or mound on which Estragon sits. The barrenness of the set, along with the play's complicated classification as a tragicomedy, has caused scholars to study and theorize about the play. Beckett's literary and theatrical immortality was confirmed when Waiting for Godot was voted the most significant English-language play of the 20th century in a poll conducted by the British Royal National Theatre.

1. Lucky is often viewed as a Christ figure.

Beckett stated explicitly that Christian allegory was not intentional in Waiting for Godot. However, many critics view Lucky as comparable to Christ, in both how he carries the constant burden of Pozzo's bags and how he is treated like a subjugated prisoner.

2. Beckett didn't support the idea of an all-female ensemble performance of Waiting for Godot.

When questioned about his opinion of an all-female cast performing Waiting for Godot, he expressed his distaste for the idea by replying, "Women don't have prostates." This was in reference to the number of times Vladimir has to leave the stage to urinate during the play.

3. Beckett appreciated prison productions of Waiting for Godot.

Prisoners in Lüttringhausen, German, undertook the staging of the play in 1954 with input from Beckett himself. Beckett generally approved of the play being staged in the prison environment. Later when he was discussing pictures taken from a performance in 1957 at San Quentin prison in California, he stated, "I saw the roots of my play."

4. There were attempts to ban Waiting for Godot in the 1950s.

In 1950s England, strict censorship was applied to theatrical performances. The Lord Chamberlain at the time received a letter in favor of banning the play for its use of bathroom humor. The letter read, "One of the many themes running through the play is the desire of two old tramps continually to relieve themselves. Such a dramatisation of lavatory necessities is offensive and against all sense of British decency."

5. Many famous acting duos have portrayed Vladimir and Estragon.
In 1979 Geoffrey Rush and Mel Gibson—who happened to be roommates at the time—appeared in a production as Vladmir and Estragon, respectively. Steve Martin and Robin Williams appeared in the iconic roles during a 1988 performance. However, perhaps the most interesting combination took the stage in a London performance where the sketch comedy actors from Totally Tom—Tom Stourton and Tom Palmer—took the stage, "Sporting Adidas tracksuit bottoms, hoodies and five-day stubble."

6. An online adaptation of Waiting for Godot stages the play among New York's homeless population.
Entitled While Waiting for Godot, the web series is described as, "Giving backdrop to the play—and a sharp commentary on the issues of poverty and the urban homeless population." Each episode is between five and eight minutes long. In 2014 the web series won Best Cinematography at the Rome Web Awards.

7. An unauthorized sequel actually features Godot.
The "sequel," entitled Godot Arrived, was written by the Yugoslavian playwright Miodrag Bulatović in 1966. Beckett did not encourage this sequel to be composed, but he did not take any sort of action against Bulatović or openly disapprove of him writing it.

8. Beckett likely intended the name Godot to refer to feet.
Rejecting the notion that the word Godot is a play on God, Beckett noted in an interview that the character's name was derived from the French word for boot: godillot or godasse. This is a distinct possibility, since feet and boots do play a prominent role in the play, but another story claims that a man named Godot was the last competitor to pass Beckett as he was observing a bicycle race in France.

9. Lucky was originally portrayed as suffering from Parkinson's Disease.
French actor Jean Martin, who played Lucky in the premiere of Waiting for Godot, decided to play the character with the constant trembling and quivering symptomatic of Parkinson's. Martin consulted a doctor to mimic the attributes of the condition properly. Not wanting to confirm or deny anything about the characters' personal histories, Beckett refused either to approve or disapprove of the interpretation, although Beckett himself had only recently lost his mother to Parkinson's.

10. Sesame Street featured a spoof of Waiting for Godot.
Oddly, the PBS children's show parodied Beckett's play in a skit called "Waiting for Elmo" (1992). The parody appears in the show's "Monsterpiece Theater" segment, which pays homage to the adult PBS program Masterpiece Theater. In the parody, Grover and Telly Monster wait for Elmo near a tree. Fed up with the never-ending waiting, the tree abandons the characters to join the cast of the musical Okalahoma!

Characters

Estragon
One of the two main characters of the play, along with Vladimir, Estragon is rather helpless on his own. In the beginning of the play, he struggles just to take off his boots, for example.

Unlike Vladimir, he has no grasp of time, and is confused as to whether it is evening or morning in act two. Along similar lines, he has a poor grasp of people's identities. He doesn't recognize Lucky and Pozzo in act two, and at one point thinks Pozzo's name is Abel. He cannot even remember his own past, and tells Pozzo his name is Adam. Estragon repeatedly wants to leave, but each time Vladimir reminds him that they must stay and wait for Godot. While he often forms the dull-minded counterpoint to the more cerebral Vladimir, Estragon is still able to match Vladimir's verbal wit and once claims that he used to be a poet.

Vladimir

Perhaps the real protagonist of the play, Vladimir often seems to be more rational than his more nonsensical companion, Estragon. Unlike the other characters in the play, he has a sense of linear time and realizes that the events of act two essentially repeat those of act one. He is also able to remember people's identities, unlike Estragon and Pozzo, who forget each other in act two. He seems to be the only one who is really outraged at Pozzo's horrible treatment of Lucky in act one, but he doesn't actually do anything to help him. Vladimir often tries to explain what is going on in the world—where they are, when they are—and to show evidence to support his theories. But such rational or "scientific" efforts never yield any solid insight, and by the end of the play Vladimir seems less sure than he did at the beginning. Vladimir relies upon Estragon's company as much as Estragon relies upon Vladimir: whenever Estragon leaves the stage for a brief moment, Vladimir panics out of his intense fear of loneliness and abandonment.

Godot

While Godot never appears on stage or has any lines, he is such a significant absence in the play that he may be rightly recognized as one of the play's characters. What little we can gather about Mr. Godot comes from the dialogue of Estragon, Vladimir, and the boy he sends to deliver his message. The boy says that he watches over Godot's goats, and describes Godot as a relatively kind master. Whoever Godot is, Vladimir and Estragon are convinced that he alone will save them, so they wait endlessly for his arrival, which never comes. Because of his name's resemblance to God, Godot is often read as Beckett's pessimistic version of God, an absent savior who never comes to the aid of those suffering on earth.

Pozzo

Pozzo runs into Vladimir and Estragon while journeying along the road in both acts. He abuses Lucky and treats him as a slave, pulling him around with a rope tied around his neck and having him carry all his things. While he exercises some relative power and authority over Lucky and acts superior to the other characters, he is nonetheless far from powerful himself. He panics when he loses things like his watch and is doomed to repeat his wandering every day, just as Vladimir and Estragon repeat their waiting for Godot. He is particularly helpless in act two, when he is inexplicably struck blind and is unable to get up after falling to the ground.

Lucky

Lucky is Pozzo's slave, whom Pozzo treats horribly and continually insults, addressing him only as "pig." He is mostly silent in the play, but gives a lengthy, mostly nonsensical monologue in act one, when Pozzo asks him to think out loud. While all the characters on-stage suffer in different ways throughout the play, Lucky is the play's most obvious figure of physical suffering and exploitation as he is whipped, beaten, and kicked by other characters.

Boy

The unnamed boy who brings a message from Godot in both acts. Both times, he tells Vladimir and Estragon that Godot is not coming, but will come the next day. It is unclear

whether the same boy comes in both acts, or whether these are two different characters. In act two, the boy claims to be different from the boy of act one, but then again Pozzo claims in act two that he did not meet Vladimir and Estragon in act one. The boy describes working under Godot as if on a farm or plantation, where he watches over Godot's animals. When the boy asks Vladimir if he would like to send a message to Godot, Vladimir asks him to tell Godot simply that he saw Vladimir.

Characters' Analysis

Character Analysis Estragon

In contrast, Estragon is concerned mainly with more mundane matters: He prefers a carrot to a radish or turnip, his feet hurt, and he blames his boots; he constantly wants to leave, and it must be drilled into him that he must wait for Godot. He remembers that he was beaten, but he sees no philosophical significance in the beating. He is willing to beg for money from a stranger (Pozzo), and he eats Pozzo's discarded chicken bones with no shame.

Estragon, then, is the more basic of the two. He is not concerned with either religious or philosophical matters. First of all, he has never even heard of the two thieves who were crucified with Christ, and if the Gospels do disagree, then "that's all there is to it," and any further discussion is futile and absurd.

Estragon's basic nature is illustrated in Act II when he shows so little interest in Pozzo and Lucky that he falls asleep; also, he sleeps through the entire scene between Vladimir and the Boy Messenger. He is simply not concerned with such issues.

Estragon, however, is dependent upon Vladimir, and essentially he performs what Vladimir tells him to do. For example, Vladimir looks after Estragon's boots, he rations out the carrots, turnips, and radishes, he comforts Estragon's pain, and he reminds Estragon of their need to wait for Godot. Estragon does sometimes suggest that it would be better if they parted, but he never leaves Vladimir for long. Essentially, Estragon is the less intelligent one; he has to have everything explained to him, and he is essentially so bewildered by life that he has to have someone to look after him.

Character Analysis Vladimir

In any comic or burlesque act, there are two characters, traditionally known as the "straight man" and the "fall guy." Vladimir would be the equivalent of the straight man. He is also the intellectual who is concerned with a variety of ideas. Of the two, Vladimir makes the decisions and remembers significant aspects of their past. He is the one who constantly reminds Estragon that they must wait for Godot. Even though it is left indefinite, all implications suggest that Vladimir knows more about Godot than does Estragon, who tells us that he has never even seen Godot and thus has no idea what Godot looks like.

Vladimir is the one who often sees religious or philosophical implications in their discussions of events, and he interprets their actions in religious terms; for example, he is concerned about the religious implications in such stories as the two thieves (two tramps) who were crucified on either side of Jesus. He is troubled about the fate of the thief who wasn't saved and is concerned that "only one of the four evangelists" speaks of a thief being saved.

Vladimir correlates some of their actions to the general concerns of mankind. In Act II, when Pozzo and Lucky fall down and cry for help, Vladimir interprets their cries for help as his and Estragon's chance to be in a unique position of' helping humanity. After all, Vladimir maintains, "It is not everyday that we are needed . . . but at this place, at this moment in time," they are needed and should respond to the cries for help. Similarly, it is Vladimir who

questions Pozzo and Lucky and the Boy Messenger(s), while Estragon remains, for the most part, the silent listener. Essentially, Vladimir must constantly remind Estragon of their destiny — that is, they must wait for Godot.

In addition to the larger needs, Vladimir also looks after their physical needs. He helps Estragon with his boots, and, moreover, had he been with Estragon at night, he would not have allowed his friend to be beaten; also, he looks after and rations their meager meals of turnips, carrots, and radishes, and, in general, he tends to be the manager of the two.

Character Analysis Godot

Among all the characters of "Waiting for Godot" no other character is as confusing and as interpretable as the character of Godot. We know him to be a sort of person that has promised some kind of help to the two tramps of which only Vladimir remembers. A meeting has been promised by him for the tramps but he cannot reach them despite his promise; therefore, he sends them a message that he would come the next day which never comes at least within the scope of this play. The way Vladimir hopes for the meeting with Godot and tells Estragon that:

"Ah Gogo, don't go on like that. Tomorrow everything will be better"

shows that Vladimir has been considering him some sort of Messiah who would rescue them from their current state of loss and chaos. However, they wait for him; this wait never ends within the play. The strong belief and the continuous wait for the character of Godot make him mysterious character. The messenger of the Godot is a boy who describes the white beard of Godot. This shows old age, wisdom and knowledge of Godot. But the interesting fact is that Vladimir has not seen Godot, he asks the description of Godot from the messenger of Godot.

Analysing on symbolical levels, the mysterious character of Godot is attributed to the role of God who has promised to rescue man from every affliction and miserable situation, provided man turns to God. Further, the name of Godot is quite near to the name of God which could have been a result of the loss of memory of the humans. Since the characters are hoping aid and some sort of help which no one else can give them; therefore, it may be considered that either they have confused God with someone or they are waiting for God to intervene and help them out of the miserable plight they are in.

The relationship established between Godot and the tramps fulfills the need and presence of God in the overall scheme of the play. Though the wait for the help of God is always on, yet in "Waiting for Godot" the actual support never comes but always imminent and expected. This situation is also highlighted and contrasted by the relationships between the characters of Vladimir and Estragon; they are always quitting but never quit. They are always breaking off the relationship but they don't.

Character Analysis Pozzo

Pozzo appears on stage after the appearance of Lucky. They are tied together by a long rope; thus, their destinies are fixed together in the same way that Pozzo might be a mother figure, with the rope being the umbilical cord which ties the two together.

Everything about Pozzo resembles our image of the circus ringmaster. If the ringmaster is the chief person of the circus, then it is no wonder that Vladimir and Estragon first mistook him for Godot or God. Like a ringmaster, he arrives brandishing a whip, which is the trademark of the professional. In fact, we hear the cracking of Pozzo's whip before we actually see him. Also, a stool is often associated with an animal trainer, and Pozzo

constantly calls Lucky by animal terms or names. Basically, Pozzo commands and Lucky obeys.

In the first act, Pozzo is immediately seen in terms of this authoritarian figure. He lords over the others, and he is decisive, powerful, and confident. He gives the illusion that he knows exactly where he is going and exactly how to get there. He seems "on top" of every situation.

When he arrives on the scene and sees Vladimir and Estragon, he recognizes them as human, but as inferior beings; then he condescendingly acknowledges that there is a human likeness, even though the "likeness is an imperfect one." This image reinforces his authoritarian god-like stance: we are made in God's image but imperfectly so. Pozzo's superiority is also seen in the manner in which he eats the chicken, then casts the bones to Lucky with an air of complete omnipotence.

In contrast to the towering presence exhibited by Pozzo in Act I, a significant change occurs between the two acts. The rope is shortened, drawing Pozzo much closer to his antithesis, Lucky. Pozzo is now blind; he cannot find his way alone. He stumbles and falls. He cannot get along without help; he is pathetic. He can no longer command. Rather than driving Lucky as he did earlier, he is now pathetically dragged along by Lucky. From a position of omnipotence and strength and confidence, he has fallen and has become the complete fallen man who maintains that time is irrelevant and that man's existence is meaningless. Unlike the great blind prophets of' yore who could see everything, for Pozzo "the things of time are hidden from the blind." Ultimately, for Pozzo, man's existence is discomforting and futile, depressing, and gloomy and, most of all, brief and to no purpose. The gravedigger is the midwife of mankind: "They give birth astride the grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more."

Character Analysis Lucky

As noted above, Lucky is the obvious antithesis of Pozzo. At one point, Pozzo maintains that Lucky's entire existence is based upon pleasing him; that is, Lucky's enslavement is his meaning, and if he is ever freed, his life would cease to have any significance. Given Lucky's state of existence, his very name "Lucky" is ironic, especially since Vladimir observes that even "old dogs have more dignity."

All of Lucky's actions seem unpredictable. In Act I, when Estragon attempts to help him, Lucky becomes violent and kicks him on the leg. When he is later expected to dance, his movements are as ungraceful and alien to the concept of dance as one can possibly conceive. We have seldom encountered such ignorance; consequently, when he is expected to give a coherent speech, we are still surprised by his almost total incoherence. Lucky seems to be more animal than human, and his very existence in the drama is a parody of human existence. In Act II, when he arrives completely dumb, it is only a fitting extension of his condition in Act I, where his speech was virtually incomprehensible. Now he makes no attempt to utter any sound at all. Whatever part of man that Lucky represents, we can make the general observation that he, as man, is reduced to leading the blind, not by intellect, but by blind instinct.

Vladimir and Estragon Relationship

Vladimir and Estragon, the joint protagonists in Beckett’s Waiting for Godot are two tramps, voluntary exiles from all human contacts. A boy appears on the scene and addresses Vladimir as Mr. Albert; Estragon tells the audience that he is Adam. Later Vladimir and Estragon introduce themselves as Didi and Gogo respectively. In an Absurd drama such fantasy and mystification are quite natural.

“Vladimir and Estragon“, says Martin Esslin, “have complementary personalities.” They are the heroes or precisely antiheroes of the play, for unlike the heroes of the Greek or Shakespearean tragedies, they do not command our respect or admiration; at best they evoke our compassion. Yet they had their past.

“In the nineties”,’ says Vladimir, “hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it’s too late. They wouldn’t even let us up.”

When told by Vladimir that Estragon should have been a poet, he replies that he was a poet.

But later both of them were on the platform. They have lost their moorings, all local ties, their hearth and home. Their common platform is that they have no grass roots. Now that they have been thrown together and have a common cause, i.e. Waiting for Godot, they are extremely friendly in spite of occasional tiffs and misunderstanding. Estragon is timid and mentally feeble, and needs somebody to look after him. Vladimir becomes his guardian without pontifical solemnity.

Estragon dreams, for by dreaming he can withdraw from the alien and hostile world. His boots constantly pinch him, and he whines like a child. Once he had thrown himself into a river to put an end to his dreary existence, and Vladimir rescued him. He waits for God not so much for spiritual salvation as for some material benefit. Vladimir, however, is serious about salvation. He has only one mental weakness, his hat constantly pricks him. Estragon wants to forget his past as well as the stark reality. Vladimir faces the reality.

Both Vladimir and Estragon have to share the intolerable boredom of waiting. Vladimir is a widely read man. He knows Latin and has read the Old Testament as well as the New with avid care. Estragon does not seem to have read the Bible, and, therefore, does not know that what the four Evangelists have said about the redemption and damnation of the two thieves, crucified by the side of Christ on Mount Calvary. All that he knows of the Bible is from a lonely picture of the Holy Land. “All my life”, he continues, “I’ve compared myself to Christ”.

Here Estragon and Vladimir are on the same footing. They are equally ignorant and helpless, pitted against the inexorable and enigmatic Godot. It is here that Estragon and Godot represent the hopeless and helpless suffering humanity.

The two tramps have lost all sense of time. Waiting is what concerns them. They don’t know if Godot will come today or tomorrow. So they have to kill time. Pozzo philosophies that man has an inevitable passage from the womb to the tomb : “One day we were born, one day we shall die.” Vladimir does not philosophize. He chooses to live in the world of spirit, and asks: “Was I sleeping while others suffered ?”

Knowing full well that “Habit is a great deadner”. Vladimir wants to meet the challenge of time by having recourse to idle talks and harangues playfully abusing each other doing the tree, antics and exercises, playing at Pozzo and Lucky-all traditional pastimes. One activity is followed by another. Then the same activity is repeated. That also becomes dull and monotonous. They, then, stop talking and resort to thinking. They start talking again.

Vladimir suffers unbearable agony arising out of spiritual questionings. His ability to think is also a source of suffering. Hugh Walpole observes : “The world is a comedy to those who think, the world is a tragedy to those who feel.” But Vladimir gives the lie to this statement, and suffers intensely in spite of thinking. He has to suffer for being an intellectual.

Estragon, on the other hand, has a mind that is a clean slate. He does not tax his mind with

the memory of the past, of time and date. He does not care to remember of even what happened yesterday: “I’m not a historian”.

Vladimir and Estragon had their past, not an ignoble one. They were then respectable beings, not to be jettisoned from the fashionable society. But cruel life has taken its heavy toll. Both of them are vagrants. This is a bleak picture of regression. Their personalities have suffered disintegration. Himself a miserable man, Estragon has warm praise for Pozzo, the tyrant.

Vladimir, on the other hand, has warm sympathy for Lucky, who is treated like a dog. But both Estragon and Vladimir are inextricably tied to the place, Waiting for Godot. They have no choice, no freedom. It is here they become identified. “Yes, let’s go”, they say at the end of Act 1, and yet they donot move. At the end of Act II, they say, “yes, let’s go”, and yet they donot move. Godot will never come. They\ are in the twilight of their life with nothing to illuminate their souls.

In spite of their brief separation, Estragon and Vladimir meet again, Vladimir approaches Estragon :

“Come here till I embrace you”.

Estragon in a fit of tantrum replies: “Don’t touch me ! Don’t question me! Don’t speak to me! Stay with me!”

Occasionally there might have been a brief moment of love-hate relationship between the two, but it is love that triumphs. Desolation, doubt, fear and helplessness will persist till the end of their days. But the lamp of love between the two friends may dim, but not die.

Pozzo and Lucky Relationship

Pozzo and Lucky are on the stage for quite some time, but their contribution to the main theme is rather negligible. Usually a subplot or an under-plot has an integral part of the main plot. At times it re-iterates the idea of the main plot. The Gloucester episode in King Lear, for example, is the main plot in miniature and heightens and deepens the tragedy, and demonstrates that there is a commotion in the moral world. The Pozzo-Lucky episode serves no such purpose. As a matter of fact, even if this episode is removed, the structure and the theme of the play will remain unimpaired.

Vladimir and Estragon are tied with the invisible and unbreakable bond of friendship and camaraderie. Pozzo and Lucky are not friends. Their relation is that of a master and a slave. Pozzo is a power-mad master, who has Lucky tied with a rope. He ill treats him and abuses and manhandles him in season and out of season. He goes so far as to think of selling Lucky in the fair as a beast of burden. Lucky has to carry the luggage of Pozzo. To heighten the irony of the play he even carries the whip between his teeth which his master has to use from time to time for the chastisement of the slave, Pozzo eats chicken voraciously and throws the bones with no pith and marrow at Lucky. A trencherman, he eats and drinks and has no consideration for his slave, who plods his weary way hungry, thirsty and exhausted. Pozzo imagines that he is as powerful as Godot, and therefore, the arbiter of human destiny.

The Pozzo-Lucky episode has been introduced for several reasons. It is, as John Pilling says, a device of the ‘theatre of cruelty.’ It adds to the variety of the play. For without this episode, Vladimir and Estragon would have to indulge more in talks and platitudes, antics and exercises. The two tramps are bored and depressed and constantly say: “There is nothing to be done”, and “We are Waiting for Godot.”

The audience as well as the tramps find in the Pozzo-Lucky episode a welcome interlude, although it may not be sufficiently comical. The episode brings into sharp focus the relentless forces of existence. Vladimir and Estragon are not the only persons to suffer the arrows and slings of misfortune. They are all in an alien world, groping in the dark. They are all separated from the hostile world, where they can only abandon themselves the pessimism, ennui, despair, doubt, and fear.

The relation of Pozzo with Lucky shows the grim picture of what man has made of man. Dressed in a brief little authority, Pozzo looks upon Lucky as a pariah dog or an ass. He thinks of himself, sitting on the stool as a king seated on the throne. He does not owe any explanation for his misbehaviour with Lucky. Estragon wonders why even while at rest, Lucky does not put down his luggage. Pozzo flares up:

"A moment ago you were calling me sir, in fear and trembling. Now you're asking me questions."

Nemesis soon follows. Pozzo, the tyrant, becomes blind. He stumbles and falls, and has to be raised to his feet by Estragon and Vladimir. The two tramps are contrasted with Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo represents autocracy and tyranny. He is the symbol of the feudal lords, capitalists, and the 'Haves'. Lucky is the representative of the lowly and the lost, the waifs and wastlers, the offscourings the 'Have-nots.'

Estragon and Vladimir are poor tramps with no material resources. But they have their hearts in the right place. They feel for their fellowmen. When they watch human indignity they can at least show their sympathy and compassion. The relation between Pozzo and Lucky in the relation between the master and the slave, the relation between a heartless man and a beast of burden. The relation between Vladimir and Estragon is the relation between man and man, between two fellow-sufferers.

Pozzo and Lucky heighten the gloom of the play and contribute to its tragic effect and atmosphere. Pozzo always gives the airs of superiority and even vulgarity. Lucky has never a word of protest against his master's heartlessness. But this very man, who has been reduced to object slavery and beastliness, talks in an altogether different vein, when asked to 'think'. He strikes a note of gloom and despair as he says unequivocally that man lives in an alien world. God is not the symbol of love and goodness. He is an incarnation of 'apathia', 'athambia', and 'aphasia'. Man is not on his way to progress: he is harking back to the crude age of primitivism. Science and technology will spell disaster. Different from Lucky in all respects, Pozzo also indulge in philosophical platitudes:

"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 master and the slave both emphasize that life is a brief candle to be extinguished. Pozzo is a vivid illustration of what he himself has said. One proud and haughty, he becomes blind and is at the mercy of Lucky, who is now dumb. He presents a sad spectacle of man's impotence and helplessness. Once the symbol of the Establishment, he is now a heap of ruins. Once he seriously thought of killing Lucky. At the sight of Lucky's tears, he laughed derisively and said that even a dog had a sense of dignity. Estragon tries to console Lucky and wipe away his tears. Lucky for some unknown reason kicks him hard and stops weeping. It is now Estragon's turn to shed tears.

Pozzo is essentially an egoist, an almost Machiavellian character, who believes that the end

justifies the means. He says: “Do I look like a man who could be made to suffer?” Lucky had seen better days, when fortune smiled on him. In a sense he was the teacher of his master and taught him how to think and initiated him into the mysteries and ineffable charm of beauty, grace, truth of the first water. Pozzo learnt them only to forget.

Summary (1)

Vladimir and Estragon wait at the side of a road, near a tree, agreeing that there is "nothing to be done." Estragon struggles to take off one of his boots. Vladimir asks if Estragon has ever read the Bible. Estragon says all he remembers are some colored maps of the holy land. Vladimir tells Estragon about the two thieves crucified along with Jesus. One of the gospels says that one of the thieves was saved, but Vladimir wonders if this is true. Estragon wants to leave, but Vladimir reminds him that they have to wait here for Godot. Estragon and Vladimir debate whether they are in the right place and whether it is the right day for Godot to come. Estragon falls asleep and Vladimir immediately wakes him, saying he was lonely without him. Estragon starts to describe his dream, but Vladimir angrily stops him and tells him to keep his nightmares to himself.

Vladimir wonders what he and Estragon should do, and Estragon says they should continue to wait. While waiting, Estragon suggests they hang themselves on the tree. The two disagree over who should hang himself first, though, and Vladimir concludes that they should just wait for Godot. Estragon asks what Vladimir asked Godot for and Vladimir says that he made a vague sort of prayer. Estragon is hungry, and Vladimir offers him a carrot. All he can find in his pockets, though, are turnips. Finally, he finds a carrot and gives it to Estragon. Estragon asks if they are "tied" to Godot and Vladimir says that they are. The two are interrupted by a loud scream off-stage.

Pozzo and Lucky enter. Pozzo drives Lucky forward with a whip like a pack animal, with a rope tied around his neck. Lucky is forced to carry Pozzo's things. Estragon asks if this is Godot, but then Pozzo introduces himself. He jerks the rope that is around Lucky's neck and calls him "pig." Lucky brings him his stool and some food. Pozzo eats some chicken and Estragon begs him for the leftover bones. Pozzo gives him the bones. Vladimir is outraged at Pozzo's horrible treatment of Lucky and wants to leave. Pozzo tells him to stay, though, in case Godot should show up. Estragon asks why Lucky doesn't put down his bags. Pozzo says that Lucky has the right to put them down and be comfortable, so he must be carrying them because he wants to. He says that Lucky is trying to impress Pozzo so he won't get rid of him, because Pozzo has plenty of slaves. Pozzo says he plans to sell Lucky at a fair. Lucky begins to cry and Pozzo gives Estragon a handkerchief to bring to him. Estragon approaches Lucky and Lucky kicks him violently in the shin.

Pozzo then begins to cry, saying that he "can't bear it." Vladimir scolds Lucky for making his master cry. Pozzo collects himself and looks for his pipe, which he has misplaced. He makes a speech about night and twilight, then asks if there's anything he can do for Estragon and Vladimir, since they have been nice to him. He offers to make Lucky dance, recite, sing, or think for their entertainment. Lucky dances and his hat falls off. Pozzo says that Lucky needs his hat to think, so Vladimir places it back on Lucky's head and Lucky launches into a long, rambling monologue. Pozzo prepares to leave and says goodbye to Vladimir and Estragon, but doesn't move.

Pozzo and Lucky eventually leave, and Estragon wants to leave as well, but Vladimir tells him they need to stay and wait for Godot. A boy comes onstage, bearing a message from Godot. He says Godot will not come today, but will come the next day. He tells Vladimir that he works for Godot, minding his goats, and says that Godot is a good master. The boy leaves and Estragon and Vladimir are ready to leave for the night. They say they are going to leave,

but stay still. The first act ends.

The second act begins the next day, in the same location and at the same time. Vladimir enters and sings. Estragon enters and tells Vladimir that he was beaten the previous night for no reason. Vladimir and Estragon embrace, happy to see each other again, and Estragon asks what they should do. Vladimir tells him they should wait for Godot. Vladimir mentions Pozzo and Lucky, and Estragon doesn't remember who these people are. He also doesn't recognize the place where they are waiting from the day before. Vladimir says that he and Estragon picked grapes for the same man a long time ago in "the Macon country," but Estragon doesn't remember this, either.

After a long silence, Vladimir asks Estragon to talk about anything to fill the silence, but the two struggle to find something to talk about. Vladimir asks if Estragon really doesn't remember Lucky and Pozzo. Estragon remembers someone kicking him and remembers the chicken bones he got from Pozzo. Vladimir offers Estragon a radish or turnip, because he has no carrots. Estragon falls asleep but then wakes up startled. He begins to tell Vladimir about his dream but Vladimir interrupts him and tells him not to describe the dream. Estragon wants to leave, but Vladimir reminds him that they have to stay and wait for Godot. Vladimir notices Lucky's hat lying on the ground and tries it on. He and Estragon trade their hats and Lucky's hat back and forth, trying different ones on. Vladimir wants to "play at Pozzo and Lucky," and he and Estragon pretend to be the two characters.

Estragon leaves the stage for a moment and then returns and says that "they" are coming. He and Vladimir hold lookouts at either end of the stage. After insulting each other, they make up and embrace. Pozzo and Lucky enter. Pozzo is now blind, following closely behind Lucky. Lucky stops when he sees Vladimir and Estragon, and Pozzo bumps into him. They both fall to the ground and Pozzo cannot get up. Vladimir and Estragon consider trying to get something out of Pozzo for helping him up. Pozzo cries out for help and offers money in return for any assistance. Vladimir decides to help Pozzo up but falls over himself in the process. Estragon tries to help Vladimir up, but falls down in the process. None of the characters are able to get up for a while, but Estragon suddenly suggests that he and Vladimir try to stand up and they are able to get up easily.

Estragon again wants to leave, but Vladimir tells him to keep waiting. He suggests they help Pozzo to get up in the meantime. They stand Pozzo up, and he asks who they are, not remembering either of them from the previous day. Pozzo asks what time it is and Estragon thinks it's morning, while Vladimir is sure that it's evening. Vladimir asks when Pozzo went blind, and Pozzo says that "the blind have no notion of time." He asks Estragon to check on Lucky. Estragon goes over to Lucky and kicks him repeatedly. Pozzo shouts, "Up pig!" and yanks on Lucky's rope. The two leave the stage, as Estragon falls asleep. Vladimir wakes Estragon, saying he was lonely.

Just like the day before, a boy enters with a message from Godot, that he will not come this day but will certainly come the next. Vladimir asks the boy what Godot does and the boy says Godot does nothing. Vladimir asks the boy to tell Godot that he saw Vladimir. The boy leaves. Estragon wants to go far away, but Vladimir says they can't go far, as they have to come back here tomorrow and wait for Godot. Estragon suggests they hang themselves on the tree using his belt, but when they test the belt's strength by pulling on either end, it breaks. Vladimir and Estragon prepare to leave for the night. They say they are going to leave, but neither moves.

Summary (2)

Waiting for Godot is a play consisting of two acts, written by Samuel Beckett. The play opens

with two men sitting on a barren road beside a leafless tree. One can characterize them as tramps.

A while into the play, you realize that the world of this play has its own set of rules. In other words, you don't see anything happening there. Moreover, there is always uncertainty throughout and no one does anything significant.

Waiting for Godot summary will take us through the same in a comprehensive manner. We see that Vladimir and Estragon keep waiting for a man, Godot, every day. Godot possible refers to a diety.

Thus, both the men aren't sure whether they have met Godot. Moreover, they are not even certain if the place they are waiting for is correct. Further, they are not sure if it's the right day they are waiting on and if Godot will show up or not.

During their wait, Vladimir and Estragon keep passing their time by indulging in dull activities. For instance, they take off their boots and keep putting them back on. Further, you also hear insignificant conversations regarding turnips and carrots.

However, they do move on serious topics of suicide and the Bible. During their wait, two men arrive, Lucky and Pozzo. Lucky is the slave and Pozzo is the master. Even upon their arrival, all four of them do explicitly nothing.

After the departure of Lucky and Pozzo, Vladimir reveals he has met them before. It sounds strange as they meet as strangers when they arrive. Moreover, Estragon's memory is very weak so he does not remember much.

Next, in waiting for Godot summary, we see a boy arrives to deliver the tramps a message. He says that Godot will not come today but tomorrow. Again, Vladimir exclaims that the boy said the same thing earlier.

The two resume their talks about suicide and as night dawns, they decide to leave but do not. In Act two of waiting for Godot summary, we find the men again at the same place. They meet Lucky and Pozzo again, but this time Pozzo is blind and Lucky cannot speak.

Once again, the four men spend time and do nothing. Moreover, the boy arrives again to deliver the same message of Godot not coming today either. After he leaves, they decide to commit suicide but then resolve to leave.

Finally, nighttime arrives and they do not have to wait for Godot anymore. Nonetheless, neither of them move and the play ends. Thus, leaving the possibility that the same thing keeps repeating itself.

Conclusion

Waiting for Godot summary explores the themes of absurdity, nihilism as well as friendship. We also learn about human nature through this play that holds on to hope even when it seems meaningless.

Summary (3)

Act I

The setting is in the evening on a country road with a single tree present. Estragon is trying to pull off his boot, but without success. Vladimir enters and greets Estragon, who informs

him that he has spent the night in a ditch where he was beaten. With supreme effort Estragon succeeds in pulling off his boot. He then looks inside it to see if there is anything there while Vladimir does the same with his hat.

Vladimir mentions the two thieves who were crucified next to Christ. He asks Estragon if he knows the Gospels. Estragon gives a short description of the maps of the Holy Land at which point Vladimir tells him he should have been a poet. Estragon points to his tattered clothes and says he was. Vladimir continues with his narrative about the two thieves in order to pass the time.

Estragon wants to leave but Vladimir forces him to stay because they are both waiting for Godot to arrive. Neither of the two bums knows when Godot will appear, or even if they are at the right place. Later it is revealed that they do not even know what they originally asked Godot for.

Estragon gets bored of waiting and suggests that they pass the time by hanging themselves from the tree. They both like the idea but cannot decide who should go first. They are afraid that if one of them dies the other might be left alone. In the end they decide it is safer to wait until Godot arrives.

Estragon asks Vladimir whether they still have rights. Vladimir indicates that they got rid of them. He then fears that he hears something, but it turns out to be imaginary noises. Vladimir soon gives Estragon a carrot to eat.

Pozzo and Lucky arrive. Lucky has a rope tied around his neck and is carrying a stool, a basket, a bag and a greatcoat. Pozzo carries a whip which he uses to control Lucky. Estragon immediately confuses Pozzo with Godot which gets Pozzo upset.

Pozzo spends several minutes ordering Lucky around. Lucky is completely silent and obeys like a machine. Pozzo has Lucky put down the stool and open the basket of food which contains chicken. Pozzo then eats the chicken and throws away the bones. Lucky stands in a stooped posture holding the bags after each command has been completed and appears to be falling asleep.

Estragon and Vladimir go to inspect Lucky who intrigues them. They ask why he never puts his bags down. Pozzo will not tell them, so Estragon proceeds to ask if he can have the chicken bones that Pozzo has been throwing away. Pozzo tells him that they technically belong to Lucky. When they ask Lucky if he wants them, he does not reply, so Estragon is given the bones.

Pozzo eventually tells them why Lucky hold the bags the entire time. He thinks it is because Lucky is afraid of being given away. While Pozzo tells them why Lucky continues to carry his bags, Lucky starts to weep. Estragon goes to wipe away the tears but receives a terrible kick in the shin.

Pozzo then tells them that he and Lucky have been together nearly sixty years. Vladimir is appalled at the treatment of Lucky who appears to be such a faithful servant. Pozzo explains that he cannot bear it any longer because Lucky is such a burden. Later Vladimir yells at Lucky that it is appalling the way he treats such a good master.

Pozzo then gives an oratory about the night sky. He asks them how it was and they tell him it was quite a good speech. Pozzo is ecstatic at the encouragement and offers to do something for them. Estragon immediately asks for ten francs but Vladimir tells him to be silent. Pozzo

offers to have Lucky dance and then think for them.

Lucky dances for them and when asked for an encore repeats the entire dance step for step. Estragon is unimpressed but almost falls trying to imitate it. They then make Lucky think. What follows is an outpouring of religious and political doctrine which always starts ideas but never brings them to completion. The three men finally wrestle Lucky to the ground and yank off his hat at which point he stops speaking. His last word is, "unfinished."

The men then spend some effort trying to get Lucky to wake up again. He finally reawakens when the bags are placed in his hand. Pozzo gets up to leave and he and Lucky depart the scene. Vladimir and Estragon return to their seats and continue waiting for Godot.

A young boy arrives having been sent by Mr. Godot. Estragon is outraged that it took him so long to arrive and scares him. Vladimir cut him off and asks the boy if he remembers him. The boy says this is his first time coming to meet them and that Mr. Godot will not be able to come today but perhaps tomorrow. The boy is sent away with the instructions to tell Mr. Godot that he has seen them. Both Estragon and Vladimir discuss past events and then decide to depart for the night. Neither of them moves from his seat.

Act II

The setting is the next day at the same time. Estragon's boots and Lucky's hat are still on the stage. Vladimir enters and starts to sing until Estragon shows up barefoot. Estragon is upset that Vladimir was singing and happy even though he was not there. Both admit that they feel better when alone but convince themselves they are happy when together. They are still waiting for Godot.

Estragon and Vladimir poetically talk about "all the dead voices" they hear. They are haunted by voices in the sounds of nature, especially of the leaves rustling. Vladimir shouts at Estragon to help him not hear the voices anymore. Estragon tries and finally decides that they should ask each other questions. They manage to talk for a short while.

Estragon has forgotten everything that took place the day before. He has forgotten all about Pozzo and Lucky as well as the fact that he wanted to hang himself from the tree. He cannot remember his boots and thinks they must be someone else's. For some reason they fit him now when he tries them on. The tree has sprouted leaves since the night before and Estragon comments that it must be spring. But when Vladimir looks at Estragon's shin, it is still pussy and bleeding from where Lucky kicked him.

Soon they are done talking and try to find another topic for discussion. Vladimir finds Lucky's hat and tries it on. He and Estragon spend a while trading hats until Vladimir throws his own hat on the ground and asks how he looks. They then decide to play at being Pozzo and Lucky, but to no avail. Estragon leaves only to immediately return panting. He says that they are coming. Vladimir thinks that it must be Godot who is coming to save them. He then becomes afraid and tries to hide Estragon behind the tree, which is too small to hide him.

The conversation then degenerates into abusive phrases. Estragon says, "That's the idea, let's abuse each other." They continue to hurl insults at one another until Estragon calls Vladimir a critic. They embrace and continue waiting.

Pozzo and Lucky enter but this time Pozzo is blind and Lucky is mute. Lucky stops when he sees the two men. Pozzo crashes into him and they both fall helplessly in a heap on the ground. Vladimir is overjoyed that reinforcements have arrived to help with the waiting. Estragon again thinks that Godot has arrived.

Vladimir and Estragon discuss the merits of helping Pozzo get off the ground where he has fallen. When Vladimir asks how many other men spend their time in waiting, Estragon replies that it is billions. Pozzo in desperation offers to pay for help by offering a hundred francs. Estragon says that it is not enough. Vladimir does not want to pick up Pozzo because then he and Estragon would be alone again. Finally he goes over and tries to pick him up but is unable to. Estragon decides to leave but decides to stay when Vladimir convinces him to help first and then leave.

While trying to help Pozzo, both Vladimir and Estragon fall and cannot get up. When Pozzo talks again Vladimir kicks him violently to make him shut up. Vladimir and Estragon finally get up, and Pozzo resumes calling for help. They go and help him up. Pozzo asks who they are and what time it is. They cannot answer his questions.

Estragon goes to wake up Lucky. He kicks him and starts hurling abuses until he again hurts his foot. Estragon sits back down and tries to take off his boot. Vladimir tells Pozzo his friend is hurt.

Vladimir then asks Pozzo to make Lucky dance or think for them again. Pozzo tells him that Lucky is mute. When Vladimir asks since when, Pozzo gets into a rage. He tells them to stop harassing him with their time questions since he has no notion of it. He then helps Lucky up and they leave.

Vladimir reflects upon the fact that there is no truth and that by tomorrow he will know nothing of what has just passed. There is no way of confirming his memories since Estragon always forgets everything that happens to him.

The boy arrives again but does not remember meeting Estragon or Vladimir. He tells them it is his first time coming to meet them. The conversation is identical in that Mr. Godot will once again not be able to come but will be sure to arrive tomorrow. Vladimir demands that the boy be sure to remember that he saw him. Vladimir yells, "You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me to-morrow that you never saw me!"

The two bums decide to leave but cannot go far since they need to wait for Godot. They look at the tree and contemplate hanging themselves. Estragon takes off his belt but it breaks when they pull on it. His trousers fall down. Vladimir says that they will hang themselves tomorrow unless Godot comes to save them. He tells Estragon to put on his trousers. They decide to leave but again do not move.

Summary (4)

Act I

Setting

The setting for the act 1 is, as described by the playwright, a road in the countryside, by the side of which a tree is growing. The tree is short and leafless. The tramps identify it differently as a shrub or a willow-tree. There is a mound nearby, on which a tramp, Estragon, is sitting as the play opens.

Two Friends Meet

Estragon is sitting on a low mound and trying to take off his boots. After trying to pull them off with both his hands he becomes exhausted and gives up the effort. After resting for a while he resumes but has to give up once again, exclaiming : “Nothing to be done.” In the meanwhile, Vladimir enters, walking with short, still steps. Taking Estragon’s words in a

larger sense, he expresses his agreement with them. Both the tramps express happiness at meeting each other again and voice the fear that they thought they had lost each other for good. In answer to Vladimir's question, Estragon mentions that he spent the last night in a ditch, and that some people beat him up as usual. Vladimir takes credit for having stood his friend in good stead all these years. However, he admits that their struggle has been of no use. They ought to have jumped off Eiffel Tower in the nineties when they were presentable enough to be allowed up there. Estragon does not take much interest in his friend's talk and tells him rather irritably to help him in the job of taking off his boots.

The Boot and the Hat

Estragon becomes desperate when his efforts to take off his boots prove futile. He almost tears them. He again asks his friend to help him, reminding him at the same time to button up his fly. In the meanwhile, Vladimir takes off his hat, peers inside it and then puts it on again. Estragon makes one mighty effort and succeeds in pulling off one boot. He looks inside it, shakes it and turns it upside down, expecting something to fall out of it but nothing happens. Vladimir repeats the action about his hat. Estragon says he will air his foot a bit before putting on the boot again. The foot has become swollen visibly. Vladimir repeats his earlier action with the hat once more.

Biblical Talk

Vladimir asks Estragon if he ever read the Bible. The latter answers that he read the Gospels and remembers the maps of the Holy Land. They showed the Dead Sea as pale blue and the very sight made him feel thirsty, Vladimir alludes to the Biblical story about the two thieves. These were to be crucified at the same time as Christ. One of the two was saved while the other was damned. It seems strange to Vladimir that of the four Gospels which describe the crucifixion only one mentions that one of the thieves was saved. Two of the Gospels do not mention any thieves and the third states that both the thieves were damned because they abused Christ. It is curious that people believe the one dissenting account as if it were the only version in existence.

The Situation

Estragon is sick of the place and wants to leave. Vladimir reminds him that they cannot leave for they are waiting for Godot. Estragon asks him if he is sure that they were asked to wait at this place. Vladimir says that they were to wait by the side of the tree, and points out that it is the only tree near about. He thinks the tree is a willow, but Estragon insists that it is only a bush. Vladimir resents the insinuation that they are waiting at the wrong place. Estragon observes that Godot ought to have come, but Vladimir points out that he did not say for certain that he would come.

If he did not come that day, he might come the next day, or the day after that. Estragon complains that they came there the previous day also. Vladimir contradicts him, though he cannot answer his question as to what they did on the previous day. Estragon then doubts whether they were asked to wait this particular evening. Vladimir answers, somewhat doubtfully, that Godot had mentioned Saturday. Estragon questions whether the day really is a Saturday. Estragon then requests his friend to stop talking for a minute.

Thoughts About Suicide

The two tramps make desperate efforts to pass the time by telling anecdotes to each other. Estragon becomes irritated and the two almost have a fight. At last they make up and embrace. Estragon proposes that they should hang themselves. Vladimir appreciates this mode of suicide because, he says, it would give them sexual gratification. Estragon feels excited to hear this. Vladimir alludes to the legend about the mandrake, a plant which is popularly believed to grow under the gallows. Estragon suggests that they should hang

themselves immediately. Vladimir says that the difficulty would be about the place from where they should hang. He thinks the tree before them is not strong enough. Estragon makes a suggestion that Vladimir should be the first to hang from the bough because he is heavy If the bough can sustain his weight it would certainly bear Estragon's weight because he is lighter. Estragon puts an end to the topic by saying that it would be better and safer for them not to do anything at all.

Talking About Godot

They fall to talking about Godot once again. Estragon asks his friend what it was that they had asked Godot to do for them. Vladimir answers that they didn't ask anything very definite, they had just made a sort of prayer to him. Godot had given no definite reply; he had said he would see. He could not promise anything to them straightaway because he would have to consult his family, his friends, his agents, his correspondents, his books and his bank account before taking a decision. They are absolutely at Godot's mercy. For a moment it appears to them that there are sounds suggestive of the approach of Godot, but finally they dismiss it as the sound of the wind in the reeds, Estragon is hungry. Vladimir gives him a carrot to eat. Just then they hear a terrible cry and run away to hide in safety from the approaching danger.

Lucky and Pozzo

Two newcomers enter the scene. One of them is Pozzo who drives the Other Named. Lucky, by means of a rope tied round his neck. Pozzo bears a whip in his hand. Lucky is carrying a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a great coat. Seeing the tramps Pozzo gives a sudden jerk to the rope and Lucky falls to the ground along with his burden. The tramps feel like helping Lucky to his feet but are restrained both by their own apprehension and by Pozzo's waming that Lucky is vicious. Estragon is sure that Pozzo is Godot. They admit that they are waiting for Godot but Estragon says that he would not be able to recognise him if he saw him. Pozzo tells them that the place where they are waiting is his land. Pozzo gives some nasty pulls to the rope, telling the tramps that he is trying to wake up his servant who drops off to sleep whenever he gets the chance. He orders Lucky to hand him various things and Lucky obeys. He takes out a piece of chicken and a bottle of wine from the picnic basket and has a meal. The tramps watch Lucky who seems to sway into sleep while still on his feet and then wake up, every few moments. They notice that there is a running sore round Lucky's neck. They want to speak to Lucky but Pozzo asks them to leave him alone. Estragon begs of Pozzo to let him have the chicken bones which he has thrown away. Pozzo says he has no objection provided Lucky doesn't want them. Pozzo asks Lucky whether he wants the bones but the latter does not reply. Estragon is told that the bones are his and he greedily snatches at them and begins to gnaw them. Vladimir is unable to repress his dislike of Pozzo's treatment of Lucky and says aloud that it is a disgrace to treat another man thus. Estragon, still gnawing at the bones, expresses agreement with his friend. Then he puts the bones in his pocket.

Lucky's Bags

Estragon is puzzled as to why Lucky carries the bags all the while. He could make himself comfortable by placing the bags on the ground. After a lot of fuss, Pozzo answers the question. Lucky has the right to make himself comfortable; if he doesn't do so, it must be because he does not want to Pozzo believes that Lucky's action is meant to please him, so that he is persuaded to keep Lucky. Vladimir asks Pozzo again and again if he wants to get rid of Lucky. At last he answers that he is going to sell him at the fair, though it would be a far better thing to kill him. Hearing this, Lucky weeps. Pozzo gives Estragon his handkerchief and asks him to wipe away Lucky's tears since he feels so much pity for him. Estragon hesitates. Vladimir tries to snatch the handkerchief out of his hand, saying that he will wipe Lucky's tears, Estragon refuses to give him the handkerchief. At last, he approaches Lucky to

wipe his tears but Lucky kicks him violently in the shins. Estragon howls with pain.

Entertainment

Pozzo speaks some high-sounding words and then wants to know the tramps' opinion of his performance. They praise him warmly. He is gratified and wants to know if there is anything he can do for them in return. Estragon says that they would welcome even a few small coins, but Vladimir protests that they are not beggars. Pozzo offers them several choices they can either have Lucky dance for them, sing for them, recite to them or think before them. Estragon suggests that Lucky should first dance and then think. Lucky dances mirthlessly and Pozzo explains that he calls the movement the dance of the net. Lucky is then asked to think. Giving a jerk to the rope, after the hat has been put on his head, Pozzo asks the slave to think. Lucky begins to speak as though he is midway in a speech. A little later all the three jump on Lucky, the tramps as though to save him from misery, and Pozzo because he is disgusted with Lucky's abominable thinking. After this Lucky shouts out his words. He re-duplicates several of the words, e.g. he says 'Acacacacademy' instead of Academy. He repeats some of the sentences also. As he gets stuck on the word "unfinished'. Pozzo instructs the tramps to remove his hat. Vladimir does so. The result is that Lucky's thinking is terminated. Lucky falls. Pozzo tramples on his hat. Lucky is unable to be on his feet and falls down again and again. Pozzo asserts that he is doing so on purpose. Pozzo requests the tramps to help him in raising Lucky to his feet.

They do so once but he falls down as soon as they discontinue supporting him. At Pozzo's request they raise him and hold him up once again. Pozzo puts one of the bags in Lucky's hand but the latter drops it immediately. After several efforts, Lucky at last regains his normal self and clutches the handle of the bag tightly. The tramps withdraw their support. Lucky totters briefly but does not fall. Pozzo discovers that he has lost his watch, Pozzo and Lucky exit, the former pulling at the rope and cracking the whip at the latter.

Waiting Resumed

When Lucky and Pozzo have left, Vladimir remarks that their arrival helped them pass the time. Now they must use their own devices to pass the time. Estragon suggests that they make a little conversation. They make a tentative start, Vladimir saying that the two people they have met have changed a great deal. In the meanwhile a boy comes and asks for Mr. Albert. Vladimir asks him to approach and tell them what he wants. The boy is timid and holds back, at which Estragon orders him to approach. He announces that he has a message from Mr. Godot. Estragon demands why the boy is so late. He pleads that he was afraid of the others. He tells them that he has been there a good while. He admits that he was afraid of Pozzo's whip. Vladimir seems to have met the boy before. He suggests that the boy was there the previous day also, but he denies this. The message is that Mr. Godot would not come this evening but he would surely come tomorrow. They try to get him to say more but fail.

End of the Evening

When the tramps release the boy he goes away running. All at once it is night, with a pale moon in the sky. Estragon suggests that they might keep on waiting for Godot at the same place, but Vladimir reminds him that they must take cover for the night. Estragon looks at the tree wistfully and says it is a pity they do not have a piece of rope with which they could hang themselves. He asks his friend to remind him to bring a piece of rope the next day. Estragon mentions how he fell into the river once and Vladimir fished him out. Estragon is bitter and says that it would have been better if each one of them had been left alone. Vladimir answers that they could still part if Estragon wishes so, but he replies that it is no longer worthwhile. They decide that they must go now, but they are not shown to be moving as the curtain comes down.

Act II

The Setting

The place is described by a stage direction to be the same as in Act I. The time also is the same but one whole day has passed. Estragon left his boots back in Act I, saying that they might be useful to somebody with smaller feet. Now the boots are seen to lie in the centre of the stage. Lucky's hat is also there. The tree of the First Act can be seen but it has now four or five leaves growing on it. This time it is Vladimir who enters first. He sings to himself a song about a dog who stole a crust of bread and was beaten to death by the cook.

The Meeting

Estragon enters soon afterwards. Estragon affects to be disgusted to see Vladimir again, but after a while they are friendly to each other. They embrace and clap each other on the back. At the end of the embrace Estragon almost falls down. He says that it hurt him to see his friend singing. He thought he was expressing his happiness at having got rid of Estragon, Vladimir admits that he did feel happy in his absence but says that it is all a matter of one's moods. Vladimir says that Estragon always comes back to him because he cannot defend himself. He claims that he would have defended Estragon against the men who beat him last night if he had been with him. Estragon replies that he could not have done so because there were ten of them. Vladimir remains insistent, observing that he could have stopped Estragon from doing whatever it was that offended the people who beat him. Estragon pleads that he was not doing anything, They end by admitting that they are both happy to be together again. But the problem is-what shall they now do now that they are happy. The answer to this is the same as before they must wait for Godot.

Talking About Godot

They fall to talking about Godot once again. Estragon wonders what they would do if once again Godot fails to turn up. Vladimir says that they must not worry about it before the time comes. He feels that things have changed since yesterday. One of the changes he can even pinpoint-the tree has a few leaves growing from it now, Estragon seems to have forgotten much of what happened yesterday and Vladimir makes a patient and painful effort to remind him. Once again their problem is that of passing the time. They make brave efforts at conversation. The conversation halts every few seconds. Now and then they pause to praise their own efforts at conversation. Estragon thinks that it is only another of Vladimir's nightmares that they were there the previous evening. Vladimir points to Estragon's boots which are still lying there as a triumphant evidence of what he has said. Estragon remembers that he abandoned his boots because they were hurting him. However, after examining the boots Estragon exclaims that they are not his. Vladimir is amazed to hear this Estragon points out that the boots are a different colour. Moreover they are a different size. They agree that it would be a good relaxation as well as recreation for Estragon to try on the strange boots. He is agreeably surprised to find that the boots fit him; or rather that they are a little too big. Estragon goes to sleep, while Vladimir sings a sort of lullaby.

Lucky's Hat

Vladimir notices Lucky's hat and pick it up. This gives him the idea that they might play at being Lucky and Pozzo. Vladimir says he will play Lucky while Estragon must pretend to be Pozzo. He asks Estragon to curse him and the latter does so in the manner of Pozzo. His first attempts, however, are rather feeble. For a while Vladimir pretends to play both parts simultaneously. Estragon disappears briefly, only to come back running into his friend's arms. He says they are coming to beat him. Vladimir prefers to think that it is Godot who is coming and that they would now be saved. It occurs to them that they could pass the time by abusing each other, They call each other many fancy bad names, including curate and critic. Their next move is to inake up. They do this in a rather ostentatious manner. Then they

do some exercises.

Lucky and Pozzo Again

Lucky and Pozzo enter the stage again. They have changed a great deal. Lucky is dumb now and Pozzo has gone blind. Estragon once again mistakes him for Godot. Pozzo seems to be in trouble and cries for help. Estragon would do so only against a heavy price. Pozzo finally offers them two hundred francs. In their efforts to help Pozzo on his feet, the tramps also fall down and can get up only with a great deal of difficulty. They pretend that Pozzo and Lucky are Abel and Cain. Pozzo seems to have forgotten what took place there the previous day. At last, Lucky manages to get up and picks up his burdens again. Pozzo narrates that he suddenly went blind one day and that Lucky became suddenly dumb in the same fashion

The Messenger-Boy

Once again the messenger-boy arrives. He claims, however that it was not he who brought the message the previous day The tramps conclude that it must have been his brother of whom the boy had spoken. The message is the same as the one brought yesterday. Godot is sorry that he cannot come that evening but he will surely come the next day. The tramps realize that the evening's wait is now over and that they must return to do the same the next day.

The Attempted Hanging

Estragon proposes that now they must hang themselves. But there is no rope with which they can do so. Estragon says that they can use the string with which he keeps his trousers in place. As he removes the string the trousers fall to his knees. Vladimir says that they must test the strength of the cord. They pull at it from opposite sides. The cord breaks into two. It is useless for hanging purposes now. The tramps must go away for the night. They must come and wait for Godot again. As Estragon says, 'Let's go', the curtain comes down. The two tramps have not moved from their place.

Plot Construction

Introduction

1. Estragon and Vladimir arrive to wait for Godot.

Rising Action

2. Pozzo stops to talk to Vladimir and Estragon.
3. Pozzo has Lucky dance and think.
4. A boy arrives with a message: Godot will not come tonight.
5. Vladimir and Estragon arrive again to wait for Godot.
6. Pozzo and Lucky fall down as they arrive.

Climax

7. Vladimir and Estragon help Pozzo get up.

Falling Action

8. A boy arrives with a message: Godot will not come tonight.

Resolution

9. Vladimir and Estragon decide to wait for Godot tomorrow.

Analysis

Although very existentialist in its characterizations, Waiting for Godot is primarily about

hope. The play revolves around Vladimir and Estragon and their pitiful wait for hope to arrive. At various times during the play, hope is constructed as a form of salvation, in the personages of Pozzo and Lucky, or even as death. The subject of the play quickly becomes an example of how to pass the time in a situation which offers no hope. Thus the theme of the play is set by the beginning:

Estragon: Nothing to be done.
Vladimir: I'm beginning to come round to that opinion.

Although the phrase is used in connection to Estragon's boots here, it is also later used by Vladimir with respect to his hat. Essentially it describes the hopelessness of their lives.

A direct result of this hopelessness is the daily struggle to pass the time. Thus, most of the play is dedicated to devising games which will help them pass the time. This mutual desire also addresses the question of why they stay together. Both Vladimir and Estragon admit to being happier when apart. One of the main reasons that they continue their relationship is that they need one another to pass the time. After Pozzo and Lucky leave for the first time they comment:

V: That passed the time.
E: It would have passed in any case.
And later when Estragon finds his boots again:
V: What about trying them.
E: I've tried everything.
V: No, I mean the boots.
E: Would that be a good thing?
V: It'd pass the time. I assure you, it'd be an occupation.

Since passing the time is their mutual occupation, Estragon struggles to find games to help them accomplish their goal. Thus they engage in insulting one another and in asking each other questions.

The difficulty for Beckett of keeping a dialogue running for so long is overcome by making his characters forget everything. Estragon cannot remember anything past what was said immediately prior to his lines. Vladimir, although possessing a better memory, distrusts what he remembers. And since Vladimir cannot rely on Estragon to remind him of things, he too exists in a state of forgetfulness.

Another second reason for why they are together arises from the existentialism of their forgetfulness. Since Estragon cannot remember anything, he needs Vladimir to tell him his history. It is as if Vladimir is establishing Estragon's identity by remembering for him. Estragon also serves as a reminder for Vladimir of all the things they have done together. Thus both men serve to remind the other man of his very existence. This is necessary since no one else in the play ever remembers them:

Vladimir: We met yesterday. (Silence) Do you not remember?

Pozzo: I don't remember having met anyone yesterday. But to-morrow I won't remember having met anyone to-day. So don't count on me to enlighten you.

Later on the same thing happens with the boy who claims to have never seen them before. This lack of reassurance about their very existence makes it all the more necessary that they remember each other.

Estragon and Vladimir are not only talking to pass the time, but also to avoid the voices that arise out of the silence. Beckett's heroes in other works are also constantly assailed by voices which arise out of the silence, so this is a continuation of a theme the author uses frequently:

E: In the meantime let's try and converse calmly, since we're incapable of keeping silent.
V: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
E: It's so we won't think.
V: We have that excuse.
E: It's so we won't hear.
V: We have our reasons.
E: All the dead voices.
V: They make a noise like wings.
E: Like leaves.
V: Like sand.
E: Like leaves.
Silence.
V: They all speak at once.
E: Each one to itself.
Silence.
V: What do they say.
E: They talk about their lives.
V: To have lived is not enough for them.
E: They have to talk about it.
V: To be dead is not enough for them.
E: It is not sufficient.
Silence.
V: They make a noise like feathers.
E: Like leaves.
V: Like ashes.
E: Like leaves.
Long silence.
V: Say something!

One of the questions which must be answered is why the bums are suffering in the first place. This can only be answered through the concept of original sin. To be born is to be a sinner, and thus man is condemned to suffer. The only way to escape the suffering is to repent or to die. Thus Vladimir recalls the thieves crucified with Christ in the first act:

V: One of the thieves was saved. It's a reasonable percentage. (Pause.) Gogo.
E: What?
V: Suppose we repented.
E: Repented what?
V: Oh . . . (He reflects.) We wouldn't have to go into the details.
E: Our being born?

Failing to repent, they sit and wait for Godot to come and save them. In the meantime they contemplate suicide as another way of escaping their hopelessness. Estragon wants them to hang themselves from the tree, but both he and Vladimir find it would be too risky. This apathy, which is a result of their age, leads them to remember a time when Estragon almost succeeded in killing himself:

E: Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhone?
V: We were grape harvesting.
E: You fished me out.
V: That's all dead and buried.
E: My clothes dried in the sun.
V: There's no good harking back on that. Come on.

Beckett is believed to have said that the name Godot comes from the French "godillot" meaning a military boot. Beckett fought in the war and so spending long periods of time waiting for messages to arrive would have been commonplace for him. The more common interpretation that it might mean "God" is almost certainly wrong. Beckett apparently stated that if he had meant "God," he would have written "God".

The concept of the passage of time leads to a general irony. Each minute spent waiting brings death one step closer to the characters and makes the arrival of Godot less likely. The passage of time is evidenced by the tree which has grown leaves, possibly indicating a change of seasons. Pozzo and Lucky are also transformed by time since Pozzo goes blind and Lucky mute.

There are numerous interpretation of Waiting for Godot and a few are described here:

Religious interpretations posit Vladimir and Estragon as humanity waiting for the elusive return of a savior. An extension of this makes Pozzo into the Pope and Lucky into the faithful. The faithful are then viewed as a cipher of God cut short by human intolerance. The twisted tree can alternatively represent either the tree of death, the tree of life, the tree of Judas or the tree of knowledge.

Political interpretations also abound. Some reviewers hold that the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is that of a capitalist to his labor. This Marxist interpretation is understandable given that in the second act Pozzo is blind to what is happening around him and Lucky is mute to protest his treatment. The play has also been understood as an allegory for Franco-German relations.

An interesting interpretation argues that Lucky receives his name because he is lucky in the context of the play. Since most of the play is spent trying to find things to do to pass the time, Lucky is lucky because his actions are determined absolutely by Pozzo. Pozzo on the other hand is unlucky because he not only needs to pass his own time but must find things for Lucky to do.

Themes

Waiting for Godot is a complex and puzzling play. It offers a variety of meanings and interpretations. Its essential is not quite clear, with the result that different critics have approached it differently and interpreted it in various ways. But the play has a widespread appeal, and each set of audiences interpreted it in its own manner. It found favour not only with intellectuals but also with average theatre-goers. There is something in the play for almost everybody.

As a Picture of Humanity at Large

The two tramps in the play, according one interpretation, are wo parts of a person or of a community seen subjectively, with Vladimir representing the more spiritual part and Estragon the animal. Similarly, 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 and Vladimir, their fears, their hopes, their hatreds, and their loves; but we view Pozzo and Lucky through the eyes of the amps and therefore see in them only the social surface of life. Thus, the 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 pretenses between themselves and despair. Godot symbolizes 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 no 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. Thus, the play may be regarded as a picture of human attempts to fiddle through life.

As 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 i fable about a kind of life that has no longer any point. The playwright 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 antiheroes, are merely alive, but no longer living 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 living. The majority of people in today's world do not after all give up living despite life's meaninglessness and pointlessness. The people actually do not wait for anything. So, Godot is nothing but a name for the fact that the life which goes on pointlessly is wrongly interpreted to mean waiting for something. According to this interpretation, the play is a picture of the pointlessness of human life.

The Ordeal of Waiting, Ignorance and Impotence, Boredom

A third interpretation regards the play as a presentation of the ordeal of waiting. ignorance, impotence, boredom. It is more convincing than the other interpretations given above. People in the world go on waiting for something or the other. They 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, or the birth of a child, or for the riches, and so on. Vladimir and Estragon by their waiting indefinitely and without any tangible result thus symbolize the millions of human beings who wait for something or the 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 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 a situation which they find themselves in. 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. Vladimír and Estragon have travelled far towards total nihilism, though they have not fully achieved it. They are in a place in a mental state in which nothing happens and time stands still. If Godot comes, a new fact 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 Getting through Life

Yet another interpretation says that the problem in Beckett's plays is how do you get through life? Waiting for Godot also deals with the problem of how to get through life. The answer which Beckett gives is that we get through life by force of habit. By going on in spite of boredom and pain, by talking, by not listening to the "silence", absurdity 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, the play is about nothing, and the playwright comes to 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 Meaninglessness of Life

The play, according to some scholars, is about the meaninglessness of life. The way the two tramps pass time is indicative of the boredom and triviality of human activities, the lack of significance of life and the constant suffering which existence is. It also brings out the hollowness and insincerity of most social intercourse. Estragon and Vladimir question each other, contradict each other, abuse each other, become reconciled to each other without any serious meaning of intention. All these devices are employed to one end-to the end of making their waiting for Godot less unbearable. Estragon takes off his boots. gropes inside them, and shakes them out expecting something to fall out of them but nothing happens. Vladimir does the same with his hat, with the same result. The very essence of boredom and triviality is concentrated in the scene in which Estragon and Vladimir repeatedly put on and take off the three hats, their own and Lucky's. It is this utter lack of meaning which drives Estragon and Vladimir to thoughts of suicide, but the world of this play is one which no significant action is permitted therefore even suicide is n within their reach. In addition to trivial actions, the only others that are permitted are cruel ones, like that of beating Pozzo and Lucky.

Suffering

One of the themes of Waiting for Godot is that suffering is an inseparable part of the human condition. Vladimir and Estragon suffer intensely and incessantly. Vladimir cannot even laugh without suffering excruciating pain. Estragon's feet make life a long torture for him They have nowhere to rest their head. On top of this, Estragon is beaten daily by some gang of ruffians, without his providing them any sort of provocation. They have nothing to cat either, except carrots. turnips and radishes. Vladimir pretends to like this much as he eats it, but Estragon is frank enough to confess that it becomes more and more unbearable as he takes it. They have nothing to look back on except the days when they did not look so shabby that they could go up Eiffel Tower and jump to their deaths from there. Even those days an were far from happy otherwise, for Estragon even then tried putting end to his life by jumping into the Rhine but Vladimir fished him out. Estragon wistfully recollects that he once planned to go to the Holy Land for his honeymoon because he was enchanted by the colour of the Dead Sea as shown in maps of the Holy Land in an edition of the Bible. The ordeal of waiting for Godot, and the desperate devices which must be employed to make time pass, are now nerve-racking. Even the lives of Pozzo and Lucky are full of suffering. The one gets blind the other dumb. Otherwise too both are tied to each other. Lucky and Pozzo also illustrate the theme of exploitation.

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

Among the depressing interpretations of the play is yet another. According to this interpretation, the play represents a disintegrating 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 Theme 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 organizers 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.

Conclusion

Thus the play is very rich in meanings and themes. Besides the above themes, the playwright has also incorporated some minor themes as the inadequacy of human language as a means of communication and the illusory nature of such concepts as past and future. Beckett himself does not want to solve the mystery of the meaning. He has left it to his readers and critics. When asked what his play meant, Beckett 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. The play exposes man's tragic condition, at the same time it has a timeless validity and universality; furthermore, it is an existentialist play; at the same time, it also mocks at the attitudes of Existentialism. It seems to have some religious implications even though it seems to question profoundly the Christian conception of salvation and grace. Not only are Estragon and Vladimir the representatives of common humanity but even Pozzo and Lucky are so. If nature has progressed from winter to spring (the bare tree of the First Act has some fresh leaves in the Second Act), Pozzo and Lucky seem to have suffered a decline which is just the opposite of it.

Symbols

Some of the symbols in the play are:

Godot

Godot is a symbol that has been interpreted in different ways. Samuel Beckett himself never reiterated what he meant by 'Godot'. The interpretation of this symbol is left to the

understanding of each individual reader or audience member.

Some interpretations of Godot include:

Godot is God - the religious interpretation that Godot symbolises a higher power. Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot to come and bring answers and meaning into their lives.

Godot as purpose - Godot stands for the purpose that the characters are waiting for. They live an absurd existence and they hope that it will become meaningful once Godot arrives.

Godot as death - Vladimir and Estragon are passing the time until they die.

The Tree

There have been many interpretations of the tree in the play. Let's consider three of the most popular ones:

The tree stands for the passage of time. In Act 1, it is leafless and when it grows a few leaves in Act 2 this shows that some time has passed. This is a minimalistic stage direction that allows for more to be shown with less.

The tree symbolises hope. Vladimir was told to wait for Godot by the tree and although he's not sure that this is the right tree, it presents the hope that Godot might meet him there. What is more, when Vladimir and Estragon meet by the tree they find hope in each other's presence and in their shared purpose - to wait for Godot. By the end of the play, when it becomes clear that Godot is not coming, the tree briefly offers them the hope of escape from their meaningless existence by hanging on it.

The Biblical symbolism of the tree that Jesus Christ was nailed to (the crucifixion). At one point in the play, Vladimir tells Estragon the gospel story of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus. This points to Vladimir and Estragon being the two thieves, in a symbolic way.

Night and day

Vladimir and Estragon are separated by night - they can only be together during the day. Moreover, the two men can only wait for Godot during daytime which suggest that he can't come at night. Night falls right after the boy brings the news that Godot will not come. Therefore, daylight symbolises hope and opportunity, while night stands for a time of nothingness and despair.

Objects

The minimal props described in the stage directions serve a comedic but also a symbolic purpose. Here are some of the main objects:

The boots symbolise that daily suffering is a vicious circle. Estragon takes the boots off but he always has to put them back on - this represents his inability to escape the pattern of his suffering. Lucky's baggage, which he never leaves and keeps carrying symbolises the same idea.

Lucky's Baggage

Lucky never puts down the items he carries, except when it is necessary to fulfill one of Pozzo's orders. Then he immediately picks them up again, even when he has not been told to do so and there is no purpose in it. This action echoes the human tendency of enslavement to burdens, holding onto them even when doing so is unnecessary. The

baggage Lucky carries seems to consist mostly of items for Pozzo's comfort. In Act 2, however, one of the bags, which is never opened in Act 1, is revealed to contain only sand. Other than his hat, none of what Lucky carries is for himself and may not even be useful. Yet he takes it up again and again—another example of a character "deadened" by habit, fulfilling the task mindlessly and without purpose.

Pozzo's Rope

Pozzo's rope is the only rope that physically appears in the play, and it represents the balance of power in the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. In Act 1, Pozzo dominates Lucky with a rope half the length of the stage: "Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed around his neck," and Lucky is often the recipient of Pozzo's whip. Yet Lucky accepts this balance of power without question, as if he cannot envision any other state for himself. By Act 2, however, the rope is shortened, and the balance of power in Pozzo and Lucky's relationship is less clear. Pozzo, now blind, depends on Lucky for direction, and Lucky, still slavish, depends psychologically on Pozzo.

By extension, there are a number of figurative ropes in the play. Vladimir and Estragon, like Pozzo and Lucky, are similarly tied to each other in a relationship based on domination and submission. The pair is also tied to Godot and the dominating belief that his arrival will provide a meaning for their lives. Vladimir and Estragon also entertain the idea of hanging themselves with a rope. While suicide is never a real option, its discussion provides the pair a diversion from the act of waiting for Godot. The rope here becomes a symbol of submission to an illogical belief.

Hats

Because the play has so few props, the props that do appear onstage take on an exaggerated significance. As one example, Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky, and Pozzo all wear hats and at times seem oddly preoccupied with them. Lucky, for instance, needs his hat to think, and stops his long monologue once his hat is knocked off. In act two Estragon and Vladimir exchange their hats and Lucky's hat back and forth, trying different ones on. Given the importance of these hats to their individual owners, this scene can be seen as representing the fluidity and instability of individual identities in the play. As Pozzo and Lucky don't remember having already seen Vladimir and Estragon in act two, Vladimir begins to wonder whether the Pozzo and Lucky of act two are the same as those of act one. Estragon, for one, does not recognize them, and calls Pozzo Abel. Estragon can't even remember his own past, and at one point tells Pozzo that his name is Adam. Moreover, it is not clear whether the young boy in each act is one boy or two different ones. The boy also calls Vladimir Mr. Albert, which may or may not actually be Vladimir's name. With all of this ambiguity and instability regarding people's identities, the scene of the hat exchange playfully represents an exchange of identities, as Vladimir and Estragon wear different combinations of hats. Vladimir ends up wearing Lucky's hat—notably, the one he needed to "think"—seemingly taking on a new identity, as he then asks Estragon to "play" at being Lucky and Pozzo. Indeed, it's uncertain whether Vladimir and Estragon (or other characters) are actually being themselves throughout the play, or if they even have stable selves they can be.

Names

Many of the names in Beckett's play can be seen has having hidden meanings. The most important example is Godot, whose name evokes similarity to God for many readers. Along this reading, Godot symbolizes the salvation that religion promises, but which never comes (just as Godot never actually comes to Vladimir and Estragon). But the similarity between "Godot" and "God" could also be a game Beckett is playing with his audience and readers, a kind of red herring that actually imparts no important information. This would be in line with

other character names: Estragon means "tarragon" in French, for example, while Pozzo is Italian for a water well, but these meanings hold little to no significance for those characters. And Lucky's name is anything but fitting, as he is the character who unluckily suffers the most onstage. In the end, Beckett's character names suggest the possibility of meaning but fail to deliver on this promise, just as Godot promises to save Vladimir and Estragon but never shows up. As further examples of the nihilist worldview that pervades Waiting for Godot, the play's character names may be significant precisely for being insignificant, meaningful in that they mean nothing.

Motifs

Duality

Duality is everywhere in Waiting for Godot. Every character has a counterpart, and the paired characters often complement and contrast each other. Vladimir and Estragon seem nearly identical at first, but contrasting characteristics show them to be essentially two different parts of a whole. Pozzo and Lucky are opposites in status, but they also share a mutual dependence. The boy, although written as one part played by a single actor, may actually be two brothers, one of whom tends the sheep while the other tends the goats. Even people who are simply discussed often come in twos, such as the two thieves from the Bible (one is saved, the other is damned). The only character without a counterpart is the one who never appears: the ambiguous Godot.

The whole play is dual in structure, consisting of two acts depicting nearly the same events. Act 2 mirrors Act 1 (for example, Estragon arrives first in Act 1, while Vladimir is the first to appear in Act 2), with the events of Act 2 seeming to reflect a bit more darkly the events of Act 1. It is also clear that the two days seen in the play are reflections of many days in the past and days that will continue, endlessly, into the future.

Hats

Hats are worn by Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky, and Pozzo and are a vehicle for the characters to show their identities. For example, Lucky needs his hat in order to think; Pozzo shows his power over Lucky by taking his servant's hat off. Vladimir, the "thinker" of the two main characters, is fixated on his hat, while Estragon, who is more realistic, thinks first of his boots. In Act 2, Estragon and Vladimir have a long "bit" in which they exchange their hats along with Lucky's; an aimless attempt to make time pass as they wait.

Synopsis

The plot of Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot is simple to relate. Two tramps are waiting by a sickly looking tree for the arrival of M. Godot. They quarrel, make up, contemplate suicide, try to sleep, eat a carrot and gnaw on some chicken bones. Two other characters appear, a master and a slave, who perform a grotesque scene in the middle of the play. A young boy arrives to say that M. Godot will not come today, but that he will come tomorrow. The play is a development of the title, Waiting for Godot. He does not come and the two tramps resume their vigil by the tree, which between the first and second day has sprouted a few leaves, the only symbol of a possible order in a thoroughly alienated world.

The two tramps of Beckett, in their total disposition and in their antics with hats and tight shoes, are reminiscent of Chaplin and the American burlesque comedy team. Pozzo and Lucky, the master and slave, are half vaudeville characters and half marionettes. The purely comic aspect of the play involves traditional routines that come from the entire history of farce, from the Romans and the Italians, and the red-nosed clown of the modern circus. The language of the play has gravity, intensity, and conciseness. The long speech of Lucky, a

bravura passage that is seemingly meaningless, is strongly reminiscent of Joyce and certain effects in Finnegans Wake. But the play is far from being a pastiche. It has its own beauty and suggestiveness, and it makes its own comment on man's absurd hope and on the absurd insignificance of man.

The utter simplicity of the play, in the histrionic sense, places it in the classical tradition of French playwriting. It's close adherence to the three unities is a clue to the play's dramaturgy. The unity of place is a muddy plateau with one tree, a kind of gallows which invites the tramps to consider hanging themselves. This place is any place. It is perhaps best characterized as being the place where Godot is not. As the play unfolds we come to realize that M. Godot is not in any place comparable to the setting of the play. He will not come out of one place into another. The unity of time is two days, but it might be any sequence of days in anyone's life. Time is equivalent to what is announced in the title: the act of waiting. Tame is really immobility, although a few minor changes do take place during the play: the tree grows leaves and one of the characters, Pozzo, becomes blind. The act of waiting is never over, and yet it mysteriously starts up again each day. The action, in the same way, describes a circle. Each day is the return to the beginning. Nothing is completed because nothing can be completed. The despair in the play, which is never defined as such but which pervades all the lack of action and gives the play its metaphysical color, is the fact that the two tramps cannot not wait for Godot, and the corollary fact that he cannot come.

The rigorous use of the unities is demanded by the implacable interpretation of human life. The denouement of the play is another beginning. Vladimir asks his friend: Alors? On y va? ("Well? Shall we go?") And Estragon answers: Allons-y ("Yes, let's go.") But neither moves. And the curtain descends over their immobility. In scene after scene the permanent absurdity of the world is stressed. In the scene, for example, between the master and the slave, Lucky is held on a leash by Pozzo. He carries a heavy suitcase without ever thinking of dropping it. He is able to utter his long incoherent speech only when he has his hat on and when Pozzo commands him to think.

The unity of place, the particular site on the edge of a forest which the two tramps cannot leave, recalls Sartre's striking use of the unity of place in his first play, No Exit. There it is hell in the appearance of a Second Empire living-room that the three characters cannot leave. The curtain line of each play underscores the unity of place, the setting of which is prison. The Allons-y! of Godot corresponds to the Eh bien, continuons! ("Well, well, let's get on with it....") of No Exit. Sartre's hell is projected by use of some of the quid pro quos of a typical bedroom farce, whereas Beckett's unnamed plateau resembles the empty vaudeville stage. The two tramps in a seemingly improvised dialogue arouse laughter in their public, despite their alienation from the social norm and despite the total pessimism of their philosophy.

Many ingenious theories have been advanced to provide satisfactory interpretations for the characters of Beckett's play. Religious or mythical interpretations prevail. The two tramps Estragon (Gogo) and Vladimir (Didi) may be Everyman and his conscience. Gogo is less confident and at one moment is ready to hang himself. Vladimir is more hopeful, more even in temperament. One thinks of the medieval debate between the body and the soul, between the intellectual and the nonrational in man. Certain of their speeches about Christ might substantiate the theory that they are the two crucified thieves. Pozzo would seem to be the evil master, the exploiter. But perhaps he is Godot, or an evil incarnation of Godot. The most obvious interpretation of Godot is that he is God. As the name Pierrot comes from Pierre, so Godot may come from God. (One thinks also of the combination of God and Charlot, the name used by the French for Charlie Chaplin.)

Mr. Beckett himself has repudiated all theories of a symbolic nature. But this does not

necessarily mean that it is useless to search for such clues. The fundamental imagery of the play is Christian. Even the tree recalls the Tree of Knowledge and the Cross. The life of the tramps at many points in the text seems synonymous with the fallen state of man. Their strange relationship is a kind of marriage. The play is a series of actions that are aborted and that give a despairing uniformity to its duration.

Critical Overview

After nearly a half-century, Beckett's Waiting for Godot remains one of the most important, respected, and powerful plays in the history of world theatre. Given its radically innovative style and great degree of difficulty, it is no surprise that audiences and critics have generally reacted to it in extremes—either of love or hate, admiration or disgust. Its original director, Roger Blin, recalled in an article in Theater that the reaction to the first production in January, 1953, in a small Paris theatre was "a sensation actually: wild applause broke out from some in the audience, others sat in baffled silence, fisticuffs were exchanged by pros and cons; most critics demolished play and production but a handful wrote prophetically."

Among those who wrote prophetically was the play's first reviewer, a relatively unknown critic named Sylvain Zegel, who proclaimed in a review in Liberation that the production was "an event which will be spoken of for a long time, and will be remembered years later." With amazing prescience, Zegel simply asserted that this first-time playwright "deserves comparison with the greatest." A more famous French critic at the time, Jacques Lemarchand, added an awareness of the play's dark humor, observing in Figaro Litteraire that Waiting for Godot"is also a funny play—sometimes very funny. The second night I was there the laughter was natural and unforced." He added that this humor "in no way diminished" the play's profound emotional intensity. Internationally acclaimed playwright Jean Anouilh (On-wee) was also one of Waiting for Godot' s early commentators and in Arts Spectacles simply proclaimed it "a masterpiece." As James Knowlson summarized it in his Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett, the play's "success was assured when it became controversial." The critical and popular enthusiasm, though not universal, was widespread, and the production ran for four-hundred performances before moving to a larger theatre in Paris.

This process whereby ambivalence to the play ultimately evolved into popular and critical success was repeated when the play moved to London in August of 1955 for its first production using Beckett's English translation. Opening in a small "fringe" theatre (London's version of Off Broadway), "the play created an instant furore," according to Alan Simpson, writing in 1962, and quoted in Ruby Cohn's 1987 compilation, Waiting for Godot: A Casebook. Simpson added mat "[a]lmost without exception, the popular press dismissed it as obscure nonsense and pretentious rubbish. However, it was enthusiastically championed by Harold Hobson and Kenneth Tynan" (two of the most influential drama critics in London) and the play once again became controversial and thereby successful, eventually moving to a West End theatre (London's Broadway) and a long run. In February of 1956 an unsigned review in the London Times Literary Supplement by distinguished author G.S. Fraser asserted that die play was clearly a Christian morality play. This essay led to weeks of spirited exchange in the Times with some critics countering that the play was anti-Christian, others that it was Existentialist, and others that it was something else altogether. Characteristically, Beckett was mystified by the controversy, saying, according to Knowlson, "why people have to complicate a thing so simple I can't make out."

The first American production of the play, on the other hand, was quite uncomplicated; it was an unmitigated disaster. In January of 1956, director Alan Schneider opened what was to be a three-week preview run of the play in Coral Gables, Florida, near Miami, with popular

comic actors and personalities Bert Lahr and Tom Ewell in the lead roles. As Schneider recounted (as quoted in Ruby Cohn's 1967 compilation, Casebook on Waiting for Godot), the production was a "spectacular flop. The opening night audience in Miami, at best not too sophisticated or attuned to this type of material and at worst totally misled by advertising billing the play as 'the laugh sensation of two continents,' walked out in droves. And the so-called reviewers not only could not make heads or tails of the play but accused us of pulling some sort of hoax on them." The production did not even finish the three week preview run, but months later the production did move to Broadway, with a new director and cast (retaining only Bert Lahr as Estragon). In New York, producer Michael Myerberg took a new tack on pre-production publicity, this time asking in his advertisements for an audience of "seventy thousand intellectuals." This time the production was a success, though still drawing divided opinions from critics and audience. The show ran for over 100 performances and sold almost 3,000 copies of the play in the theatre lobby.

There have been so many important productions of Waiting for Godot in our century that it is difficult to even list, much less summarize, them. An all-black production of the play on Broadway ran for only five performances late in 1956, with Earle Hyman as Lucky. There was a West Berlin production early in 1975 that Beckett himself directed. In a production in 1976 in Cape Town, South Africa, waiting for Godot seemed to suggest waiting for the end of apartheid. In 1984 there was a San Quentin Drama Workshop production involving Rick Cluchey, former inmate of San Quentin and audience member of the famous 1957 San Quentin production of the play. In 1988 Beckett went to court in an attempt to stop an all-female Dutch production, believing as he did that the characters in Waiting for Godot were distinctively male (Beckett and his lawyers lost in court). Also in 1988 there was a production at Lincoln Center in New York City, in which Estragon and Vladimir were played by well-known contemporary comedians Robin Williams and Steve Martin.

According to Martin Esslin in his The Theatre of the Absurd, Waiting for Godot had been seen by over a million people within five years after its first production in Paris and by the late 1960s had been translated into more than twenty languages and performed all over the world. Audiences coming to it without an awareness of its nature or history are perhaps still baffled by it, but the play can no longer be dismissed as it was by Daily News contributor John Chapman, one of its first New York critics, who, as quoted by the New Republic's Eric Bentley, called Waiting for Godot "merely a stunt."

Note on the Significance of Title of the play "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett

A lot of controversies have arisen since the publication of 'waiting for Godot'. Critics have not been able to reach any kind of agreement about this play. Even Beckett himself did not offer much help to interpret the play. The chief concern of this absurd drama is 'waiting' and 'Godot' which are ever puzzling. 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 that has a general human application.

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 French ‘Eau’ (water). Even ‘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 Godean.

The source for the full title of the play caused similar anxiety. The most convincing suggestion, in this case, comes from Eric Bentley who traces the title to Balzac’s play ‘Marcadet’. In Balzac’s play, the return of a person named Godean is anxiously awaited, the frustration of waiting is a much a part of Balzac’s play as it is of Beckett’s. According to yet another view of Martin Esslin, the source of the title for the play was Odets’s ‘Waiting for lefty’. It is believed that the name of ‘Odet’s might have 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?”

The play is a direct presentation of waiting, ignorance, impotence, boredom. We all are impotent and suffering from boredom, loneliness, and alienation. We have no sons, no daughters, and no women with us, we are all alone like Estragon and Vladimir. There is no one to accompany is, no one to relieve us of our misery, pain, and suffering. It is true, no system, no philosophy, person or even God that can deliver us free. We wait and wait, that finale, our relief or freedom does not come, probably Godot would never come whether we wait hopefully or not.

‘Waiting for Godot’ is a dramatization of the themes of habit and ‘The sufferings 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-assumes 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 drawing out those voices that assail them in the silence, just as they assailed nearly all Beckett’s heroes.

Vladimir and Estragon, have traveled towards total nihilism, but they have not fully achieved it. They still retain enough remnants of hope to be fomented by despair. And in place of hope as a dynamic, they have expectancy. This is the main motif of the play. 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 time night until might comes. They realize the futility of their exercises and they are merely filling up the hours. In this sense their waiting in 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 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 be rewarded. The title of the play thus brings into our mind about the meaningless waiting and it is the waiting for Godot who may stand for God, or for a mythical human being, or for the meaning of life, or for death or for something else.

The Theme of Time in Waiting for Godot

In the modern age man has to race hard against time. In an Absurd drama, however, the dramatic Personae are separated from the world, living in no-man's-land. They have shifted from sanity to madness, for no human mind can face squarely the terrible condition of the

human predicament.

They have shed their human qualities and live in the meaningless, emptiness of nothingness. Such men are not at all particular about time. "Time has stopped", says Vladimir when Pozzo tries to look up the time from his watch.

That explains why the first Act of Waiting for Godot is repeated in the Second. Nothing is changed; nothing new happens; characters forget what they have said or heard in the earlier scenes; the language is repeated. If told, that they are doing the same thing or talking the same thing over again, they seem to be in blissful ignorance. For Vladimir and Estragon no purpose in life exists. And naturally for such person's time does not exist. As the play progresses, time moves fast, and the development of the characters. But since everything is repeated, we feel that time is not moving. Heraclitus, the ancient Greek Philosopher once said: "You cannot take your bath twice in the same river", for there is a ceaseless flow of water. So also there is a ceaseless flow of time. In Waiting for Godot, however, the flow of time has stopped. The play is static, the characters static. In fact, everything in the play has stopped. As the situations and the dialogues are being repeated, nobody seems to notice it. For everybody has lost his memory. The two tramps suggest that they should move, and yet they remain transfixed and as if terrified.

Vladimir and Estragon still device ways and means to kill the time, so that their Waiting for Godot may be less dull and monotonous. They, therefore, indulge in idle talks; they play at being Pozzo and Lucky; they do the tree; they resort to antics and take physical exercises.

The two tramps wishfully think that they are keeping up some action. But it is not action worth the name. Beckett seems to point out that Vladimir and Estragon are the representatives of the people of the modern age, who move about and talk incessantly and feel that they have some activities, but critically examined, they are nothing. We are all Sisyphus, taking the rock to the top of the mountain and letting it roll down. The same process continues. Vladimir and Estragon improvise pastimes, which are all mechanical. The audience watching their pastimes, and activities are made aware that their activities and pastimes are equally mechanical and useless.

Pozzo and Lucky are, however, conscious of time. Pozzo loses his watch, and Vladimir, Estragon and Pozzo frantically move about in search of the lost watch. Pozzo at last recalls that he has left his watch in his manor. But he has also lost his memory, for only a few minutes ago, he did consult his watch to "observe his schedule."

As Pozzo becomes blind, he can no longer look up the time from his watch. He says ruefully: "The blind have no notion of time; the things of time are hidden from them too." He, thus, is on the same platform with Estragon and Vladimir. To Estragon, today, tomorrow, and yesterday are alike. Vladimir's condition is not that bad, but he wonders how in the course of a day the true, by the side of which they are Waiting for Godot, could have burgeoning leaves.

The Theme Of Suffering In Waiting For Godot By Samuel Beckett

Beckett's writing elaborates hope, sufferings, death. Beckett expressed three main concerns in waiting for Godot those are relationships, human nature and sufferings. Life is not a bed of roses. Human beings have to face all the difficulties and sufferings of life. In order to survive we have to accept the challenges. It is not to be forgotten that the play was written after the post World War 2. All the aspects of the play are the situations which were faced by the people after the war. People were living a rough and tough life but still doing nothing to

enhance their situations. Life without a companion is hard to spend. In our bad times we want someone to comfort us like Vladimir and Estragon wanted each other. Even they wanted to hang themselves together. The world where they live or they exist, give them pain and it's human nature to receive the give and receive the pain.

In the play Waiting For Godot suffering is the essential part of human existence. Vladimir and Estragon both were in physical pain one had urine problem and the other had pain in his foot respectively. This condition kept them unhappy. This physical pain had a great influence on their mental state. Samuel Beckett believed that there are two types of suffering basically, mental and physical that snatch away happiness, peace and joy from life. Now it elaborates that if there is existence then there must be sufferings. Man is born to suffer till the end of his life. As far as life is concerned sufferings, miseries and troubles are part of it. It will also affect the mental state. Characters in the play suffer due to their existence. There is rarely perfection in the Beckett's play. Human is a subject to decay in this world.

There is representation of human condition through fatuous characters in Waiting for Godot. The goof characters believed that someday a miracle would happen and a mysterious man naming Godot will come and save them from sufferings. Sufferings are integrated in human life. Modern people are suffering from different issues, miseries and circumstances like: harmful natural conditions, harmful ecological conditions, harmful political conditions, emotional condition, spiritual condition and leading a meaningless life. All these emotional, social, political, spiritual, and mental problems are related with the existence of human being. In waiting for Godot Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot to come and solve their problems. They both believed that Godot will appear someday and everything will be changed. Godot a person who never shows up, but they still wait for him. Godot is their hope. Hope that keeps them away from suicide. A fake hope that kept them alive but in miseries. Beckett denied Godot as God because of many contradictions. Godot could be some religious force, a false belief, a fake hope but not God. Anything for which we are waiting can be seen as Godot. This worthless wait gave them nothing but frustration.

They believed that by committing suicide they can get rid of these problems but they couldn't attempt suicide. Waiting, as the condition of man, involves an acceptance both of death and of life. As they keep on waiting they become bore. Since there is nothing to be done the characters engaged themselves in variety of gossips, this is the portrayal of human relationship in play whether willingly or unwillingly the are exchanging words, telling stories. Waiting for Godot is about the compulsive need for action, if only in order to make the time pass. As Vladimir says, "Habit is a great deadener". Estragon and Vladimir debate whether they are in the right place whether it is the right day Godot to come. A boy comes onstage, and says that he is the messenger of Godot he works for him. He says that Godot will not come today he will be coming on the next day and the boy leaves. 'He who despair the human condition is coward, but he who has hope for it is a fool.' (Albert Camus)

Beckett has planned to mention the human sufferings through human condition in the play which is the essential part of human existence. Human condition is the characteristic of suffering from such misfortunes as meaningless waiting, fake hope, unreliable relationship among them and their fear of death. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for something unusual to happen, they are waiting for something which would not happen. They are waiting for the arrival of Godot. Human life is portrayed as a period of waiting; waiting for an event, person, hope and eventually death. Vladimir and Estragon await for Godot to appear and save them form miseries. Actually they don't want Godot as a person, but Godot for them is a hope for whom they are waiting, even a fake hope. They just need something to wait for and this is the worst part of human condition. In the words of Breuer: We are all like

a donkey running after the carrot dangle in front of its nose by its rider... We would be both donkey and rider but the donkey part in us would just love to forget that we are also the rider who holds the carrot.

Another pair in the play is Lucky and Pozzo. Lucky wants to have a good relationship with his master Pozzo. For this he has sacrificed everything, even his creativeness more over his self respect. He tolerates his torcher and slavery. They both are dependent on each other. Without Lucky, Pozzo is unable to step forward. Lucky is bound to Pozzo's orders. In fact Lucky teachers Pozzo all the higher values of life. Beckett has portrayed the picture of men who has invested their hope in a supernatural mysterious or absent savior, rather than standing on their feet and determining their own fate as they are supposed to. Human beings are creatures who are trapped in a lifelong struggle to make sense of their existence, and it seems as if they cannot actualize their true selves and step into the course of growth unless they come to realize the essence of their being. Hence, as they find themselves trapped in a state of meaningless existence, they end up being stagnated in misery.

The Futility Of Our Actions In Waiting For Godot By Samuel Beckett

The existential play Waiting for Godot, explores themes of absurdity, in particular, the absurdity of life, and furthermore how our actions to ascribe meaning to life is futile. Beckett displays the absurdity through irony and characterization of the characters. The play begins with no aforementioned context, with two tramps like character, Vladimir and Estragon. During the play, they are perpetually stuck living their days waiting by a dirt road for a man named Godot, while waiting they encounter two men, Pozzo and Lucky, one being a slave master and the other a slave respectively. The nonsensical actions and repetition of the characters encounters are used by Beckett to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of their actions to give meaning to their life. Beckett wonderfully utilizes irony to depict the farce nature of life, through the juxtaposition in the characters actions with the setting of a dirt road. Estragon and Vladimir spend the whole play on the side of a dirt road waiting for Godot, whom they are not sure if they've met, or if they're waiting for him at the right place, or if it is the right day, they're not even sure if Godot is going to appear at all. As mentioned before they almost seem stuck in this monotonous cyclic life of waiting, Vladimir and Estragon fill their time with mundane activities and insignificant conversations, while never leaving or moving down the road. The road signifies movement, a set path, and progress, which completely contradict their meaningless actions. Their action of 'waiting' is virtually their only meaning and thing for them to do in their life, despite Estragon's measly efforts to leave and move along with life, Vladimir insists on waiting. As we delve further in the play we learn that Vladimir's incentive on waiting for Godot is like a prayer or vague supplication. "What exactly did we ask him for?. . . nothing very definite. A kind of prayer. Precisely. A vague supplication. " They paint Godot as someone who will give them meaning or an answer when in reality they're not even sure that Godot exists. Beckett's keen use of naming Lucky should allude to him having some sort of luck, which we find to be quite the contrary at first glance, as he is a slave. He is abused physically and verbally by his owner, he is forced to work to the point of exhaustion, and is denied any chance to act on his own free will.

However, when comparing him to the other characters, we can see Beckett's brilliance in naming him Lucky. Considering that he is the luckiest character in the play, is a true testament to show how dreadful everyone else's life is when a slaves role is desirable. Although Lucky does not have physical luck on his side, which can be seen through his physicalities like his hunchback, and sores, he is lucky due to the way he looks at life especially compared to Vladimir and Estragon. Lucky is fully aware of enslavement and his owner, which gives him a sense of purpose, and freedom since he has no expectations of life getting better, and in turn acknowledges that everything we do is futile in the end as we will

all pass away. This contrasts with Vladimir and Estragon as they don't have an absolute like Lucky, they're enslaved to this idea of Godot, whom they themselves don't know if he is real.

Additionally Lucky presents his viewpoint further through his confusing speech in act 1. In essence, his wordy speech pertains to the human condition, and how we try seeking for answers and meaning to life in different ways. He starts off with addressing those who find meaning in a higher being such as a deity or god. He indicates that believing in such a being and having faith is useless, through describing these beings as apathetic which alludes to them being absent and uninterested. Thus by calling a being apathetic, he says that these gods are indifferent to the issues humans face.

Lucky also mentions these beings as "divine athambia and divine aphasia" as a result, by calling them athambic he is alluding to the fact that they have no need for humans since they have great self-assurance. He also speaks upon the nature of communication between these beings, by calling them aphasic, he is mentioning that these beings cannot communicate with us. Thus through questioning the notion of higher beings, he brings to light the faults in believing in a divine being and sparks the question in whether we want to find meaning and purpose from such a disconnected being. Lucky proceeds to speak upon our human response to the condition of life, and how humans engage in various activities such as sport to improve themselves. He points out that this goal of self-improvement proves to be in vain, as he criticizes academics as "labours left unfinished. " and that these efforts are a matter of "alimentation and defecation. " Thus, he is calling upon the faults of our academic efforts, which is known to be the foundation of progress, as a fruitless exercise. Lastly, after calling upon all the uncertainties of life, he leads us to the ultimate certainty, death. The end/last part of his speech concludes with imagery of apocalyptic earth, where nature runs its course and darkness would prevail, "the earth in the great cold the great dark... the earthly abode of stones in the great cold. . . I resume the skull fading fading. " Beckett's arouses imagery of stones and skulls to delivery the true bleak picture of life as we are all born to die.

In the end, Lucky's speech turns into incoherent ramblings, which suggests that the breakdown of his language and his inability to communicate represents the inability to give meaning and structure to life. The play ends in the same fashion as it began, Vladimir and Estragon waiting by the side of the road, never having left the spot. Beckett's use of concluding the play in this similar fashion simulates the monotonous cycle of life, and it's repetitiveness. In the end, the two tramps Vladimir and Estragon are left without having met Godot, yet we know that they continue to wait. Will Godot ever appear? No one has an answer, similar to Lucky reiterating "for reasons unknown" in his speech, the tramps continue to wait, for reasons unknown, this represents our human condition and the uncertainty of life. We all wonder and seek purpose while living, and we do this through filling our time with activities that we feel are productive, but through the view of this play, we can see that in everything we do, we will eventually pass away, thus concluding our actions as futile and meaningless.

Dramatic Divisions of Waiting for Godot

Even though the drama is divided into two acts, there are other natural divisions. For the sake of discussion, the following, rather obvious, scene divisions will be referred to:

ACT I:
(1) Vladimir and Estragon Alone
(2) Arrival of Pozzo and Lucky: Lucky's Speech
(3) Departure of Pozzo and Lucky: Vladimir and Estragon Alone

(4) Arrival of Boy Messenger
(5) Departure of Boy Messenger: Vladimir and Estragon Alone

ACT II:
(1) Vladimir and Estragon Alone
(2) Arrival of Pozzo and Lucky
(3) Departure of Pozzo and Lucky: Vladimir and Estragon Alone
(4) Arrival of Boy Messenger
(5) Departure of Boy Messenger: Vladimir and Estragon Alone

The above divisions of the play are Beckett's way of making a statement about the nature of the play — that is, the play is circular in structure, and a third act (or even a fourth or fifth act, etc.) could be added, having the exact same structure. For further discussion, see the section on Circular Structure.

The Circular Structure of Waiting for Godot

"But what does it all mean?" is the most frequent statement heard after one has seen or finished reading a play from the Theater of the Absurd movement. Beckett's plays were among the earliest and, therefore, created a great deal of confusion among the early critics.

No definite conclusion or resolution can ever be offered to Waiting for Godot because the play is essentially circular and repetitive in nature. Once again, turn to the Dramatic Divisions section in these Notes and observe that the structure of each act is exactly alike. A traditional play, in contrast, has an introduction of' the characters and the exposition; then, there is a statement of the problem of the play in relationship to its settings and characters. (In Waiting for Godot, we never know where the play takes place, except that it is set on "a country road.") Furthermore, in a traditional play, the characters are developed, and gradually we come to see the dramatist's world view; the play then rises to a climax, and there is a conclusion. This type of development is called a linear development. In the plays of the Theater of the Absurd, the structure is often exactly the opposite. We have, instead, a circular structure, and most aspects of this drama support this circular structure in one way or another.

The setting is the same, and the time is the same in both acts. Each act begins early in the morning, just as the tramps are awakening, and both acts close with the moon having risen. The action takes place in exactly the same landscape — a lonely, isolated road with one single tree. (In the second act, there are some leaves on the tree, but from the viewpoint of the audience, the setting is exactly the same.) We are never told where this road is located; all we know is that the action of the play unfolds on this lonely road. Thus, from Act I to Act II, there is no difference in either the setting or in the time and, thus, instead of a progression of time within an identifiable setting, we have a repetition in the second act of the same things that we saw and heard in the first act.

More important than the repetition of setting and time, however, is the repetition of the actions. To repeat, in addition to the basic structure of actions indicated earlier — that is:

Vladimir and Estragon Alone
Arrival of Pozzo and Lucky
Vladimir and Estragon Alone
Arrival of Boy Messenger
Vladimir and Estragon Alone

There are many lesser actions that are repeated in both acts. At the beginning of each act, for example, several identical concerns should be noted. Among these is the emphasis on Estragon's boots. Also, too, Vladimir, when first noticing Estragon, uses virtually the same words: "So there you are again" in Act I and "There you are again" in Act II. At the beginning of both acts, the first discussion concerns a beating that Estragon received just prior to their meeting. At the beginning of both acts, Vladimir and Estragon emphasize repeatedly that they are there to wait for Godot. In the endings of both acts, Vladimir and Estragon discuss the possibility of hanging themselves, and in both endings they decide to bring some good strong rope with them the next day so that they can indeed hang themselves. In addition, both acts end with the same words, voiced differently:

ACT 1:
ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?
VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.

ACT II:
VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?
ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

And the stage directions following these lines are exactly the same in each case: "They do not move."

With the arrival of Pozzo and Lucky in each act, we notice that even though their physical appearance has theoretically changed, outwardly they seem the same; they are still tied together on an endless journey to an unknown place to rendezvous with a nameless person.

Likewise, the Boy Messenger, while theoretically different, brings the exact same message: Mr. Godot will not come today, but he will surely come tomorrow.

Vladimir's difficulties with urination and his suffering are discussed in each act as a contrast to the suffering of Estragon because of' his boots. In addition, the subject of eating, involving carrots, radishes, and turnips, becomes a central image in each act, and the tramps' involvement with hats, their multiple insults, and their reconciling embraces — these and many more lesser matters are found repeatedly in both acts.

Finally, and most important, there are the larger concepts: first, the suffering of the tramps; second, their attempts, however futile, to pass time; third, their attempts to part, and, ultimately, their incessant waiting for Godot — all these make the two acts clearly repetitive, circular in structure, and the fact that these repetitions are so obvious in the play is Beckett's manner of breaking away from the traditional play and of asserting the uniqueness of his own circular structure.

Waiting for Godot: An Absurd Play by Beckett

Samuel Beckett is a revolutionary playwright. He is an iconoclast and an image breaker. He has shattered conventions and pioneered a new kind of drama. His drama is above categories of tragedy and comedy. It is called absurd drama. His plays show the situation in which we are. They expose us in our existential predicament.

Waiting for Godot is an absurd drama. In fact, absurd drama presents human life and human situation as absurd. This type of drama is free from traditional plot, story or division into acts and scenes. Here we get few characters. They have symbolic significance. Dialogues

are very short and crisp. Nothing significant happens on the stage. It prefers existential themes. Things are not explained but they are merely hinted at. One can find all these features in Waiting for Godot.

Lack of action is one of the major characteristics of an absurd play. There is nothing significant in the play. So is the case with Waiting for Godot. In this play nothing significant happens except waiting and waiting. The waiting also becomes meaningless because no Godot arrives. As soon as the play opens, we find Estragon, a tramp.

The first comment of this character is, "Nothing doing." This comment echoes throughout the play. Thus in the world of Godot even the minimal action is impossible.

In an absurd play, the characters generally lose their identity. In Waiting for Godot, we find tramps as characters. They lose their identity in Act II. Their relationship is in doubt. They spend the night apart. Life to them is an endless rain of blows. Estragon and Vladimir have lost their identity. The other pair of characters Pozzo and Lucky become blind and dumb respectively. Suicide is a recurrent temptation.

Waiting for Godot deals with the absurdity of man's existence in this universe. When the play starts Estragon and Vladimir agree that they have nothing to do. They think that they have lost each other. They admit that struggle has been of no use. Sometimes they feel that they should jump from a tower and kill themselves. On another occasion they want to hang themselves immediately with a tree. The existence of Pozzo and Lucky is also absurd. They become blind and dumb respectively.

The last part of the play is again full of absurd situations. Estragon says to Vladimir that they must hang themselves. Vladimir replies that there is no rope to do so. Estragon says that the cord of the trousers will serve this purpose. As soon as he removes the cord, the trousers fall to his knees. They test the strength of the cord. The cord breaks into two. They decide to go. As Estragon says, "Let's go", the curtain falls.

This last part of the play symbolizes human situation. We do not know why and for whom the tramps are waiting. Like them we are also waiting for something. We are also living in the same situation in which these two characters are living.

The setting of the play is bare. We find only one tree in the first Act, It is without leaves. In the second Act this tree attains some new leaves. The whole background is absurd. It reminds us of man's loneliness and alienation. There is suffering, agony, anxious wait, futility and all sorts of absurdity.

Thus from the points of view of structure, theme, motif, characters, setting and language, Waiting for Godot is an absurd drama. It mocks at the futility of man's life and its meaninglessness. Life as well as death is treated as a joke. God is made a non-entity. There is nothing to do in man's life.

Waiting for Godot - An Existential Play | Samuel Beckett

"Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful." - Samuel Beckett : Waiting for Godot (34)

Waiting for Godot, a paragon of existentialism, is crafted by the brilliant mind of Samuel Beckett. Beckett, a modernist Irish writer, often associated with the 'Theatre of the Absurd.' He was highly influenced by the French philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Waiting for Godot is a highly celebrated existential play. Existential philosophy says that we human beings simply exist in a world that does not have any overarching moral order or meaning. We are not essentially good or bad, we are what we make of ourselves, what we think of ourselves and we are what we choose to believe. Questions such as life, death, the meaning of human existence and the place of God in that existence are among them. The theories of existentialism assert that conscious reality is very complex and without an "objective" or universally known value.

We see, that, in Waiting for Godot, all the four characters Estragon, Vladimir, Lucky, Pozzo discuss the problems of existence and also questions their own existence in an absurd way. As is shown in the play, they are waiting for an unknown person called 'Godot' at an unknown place. All of them suffer from meaninglessness, isolation, and frustration. As it happens, no Godot comes but ironically a messenger boy comes who informs that Godot will not come. And these characters become fed up of waiting repeatedly. The word 'waiting' is universalized in the play, which is an essential feature of any existential play. According to renowned critic Harold Bloom:

"Waiting for Godot portrays both the need for purpose and the emotional fragmentation that accompanies the struggle for this anchoring of self. Vladimir and Estragon have inherited a world they cannot master, and despite their heroic accommodations they cannot escape the turmoil that accompanies their sense of purposelessness." (124)

The paradox of survival in Waiting for Godot involves a re-reading of Camus' The Myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus had the choice of abandoning his rock at the foot of the mountain or of continuously rolling it to the top, the only certainty being that after the rock fell, he could, if he so chose, once more perform this arduous, useless act. The paradox of Camus' Absurdism, like Sartre's Existentialism, demands a tension between engagement and impotence and between logic and absurdity, where the awareness of life's ultimate meaninglessness—when placed in the recesses of the mind—allows one to live fully and without anguish in a random and disordered universe. But Beckett's heroes differ from those of Camus: they lack a sense of defiance regarding their lot in life. One would never imagine a weary, disconsolate Sisyphus at the end of his rope, either literally or metaphorically; but this is Vladimir and Estragon's frequent situation. Jeffrey Nealon states:

"Waiting for Godot is the play of Vladimir and Estragon's words, not any agreed-upon meaning for them, which constitutes their social bond."(Sharma 275)

Renowned critic Martin Esslin argued in his The Theatre of the Absurd, that Waiting for Godot was part of a broader literary movement that he called the Theatre of the Absurd, a form of theatre which stemmed from the absurdist philosophy of Albert Camus. Absurdism, pioneered by Soren Kierkegaard, itself is a branch of the traditional assertions of existentialism, and puts forward that, while inherent meaning might very well exist in the universe, human beings are incapable of finding it due to some form of mental or philosophical limitation. Thus humanity is doomed to be faced with the Absurd, or the absolute absurdity of the existence in lack of intrinsic purpose.

The play Waiting for Godot can be and has many interpretations. The question of existence can be noticed in almost all the dialogues of the play. We see two tramps wait beside a tree for a mysterious figure with whom Vladimir asserts and Estragon believes, they have an appointment. This mysterious figure hopefully will change their position for better. The existentialist element is visible in this dialogue:

Estragon: Didi.
Vladimir: Yes.
Estragon: I can't go on like this.
Vladimir: That's what you think.
Estragon: If we parted? That might be better for us.
Vladimir: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. Unless Godot comes.
Estragon: And if he comes?
Vladimir: We'll be saved. (Beckett 87)

We see human beings on earth always expect somebody to save them from all existential problems. But ultimately nobody comes to save us or to solve our problems. The play Waiting for Godot does not tell a story, it explores a static situation. There are several existentialist elements present throughout the play and one is very evident in Estragon's words:

"Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful." (Beckett 34)

The two heroes of this play neither recognize their own existence as accidental, nor think of transforming it into something positive with which they can identify themselves. What Beckett presents is not nihilism, but the inability of a man to be a nihilist even in a situation of utter hopelessness. In spite of their inaction and the pointlessness of their existence, these two tramps still want to go on. Millions of people today do not, after all give up living even when their life becomes pointless. Even the nihilist wish to go on living. 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. Anthony Jenkins writes:

"...there can be no answers; Godot may or may not exist and may or may not arrive; we know no more about him than do Vladimir and Estragon." (40)

At a time, Beckett is talking about the problem of boredom and problem of living like many other existential philosophers. Pozzo and Vladimir have both entered a kind of risky zone when for a moment their 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. We can see that Pozzo cries to Lucky when they make their last exit.

To sum up, we can definitely say that Waiting for Godot is a remarkable existential play, as all the four characters Estragon, Vladimir, Lucky, Pozzo are always worried about their lot and try to adjust in the dreary setting of life. They fight with the hopelessness and meaninglessness of life. The uncertainty and unreliability with which Godot surrounds them reveal the existential outlook of the play. At first sight the play does not appear to have any particular relationship with the human predicament. But as we probe through the absurd dialogues we are confronted with the existential elements visible in the play. The perplexed helplessness of the couple 'Vladimir' and 'Estragon' appeals to us as our own helplessness on this earth.

Waiting for Godot as a Tragicomedy

Tragic-comedy is a play which claims a plot apt for tragedy but which ends happily like a comedy. The action is serious in theme and subject matter and tone also sometimes but it seems to be a tragic catastrophe until an unexpected turn in events brings out the happy ending. The characters of a tragic-comedy are noble but they are involved in improbabilities. In such a play tragic and comic elements are mixed up together. Fletcher, in his "Preface to the Faithful Shepherdess", defines a tragic-comedy as:

“A tragic-comedy is not so called in respect to mirth and killing, but in respect it wants death which is enough to make it no tragedy. Shakespeare’s ‘Cymbeline’ and ‘The Winter’s Tale’ may also be categorized as tragic-comedy.”

The English edition of “Waiting for Godot”, published in 1956 describes the play as a “tragic-comedy” in two acts. There are many dialogues, gestures, situations and actions that are stuff of pure comedy. All musical devices are employed to create laughter in such a tragic situation of waiting. The total atmosphere of the play is very akin to dark-comedy. For example, Vladimir is determined not to hear Estragon’s nightmare. The latter pleads with him in vain to hear him, saying that there is nobody else to whom he may communicate his private nightmares.

The audience burst out in laughter when they see Estragon putting off and on his boots. Vladimir’s game with his hat appears as if this is happening in a circus. Vladimir is suffering from prostrate problem. Vladimir's way of walking with stiff and short strides is as funny as Estragon’s limping on the stage. Estragon’s gestures of encouraging Vladimir to urinate off-stage are farcical. The comedy in this play at certain times gives the impression of Vaudeville. There are many dialogues:

Estragon: Let’s go.
Vladimir: We can not.
Estragon: Why not?
Vladimir: We are waiting for Godot.
(They do not move.)

These dialogues occur like a comic paradigm in the play.

Estragon and Vladimir put on and take off each other’s hat as well as that of lucky again and again. It shows that in the world of tramps, there is no place of significant actions. The most farcical situation in the play is the one where the tramps are testing the strength of the cord with which they wish to hang themselves. The cord breaks under the strain. One cannot have an uninhabited laugh at the situation for there is also something deeply uncomfortable.

“Waiting for Godot” has several moments of anguish and despair. Someone beats Estragon daily.

Estragon: Beat me? Certainly they beat me.

Estragon’s feet and Vladimir’s kidneys are also taken to be granted. The tramps resent that they should be asked whether it still hurts. It goes without saying that it hurts all the time. When Vladimir asks Estragon whether his boots are hurting him, he responds:

“Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!”

A little later Estragon asks Vladimir about his kidney trouble and the latter replies in the same words:

“Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!”

In fact his trouble is so bad that it does not even permit him to laugh. Life lies all bleak and barren before them and that only valid comment on it is the one with which the play opens, “Nothing to be done”. Theirs is a world of negation in which inactivity is the safest course; as

Estragon says:

“Do not let us do anything, it’s safer”.

The tramps are living at the barest level of existence. Carrot, turnips and radishes are all they have to eat. Estragon’s remarks show tragedy and helplessness:

“Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful.”

The situation of Lucky is quite pathetic, especially in view of his glorious past, as Pozzo describes it. His speech tells us that in his sonar moments Lucky must have brooded deeply over the anguish of the human situation. The anguish breaks in his incoherent harangue:

“... the flames, the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the labours abandoned left unfinished graver still abode of stones in a word I resume alas alas abandoned unfinished the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull alas the stones Cunard (melee, final vociferations) tennis ... the stones ... so calm ...Cunard ... unfinished ...”

The comedy in “Waiting for Godot” at once turns into tragedy when the audience thinks about the helplessness of tramps. Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for someone who never comes. In order to pass time they indulge in irrelevant, meaningless activity. The element of force fades away and miserable condition of man looms large in our imagination. Their life can be compared with that of a prisoner for whom there is no escape, even suicide is impossible. Every activity is a mockery of human existence.

The changing of farce into absurdity brings a lot of tragic sentiment in the play. Estragon’s nakedness is a picture of ‘man’s miserable condition’. The absurd living is a major source of tragedy. The source is the situation of pointless waiting of Estragon and Vladimir. They do not know who Godot is. They are sure neither about the time nor about the place of their appointment. They even do not know what will happen if they stop waiting? Lack of essential knowledge makes them totally impotent and powerless. They are glued to a situation. Nothing is certain all they can say is “Nothing to be done”.

The total effect of this co-mingling of tragic and comic suggests that Samuel Beckett’s is a realistic dramatist who looks at life from a position of a pessimist and an optimist. The form of tragic-comedy is highly suitable to this vision of life. The climax of Beckett’s tragic-comedy is the role of Lucky. He is wearing servant’s vest while holding his master’s overcoat, a basket and a stool. His neck is tied with one end of the rope. His appearance is not only fantastic but grotesque also. The moment we realize that he is a half-wit; he becomes an image of man’s misery. We are all the more sorry for Lucky when it is revealed that Pozzo has learnt all the beautiful things of life from lucky. But now Pozzo is taking the same person to sell in a fair. The relationship of a ringmaster and his trained animal, changes into a relationship of an owner and a slave. It is an exploitation of a man by a man who stops the audience from bursting out into laughter. Comedy has been checked by tragic element or sentiments, while the effect of tragedy has been mitigated by farce created through characters, dialogues, gestures and actions.

We can sum up with the remarks of Sean O’ Casey,

“Beckett is a clever writer, for within him there is no hazard of hope; no desire for it; nothing in it but a lust for despair and a crying of woe, not in a wilderness, but in a garden.”

Waiting for Godot as a Religious Play

In an Absurd play the idea of God and religion is conspicuous by its absence. The playwrights normally emphasize irony and negation, neurosis and despair, a ritual orgy of jabbering, the infinity of nihilism. They present a hostile universe where man withers like atomic dust.

Waiting for Godot, an absurd drama as it is, has an unmistakably religious element. When Beckett was once asked to comment on the play Waiting for Godot, he quoted from St. Augustine: "Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned". This is a significant statement and may be regarded as a clue to the play.

Not Waiting for Godot alone, the other plays are also imbued with deep religious fervour. For Beckett God has not failed. There is religious symbolism throughout. In his novel Molloy, Beckett says: "It was a cargo of nails and timber, on its way to some carpenter I suppose". And we all know that Jesus Christ was a carpenter by profession and helped his father Joseph before he had undertaken his missionary work.

As a matter of fact, Beckett is never tired of referring to Christ and the salvation of the suffering and penitent man. Suffering is the true badge of honour for a Christian.

"The suffering that characterizes earthly existence", says Herst Zeifman, "and the theological context of that suffering are recurrent leitmotifs in Beckett's drama. The casual relationship between divine cruelty and human suffering is perhaps most effectively dramatized in Beckett's portrayal of many of his characters as emblematic Biblical sufferers."

If we regard Waiting for Godot as a Morality play, it naturally becomes a religious play as well. The Morality play was a medieval forerunner of our modern novel-with-a purpose, as unconvincingly didactic as instructive. The Morality play may be defined as an attempt to dramatize a Sermon. The characters in such a play are personified qualities, e.g. vices, mental attributes, impulses, moods, states of mind, and the like, or of universalized types set in a framework of allegory. Exactly like the Morality plays, the Theatre of the Absurd, as has been pointed out by Martin Esslin, is concerned with the ultimate realities of the human condition, e. g. life, death, isolation and communication.

Drama owes its origin to religion. So does Absurd Drama, in which man has confrontation with ultimate realities, synonymous with religious reality. In the twentieth century Europe has become a vast and arid waste land, where man is groping in the dark for light. It is an era of nothingness, of nihilism, and negation of traditional values. Religion has been weighed in the balance, and found wanting. Christ is being crucified for umpteen times. Vladimir and Estragon are the representatives of the modern man standing for hope and light. They are not men of flesh and blood but the concrete shapes of abstract qualities.

There is the reference to Salvation, Judgment and Crucifixion like a recurrent refrain. In Waiting for Godot, for example, the first clearly explicit reference to salvation is found in Vladimir's mention of the two thieves crucified on either side of Christ, one of whom was saved and the other damned. When asked by Estragon what the thief was saved from, Vladimir replied that the man was saved from hell. Vladimir wonders that of the four Evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John, only one speaks of a thief being saved.

Beckett was fascinated by the idea of salvation, while most people have to suffer damnation.

Ever since the dawn of history there have been millions of persons who had to be damned for their misdeeds. Only two thieves got the splendid opportunity of being saved. The Sheep and the Goats or "the Judgment of the Nations" is a pronouncement of Jesus recorded in chapter 25 of Matthew's Gospel in the New Testament.

While Pozzo tells Vladimir about Lucky: "Remark that I might easily have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed it otherwise", he might be thinking of the thieves. Man cannot be sure of the Grace of God, which is awarded fortuitously. God willed otherwise, and, therefore, Pozzo, so long better placed, had to become blind, at the mercy of others. If Godot is God, he does not bestow favours in a strictly logical manner. For the ways of God are mysterious and inexorable. Take the case of Cain and Abel, who were siblings and brought up in the same environments. Abel was saved and Cain damned.

There are several other references to the fortuitous bestowal of divine grace. Two boys serve as the messengers of Godot- one tends the goats and the other sheep. They are brothers Cain and Abel. But unpredictably Godot is kind to one who tends the goats, and beats the other who tends the sheep. When Estragon thinks that Godot is coming, he cries out in fear: I'm accursed!" Estragon feels that he is in hell. Vladimir, on the other hand, rejoices at what he imagines to be the arrival of Godot.

Salvation as divine grace is matter of chance, and Beckett reiterates the point. When asked to think, Lucky, gives a demonstration of his thinking and mentions several words, namely 'apathia' 'athambia', and 'aphasia'. This is not mere rigmarole, and has a philosophical significance, for apathia means divine apathy; athambia means terror of God, and aphasia means the speechlessness of God. That is to say, God may be apathetic; God may be speechless; God has the capacity for terror. God will love and save only a select few.

Tree is the symbol of cross on which Christ was hanged. Few leaves on the tree in second act indicate the idea of hope. They have hoped that their wait will give them some meaningful results.

The Boy, a messenger of Godot conveys the message of Godot's arrival to Vladimir and Estragon. The boy here is a symbol of hope and better tomorrow.

Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for divine grace. For to wait for Godot is to wait for divine grace and salvation. Vladimir has consistently practiced Christian tolerance and charity and has not left his friend even amidst trying circumstances. Beckett has taken infinite pains to distinguish the two tramps from Pozzo and Lucky. While the tramps have something to wait for, something to look forward to, Pozzo and Lucky are cast adrift with no objective in view. Pozzo particularly suffers from the chastisement of hubris, pride, which is one of the Seven Deadly Sins. He believes that night will never fall upon him. But at the advent of night he becomes blind and plays the penalty of his overweening confidence.

Who is Godot in Beckett's Waiting for Godot?

What is the identity of Godot?

The meaning of Waiting for Godot has defied analysis. Critics have spilled ink and failed to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. "Even those who agreed that Godot had a 'meaning'," says Alec Reid, "were deeply divided among themselves as to what that meaning was". Two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, are waiting to meet a men or a divine being known as Godot, who eventually does not turn up. The identity of Godot has posed a question, yet to be answered. According to Ruby Cohn, Godot has been variously identified as God, a diminutive God, Love, Death, Silence, Hope, DeGaulle, a Balzac character, a bicycle racer, and a Paris

Street for call girls.

To Alan Schneider, who anxiously asked him about the identity of Godot, Beckett replied: "If I know, I would have said so in the play." He also remarked, and it is difficult to ascertain if he was serious or flippant, that the spectacular success of Waiting for Godot was due to the misunderstanding. The critics and public alike were seeking to impose an allegorical or symbolic explanation of Godot.

And yet Godot remains an enigma. Others abide our question, and Godot, like Mathew Arnold's Shakespeare, smiles and smiles, and out tops our knowledge. Had Godot appeared on the stage even for a moment, we could have sized him up. But he does not come. We learn from a messenger boy that he will come on the following day. But he fails to fulfil his appointment.

Furthermore the name 'Godot' will entail many possible meanings if it is observed within the context of French. According to Graver, there are some common French words and phrases which begin with 'god'. Godillot in French for 'old shapeless boot'; Godasses are 'military boots', Godailler is 'to go pub-crawling'. Goder means 'to pucker'. In addition, 'Godo' is spoken Irish for God. Thus, as a 'signifier', 'Godot' potentially will result in many debatable and fractured interpretations.

Is Godot God?

Right up to the end of the play Godot remains a mysterious figure. If we regard Waiting for Godot as Christian play or a Morality play, Godot may stand for God. Martin Esslin lends unqualifying support to this view. He says that the play is concerned with the ultimate realities of the human condition, for an Absurd Drama is concerned with the fundamental problems of life and death. When man fails to answer the questions relating to ultimate reality, he has to think of God and religion.

If so, Godot is as much the God of the Old Testament as of the New. Jehovah and Godot may look alike, particularly for his white beard. The similarity may also be noticed when we consider that Godot does not love everybody. He has handsome rewards for the boy who tends the goats, while he metes out punishment to the shepherd the award appears arbitrary. That reminds us of Jehovah, who preferred Abel to Cain. The reference to the goats and sheeps is to be found in the Gospel according to St. Matthew :

"And he [Christ] shall seat the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left."

Godot may refer suffering also. "The casual relationship between divine cruelty and human suffering is perhaps most effectively dramatised in Beckett's portrayal of many of his characters as emblematic Biblical sufferers". Suffering is divine punishment. Christ himself is the worst sufferer in his mundane existence His death on the Cross, says Hersh Zeifman, is the paradigm of divine rejection. It is for this reason that Estragon says: "All my life I've compared myself to Christ."

With absolutely no ambiguity Beckett refers to salvation and damnation in his play. Vladimir mentions two thieves crucified on either side of Christ, one of whom was saved and the other damped. The two tramps are also thinking in terms of salvation or damnation according to the sweet will of Godot. Much depends on their repentance, which is the way to divine grace. On an inquiry from Vladimir if he has ever read the Bible, Estragon replies:

"I remember the maps of the Holy Land, Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's

where we'll go for our honeymoon."

If we accept this view, Godot may mean God. But Becket has no anthropomorphic conception of God. The very fact that God does not come means that he is disembodied. But just because he does not come, it does not mean that he is non-existent As far as Vladimir is concerned, he very much exists. The idea of salvation is all the while haunting his mind.

When asked by Pozzo to think', Lucky gives a harangue on Godot. When the gaudy and inane phraseology is left out, he says:

"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."

Godot may be termed as "waiting" what really matters. Waiting is charged with expectancy. Everybody waiting for something expects that something better will turn up.

Eric Bentley does not set store by the religious interpretation of Waiting for Godot. He maintains that the name Godot is taken from a play entitled Mercader. Mercadet is a stock Exchange speculator who all the while complains that his financial trouble are largely due to Godeau, who defalcated the money and away.

But the religious interpretation has a greater appeal himself quoted from St. Augustine: "Don't despair ! One of the thieves was saved. Do not presume. One of the thieves was damned." It is this conviction that makes Godot a loving figure and not a bugbear.

Discuss the importance of parallelism in "Waiting for Godot".

In "Waiting for Godot", Samuel Becket has portrayed a dismal and shocking condition of man. Becket has used pairing and parallels in establishing the relationships of the characters in such a way as to project the miserable plight of man. There are three pairs of characters: primarily, the attachment between Vladimir and Estragon, intermittently, the association between Pozzo and Lucky, and the relationship between the tramps and the mysterious character, Godot. As a result of these relationships, the playwright is successful in depicting the themes of paralysis, delusion ignorance, loss of memory and uselessness. The characters and relationships create a sheer sense of loss and chaos. The characters are dependent on each other. The relationships are important in associating rays of hope, sympathy and wit as well. Probably, it is due to these relationships that the characters are able to bear the pain and misery. The impact of time reflects the burden of existence for these characters which is contrasted and reflected in their relationships.

The two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, are parallel to each other. They are waiting for Godot, a mysterious and dubious character symbolizing God. Though they are identical and comparable in several aspects, yet they are different personalities having the same sense of loss and painful existence. Vladimir is a strong and shielding friend. He is helpful to Estragon. He seems a bit responsible. Estragon is an emotional fellow always complaining and shouting. Estragon is presented in physical pain while Vladimir is silent and thoughtful. For them time has halted. Estragon echoes "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful...". Everything seems to be changing around them but they can't. Estragon remarks: "They all change, only we can't". Both of them convey the sense of human inability to act. They are lost. They are waiting for rescue.

They are waiting for some help from Godot. "Only he can" help them. He can get them out of

the trouble. Both of them are waiting for ever and ever. Both of them quit. But both of them wait. The two tramps have symbolic significance and are related to human society in general. They may be seen as paralleled (in relationship) to human society. The human race is as lost as the two tramps. There is loss of identity for both of them. Modern man is directed to a vague path leading nowhere; similarly the two tramps are just making the time pass. They have no purpose. They meet. They intend to go. They intend to commit suicide. They have lack of trust. But they do nothing. They profess "every man to his cross" that everyone has to bear the burden of his existence.

Though shown intermittently, yet the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is of grave importance to the overall theme of the play. Pozzo is the master while Lucky is the slave. We find Pozzo, the haves, dragging Lucky by the rope in his neck. Lucky is wounded on his neck. Pozzo is symbolic of the exploitative society. Lucky represents the oppressed, have-nots, bearing the drudgery and inhuman treatment of Pozzo. This has reduced Lucky to a mere animal. Pozzo feeds Lucky with the bones and leftovers of food. He carries the burden of Pozzo's luggage all the time. He is beaten by Pozzo. Pozzo is so cruel to Lucky that he calls him "pig" and "hog". Pozzo wants to sell Lucky at a fair. But we find him serving Pozzo very faithfully even when Pozzo has gone blind. Lucky appears to be devoid of any human feelings except for a couple of instances. The dead feelings of Pozzo depict the hopelessness of the depressed modern man.

Existentialism in “Waiting for Godot” | Philosophy in Existential Plays

“Waiting for Godot” is a play in which Samuel Beckett adopted the doctrine of existentialism. Critics call it one of the prominent existentialist plays that demonstrate theme of existentialism as main story of the play. However, certain elements are there in it that reveal theme of nihilism too. Nihilism and existentialism are two distinct things still it seems that Samuel Beckett combined them in order show superiority of Existentialism. Some of the critics are of the opinion that “Waiting for Godot” is neither entirely on existentialism nor entirely on nihilism but somewhere in between.

What is Existentialism?

Jean Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger presented theory of existentialism in which they stated that humans had been thrown in a meaningless universe in which they had no purpose at all. They were put in absurd situation by an unknown force and were living in mental pains and sufferings. Life is terrible or not, it is not the topic relevant to theory of existentialism. Hence, main reason behind sufferings of humans is not the terrible world but that they are freely living in it. They are free to choose but irony is that no choice is given to them but existentialism believes that even not making a choice is a choice. In concise words, existentialism is theory that believes “man is what he does”.

Existentialism in “Waiting for Godot:

“Waiting for Godot” is indeed a play that demonstrates theme of existentialism. Two main characters of the play named as Vladimir and Estragon are put into an absurd situation just like humans have been put in the world without any purpose. In whole play they do nothing to change their miserable condition. Existentialism emphasizes on the practice of doing something and creating a purpose while accepting existence in this world. Hence, they have freewill to make their life better. They can come out of this situation and can give their lives a meaning but they do nothing. Estragon’s dialogue is notable in this regard. He says:

“Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful.”

Estragon- Waiting for Godot

He knows that his situation is awful yet he does nothing to make it better.

Nihilism in "Waiting for Godot":

Nihilism means nothing. It determines that humans exist in this world is enough. They should not do anything because everything they do is meaningless. "Waiting for Godot" portrays theme of despair as well as concept of nihilism. Estragon and Vladimir do nothing. Play starts with nothingness and ends with nothingness.

Still this play does not promote theory of nihilism. Two tramps do nothing even then they are doing something. They are waiting for Godot. They have set a purpose for them through which they accept their existence. Furthermore, they are finding their identities. They are unable to find answers of their questions and the only reason due to which they are not successful is that they are confused.

In addition, they are christian by religion and believe on existence of god which is opposite to the concept of nihilism. Theory of existentialism also does not believe on existence of God. However, there is a type of existentialism that do so. It is called "Christian Existentialism". "Waiting for Godot", in this way, demonstrates this type of existentialism.

Christian Existentialism "Waiting for Godot":

Believing on existence of God does not change meaning of existentialism. Characters are finding their purpose in this world. They want answers of their questions like who they are and why they are here? It is, therefore, Estragon says:

"We always find something, eh Didi, to let us think we exist?"

Estragon- Waiting for Godot

"Waiting for Godot" is a situation that has no begging and no end. Tramps don't know about their past nor are they sure about their future. It is a situation which every person in the world facing. Samuel Beckett also said the same. In his eyes, we are all like Estragon and Vladimir. Furthermore, he is of the view that the play is more about waiting. Thus, it is true that they are living in an absurd world that is one of the major characteristics of existentialism.

Pointlessness of Existence:

They go on living. They know pointlessness of their existence still they don't give up on life. It is main problem that no one is here to answer the question of human existence in this world. Same is the case with protagonists of the play; they are waiting for Godot. It is the only way through which they would know purpose of their lives.

Besides, we see that Estragon and Vladimir are living a miserable life not because life is the name of pains instead because they are free. It is also a problem that humans have been given freewill. Lucky is satisfied with his life as compared to Estragon and Vladimir. Though his life is tough yet he does not consider it tough. A purpose has been set for him by his master. On the other hand, Estragon and Vladimir have no purpose. Freewill is their problem.

They portray a universal problem. Humans are living in this world but why are they living? No one has exact answer of this question. It would have been easier for us if our goals were set. Freewill is our main problem because it has become our duty to find purpose of life. It is primary meaning of existentialism. Samuel Becket clearly shows it in "Waiting for Godot" through Estragon and Vladimir.

Meanings of Existentialism in "Waiting for Godot":

Simplest definition of existentialism is that "humans define their own meaning in life, and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe" [source:philosophybasics.com].

Above said definition can be divided into three parts.
Universe is irrational
Humans existence in it and
Humans define meanings of life with rational decisions.

If so, then "Waiting for Godot" frankly promotes theory of existentialism. Estragon and Vladimir are existing in irrational world, and they have defined meanings of their lives i.e. "waiting for Godot". He would come and answer them. They are loyal to their purpose.

Even otherwise, if that is not their purpose then Samuel Beckett intimates us that instead of waiting for godot one should set purpose of his life and existentialism also suggests the same.

Existentialism deals with individual existence, freedom and choice. "Waiting for Godot" presents the same notion due to which it is called "a play that advocates theory of existentialism".

Suffice is to say that there are two aspects of the play through which it can be seen. Firstly, it shows theme of despair and nihilism. Secondly, "Waiting for Godot" promotes philosophy of existentialism. However, majority of the dialogues, settings, actions [useless actions] reveal that existentialism is the main theme of "Waiting for Godot".

Nihilism in Waiting for Godot

Waiting for Godot, by Samuel Beckett, portrays a nihilistic philosophy through two protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon. Throughout Waiting for Godot the two tramps convey a lack of morality, understanding and a lack of purpose. Vladimir and Estragon incessantly persist in chatting about meaningless matters with no intent of acting upon their decisions. Beckett's use of nonsensical circular language expresses the existentialist theme that is consistent throughout Waiting for Godot.

Nihilism is the belief that existence is not real and that there can be no objective basis of truth.

This definition directly relates to the nihilistic philosophy that is behind Waiting for Godot. It indicates that the world and all humanity exist without meaning, purpose, truth or value. Beckett's own interpretation is obvious in Waiting for Godot as when Vladimir tells Estragon that they must return the following evening to keep their appointment once again. However, Vladimir knows that the routine is meaningless: Godot will not come.

ESTRAGON: And if we dropped him? [Pause.]
If we dropped him?
VLADIMIR: He'd punish us.
VLADIMIR: ...Unless Godot comes.
ESTRAGON: And if he comes?
VLADIMIR: We'll be saved.

Nevertheless the punishment is already apparent to Vladimir: the pointless execution

without hope of fulfilment. Estragon and Vladimir are as dependent on Godot as he is on them. They all need an outside witness to have proof of their own existence. Vladimir's confrontation with the boy expresses his doubt over his and Estragon's existence.

BOY: What am I to say to Mr Godot, sir?
VLADIMIR: Tell him... [He hesitates.]
...tell him you saw us. [Pause.] You did see us didn't you?

From this extract we can determine Godot's own fear of non-existence and his need for the reassurance of the two tramps' continuing belief in him. Even so Godot is also a nothing figure and this is the only extent to which his existence is real. Nothing is more real than nothing.

Furthermore, Beckett relates nihilism to existentialism consistently by using the introduction of Pozzo and Lucky to highlight this relation.

POZZO: You see my memory is defective.
[Silence.]
ESTRAGON: In the meantime nothing happens.

Pozzo's introduction in the previous few lines portrays Beckett's interpretation of nihilistic and existentialist as having physical extensions of the human mind. As Estragon adds to the overall effect of the exchange, he also touches upon the belief that "Anxiety or the sense of anguish, a generalised uneasiness, a fear or dread which is not directed to any specific object. Anguish is the dread of the nothingness of human existence." This indicates to the audience that although Pozzo is concerned with his memory loss, Beckett expresses the lack of caring that the characters establish. This lack of caring enables Beckett's combination of nihilism and existentialism throughout Waiting for Godot and the similarities that define it

In addition to this, a common factor in all of Beckett's drama is that the figures portrayed are all imprisoned.

ESTRAGON: ...Let's go.
VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.

The imprisonment of Beckett's protagonists forces the audience's attention upon the extent to which we depend on mobility. Mobility offers the chance of escape from an undesirable situation. Without it we are reduced to a passive, vegetative existence. Beckett portrays this passive existence, this belief that existence is not necessarily real.

ESTRAGON: We always find something, eh, Didi give us the impression we exist?
VLADIMIR: [Impatiently.] Yes, yes, we're magicians.

From this, we can determine that Beckett represents the imprisonments of the human consciousness within the bounds of infinity and eternity. Beckett's so-called nihilism can thus be seen as no more than the necessary outcome of his refusal to deal in generalisations and truths. The existential experience is thus felt as "a succession of attempts to give shape to the void".

Furthermore, the play highlights that life lacks a sense of purpose. This play revolves around two characters waiting for someone who has little proof of existence. This shows that life has

no purpose; it's just a waiting game for unknown questions and answers. They discuss having no ties to anything "...Tied to Godot? What an idea! No question of it...". Pozzo questions the fact that something that appears to be human is even human. He says, "I am perhaps not particularly human, but who cares?" This reflects that we should not care if we are human as life is meaningless, thus relating directly to nihilism. Vladimir and Estragon discuss if they should repent their births .

VLADIMIR: Suppose we repented.
ESTRAGON: Repented what?...Our being born?

Perhaps they should as life is so meaningless. It is so meaningless that suicide is as good an option as doing anything else. Estragon says, "One is what one is, the essential doesn't change." His viewpoint tells the audience that no matter what it is impossible to change the circumstances thus giving life no meaning and therefore reflecting the nihilistic philosophy in Waiting for Godot.

In Waiting for Godot Beckett presents the question of what is life without action. He expresses that as life has no substance, living is intangible when one is not sure who or what they are waiting for. In addition to this, there is no substance to Godot to imagine his form.

POZZO: You took me for Godot...
VLADIMIR: ...he's a kind of acquaintance
ESTRAGON: Nothing of the kind, we hardly know him.
VLADIMIR: True...we don't know him very well...but all the same...
ESTRAGON: Personally I wouldn't even know him if I saw him.

Vladimir and Estragon's confusion about the appearance of Godot mirrors that of the audience's. This confusion over Godot's appearance therefore leads to the questioning of his actual existence. Furthermore, Beckett's induced confusion relates to his misuse of time. When Pozzo's watch stops, not only is there confusion on and off stage, but there is also a stoppage of time.

VLADIMIR: Time has stopped.
POZZO: [Cuddling his watch to his ear.] Don't you believe it sir, don't you believe it.

This immediately impresses upon the audience the nihilistic philosophy behind Waiting for Godot. The stoppage of time introduces the audience to a new way of presenting nihilism. As one of nihilism's major definitions suggests "a firm belief that life is meaningless." This statement relates directly to Pozzo as his seemingly busy life is ruled by time and because of this Pozzo loses his meaning in life when time stops.

Post-War Disillusionment in Beckett's Waiting for Godot

Darko Suvin in his famous critical book on Beckett and Post-World War II theatre entitled To Brecht and Beyond : Sounding in Modern Dramaturgy (1984) tend to identify Samuel Beckett's position as a dramatist in Waiting for Godot as expressive of the general human condition. The play is based on Albert Camus' The Myth of Sisyphus (1942). It does not tell a story; it explores a static situation. Martin Esslin in his famous work The Theatre of the Absurd (1961) categorizes the seminal properties of an absurd drama which present lack of plot-construction, lack of characterization, limitation of language, absurdist situation in space and time and man's waiting for the sake of waiting for a better tomorrow. In a drama dealing with these themes, the dictum is

“Nothing to be done”.

If we look into the four characters treated as pairs we can easily understand the universal phenomenon. Estragon is from France; Vladimir is from Russian; Lucky from English and Pozzo Italian. Four different nationalities are being presented and they comprise with two different groups – Estragon-Vladimir and Lucky-Pozzo. Darko Suvin’s comment on Samuel Beckett can be noted :

“...in his nightmare and horrors of the same presumably identical and relevant for a Vietnamese pageant, a Yugoslav worker, a French intellectualist and an American businessman.”

Our critical response to Suvin’s word would be the specific condition as located in the play is the microcosm of human experience characterized by a plurality – Estragon and Vladimir, Lucky and Pozzo.

The late 1940’s has also witnessed the indescribable situation of the slave; the suppression of the political prisoners. The drama also highlights the binary division between the supremacy of the colonizer and the oppression of the colonised. We also understand that a homogenized human experience cannot be put forward to one universal category. Man in this generation has lost faith in himself. He has seen bloodshed, brutality and murder and he is reduced to the level of non-entity. No bond can attach him with anyone.

The traumatic picture we get in the drama give a negative history of mankind. The historicity of the sense of “being” is reduced to the nothingness; man’s position in the discourse of space and time is absolutely absurd. It is seemingly incomprehensible nightmare of the history where things fall apart. The drama also highlights the theme of empty promise. The stage direction of the Tree alludes to life it remains unrealised even at the end. The characters wait for Godot as a routine habit but Godot never appear physically on the stage. The Boy announces Godot’s arrival, he promises a better tomorrow is never going to be fulfilled. ‘Godot’ also stands for “a better social order” (Keith Whitlock in his book The Varied Scene). The better social order happens to be socialist’s promise which is a far cry, a remote possibility.

Waiting for Godot is a universal condition – the quest for mythological human being. The characters discuss about the ‘ape man’, the physical stage before the human formation. In this drama man’s identity has been challenged, his position in space and time has been questioned. All these ontological questions deal with the central crisis of being nothingness. In the drama Pozzo and Lucky refer to the Atlas, the mythological reference to a man who carries the weight of the heaven. Man’s life is burdensome – the irrationality, cruelty and brutality are in the year. The situation was so horrid that it had a significant impact on the middle class intelligentsia in the post-war Western society. Socialism practises anti-bourgeois socialist framework which stand as a sharp contrast to the feudal colonizer.

As a Post-World War absurd drama, Beckett’s Waiting for Godot is a response to the brutal advance of capitalism, rampant individualism and the consequent loss of community life, large scale devastation of the World-War, loss of man’s internal goodness and liberal traditions and a threat of nuclear holocaust.

Criticism

Terry Niehuis

Niehuis is an associate professor of English at Western Carolina University. His essay

discusses how Waiting for Godot can best be understood in musical terms such as repeating themes and motifs.

Waiting for Godot has been and may always be a difficult work to read or view. However, much of the difficulty that readers and audiences have had with the play seems to have come from false expectations. If audiences come to a production expecting a traditional theatre experience featuring a clear plot, realistic characters, and conventional dialogue, they are doomed to frustration and may not be able to adjust and simply experience what the play does have to offer.

The traditional play tells a story and the movement of a story is usually in a more-or-less forward line from beginning to end. The movement in Beckett's play, however, is more like a circle. The play has a beginning, but the beginning seems somewhat arbitrary because what happened before the beginning does not seem to be important. The play has an end, but the end seems to recall the beginning and create a sense of circularity rather than the traditional sense of closure that conventional stories generally provide. So Beckett's play could perhaps be described as "all middle." This, of course, reinforces the Absurdist or Existentialist idea of human life as having no clear purpose or direction, of life being an interminable waiting for a sense of purpose or closure that is not likely to ever arrive. Seen clearly, life seems to these thinkers as something we simply do while we are waiting to die, and the illusions human beings create to give their lives a sense of teleology or purpose will not finally sustain the thoroughly reflective twentieth-century human being.

In a way, these Existentialist ideas in Waiting for Godot are encapsulated in the first image and line of the play. As the lights rise on the stage, the audience sees Estragon in a bleak landscape, sitting on a low mound, struggling to remove his boot. He tries, gives up, rests exhausted, tries again, gives up again, repeats the process, and finally says, "nothing to be done." That, in a sense, is the whole play in a nutshell. In an indifferent universe, human beings struggle with the simplest of activities, are tempted to give up, but can do nothing to alter their fate except persist. It can be said, as Hugh Kenner did in his A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett, that the rest of the play simply repeats this observation: "insofar as the play has a 'message,'" said Kenner, "that is more or less what it is: 'Nothing to be done.' There is no dilly-dallying; it is delivered in the first moments, with the first spoken words, as though to get the didactic part out of the way." The rest of the play could be seen as a set of "variations" on this theme, much as a jazz or classical musical composition announces a theme or motif and then enlarges upon that theme, modifying it and adding additional themes and motifs until the composition has succeeded in fully presenting its mood, tone, or idea. In the opening moments of Waiting for Godot this kind of musical quality is most obvious when Vladimir finally repeats Estragon's opening line, saying himself, "Nothing to be done." At the end of the second page of the script and then near the end of the third, Vladimir's repetition of this opening line echoes like a musical refrain and establishes the main idea of Beckett's play.

To adjust the expectations one brings to the reading or viewing of Waiting for Godot it may be useful to think of the play as something like a musical composition. Linda Ben-Zvi explained in her Samuel Beckett that Beckett "bemoaned the fact that his characters could not be portrayed as musical sounds—a simultaneity of sounds played at one time: 'how nice that would be, linear, a lovely Phythagorean chant-chant solo of cause and effect.'" Ben-Zvi went on to observe that "the theatre, while it still may not explain characters, can do what prose cannot: present the 'chain-chant' directly to audiences who are free to react without the necessity of explanation, who can apprehend life being presented." In his The Theatre of the Absurd Martin Esslin quoted Herbert Blau, the director of the 1957 San Quentin production, who attempted to prepare the convict audience for the play by comparing it "to

a piece of jazz music 'to which one must listen for whatever one may find in it.'" Peter Hall, the director for the first London production, reported in an interview on the BBC's Third Programme that neither he nor his actors really understood the play but that he "was immediately struck by the enormous humanity and universality of the subject, and also by the extraordinary rhythms of the writing, and it was these rhythms and almost musical flexibility of the lyricism which communicated itself to me and which I tried to pass on to the actors." And in a famous letter (quoted in Steven Connor's Waiting for Godot and Endgame: Samuel Beckett) to director Alan Schneider, who was preparing a production of Endgame, Beckett wrote:"my work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin."

Thinking of the play in terms of a jazz or classical musical composition can solve a number of the problems readers and audiences traditionally have with Waiting for Godot. The play's apparent "meandering" quality is accounted for, as well as its obvious repetition and circularity. The quick, stichomythic exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon, as well as their abrupt shifts in topics become as important for their sound and rhythm as they do for their sense, full as they are of crescendos and diminuendos. The numerous pauses and silences also become crucial as they contribute to the dialogue's rhythm. Like a "quartet" the play is a series of voices, all different but all eventually complementary, elaborate variations on the theme of "nothing to be done." Beckett's primary concerns are with mood and tone, using rhythms in language and numerous examples of repetition to create something very much like melody.

Even Lucky's monologue, which exists as the play's greatest frustration when one is expecting traditional "sense" in dialogue, becomes more meaningful when one hears the "sound" of it. When we first see Lucky, he is a pathetic figure sagging under a tremendous load of baggage, tethered by a cruel rope to a whip-wielding figure still offstage. Working silently, like an automaton, Lucky is disgustingly abused but still subservient to a Pozzo who is obviously inflated and unworthy of Lucky's devotion. When Lucky weeps at the mention of his being sold at the fair, he is a moving symbol of human misery, but when he kicks the solicitous Estragon we feel his anger and wonder at the apparent inappropriateness of his response. All of our complex feelings about this figure are gathering momentum, just as perhaps his are, and these feelings find their most powerful expression in the culminating moment of Lucky's monologue. The monologue is breathless, one long shouted sentence without punctuation, as if to express in his heroic effort to "think" all of his suffering, degradation, and yet determination to survive. In the theatre it can be a moment of transcendence, not so much because of what the words "mean" (there are brief flashes of "sense") but because of how the words "sound." James Knowlson recounted in his Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett that in the 1984 San Quentin Drama Workshop production of the play, "a small, bald-headed actor named J. Pat Miller" played Lucky at a number of performances and "built the speech into so overwhelming and searing a performance that Beckett, hearing him for the first time, sat totally transfixed, tears welling up in his eyes. After the rehearsal, he told Miller that he was the best Lucky he had ever seen."

As another example of how essentially musical the play is, consider the way sound communicates the difference between Pozzo's two appearances in the play. In the first act Pozzo is mostly volume and bluster as he attempts to dominate everyone around him. In the second act, he is a small voice simply crying "help" repeatedly. From his entrance and fall where he lies helpless on the ground, Pozzo cries "help" or "pity" eleven times while the foreground sound is of Vladimir and Estragon debating what to do. Pozzo is thus like a recurrent sound from the percussion section until he offers to pay Vladimir and Estragon to

help him up. As Vladimir attempts to help Pozzo up, Vladimir is dragged down and then joins in the refrain of "help" until all three of them are on the ground. Obviously comic, the scene also generates an enormously effective pathos. At one point Pozzo and Vladimir cry "help" in successive lines as Estragon threatens to leave, with the richness of the theatrical experience lying mostly in the different way those two calls for help sound.

Beckett was a poet in the theatre, more interested in the evocative quality of his words than their declarative quality. Declarative language is easier to understand but evaporates very quickly. In simple, declarative language we can say that Shakespeare's Hamlet is a sensitive young man who is so hurt by his father's death and his mother's hasty remarriage that he contemplates suicide in his famous "to be or not to be" speech. But the lasting value and pleasure of that speech lies not in the mere identification of its declarative meaning. Its lasting power lies in the elusive but evocative quality of its images, diction, and rhythms. In all of his art, Beckett sought to emphasize the evocative quality of his language by reducing the appeal of its declarative aspects. Thus, Waiting for Godot purposely frustrates the audience's dependence on declarative language in order to force it to pay more attention to the dialogue's evocative quality. Thus, in the simplest of exchanges we can find great poetry. For example, Vladimir gives Estragon a carrot in Act I and while Estragon chews on it Vladimir asks, "How's the carrot?" Estragon replies simply, "It's a carrot," and Vladimir adds, "So much the better, so much the better. [Pause.] What was it you wanted to know?" Here there are rhythms and tones in the dialogue that not only mirror the sense of the lines but can even stand in for them. The rising tone of Vladimir's question, so full of hope, is countered by the gently falling tones of Estragon's response. Hope and expectation fall back to the earth in simple fact. Life is what it is. Nothing more and nothing less. And the repetition of Vladimir's "so much the better" is as crucial as the phrase itself, as is the pause that follows. "What was it you wanted to know?" is the sound of "resuming" after recognizing that there is "nothing to be done."

Questions and Answers

1.What do you think is the most effective way that Beckett presents repetition in Waiting for Godot? If the play is meant as a representative sample of what happens every night in the lives of Vladimir and Estragon, why does Beckett choose to present two acts instead of three, or one?

Ans: The presentation of essentially the same action twice in the two acts is the most important form of repetition in the play. More than one act is necessary to show the repetition of actions in the play, but this does not explain why Beckett chooses to use two acts instead of more than two. The choice of two acts may be somehow related to the use of pairs of characters, emphasizing the importance of characters and actions that occur in twos.

2.Describe the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon. Why do you think they stay together, despite their frequent suggestions of parting?

Ans: Some critics have suggested that Vladimir and Estragon remain together because of their complementary personalities, arguing that each fulfills the qualities that the other lacks, rendering them dependent on each other. Think about what evidence there is in the play for this type of interpretation.

3.How has Waiting for Godot influenced culture today?

Ans: Waiting for Godot is one of the most famous plays of the 20th century. It has had many interpretations, ranging from politics to philosophy and religion. Indeed, the play is so well-known that, in popular culture, the phrase 'waiting for Godot' has become synonymous with waiting for something that would probably never happen.

The English-language premiere of Waiting for Godot was in 1955 at the Arts Theatre in London. Since then, the play has been translated into many languages and there have been numerous stage productions of it around the world. A notable recent English-language production is the 2009 performance directed by Sean Mathias, which featured the famous British actors Ian McKellen and Patrick Steward.

4.What is the storyline of Waiting for Godot?
Ans: Waiting for Godot follows two characters - Vladimir and Estragon - as they wait for someone else called Godot who never appears.

5.What are the main themes of Waiting for Godot?
Ans: The main themes of Waiting for Godot are: Existentialism, The passing of time, and Suffering.

6.What is the moral of Waiting for Godot?
Ans: The moral of Waiting for Godot is that human existence has no meaning unless people create their own.

7.What does "Godot" symbolise?
Ans: Godot is a symbol that has been interpreted in many different ways. Samuel Beckett himself never reiterated what he meant by 'Godot'. Some interpretations of Godot include: Godot as a symbol for God; Godot as a symbol for purpose; Godot as a symbol for death.

8.What do the characters in Waiting for Godot represent?
Ans: The characters in Waiting for Godot represent different kinds of suffering. The main characters - Vladimir and Estragon - represent human uncertainty and the failure to escape the absurdity of existence.

9.What is nihilism in Waiting for Godot?
Ans: Waiting for Godot, by Samuel Beckett, portrays a nihilistic philosophy through two protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon. Nihilism is the belief that existence is not real and that there can be no objective basis of truth. This definition directly relates to the nihilistic philosophy that is behind Waiting for Godot.

10.Would you call Waiting for Godot a nihilistic play?
Ans: Yes, Waiting for Godot is a nihilistic play. Nihilism expresses the idea that life is ultimately meaningless. There is no greater purpose to peoples'...

11.Why does the boy call Vladimir Albert?
Ans: The arrival of the boy with a message from Godot only increases the uncertainty. He calls Vladimir "Mr. Albert," raising the possibility that the message isn't even meant for Vladimir or Estragon (or that they aren't actually named Vladimir and Estragon).

12.Is Pozzo a bully?
Ans: Pozzo is a bully. He defines himself as Master to Lucky, his slave.

13.What are Kierkegaard's three stages of existence explain?
Ans: Kierkegaard proposed that the individual passed through three stages on the way to becoming a true self: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Each of these "stages on life's way" represents competing views on life and as such potentially conflicts with one another.

14.What is the meaning of time in waiting for Godot?
Ans: Discuss the idea of the meaningless of time in Waiting for Godot. Time represents an existential category, a well of possibilities and decisions, shuffled and scattered throughout what a human being perceives as past, present, or future. Beckett observes it from a different angle, giving the reader an insight into its absurd nature.

15.Is waiting for Godot a metaphor for human life?
Ans: Time seems to be a repetitive process in which waiting for something results in its repetition. If that "something" does not occur, time spent waiting for it becomes useless. It can be concluded that Waiting for Godot is a metaphor for human life. Rarely do people live in this very moment, unaware of how quickly "now" becomes "then."

16.What is Beckett trying to say about Godot in Withanage?
Ans: Beckett observes it from a different angle, giving the reader an insight into its absurd nature. Estragon and Vladimir are mere puppets of time who are waiting for the supposed arrival of Godot, although it is unknown who he is or when he will come (Withanage 7-8).

17.How does Beckett use absurdism in waiting for Godot?
Ans: In Waiting for Godot, however, language is meant to confuse readers and viewers. This is because absurdists believe that language is a flawed as communication. Beckett uses the cyclical nature of the novel and the character's conversations to shows this belief.

18.When and where does the play 'Waiting for Godot' take place?
Ans: All the action takes place next to a tree on a country road, beginning on the evening of one day and ending on the evening of the next. The presence of the tree and a rock of some sort is apparently important, at least according to Beckett -- the setting, he says, is complete with animal, vegetable, and mineral.

19.Why is the play 'Waiting for Godot' in two acts?
Ans: "Waiting for Godot" appears to have been structured on sets of binaries. There are two messenger boys, two sets of characters and hence two acts. The two acts show two sides of the same character. Moreover, the two acts describe circular events which means the play could go on forever.

20.What is the basic difference between Act I and Act II of 'Waiting for Godot'?
Ans: "Waiting for Godot" has a circular structure. From Act I to Act II, there is no difference in either the setting or in the time. The basic difference between Act I and Act II is the reversal of fortune of Pozzo and Lucky. Whereas Pozzo was clearly the master and Lucky was his slave in Act I, in Act II Pozzo is blind and Lucky mute. They have become dependent on each other for survival.

21.What are the major themes of 'Waiting for Godot'?
Ans: Humour and the absurd, freedom and confinement, modernism and postmodernism, condition of the universe, devaluation of language, uncertainty of all knowledge, search for meaning, choices, truth, time, religion, friendship, hope and dependency are the major themes of "Waiting for Godot".

22.What is the significance of Godot in the play 'Waiting for Godot'?
Ans: Beckett denies that Godot is "God". On the surface, Godot is a person for whom the characters are waiting, but who never arrives. In this play, Godot represents a personal god to which we attach our hopes to make our lives better. Vladimir and Estragon wait Godot to get their lives improved.

23.What is an absurd play?
Ans: An absurd play is a form of drama that emphasizes the absurdity of human existence by employing disjointed, repetitious, and meaningless dialogue, purposeless and confusing situations, and plots that lack realistic or logical development. "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett is an example of absurd play.

24.How does 'Waiting for Godot' demonstrate the qualities of theatre of the Absurd?
Ans: "Waiting for Godot" has a loose plot, there is no significant change in setting, its characters are mechanical puppets, its theme is unexplained, there is no witty repartee and pointed dialogue, and above all Estrogen and Vladimir's endless waiting for Godot is completely absurd.

25.Mention the modern qualities which are present in 'Waiting for Godot'.
Ans: "Waiting for Godot" is a modern play in the sense that it defies classic standards. Modern writers had a new liking for fragmented forms and discontinuous narratives, and "Waiting for Godot" is a superb example of fragmented form.

26.How is 'Waiting for Godot' a tragicomedy?
Ans: "Waiting for Godot is a mixture of comic and tragic elements. Musical devices, circus acts, cross-talks and the atmosphere of the play are stuff of pure comedy. However, Lucky's pathetic situation, the night-mares, the attempted suicide and above all Estrogen and Vladimir's waiting for something who never comes turn this comedy into a tragicomedy.

27.What is the moral of the play 'Waiting for Godot'?
Ans: Life is condensed down into absolutely nothing and only the friendship between Vladimir and Estragon is able to stave off temporarily the loneliness of such a barren existence. We enter the world with no sense of identity and gradually as we grow up assume our identity from things around us -- our families, our achievements etc. However, our assumed identity may be based on illusory concepts.

28.In what language was 'Waiting for Godot' originally written?
Ans: "Waiting for Godot" was originally written in French in 1948, with the title "En attendant Godot". Beckett personally translated the play into English. The world premiere was held on January 5, 1953, in the Left Bank Theater of Babylon in Paris.

29.What is 'mandrake'? What is its symbolic reference?
Ans: Mandrake is a plant of the nightshade family, with a forked fleshy root which supposedly resembles the human form and which was formerly used in herbal medicine and magic; it was alleged to shriek when pulled from the ground. In "Waiting for Godot", Vladimir says, "Where it falls mandrakes grow". It refers that mandrakes grow where the semen of the hanged man has dripped onto the ground.

30.What does the song about the dog signify in 'Waiting for Godot'?
Ans: In the beginning of Act II, Vladimir moves about feverishly on the stage and suddenly begins to sing a dog song -- an old German Balled. It is a circular song. It is emblematic of the circularity and repetitiveness of the play as a whole. It also reinforces Beckett's idea of the loss of individuality, and creates more conflict between Vladimir and Estragon.

35.What does Lucky's 'Dance in a Net' symbolize?
Ans: When Lucky is commanded to dance in Act I, Pozzo reveals that he calls his dance "The Net", adding, "He thinks he's entangled in a net". Thus Lucky's dance symbolizes the agony, strain and entanglement in life to magnify the ultimate suffering of human existence.

36.What is the function of the audience in 'Waiting for Godot'?
Ans: In the Theatre of the Absurd, there is an attempt to draw the audience into the play and make them feel involved. In "Waiting for Godot" it is never revealed conclusively who or what Godot is, this unknown force can be seen metaphorically represent that for which the audience is waiting in their own lives. The audience relates to the protagonists because waiting is common for all.

37.What is the tone of Waiting for Godot?
Ans: Waiting for Godot is both bleak and absurdly humorous. From the moment the curtain rises, the barrenness of the set conveys loneliness and isolation, and the rundown characters exude a subtle desperation. They seem to have hope, persevering in waiting for some sort of meaning or salvation, but it is ultimately revealed to be foolish and futile. But the humor created by the absurdity of the characters and their situation saves the play from total darkness. The audience's laughter is cathartic, counteracting the sense of hopelessness to create a lighter mood. In a way, the two tones reinforce each other. Things are bleak to the point of absurdity, and the absurdity reveals bleak truths about humanity and existence. The first line of the play, "Nothing to be done," in addition to summing up the action in the play, demonstrates both bleak resignation and a comically absurd casualness. Beckett called the play a tragicomedy, and his work has been interpreted both bleakly and humorously on the stage.

38.Why is Vladimir appalled in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) and what does it mean in the context of the play?
Ans: In Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir), Vladimir is talking about "the last moment" when he says he feels "it coming." He is both relieved and appalled. He has also just tried to remember a quotation he heard before about "hope deferred" making someone sick. Presumably it is death that he feels coming, and remembering the quotation provokes these mixed feelings. Although he mentions being both relieved and appalled, the feeling of being appalled is clearly stronger because the word is repeated, written in capital letters, and broken into syllables to be spoken with strong emphasis. Virtually, the only hope demonstrated in the play is implied by Vladimir's insistence on continuing to wait for Godot despite his ongoing failure to appear and Vladimir's recurring longing for death. For just a brief minute, Vladimir seems to recognize that waiting is the cause of his suffering, leaving him appalled and perhaps even making him physically ill. However, as often happens in the play, he quickly gives up on the thought with the comment "Nothing to be done."

39.What does Vladimir mean by a man "blaming on his boots the faults of his feet" in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir)?
Ans: Like many statements in the play, Vladimir's statement in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) sounds like a profound truth, but becomes absurd on closer examination. This is often interpreted as pointing out the tendency of humans to blame their problems on external sources (the boot) rather than looking to themselves (one's own foot) for the root of the problem. While this is something people do, the metaphor is based on the absurd premise that feet should somehow fit their boots rather than the other way around. It also is an example of situational irony that Vladimir and Estragon are never able to take it upon themselves to escape the excruciating waiting by just leaving instead of waiting for an external figure, Godot, to appear and save them.

40.What does Estragon suggest repenting of in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir)?
Ans: In Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) when Vladimir comes up with the idea of repenting of something, Estragon suggests they repent of being born. In Christianity, repentance is usually understood to involve feelings of deep regret for past wrongs, so Estragon is

suggesting their very existence is a regrettable mistake. If Estragon feels they would have been better off not being born, he must not feel their lives have contained much worth living for, thus contributing to the ideas in the play about life being devoid of purpose. Another interpretation suggests itself in the idea of Estragon repenting of something that cannot possibly be his own fault—his birth. This exposes the idea of repentance as absurd.

41.In Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) why does Estragon say, "People are bloody ignorant apes"?

Ans: Estragon makes this statement in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) in response to Vladimir's complaint about the story of the two thieves in the Bible. Only one of the four Gospels in the New Testament says Christ took mercy on and saved one of the thieves crucified alongside him, yet Vladimir says it is the only version people know. (Another Gospel says both thieves were damned, and the other two don't mention the thieves at all.) Estragon explains this by saying you can't expect any more of people because they're really nothing but animals. Rather than thinking through complex ideas, they simply choose whatever seems likely to be better for them. It is fitting that, of the two main characters, Estragon is the one to observe that people are no more than animals because he is the character most in touch with his animal drives, including pain and hunger. Like the apes he decries, Estragon also refuses to think through complex ideas with Vladimir. It is also interesting to note that this statement, which is based on the theory of evolution, occurs during a discussion of a Bible story. It is only in evolutionary science that humans are believed to have descended from apes. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, people are created separately from animals and considered to be inherently superior.

42.What must Godot do before answering Vladimir and Estragon's request in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) and what does it reveal about Godot?

Ans: According to Vladimir and Estragon in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir), before answering their "kind of prayer," Godot must "think it over" and consult with his family, friends, agents, correspondents, books, and bank account. This list is delivered in the same comic free-association format Vladimir and Estragon repeat throughout the play, in which they seem almost to compete to see which one can come up with the most ways to say the same thing. This raises the question of whether they're listing meaningful things or simply saying the next thing that occurs to them. If, however, their list is meaningful, it reveals that this higher power they are depending on to save them, instead of having final decision-making power, must first consult with pretty much everyone he knows as well as established learning and financial institutions to make a decision. This reveals Godot to be less than a definitive or divine authority and points out the foolishness of Estragon's and, especially (because he represents the mind) Vladimir's reliance on him to provide meaning to their existence.

43.Why does Vladimir stifle his laughter in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir)?

Ans: In Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir), Vladimir "breaks into a hearty laugh" and stifles it, "his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted." Then Vladimir claims laughter is not allowed. He is the only character who makes this claim, however, and apparently the only one bound by it because both Pozzo and Estragon laugh freely and without consequence before the end of Act 1. This restriction Vladimir imposes clearly applies only to himself. Obviously, Vladimir has a prostate problem, but on a subtler level the restriction he tries to impose on everyone implies that he sees his physical illness as a type of punishment. Later in the play, he says they cannot drop (abandon) Godot because he will punish them. It explains perhaps why Vladimir insists on waiting for Godot, and it shows that he really does believe in Godot's powers.

44.What is the significance of the confusion about Pozzo's name and identity in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: In both acts Estragon asks whether Pozzo is Godot when he and Lucky first arrive. They have been waiting for an authority figure, and Pozzo appears to be one, at least in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive). The idea is chilling: This pompous person who treats a fellow human being so callously could be the higher authority Vladimir and Estragon have been waiting for. Thankfully, Vladimir is certain he is not Godot—mostly. In the confusion about Pozzo's name in Act 1, Estragon calls him "Bozzo," comparing him to a clown. Vladimir says he knew a Gozzo family, the mother of which had a sexually transmitted disease (gonorrhea, known as "the clap"). He offers this information to try to calm Pozzo, but the unfavorable comparisons only highlight the absurdity of Pozzo's demands for recognition and respect.

45.What is the significance Vladimir and Estragon's reaction when they examine Lucky in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive)?

Ans: As they examine Lucky in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive), Vladimir and Estragon first notice that rubbing from the rope is causing a sore on Lucky's neck. Estragon declares this inevitable. After noticing he's "not bad looking," Estragon points out Lucky's "slobber," and Vladimir declares that inevitable. They speculate that he is mentally disabled. Vladimir thinks Lucky has a goiter (an abnormal enlargement of the thyroid gland in the neck), but Estragon says it is uncertain. Then Vladimir notices Lucky's "goggling" eyes, and Estragon says Lucky is at his "last gasp," but Vladimir calls that uncertain, too. The contrast between their two primary conclusions, things are either inevitable or uncertain, is comical, but their conclusions are also self-serving. Concluding that the sore and the slobber are inevitable is heartless; accepting Lucky's condition without question, and dismissing his signs of illness, even possible death, as "uncertain" ensures that they don't need to help him. They can continue to avoid action and resume waiting.

46.In Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) how do the chicken bones help illustrate differences between Estragon and Vladimir?

Ans: As the half of the pair that represents the body, Estragon is primarily concerned with his hunger, and nakedly shows his interest in the chicken bones. In Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive), he holds to social conventions enough to ask permission to take the bones but feels no embarrassment about greedily scooping them up and gnawing on them once he has been given the go-ahead. Estragon can also be seen as personifying the id in Freud's theory of the human psyche, or personality. The id functions purely on instinct, is only concerned with biological needs, and demands instant gratification. As the one concerned with reason and logic, Vladimir is more bound by social conventions, and is scandalized by the forwardness of Estragon's request. In Freud's framework, Vladimir best represents the ego, the part of the psyche concerned with reasoning and social consequences. He is also the only character who occasionally demonstrates features of the superego, which is concerned with higher societal values such as morality.

47.In Waiting for Godot, Act 1 what do the characters' comments about the carrot and Pozzo's reaction to his second pipe suggest?

Ans: In Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir), Estragon says the more he eats the carrot the worse it gets, and it was just a carrot to begin with. Vladimir replies that he is the opposite; he gets "used to the muck" as he goes along. As Pozzo smokes a second pipe in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive), he comments that the second pipe is not as sweet as the first, although it is still sweet. Although they are talking about specific experiences, these varying reactions seem to make larger statements about their varying attitudes toward life and existence. Estragon's reaction indicates his increasing disillusionment with his existence as it goes along, although he doesn't expect much to begin with. Pozzo seems to experience a similar disillusionment toward his repetitious life experiences, but he also holds on to some degree of satisfaction with life. Because Vladimir expects "the muck" of existence, it actually becomes more bearable for him as he goes along. Pleasure might be seen as meaning in

life, and these reactions suggest that seeking meaning is bound to lead to disappointment.

48.What is the significance of Pozzo's vaporizer in Waiting for Godot?
Ans: In Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) and Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Pozzo sprays his throat with a vaporizer before answering questions about Lucky and making an extended speech. This repeated action lends a feeling of almost ceremonial preparation, calling attention to himself and creating the impression that he is going to say something of great importance. Of course when he does speak, his words don't live up to the expectation created by his contrived preparations, again pointing out the absurdity of his social pretentions. Like many people, he acts as if he is more important than he really is. The vaporizer is clearly linked with speaking for Pozzo, similar to the way in which the bowler hats are linked to thought. Pozzo doesn't seem to strictly need the vaporizer to speak as Lucky needs his hat to think, but he uses it when he wants to call particular attention to what he is saying. Significantly, the vaporizer does not appear in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) after Pozzo's social status has been reduced by his blindness.

49.What are the philosophical implications behind Pozzo's reasoning for why Lucky never puts down the bags in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive)?
Ans: Pozzo "reasons" in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) that Lucky has the right to make himself comfortable by putting down the bags he holds, so the fact that he does not put them down must mean he chooses not to. This logic, however, is based on a false and absurd premise—it is not at all a given that Lucky has the right to put down the bags. Philosophically, Lucky may have the same right as any human being to exercise his will freely. As an apparent slave, however, bound by rope and on his way to be sold, Lucky does not have the power to make the choices Pozzo hypocritically imputes to him. Perhaps Pozzo would not object to Lucky's putting down the bags, but he certainly never encourages him to do so either, demonstrating a total lack of concern for Lucky's feelings. In fact, Pozzo claims Lucky is trying to take advantage of him by convincing Pozzo not to sell him. Behind all this rationalizing, Pozzo merely tries to dissimulate his culpability in Lucky's lot.

50.What is the effect of Pozzo's saying that Lucky drives him mad in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive)?
Ans: When in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) Pozzo says he and Lucky have been together nearly 60 years, Vladimir and Estragon become outraged that he would want to get rid of such an "old and faithful servant." But then Pozzo seems to break down, saying the way Lucky "goes on" drives him mad. The timing of Pozzo's outburst seems convenient for moving the blame away from him, and it is supremely hypocritical of Pozzo to complain about Lucky's decline after inflicting years of abuse on him. Nonetheless, Vladimir and Estragon begin abusing Lucky for his "mistreatment" of Pozzo. Pozzo, meanwhile, recovers himself, tells the others to forget what he has said, and, in a comic reversal, denies he is the kind of "man that can be made to suffer," ending the discussion. This exchange reveals the absurdity of human social conventions. Vladimir and Estragon's sympathy for Lucky is shown to lack any basis in principle because they switch their sympathies to Pozzo as soon as he acts upset. And Pozzo ridiculously denies the feelings he has just expressed because they don't fit with his concept of his social role.

51.What do Pozzo's references to Greek gods show in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive)?
Ans: Instead of referencing Christian religious traditions as Vladimir and Estragon do, in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) Pozzo exclaims "Atlas, son of Jupiter!"—two Greek gods (more or less)—when outraged, and uses the Greek demigod Pan to describe the stillness of nightfall. This seems to be another way Pozzo pompously tries to separate himself from the more "common" Estragon and Vladimir. The study of ancient Greece was seen as the height of

learning, so Pozzo is trying to establish that he is a learned man. However, he gets his Greek mythology wrong—Jupiter is not the son of Atlas—emphasizing the absurdity of his social posturing. These Greek references seem to have no meaning for Vladimir and Estragon, suggesting the uselessness of religion to provide meaning in life. Although they are more familiar with the Christian tradition, it never gives them any answers, either.

52.In Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks) how does Pozzo describe his view of life during his speech about the night?

Ans: After reminding everyone to pay attention to him in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Pozzo begins his speech about the night by describing the sky as they are seeing it at twilight, the time after the sun sets but before the sky is totally dark. He describes how the sun shines strongly during the day and then more and more palely in the evening until it finally goes down. It seems like a gentle time, but behind the peaceful twilight, night is "charging" and will "burst upon us ... like that!" He concludes, depressingly, "That's how it is on this bitch of an earth." This speech of Pozzo's, which comes shortly before Lucky's long speech, previews the speech's theme and mood. Both speeches address a kind of decline, represented in Pozzo's speech by the fading of sunlight and onset of night. The sunlight fades gradually, making it feel inevitable that night will take over, a night Pozzo depicts as vital, forceful, and even malicious. Day and night (or light and dark) are common symbols for life and death, so Pozzo seems to be making a deeper statement that life is weak and powerless and is easily overtaken by death.

53.In Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks) how are the names given to Lucky's dance significant?

Ans: When Pozzo asks Vladimir and Estragon to guess the name of Lucky's brief, flailing dance in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Estragon calls it "The Scapegoat's Agony," and Vladimir guesses "The Hard Stool," which might seem at first to refer to the stool that Pozzo sits on and Lucky carries but makes more sense as a reference to a difficult bowel movement. Both names indicate that Lucky's dance makes him appear to be in pain. Estragon's name also calls to mind that Pozzo blames Lucky for driving him mad when his abuse can't have helped but contribute to Lucky's decline. Pozzo has made Lucky his scapegoat, among other things. Lucky's own name for the dance, "The Net," goes even deeper, echoing the characters' entrapment—Vladimir and Estragon's in their endless waiting, and Lucky and Pozzo's in their endless journeying. There is no indication in Lucky's dance that he gets out of the net—he struggles only briefly within it, suggesting there is no purpose to struggling, or to life.

54.How do Lucky's hats relate to independent thought in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: In Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Pozzo says Lucky must have his hat on to think; the speech Lucky gives when he thinks does seem to express some thoughts of his own, although they are jumbled. Even then, he needs to be ordered to think. Just wearing the hat, however, is not enough. Although he is wearing his hat when he and Pozzo arrive, he shows no sign of independent thought, only responding to Pozzo's orders. The other characters remove Lucky's hat to stop his thinking, and it's left behind when Pozzo and Lucky continue on their way. When Lucky returns in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), he is no longer able to speak, so he could not express any independent thoughts even if he were so inclined. That he wears a different hat seems to symbolize this change in his ability to think.

55.In Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks) how does Lucky's speech make fun of academic speech?

Ans: Parts of Lucky's speech in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks) echo structures of academic language, such as the statements "Given the existence ... of a personal God" and "considering ... that as a result of the labors left unfinished." However, the conclusions to these statements never appear, implying the lack of meaningful conclusions in academic speech. Lucky often

repeats syllables such as "quaquaquaqua." Qua is a preposition originating from Latin and used in both French and English to mean "which way" or "as," again signaling a logical direction or conclusion that is never fulfilled. He also repeats syllables in words such as "Acacacacademy of Anthropopopometry." While academy and anthropometry are real words associated with learning (anthropometry is the study of the measurements of the human body), the repeated syllables call to mind slang terms for feces. The names of "scholars" in Lucky's speech use similarities to words in English, French, and even German to reference nonacademic concepts. For instance, the driver and ticket puncher on a tram are "Puncher and Wattman." Many, such as "Fartov and Belcher," take words for bodily functions and make them sound like words in foreign languages. These references clearly signal that academic speech foolishly fails in its attempts to identify and prove any sort of meaning in existence.

56.What does Lucky's speech suggest about the meaning of existence in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks)?

Ans: The premise at the beginning of Lucky's speech in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), "Given the existence ... of a personal God," seems to indicate he is arguing for religion, which traditionally provides meaning in people's lives. But he then attributes to God the characteristics of apathia (apathy or indifference), athambia (inability to be bothered), and aphasia (inability to communicate), showing that if there is a God, he apparently doesn't much care to help or even communicate effectively with people. Lucky's speech also indicates humanity has turned away from God and toward learning, technology, and various forms of recreation to find meaning. This effort has also failed, however, and humanity "wastes and pines." The end of Lucky's speech portrays humanity as abandoned and fading in a cold, dark, wasteland, containing nothing but stones and skulls. It is understandable that the horrors of World War II, including the Holocaust, would have led to this view of the decline of humanity and the world. If God doesn't intervene to prevent such horrors, it certainly calls his existence into question, and it is difficult to find any other meaning in it, either. Beckett seems to see this loss of meaning as causing the decline of humanity. What remains is a hard, barren wasteland. The final word, "unfinished," seems to refer both to Lucky's unfinished speech and the continuing decline of mankind.

57.In Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks) why does Lucky's speech upset the other characters?

Ans: In Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Lucky's speech paints a fairly unhappy picture of the future of humanity, which could provoke a listener to want to make him stop. Pozzo has also indicated that Lucky, who "used to think very prettily," now drives him mad, likely because of the extremely broken way he expresses his thoughts. Lucky's speech is jumbled and scatological (contains bathroom humor); it brings up lofty theological notions only to drop them for fart jokes; and though the other characters succeed in breaking it off at the word "unfinished," Lucky otherwise shows no signs of stopping. It is significant that Beckett leaves the stage directions vague for the rising frustrations of the other characters during Lucky's speech. Their increased frustration is not tied to any particular word or phrase. Instead, the speech seems to simply irritate the other characters the more it continues, until they finally reach the point of attacking Lucky physically to make him stop. If the rising frustration correlates to anything in the speech, it is probably Lucky's torrent of incoherence.

58.What is unusual about Estragon's and Vladimir's names in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: The identities of the two main characters are never quite certain throughout the play. When Pozzo asks Estragon what his name is in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Estragon mysteriously tells him "Adam." His choice of the name of the Biblical first man reinforces the impression that he is an Everyman, representing all of humanity. It also raises the question of whether their names even are Estragon and Vladimir. They never volunteer their names to other

characters and only address each other by the childish nicknames "Gogo" and "Didi." Vladimir says his own name just once, and the longer form of Gogo's name, Estragon, appears only in the script. This uncertainty is heightened when the boy with a message from Godot refers to Vladimir as "Mister Albert" in both Act 1 (A Boy with a Message) and Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message), and Vladimir fails to correct him. Are they Vladimir and Estragon, or are they Albert and Adam? Are they using code names, like members of the French Resistance? In the end, it doesn't really matter. Whatever their names, they are the ones keeping themselves waiting for a meaning that will likely never come.

59.How does Pozzo's watch contribute to the uncertainty of time in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks)?

Ans: Before Lucky's dance and speech in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Pozzo listens to his watch to disprove Vladimir's claim that time has stopped. After Lucky performs, however, Pozzo is suddenly unable to find his watch. Absurdly, instead of checking his pockets, he, Vladimir, and Estragon listen to his chest to try to find it. They hear something but conclude it is Pozzo's heart, making a connection between the heartbeat, death, and time: when the heart stops, a person dies. Estragon suggests the watch has stopped, suggesting perhaps time itself has actually stopped, or time is an illusion. Pozzo ultimately concludes he left his watch at home, apparently forgetting that he had it only a little while before. The unreliability of Pozzo's memory throws into doubt any number of other details: perhaps he and Lucky have met Vladimir and Estragon before, even many times before—perhaps they are actually reliving the same day over and over.

60.How does the boy contribute to Vladimir and Estragon's uncertainty in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: Despite his multiple appearances (or the multiple boys who appear), always conveying a message to or from Godot, in both acts the boy does not firm up Vladimir and Estragon's certainty. In fact, the boy contributes to their uncertainty by providing a real but totally confounding link to Godot: if he is indeed carrying a message from Godot, where did he come from? Where is Godot right now? Why cannot the men travel back to Godot with the boy? Far from raising their hopes by being a real-life, and almost real-time, connection with the long-awaited guest, the boy serves only to heighten the unreality of their whole waiting enterprise—so much so that, by the time the boy finally returns, the men know exactly what message he brings.

61.Have Vladimir and Estragon met Lucky and Pozzo before Act 1 of Waiting for Godot?

Ans: After Pozzo and Lucky leave, Vladimir says in Act 1 (A Boy with a Message) that they have actually met before and he just pretended not to recognize them. This seems surprising at first because Vladimir went along with Estragon's apparent confusion about Pozzo's name in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive). When the scene is reviewed with the new information, however, it seems possible that Vladimir was deliberately playing along and perhaps even trying to provoke Pozzo by linking him to a woman with a sexually transmitted disease. In Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), it becomes evident that Vladimir and Estragon are living the nearly same day over and over again, including the arrival of Lucky and Pozzo. This strongly suggests that the same day probably also played out at least once before the beginning of Act 1, meaning they had all met before. It could still be debated that Vladimir actually remembers previous meetings with Lucky and Pozzo, because memory, even Vladimir's, is extremely uncertain in Waiting for Godot. It brings up a deeper philosophical question: Can a person actually be the same every day, because circumstances, reactions, and emotions are constantly in flux? Beckett seems to be making the contradictory point that everything changes and stays the same simultaneously.

62.What does the rising of the moon signify in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: In Waiting for Godot, the moon rising signals the beginning of full night and the time

when Vladimir and Estragon stop waiting for Godot for that day. As in Pozzo's speech about the twilight, night could be seen to represent death. Indeed, night falls quite suddenly based on the stage directions, echoing Pozzo's picture of night bursting upon a weakly fading day. Godot's messenger arrives shortly before the moon rises, making it clear that Godot will not come after dark. If night is death and Godot represents some sort of meaning to existence, these events suggest humanity will find no meaning before or after death. In Act 1 (A Boy with a Message), Vladimir exclaims "At last!" when the moon rises, seeming relieved by the symbolic arrival of death as an end to their waiting. They also consider literal death—hanging themselves from the tree again after nightfall. Estragon adapts part of a Percy Bysshe Shelley poem, saying the moon is pale and tired from climbing the heavens and looking down on "the likes of us." Even the moon is exhausted by Estragon and Vladimir's existence. In Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message), the moon rises even more quickly, and Vladimir and Estragon play out virtually the same scene as in Act 1, contemplating hanging themselves or parting ways, and in the end, doing nothing.

63.Why does Estragon abandon his boots in Waiting for Godot, Act 1?

Ans: In Act 1 (A Boy with a Message), Estragon leaves his boots at the edge of the stage, saying someone will come along with smaller feet and the boots will make this person happy. Although also absurd, this is one of the most hopeful actions in the play. The boots are a constant source of suffering to Estragon, so by abandoning them he is actually taking a small step toward improving his existence. Unfortunately, he is unable to take the larger step to end the suffering of their endless waiting, although he repeatedly wants to (and even once tries to) leave. Estragon hopes his boots might be found by someone with the right-sized feet who will find them a source of comfort rather than suffering. Of course, chances are slim that someone with just the right-sized feet will find the boots, making his hope somewhat absurd. But improbably, the boots in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return) do seem to be different from the ones Estragon left at the end of Act 1, at least allowing the possibility that someone took his old ones because they found them useful. The boots represent the possibility that good things do happen but humanity is too figuratively asleep to notice.

64.What is the significance of Estragon's comparing himself to Christ in Waiting for Godot, Act 1 (A Boy with a Message)?

Ans: When in Act 1 (A Boy with a Message) Vladimir tells Estragon he can't leave his boots and go barefoot, Estragon says, "Christ did." Vladimir protests he can't compare himself to Christ, and Estragon replies he has all his life. Vladimir argues against this by focusing on the practical differences, pointing out that Christ lived in a place where feet didn't need so much protection from cold and wet. Estragon replies, "And they crucified quick." By focusing on the suffering of Christ's death, he seems to be drawing a parallel to his own suffering, caused by his ill-fitting boots and the mysterious nightly beatings. The comparison, however, is absurd because it applies only at a surface level. Whereas it is a central article of Christian faith that Christ suffered to save all humankind, it is difficult to see any purpose or meaning in Estragon's suffering. And that may be Beckett's point: if there is no God or higher meaning, then Christ's suffering doesn't mean any more than Estragon's does. In fact, Estragon replying "And they crucified quick," implies that he feels he suffers more than Christ did because Christ died quickly, while Estragon is still suffering.

65.What are some elements of metafiction, in which the characters are aware that they are in a work of fiction, in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: In Waiting for Godot, Estragon and Vladimir occasionally say and do things to indicate that they are aware they are in a play. This makes the play, to some extent, a work of metafiction, in which the elements of a literary work are used to point out that the work itself is an artificial construct. The most obvious of these instances occurs in Act 1 (Lucky and

Pozzo Arrive) when Estragon directs Vladimir to the "End of the corridor, on the left" to go to the bathroom. These directions are more consistent with a building, such as a theater, than the outdoor setting of the play. Vladimir strengthens the impression they are in a theater by replying, "Keep my seat." Of course, there are no seats on stage. In Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time) when Estragon becomes convinced that people are coming after him from all directions, Vladimir points him beyond the front of the stage, toward the audience. Although Vladimir says there is no one in sight, Estragon recoils as if he is afraid. Given that he has been afraid of strange people coming, there is a definite impression that he is horrified to see people—the audience—in that direction as well. Vladimir then acknowledges whatever Estragon is reacting to, saying, "Well I can understand that." When the two begin insulting each other a few moments later to pass the time, Estragon comes up with "Crritic!" as the ultimate insult. Of course, an actor would consider a critic the worst of the worst, much more than two ragged men on the side of country road would. These comments, revealing the fictional nature of the characters' existence, only emphasize the absurdity of their "reality," and by extension, all of humanity's as well.

66.Why do negative reactions tend to follow acts of affection in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: In Waiting for Godot, characters only occasionally display affection or compassion (they are most often concerned with their own feelings), and in Act 1, those displays are followed immediately by negative reactions. Vladimir wants to embrace Estragon when he first arrives in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir), but Estragon irritably brushes him off. Later, Estragon prompts Vladimir to embrace him but then recoils because he smells of garlic. In Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive), Estragon tries to comfort Lucky by wiping away his tears, and the usually passive Lucky viciously kicks Estragon for his efforts. Generally, affection and compassion serve to connect people to one another; these negative reactions serve to immediately cut off those connections, again keeping the characters isolated from one another emotionally, and generally reinforcing the impression of an uncaring, meaningless existence. This disconnection between the characters lessens somewhat in Act 2. Estragon forcefully rejects Vladimir's first request to embrace in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return) because he is angry that Vladimir seems happy without him. When they do finally embrace a bit later, however, neither one is disgusted or reacts violently. Vladimir comically pulls away first, making Estragon almost fall, but overall, it is a moment of connection. Their embrace in Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time) is even more positive. After insulting each other, the two embrace to make up. Finally, there is nothing awkward or negative about the embrace, although as part of their efforts to fill time it may be less than completely genuine. This increasingly evident emotional connection between Vladimir and Estragon is a small, positive, counteraction of the torture of their endless waiting. They may be waiting forever, but at least they have each other.

67.What is the significance of the changed tree in Waiting for Godot, Act 2?

Ans: The changes to the tree between Act 1 and Act 2 of Waiting for Godot, like most things in the play, could mean a number of different things. Even the change itself is a bit uncertain. The stage directions in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return) describe the tree as now having "four or five" leaves, which continues the impression of barrenness in the setting, while Vladimir characterizes it as "covered with leaves" in Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time). The presence of leaves leads Estragon to conclude it is spring, a season that usually represents new life and hope. A change of season also indicates that much more time has passed than the one day Vladimir and the audience assume, a possibility that is not nearly so hopeful. It's also possible that this is a different tree altogether, making it uncertain whether the characters are waiting in the right place (if there even is such a thing). The effect of having the audience notice the discrepancy between the tree and what the characters say about the tree highlights the idea that truth is subjective, not objective; it depends on the viewer's or seeker's perception.

68.What do Estragon's nightly beatings suggest in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: Of the two primary characters, Estragon is clearly the one most connected with bodily concerns, including physical suffering. The beatings he says he receives every night are perhaps the most significant feature of his suffering. Rather than fighting against or trying to avoid the beatings, however, he seems almost to take them for granted. The source of the beatings remains largely undefined; Estragon says in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return) only that there were 10 of "them." The lack of a source or clear cause for the beatings suggests that suffering is simply an unavoidable part of existence. Furthermore, the suffering is entirely without any sort of purpose or meaning, emphasizing the purposelessness of life itself. Vladimir, at least, thinks of trying to prevent the beatings, claiming that he would have stopped Estragon from doing whatever caused him to be beaten. His assumption, however, that Estragon brings the beatings on himself is absurd.

69.How do Vladimir's and Estragon's memories of Lucky and Pozzo differ in Waiting for Godot, Act 2?

Ans: When Vladimir brings up Lucky and Pozzo in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return), Estragon remembers very little about them. He recalls mostly the parts that affected him physically, such as being kicked by Lucky in the shin and chewing on Pozzo's discarded chicken bones. Estragon has no clear sense of when these things occurred, but he doubts that those things he does remember happened yesterday, again raising the uncertainty of time. It is almost as if he is remembering something that happened a long time ago, and the rest of the details have gotten lost in time. Estragon also acknowledges his bad memory: "Either I forget immediately or I never forget." Vladimir's memory and sense of time is more fixed; he remembers more details of their previous encounter with Lucky and Pozzo and is relatively certain it occurred yesterday. By the time Vladimir mentions Pozzo and Lucky again in Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time), Estragon already has forgotten them. Now he doubts Pozzo gave him the bones, which he now remembers were "like fishbones," perhaps suggesting they were different bones and he is remembering a different day. Vladimir seems to prove that the events he remembers happened yesterday by finding a wound just "beginning to fester" on Estragon's leg, presumably from Lucky's kick. But Vladimir doesn't remember exactly which leg was injured and looks first at the wrong one. Estragon appears to once again forget everything immediately—a few minutes later Vladimir suggests playing a game called "Pozzo and Lucky," and Estragon replies that he has "Never heard of it." Beckett asks the audience to consider how reliable the constructs of human memory and time really are.

70.Are Estragon's boots different in Waiting for Godot, Act 2?

Ans: In Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time), Estragon claims that the boots that appear on the stage in Act 2 are not the ones he left at the end of the previous act. He believes they are a different color—either brown or green when his were black, or maybe gray. At Vladimir's suggestion, Estragon tries them on, and the two characters struggle getting them on, but perhaps only because they cannot work together gracefully. Estragon says the boots fit, or are even a bit too big, supporting his claim that they are different boots. Then in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), he again has trouble taking them off, in much the same way he struggled with his boots in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir). This seems to suggest that they might be the same boots and the problem really is with his feet (swelling, perhaps). Finally, Estragon removes the boots easily after waking up from a nap in Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message) and once again sets them out in preparation for leaving for the night. Although nothing is certain in Waiting for Godot, most of the evidence in Act 2 seems to point to the boots being different from the ones in Act 1, which could be another indication that more than one day has passed between the two acts. The discrepancy does leave room for another unexplained possibility—such as someone leaving the boots there—but no specific answer is provable.

Perhaps the question is the point. There are some things Estragon and Vladimir can never know, hence the folly of seeking meaning.

71.Why is Pozzo's rope shorter in Waiting for Godot, Act 2 and what does that signify?
Ans: In Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), the rope around Lucky's neck is much shorter than in the previous act. While this is a practical change, allowing the now-blind Pozzo to be guided by Lucky's movements, it also symbolizes the increased dependence between these two characters. The rope is now only partly an instrument of control over Lucky; Pozzo is also dependent on it to navigate through life, and when Lucky falls, he takes Pozzo with him. The shorter rope suggests that the inequality between them has lessened; now that they are both afflicted with physical limitations (blind and mute), Pozzo is no longer Lucky's superior. Lucky seems also to be more dependent on Pozzo because he takes no independent action in Act 2, even when Pozzo drops the rope after falling. He moves only in response to Pozzo's orders, automatically giving the rope back to Pozzo on request. Whether by conscious choice or the oppression of slavery, Lucky seems to have embodied his role to the point that he is dependent on Pozzo for decisions and directions.

72.What is Pozzo's relationship with time in Waiting for Godot?
Ans: Whereas Vladimir and Estragon are uncertain of the passing of time throughout the play, Pozzo starts out the play quite sure about time. From the beginning of his first appearance in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive), Pozzo consults his watch whenever he mentions a period of time. He says explicitly that they've been on the road for six hours. In Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), he says he has a schedule to keep and, to contradict Vladimir's statement that time has stopped, listens to the ticking of his watch. The watch also plays a part in Pozzo's speech about twilight, the transition time between day and night. When Pozzo suddenly cannot find his watch after Lucky's speech, rather than acknowledge that it might be lost, he absurdly concludes that he left it at his manor house, even though he had it just minutes before. Pozzo's blindness in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) is clearly tied to his concept of time because he says, "the blind have no notion of time." It is possible to see Pozzo's loss of the watch as causing the loss of his sense of time, which is associated with his blindness. Estragon and Vladimir even express doubt about his actual blindness, suggesting it might be something he is affecting to deal with the loss of his concrete sense of time. Pozzo tries to hang on to his previous sense of time: after being helped up and determining that Vladimir and Estragon will not kill him, he asks what time of day it is and gets quite anxious when they have trouble answering. He cannot, however, escape the fact that time is now as uncertain for him as it is for them. In fact, he now sees all of life as without time, going straight from birth to the grave in "an instant."

73.What is the significance of the loss of Lucky's voice in Waiting for Godot, Act 2?
Ans: Because the only independence Lucky displays in the play is during his speech in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks)—although he must be ordered to speak and must have his hat on to do it—the loss of his voice in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) cuts him off from all independence. There is also possibly a relationship between Pozzo's going blind and Lucky's going dumb, because the two of them turn up in this changed condition at the beginning of Act 2. (And if only one day has passed since their previous meeting, then Lucky's muteness and Pozzo's blindness befell them on the same day.) It is even possible that Lucky cannot speak because Pozzo has decided not to order him to speak. There is even less evidence for Lucky's being unable to speak than there is for Pozzo's being unable to see. He simply does not, which is no different from how he behaved when not ordered to speak in Act 1. Only Pozzo's perception of Lucky has changed.

74.Why does Estragon call Pozzo "Abel" and Lucky "Cain" in Waiting for Godot, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return)?

Ans: The names Abel and Cain refer to the Bible story about the origins of humanity. They are the first two sons of the first man and first woman, and Cain kills Abel out of envy when God seems to favor Abel over Cain. For this, Cain is exiled, and his descendants are believed to also bear his wickedness. On the other hand, Abel is remembered as a saint. Because people can be classified as either good or bad, Cain and Abel represent another duality in the human condition. By seeing if Pozzo and Lucky respond to these names in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), Estragon may be trying to determine which of them is good and which bad. And when Pozzo responds to both names, Estragon concludes, "He's all of humanity."

75.How does Vladimir play on Shakespeare in Waiting for Godot, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return)?

Ans: In his long speech about why he and Estragon should help Pozzo up in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), Vladimir says, "What are we doing here, that is the question." This statement calls to mind perhaps the best-known line from Shakespeare, Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be—that is the question" phrase. By asking "What are we doing here" instead of "To be or not to be," Beckett changes the question from one of existence to one of purpose. For Vladimir, the defining question of existence is his purpose in life, and he is proud to have an answer to his question: "We are waiting for Godot to come." Unfortunately, when Godot again fails to arrive, the dramatic irony of this purpose is revealed—it is quite likely Godot is never going to come, making this purpose meaningless. And if the focus of Vladimir's and Estragon's existence—waiting for Godot—is, in fact, purposeless, does anyone's life really have a purpose?

76.What does Vladimir's answer to Pozzo about what time it is in Waiting for Godot, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) suggest about Vladimir's viewpoint on life and death?

Ans: When in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) Pozzo asks first what time it is and then whether it is evening, Estragon and Vladimir at first argue about the answer, but Vladimir eventually answers Pozzo that it is evening, almost night. He says Estragon made him doubt for a moment, "But it is not for nothing I have lived through this long day." He assures Pozzo that the day is "very near the end of its repertory." On the surface, Vladimir is simply answering Pozzo's question about the present day with a bit of flowery language. Given other instances, however, of day standing for life and night representing death, a deeper figurative meaning can be seen. Vladimir has been living a long time—he and Estragon believe they have been together 50 or so years—and repeating virtually the same day waiting for Godot for who knows how long. Their existence has indeed been one very "long day," and they are tired of it. Vladimir envisions the end of the day, death, drawing "very near." It seems only death can release them from the purposelessness of life.

77.What is the significance of the Latin phrase Memoria praeteritorum bonorum, used by Vladimir in Waiting for Godot, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return)?

Ans: In Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) when Pozzo says his sight used to be "wonderful," Vladimir quotes a Latin saying, Memoria praeteritorum bonorum, which means the past is always remembered well. In other words, people tend to remember the good things about the past more than the bad, or reshape their memories to make the bad events seem less negative. Vladimir then comments, "That must be unpleasant," contradicting the usual understanding that people enjoy remembering the good things about the past. Instead, Vladimir says remembering the past well is unpleasant for Pozzo, perhaps focusing on how unpleasant his blindness must seem in contrast to his past "wonderful sight." Vladimir also seems to mean that remembering the past well is generally unpleasant, which is supported by other instances of memory in the play. He has brought up with Estragon their past time in France, and it often seems to reflect badly on their present situation.

78.In Waiting for Godot, Act 2 what does Lucky's bag of sand say about life?

Ans: As Pozzo and Lucky prepare to depart in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), Vladimir finally thinks to ask what is in the bag Lucky carries. Pozzo casually answers, "Sand." It is jarring to discover that the apparently heavy bag Lucky has been carrying throughout the play is full of sand, used simply to weigh things down. Generally, no one transports a heavy bag without a reason, and the audience automatically assumes it contains something of value—clothes and supplies for the journey, or maybe even gold. The unexpectedly absurd revelation that it contains only weight both creates humor and serves as a powerful illustration of the purposelessness of life. Poor Lucky is shown to be not only carrying burdens not his own but also doing so pointlessly.

79.In Waiting for Godot, Act 2 how are Vladimir and Estragon similar to the two thieves crucified with Christ?

Ans: Near the end of Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message), Vladimir confirms that he and Estragon will hang themselves tomorrow—unless Godot comes, in which case they will be saved. This plan calls to mind the same duality in Vladimir's Bible story from Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) about the two thieves crucified along with Christ, one of whom was damned and the other saved. Vladimir and Estragon are caught in this same duality, although rather than suffering either of these fates, they exist in a kind of perpetual limbo between them every day. Godot never comes to save them, and they never manage to actually damn themselves to hanging, either.

80.Why doesn't the boy see Lucky and Pozzo in Waiting for Godot, Act 2?

Ans: When the boy arrives in Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message) shortly after Pozzo and Lucky have departed, he says he hasn't seen them. This is a marked difference from the boy in Act 1 (A Boy with a Message), who says he waited until Pozzo and Lucky left to deliver his message because he was afraid of them. It is unclear from the stage directions whether the boy arrives in Act 2 from the same direction in which Pozzo and Lucky have recently departed, but his claim not to have seen them seems a little odd, just like his other claims (such as never having seen Vladimir before). Vladimir has just been pondering whether he, Estragon, and their whole existence waiting for Godot are even real—perhaps he is asleep and dreaming. This would go a long way toward explaining the absurd lack of logic in time, memory, and everything else they do and say. However, like the rest of the play, whether it is all a dream remains uncertain; Vladimir immediately rejects the idea, and he and Estragon continue waiting for Godot.

81.What does the boy represent in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: The character of the boy, like everything else in Waiting for Godot, is open to different interpretations, but a few things are relatively clear. First, the boy is the only character who says he has direct knowledge of someone named Godot. Second, he is a messenger. (To those who see Godot as God, it is difficult not to think of the boy as an angel, one of God's divine messengers.) However, his message is the opposite of the answer Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for—it serves only to keep them endlessly waiting. Children often represent innocence, and Vladimir defends the boy against Estragon's anger in Act 1 (A Boy with a Message), perhaps suggesting that he is less to be blamed than an adult. The boy also displays a level of timidity, saying he is frightened of Lucky and Pozzo in Act 1 and running away from Vladimir's frustrated lunge in Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message). Overall, however, the boy doesn't seem particularly innocent. Thematically, the boy's message is what keeps Vladimir and Estragon's search for meaning—in the form of answers from Godot—alive. Without a nightly assurance that Godot will arrive tomorrow, they would likely stop waiting. Despite this, the hope of finding meaning is enough to keep Vladimir and Estragon trapped in endless waiting.

82.Why do characters wonder if they're asleep or dreaming in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: Reality is one of the many uncertain things in Waiting for Godot. Characters often suggest they might be sleeping and living in some sort of dream; perhaps predictably, it seems to be Estragon who is most in touch with this deeper possibility. The first time he wakes up from a nap in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) and Vladimir refuses to hear his dream, Estragon asks, "This one is enough for you?" The stage directions specify that his words are accompanied by a gesture that indicates "the universe." Vladimir's concrete idea of time and reality contrasts with Estragon's more subjective view in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return). When Vladimir tries to remind Estragon of events that happened "yesterday," Estragon suggests that Vladimir dreamed them. Even Pozzo in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) begins to doubt his reality after going blind. When he describes waking up without his sight, he wonders if he's "not still asleep." In Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message), Vladimir finally wonders if he is also sleeping, implying that his existence is a dream and wondering what truth there is in the events he remembers. But he cannot seem to face the implications of this possibility—if their reality is a dream, Estragon and Vladimir may not really exist either—and quickly reverts to his "rational" viewpoint, at least on the surface. His deeper doubts are revealed in his reply to Godot's messenger—to acknowledge that he's seen him, that he really exists.

83.What is the significance of the bowler hats in Waiting for Godot?
Ans: The bowler hats all four men wear are clearly associated with thinking. Lucky is unable to perform his thinking without his hat on his head in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), and Vladimir frequently takes off his hat when he is trying to think of something, peering into it as if he will find what he's looking for hidden in the lining. (As the character most connected to bodily concerns and least concerned with intellectual thought, Estragon stares into his boot instead.) When Vladimir discovers in Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time) that Lucky's hat has been left behind, he discards his own and wears it instead (after a slapstick exchange of the three hats between him and Estragon). He claims that his was bothering him, perhaps suggesting that he is unhappy with his own thoughts and wants to think someone else's.

84.What is the significance of Estragon's dreams and nightmares in Waiting for Godot?
Ans: Throughout the play, Estragon tends to go to sleep to avoid unpleasantness, ranging from boredom to physical injury. Unfortunately, he doesn't usually find a refuge from suffering in sleep because he often reports nightmares or unpleasant dreams upon waking up. Estragon calls his dreams in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) "private nightmares," and in Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time) he reports dreaming of falling from the top of something. It doesn't seem too surprising that Vladimir doesn't want to hear about these nightmares. When Estragon wakes up after sleeping through Pozzo and Lucky's departure in Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message), he says he was dreaming that he was happy—and Vladimir still doesn't want to hear about it. Either Vladimir is too decorous or proper to want to hear Estragon's dreams, or Estragon's dreams get at a reality Vladimir wants to ignore, such as clues that they don't really exist or that Godot is not going to come—things Estragon is closer than Vladimir to understanding.

85.What is the significance of Lucky's name in Waiting for Godot?
Ans: Lucky's name is mostly situationally ironic because he is far and away the most abused and beaten down character in the play. His situation seems anything but lucky. He is the recipient of some of the worst impulses human nature has to offer—Pozzo treats him as less than human, and even Vladimir and Estragon can muster only fleeting sympathy for him. In a way, however, Lucky can also be said to be actually lucky. Because all decisions are made for him, he doesn't agonize over his own existence as the other three main characters do. The slavery that binds him, like the rope, also relieves him of the need to think, except when ordered. This frees him from the fruitless search for meaning that keeps Vladimir and Estragon waiting for Godot.

86.What might Godot represent in Waiting for Godot?

Ans: It is important not to attach too specific an identity to Godot because Beckett himself said he didn't know who Godot was. Many readers and audience members see similarities between the name "Godot" and "God," and that might have been intentional. Although Beckett originally wrote the play in French, he was a native English speaker and would have recognized the similarity. From his later statements though, it seems the similarity wasn't meant to be a concrete sign that Godot was God. It is possible, however, to conclude from the play's allusions to Christianity related to Godot that he represents something about religion, possibly spirituality in general—anything people seek outside themselves to try to provide meaning in their lives. The fact that Godot will probably never come expresses a strong doubt on Beckett's part about whether such a meaning exists, in which case people are actually seeking nothing. To wait for Godot is essentially a fool's chase.

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