
UNIT 1 WAITING FOR *GODOT* : AN AVANT GARDE PLAY

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are to introduce you to the idea of tragicomedy, the theatre of the Absurd, and to enable you to appreciate how waiting for *Godot* is different from other plays prescribed in your syllabus.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Waiting for Godot was originally written in French entitled *En attendant Godot* in 1952. The play broke new ground in theatre history and is rightly called an *avant garde* play. There are certain distinct features of it, which make it markedly different from other plays you may have read in this course. Some of the things which distinguish it from other plays could be:

- i) the austere stage-setting,
- ii) tramps as protagonists,
- iii) use of language and linguistic devices such as, speech-paces, pauses, silences etc.,

- iv) Beckett's incorporating elements from different performing arts like, mime, music hall cross-talk, circus, stylized movements etc.,
- v) static nature of the action,
- vi) absence of conventional plot, and,
- vii) asymmetrical structure of the play.

These features are meant to give you a sense of direction. You should try to apply these ideas as you read and reread the text. The text referred to in the discussion on Godot is Faber and Faber, London, 1979 edition.

1.2 TRAGICOMEDY

In order that you are able to appreciate the play better, especially in relation to Beckett's use of the resources of the performing arts, and as a literary genre (i.e. as a tragicomedy), I would urge upon you to read T.S. Eliot's essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent". The reading of this essay should enable you, in general, to see how a writer draws from the tradition and at the same time enriches it. In the light of Eliot's ideas of tradition and the individual talent, you should be able to see how the tradition of tragicomedy is continued by Beckett and how it undergoes a change at his hands.

Waitingfor Godot was originally written in French. The French version did not have the subtitle underscoring its nature. Beckett translated the play himself into English and gave it the subtitle: 'A Tragicomedy in Two Acts.' We shall see how this play is different from tragicomedies of the past.

Stated simply, tragicomedy is a blend of the elements of tragedy and comedy. To quote the Seventeenth Century playwright John Fletcher from the preface to his play *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608); a tragicomedy

is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy.

In the 18th century Dr. Samuel Johnson defined tragicomedy as "drama compounded of merry and serious events". Contrary to classical injunction against mixing the tragic and the comic in one composition (as is insisted by Socrates at the end of Plato's *Symposium*), Dr. Johnson praises Shakespeare's mixture of the two, when he says, "Shakespeare has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind, but in one composition." In Shakespeare's tragedies the comic element, though a part of the play, nonetheless remains a distinct constituent in the sense that whereas it intensifies the tragic effect, it doesn't threaten to influence the action of the play. Porter in *Macbeth*, Fool in *King Lear*, and the grave digger in *Hamlet*, are a case in point. In Shakespeare's tragicomedies too, the tragic element constitutes a significant part of the action of the play. But here too, tragedy is threatened, yet avoided in time so that ultimately it doesn't affect the fortunes of the protagonists. The two elements, the tragic and the comic, thus remain distinctly apart, as is the case in *Much Ado About Nothing* and other tragicomedies.

Modern playwrights, on the other hand, mix the two elements differently and perhaps far more effectively. The two elements interpenetrate within the same character and the boundary between the two in a composition is blurred. This also projects their conception of the human existence and the audience, according to Styan, "is treated to the absurdity of human life inoculated first with laughter." So you will see that in *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett has, to use Styan's words again, "filtered the nightmare of human existence through the screen of laughter," Or, shall we say, that the protagonists in *Waiting for Godot* laugh to save their tears?

You will further note that Beckett uses various theatrical devices, such as mime, music hall cross-talk, varying pace and rhythm of dialogue, etc., in an attempt at cheerfulness in a world of weariness and despair, which the tramps inhabit. Beckett, to quote Roger Blin (the first director of and also an actor in *Waitingfor Godot*, when it made its debut in Paris), "is unique in his ability to blend derision, humour and comedy with tragedy : his words are simultaneously tragic and comic." Fletchers (Beryl S. and John), critics on Beckett, also speak of Beckett's ability to harmonize tears and laughter.

1.3 **WAITING FOR GODOT AND THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD**

What is the theatre of the Absurd? The label Theatre of the Absurd is often applied to the plays of Engene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Samuel Beckett, and the early plays of Edward Albee. Plays written by these playwrights flout all the standards by which drama has been judged over the centuries. Structurally, in contrast to a well made play with a beginning, a middle and a neatly tied up ending, the plays by the absurdist playwrights often start at an arbitrary point and end just as arbitrarily. The arbitrary structure of the plays reflects the arbitrary and irrational nature of life. To put it differently, the playwright of the absurd views life existentially, he expresses the senselessness of the human condition by abandoning rational devices. Most of the plays, thus, express a sense of wonder and incomprehension, and at times despair at the meaninglessness of human existence. Since they do not believe in a rational and well-meaning universe, they do not see any possibility of resolution of the problems they present, either.

When you read *Waitingfor Godot*, try to see if the play has conventional structure. If not, what are the points of difference?

Do you see a definite ending or a conclusion? Can we call the play open-ended?

1.4 **AN AVANT GARDE PLAY**

Waitingfor Godot is a landmark in modern drama. When it premiered in Paris, its originality-stunned audiences; no one had seen or heard anything like it before. Initially, some were disgusted; some were puzzled; and some were wildly enthusiastic. Within a short time, audiences came to the theatre prepared for a wholly new dramatic experience and went away with praises for Samuel Beckett. Let us now have a look at the distinct aspects of *Waitingfor Godot* so as to highlight the devices which made it an avant garde play.

1.4.1 **The Austere Stage Setting**

Compared to the elaborate stage-setting in other plays in your course, you will notice that in *Waitingfor Godot*, the stage is almost bare and shorn of stage properties. This is characteristic of Beckett's plays. See the stage-setting in plays like *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, etc..

Compared to the stage-setting in some of his own plays the one in *Waitingfor Godot*, is much barer : an open road, a mound of earth and a bare tree.

Read other plays of Beckett to get an idea of stage setting in them and their significance for the theme, action and plot of the plays. Also, you will observe that

the stage-setting in Shakespeare's, Marlowe's and other writers' plays creates the ambience (in which the protagonists--Kings, Princes, heroes etc.--are placed), to heighten the tragic effect.

Do you think the stage setting has necessarily to be in tune with the protagonists' tragic situation?

1.4.2 Tramps as protagonists in *Godot*

Have a close look at the protagonists in the plays you have studied. Notice the gradual transformation in the idea of the protagonist over centuries from Kings, Princes, heroes to the common man and even tramps. For example, from Prince Hamlet in the play by the same name, again, Dr. *Faustus* in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, to Professor Higgins and Flower Girl in Shaw's *Pygmalion* and finally, the two tramps in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

Don't you think the tramps conform to the bare setting they are placed in? If so, what purpose does Beckett wish to achieve thereby?

1.4.3 Linguistic Devices

The religio-political and socio-cultural developments from the late 19th century to the middle of 20th century, brought about a profound sense of meaninglessness and rootlessness in life. Such a sense of meaninglessness naturally led to a loss of faith in a coherent and cohesive universe. This was further manifested in the breakdown of communication, and the inability of language to communicate the illogicality of human situations. Thus the language of the absurd is very often at variance with the immediate action and is reduced to meaningless patter, to show the futility of communication. Sometimes what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts the words spoken by the characters. Have a look at the following dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon in *Godot*:

Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.

Estragon: You want me to pull off my trousers? Again,

"Let's go". (They do not move) says the stage direction, at the end of Act I

No wonder, at times, these tramps lapse into monologues and silences in much the same manner as Beckett the playwright also lapsed in *Breath* (1966).

Thus, as is the case with the stage setting and the nature of the protagonists, there is also a very close interrelation between these two and the language (used by the protagonists),

While reading the tragedies of Shakespeare and Marlowe, you will find that the poetic intensity of the language used by the protagonists not only expresses their character but also intensifies their tragedy. Their language is also attended by a certain degree of formality. They use imagery, rhythm, and other prosodic devices to heighten the effect.

Contrasted with the above what significance do you see in the use of communicative devices by Beckett, like, common idiom, the pauses, repetition, monologues, the speech-pace, the silences etc.

1.4.4 *Godot* and Performing Arts

Closely related to the distinct communicative devices mentioned above are some of the non-verbal acts, accompanying them in *Godot*. Beckett makes extensive use of devices like gestures and mannerisms employed in various other performing arts. Let's first look at

- a) Mime:
Vladimir's mimickry on pp.40, 89.
Pozzo mimicking a public speaker in Act I.
Estragon and Vladimir playing Pozzo and Lucky in Act II.
- b) Banalities of mother and wife.
Boots must be taken off everyday
I'm tired telling you that - p. 10, and,
There's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet - p. 10
- c) Music Hall Cross-Talk : on pp. 18-19.

Also cross talk between a straight and a funny man, when they contemplate suicide, on pp 17-18.

Estragon	Let's hang ourselves immediately!
Vladimir	From a bough? . . . I wouldn't trust it.
Estragon	We can always try.
Vladimir	Go ahead.
Estragon	After you.
Vladimir	No no, you first.

.....
Estragon If it hangs you, it will hang anything.

Does it remind you of the typical aristocratic etiquette and mannerism of the Nawabs of Lucknow--"Pahle Aap"--(You first!), giving precedence to the other person over oneself. See how the two tramps give precedence to each other while suggesting suicide! What effect would it have on the audience?

- d) Elements of Circus: Clowning as is done in a circus,

In the beginning itself Estragon struggling to take off his boot and panting as if it involves great effort.

When they purposely misunderstand: "Pull on your trousers." See the dialogue between Estragon and Vladimir quoted on p.8 above. (iii) Linguistic devices.

- e) Stylized movement;

1. Vladimir walking with stiff strides, legs apart, reminding readers of the Chaplinesque gait.
2. Lucky sagging slowly and sleeping on his feet in Act I.

The list of examples given above, however, is not exhaustive. Please do look for other examples in the text.

1.4.5 Static nature of the play

The last line of the play typifies the nature of action: "They don't move."

The entire action takes place at one place.

The only movement is from wings to the stage and vice versa.

The plot lacks linear progression. There is no basic change in the protagonists' situation.

The wait seems endless. The curtain goes up on the two tramps waiting for the elusive *Godot* and it comes down with the two tramps hinting to come the next day, and wait for him all over again.

The only thing that really moves is time.

1.4.6 Lack of coherent story, plot, etc. in *Godot*

The static nature of the play is reinforced by the absence of a coherent story in it.

Please try to locate the primary movements of the play--movements which take the action, if any, forward.

Do these movements cohere and **form** a chain, or are they logically linked up with each other?

The plot of a conventional play has an opening leading to a climax and finally the resolution. In a play with a **deterministic** conception, do you think *Waiting for Godot* follows this conventional pattern?

1.4.7 Structure--symmetrical or asymmetrical?

The play has two Acts. In both Acts, the two tramps meet, they are joined by Lucky and Pozzo, who leave the two of them together **after** sometime. The tramps are finally visited by the Boy who in both the Acts conveys an identical message.

Note the repetition of action in the two Acts.

Graph of 'action' follows identical path in the two Acts.

The structure is sustained by the refrain: "We are *Waiting for Godot*".

1.5 SAMUEL BECKETT (1906-1989): LIFE AND IMPORTANT WORKS

Beckett was not forthcoming in accepting that he was **autobiographical** in his writings, yet one continuously hears echoes of certain incidents of his life in his writings.

Samuel **Barclay** Beckett was **born** in **Foxrock**, in the Southern part of Dublin, Ireland in a Protestant family on April 13, 1906--that happened to be Good Friday. He went to Earlsfort House, a preparatory school, in Dublin, and **from** 1920 to 1923, he attended Portora Royal School, in **Enniskillen**, **Northern** Ireland. As a student he showed a remarkable talent for cricket and swimming. In 1923, he joined Trinity College, Dublin, where he did his graduation in 1927 with honours in French and Italian, together with a sound knowledge of German and Spanish. His interest in French language, life, and culture was stimulated by French **lecturer**, Alfred Pesson, a **Surrealist** poet who later became a good friend of his.

Beckett began his career as a school teacher, and after a few months in October 1928, he was appointed to a prestigious position of **Lecturer d'anglais** at E'cole Normale Supérieure in Paris. In Paris Beckett moved in both French and Anglo-Irish intellectual circles. In particular, he came in close contact with James Joyce. It was during this period that Beckett began writing seriously--poems, short stories and criticism. The poem *Whoroscope* (1930), and criticism, "Dante . . . Bruno, Vico, Joyce" (1929) belong to this period, as does *Proust* (1931). On the expiry of his term at E'cole Normale Supérieure, Beckett was appointed as assistant Lecturer in modern

languages at Trinity College. Dublin, which he joined in October 1930 and resigned about 15 months later. He felt he was teaching something he knew nothing about. That decision was the birth of a writer.

Beckett had always had a liking for the anti-academic jokes. At Trinity he successfully lectured to the University Modern Languages Society on a non-existent group of French poets called Les *Convergistes*. No one has exposed the follies of pseudo-intellectualism more hilariously yet more ruthlessly.

Beckett came to London and took up a job as an attendant in a mental home for a year. Jack Mac Gowran (an Irish actor) believed that Beckett's first novel *Murphy* (1938), came out of his experiences as an attendant in the mental hospital, during which period he had seen many people who were handicapped severely in some way. Besides, there was a war pensioners' hospital very close to where he was born. When he was young, he saw them regularly everyday, they were at various stages of physical disability. No wonder many of Beckett's characters like Hamm, Clov, Nell, Nagg, Pozzo, Lucky, etc., are damaged people. Speaking of his childhood to MacGowran, though, Beckett stated: "People must think I had a very unhappy childhood, but I hadn't really. I had a very good childhood, and a very normal childhood as childhoods go. But I was more aware of unhappiness around me than happiness."

Beckett thus grew to be very sensitive to his surroundings.

The next five years beginning end of 1934 Beckett moved from London to Dublin, and from Paris to Kassel and Munich. In 1934 Beckett published his first volume of stories *More Pricks Than Kicks*. The book was banned by the Irish authorities and it appears that thereafter Beckett decided to spend as little time as possible in his country of birth. He took up residence in Paris in 1937. There on January 7, 1939, an incident occurred that had a deep and lasting effect on his life in many ways. While walking out at night he was accosted and stabbed by a pimp named Prudent. He was administered the first aid by a passing conservatoire student, Suzanne Deschevaux Dumesnil, who thus entered Beckett's life and after 22 years of live-in relationship with him eventually became his wife in 1962.

In June 1940, when the German Army occupied Paris, Beckett and Suzanne moved to Areachon, and returned to Pal-is. He was so disgusted with the Nazi's treatment of the Jews, who were forced to wear a yellow star of David stitched onto their clothing, that he felt compelled to act: "I couldn't stand with my arms folded." And, he became actively involved with a Resistance group with its agents spread out all over France collecting information about enemy troop movement. But in August 1942 the group was betrayed and out of about 82 members less than twenty survived. Beckett and his 'wife' were alerted and they escaped barely half an hour before the Gestapo came for them. For the next four months they were on the run and lived life dangerously. At last they crossed into unoccupied France ending up at Roussillon, a village in high mountains famous for its red clay. Here they remained in semi-hiding until the German occupation collapsed. He worked as a farm labourer during the daytime, while in the evening he wrote *Watt* (1953), a comic-novel. This, as Beckett put it, helped to take his mind off the German occupation.

Between 1945 and 1952, in addition to *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett wrote trilogy of novels, *Molloy* (1951), *Malone meurt* (*Malone Dies*, 1951) and *L'Innommable* (*The Unnameable*, 1953), some short stories, the prose tale *Mercier and Camier* (1970) and an unpublished play *Eleutheria* (1947) whose title is the Greek word for freedom. Beckett's trilogy is a major achievement in the history of novel. In working on it he turned his back on the realistic mode and instead chose to explore the boundaries of a totally hermetic sphere. Beckett had abandoned writing in English. He believed, "perhaps only the French language can give you the thing you want. . . . It was more exciting for me--writing in French." He felt that writing in English "you couldn't help

writing poetry in it." Beckett thus became a "double expatriate"--first from his country and then from his mother tongue.

In writing *The Unnameable* Beckett found himself meeting the wall. The work, he said, "finished me or expressed my finishedness." He was, he observed, "not so much bogged down as fogged out." It was during the interval between *Malone Dies* and *The Unnameable*, that he turned to writing a play as a "relaxation, to get away from the awful prose I was writing at the time." In 1985, he further remarked, "I needed a habitable space, and I found it on the stage." That is how *Waiting for Godot* was born.

Beckett followed up *Godot* with *Endgame* (1958, English version) which Beckett dedicated to Roger Blin, who you will recall directed and acted in the first stage production of *Godot* in 1953, in Paris. The play which first appeared in French, *Fin De Partie* (1956), borrows its title from the game of chess. In the same year, 1956, Beckett also wrote, his first radio play on commission, *All That Fall* and *Actes Sans Paroles I and II*, the latter two were subsequently translated as *Act Without Words I* (1958) and *Act Without Words II* (1959).

Fin De Partie (Endgame)

It is a play in one Act. It was originally written in French and Beckett himself translated it into English in 1957. The play had its first production in French in London in 1957, since no French management would put on the play in Paris.

Beckett himself called the play "rather difficult and elliptic . . . more inhuman than *Godot*," Jack Mac Gowan stated, "If *Godot* is the anguish of waiting, *Endgame*, is the anguish of going." In *Endgame* Beckett recreates *Dante's Purgatory* in a 20th century claustrophobic setting--both literally and metaphorically. The room with two eye shaped ventilators is inhabited by Hamm and Cloy, besides the former's parents, Nagg and Nell. Of the two protagonists, Hamm and Cloy, Hamm is blind and is confined to an arm chair on castors, while Cloy is not able to sit. The Pozzo-Lucky relationship between authoritarian master and slave is continued in this play.

Krapp's Last Tape

Krapp's Last Tape (1958) was written for the Irish actor Patrick Magee. In fact he called the early draft "Magee Monologue". It is Beckett's first uninterrupted monologue for the live theatre. Like other characters of Beckett, Krapp, an old man, too, is a marginalised human being with physical infirmities: he is nearsighted, and hard of hearing. The "protagonists" in this play are two voices: one that of Krapp himself on stage and the other recorded on audio-tape, which the same actor had recorded at two points of time--when he was 39 (about 30 years ago) and the other 12 years prior to that. The tapes unfold Krapp's unhappy love affair, his intellectual pursuits and his relationship with his parents. Listening to tapes, Krapp responds and reacts to his past. *Krapp's Last Tape*, moves not only in time, but moves through time. In this play Beckett dramatizes listening. Pierre Chabert, who played Krapp under Beckett's directions in Paris explained it thus: "Listening is here communicated, by the look. It is literally the eye which is listening." Hindi film Anupama, played in the lead role by Sharmila Tagore, is one such film in which listening and speaking are communicated by the eyes by her.

Happy Days

Happy Days (1961), the next important play brings to a close the first great period of Beckett's writings for the stage. Alan Schneider directed its world premiere in New York on September 17, 1961. *Happy Days* is scenographic, in that the set and the characters coalesce. It has a couple as the protagonist. Willie, about 60 can move on all fours; he passes his day reading newspaper or looking at a naughty postcard. Willie lives at the back of the mound, in the exact centre of which stands buried his

wife, Winnie, a woman of about 50. She can move her arms and handle her few possessions: a tooth brush, a tube of toothpaste, a small mirror, a revolver, a handkerchief and spectacles. Since there is no night in her life, her waking and sleeping are governed by a bell off stage. In Act II, she is buried to the neck and can't even move her head. She can't use her possessions, but can only talk about them. She whiles away her time inventing stories. Willie, with great difficulty, crawls up to her, and is "dressed to kill," but Winnie can no longer give him a hand. Willie also falls back twice - but Winnie finds in his visit matter good enough to make it "one more happy day!"

Beckett continued with experimentation to create and remake the playwright's space, with plays like *Play* (1962-63), *Come and Go* (1965) and *Breath*. Beckett communicated by progressively diminishing presence of the protagonist on the stage. In *Breath* a curtain rises and falls interrupted by an infant cry. In *Not I* (1972) Beckett achieves new height in stage technology: there is a gaping Mouth and opposing it is the Auditor, which is larger than life figure. Mouth's words pass by quickly and are intelligible. To the furious monologue of Mouth, Auditor responds four times in the play with "a gesture of helpless compassion." Beckett told Jessica Tandy who played Mouth in the world premiere directed by Schneider, at Lincoln Centre in New York in 1972, "I hope the piece may work the nerves of audience, not its intellect."

That Time (1975) which Beckett called "a brother to *Not I*," is similarly concerned with theatrical form. A disembodied head hangs suspended in a frame 10 feet above stage level and the face is its own auditor. Once again Beckett fills the void with language, Three prerecorded Voices A, B, and C, broadcast memories from three fixed positions, "both sides and above." Each Voice is the same voice, yet each narrates different story. In *Footfalls* (1975) the presence of the character is felt through the sound of steps falling through space in time.

In his later writings for the theatre Beckett brought his experiences in radio, film and television to bear on the contingencies of the stage. This is amply demonstrated in new ideas Beckett introduced in theatricality of *A Piece of Monologue* (1980), *Rockaby* (1981), *Ohio Impromptu* (1981) etc.

1.6 HISTORY OF *GODOT*: IN PRINT AND PERFORMANCE

Written in the 1940s and published in text form in 1952 in French, *Waiting for Godot* received fair to mild reviews on its stage debut directed by Roger Blin in Paris in 1953. Gradually it gained acceptance and ran for more than four hundred performances. While some critics objected to Beckett's disregard for such dramaturgical elements as plot, scenery, and dramatic action, others argued that the play's strength lay in its opposition to rules of convention. The play had, despite numerous successful runs in major cities in Europe, including a highly acclaimed German-language version performed in Berlin, encountered opposition. These included a ban on reviews and advertisements of the play in Spain, where its message was considered pessimistic, and also its threatened cancellation in the Netherlands.

Prior to the first London production of the play in 1955, Beckett revised and tightened the play's dialogue in the second Act and translated it into English. The original French title of the play *En Attendant Godot* translates more literally as *While Waiting for Godot*. However, Beckett while giving the title in English opted for a phrase as easy for the English tongue as the original is for the French. Beckett didn't do the German translation--it was made by Elmer Tophoven. Here too the audience response was a mixed one. Some dismissed it as pretentious, while others praised its power to disturb and disquiet audiences. Encouraged by the London production

American producer Michael Myerberg presented the play first in Miami, Florida in 1956. The play failed due to its misleading billing in area newspapers, which called it: "the laugh hit of four continents." Myerberg attempted to correct the wrong, before attempting a second production in New York city, by giving a statement in New York's most prominent newspapers which read:

Waitingfor *Godot* is a play for the thoughtful and discriminating theatergoer. . . . I respectfully suggest that those who come to the theater for casual entertainment do not buy ticket to this attraction.

American critic Walcott Gibb came heavily on the play, stating "All I can say, in a critical sense, is that I have seldom seen such meagre moonshine stated with such inordinate fuss." Most people, however, acknowledge Waitingfor *Godot*, as an enduring and important contribution to world drama. American dramatists Thornton Wilder and Tennessee Williams endorsed the play, while William Saroyan remarked: "It will make it easier for me and everyone to write freely in the theater." Thornton Wilder called the play "a picture of total nihilism and a very admirable work; and also added, "I don't try to work out detailed symbolism. I don't think you're supposed to."

Norman Mailer in a public advertisement in The Village Voice of May 7, 1956, apologised for his initial reaction on Waitingfor *Godot*, published in its preceding issue. In his remarks he had stated that Beckett's play was "a poem to impotence and appealed precisely to those who were most impotent." Subsequent reading of the play, watching its performance at Broadway, and again reading it struck him with a sense of guilt for his harsh initial response. He in the abovementioned apology stated: ". . . I was most unfair to Beckett. Because Waitingfor *Godot* is a play about impotence rather than an ode to it, and while its view of life is indeed hopeless, it is an art work, and therefore, I believe it is good."

On Broadway Waitingfor *Godot* also created extraordinary phenomena in American show business. For, after the final curtain on many nights, the audience remained and, joined by interested literary figures and laymen, debated the play's meaning and merit. In these debates clergymen were sometimes pitted against each other on whether *Godot* was religious or atheistic. The strategy has since been used by many feminist women playwrights also, but for a limited purpose of highlighting and discussing woman-issues, to create awareness among women.

The play kept generating a lot of interest and enthusiasm among theatergoers. The play was revived in September 1958 in New York by San Francisco Actors' Workshop, which took the play to Brussels the same month. At many of the performances spectators were asked to write comments on *Godot*. At least one quarter of over 200 returns were unfavourable, another third bewildered or undecided, and the rest favourable (Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol.57, p. 74).

As often happens with many popular plays, they are tinkered with by the Directors or the playwright-director himself, and the focus of the play and its scenario changes in different performances. *Godot* was no exception.

"One thing interesting about Beckett and Waitingfor *Godot* is that whenever Beckett took interest in a particular production of the play, he tinkered with the references to time and place. . . . In any strict sense;" says Denis Donoghue, "there is no established text of the play. The New York production, used "a text provided by Samuel Beckett in August, 1988, which will be published soon by Faber and Faber." (Beckett died in December 1989, and to date the revised version does not appear to have been published). Certain details from the current published text of 1954 probably cannot survive. When Pozzo says "I've lost my Kapp and Peterson!" the reference must be obscure to anyone who doesn't know that Kapp and Peterson is a distinguished Dublin pipe making firm. For the play's first several years, such local references as the play had were French : the Eiffel Tower, the Macon country, the Rhone, Rousillon, etc. In the Dublin production, the Macon country became the

Napa Valley, thereby facilitating a bout of rage--"the Crappa Country"--from Estragon.

Waiting for Godot
Avant Grade Pla

In the new version staged in California, the scene is "somewhere in the United States--badlands, a bit of desert, a waste patch littered with a few stones, rusty detritus of trucks, hubcaps, a truck tire, bumper, a broken spring, a buffalo skull, a sheep skull. It is theater in the round, befitting a rigmarole in which Estragon and Vladimir, agreeing to go somewhere, do not move. . . ." About California setting, Robert Brustein finds it difficult to believe that Beckett himself could have authorized such a radical shift in geography. Beckett intended *Godot* to be situated in a generalized purgatory.

1.7 DIFFERENT ARTISTIC FORMS OF *GODOT*

Godot has been made into an opera, a television movie, and has also been adapted to two dance recitals--one called *May B*, performed by the French troupe Maguy Marin, and another called *La Espera*, choreographed by Rolando Beattie and performed in 1987 at the Teatro de Bellas Artes in Mexico city.

There is even an unauthorized sequel called *Godot Came*, written in 1966 by the Yugoslav playwright Miodrag Bulatovic. Further, in an Israeli production in Tel Aviv, Pozzo and Lucky were cast as a Jew and an Arab respectively. Brecht, the German playwright wanted to change them into landowner and peasant in the Marxist counterplay he thought of writing before he died.

Writers like Harold Pinter, Alain Robbe, Grillet, Athol Fugard, Sam Shepard, David Mamet, Eugene Ionesco, Tom Stoppard, Vaclav Havel, Caryl Churchill, and Maria Irene Fomes have expressed their indebtedness to *Godot* in various ways. Lillian Hellman, American woman playwright when asked in 1972 about which plays she liked to follow, replied: "Everything by Beckett."

1.8 *GODOT* IN INDIAN LANGUAGES

Godot has been translated into several Indian languages. Notable among them are:

- a) *Waiting for Godot* (Hindi) translated by A.N. Prasanna, pub. by Anuvad Sagar, Akshara Prakashan, 1974.
- b) *Godo di Udik* (Punjabi) translated by Surender Mohan, pub. by Sanket Prakashan, Jullunder, 1971.
- c) *Godo Pratikhaye* (Bengali) translated by Kabir Chowdhury, pub. by Muktaadhara, Dacca.
- d) *Waiting for Godot* (Bengali) translated by Ashok Sen, Calcutta.

Besides *Waiting for Godot* is also available on video-cassette produced by E.M.R.C. Poona University, Poona.

1.9 LET US SUM UP

The information in this Unit is of two kinds: material that is not directly about the play but deepens our understanding of it which includes information about tragicomedy, theatre of the Absurd and life and works of Beckett, and material directly about the play such as an avant grade play, history of the play in print and performance, and different artistic forms. Our purpose has been to familiarize you with the play as also sharpen your wits to examine it critically.

UNIT 2 *GODOT* : A CRITICAL ANALYSIS-I

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Brief Comments and Key Questions
- 2.3 Critical Analysis : Act I

2.0 OBJECTIVES

To analyse the text of the play in the background of the distinct aspects of the play discussed briefly in Unit 1.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

We will raise some key questions here, which you should bear in mind when you start reading the play along with the critical analysis. As you look for answers to these questions, you will get to understand the play better.

2.2 BRIEF COMMENTS AND KEY QUESTIONS

Let us first look at the stage decor in *Waitingfor Godot*: Compare it with the elaborate stage decor in other plays you have studied.

In this play it is an open country road with a leafless tree--a tree if we can call it. Beckett has not placed his characters in a 'specific' place or time. By refusing to mention the specifics, is Beckett trying,

- i) to decontextualize the play and lend it, simultaneously, a 'universal' dimension in terms of time and space?
- ii) Do you think this dramatic device makes the play an open-ended play which, in turn, reinforces (i) above?
- iii) Further, can we take the road as an emblem of movement, future, and progress, where other people might come along?
- iv) Do you think a positive answer to (iii) above will possibly **make** the play, a play of hope which the word "waiting" in the title seems to denote? However, if read ironically, will "waiting" acquire different connotations? If so, what?

In case of the *dramatis personae* too, Beckett strips them of their genealogy and renders them rootless. We are not told anything about the two main characters, Estragon and Vladimir. We are left to hazard a guess about their nationalities as also

about their background only by their names. Beckett, thus, takes away man's individuality, identity, his property, his family, his place and function in society, and then begins to strip man of his normal 'human equipment' also as is seen in *Endgame*, where the main characters are deprived of their legs and mobility.

It is not just that the two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, have no home and no locale, what is worse, they seem unaware that they have neither.

We will talk about the significance of these aspects in the later units. Please first try and find out the significance of the 'names' of the *dramatis personae* as you attempt to find answers to the questions that follow.

As stated above, Beckett does not give the nationality, history or past life of the characters. So,

- i) What, in your view, is Beckett trying to convey through this device?
- ii) Do their names hint at their possible nationality?
- iii) Does he wish to make the play cross-cultural in its content and intent, although Beckett denied any attempt to "internationalize" the play by giving the characters French (Estragon), Russian (Vladimir), English (Lucky), and Italian (Pozzo, pronounced Podzo) names?

2.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS: ACT I

The play starts with the reunion of two tramps Vladimir and Estragon. You will note that in beginning of Act I, Vladimir says, "I am glad to see you back . . . Together again at last" (p. 9). The use of the word "again" shows that they have been here earlier also. Compare Vladimir's remark in Act II "You again!" (p.58)

There is a lot of exaggerated physical action in the play, which provokes laughter. Note how Estragon pulls at his boots "with both hands panting" and is "exhausted."

Beckett believes, that "the first words should introduce the theme of the play, The opening words in *Godot* "Nothing to be done" do precisely that. These words will echo again and again during the course of the play.

In line with the exaggerated action we observe that Vladimir moves with "Short, stiff strides, with legs apart" as he suffers from the enlargement of the prostate gland--a complaint common in old age. His gait reminds us of the king of comedy, Charlie Chaplin.

On their meeting the two tramps embrace each other; whenever they meet they go through the same motions of greeting.

Also, you will note the mock-heroic manner in which Vladimir addresses Estragon, "May one enquire . . .?" The latter's response to it, "In a ditch" instantly pricks the air bubble of the heightened style.

Estragon informs that he had been beaten by some people whom he identifies only as "They". What "they" refers to remains a mystery, much like the malevolent cosmic forces, the tormenters of humanity. "They" are as mysterious as *Godot* is to be later. Beating here signifies human suffering. So when Vladimir remarks that "We should have thought of it [the human suffering] a million years ago" Beckett attempts to historicize it and also brings it closer to our times ("in the nineties").

How do human beings cope with their suffering? Estragon and Vladimir had, during their younger days, together planned to commit suicide by jumping off the Eiffel Tower. But, Vladimir thinks, in their present condition, they would not be allowed to go up the Eiffel Tower and will thus be denied even the most despairing choice (of committing suicide).

Estragon, however, remains occupied with his personal "suffering" caused by his hurting shoes. Aghast when asked by Vladimir if his shoes hurt, Estragon addresses the audience directly, "Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!" He, thus, draws the audience into the play -- an instance of Brechtian influence on Beckett, who through such theatrical devices, breaks the illusion of being in a theatre.

A little before this Vladimir mimics maternal scolding to a child: "Shoes should be taken off everyday. I'm tired telling you that." (p.10). Such a characteristic feminine banality is further repeated in a conjugal tone: "There is a man all over for you.... Fault of his feet." (p.11). Vladimir suddenly has an urge to pass water - his kind of suffering due to the prostate problem. The play introduces a more sombre note, which, with the tramps' comic manner in the background is further accentuated. When Vladimir plays upon the Proverb, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick," and uses the word 'something' in place of 'heart' Beckett introduces 'uncertainty' as a theme.

Both, remain preoccupied with their respective problem, Estragon with his boot and Vladimir with his intense urge to pass water. He feels it coming and yet it doesn't. So he is "Relieved and at the same time appalled. Estragon in order to even up with Vladimir asks if his difficulty in urinating hurts, Vladimir's response to it is identical to Estragon's. He too addresses the audience directly: "Hurts...". Vladimir keeps examining his hat for some foreign body in it and Estragon, in the meanwhile, succeeds in taking off his shoe. The play once again moves from banality to the biblical plane when Vladimir refers to the story of the two thieves and Christ. Beckett himself referred to St. Augustine's words about the two thieves: "Do not despair, one of the thieves was saved; do not presume, one of the thieves was damned." Beckett claimed that he had always been impressed by the symmetry of St. Augustine's words

You will observe that such a symmetry works at different levels in the play: it corresponds to Estragon's feet, one of which is 'damned', the other is 'saved'. Later, of the two tramps, Estragon is 'beaten', the other, Vladimir 'saves' him and is 'saved' himself.

Vladimir, ever resilient, finds the percentage of being saved 'reasonable'-- as chances are fifty-fifty.

Also, it is interesting to note that only in the list of characters are the tramps named Estragon and Vladimir. Right through the play the two address each other by their nicknames, Gogo and Didi. Could we say that with passage of time their eight-lettered names (Vladimir and Estragon) have been reduced to four-lettered each (Gogo and Didi), which falls in line with what, Lucky later says about man "that man in spite of the strides of physical culture the practice of sports . . . , shrinks and dwindles."

Estragon's proposal to "repent" for the sin of their being born, which brought about their respective suffering, evokes a hearty laugh from Vladimir which he stifles immediately as laughter revives his pain (due to prostate gland enlargement).

Beckett quoted Calderon who said, 'Man's greatest sin is to have been born.' It seems to be Beckett's one of the most deeply felt convictions.

Having stifled his laughter suddenly Vladimir smiles as suddenly from ear to ear. Laughing and smiling mechanically highlight Vladimir's clownish antics. On being

asked if he had read the Bible, Estragon's reply, "I must have taken a look at it" is characteristic of his inconsistency", since later in the play he affirms that all his life he has "compared himself to Christ" (p. 51). Estragon goes on to speak graphically about the maps of the Holy Land, and his deep desire to go to the Dead Sea. Since there is "Nothing to be done" Vladimir offers to tell the story of two thieves in the Bible to pass time. Estragon, however, is disinterested in the story and declares: I am doing. Yet he doesn't move. Such a dichotomy between proposal and action underlines element of the absurd in the play, which will be repeated several times.

The story of two thieves was used by Beckett in *Murphy* also, where Neary says, "Remember also one thief was saved". In the Bible three Evangelists speak of the thieves: St. Luke 23:43 speaks of a thief being saved. Of the other three Evangelists, St. Matthew 27:38 and 27:44, and St. Mark 15:27, contrary to Vladimir's assertion, do mention the thieves. Thus, an inaccuracy is committed by Vladimir when he says, "Only one speaks of a thief being saved . . . of the other three two don't mention any thieves." This inaccuracy can be attributed to the theme of "uncertainties" in the play. Besides, Vladimir is not a student of theology.

Vladimir maintains that people believe the kindlier version of the story because they, possibly, hope that they too shall be saved if they have the faith even of one of the malefactors.

After some feverish movement Estragon alternately turning his back to the auditorium and then facing it, is appreciative of the "Inspiring prospects" and suggests they leave. Vladimir, however, reminds him: We are waiting for Godot. This, like "Nothing to be done," is one of the leitmotifs that run through the play and give it cohesion. The two tramps, however, are not sure about the place and day they were to meet *Godot*. As they stand by the leafless tree near which they were to meet *Godot*, Vladimir tries to guess about the species of the tree. Perhaps it is a willow, a weeping-willow. With its leaves now dead, there will be no more weeping. Suffering, in case of human beings too, ends with death. In the existentialist view living is suffering.

Gogo and Didi keep contradicting each other about time and place of their appointment with *Godot*, Vladimir, finally, turns towards the auditorium, which along with the tree, should be the place to meet *Godot*. Vladimir calls the auditorium "that bog". Vladimir draws the audience too, into the absurd situation in which the tramps themselves are. Here is another example of Brechtian influence.

Further, bog is a wet, muddy area, or, a toilet in informal British English. Look how Beckett is reductive of the auditorium and audience. If Estragon slept in a ditch, audience is in "the bog". Would you say that Beckett is, thus, trying to universalize the absurd situation,

Estragon and Vladimir's uncertainty about their appointment further reinforces the elusive and shadowy nature of *Godot*. Finally, Estragon falls asleep and has a dream, during which Vladimir feels lonely, which shows that the two tramps need each other's company very badly. This is further reinforced when they plan to commit suicide together later in the play.

Estragon desires to narrate his dream to Vladimir, who declines to share his nightmares. The intellectual, rational mind, Vladimir recoils in horror from the fantasies of the creative mind, Estragon. Their conversation leads Estragon to an obscene French joke which turns on the alleged preference of the English for sodomy. Estragon invites Vladimir to embrace him which the latter does reluctantly. Estragon, however, recoils since Vladimir stinks of garlics. So, if Estragon has stinking shoes, Vladimir has stinking breath. Such parallelisms are a pervasive feature of the play.

Since they have nothing to do, Estragon and Vladimir think of hanging themselves. They, by mentioning "mandrakes", (p.16) give an evidence of their love for knowledge. An ancient fertility symbol, mandrake, is believed to grow below the gallows. Note that death and birth being two facets of the same coin, Gallows, a symbol of death, is put side by side with mandrakes, fertility symbol.

Also see the humorous situation how each is urging the other to commit suicide first. They in the end decide not to do anything but wait for *Godot* to see what he has to offer them.

Estragon's question: What exactly did we ask him for? sets off the first music-hall type cross talk between the two tramps at the end of which the two sink into abrupt, temporary silence. After a while they adopt a grotesquely rigid posture, remain frozen in this posture as they hear some indiscernible voices or shouts. These give them a scare and also a hope--hope about *Godot's* arrival.

Estragon asks Vladimir whether they are tied. They are tied to "waiting" for *Godot*. They cannot get away from it as doing so would mean giving up hope, howsoever illusory that hope may be? Notice how Vladimir does not reply and the question is dropped and then picked up again. In doing so Beckett replicates the inconsequentiality of every day conversation in which the subject of discussion gets dropped, and then is either lost sight of completely or picked up again much later. Estragon's remark about the carrot, which he is eating, that "the more you eat the worse it gets", elicits a sick response from Vladimir: "I get used to the muck as I go along." His concluding remark that "The essential doesn't change" is an expression of despondency about human condition. Or, may be of the futility of human struggle. Or, further still, a belief that, at one level, change changes nothing, essentially speaking. Or, as Pozzo would state: "The tears of the world are a constant quantity.

The tramps once again hear a terrible cry. They feel threatened and also wait expectantly for the human source of cry to emerge on the stage. Their response to it is a mixture of the comic and the pathetic. It also underlines their vulnerability and need for each other.

Lucky enters, driven by Pozzo by means of a rope. Though Pozzo drives Lucky, he is no less bound to Lucky himself. There is complementarity in the master-slave relationship, which gets further reinforced in the Second Act, where Pozzo's dependence on Lucky, as he goes blind, increases.

Beckett's "drama of inaction" does not really lack in action and suspense. See how suspense is created about Pozzo's appearance on the stage. The audience too is wondering, like the two tramps, whether this isn't *Godot* at last.

Pozzo, a local landlord introduces himself in a highly dramatic manner, which, reflects his pride, his loudness and the pompous attitude. His arrogance and pompousness are further reinforced, when he is peeved to find that his name does not stir them. The two tramps on their part put on an act of not recognizing him in order either to deflate Pozzo of his pompousness, or to make fun of him.

Pozzo on the other hand, is condescending in his attitude towards the two tramps, who, he grants, belong to the same species as he (Pozzo), and have been made in God's image. Pozzo, thus is not only self-elevating, but is also, on the other hand, undercutting God's image.

Estragon and Vladimir make statements in which they contradict themselves, about their initial reaction to Pozzo and instantly create a comic situation.

The question, "Why doesn't he put down his bags?" asked on p.25 too is dropped, and is not answered until p. 31, by Pozzo. Pozzo's exaggerated behaviour is quite comic and in this backdrop his treatment of Lucky as a beast of burden underscores human

tragedy. Lucky, in order to impress Pozzo, doesn't put down his bags. In the meanwhile they have a close look at Lucky and describe him by themselves lapsing into a music hall cross talk. Pozzo feasts on chicken and wine and Estragon craves for the discarded bones, which Pozzo maintains should go to the carrier (Lucky). However, in face of Lucky's silence, they are offered to Estragon, who, to Vladimir's embarrassment, darts at them and gnaws them.

Writing about Lucky, Professor Duckworth while making two suggestions about the source of his name, says (i) Lucky is 'lucky' because he gets the bones or (ii) he is lucky because he has no expectations, hence he'll not be disappointed in life. cf. "Blessed are those who do not hope, for they shall not be disappointed." Is Estragon, in usurping Lucky's role as a taker of discarded bones, identifiable with him, in a limited sense?

Pozzo's speech on pp. 29-30 is noteworthy for its monologic quality. Besides he mimics a nervous public speaker, as Pozzo himself admits: "You're making me nervous." Before starting to answer the question, he "Sprays his throat . . . clears his throat, spits". His exaggerated action heightens the comic effect.

There is drama with in drama, when Pozzo forgets the question he was asked and, Vladimir and Estragon act as prompters. The former prompts by mimicking Lucky and the latter by uttering monosyllabic words and half sentences to help him recall the question, which he finally does and gives his own explanation for this, ridiculing "Lucky, son of Atlas" trying to impress him [Pozzo] in vain.

Pozzo nonetheless realizes the blind freakish nature of fate. He could have been in Lucky's position, if fate had so willed.

Lucky begins to cry when he learns that his master wishes to get rid of him. There is an instance of black humour as black humour as Lucky's suffering affords Pozzo an opportunity to poke fun at him and playfully suggest to Estragon to wipe away his tears before he stops crying. As soon as Estragon approaches Lucky, the latter kicks him violently in the shins. Estragon starts bleeding, and howls with pain. He, as if, has replaced the weeping Lucky.

"Pozzo suddenly turns very philosophical, when he says: "The tears of the world are a constant quantity: for each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. That is, human suffering remains unmitigated, Lucky, Pozzo acknowledges, taught him all beautiful things.

The intellectual barrenness of Pozzo is symbolized by his baldness, in contrast to Lucky's abundant white hair. Pozzo's baldness fits well in the scheme of things. There is all round barrenness! The subject of turning Lucky out of job is resumed and we have the two tramps mockingly sympathizing with Lucky and Pozzo by turns. On his part, Pozzo too acts as an aggrieved person at the hands of Lucky. He, however, puts on a brave face when he asserts, "Do look like a man that can be made to suffer" (34). The tramps are having a charming evening..

Here is an example of drama within drama, in which the two tramps now play the role of audience to Pozzo's **performance**. It is made more apparent a little later. On the next page (P.35) when Vladimir compares it [Pozzo's role] to the pantomime, the music hall, and the circus. The idea of drama-within-drama reaches a climax when Vladimir wishes to relieve himself of full bladder and asks to Estragon to 'Keep my seat' (p. 35). In an immediate reverseal of roles Estragon **hurries** Pozzo (to be a spectator and) to watch Vladimir urinating.

Beckett, thus, breaks the illusion of the world of drama, which, paradoxically, at one level, gets accentuated, In the meanwhile Pozzo loses his smoking pipe, of Kapp and Peterson make, 'which he had smoked after eating chicken. Another comic situation arises when Pozo who had got up to leave wants to sit for a while but wishes

Estragon to request him to take a seat with all the formality attending it. The latter in a rather comic and circumlocutory way asks him "to take weight off your feet. I implore you, you'll catch your death" When asked by Pozzo, Estragon gives his name as "Adams". Either Estragon assumes "Adams" to be (i) a character in the game he plays with Pozzo, when he requests him to be seated, or (ii) Beckett thereby attempts to add to the symbolic meaning of the play representing the entire mankind.

Pozzo's indulges in a harangue about night; where it becomes **synonymous** with death, with Vladimir longing for night, "Will night never come?" - which will bring relief, albeit temporary, from their long *Waiting for Godot*. Pozzo has found the two of them quite civil to him and wonders if he could do something for them, whereon Estragon grabs the opportunity and says, "Even ten francs would be welcome." A comedy of error ensues when Vladimir is outraged at Estragon's lowering himself to a beggar's level. Estragon, however, interprets Vladimir's angry words, "That is enough," to mean that five **francs** would be sufficient, and is quick to declare that he wouldn't settle for anything less than that.

Desiring to do something for the two, Pozzo wishes to know what they would want Lucky to do for them: dance, or going, or recite, or think. Vladimir, the intellectual wishes to "**hear** him [Lucky] think but later on goes along with Estragon's preference for 'dance' first and '**think**' afterwards.

Lucky dances, which is another example of 'performance' within drama. As this point Estragon playing the 'critic', attempts to dance like Lucky but **fails**, and almost **falls** **Beckett**, thus, under scores the big hiatus between 'creativity' and 'criticism'. A little later Vladimir too feels called upon to make some critical comment on Lucky's dance. His "squiriming like an aesthete" only reveals his pretentiousness. Thus Vladimir fails as a critic while Estragon fails as a performer.

Footnote

Beckett mentions a **number** of dances here which are as follows:

Farandole	French dance performed in a long string.
the fling	Scottish impetuous dance.
the brawl	old French dance: mentioned in Love's Labour Lost , III, i, 5-6.
the jig	a lively ('jerky') dance.
the fandango :	'lively Spanish dance.
the horn pipe :	Sailor's dance.
Caper (ed) :	danced in a frolicsome manner.

Lucky calls his dance variously, '**The** scapegoat's Agony,' 'The Hard Stool' and 'The Net' a **trap**, **Lucky's** dance is supposed to convey agony, strain **and** entrapment. It calls up the sense of being hunted, . . . having no escape in much the same way as Estragon and Vladimir remain **on** stage (they do not move - p. 54 and p. 94); as there is no other world for them.

When Estragon says "My **left** lung is very weak! But my right lung is as sound as bell" it echoes the motif: One thief was saved the other was damned! Chances of our being saved are fifty-fifty.

Reflecting on the basic situation of their life, Estragon notes: "Nothing happens nobody comes, nobody goes, it is awful!" It applies, in a limited way, to the play as well.

After watching Lucky's dance the two of them want him to think. Pozzo tells them that Lucky can't think without his hat on. This is comic, because the other three cannot think with their hats on. You will see how in order to **terminate** Lucky's

thinking they have to remove his hat, as if an energizer has been removed from a machine. Thinking, thus, becomes mechanical. This is in line with "thinking" later, as a command performance. Lucky stops suddenly after commencing "thinking" when he is commanded to "stop," and resumes when asked to "think" by Pozzo (p.42)

MacGowran is of the opinion that Lucky's speech is really one long sentence.

General points from Lucky's speech are enumerated herebelow:

1. We are told God exists and loves us, yet we cannot be sure;
2. We work, play, apply our rationale, yet none of these activities is able indefinitely to avert decay;
3. The physical world of water, earth, air and fire (or the elemental forces are) is indifferent to man;
4. We must face the incapacity of our reason to make sense of life and the inevitability of our extinction.
5. Lucky's speech is a monologue of non-sequitur. Beckett has modified a specific form of dramatic convention. He has altered the stream of consciousness device to jar coherence at every level.
6. Lucky's attempt at thought stands as a brilliant monument to man's entanglement in uncertainties.

Ruby Cohn has stated that "the repetitive passages summarize or parody several of the play's themes: the erosive effect of time, the relativity of facts, the futility of human activity, faith in God, and proof through reason" *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, p. 217.

"Lucky's speech is, thus, more than a continuous run-on of unpunctuated idiotic words and phrases; there is a latent intelligibility" (Open University Lesson, p.).

Lucky's speech begins with "Given the." We know "Given that" is a traditional way of introducing a rational argument and a basis of deductive logic. Parody of rationality in one sense, Lucky's speech is, in another sense, the ultimate in rationality, because it makes the overall point that the faults of existence and the surrounding universe do not submit to reasoned exposition or rational explanation.

Lucky invents names like, Puncher and Wattmann which literally mean, ticket puncher and tram-driver. Here they are supposed to be authors of theological works. And in his in corntation of "Quaquaquaqu," theological jargon is mimicked.

When Lucky speaks of "divine apathia, divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown,"... he highlights a God who is insensitive to human suffering, God whose existence too is questioned.'

Beckett, it seems, is being ironical when he refers to God's heights of divine apathia: which means freedom from or insensibility to suffering, or athambia, that is, 'imperturbability' or unsurprisability; or, aphasia, which means muteness, or inability to communicate. In addition, the unsympathetic universe is conveyed by the stage decor, and the futility of life through the sand that Lucky carries.

Acacacademy of Anthropopopometry: Academy of man measurement.

Anthropometry is measurement of the human body, distortion of spellings by adding 'caca' and 'popo' to academy and anthropometry respectively.

caca and popo: Childish words for excrement and chamberpot respectively.

Crowned: awarded (a prize).

Essy-in-Possy: Lat. esse, to be, and posse, to be able, being able, potential existence: are terms from medieval scholastic jargon, here conveying parody of university training in philosophy and theology.

Testew, Cunard: Names coined **after** private human parts. Testicle: male reproductive gland. Cunt: a very rude and offensive word that refers to a woman's vagina.

Fartov, Belcher: Names of vulgar origin. Fartov: derived from 'to fart', 'Belcher'-- from 'to belch.'

In Lucky's speech, Beckett wishes to underline that **inspite** of the shrinking and dwindling over ages and the knowledge of the decline of man and his unmitigated suffering, the labours of Testew and Cunard (i.e. procreation) continue.

Fletcher calls Lucky, "senile professor, decayed scholar and degraded man of reason," who makes a kind of statement that in spite of the existence of a loving God (of sorts) and progress of various kinds, man is in full decline." Science offers no more consolation than does theology.

Human activity is summarized, in brief, as alimentation and defecation.

Does Beckett, through Lucky's surface gibberish, demonstrate his irreverence for logically connected thought?

It is interesting to note that Wellwoth in *The Theatre of Protest and Paradox*, identifies this parody of stream of consciousness monologue as the clearest statement of Beckett's belief in the uselessness of thought.

Feckham: Invented name of a fictitious London district.

Peckham, Fulham: Possibly two places where the poet Blake had visions.

Clapham: an area in London district.

Per caput: per head

Bishop Berkeley: The French version reads Voltaire; an earlier English version reads Samuel Johnson. All these thinkers are of the 18th century, called the age of Reason and Enlightenment. Berkeley, an Irish philosopher (1685-1753), was one of the great empiricists and a leading representative of the brand of philosophy known as idealism. According to Berkeley, things which cannot be perceived cannot be supposed to exist; since God perceives everything, this, thus ensures its existence. Perhaps Beckett introduced Berkeley into Lucky's speech to link with Estragon's question: 'Do you think God sees me?' (Fletcher, p. 76) i.e. Estragon while seeking reassurance of God's existence seeks his own.

Lucky's thinking aloud is a "command performance". The torrent of his incoherent speech is a parody of stream of consciousness monologue and is clearest statement of **Beckett's** belief in the uselessness of thought. Lucky's thought can be terminated by taking his hat off his head.

Thinking thus, becomes a **mechanical** process, as do the subsequent movements of Lucky, who appears **completely exhausted**.

To ensure that there is no possibility of Lucky going into his 'fit' of thinking again, Pozzo crushes Lucky's hat under his feet.

Pozzo who had earlier lost his ~~dudeen~~ and, vapourizer, finally loses his watch too. It remains a mystery as to how and where they are gone!

Half-hunter: Hunter: a watch whose face is protected with a metal case (a half-hunter, if that case has a small circle of glass let in).

Dead-beat: Quite overcome, exhausted, tired.

Escapement: An escape: part of a time piece connecting the wheel work with the pendulum or balance, and allowing a tooth to escape at each vibration. The 'dead-beat escapement', connects up with the theme of exhaustedness of the tramps, Pozzo and Lucky.

Instead of searching his fob (a small watch pocket in the waistband of trousers) for watch, Pozzo doubles up, and tries to apply his ear to his stomach, to hear its (watch's) tick-tock rather than feel it and see whether it is there or not. The play is full of such clowning or comic actions, which in the present case is made funnier by Estragon and Vladimir's joining Pozzo to hear the watch's ticking.

When told that tick-tock is not of the watch but of his beating heart, Pozzo's response is: "(disappointed) Damnation!" His response raises many questions: Is Pozzo disappointed with life ticking away? Or, with life continuing like this? Or, with not being able to locate his watch? Does his response not take the play off to existentialist level? The comic situation is carried further as Pozzo's interest right now seems to be more in his watch than in his heart. Pozzo who got ready to depart on a couple of occasions but did not, appears to feel tied down to the situation as do Estragon and Vladimir.

Further, Estragon's response: 'Such is life', shows that it is difficult to depart both from the 'situation' one is in, and also from 'life'; as has been shown by the failed attempts of the tramps to commit 'suicide' and thus depart from it. Finally, the two of them leave and Vladimir, with a sense of satisfaction remarks: "That passed the time". Estragon's reaction to it that "It would have passed in any case" brings into sharp focus a sense of inevitability, and acceptance of the reality of life.

Vladimir and Estragon's talk about the change, both, Pozzo and Lucky have undergone, shows that they have met them before.

For Vladimir, this encounter has happened before and will happen again, in Act II, when the two have "changed"--Pozzo having gone blind and Lucky dumb. Estragon seems to have forgotten about their earlier meeting, but he questions Vladimir why did they not recognize them? Vladimir with a sense of self-importance says: "I too pretended not to recognize them" It shows not only the hurt 'self-esteem' of the tramp, but simultaneously such reactions, comic in nature, evoke laughter too.

The appearance of the Boy (Godot's messenger's) towards the end of Act I does many things simultaneously. In the first instance his words assure us that Godot exists. The Boy's appearance brings hope and terminates it in the same breath. He, however, regenerates hope when he holds out promise for Godot's arrival the next day. He introduces some mystery, and also establishes connection between Godot and the God of the Bible by disclosing the work which he and his brother are engaged in: looking after the sheep and the goats, a familiar biblical image. And, finally, the word "again" in Vladimir's "Off we go again", shows that the boy has been here before,

The Boy addresses Vladimir as Mr. Albert and Vladimir responds to it. He is kind and more humane towards the Boy, whereas, Estragon is harsh in tone, and behaves like a bully.

Vladimir attempts to pacify Estragon by indirectly reminding him of his [Estragon's] own plight at the hands of his tormentors. Estragon's attitude towards the Boy shows that the victimized don't hesitate in victimizing others, as is seen in Lucky's kicking of Estragon earlier in the play. In the course of their conversation we are informed that Godot beats the Boy's brother; and thus the play's leitmotif, "one thief was saved, the other damned" is repeated. One brother is beaten, the other is not.

When the Boy states that he does not know whether he is happy or unhappy living with Godot, Vladimir includes: You are as bad as myself. Suddenly the light fails and in a moment it is night which brings a sense of relief to him, as that will put an end to their futile wait for Godot, and will, possibly, bring rest and sleep to them. This also provokes Estragon, the poet, to quote from P.B. Shelley's poem "To the Moon": "Art thou pale for weariness/Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth."

Estragon leaves his boots at the edge of the stage and intends to leave barefoot. To Vladimir's suggestion that he can't go barefoot, Estragon, who has all his life compared himself to Christ, replies: Christ did.

Estragon wishes to be reminded to bring a bit of rope to commit suicide the next day, and also recalls an abortive attempt at suicide he had made earlier in his life by jumping into the Rhone. He was, then, fished out by Vladimir. Twice did he try to 'depart' from life, but could not. Having stayed together for about fifty years Estragon, wonders if they wouldn't have been better off alone. The two are different in character and in action, yet at some level they are so very similar, and complementary that they realize that separating now from each other is not worth its while. Together they decide to leave but do not move, and remain frozen in their situation.

The fact that they do not move after suggesting so underscores the disjunction between language and its meaning, besides highlighting the static nature of the play

UNIT 3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS-II

Structure

- 3.0 Objective
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Brief Comments and Important Questions
- 3.3 Critical Analysis : Act II
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Glossary
- 3.6 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this Unit is to complete the critical analysis of the play and relate the Second Act of the play to Act I.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we resume analysis of the text, we will raise some questions, which you will do well to answer so that you can follow the discussion of the play later in Units 4 and 5 better.

3.2 BRIEF COMMENTS AND IMPORTANT POINTS TO PONDER OVER: ACT II

As the curtain goes down on Act I, we find the two tramps frozen in their situation. Going by your experience of reading plays by other playwrights, what expectation do you have in this play when the curtain goes up in the second Act?

In the first Act we found Estragori and Vladimir waiting for the elusive *Godot*. Do you think the two tramps would not be *Waiting for Godot* as expectantly as they did in the first Act? You would recall that in the first Act, the two tramps do not state exactly what they expect *Godot* to do for them. Can you make a guess about their expectation?

Do they expect him to improve their life in any specific manner? Is there any indication about it in the play?

Or, do you think they will give up their wait for him?

If they terminate their wait, where would they go? Do they have anywhere to go?

As noted earlier, Beckett presents a starkly austere setting and deprives his characters of any antecedents, and gives them little human dignity. In view of this existentialist situation do you think the tramps will achieve anything even if *Godot* came? To put it differently, would their waiting or not-waiting for *Godot* make any difference to their life?

And, in the background of this existentialist situation, is any fulfilment possible in the life of Estragon and Vladimir?

We will discuss various aspects of the play in later units of the study material. However, to understand the structure of the play, please make note of repetitions and differences at all levels in the play, especially keeping in mind the situation of the two tramps and their relationship with each other.

Towards the end of both the Acts the two tramps propose to move and yet *don't* and the curtain in both cases, falls with the stage directions: "They don't move."

Is there any finality in the ends of the two Acts? Why or why not?

3.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ACT II

When the curtain goes up at the beginning of Act II, we see that the tree, which was leafless in the first Act, has four or five leaves. Vladimir, however, exaggerates on p. 60 and says "It's covered with leaves." The swift leafing keeps the tree at the centre of attention and speculation. Beckett gets a great deal from this visual image: it can stand for spring, as Estragon comments; for renewals, and the cycle of life. The leafing can stand for hope as well. Yet the tree is associated with death, since the two planned to hang themselves from it, and reminds us of Christ's crucifixion.

Vladimir moves about feverishly on the stage and suddenly begins to sing a dog song-- an old German ballad.

When we go through the seemingly circular dog song, it appears we could go on and on with it; it seems never-ending, but Vladimir's brooding repetition of the word "tomb" "tomb" "tomb" gives that idea a conclusiveness, a finality; the word itself conveys a final destination. The song is circular, but the effect is linear. Its syntax, using so simple a vocabulary, with its repetition and its emphasis on death, brings to mind Lucky's very different speech in Act I. The dog song ends with "tomb", Lucky's speech ends with "the labors abandoned left unfinished . . . so calm . . . cunard . . . unfinished . . ." We thus see presentation of balance and antithesis throughout the play.

Meeting of the two tramps in Act II begins on a note identical to the one we have at the beginning of Act I.

In Act I, Estragon was joined by Vladimir, it is vice-versa here. Also, Vladimir's invitation to embrace in Act II is slightly differently worded. At the end of the embrace Estragon who is no longer supported by Vladimir, almost falls. This manifests the complementary nature of their relationship. Nonetheless, their nagging continues and each claims to be better off without the other. Vladimir also questions Estragon about his tormentors and whether they beat him again. Their beating of Estragon defies all reason.

Both the tramps, nonetheless, feel happy having come together, and would wait for *Godot*. Things also seem changed since the previous day. But Estragon's statement: "It's never the same" is a sick remark about living and the passage of time; it hints

also at its (life and time's) irreversibility/irreversible movement/unidirectional movement.

Estragon has forgotten everything which took place the previous day. Vladimir's attempts to remind him end up with another sick remark about his life condition. He has, he states, crawled about in the mud all his lousy life, and never stirred from the muck heap of lit. Vladimir unsuccessfully attempts to calm him down, but Estragon expresses his disgust at his failed life saying, "I've puked my puke of a life" (p.62). He also echoes Pozzo's words about Lucky (p.32) and wishes. "The best thing would be to kill me, like the other." Vladimir, however, reminds him of the Biblical saying, "To every man his little cross ... Till he dies And is forgotten."

The two are inexhaustible in inventing new ways of passing time (see discussion of the play). They once again lapse into music hall cross talk wherein they speak of the dead voices, which according to Martin Esslin are "the rustling, murmuring voices of the past, are the voices we hear in the three novels of his trilogy; they are the voices that explore the mysteries of being and self to the limits of anguish and suffering. Vladimir and Estragon are trying to escape hearing them."

The cross talk here stresses that death is as inadequate as life, and at the end of it they once again fall back on *Godot*.

As a means of passing time they propose different things: to sing, to think or to contradict each other, or ask each other questions. They also agree that if they thought less, there will be that much less misery, since "to think is to be full of sorrow" – as Keats would have us believe.

To the two tramps the audience and the auditorium assume metaphorical and existentialist propoition. In another example of Brechtian influence, their remark, "Where are these corpses . . . , skeletons . . . A charnel house! A charnel house" embraces the audience and the auditorium (wherein cospes/skeleton and charnel house refer to audience and auditorium respectively).

Lucky's speech in Act I emphasized the failure of religion and science to help mankind in such a world, Estragon now suggests that they turn to Nature for 'succour'. But Vladimir knows that that too has failed.

Looking at the tree "covered with leaves" they become unsure about the place of their last visit. Their inability to recall the past truthfully is compounded by the fact that nothing has happened in their life for over half a century. Besides, there is nothing certain in Beckett's world. Estragon, by association; tries to recall their earlier visit through the kick Lucky gave him; he, however, does not remember the bones given by Pozzo. Vladimir wishes to confirm it by showing the wound Estragon had received, which has begun to fester in a day's time--so fast is the process of degeneration. The idea of the uncertainty is further underlined by Estragon's unsureness about the colour of his boots.

Throughout this exchange Vladimir has been patiently leading his friend towards what he hopes (vainly, as it turns out) will be an incontrovertible demonstration of the fact that they were in very truth at the same spot the previous evening. Such small insignificant and absurd situations in their life enable the two to have the "impression" that they exist, The use of the word 'impression' gives a feeling of vagueness about their existence; "the impression" means we believe that something is the case, often when it is not actually so. Such is their life,

In line with the motif of uncertainty (and vagueness about the identity of *Godot*, the exact time and place of their appointment with *Godot*) is their indefiniteness about the boots which Estragon had left behind when the curtain went down on the first Act. Further, the boots, which Estragon now finds "too big," reinforce what Lucky's speech had stated about human life. About the boots Beckett wrote "o Duckworth:

'The second day boots are no doubt the same as first and Estragon's feet wasted, pined, shrunk and dwindled in interval;' as Lucky's speech had warned. This evokes further questions. How does it happen overnight? Is there a longer interval between the two Acts than is indicated in the play? Is the 'Next Day' being used metaphorically rather than literally?

Desiring to rest now Estragon angrily puts an end to discussion about the boots. He soon falls asleep in a foetal posture while Vladimir sings lullaby in a loud voice. The whole sequence brings out mother-child relationship between the two tramps, (cf. Shoes should be aired.) This is reinforced by Vladimir's laying his coat across sleeping Estragon's shoulder and his maternal assurance to the scared 'child' (Estragon), when the latter "wakes with a start," and, "casts about wildly." (p.70).

Tired, Estragon suggests they leave, but is reminded by Vladimir that they are *Waitingfor Godot*. He also complains about the night that does not fall. Night which will bring only temporary relief followed by a long period of despair, the next day.

Vladimir rebukes him for always complaining about things. To be able to pass time and fill the void, the two, now, decide to re-enact the Pozzo-Lucky drama, with Vladimir choosing to play Lucky. He asks Estragon to curse him, as Pozzo cursed Lucky earlier in the play. Estragon begins with mild one and later calls him "Gonococcus! Spirochaete!" (p.73). In a huff Estragon exits left but rushes back to Vladimir fearing the arrival of his tormentors. He, however, is uncertain about their identity and their number. Vladimir, nonetheless, assures Estragon that it is *Godot*, and that they are saved. Estragon next rushes to the right and finds them coming there too. It is a "no exit" situation for him when Vladimir tells him: There is no way out there.

Beckett thus humorously exploits the fact of being in a theatre. Fletcher remarks, "the stage, in Beckett, has a particular reality, It is not a facsimile of a middle class living room as in a 'drawing room comedy', but a place in its own right The stage is an emblem of the notion of imprisonment."

In yet another example of Brechtian influence, Vladimir gestures towards the audience and remarks: There! Not a soul in sight! The statement further brings into focus the existentialist theme in the play.

Vladimir suggests Estragon to disappear, whereon the latter attempts to hide himself behind the tree, but fails. They now stand back to back to watch out for the 'coming' people. Once again they suggest to play game to pass time. Now they decide to abuse each other.

They call each other moron, vermin, abortion, sewer-rat, morpion, curate, etc. Estragon calls Vladimir "Crritic" and silence's him. Beckett, the creative writer seems censorious of critic, using the term opprobriously. Using "critic" as an abuse seems the ultimate. Besides, from a highly formal note, their banter degenerates into personal abuse.

Soon they make it up. Vladimir acts maternally once again and invites him to his 'breast'. They, once again, lapse into a music hall cross talk, and then decide to do their exercises, including deep brcathing. Estragon however is tired breathing. A seemingly innocuous remark, once more, points at the existentialist dimensions of the play and expresses Estragon's sense of futility of living. He shouts for God's pity and is joined in by Vladimir.

Pozzo and Lucky enter, Pozzo is blind and is now led by the latter Lucky. Rope has become much shorter. This too fits well in the scheme of things where humans shrink and dwindle. With distance between the two reduced, they seem to have come

closer to each other, existentially, too. One may ask: Has Pozzo, the master, become his servant's dependent? Are the roles reversed?

Pozzo-Lucky couple here seems to illustrate Gloucester's line in *King Lear*, "'Tis the time's plague, when mad men lead the blind."

Lucky and Pozzo fall and shout for help. With their arrival, Vladimir hopes, they will be able to see the evening out. While these two discuss whether to help the fallen Pozzo or not, the latter keeps shouting for it. Vladimir does not wish to waste time in idle discourse and wishes the two of them to avail of the chance to help Pozzo, as a representative of "man'tind", the "foul brood to which a cruel fate has consigned us". (p.79).

Lost in diatribe against fate and humanity, Vladimir, goes tangential and does not hear Pozzo's cries for help. In this "immense confusion", that the world is, he finds only one thing certain that they are *Waiting for Godot*.

Vladimir is conscious of the unavailing nature of the games they play to fill the void while *Waiting for Godot*. It's a sort of self-deception. Vladimir looks at the chance to help Pozzo as a "diversion" in the midst of immense confusion, in the midst of nothingness.

Vladimir, finally, tries to pull Pozzo to feet, but fails and himself falls. He too shouts for help now. After a long dilly dallying Estragon extends a helping hand to Vladimir, but he falls on the "sweet mother earth," where he wants to have a little nap. "This multiple fall Beckett sees as 'the visual expression of their common situation and as being related to the threat in the play of everything falling' (Fletcher, p. 68).

Disturbed by Pozzo's cries, Estragon suggests Vladimir to silence him by kicking him in the crotch, which he does. Crying with pain Pozzo crawls away. Once again they invite Pozzo, who does not respond. They call him Abel, and Lucky Cain, and imagine the blind Pozzo to have the power to see into the future.

Together they hoist Pozzo, his arms around their necks. They cart him around, for a while. Vladimir uses Latin *Memoriapraeteritorum bonorum* to describe Pozzo thinking of his past happiness. The two tramps, you will observe, can quote the Bible and Shakespeare, and speak Latin. How lightly they carry their erudition! Is Beckett ridiculing scholarly pursuit in much the same way as he ridicules a critic's vocation in *Godot*?

Speaking of his blindness Pozzo informs them that he "woke up one fine day as blind as fortune" (86). Pozzo questions them about their whereabouts and asks, "isn't by any chance the place known as the Board"--a humorous reference to theatre. . Vladimir's faithful description of the stage and its properties, and Pozzo's response thereto on p. 87: "Then it's not the Board," is reminiscent critics' initial reactions to Beckett's avant garde theatre. It also shows how Beckett was able to anticipate critics' response to *Godot*.

Pozzo enquires about his menial and suggests ways of awakening him from his sleep, which will provide Estragon an opportunity to "revenge" himself. Finding Lucky breathing, Estragon begins to kick him, but in turn he hurts himself and comes limping and groaning. Pozzo who had till now not recognized Vladimir and Estragon does so now, and gets ready to leave. Lucky we learn carries sand, a symbol of burden and of time (in hour glass), in his bag.

Pozzo, in his blindness, has acquired a new insight into the meaning of life and human existence, which underlines the absurdity of life, Life is a mere series of meaningless repetitious activities. Journey from womb to tomb is full of miseries. Delivery is no deliverance.

Pozzo's last word "On!" as he leaves the stage, (on p. 88) now closely tied to Lucky, is leading them both to death. That "On!" is itself tied to Pozzo's most important last words: "They give us birth astride of a grave ...", which make the first significant existentialist statement on human life.

After Pozzo and Lucky leave Vladimir makes comments on his own condition, on the cries of tormented man and innocent babe, on watchers and watched, on those awake and those asleep. A series of seeming balances and anti-theses, and complementarities, but again the emphasis is on death. He repeats Pozzo's words, "Astride of a grave . . . puts on the forceps" (p.89). He uses the imagery of a child birth by forceps: Obstetrician becomes grave digger, and forceps correspond to shovel. Vladimir's journey is slower than Pozzo's; the crucial word is "lingeringly". His is a long day's journey into night--so painful that he says, "I can't go on!"

In a repeat of the first Act we have the Boy. Vladimir, unlike in Act I, asks the Boy no questions. Instead he makes statements. For the first time Vladimir asks him about *Godot*, and if he has a beard. The Boy replies, "I think it is white Sir" According to Beckett, the whiteness shows that *Godot* is very old: if he were less experienced there might be some hope" (Fletcher, p. 70).

Under these circumstances, Vladimir asks for God's pity for both, and possibly for the entire humanity. Disappointed with *Godot's* non-arrival and the futility of wait they think of leaving, bowing they can't go far away from here as they will have to come back to wait for *Godot* the next day. Estragon proposes 'Let's go,' but "they do not move." The pattern is repeated. It further reinforces the static nature of action in the play. They have nowhere to move to. It is all a landscape of barrenness and despair, of *Dr. Faustus*:

Faustus:	Where are you damn'd?
Mephostopheles:	In hell.
Faustus:	How comes it then that thou art out of hell?
Mephostopheles:	Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it. (I, iii, 75-78).

Nor are the two tramps out of their hopeless situation in life.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

Waitingfor Godot is a play with a difference and so it has been called an avant garde play. In units 2 and 3 we have analysed the play covering both the acts, highlighting scenes, sequences, characters, language and issues that the play raises.

3.5 GLOSSARY

Music Hall:

Variety entertainment of songs and comic turns at which the audience could buy drink. It developed from the tavern entertainments. Gradually with changes in the theatrical licensing laws, the pub connection vanished though it was normal for there to be bars around the main music hall so that the entertainment could be combined with alcoholic refreshment. The programmes of the music hall in its heyday were really 'variety' shows in nature. Songs and comedy were accompanied by acrobats, animal acts, and even interludes by legitimate actors, ballet dancers etc. The 1960s have seen something of a revival, however, starting, just where music hall did originally, as free entertainment in bars of working class public houses.

In 'cross-talk' two comedians swap gags or fail comically to understand each other. Nowadays it is no longer a living form of entertainment. Usually, of the two comedians, one is a 'straight' man and the other a 'funny' man. The comedy arises out of comedian 'A' trying, for instance, to explain to 'B', the complexities of the traffic system or income-tax rules, and feign exasperations at the latter's comic propensity for getting the wrong end of the stick. An echo of this sort of comedy can be heard frequently in the quickfire exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon in this play.

Myth of Sisyphus:

In Greek mythology son of Aeolus whence he is called Aeolides. He was mated to Merope, a daughter of Atlas, became by her the father of Glaucus, Ornytion, Thersander and Halmus. In later accounts he is called a son of Autolycus, and the father of Ulysses by Anticlea; whence we find Ulysses sometimes called Sisyphides. He is said to have built the town of Ephyra, afterwards Corinth. As king of Corinth he promoted navigation and commerce, but he was fraudulent and avaricious. His wickedness was punished in the lower world, where he was condemned forever to roll uphill a marble block, which as soon as it reached the top always rolled down again.

Vaudeville:

More or less the American equivalent of British music hall, vaudeville consists of a series of comic, musical, acrobatic actions, deriving from the rough vulgar beer hall entertainments of the middle 19th century. The heyday of vaudeville was almost exactly contemporary with that of music hall, from the early 1890s to the mid 1920s; and in America as in Britain, it was ousted mainly by the cinema, particularly the talkies.

Existentialism -

May be defined as a school of thought based on the conception of the absurdity of the universe and the consequent meaninglessness and futility of human life and action; as Sartre has put it--all human activities are equivalent, all are destined. . . . to defeat. One of the basic tenets of Sartre's existentialism, is that man can shape his own destiny by the exercise of his will in the face of the given set of potentialities which is his life. The main premiss is the concrete fact that man exists; predetermination is denied. Man has freedom of choice and action; and each man's actions, while subjectively inspired, influence other people, so every individual is responsible to humanity as a whole. No dogmatic solutions of the eternal questions of ultimate origins or endings are offered. A man can choose his faith. An existentialist, says Sartre, can be Christian or atheist.

(From Everyman's Encyclopaedia)

Adamov, Arthur (1908-70) French playwright of Armenian origin. Adamov's twenties and thirties, were marked by loneliness and neurosis, chronicled in *L'Aveu* (*The Confusion*, 1946) and *L'Homme et L'Enfant* (*Man and Child*, 1968). He began writing plays after the Second World War. The masterpiece of this period is Professor *Taranne* (1953). In 1955 when the theatre of the Absurd, with which his name had been linked, was becoming well known, Adamov's Ping Pong heralded a move towards a more politicized theatre. His other plays are *Paolo Paoli* (1957) *Off Limits* (1969) *If Summer* Returned (1970).

Balzac, Honore'de (1799-1850) depicted French society with utmost realism. His greatness lies in his ability to transcend mere representation and to infuse his novels with a kind of "suprarealism". Another aspect of Balzac's extreme realism lies in his attention to the prosaic exigencies of everyday life.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). During his early period in his career Brecht trained actors and began to develop theory of dramatic technique known as epic theatre. Rejecting the methods of traditional realistic drama, he preferred a loose narrative form in which he used distancing devices such as asides and masks to create a historical frame around the action. The technique prevents the spectator from identifying with the characters on stage. This is known as alienation effect.

Camus, Albert (b. Mondovi, French Algeria, 1913, died France, 1960). He was a philosopher, novelist, and playwright. He believed human beings are not absurd and the world is not absurd, but for humans to be in the world is absurd. Attracted by the theatre, he organized the *avant-garde* drama group Theatre de Equipe in 1935 and worked with it until 1938. Among his important plays are *The Misunderstanding*, *Caligula*, *State of Siege*, 1948, *The Just Assassins* 1950. His *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1955, brought immediate recognition to him. In 1957, Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, no mean achievement for a person born of humble parents - an itinerant agricultural labourer for father and a charwoman for mother.

Heidegger, Martin (1889-1976), German philosopher, who developed existential phenomenology.

In *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*, 1927), Heidegger was concerned with the philosophical question: What is it, to be? What kind of "being" human beings are? They are, he said, thrown into a world that they have not made, but that consists of potentially useful things, including cultural as well as natural objects. Heidegger posited a fundamental relation between the mode of being of objects, of humanity, and of the structure of time. The individual, according to him, is however, always in danger of being submerged in the world of objects. The feeling of dread (*Angst*) brings the individual to a confrontation with death and the ultimate meaninglessness of life, but only in this confrontation can an authentic sense of Being and of freedom be attained.

Ionesco, Eugene (b. Romania, 1912, naturalised French citizen). At a performance of an Ionesco play, there is a considerable laughter in the audience: it is man laughing at his own emptiness, his own triviality. Ionesco's first few plays are *The Bold Soprano* and *La Lecon* (*The Lessons*, 1950), *Rhinoceros* and *Anedee* 1953. He calls his plays "comic dramas" or "tragic farces," because the elements of the comic and tragic are not fused. For Ionesco they co-exist, and each stands as a criticism of the other. In 1981, a new play *Voyages Chez Les Morts* (*Journeys to the Homes of the Dead*) recaptured the hallucinatory quality of early work.

Kierkegaard, Soren Aabye (1813-1855), Danish religious philosopher, whose concern with individual existence, choice, and commitment profoundly influenced modern theology and philosophy, especially existentialism. He applied the term existential to his philosophy because he regarded philosophy as the expression of an intensely examined individual life. Kierkegaard stressed the ambiguity and paradoxical nature of the human situation. The fundamental problems of life, he contended, were to defy rational, objective explanation; the highest truth is subjective.

Kierkegaard maintained that systematic philosophy not only imposes a false perspective on human existence, but that, it also, by explaining life in terms of logical necessity, becomes a means of avoiding choice and responsibility. Individuals, he believed, create their own natures through their choices, which must be made in the absence of universal, objective standards. The validity of a choice can only be determined subjectively.

Sartre, Jean Paul. First gave the term existentialism general currency by using it for his own philosophy. Sartre's philosophy is atheistic and pessimistic. He declared that human life is a "futile passion." Sartre, nevertheless, insisted that his existentialism is

a form of humanism, and he strongly emphasised human freedom, choice and responsibility. Much of Sartre's work focuses on the dilemma of choice faced by free individuals and on the challenge of creating meaning by acting responsibly in an indifferent world. In stating that "man is condemned to be free," Sartre reminds us of the responsibility that accompanies human decisions.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. What changes have Pozzo and Lucky undergone during the course of the play?
2. Do you observe any difference in Pozzo's demeanour in Act II? Does he seem to be more serious and more philosophical than he is in Act I? What do you think is the reason for it, and what is its significance?
3. Do you see any change in the language of Pozzo compared to that he uses in the first Act?
4. Does the language used in Act II express the sense of metaphysical anguish more explicitly than it did in the first Act?
5. What difference do you see in the relationship between Lucky and Pozzo? Is there a reversal of roles in Act II?
6. How far, do you think, is Act II a repeat of Act I? Do you see any development in terms of plot, theme and characters in Act II?
7. How does the ending of Act II compare with the ending of Act I? Do you find the end of Act II more optimistic or pessimistic than that of Act I? If so why? Give examples.

UNIT 4: THEMES AND ISSUES-I

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 *Godot* as a Tragicomedy
- 4.3 Tragic, Comic, Absurdist and *Godot*
 - 4.3.1 *Godot* and the theatre of the Absurd
 - 4.3.2 Theatre of the Absurd and the audience response
- 4.4 *Godot* as an Existentialist play
 - 4.4.1 Estragon and Vladimir Existentialist Characters
- 4.5 Structure of *Godot*
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Unit are to discuss in detail various aspects of *Waiting for Godot*.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A reading of the first three Units should have by now given you an idea of what the play is about. In this Unit we propose to discuss *Godot* (i) as a tragicomedy, (ii) as an absurd play, (iii) as an existentialist play, and finally, (iv) its structure.

4.2 *GODOT* AS A TRAGICOMEDY

As we pointed out earlier, Beckett, in his English translation, calls *Godot* a tragicomedy, while in the original French it is merely a "*piece en deux actes*." *Waiting for Godot* is a tragicomedy because it combines tragic and comic elements.

Jacobsen and Mueller point out the "constant simultaneity of tragedy and comedy" in *Godot*. If according to them, its barrenness situates the tragedy, then its construct makes possible the comedy. David Grossvogel speaks of "part-tragedy, part comedy" in the play.

Let us first see why *Waiting for Godot* is not a tragedy, in spite of undertones of tragedy in it.

Waiting for Godot cannot be called tragic in the traditional or any other sense because it lacks the kind of sublimity which is believed to be the common attribute of most tragedies. Yet we observe that *Godot* depicts a despair which in view of the slenderness of hope in it, is nothing short of "heroic," heroic in the manner of "robust optimism." Estragon and Vladimir will come back and wait for *Godot* day after day, although through their daily experience, they should know in their heart of hearts (See Vladimir's response to the Boy's arrival on the second day--he seems to be able to anticipate the message from *Godot* "Here we go again") that *Godot* will never come, there is really little hope which they can look forward to. Besides, it won't help even if he comes and is willing to grant their request, for they did not ask him to do anything tangible for them. What they said to him was only "a sort of prayer, a vague supplication" (p.).

There is also something very moving in the plight of Estragon, who sleeps, as the Boy tells Vladimir that *Godot* won't come even that day. His being beaten by the mysterious persons, in Act I, in addition to the kick from Lucky underscores his unenviable position fate has consigned him to.

In the second Act Pozzo has all but disintegrated. He, thus, acquires a near tragic status. His pitiable cries in the second act are in stark contrast to his demeanour in Act I. His cries of "help" however, do not remain specific but also symbolize human suffering. The tragic element is more explicit in Pozzo-Lucky relationship. Pozzo, like Marlowe's Tamburlaine is, in Act I, arrogant and domineering, treating Lucky as beast of burden. (Tamburlaine too yokes his vanquished Asian potentates, to chariot, and compels them to pull it.)

All through the play Vladimir has behaved as a sober, level-headed person capable of enduring hopeless agony patiently. In the second Act even his pain seems beyond endurance, as we see in his soliloquy in which he repeats a sentence of Pozzo, elaborating it so as to give it an altogether new significance:

Astride of a grave and difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries (he listens). But habit is a great deadener.

Vladimir and Estragon create a situation of pathos. It is their dissimilarities--and also their deep sense of mutuality--which bind them together. The relation between them is so profound that it evokes in the spectators and readers a sympathy for them.

Waiting for Godot is also a dramatic statement of the human situation itself. The play is a metaphor of one's tragic awareness of one's own self. The self that is caught up in the endless process of decay and destruction.

In spite of a tragic scenario building up, the play successfully avoids being a tragedy. How is it achieved by Beckett? Let us see.

Beckett deals with such a tragic situation of human life comically, and thus offers us a subdued form of comedy to illustrate Nell's profound dictum in *Endgame*;

To (be'able to) laugh at our misery is the only way we have found of coming to terms with it.

You must have observed that the two tramps invent various games to fill the "void" that their life is. This is amply illustrated by Vladimir and Estragon when they make such statements: ". . . we are inexhaustible" (62) and "We always find something. . . to give us the impression we exist?" (p.69). This innovative skill of theirs keeps them going in a world which otherwise is very stifling.

Further, Beckett uses various devices to camouflage the tragic nature of their situation. Lawrence Graner is of the opinion that *Waiting for Godot* is a resolutely

comic play, its comedy is borrowed from the most direct of all forms of humour, the circus. As has already been pointed out in Unit 1 Section 'Distinct features of the play,' *Waiting for Godot* has many touches which are genuinely comic, whether because of wit of the dialogue or the humour of character or situation or mime. There is also comedy on the lower plane, comedy of the type seen on the music hall stage. Quite understandably this occasionally degenerates into the farcical, or it would be more correct to say that it assumes the aspect of the Absurd. Often, of course, the comedy is not unalloyed with more serious implications, so that the total atmosphere is closer to "dark-comedy." The wit is at times a cover for a more profound response,

Estragon's mime when he struggles to take off his shoes and gives up in frustration, is soon followed by Vladimir's Chaplinesque gait and his cry of pleasure. The two emotional states are at variance. Either the two do not feel together or they misunderstand each other, at times deliberately. Again, Vladimir utters characteristic feminine banalities "Boots must be . . .," and "There's man all over for you, . . ." The two statements, we note are maternal and "wifely," respectively. The question that needs to be asked is whether these lines are solely pathetic, comic, or a mixture of the two. It appears they are both. The pieces of mime are funny, but moving too.

Throughout the play there is a sort of tragi-comic double vision--in a single utterance and action. Tragic and comic feelings are visually underscored by mime. For example, Vladimir is determined not to hear Estragon's nightmares. The latter pleads with him in vain to listen to him, saying that there is nobody else to whom he may communicate his private nightmares. When Vladimir is unrelenting, Estragon turns the tables on him by implying that Vladimir is afraid of listening to his dreams because he finds it impossible to cope with another nightmare, the Universe, in which he himself is placed:

Estragon	I had a dream.
Vladimir	Don't tell me!
Estragon	I dreamt that . . .
Vladimir	Don't tell me!
Estragon	(gesture towards the universe) : This one is enough for you?

Here, Estragon's buttonholing of Vladimir is quite comic; his dream is tragic; and, reference to the Universe makes it existentialist, simultaneously. Notice how the three elements interpenetrate each other.

Further, sometimes the wit arises from the fact that one of the speakers, either really mistakes the meaning of the other, or pretends to do so; i.e., the speaker puts a construction on the words of the other. Thus, when Vladimir wishes to tell Estragon that he has done "enough" of begging and must stop it now; the latter applies the word to the five francs he has asked for from Pozzo, rather than to his own beggar like behaviour, which is actually intended by Vladimir. Look at the exchange between Estragon, Pozzo and Vladimir:

Estragon	Even ten francs could be welcome.
Vladimir	We are not beggars.
Pozzo	. . . But is it enough, that is what tortures me, is it enough?
Estragon	Even five.
Vladimir	(To Estragon, indignantly) : That is enough!
Estragon	I couldn't accept less.
Pozzo	Is it enough?

See how Estragon deliberately misunderstands the word "enough" and adds to the comic effect of the situation.

Another example of farcical situation is when Pozzo, not knowing the reason why Vladimir has gone away, says to Estragon that Vladimir ought to have waited. Estragon, who knows why Vladimir couldn't have waited longer (since he was feeling the pressure of a full bladder), makes a witty comment on it.

Estragon He would have burst.

The use of the word 'burst' combines, both the farcical and the pathetic elements--as Vladimir suffers from enlarged prostate gland.

During the course of the play the ways by which the two tramps pass time seem funny at first sight, yet we feel that all of us at some time or the other, pass our life in such transparent deceptions. We, thus, see that Beckett uses various devices to subsume the tragedy of life by interlacing it with comedy.

4.3 TRAGIC, COMIC, ABSURDIST AND *GODOT*

Let us see to what purpose Beckett uses the tragic and comic elements in the play, and how effective is their "commingling" in portraying Man's valiant attempts to face up to the absurdity of life.

Explaining the absurdist's resistance to "the traditional separation of farce and tragedy," Oliver I. Williams states that "the subject of the farce is the same as that of tragedy: the terrible or comic discovery of man's absurdity, ignorance and impotence. The essential difference between the two forms is one of quality: farce arouses laughter and tragedy draws out tears--tragedy awakens our sympathy, while farce dispels our sympathy and frees our cruelty.'" Williams goes on to add that the absurdist, as Euripides once did, "commingle the qualities of farce and tragedy, making us laugh at that which hurts us most, making us weep at that which is most foolish in our nature." Most absurdist are best described as "ironists."

The absurdist's picture of life--reasonable though it is--is not a very popular view. A confrontation with the absurdity of one's condition is an inescapable prerequisite if one hopes to live sanely. Williams asks how then to administer this view to an audience optimistically rooted in the certainty of faith--be it a God, or culture, or even in potency of their own individuality. The answer, according to him, is simple: pretend to give them something else. Make the play as amusing and sensational and surprising as possible but bury the message in symbols. The ironic approach to life and dramatic action is justified rhetorically since most of the audience finds it difficult to equate the farcical cavorting with anything as disturbing as absurdity. Furthermore, this approach is also justified thematically since the absurdist thinks of life in the light of a tragic joke or comic tragedy.

4.3.1 *Godot* and the Theatre of the Absurd

In section (ii) Unit 1, '*Waiting for Godot* and the Theatre of the Absurd' we have said that an absurd play reflects the arbitrary and irrational nature of life, usually through an arbitrary structure. Let us look at *Godot* as a play written in the "tradition" of the Theatre of the Absurd.

What do we mean by absurd?

In philosophy, the term absurd means out of harmony with reason, or plainly opposed to reason. The word is a compound of the Latin prefix *ab* meaning 'from' and the Latin adjective *surdus* meaning irrational. Thus, philosophically the term applies to a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world, and his relationship with the universe. The idea of the absurd condition of man has arisen

mainly from the need to provide an explanation of man's purposeless existence in a world which seems to be devoid of any meaning.

According to William, "The absurdist playwrights believe that our existence is absurd because we are born without asking to be born, we die without seeking to die. We live between birth and death trapped within our body and reason, unable to conceive of a time in which we were not, or a time in which we will not be--for, nothingness is very much the concept of infinity: something we perceive only in so far as we cannot experience it. Thrust into life, armed with our senses, will and reason, we feel ourselves to be potent beings. Yet our senses give the lie to our thought and our thought defies our senses. There, ultimately, comes a sense of helplessness and impotence--something, which the plays of Beckett also deal with.

What do the absurdist deal with?

The Absurdist playwrights deal with purposelessness of life and human existence which they find out of harmony with its surroundings. The Absurd Drama as a genre is based on the tenets summarised by Albert Camus in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1942). The situation of Sisyphus (see Notes Unit III), for ever rolling a stone up a hill, for ever aware that it will never reach the top is a perfect metaphor for the play *Waiting for Godot* too.

Such a futile action symbolises all human effort on earth. Awareness of this lack of purpose in all we do produces a state of metaphysical anguish which is the theme of writers in the Theatre of the Absurd. This idea is allowed to shape the form as well as the content of the plays; all semblance of logical construction of the rational linking of ideas in an intellectually viable argument, is abandoned, and instead the irrationality of experience is transferred to the stage.

So, in *Waiting for Godot* everything can be looked up as a metaphor for the human situation at its most 'absurd.' *Godot* could be taken for anything or nothing. Similarly with regard to Vladimir's and Estragon's journey through time, it is pointless to consider whether it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive, because arrival is never seriously in question and even hope is scarcely possible.

Just as we quizzically question the purpose of life, so do we question the plays of Beckett and what they are about. Usually they leave the audience with a vague sense of uncertainty about the theme of the play. Indeed, Beckett himself has made gentle fun of spectators eager to know what his plays mean or who is *Godot*? In his third full length play *Happy Days*, he has his heroine Winnie (who is throughout the play largely buried in a mound of earth, first up to her waist, then up to her neck) take exception to the comments of a couple of passers-by who want to know 'What's the idea? . . . stuck up to her diddles in the bleeding ground? What does it mean? What is it meant to mean? To herself obviously, she does not mean anything. she just is. And in all of Beckett's plays we find a similar avoidance of exact definition. It is because either Beckett himself does not know, or is not willing to define for himself, who *Godot* is, what Winnie means, what is the significance of master-servant relationship in *Waiting for Godot* and in *Endgame*, or any other of the questions which arise while watching his plays. Beckett's attitude to the sense of uncertainty that he sees around himself is reflected in a remark that he made about himself: ". . . I have never in my life been on my way anywhere, but simply on my way." His life seemed open-ended, as are his plays.

We will discuss the structure of *Godot* later. Here, however, let us see how the structure of the play and the idea of 'absurd' form the warp and woof of the play.

Beckett rejects the received logic of form and conventional structure, so that both form and content support the representation of what may be called absurd predicaments. In fact, as Beckett reminds us, in art matter and form must be the same thing. The structure of Lucky's discourse, for example, disjointed and incoherent as it

may seem, is representative of irrationality and the mess called life. That is why it makes sense or has a logic of its own in the ultimate analysis.

But one must ask whether the writer of the absurdist play does believe in the total meaningless of life and human existence. If the author were totally convinced of the meaninglessness of life, why would he go on living? Also, wouldn't it be pointless to go on writing about the act of living? The mere fact of writing is an expression of meaning by imposing some kind of an order or value on experience. As Eric Bentley remarks, "Artistic activity is itself a transcendence of despair, and for unusually despairing artists that is no doubt chiefly what art is: a therapy, a faith."

Therefore, paradoxical as it may seem the very act of writing about despair or the mess of life, is an attempt by the absurdist writer to impose an order on 'disorder.'

4.3.2 Theatre of the Absurd and the Audience Response

Writing about the absurdity of life and theatre Martin Esslin states that the theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of human conditions; it merely presents it in 'being'--that is, in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of experience. Besides, the audience is often confronted with characters whose motives and actions largely remain incomprehensible and ridiculous, hence it is almost impossible to identify with them, even when the subject matter itself is of a serious nature. Then, how does the playwright elicit empathic response from the audience?

The playwright uses various devices to achieve it: it is done by actual separation of the speaker from his words, by burking and hiccuping to defeat heroic proportions the character may assume, by direct address to the audience breaking the illusion of being in a theatre, and by use of asides, etc. These make emotional identification with the characters difficult. Instead, a new form of empathic response is produced--one through direct experience and through the metaphor of direct expression. The dramatists of the absurd, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Adamov seek not so much to create an initiation of absurdity as to conceive a work of art which when heard or read will transport the audience into the very sense of absurdity--will draw them into the very experience itself.

Hence, communicating an experience of being sums up the purpose of absurdist drama.

4.4 GODOT AS AN EXISTENTIALIST PLAY

What is existentialism?

Existentialist thought starts from the view that in our age man no longer knows what he essentially is. Existentialism portrays man as thrown into this world as a diseased animal. The very fact of his being conscious is his disease. Existentialism is opposed to all forms of utopian thinking. It constantly underlines human finitude, and the misery and despair that dog human life from cradle to the grave.

What is valuable in the existentialist thought is not the exaltation of the antirational--this is a negative feature of the thought. Rather, what is of great value is the passionate insistence that human existence has many elements that cannot be fitted into the tidy logic of philosophy. Or as Ernest Hemingway states: "there isn't always explanation for everything." Existentialism, however, has founded a logic of persons in addition to the logic of things.

According to Katharine M. Wilson:

Waiting for Godot exactly fulfils Sartre's definition of an existentialist play as one which sets out to present the contemporary situation in its full horror so that the audience, finding it unendurable, may feel forced to remedy it.

Eric Bentley talking about man's hopeless position in a universe devoid of meaning and purpose, as reflected in *Godot* observes that:

Samuel Beckett's point of view seems close to that of Anouilh or Sartre. *Waiting for Godot* is, so to speak, a play that one of them ought to have written. It is the quintessence of "existentialism" in the popular, and most relevant sense of the term--a philosophy which underscores the incomprehensibility, and, therefore, the meaninglessness of the universe, the nausea which man feels upon being confronted with the fact of existence, the praiseworthiness of the act of defiance man may perform--acts which are taken, on faith, as self-justifying, while, rationally speaking they have no justification because they have no possibility of success.

Waiting for Godot is also about the emptiness of modern world that does not know that it is empty. What is incomparable in this great solitary play is its insistence upon sending us back to the darkest part of the spirit that created it and upon permitting illuminations only through darkness. In *Godot* the characters like Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky and Pozzo are seen struggling with the irrationality of experience.

Charles McCog urges that we distinguish between "nihilistic existentialism" of Sartre and Christian existentialism of Kierkegaard, and insists that the latter offers one of the essential keys to Beckett's play. Martin Esslin also leans strongly towards Kierkegaard as a shaping influence on Beckett. Yet he insists elsewhere on the Sartrean (nihilistic existentialism) side of *Godot*. Although Beckett himself is not aware of any such influence, his writings might be described as a literary exposition of Sartre's existentialism. In the play there is a perpetual series of rebounds, in which man is constantly thrown back into his solitude. All of Beckett's characters are in essence solitaires: for Beckett, man is not or never willingly, a social animal.

In *Waiting for Godot* the non-action of futile waiting by the two tramps is enacted twice. In the play we are not told who *Godot* is and what the two characters really expect him to do for them. They keep on *Waiting for Godot*, but *Godot* never comes to meet them. The play, therefore, shows how man is thrown back into solitude and non-action. The two tramps *Waiting for Godot* may be representing human beings whose waiting may thus be humanity's vain hope of salvation or as others call it "hopelessly hoping."

The final night makes all waiting unnecessary. The way the two tramps pass time is indication of boredom and triviality of human activities, the lack of significance in life and the constant suffering which existence is. Suffering, as per existentialism is an inseparable part of human condition. It remains unmitigated: "The tears of the world are a constant quantity" (p.33), or, mark, "No use struggling . . . the essential doesn't change" (p.21). Vladimir and Estragon suffer intensely and incessantly. Vladimir cannot laugh without suffering excruciating pain "One dare not even laugh" (p.5). In Act II both Pozzo and Lucky have suffered great physical affliction. There doesn't seem to be any reason for it all.

The hope of salvation may be merely an evasion of the suffering and anguish that has sprung from facing the reality of the human condition. Martin Esslin is of the view . . . that "there is here a truly astonishing parallel between the existentialist philosophy of Sartre and the creative intuition of Beckett. If, for Beckett as for Sartre, man has the duty of facing the human condition as a recognition that at the root of our being there is nothingness, liberty, and the need of constantly creating ourselves in a succession of choices, then *Godot* might become an image of what Sartre calls "bad faith."

4.4.1 Estragon and Vladimir as Existentialist Characters

Writing about Existentialism and *Waiting for Godot* Andre Gunthers has given a somewhat hopeful and positive interpretation of man's existentialist existence. In the twentieth century there appears to be nothing to do any longer since "actions" have become more and more questionable . . . because millions and millions of people who are in fact still active, increasingly feel that they are acted upon: that they are active without themselves deciding on the objective of their action, without even being able to discern the nature of their objective or because they are aware that their activity is suicidal in its objective. In short, action has lost so much of its independence that it itself has become a form of passivity, and even where action is deadly strenuous or actually deadly, it has assumed the character of futile action or inaction. That Estragon and Vladimir, who do absolutely nothing, are representative of millions of people, is undeniable.

In addition, Estragon and Vladimir lack firm outline about their character and personality and we have only the scantiest biographical data. They are defined not in relation to time, place, or social circumstance, but in relation to eternity and to human longings for a sense of purpose. The problem of Vladimir and Estragon is that they are alive.. Like everyone and like Everyman, they are trapped between birth and death. What is happening to them does not seem to be consequent either on a specific set of circumstances (situations) or on their behaviour patterns (characters).

But they are so fully representative only because in spite of their inaction, and pointlessness of their existence, they still want to go on, and thus do not belong to the tragic class of those who consider suicide. And it is not despite the pointlessness of their life that Estragons and Vladimirs wish to go on living, but, on the contrary, just because their life has become pointless, ruined by their habit of inaction or of acting without their own initiative, they have lost their will power to decide not to go on, their freedom to end it all, to terminate it.

It is with this kind of life, with man who continues existing because he happens to exist, that Beckett's *Godot* deals. But it deals with it in a manner basically different from all previous literary treatment of despair. Estragon and Vladimir seem to be saying, "We remain, therefore we must be waiting for something." And: "We are waiting, therefore there must be something we are waiting for."

To characterize this mode of life in which man continues to wait merely because he happens to be, French commentators have used Heidegger's term "Geworfenheit" (the fact and state of having been "thrown" into the world). Quite wrongly. For while Heidegger, in using this term, designates the contingency of each individual's being just himself (and demands that each take possession of his contingent being in order to make it the basis of his own "design") the two heroes of Beckett's play do neither, like the millions whom they represent. They neither recognize their own existence as contingent, nor think of abolishing this contingency, **transforming** it into something positive with which they can identify themselves. Their existence is far less heroic than that meant by Heidegger, far more trustful, far more "realistic."

Vladimir and Estragon conclude from the fact of their existence that there must be something for which they are waiting; they are champions of the doctrine that life must have meaning even in a manifestly meaningless situation. To say that they represent "nihilists" is, therefore not only incorrect, but the exact reverse of what Beckett wants to show. As they do not lose hope, are even incapable of losing hope, they are naive, incurably optimistic ideologists. What Beckett presents is not nihilism, but the inability of man to be a nihilist even in a situation of utter hopelessness. Part of the compassionate sadness conveyed by the play springs not so much from the hopeless situation as much as **from** the fact that the two heroes, through their waiting, **show** that they are not nihilists. It is this defect which makes them so incredibly funny.

The play seems to have been constructed primarily on sets of binaries. Beckett once said, "It is the shape that matters." He was referring to a remark of St. Augustine's "Do not despair one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned," but it applies to his own play more aptly. Referring to the two acts of the play, Beckett maintained, "One Act would have been too little . . . and three Acts would have been too much." The two Acts purport to dramatize two consecutive evenings in the life of its central characters. The play has a symmetrical structure like a mathematical formula in which one side balances the other. This symmetry is evident in the manner Beckett conceives things in pairs: two Acts, two messenger boys and two sets of characters, and each set a pair again--pairs of apparently disparate constituents, yet complementary.

Let us see whether structure of *Godot* is symmetrical or asymmetrical

As stated earlier the play has a 'symmetrical' structure. The apparent symmetry of the play is like the order that every human being attempts to impose on the constant flux of discrete phenomena around him. You'll notice that everyday routine of a human is apparently the same--but scratch a bit and the differences come to the surface.

Let us compare the opening and ending of each Act, the sequence of events like the entry of Pozzo and Lucky and the Boy, and the stage directions in the two Acts as also the dialogues.

Do you find a symmetry--a similarity--in the two acts?

You will observe that both acts start with the union of the two tramps. Similarly the ending of each act is almost identical. Further there is a repetition of certain incidents in the second act; arrival of Pozzo and Lucky, coming of the messenger Boy towards the end to announce that *Godot* will not come that day etc. Such a repetition strikes a balance between two acts.

Similarly in both acts Estragon handles food (p. 20, p. 68), plays with his boots (p. 11, 69), sleeps (p. 15, 70), in both acts the two central figures contemplate suicide (pp. 17-18, pp. 93-94), etc. The comparison of the events in the two Acts shows there is repetition, but a closer reading will bring out the difference, which underscores the asymmetrical nature of the structure of the play.

The following table will further illustrate the asymmetrical nature of the play's structure:

In Act I	In Act II
Estragon accepts a carrot	Estragon rejects a radish
Takes off his shoes	Finds his boots too big
Nibbles a chicken bone	Recalls it as a fish bone
Estragon rejects suicide as the survivor will be solitary	Defers suicide for want of a suitable rope
Tree - bare	Has sprouted 4-5 leaves
Lucky is Pozzo's slave	Symbolically, Pozzo is slave to Lucky
Boy arrives	Boy denies he is the same who came the day before

Besides, we notice that the events and stage-directions, dialogues, etc. in the second Act do not exactly repeat those of Act I. You must also have noticed that the punctuation of the last spoken lines of each act is different and the lines are switched from one tramp to the other. You may try to find more examples showing similarities and dissimilarities in the two Acts.

Beckett was impressed by the syntactical balance of St. Augustine's statement mentioned earlier. He is reported to have told MacGowran that St. Augustine's remark is the key to the whole play. Further, Beckett told Harold Hobson that the production of the play should bring out stylized movement--a movement which relies heavily on asymmetry.

The asymmetrical structure of the play helps achieve a disparity between the two time scales: the human and the natural. Look at the stage direction that precedes Vladimir's song at the beginning of Act II. It reads: ". . . the tree has four or five leaves"--which denote cyclical phenomenon in nature, although we have just read in the beginning of Act II: "Next day. Same time. Same place." Does Beckett, thus, seek to remove the play from its temporal locations? He has also stripped the stage of physical details other than a mound and a tree. Does Beckett underline the difference between human and natural time scales?

It is these stage directions that initially connect the two acts.

Duckworth is critical of Vivian Mercier who described *Godot* as a play in which "nothing happens twice."

Duckworth highlights the circularity of the whole structure; "the return to zero leaves us with an overall impression of the monotony and futility of the eternally repeated ritual enacted on that deserted road. The symmetry, and the differences between the two Acts--by which our interest has been kept alive--are quietly subordinated. Beckett thus solves the immense problem of how to create repetitious inotony without being repetitious and monotonous."

Going a step further Duckworth also discerns the Aristotelian elements or the conventional structure in the play when he says that it is not really true to say that "the categories of exposition, inciting moment, rising actions, turning point, falling action, climax and conclusion are not observed in any strict sense" in *Godot*. These categories do exist in each act--with the notable and inevitable exceptions of the inciting moment (i.e. incitement to action), for, this is theatre of situation, of inaction. The order in which they (the categories) appear is changed, however: exposition (of underlying themes), rising action (in the sense of increased activity, especially in Act II, climax (arrival of Pozzo and Lucky), turning point (the boy, announcement that *Godot* is not coming), falling action. (IXXXIX - XC, Duckworth).

How does the choice of two acts help in achieving dramatic interest in spite of repetition?

It would be pertinent to recall here Beckett's statement that "One Act would have been too little. . . . and three Acts would have been too much."

According to Duckworth, the situation in *Godot* is one of monotonous sameness, and Beckett had to suggest this perpetual recurrence in the most economical way possible. Surely, one act would have been too little, three too much. Two is the magic number denoting continuous repetition--not just a single repetition, explains Duckworth. In our everyday vocabulary (we use or repeat a word to convey a sense of continuous repetition), it went on and on, it grew smaller and smaller, it went round and round . . . for ever and ever, etc. In Act I, it is hinted that exactly the same thing happened before the beginning of the play; by the end of Act II we realize that the cyclic pattern will continue like an unbroken circle until the end of time.

Duckworth finds the structure of *Waiting for Godot* "tight and economical" and is critical of Hugh Hunt who opined that "Samuel Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* . . . symbolizes that chaotic state of existence by a corresponding anarchy in the construction of the play itself, Play architecture as it was understood by the writer of the well made play . . . has given place to a seemingly abstract void in which plot, or dramatic story telling, is almost non-existent." Duckworth further quotes M. A. Scott who found "absolute clarity of form" (in *Godot*) that is possessed by such modern masterpieces as Kafka's *Das Schloss* (The Castle), Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Camus' *La Peste*, and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, "in spite of its meaning being obscure and ambiguous.

The structure, as stated earlier, appears symmetrical, but is asymmetrical at one level, too. "Within the symmetrical, circular structure of each act there are smaller circles represented by

Vladimir's repetition, pantomime, taking off his hat and knocking out an invisible foreign object

- Estragon's repeated fussing with his boots
- Lucky's recurrent acts of picking up and putting down the luggage
- the hat-exchanging routine
- Vladimir's endlessly repeatable round-song at the beginning of Act II."

Besides, "We are *Waiting for Godot*!" recurs in the play like a **refrain**. It occurs three times in the first Act and a dozen times in Act II, indicating an increasing impatience as time goes on. The monotony becomes imperceptibly cumulative and more unbearable for the two tramps as the play progresses.

One thing that has to be borne in mind is that the structure of the play is sustained by the themes which keep recurring both in Act I and Act II.

Both Acts continue with reference to the tree and "to the capriciousness of memory." In Act I it is Estragon who remarks that they were by the tree the day before; in Act II it is Vladimir, and Estragon remembers nothing, a little diversity within the repeated pattern, such dissimilarities and variations within the seeming similarities make the structure asymmetrical as has already been pointed out.

Further, the structural balance of two acts is subtly varied by the relation of Pozzo-Lucky scene to the structure of each act. The dominant factor in Act I is the Pozzo-Lucky scene, whereas in Act II the first half is taken up by the two tramps preceding the return of Pozzo and Lucky from the fair. This happens in the middle of the Act. Note how the two of them contribute to the theme of the play in each Act.

In Act I it is hinted that exactly the same things happened before. By the end of Act II we realize that the cyclic pattern will continue like an unbroken circle until the end of time.

Cyclic pattern notwithstanding there is an accompanying "down movement" and the shadow of the first Act gets darker as the play progresses. The darker side is explicitly articulated by Pozzo and further expanded by Vladimir in the statement about human life and birth. ("They gave us birth astride of a grave. . .") It is further suggested in various ways: Lucky has degenerated and has worsened in Act II, Pozzo has lost his possessions one by one, besides he has gone blind and cannot stand up in Act II. Vladimir and Estragon too have degenerated—earlier they were presentable enough to be admitted to Eiffel Tower but not now. In Act II Pozzo has nothing to eat at all; the more Estragon eats of the carrot, the worse it gets--the two tramps find

communication more difficult in Act II. In addition there is a greater lack of coherence; the pauses are longer and often there is a painfully strained effort to keep up the dialogues. Estragon is more sulky and depressed and Vladimir agrees at the end of the play to the idea of suicide. The structure of *Godot* thus achieves the rare quality of being both static and dynamic--a quality which is defined at the beginning of Act II with Vladimir's round song.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed *Godot* (i) as a tragicomedy, (ii) as an absurd play, (iii) as an existentialist play, and also its structure. The play states metaphysical anguish of the Theatre of the Absurd. We are left to dwell in the irrationality of experience that is transferred to the stage.

UNIT 5 THEMES AND ISSUES-II

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 *Waiting for Godot* and time
- 5.3 *Godot* as a Christian Play
- 5.4 *Godot* and Use of Language
 - 5.4.1 Language and Theatricality
- 5.5 *Godot* and Theatricality
- 5.6 Contribution of *Godot* to Theatre and Drama
 - 5.6.1 *Godot's* Appeal to Modern Times
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Select Bibliography with Critical Comments

5.0 OBJECTIVES

Continuing our discussion from Unit 4 we will be focussing on more technical aspects of the play. We will also touch up *Godot's* contribution to modern theatre.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

You are by now familiar with the new ground *Waiting for Godot* broke in the history of theatre and the reasons why it is rightly called an *avant garde* play. We shall further continue our discussion on *Godot* by taking up aspects such as:

1. *Godot* and the Theme of Time
2. *Godot* as a Christian Play
3. *Godot* and the Use of Language
4. Language and Theatricality
5. *Godot* and Theatricality and
6. Contribution of *Godot* to Theatre and Drama

5.2 GODOT AND THE THEME OF TIME

Relating the theme of 'waiting' to time in *Godot*, Eric Bentley states:

The subject of the play is not *Godot* but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. *Throughouour

lives we always wait for something, and *Godot* simply represents the objective of our waiting--an event, a thin'g, a person, death. Moreover, it is the act of waiting that we experience the flow of time in its purest, most evident form. If we are active, we tend to forget the passage of time, we pass the time, but if we are merely passively waiting, we are confronted with the action of time itself. . . The flow of time confronts us with the basic problem of being--the problem of the nature of self, which being subject to constant change in time, is in constant flux and therefore ever outside our grasp . . .

Being subject to this process of time flowing through us and changing us in doing so, we are, at no single moment in our lives, identical with ourselves. . . . It is significant that the Boy who acts as go-between in *Godot* fails to recognize the pair from day to day.

Similarly, when Pozzo and Lucky first appear, neither Vladimir nor Estragon seems to recognize them; Estragon even takes Pozzo for *Godot*. But after they have gone, Vladimir comments that they have changed since their last appearance. In the second Act, Pozzo and Lucky are cruelly deformed by the action of time. Waiting is thus to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change is in itself an illusion. The ceaseless activity of time is self-defeating, purposeless, and therefore null and void. The more things change, the more they are the same. That is a terrible stability of the world. One day is like another, and when we die we might never have existed. As Pozzo exclaims in his great outburst:

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time? . . . One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day: one day he went dumb. . . one day we are born, one day we'll die, the same day, the same second. . . .

Still Vladimir and Estragon live in hope: they wait for *Godot*, whose coming will bring the flow of time to a stop. In the French version Beckett wrote: "Tonight perhaps we shall sleep in his place, in the warmth, dry, our bellies full, on the straw. It is worth waiting for that, is it not?" This passage, omitted in the English version, clearly suggests the peace, the rest from waiting, the sense of having arrived in a haven, that *Godot* represents to the two tramps.

Alvarez relates time to memory and functioning of the memory. Frequent forgetfulness brings about the invalidity of time--as is borne out by Vladimir and Estragon's uncertainty about the time, place and human beings. Boredom hangs over every word and Estragon's constant forgetfulness is answered by Vladimir's "Try and remember." One goes through life, its boredom and pain by force of habit - "the great deadener," - absurdly and hoping for an elusive rescue.

Ruby Cohn compares the effect of time on the two pairs, Vladimir-Estragon and Pozzo-Lucky, who represent antithetical attitudes to infinity--wait and wander respectively. *Waiting for Godot*, or nothingness or infinity, Vladimir and Estragon are ageless with only the haziest past and a hazier future, tied to *Godot*. Ignorant of *Godot*, Pozzo and Lucky live in time. Pozzo's watch tells hours and years, but Pozzo loses his watch, and considers his heart a poor substitute, changed and changeless, each couple lives by its own compulsions.

5.3 *GODOT AS A CHRISTIAN PLAY*

Many commentators have interpreted *Godot* as a religious parable, although Beckett himself disclaimed it saying, "If by *Godot* I had meant God, I would have said God, not *Godot*." As for the presence of Christian elements in his works he maintains, 'Christianity is a mythology with which I am familiar, so I naturally use it.' Beckett

is interested in mythologies for their own sake, without any commitment to them whatsoever. Speaking in a characteristic Beckettian manner, he stated: 'I'm not interested in any system. I can't see any trace of any system anywhere.'

Beckett, according to Fletcher, is the complete agnostic. He is simply not interested in whether the Christian Church is telling fairy stories or not. Beckett is essentially interested in probing into the state of man in this Universe. Even were God to exist he would make no difference, maintained Beckett. He (God himself) would be as lonely, and as enslaved and isolated and ridiculous as man is, in a cold, silent, indifferent universe.

But, "trust the tale and not the teller" goes the saying. Critics would like to judge the play on its own merits, rather than on the basis of what its author says about it. Those commentators who have viewed *Godot* as Beckett's reaction to his Roman Catholic background consider Vladimir and Estragon as representatives of the fallen state of humanity faithfully awaiting the arrival of an elusive God who promises salvation but never arrives. Despite their inability to thoroughly explain *Godot*, most critics agree that the play's religious associations enliven and enrich its sense of fluidity and ambiguity.

As Beckett himself has admitted the fundamental imagery of *Godot* is drawn from Christian mythology. There are numerous references to the Bible, Christ/God, to the "two thieves" and the four Evangelists (pp.11, 13), as also to certain Christian beliefs, as you will see from the list.

1. Suppose we repented "Our being born" (p.4)
2. I must have taken a look at it [The Bible] (p.12):
3. Estragon has all his life compared himself to Christ" (p.12).
4. **Pozzo is "made in God's image" (p.23).**
5. References to Adam, Abel and Cain, p.83, etc.

The protagonists have come from nowhere in particular and have nowhere in particular to go. Their life is a state of apparently fruitless expectation. Their attitude towards *Godot* is one partly of hope, partly of fear. The orthodoxy of this symbolism, from a Christian point of view, is obvious. The tramps with their rags and their misery as already stated, represent the fallen state of man. The squalor of their surroundings, their lack of a "stake in the world," represent the idea that here in this world we can build no abiding city. The ambiguity of their attitude towards *Godot*, their mingled hope and fear, the doubtful tone of the boy's messages, represents the state of tension and uncertainty in which the average Christian must live in this world, avoiding presumption, and also avoiding despair.

Finally, the tree, as has already been explained in some detail in Unit 3, can variously symbolize death, the crucifixion, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and when it puts on green leaves, the Tree of Life.

5.4 *GODOT* AND USE OF LANGUAGE

You would recall that in Unit 1 we pointed out the inability of language to be an effective means of communication in modern times. Besides, we also brought into focus how this "breakdown of language" successfully conforms to the "absurdity of life" as is portrayed in *Godot*. Ironically, the writer must use language itself to be able to show its inadequacy as a medium of communication. That is why we said that Lucky's speech which on surface is a mere barrage of words and appears illogical does have a logic of its own.

During the course of the play you have noticed that the tramps lapse into silences, or into monologues; besides, there are often pauses, too. All these further reinforce the idea of the inability of language to communicate effectively. If 'silences' connote difficulty in expressing one's thoughts, leading to withdrawing within oneself, the monologues signify their inability to understand each other. That language fails both at the encoding and decoding levels, is to be further seen in the great deal of 'verbal repetition' and 'echoing' in the play. These theatrical devices, used by Beckett, also serve the dramatic purpose of emphasizing the existentialist situation of the two tramps, in which they are essentially lonely and cannot communicate with each other.

We have earlier also referred to the heightened use of language to communicate the emotional intensity in plays by Marlowe, Shakespeare, Webster, etc., and attempted in the present times by T.S. Eliot in his poetic drama. Beckett, however, inverts the conventional use of language. There is little imagery or figurative language in the speeches of the characters. You will find that much of the dialogue consists of studied banality and clichés interspersed with silences. Some of the examples of such usage have been pointed out in the annotations to the play and in the first Unit.

Also, there is a spectrum of usage ranging from the highly colloquial, including Irishisms, to the self-portraying formality (e.g. "All my life I've tried to put it from me), and "And I resumed the struggle," respectively, and again to mock-heroic formality "May one enquire where His Highness spent the night?" and "Your Worship wishes to assert his prerogatives?" (p.19).

With all this the dialogue comes to span the earthy and realistic at one end and the mysterious and disturbing at the other.

Esslin rightly observes that the disintegration of language is central in Beckett's drama, and there is a steady progression until in the later plays the audience is fortunate to be able to make anything out of what is said on stage. Niklaus Gessner points out ten different modes of disintegration of language in the play. They are misunderstandings, double entendre, monologues, dialogues, clichés, repetition, inability to find the right word, telegraphic style (loss of grammatical structure, communication by shortened commands, etc.) culminating in Lucky's speech. In his speech there is a complete breakdown of syntax. This reflects Beckett's inability to see "any trace of any system anywhere" ("I am not interested in any system. I can't see any trace of any system anywhere.") Such a lack of coherence, system, and 'structure' in language in the play, implicitly becomes a fitting vehicle to convey the playwright's sense of uncertainty, meaninglessness and absurdity in the universe surrounding us. As Eliopolus observes, "the essential purpose in relating the general breakdown of language is to demonstrate its relationship to one of the main themes in Beckett's plays - "where there is no certainty there can be no definite meanings."

5.4.1 Language and Theatricality

Underscoring the complementarity between language and theatricality, Morris Freedman suggests that "language is far too straightforward an instrument to express the multiple complex and multi-dimensional aspects of reality. Reality can only be conveyed by being acted out in all its complexity. Hence it is the theatre which is the only instrument to express the bewildering complexity of the human condition."

What language, thus, fails to convey is sought to be communicated by effective use of techniques borrowed from various performing arts such as music, circus, music hall cross talk, vaudeville, stylized movements and gestures etc. Together they take on the role which language does not or cannot. Where one language has broken down, a new one has been devised to take its place.

Ostensibly, language may have lost its conventional role and communicability--as has been brought out by the foregoing discussion, yet, paradoxically the play makes its profoundest statements in truly evocative language - which exploits the traditional

stylistic devices like, metaphors, images, connotations, etc. "From the play of contradictory hypotheses down to the most gritty, concrete images of human functions, the words swirl about embracing all the nuances of existences." When Vladimir says, "one of the thieves was saved" or gives his name as "Adam," Beckett has, in one sweep, historicized and compressed millenia of human existence, something which language alone could have achieved.

5.5 GODOT AND THEATRICALITY

We have in Unit 1 hinted at the uncharacteristically bare stage in *Godot*, and how it forms the fitting backdrop to the meaningless existence of the protagonists. The empty stage is, thus, a device to magnify theatricality. The stage itself becomes a character undergoing a change as the play progresses. One can go to the extent of saying that the two protagonists (Estragon and Vladimir) do not undergo so much transformation as does the stage during the course of the play.

The emptiness of the stage, highlighted and filled by a mound and a bare tree, is further filled with words, actions, and images, such as the moon rising at the end of Act I; interestingly, the words themselves match the stage-setting in "emptiness."

During the course of the play the stage becomes an extension of the auditorium as does the auditorium become an extension of the stage. Besides, the tramps assume the role of audience vis-a-vis Pozzo-Lucky. What Beckett is doing is to consciously construct a "play within a play" in the form of Pozzo-Lucky episodes. The protagonists are 'entertained' by the master slave pair and they find that they are having "charming evening." They thus assume the role of an audience, as also of critics.

In the middle of the first Act Pozzo-Lucky episode when Pozzo is speaking in his most histrionic manner, the two of them are aware of the spectacle they are enjoying:

Vladimir.	Charming evening we are having.
Estragon.	Unforgettable
Vladimir.	And it's not over
Estragon,	Apparently not
...	
Estragon.	It's awful.
Vladimir.	Worse than mime.
Estragon.	The circus.

Their remarks do not confine themselves to the Pozzo-Lucky performance but are also a pointed reference to the play itself which has incorporated elements from these performing arts.

The two protagonists thus, during the performance of Pozzo-Lucky, identify themselves with the audience, and alternate their roles as audience and characters. Beckett, according to June Schlueter, endows his tramps with a duality of which the audience is constantly aware - they are not only characters but also participants in theatre. The tramps' running commentary on the progress of the play reflects their awareness of the presence of an audience. Some of their comments reflect their consciousness of themselves in relation to the audience: upon Pozzo's and Lucky's second entrance, for example, Vladimir assures anyone who feels the play is dragging, "We were beginning to weaken. Now we're sure to see the evening out." And as we approach the end of the play, we are again comforted by Vladimir, who assures us. "It is very near the end of its repertory."

In the Second Act, the stage, more specially, becomes a microcosm of the Universe in which the two tramps are trapped. Such inward-pointing theatre metaphors are intensified when the two find themselves surrounded and realize there are no exits: "We are surrounded--There's no way out there. There! Not a soul in sight." The latter reference to the audience in the auditorium brings to mind the earlier references to the auditorium as a "Charnel house!" and "a bog" and the audience as "corposes" and "skeletons." So Beckett uses clown's jests for effect. Thus, throughout the performance of *Godot*, the spectator watches "from without": he finds no opportunity of identifying himself with the characters or projecting his own personality on to the play or living through their tragedy as if it were his own. And it is this very detachment which produces a catharsis in the audience. Since the spectator doesn't get emotionally involved in the play, he can enjoy the acting jests and admire the literary and artistic skill of the play very objectively.

You will observe that in *Waiting for Godot* the audience is never allowed to settle down. There is always "uncertainty" and questioning - be it "the tree," the 'shoe' or Pozzo himself. Their understanding is being questioned at every step. In all this questioning the tramps are compelling the audience to question the reality--to which they and the audience have together been a witness to. By extension, they question the very nature of existence--hence they are not sure whether they were here yesterday or day before. Particularly the shoe which earlier was very tight in the beginning of Act I, on Estragon's feet, is now too big for him. Has Estragon "dwindled" or the 'shoe' grown in size? Either way the reality is at stake: Pozzo doubling up to search for his watch in his fob, Estragon's trousers slipping down, Estragon going through the motion of civility giving precedence to Vladimir to commit suicide, are all farcical gestures which by their theatricality underline the absurdity of human life.

5.6 CONTRIBUTION OF *GODOT* TO THEATRE & DRAMA

Ruby Cohn in "Growing up? with *Godot*," maintains that *Waiting for Godot* is Beckett's most resonant play. After *Godot* it was theatrically viable to perform a deeply serious and playful play. After *Godot* plots could be minimal; expositions, expendable; characters, contradictory, settings, unlocalized; and dialogue, unpredictable. Blatant farce could jostle tragedy; obscenity could pun on the sacred. One actor could recite a ten-minute monologue, and other be mute, or the same actor could be both monologist and mute. Delicate verse lines could mourn the humanist tradition-like leaves, like ashes - while the stage showed the cruelty of that tradition - a charnel house! (p.23).

Beckett's unique contribution also lies in giving a new idea of drama which focussed on situation rather than on story and also on direct experience than indirect description. He is an innovative dramatist who does imaginative things with old ideas. Besides, Beckett while rejecting didacticism, strikes a universal note with his concept of impotence and its subsequent implications for morality, society, and communication. And finally, Beckett imaginatively creates situations which demonstrate rather than rhetoric which describe.

5.6.1 *Godot's Appeal to Modern Times*

Writing about the contemporaneous appeal of *Waiting for Godot* Enoch Brater writes:

In Waiting for Godot, Beckett succeeded in writing a lyrical play for an age that had almost nothing poetic to say for itself. The scene in which 'nothing happens, twice' was somehow not merely diagnostic, but prophetic: it was

suddenly mankind, not just any poor player, who was waiting for something to arrive which never comes. The lines echoed recent European history, but they also had at their core the substance of myth. Beckett was with the empyrean. *Godot*, in Alan Schneider's words was something more than a play. It had become, he wrote, 'a condition of life.'

5.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit besides discussing the themes of time, *Godot* as a Christian play and Beckett's use of language, we have deliberated on *Godot* and theatricality to ascertain *Godot's* contribution to modern drama.

5.8 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY WITH CRITICAL COMMENTS

Duckworth, Colin. *Angels of Darkness: Dramatic Effect in Samuel Beckett with Special Reference to Eugene Ionesco*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 153 pp. (1972).

Studies Beckett's plays and attempts to explain their effectiveness. Duckworth compares Beckett's plays to those of Ionesco because they frequently elicit similar kinds of response from empathic spectators. The author tries to discover and describe the function and effect of dramatic structures of these two dramatists as a form of inner exploration leading to deeper self-knowledge. The problems of dramatic impact and intensity are examined to find out how and why people react to performances, and to account for the degree and kind of tension created by plays written with a minimum of conscious control. Duckworth illustrates his theory through the results of a survey of audience reaction to performances of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* that he compiled in 1971.

Cohn, Ruby. *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962.

Connects Beckett's use of the term tragicomedy with Sir Philip Sidney's mungrell "Tragy-Comedie" of his *Defense of Poesie*.

Duckworth, Colin. Ed. *Samuel Beckett: En attendant Godot Piece en deux actes*. Nelson, 1966.

A detailed analysis of the play dealing with its genesis, composition, structure and style, symbolism, characterization etc. Interestingly Duckworth views the structure of the play assimilating the conventional and the unorthodox elements. Duckworth makes a detailed study of the structure and attempts to show how the play achieves a rare quality of being both static and dynamic.

Eliopoulos, James. *Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Language*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, pp. 131, (1975).

This concise description of Beckett's dramatic style is developed through three phases: (1) an examination of the rhetorical poetic elements (author, purpose, audience and occasion, method, medium, and subject matter); (2) a portrait of Beckett's literary development followed by an interpretation of the modern theatre movement; and (3) an analysis of Beckett's dramatic language from a structural

approach. In conclusion these stylistic qualities are assessed as they impose upon dramatic situation, ideas, and characters.

McCary, Judith D. and Ronald G. McCary. "Why Wait for *Godot*?" Southern Quarterly 14, no.2 (Jan): 109-15. (1976).

Studying the audience reaction to *Waiting for Godot*, demonstrates how Beckett forces the spectator to become an integral part of the play: "Beckett supplied the theme, waiting, and each spectator must wait, in his own way and on his own terms." The study analyzes various reactions to the play's premier performance and illustrates the effectiveness of the play in its lack of conventional dramatic structure by the play's performance at San Quentin Penitentiary in 1957.

Bair, Deirdre. *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*. London: Cape, 1978.

Exhaustive life history of Beckett, which received a controversial reception. While some thought it authoritative, others did not think so.

Esslin, Martin. *Theatre of the Absurd*. Re. & enlarged edition. 1961; Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1968.

Attempts to link Albert Camus' term "absurd" to the theatre of Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Genet etc. Esslin accepts the philosophies of Sartre and Camus as the basis of *Godot*, but he is careful to indicate that the plays of these two dramatists **are** markedly different from Beckett's plays; the difference is in the form. The texture of *Waiting for Godot*, with all its dramatic irregularities mirrors its metaphysical basis. While the theatre of Sartre and Camus remains formally traditional.