

# Beckett's Vision of Life and Art

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## **Chapter Two**

### **Beckett's Vision of Life and Art**

In the introductory chapter we have seen the pre-eminent position of Beckett among the Absurdists and the complexity of his dramatic art. Along with the definition of 'Absurdism', salient features of the movement were discussed with special reference to the approach of Beckett. Now we may think of his vision of life and art, more deeply.

Vision motivates a person to understand and accomplish a mission in his life. The literary mission Beckett took up and its successful end secured him the Nobel Prize in 1969. When we try to make a study of the vision of Beckett, we have to take his comprehensive view of life into account. His early upbringing, the education he received, the persons he came in contact with, and the society in which he lived, are some of the factors that have contributed to the shaping of his vision.

## **Early life and education**

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born at Cooldrinach in Foxrock County, Dublin on 13 April 1906. He was brought up in a middle class Protestant family and grew up in an atmosphere away from the rebellion nearby. Even as a small boy he was fond of the quiet of solitude. He had his learning first at Earlsfort House in Dublin and then at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen where he began to learn French, one of the two languages in which he could write.

At 17, he joined Trinity College choosing French and Italian as his subjects. Moreover, he was attracted towards the theatre scene of post-independence Dublin. The plays of J.M. Synge interested him. He also got the opportunity to watch American films and discover the silent comedies of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. The influence of these actors later led to the creation of the vaudevillian tramps in his plays.

After graduation, Beckett went to France where he met James Joyce who became his seminal influence. Beckett assisted James Joyce in

his literary works. During his stay in Paris, he was inspired by the vibrant Parisian literary circle and he began writing. In 1930, his first poem “Whoroscope” was published and it was followed by the publication of an essay on Proust. This helped the fledgeling and unsure artist shape his own aesthetics. Then on his return to Dublin he became a lecturer at Trinity and it was at this time that his first collection of stories More Pricks Than Kicks (1934) was published.

He gave up his teaching post and again returned to Paris in 1932. Beckett’s unwillingness to settle down in a respectable career was a cause for worry to his family and he remained estranged from his mother for several years. While in Paris he wrote his first novel, Dream of Fair to Middling Women (1932), a highly autobiographical one with its digressive tendencies of Fielding and Sterne. With the publication of this novel, Beckett was emerging from Joyce’s shadow and developing his own voice. Faced with financial difficulties he returned to Dublin and then moved to London where he began to write his next novel Murphy (published in 1938). For the next few years he travelled from one place to

another and then in 1937, he settled down permanently in Paris. Once he was stabbed by a pimp and admitted in the hospital. James Joyce looked after him in the hospital. While he was recuperating, he was taken care of by a French acquaintance called Suzanne Deschevaux Dismernil who later became his wife.

In 1941 Paris was invaded and during the Occupation, Beckett and his wife joined the Resistance. Later they were forced to leave Paris as they feared arrest by the Gestapo. They went to Rousillion in the South of France and he worked on a farm for his livelihood. Side by side, he carried on the work of completing Watt (1953), a novel he had begun in Paris. After the defeat of the Germans, the couple came back to Paris in 1945. Beckett then travelled to Ireland to see his mother. He began to write in French and the period (1947 – 1950) was the most prolific and the finest. It was during this period that his first French novel Mercier at Camier, the famous novel trilogy, his first play Eleuthesia and Waiting for Godot were written. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed the publication of his master pieces and radio plays. During this period, he suffered from

health problems and he underwent operation on his eyes. The 1970s were a less prolific period but still he wrote television plays for the B.B.C and got involved in the productions of his theatrical works. In 1986, he suffered from the onset of emphysema and his deteriorating health prevented him from writing but took up the work of translating his books. His wife died on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1989 and Beckett breathed his last on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1989. He was buried in Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris.

A study of Beckett's literary works will reveal that the themes of alienation and suffering are recurrent. The story of this torment that his characters are subjected to, has its roots in the life of loneliness, privations, diseases and decay that Beckett suffered. A glimpse into some of the events in the private life of the author will be illuminating.

At the age of 22, Beckett got the post of lecturer in Paris. On his way to Paris he travelled to Germany to visit his aunt who lived with her husband William and three children. Beckett fell in love with Peggy, one of their daughters. But their love did not find fulfilment. At the age of 18, she contracted tuberculosis and two years later died in Germany. She was

Beckett's first love and she became the original for the green-eyed heroines in his writings.

At the age of 24, he returned to Dublin and got appointment as a lecturer in French at Trinity College. In Dublin he suffered from serious depression. In 1933, when Hitler took power, he was in Dublin. This was a hard period for Beckett. His father suffered from a massive heart attack and this totally overwhelmed him. After spending several months in Ireland, he went to London where he spent two miserable years depressed and confused. It was during this period that he wrote Murphy (1938) with London as its background. Its protagonist is seen as projection of Beckett wandering about in London as a depressed person. Another incident that created a feeling of alienation was his long stay in the South of France caused by his hiding from the Nazis.

After the war, Beckett returned to Ireland to be with his ailing mother. She died of Parkinson's disease and throughout her final illness, he cared for her. He wrote about his mother's death in Krapp's Tape:

-bench by the weir from where I could see her window. There I sat in the biting wind, wishing she were gone (pause)... I was there when (...) the blind went down, one of these dirty brown roller affairs, throwing a ball for little white dog as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with at least. I sat on a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. (pause). Moments. Her moments my moments. (pause). The dog's moments. (15)

Towards the end of his life, he lost his capacity to walk and finally lost his mobility completely.

When we try to discuss Beckett's vision, we tend to view it in terms of Absurdity because Absurdity is a key word in his literary writings. Before examining the various aspects of Absurdism, it will be appropriate if we think of the circumstances and other factors that led Beckett to hold this view of life. Critics are of the opinion that apart from the backdrop of his early life and the war torn world, certain free thinkers



like Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus, Descartes, Schopenhauer and Geulincx were the main sources that influenced and formed Beckett's view of the world as well as his literary writings.

To add to it, I would like to maintain that his familiarity with the Bible, especially Book of Ecclesiastes, might have seminal influence on him in the shaping of the Absurdist view.

### **The Book of Ecclesiastes**

Let us examine how the very idea of Absurdism has its genesis in this book. The name of this book "Ecclesiastes" means "The Teacher". It is generally believed that the book was written about the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. The central problem in this book is "meaninglessness". The writer examines every aspects of human life – wealth, social position, professional success and pleasures. The teacher was a king over Israel in Jerusalem (10<sup>th</sup> cent. BC); he devoted himself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. He came to the realisation that God

laid a heavy burden on man, and all the things done under the sun were meaningless. His application to the understanding of even wisdom and madness was merely “a chasing after the wind” (Eccles. 1:4). Even pleasures and laughter were proved to be foolish. So he hated life because the work done under the sun proved to be grievous. For, a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill and then he must leave all that he owns to some one who has not worked for it. Moreover, he has to face misfortune also.

According to the Teacher, there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up (Eccles. 3:2-4).

The same fate waits for man and animals. All come from dust and all return to dust. Nobody knows what is good for a man in life during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow. Nobody can tell him what happens after man is gone. He has seen that righteous man

perishing in his righteousness and a wicked man living long in his wickedness. He has also seen that sometimes the swift do not win the race or the strong lose the battle, the wise do not get food, the brilliant do not get wealth and the learned do not get the favour. Fools are put in many high positions while the rich occupy the low ones. He has learnt this also:

For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow (Eccles. 1:18).

### **The influence of various writers and movements**

Among the thinkers who have influenced Beckett, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) has a pre-eminent place. Nietzsche was especially interested in the analysis and evaluation of the fundamental cultural values of western philosophy, religion and morality. He characterised them as expressions of the ideal that is ascetic in nature. The ascetic ideal comes into being when suffering is endowed with ultimate importance. According to the traditions of Judea-Christian faith, suffering was made

tolerable as it was a part of God's design and if, through it, the believers are given an opportunity for atonement. The doctrine of personal immortality and the belief that each individual's life and death have cosmic significance, were strong in the minds of the Jews and the Christians. Likewise, traditional philosophy lent credence to the fact that the soul is more important than the body; and the Christians attached more importance to mind, duty, reality and the timeless than to senses, desire, appearance and the temporal. Nietzsche's criticism of traditional morality was centred on the typology of master and slave morality. The good and evil contrast arose when slaves avenged themselves by converting attributes of mastery into vices. If the favoured were powerful, it was said that the meek would inherit the earth. Pride became sin. Charity, humility and obedience were considered virtues whereas competition, pride and autonomy were considered vices. The triumph of this slave morality led to the claim that it was the only true morality. 'Nihilism' was the term Nietzsche used to the devaluation of the highest values posited by the ascetic ideal. He maintained that religious and philosophical absolutes lost their sheen in the emergence of 19<sup>th</sup> century

positivism, a doctrine that man can have no knowledge of anything but phenomena and that the knowledge of phenomena is relative, not absolute. When metaphysical and theological foundations collapse, a sense of purposelessness and meaninglessness would pervade. Therefore, the triumph of meaninglessness is the triumph of nihilism: “God is dead”. Nietzsche believed that most people would not accept the intrinsic meaninglessness of existence and they would create other surrogate gods like nationhood. Then again, slaughter will take place under banners of universal brotherhood, democracy and socialism. Nietzsche very often thought of his writings as struggles with nihilism. Apart from his critiques of religion, philosophy and morality, he developed original theses like perspectivism, will-to-power, eternal recurrence and the superman. We find that Beckett also got imbued with these ideas which found expression in many forms in his works.

Albert Camus (1913 – 1960) a French novelist and essayist worked out the theory of Absurdity and applied this thesis in his writings. The year 1942 saw the publication of an influential philosophical essay “The

myth of Sisyphus” in which Camus, with considerable sympathy analysed ‘nihilism’ and the sense of the “absurd”. His brilliant novel The Outsider is a study of 20<sup>th</sup> century alienation. Camus sees absurdity in the bilateral relationship between the human being and the world he lives in. The world of things is impenetrable and because of its impenetrability it is also alien to man. His plays Cross purpose (1944) and Caligula (1945) remain landmarks in the Theatre of the Absurd.

Descartes (1596 – 1650) a crucial figure in the history of philosophy combined the influences of the past into a synthesis that was original and yet congenial to the scientific temper of the age. He is reckoned as the progenitor of the modern spirit in philosophy. In his Principia (1644), Descartes defined philosophy as the study of wisdom. The chief utility is for the conduct of life, the conservation of health and the invention of all arts. His metaphysics in essence consisted of three principles of scepticism, mathematicism and subjectivism. From the indubitability of the self, Descartes deduced the existence of a perfect God and from that a perfect being, incapable of falsification or deception

and those ideas about the corporeal world within which man must be true. The achievement of certainty about the natural world also is guaranteed by the perfection of God and by the clear and distinct ideas that are His gift. The Cartesian philosophy suggests that clarity, distinctness and absence of contradiction among ideas are the ultimate test of meaningfulness and truth. The Cartesian self is just such a substance from which the idea of God originates and with which all deductive reasoning begins and in the question of truth in science only man's reason can ultimately decide. Cartesianism was to dominate the intellectual life of the continent till the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One can see that Beckett's poem 'Whoroscope', his novels Murphy and Mercier at Camier mirror Descartes' ideas abundantly.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860), himself a German idealist, maintained that the irrational is the truly real. He waged a life long battle against academic philosophy and constructed his own system of philosophy. Schopenhauer was in agreement with Kant that the world of appearances of phenomena is governed by the conditions of space, time

and casualty. But he held that science which investigates this world cannot itself penetrate the world behind appearances and this world is dominated by a strong, blind, striving, universal cosmic will. This will expresses itself in the vagaries of human instinct, in sexual striving, and in the wild uncertainties of all animal behaviour. Everywhere in nature one sees strife, conflict and inarticulate impulse and these, rather than rational processes or intellectual clarity, are man's true contacts with ultimate reality. Mind is an instrument of instinct to be used in the service of life and power. Illusion is as necessary to man as truth. He provided Beckett with a new, nonrational conception of human nature which views the mind not with rational clarity but as something dark, obscure, hidden and deep.

Arnold Geulincx (1624 – 1669) tried to resolve a specific problem in Cartesian metaphysics. A version of Cartesian metaphysics was that all interaction between mind and body is mediated by God. This assumed that unextended mind and the extended body do not interact directly. The appearance of direct interaction is maintained by God. It is God who



moves the body on the occasion of the mind's willing and who puts ideas in the mind on the occasion of the body's encountering other material objects. Occasionalism was primarily developed by Arnold Geulincx and Nicolas Malebranche. For Descartes, mind is active and unextended thinking. Body is passive and unthinking extension but these two created substances are combined as a third compound substance – living man. With regard to the problem of interaction between mind and body, the answer to the question by the occasionalist was that it was mediated by God, the fourth uncreated Cartesian substance. Many thinkers have criticized occasionalism on the ground that how God, a mental substance can himself interact with the material substance, body. An answer to this problem is that God created it. It is argued by some philosophers like Leibniz, that the units of reality do not interact but only appear to do so because God has created them in pre-established harmony. The apparent interaction of mind and body would also be pre-established. This was then seen to be a logical outcome of occasionalism. Beckett's novels Murphy and The Unnamable appear to reflect the views of Geulincx, to a great extent.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 – 1980), a French novelist, playwright and exponent of existentialism – a theory acclaiming that man is a unique and isolated individual in a hostile world, responsible for his own actions and free to choose his destiny – also influenced the thinking and writings of Beckett. Sartre’s famous novel Nausea written in the form of a diary narrates the feelings of revulsion that a certain Roquentin experiences from the very awareness of his body. It is an original, fiercely individualistic, antisocial piece of work containing many of the philosophical themes Sartre later developed. He later took over the phenomenological method from the German philosopher Edmund Husserl and used it with great skill in his successive publications like Imagination (1936), Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions (1962) and the Psychology of Imagination (1950). But it was in Being and Nothingness (1956) that Sartre revealed himself as a master of outstanding talent. He places human consciousness or nothingness in opposition to being or thingness. Consciousness is not matter and by the same token escapes all determinism.

Phenomenology is a 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophical movement. Its primary objective is the direct investigation and description of phenomena. It is opposed to positivism and concerned with the experiences of the self. In other words, it is the description of the phenomena consciously experienced without theories about their casual explanation and unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions. Johann Heinrich Lambert, the Swiss–German mathematician and philosopher, used this term when he dealt with the part of his theory of knowledge that distinguishes truth from illusion and error. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hegel traced the development of human spirit from sense experience to absolute knowledge in his book Phenomenology of Mind (1807). Then it was only in the early period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that the movement of phenomenology gathered momentum with many varieties. In the growth and development of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl has rendered signal services. He wrote The Idea of Phenomenology in 1964. Even for Husserl the conception of phenomenology developed only gradually and kept changing to the end of his career. But the basic concept in phenomenology is the concept of intentionality, the directedness of

consciousness toward an object. So one can define psychic phenomena as phenomena which, precisely as intentional contain an object in themselves. Husserl's investigation into the concept of numbers is noteworthy. Numbers are not found readymade in nature but result from mental achievement. His preoccupation with the question of how the numbers are constituted, brought out the concept of reflection, constitution, description and founding constitution of meaning that later played a predominant role in his philosophy.

A philosopher usually is to examine the relationship between consciousness and being and he must realise that being is accessible to him as a correlate of conscious acts. This is possible only by a science that tries to understand the very essence of consciousness and this is the task that phenomenology has set for itself. The objects of phenomenology are absolute data grasped in pure, immanent intuition and its goal is to discover the essential structures of the acts and the objective entities that correspond to them. When history is connected with facts, phenomenology deals with the knowledge of essences.

Following upon the work of Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938), phenomenology spread into a worldwide movement. Emmanuel Levinas, a French author combined ideas from Husserl and Heidegger in a very personal way. Sartre, the leading existentialist of France took this point of departure from the philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger. Maurice Merleau-ponty, though an important representative of French existentialism was also an important French phenomenologist. His works Structure of Behaviour (1963) and Phenomenology of Perception (1962) were the further developments and applications of phenomenology. Merleau-ponty gave a new interpretation of the meaning of human body and of man's perception of space, the natural world, temporality and freedom. He anchored the phenomena of perception in the phenomenology of the lived body in which the perceiving subject is incarnated as the mediating link to the phenomenal world. Such a phenomenology of human presence in the world was also to offer a system in which consciousness and world could be reciprocally related in the place of the rigid dichotomy between idealism and realism. Thus phenomenology became a way of showing the essential involvement of

human existence in the world starting with everyday perception. Paul Ricoeur, in his Philosophy of the Will (1950) deals with the problems involved in the theological concept of guilt as a part of phenomenology. Jacques Derrida (1930 - ) an 'original' French thinker on the limits of thought and language has combined phenomenology with structuralism in his interpretation of literature. It is obvious that a considerable part of Beckett's vision of life and art, was influenced by phenomenology.

A proper study of the works of Beckett will definitely unfold the story of a formidable talent leading us to his vision of life that sounds, in the first instance, incongruous and unintelligible. With the performance of Waiting for Godot (1955), the name of Beckett has been heard everywhere. He has emerged as a supreme artist who is capable of turning art against itself and as a visionary comedian who knows that human consciousness must be stripped to naught. Beckett states, "When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right, I do not know but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of

him and that is simply a mess” (Esslin, Samuel Beckett 169). When Beckett acknowledges that he is not a philosopher, he is concerned about the ‘mess’ that is in front of him. His concerns and anxieties about the confused state or the disorder around him reveal the mind of a philosopher in him. Moreover, Beckett used to examine the philosophical questions on the self, the world and God. In conformity with the ‘absurd’ view he maintains that life is not worth living and but at the same time he used to believe that the life unexamined was not worth living.

Beckett believes that there is a cleavage between the mind and the body on the Cartesian line. Beckett writes about the protagonist of his first novel Murphy : “Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently. Otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be body tight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected or how the two experiences came to overlap” (qtd. in Esslin, Samuel Beckett 170).

Similarly in his novel Mercier at Camier (1946) there is a cleavage between Mercier representing the mind and Camier, representing the body. In their life, they tend to move apart and in the end they part each other. Physical Camier enters a hospital for skin ailments and mental Mercier enters the hospital to observe the growing shadows.

In Waiting for Godot the relationship between Didi and Gogo gives us the impression that they are the two sides of the same character. Didi acts as mind and Gogo as body. When Didi thinks about spiritual matters, Gogo is interested in eating and sleeping. Didi is rhetorical whereas Gogo is pantomime. Though they represent polarity, the polarity moves in the direction of unity towards the end of the play where they try to move away but fail. In Beckett's trilogy of novels, mind is precariously fastened to bodies in successive stages of decay. Moran, though energetic and healthy initially gets affected with paralysis and becomes dependent on crutches. Molloy, though handicapped at first, ends up with crawling and rolling. The Unnamable ends in headless thought, mouthless speech and earless listening to words that may or may



not be his. All these ‘heroes’ are seen in frenzies of philosophical meditation, too.

### **A bleak view of life**

Beckett has, so to say, a mordant view of the human condition with restricts limits of freedom. In Happy Days (1963), we do not see Willie crawling until the final moments of the play but his wife Winnie can see him and encourage his motions – “What a curse, mobility”! (35). In How It Is (1964), the narrator – protagonist meticulously describes his own crawling at frequent intervals throughout the book. In Endgame (1958), we find the parents of Hamm in ashbins, as legless, because of a cycle accident. Hamm himself is in the armchair incapable of walking. All these characters give us the picture of the human condition where freedom is restricted and Beckett presents this pathetic state of human beings in almost all of his works.

Beckett is a writer using the medium to translate his unique vision of life. According to him suffering is a part of human life and his works convey this message. Density, spareness and desolation are associated with his work. Even when his literary compositions play the role of entertainers, they belong to social and cultural worlds also. A reading of his plays may apparently lead us to believe that the characters of his plays require food and other articles, wait for better days to come and think that something meaningful will happen in their meaningless world. But the fact remains that everything is meaningless. Beckett's heroes have no purpose, no meaning in their lives. Reasons are unknown. They are in some occupation, role or relationship. They are unaccommodated men. Space and time find them though space is empty except a mound and a tree. Time is no longer the measure of motion but arbitrary imposition through which they crawl to a death they can never know. They do not take advantage of the time but they try to pass the time. They are men of diminished respectability in a no man's land of despair and emptiness. Even though they aspire to stasis and silence, their efforts prove futile.

Suffering is another hallmark of Beckett's characters. From the contrasting worlds of static figures of Vladimir and Estragon or Pozzo and Lucky we are driven to the world of Hamm, "finished, almost finished" (Endgame 12). Krapp appears before us within a world of old misery, with no fire left, with addiction to bananas and drink. The picture of Mrs. Rooney, as a lone suffering woman in a world of decay presents to us a condition of frustration, impotence and absurdity. Henry in Embers (1959) is subjected to face a situation of emptiness, isolation and loneliness. He is haunted by a sense of guilt because of his involvement in the death of his father. In Cascando (1963) both Woburn and the Voice are in travail and moving deeper into degradation. Joe in Eh Joe (1967) also is in a state of desperation and not free from the noises that haunt, taunt and paralyse him. All emotions are of the cold terror and anguish of a man trapped in a world of anguish and near to death. Even this state is no consolation to him in his hallucination as he is open to the miseries of other people's death which seems to have released him from here in life. Winnie in Happy Days (1963) presents the pathetic life of a woman that is enigmatic and frightening. It seems that she is afflicted with some

terror which she cannot articulate or put in words. So we find that all the characters in Beckett's work are subjected to torments or live in a world of decay and deprivation. Even when Beckett's work is concerned primarily with the sordid side of human existence, it does not mean that he was interested in the sordid and diseased aspects of life but it may be said that he focused only on the 'essential' aspects of human experience.

## **Religion**

When we examine Beckett's attitude towards religion, we find that he lost his faith in religion by the time he entered college and he continued to live without belief. James Joyce with whom he had friendship was highly critical of Catholicism. Beckett who worked as an assistant to him must have come under his influence. So some kind of struggle was going on in Beckett also against religion. His attitude to religion and his opinion about the religious significance of his plays are expressed in an interview given to Tom. F. Driver from the Union Theological Seminary in New York. Beckett states:

‘Well, really there is none at all. I have no religious feeling. Once I had religious emotion. It was at my first communion. No more. My mother was deeply religious. So was my brother. He knelt down his bed as long as he could kneel. My father had none. The family was protestant but for me it was only irksome and I let it go. My brother and mother got no value from their religion when they died. At the moment of crisis it had no more depth than an old school tie. Irish Catholicism is not attractive but it is deeper. When you pass a church on an Irish bus, all the hands flurry in the sign of the cross. One day, the dogs of Ireland will do that too and perhaps also the pigs’. (Doherty 15)

Another influence that led to the loss of Beckett’s religious convictions was that of Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra published in 1883 increased the number of people for whom God is dead. After the horrors of two terrible wars, there were many trying to come to terms with the implications of Zarathustra’s message. They were in search for a way in which they can, with dignity, confront a universe deprived of a

generally accepted principle. They were reluctant to accept art forms based on the continuation of standards and concepts that have lost their validity. As an answer to it, the Theatre of the Absurd formed part of the unceasing efforts of the true artists of our time to breach this dead wall of complacency and automatism. Beckett thus became of such artists making

‘an effort however timid and tentative, to sing, to laugh, to weep and to growl – if not in praise of God (whose name, in Adamov’s phrase, has so long been degraded by usage that it has lost its meaning), at least in search of a dimension of the ineffable; an effort to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, to instill in him again the lost sense of comic wonder and primeval anguish, to shock him out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical, complacent and deprived of the dignity that comes of awareness. For God is dead, above all to the masses who live from day to day and have lost all contact with the basic facts and mysteries of human condition with which, in former times,

they were kept in touch through the living ritual of their religion which made them parts of a real community and not just atoms in an atomized society'. (qtd. in Esslin, Absurd 390)

In his novel Watt (1953) Beckett makes Mr. Case speak at the end of it "And they say there is no God," (245). Moreover, we find that the novel is a parody of Leibnizianism. Watt entered the house of Mr. Knott for his service with premonitions of harmony and he believed that he was entering Leibniz's city of God "the most perfect state formed and governed by the greatest and the best of monarchs. Here there is no crime without punishment, no good action without a proper reward and finally as much virtue and happiness as is possible" (Hesla 80). But in the case of Watt at the house of Mr. Knott, he goes unpunished even in the face of violating Mr. Knott's orders evidenced by the words: "no punishment fell on Watt, no thunderbolt" (113). Beckett is of the view that our attempts to decipher the unutterable or the ineffable are bound to fail. This idea finds expression in the following passage in the novel,

for here we all seem to end by being good natured men and of good will and indulgent towards the dreams of middle

age, which were our dreams, whatever may escape us now and then in the way of bitter and I blush to say even blasphemous words and expressions and perhaps also because what we know partakes in no small measure of the nature of what has happily been called the unutterable or ineffable. So that any attempt to utter or if it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail. (61)

David H. Hesla writes:

Having entered the domain of Knott, the domain of the absurd, Beckett will not leave it even though it seems that Watt does. From this item forward, Beckett must and will conduct the art of narrative fiction on premises which will not permit him to escape from the ascesis imposed by the irrationality of existence. These premises are two. The first is that, if God is not dead, he is at any rate unavailable to man and has abdicated from responsibility for the universe. He can be no longer be counted on to work the appropriate miracle on the occasion of my unextended etc.; nor does the



empirical evidence prove or even suggest that there is a pre-established harmony within the monad which I am (or Watt is) or among the infinite number of monads which constitute the world. The second premise is actually a corollary of the first: in the absence of the absolute (and in the presence of spinoza's principle of negation), knowledge is impossible.

(Hesla 84)

Over and above, Beckett's attitude towards the concept of God comes to light from the words of Sam, in Watt

The only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of is as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of god is to speak of him as though he were a man, which to be sure he was, in a sense, for a time and as the only way one can speak of man, even our anthropologists have realised that, is to speak of him as though he were a termite. (74)

We know that Beckett is very often satirical of religion. Sometimes, it goes even beyond that. Beckett tends to regard the sufferings of others as his own; this feeling emerges in the form of bitter irony that leads to the linkage of the mystery of evil with the mystery of divinity. A reading of Watt reveals this aspect of Beckett's religious irony. One such instance is the case of the news agent destined to suffer from unremitting mental, moral and perhaps even physical pain, and who is short and limps dreadfully. "When he got started he moved rapidly, in a series of aborted genuflexions" (24). The handing over of the kennel of famished dogs to the case of the Lynch family consisting of crippled and disabled members who enter the service of Mr. Knott or in other words men with free will cursed to eat Mr. Knott's leftovers, is another example of bitter irony of the blend of evil with divinity. Moreover, the activities of Sam and Watt in the mental asylum like killing birds, grinding the eggs of larks, feeding the rats with frogs and baby thrushes and placing rats in their bosom, delight them. Sam speaks, "It was on these occasions, we agreed, after an exchange of views, that we came nearest to God" (153).

In Waiting for Godot, we come across a deity – “a personal god qua qua qua qua with white beard qua qua qua qua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown” (43). The deity is characterised by negative attributes. The triple qualities make it the Trinitarian God but the three qualities i.e. the absence of feeling, brilliance and speech remain opposed to the qualities of power, wisdom and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that compose the Trinity. In the vision of Beckett, God seems to be indifferent, darkly mysterious and uncommunicative as revealed by the three terms referred to in the quote. In Happy Days (1963), Winnie describes the mode of magnifying the Almighty in the following words: “How can one better magnify the Almighty than by sniggering with him at his little jokes, particularly the poorer ones?” (24). Viewed in the background in the misery and helplessness, the quote expresses strong irony coupled with sarcasm.

Nagg’s story of the English man and his tailor in Endgame (1958) casts bitter reflections on God’s created world. The Hamm-Clov colloquy

about the flea in Clov's trousers and the being called "The bastard", (27) and Nagg being cursed as "Accursed progenitor!" (15) in the context of generative process reveal the hostile and derisive attitude towards God. So we can find that the Beckettian God with the above attributes is one who is sealed off from the comfortable and orderly world of men.

### **Views on art and art criticism**

Beckett's views on art merit consideration in the context of understanding his vision. Proust is Beckett's main contribution to literary criticism and it was published in 1931. It deals with a dualistic vision based on the division between an intuitive, discontinuous and sensuous evocation of reality and the abstract, logical, continua created by conceptual reason. In the intellectual formation of Beckett, Proust was equally important as Descartes. Our life in this world has an illusory nature and the motion of surface and depth recurs throughout Proust. Our physical being that inhabits the outer world is termed as a shell and the essence of our many selves dwell in it. It is an important opinion of Beckett that an artist finds it difficult to communicate with another being

on the surface or in depth. Friendship, a phenomenon of the surface world, is only a social expedient. The artist who realises that there are no vehicles of communication knows that art is the apotheosis of solitude, and for him, the only possible spiritual development is in the sense of depth. The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. The artist is active but negatively shrinking from the nullity of extra circumferential phenomena, drawn into the core of an eddy.

Beckett opines that art is a better link to the ultimate. It does not mean that it can give answers to our doubts about the ultimate. Art keeps a man in a state of awareness of his deepest nature when diversions of the surface world turn him away. Beckett is not the man of science and theology nor is he the artist in any triumphant sense. He does not bring reason and order but unreason and chaos. For Beckett, man needs to be in a state of need or privation. At the same time, he desires to be out of it. This is because, Beckett does not hold any philosophical point of view of fulfilment or rather holds the belief in a sense of fulfilment through

privation or in the feeling for the unreality of the world of senses. Every man is not an artist and very few understand art. The life of an artist is solitary and difficult but the overall unity of all is in the quest towards a common end or horizon. He devotes himself to this even when he sees nothing. Even if worst comes to worst, he may end in lucidity. The motives of an artist in creating the work are mysterious and even absurd. He has a desire to express himself and rid himself of his inner tension. It is these impulses that urge him toward creating the work. The desire to communicate with one's fellow beings is of secondary importance. An examination of Beckett's novels and plays reveals the nature of the artist as one who needs privation, who needs fulfilment in creation. The impossibility of fulfilment leads to the end of the need for fulfilment. Art finally points to man's deepest nature and in itself it is wholly meaningless and futile. Beckett is of the view that this is the expression of the ineffable and he tears down the barrier between art and life. Usually the activity of an artist is considered more or less positive. He is interested in the discovery of order or creating something new. But for Beckett, to be an artist is to fail and failure is the artist's world. Even the

form of the work of art in such a situation of aesthetics will be in danger. Beckett maintains that in the economy of art what is not said is the light of what is said and the very absence presupposes a presence. Language belongs to the practical world of surfaces and intellect but it is poorly adapted to the exigencies of art. He describes his own language as a veil which must be torn asunder to get at things. Grammar and style are out of use for him and hopes for the time when language can be best used where it is most zealously misused. Art, traditionally possessive and triumphant, is in conflict with being which is weakness and chaos. He speaks of the difficulty experienced by an artist given to making with words that there is no form that does not violate the nature of being. In other words Being puts form in Jeopardy.

Beckett expresses the view that words cannot create meaningful order or mirror experience. Man longs for knowledge but he has only the words of his speech to use and these are inadequate. There can be little or no communication between man and man, for words are the names of memories and no two men can have the same memories. Moreover,

words are little suited to knowledge, since each word is surrounded by the undertones of its own history. Finally, words are inadequate for piercing the essence of reality since they are only the indicators of our memories and the things we used to express our thoughts and these being merely contingent can no more get at true reality than a spider that has puts its nest in a corner of a place can get at the total reality of the place. Beckett tends to draw a parallel between God and the artist. He compares the macrocosm to the little world of the work of art. His preference is always for the microcosm of the mind and its artistic issue. His interest lies in the unreality of things in the world outside, things hidden by surfaces, immersed in flux, subject to the condition of space. We experience isolation from things as well as man. We live in a world where communication is impossible, short of gross distortion. Severed from the outside, we find ourselves in a state of ignorance. We become disenchanted with surfaces and no longer the dupe of the phantom accident but substance still evades us. And a new void gives rise to a new need to know but the results are despair and persistence.



From the world of surfaces, certain things are hostile to art. One is the intellect in all its many forms that very often include language also. Art is concerned with the unique and the elementary. The intellect attempts the impossible when it tries to meddle with it. The other is social existence. To the solitary nature of an art that strives to 'see', the blindness of society is an obstacle. Art has its origin in man's temporal condition. Beckett suggests that it is high time for the artist to represent the metamorphosed objects of the mind instead of the representations of the exterior world:

'Paradoxically, the daylight world, according to Beckett, is a realm of blindness where the myriad masks of temporal succession hide the permanent reality (if it exists) of the essential object. Concealed beneath the veil of its accidental surfaces, caught up in becoming, the ultimate being escapes man. Space and time conceal – from a being whose deepest need is to see'. (qtd. in Harvey 427)

Beckett has his opinions about art criticism also. He is opposed to traditional scholarship and criticism. The explanation of art in terms of its

origin and as a product is rejected by him. The reason is that the world of consciousness is divided into the upper zone of light and the lower zone of darkness. In the upper zone of light, forms correspond to those in the physical world outside and the zone of darkness is devoid of any correspondence. Therefore, any interpretation of the new art in terms of the upper zone of intellect or its macrocosmic correlatives makes no sense in the words of Beckett. "It is like explaining the nature of a waterlily by studying the composition of the desert soil out of which it does not grow" (qtd. in Harvey 436). Beckett does not accept the psychological analysis of the author as a form of criticism because of the obscure inner tensions that give rise to a work of art which are unavailable and a critic has no access to them. Any form of scientific criticism is also rejected on the ground that the artistic instinct of a person is an absurd and mysterious compulsion about which he himself most often knows nothing. The urges of artist, very often being irrational, and the activities of the critic, being intellectual, do not always agree. Similarly there is always a gap between the work and its social context as a superficial society which hides from itself the eternal

conditions of human existence with which art is concerned. Beckett is of the view that the nature of true art is free from the influences of race, moment or milieu and the dates, periods, schools and influences of literary history are so many intellectual constructions usually without any reference to individual works of art. Thus being opposed to such prescriptive criticism, he vigorously defends the absolute freedom of the artist.

With regard to the views of the audience of the work of art, he thinks that its uses for them are not of much pertinence as they do not affect the genesis of the work. Art is concerned with the human condition in its more universal aspects. Since art is not intended to impart precepts or make a person better, ethical criticism also is beside the point. He is not friendly towards art that is socially engaged. He turns his ire against the bourgeois blindness and complacency that stifles goodness, truth and beauty. Moreover, he warns that a materialistic society is likely to disapprove of art that is solitary and productive of painful visions. Beckett regards art as a sound independent domain of human activity for

which no substitute exists and points out the dangers in interposing considerations alien to the nature of art between the spectator and the work. The best of criticism is a gross operation that kills the capacity of the work to radiate its magic to its lovers. The mania for evaluation is one of the most dangerous aberrations of criticism. Painting is neither good nor bad but the categorizers insist on putting them into pigeonholes under various labels. The ultimate result of such obsessive judgment is the destruction of the individual work. While all true art lays bare the human condition, each work is unique and one cannot reason about the unique. Art is usually meant to give only the pleasurable insight but criticism is useful in preparing the ground for intuition, insight and in elucidating the nature, varieties, and goals of art and in illuminating artistic procedures.

## **Music**

Beckett very frequently appears concerned with the movement behind words in disregard of their meanings. This is because of his inclination toward music. Music plays an important role in his writing, which renders it easier to listen to than to understand. It has its effect on

the structure of the plays, his characters, their movements and their sounds. Beckett was a lover of music. He himself was a musician and had a deep knowledge of music. As a child, he was fond of playing piano and later used to spend much of his time listening to music and attending concerts. He came under the influence of composers like Beethoven, Chopin and Schubert. The aspirations, pauses, and the tempo with which his dialogues are spoken reveal rhythm and balance in the overall structure of his plays. Beckett has used the medium of radio for certain plays to express his particular concerns in a language that resembles the imageless language of music. In radio, Beckett is able to exclude the visual dimension altogether and create characters with voices alone. His language is usually simple revealing its own limits. His characters can only discover and comprehend by means of perception and intuition. They state what they see. Beckett's initial idea for his radio play All That Fall (1957) was that of an atmosphere and landscape wherein we can hear the sounds of cartwheels and dragging feet and puffing and panting.

Beckett's taste in music was primarily romantic. He was attracted towards Beethoven who was noted for tempo and sonority with pauses

and intensity of feeling. He used to listen to Beethoven's chamber music and Schubert in particular. Chamber music is, of course, music for a smaller room rather than a large hall. The intimate presentation required for this music with a few performers each treated as soloists on equal terms seems to correspond to Beckett's plays as his stage is a small one for its few characters. The significance of silence in All That Fall can be felt because pauses and silences give the play a rhythm and the magnitude of the inexpressible compared to the limitation of words. Sound and silence are dependent on each other in the play.

Beckett claims that "music is the idea itself unaware of the world of phenomena, existing ideally outside the universe apprehended not in Space but in Time only and consequently untouched by the teleological hypothesis" (Proust 92). The nature of radio dispenses with a concrete visual field for the audience to perceive and it takes the audience towards the imageless universal language. In his radio play, Words and Music (1962) Beckett presents the different materials for artistic expression separating the voice from the music. He has made the innovative use of music as a

protagonist in drama. In this play, two characters, Words and Music, are asked by Creak to express given theme like 'love', 'age' and 'the face'. Words by means of the conceptual language of reason and music by the immediate and direct nonrepresentative language of music are depicted as making efforts to express on various themes. We usually view music as a substitute for speech. It is an expression of itself. When Music is seen making suggestions for the shape of word's expression or using words into the right tracks and Words imitates them, the balance between their phrases again allows us to perceive the incongruity.

On radio, Beckett could control the tempo, the rhythm, the pitch and the timbre or every sound. His stage directions do not permit free play and chance. Notwithstanding the simple words, inconclusive narratives and unintelligible babble, Beckett is capable of keeping the rhythm of the plays with due attention given to the details of setting, pace and sonority. From the fact that his plays That Time (1976), Not I (1973), and Come and Go (1967) were all set to music, it is evident that Beckett was all the more willing to let his work set to music to express the mental

and physical pain of the characters without resorting to emotional padding.

### **Attitude towards Nature**

The place of Nature and her vital role in English literature are ineffable. Especially the spectrum of Romantic literature is formed mainly of the colours through the prism of Nature. A study of English poetry from the very beginning to the present day will reveal that Nature has been treated in various ways by various writers. It has appealed to poets in different ways. Every one responds to Nature according to the peculiar qualities of his temperament.

Nature is treated in Chaucer's poetry to provide simple delight. In the poetry of Thomas Gray and Goldsmith we find that Nature is used as a background or setting to human emotion. For Wordsworth it has a source of joy, quietude and communion. His happiness came from living close to Nature. Coleridge treated Nature as a fitting counterpart to his



dreamy psychological perception of the human soul. He conjures up supernatural and mysterious atmosphere in his poems. For Byron, Nature has no gospel and he gives expression to the wilder aspects of Nature. Shelly identifies himself with the elemental forces of Nature. Keats stands for the sensuous beauty in Nature. Nature is depicted by Hardy as cruel and unsympathetic towards human sufferings. T.S. Eliot's view presents Nature as unfriendly to man. His famous poem 'Waste Land' begins on this note:

April is the cruellest month breeding Lilac out of the dead land,  
Lilac out of the dead land mixing memory and desire stirring  
Dull roots with spring pain.

Against the backdrop of the views and attitudes of the aforesaid poets, we may examine how Beckett has treated Nature in his poems and plays. Beckett's early writings include poems and criticisms. Though not as well known as his plays, his poems are powerful thematically and rich in imagery and descriptions of Nature. For the exploration of inner space through the medium of poetry, Nature also has come to his aid. A study

of his early poems will provide us important keys to the ways in which he has handled Nature to produce the results he wanted to. The real world outside also exerted great influence on his mind. His poems are liberally sprinkled with description of nature. As we are aware, Beckett is a poet noted for his strong subjectivity and literariness but at the same time he is conscious of the fact that the objective and the concrete are of great importance to poetry. With the result, he makes use of the materials in his immediate surrounding for his poetic ends. It was during the period (1931- 43) that the poems of Echo's Bones were written. In most of the poems of Echo's Bones, the literal landscape has been turned to artistic assets. Most of the poems are concerned with the need and impossibility of love's fulfilment and a whole series of themes from absence to sterility show this unresolved tension. The change of the lover through suffering caused by frustration of desire and the thwarting of his love through love's cruelty towards the beloved are the main themes in these poems. Sickness, ageing, death are the real culprits. Therefore, the lover withdraws partially and he is reluctant to engage himself further and

invite further suffering. From concern with the other, the focus moves to the self.

Some of the poems especially “Enueq I” and “Sanies I” depict landscape which Beckett uses for his purposes. The opening lines of “Enueq I” indicate how Nature is handled by Beckett to describe the mental state of the solitary walker:

Exeo is a spasm  
tired of my darling’s red sputum  
from the Portobello Private Nursing Home its secret things  
and toil to the crest of the surge of the steep perilous bridge  
and lapse down blanky under the scream of the boarding  
round the bright still banner of the boarding  
into a black west  
throtilled with clouds.

Above the mansions the algum-trees  
the mountains

my skull sullenly

clot of anger

skewered aloft strangled in the cang of the wind

bites like a dog against its chastisement.

I trundle along rapidly now on my ruined feet

flush with the livid canal,

at Parmell Bridge a dying barge

carrying a cargo of nails and timber

rocks itself softly in the foaming cloister of the lock;

on the far bank a gang of down and outs would seem to be

mending a beam.

Then for miles only the wind

and the weals creeping alongside on the water

and the world opening up to the south

a cross a travesty or champaign to the mountains

and the still born evening turning a filthy green

manuring the night fungus

and the mind annulled  
wrecked in the wind. (ll 1-29)

There is a reference to 'Parnel Bridge' that stands for peril and the foaming water symbolizing the surge of emotions; 'the algum-trees', the 'mountains', 'the cang of the winds', 'a filthy green manuring the night fungus' express somber and powerful images. Apart from reflecting the mental state of the protagonist, the image of the metamorphosis of an artist is also seen emerging. Just as the night feeds on the defunct day, the nocturnal bard feeds on the dead past. The poet is similar to the vigilant gulls in the gray spew of the sewer or to the evening vulture. In this poem, the narrator begins walking from Dublin and after a circle to the South and the West it brings him back along the quays to the city. The circle is symbolic of frustration. His exit from the Portobello Nursing Home is an attempt to escape decline and death but the signs of decline are everywhere. Nature is important to him not as a source of mere materials but as a reality that is autonomous though related to man.

Beckett is of the view that society is not only hypocrite, but Nature too masquerades under false colours.

An examination of his mature plays will reveal that Nature and the various objects of Nature are used to depict the mental states of the protagonists. In Waiting for Godot we find that the two tramps are seen by the side of a tree without leaves. They are on a deserted road. It is evening. The action of the first scene is set in this background of Nature. The tree without leaves is a symbol of life that is devoid of hope. The deserted road may refer to a way of life, marked by desolation and solitude. The time 'evening' implies that darkness is going to envelop the lives of the people basking in the glory of hope and waiting like the tramps. Vladimir's words, "We will hang ourselves tomorrow (Pause) unless Godot comes" (94) indicate that the tree also will facilitate their hanging. In the second Act, the tree is seen with four or five leaves. It denotes change or ray of hope for the persons caught in the act of waiting for something or someone.

Beckett makes use of description of Nature to fill up time. The tramps are waiting for Godot but Godot does not come. In the meantime they try and converse calmly since they are incapable of keeping silent:

ESTRAGON. All the dead voices.

VLADIMIR. They make a noise like wings

ESTRAGON. Like leaves

VLADIMIR. Like sands

silence

VLADIMIR. They all speak together

ESTRAGON. Each one to itself

Silence

VLADIMIR. They make a noise like feathers.

ESTRAGON. Like leaves

VLADIMIR. Like ashes

ESTRAGON. Like leaves. (62-63)

All That Fall (1957) abounds in rural sounds and other pictures of natural scenery. At the very outset of the play, we hear the sounds made

by sheep, bird, cow and cock severally and then together. By these sounds, the dramatist has no intention of creating any rustic atmosphere for the play but wants to provide a rhythm to it. Sounds and silences in the play indicate the magnitude of the inexpressible especially the suffering and the pain. In Mrs. Rooney's monologue after the departure of Mr. Tyler on his bicycle is seen her mental agony. The cooing birds immediately after that bring to our mind the real suffering of the protagonist:

You'll tear you tube to ribbons! (Mr. Tyler rides off.  
 Receding sound of bumping bicycle, silence, cooing) Venus  
 Birds! Billing in the woods all the long summer long (Pause)  
 on cursed corset if I could let it out, without indecent  
 exposure. Mr. Tyler! Mr. Tyler! come back and unlace me  
 behind the edge! (She laughs wildly, ceases) what's wrong  
 with me, What's wrong with me, never tranquil, seething  
 out, of my dirty old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms,  
 in atoms! (Frienziedly) ATOMS! (13)



Beckett bends Nature and its silence to project the isolation and the oppressive solitude the protagonist experiences. Mrs. Rooney is presented as a woman who is mourning her lost life. The lonely state of her mind is expressed in the following words:

Mrs. Rooney: All is still. No living soul in sight. There is no one to ask. The world is feeding. The wind – (brief wind) – scarcely stirs the leaves and the birds – (brief chirps) – are tired singing – The cows- (brief moo) – and sheep – (brief baa) – ruminates in silence – The dogs – (brief bark) – are hushed and the hens – (brief cackle) – sprawl torpid in the dust. We are alone. There is no one to ask. Silence. (32)

In Embers (1959) also, Beckett employs landscape to suit the disposition of the protagonists. The play opens with the sound of the sea and ends with it also. We hear the horse's hooves. We see the beach. Henry the protagonist describes the sound of the sea:

HENRY. I say that sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand. (pause.) I mention it because the

sound is so strange, so unlike the sound of the sea, that if you didn't see what it was you wouldn't know what it was. (pause.) (21)

The sound of the sea represents so many things in the play. It is a threat to him. Still he is attracted towards it. It is associated with drowning of his father and it provides him an opportunity for an insight into his self. The sound is dreadful but it is permanently with him. He wants to escape it but he cannot.

HENRY. I once went to Switzerland to get away from the cursed thing and never stopped all the time I was there. (pause.) (22)

Thus the sound is strange. He listens to it. Its a source of light.

HENRY. Listen to the light now, you always loved light, not long past noon and all the shore in the shadow and the sea out as far as the island. (pause.) (22)

Moreover, the boredom of existence has been given an audible dimension from the constant rhythm of the waves on the shore. The

tedious emptiness of the landscape expresses the inner emptiness of life. This is evident from Henry's words towards the close of the play: "...very unhappy and uneasy, hangs round a bit, not a soul about, cold wind coming in off sea, goes back down path and takes from home" (38).

In short, we find that Beckett, unlike other writers, transforms Nature and natural phenomena to suit the emotional beats of the protagonists. In other words, his concern is with the vivid depiction of the emotional states of the protagonists in the plays. In exploiting Nature for his creative work, he reduces the living landscape to its moribund state and proves that beneath the surface of life lies the sure signing of death and decay.

### **The identity of man**

The question concerning the identity of man has baffled many philosophers and thinkers for centuries. Pythagoras, the celebrated Greek philosopher (6<sup>th</sup> century BC) taught that human being possessed souls

and all souls were equal before eternity. His doctrines of the transmigration of the soul and its immortality were widely known and attracted many. The followers of Pythagoras respected numbers and mathematical relations which were dispassionate and immaterial. God and the entire surrounding world were reflected in the symbolic correlation of certain numbers which promoted a mathematical approach to the world and the development of the exact sciences. The Pythagorean doctrine showed man the righteous path to immortality. Socrates (5<sup>th</sup> century BC) believed and argued that the existence of God could be discerned in the providential order of nature and God was the ruler of the world. He too held that man has soul and it partook of the Divine. Moreover, he believed in the immortality of the soul.

Plato (427-348 BC) developed thesis concerning eternal and immutable ideas amid the transience of existence. His theory is that ideas are independently existing higher forms of being that determine material reality. They are the eternal patterns or paradigms by which all things are constructed from formless, dark, transient and endless material. The world of ideas is outside time. It abides or reposes in eternity. The

highest idea is 'God' which is identical to absolute beauty. 'God' is the highest principle that underlies everything. The creator created this visible celestial and earthly world according to the wisest eternal laws of beauty and all parts of the cosmos were carefully planned and made it perfect. The demiurge planned to create people the same way. But there was only a little of the former mixture left. After mixing another portion, the purity was lost. Therefore, the inhabitants of the universe turned out to be mortal and thus subject to evil as well as good. With the result he was prone to woes and sufferings. Man's innate abilities are valued by Plato and he would like change the imperfect nature of man. Here man lives in the midst of mud and mire like fish at the bottom of the sea having a vague notion of the Sun and sky but unable to lift himself into its endless vastness. Plato wishes that man could see the celestial heights and the true world that exists in the true heaven.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) too concurred with Plato with regard to the fact that the thing does not exist without the Idea but does not agree to the premise that Idea can exist in isolation from things. According to Aristotle, the idea of the thing is located within the thing itself. The idea,

the matter, the cause and the aim are the four principles of the structure of anything as an organism and everything is the result of creative activity. All the diversity of the material world is based on varying correlations of idea and matter in their casual – purposive – embodiment. Aristotle views the soul as nothing other than the principle of a living body and this principle is an organizing, directing and even commanding one. The idea of a living body is its life principle, i.e. its soul. But any soul moving a body also has its own idea which Aristotle calls mind. So the soul is nothing but the energy or actuality of mind or thought. Mind is the idea of all ideas and in existence there is nothing higher than the ideas or mind. Whereas the individual human soul moves here and there in different direction, the mind of the whole cosmos which comprehends absolutely everything cannot itself move since it has already embraced everything. It is out of the identity of idea and matter that life is born and life is a work of art. This human work of art is a tragic one. Thus we find that Aristotle was a man who looked for the meaning of reality and formulated the truths he discovered. Reality is full of contradictions and these contradictions seem perpetual. Though Aristotle represents a

courageous answer to the question of the meaning of life, we cannot say that it can be considered the best. As for the route to search the truth and surmount life's contradictions, everyone must figure it out for himself.

One of the important shifts in the history of western thought came about when, instead of talking about mind and thinking substance or about pure reasons and judgment, Hegel (1770-1831) began talking about consciousness and self-consciousness. Freud's concept of the 'subconscious' called attention to the fact of consciousness. In the same period, consciousness was being tentatively explored through one of the special forms appropriate to the age – the form of the novel. One thinks of Dostoevsky, Virginia Woolf, Proust, Joyce and Faulkner. In this context one thinks as well of Samuel Beckett.

Beckett insisted that art must admit into itself what he calls "the mess" or the "confusion". The confusion is not the natural intention of conversation. We cannot listen to a conversation for five minutes without being acutely aware of the confusion. It is all around us and our only

chance of renovation was to open our eyes and see the mess though it is not a mess we could make sense of. One could only speak of what is in front of him.

If the relation between form and chaos is the technical problem which the artist must solve, the chaos itself is Beckett's continuing theme. By the word "the chaos", he means absurdity of human condition. By the word 'absurd' we mean ridiculous or funny or ugly or unpleasant. The word comes from the Latin 'surdus' meaning deaf. But it is also used of musical sounds, where it means 'unharmonious'. A person may be 'absurd' if he is so stupid as to be unable to hear or understand what is being said. A thing or situation may be absurd if it is not understood by a person of normal intelligence. Of more relevance is the fact that the Latin 'surdus' was used to translate Euclid's 'alogos', the term for irrational numbers. It can also mean "without a name" or "having no name" or briefly "The Unnamable", which is, of course, the title of the third volume of Beckett's trilogy. So the word means unnamable or unintelligible. The absurd is impressive to the human logos, to human



speech and reason. Hence the writer's dilemma. His task is to discourse upon the intelligible, to name the unnamable. What is absurd in human existence? Why is it absurd? Because being human and existing are mutually contradictory. One can be a human being if one does not have to exist and one can not exist though not as a human being. But one cannot exist and be a human being in the same place, at the same time. There are a number of reasons for this. To be a human being is to be body and mind but what one needs and wants a body for is what, as mind, one neither needs nor wants and vice versa. To be a human being is to want to know and to love, that is to say, to become one with the other, but the other is precisely that which one cannot become one. To be a human being is to want to say who one is, but who one is precisely is what one cannot say. To be a human being is to want to be self-grounded which is precisely what a human being is not and cannot be. In other words, man is not congruous with the conditions provided for the existence. He and his world do not suit with each other, do not make a fit.

There is, of course, a tradition in the West that holds that whatever problems man has, they result from the fact he does not use his head. If

he used his head, he would see that this world is the best of all possible worlds and is exactly adjusted to the support of human existence. This tradition runs from contemporary Marxist and Christian thinkers back through Hegel and the rationalists of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries to the medieval school, to Aristotle and Plato, and to its source in Parmenides. This tradition acknowledges that there are more or less serious flaws in the system but holds that these can be corrected either now or in the future by the application of reason or faith or science or technology. The ground of this tradition is the principle that cosmos and logos are congruent with each other. If 'non being' cannot either be expressed or recognized, 'being' can be both recognized and expressed. According to Parmenides, it is the same thing to think and to be. But according to Democritus, Naught exists just as much as Aught. In reality, both atoms and the void exist; but since man can have knowledge only of the ways in which the atoms impinge upon the senses, he can have no knowledge of the void. Truth is matter merely of human customs and conventions. We know nothing in reality, for truth lies in an abyss. This means that the cosmos and human logos are incongruent, incompatible,

unharmonious and their relations can properly be spoken of only as absurd.

The Greeks dealt with the cosmos in terms of being and non-being, truth and ignorance. The Hebrews dealt with it in terms of life and death, justice and injustice, happiness and misery. As the Bible says,

Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not. For there is hope of tree, if it is be cut down, that it will sprout again and the tender branch thereof will not cease. But man dieth and wasteth away, yea, man giveth up the ghost and where is he?  
(Job 14: 1-2, 7,10).

This too is absurd; for man would live and be happy but existence gives him suffering and death. So the idea of the absurd is not a new idea. It goes back in the west from Sartre and Camus and the Christian ascetic and pietistic traditions to Roman stoicism and Greek skepticism and cynicism or Oriental wisdom Literature such as the Book of Job and

Ecclesiastes. The idea is implicit in every event that merits the adjective 'tragic'. The question arises as to how to deal with the despair and anguish of the person for whom 'the mess' is an existential fact. Only a very few alternatives have been found capable of dealing adequately with this fact. Human reason is not one of these. For reason, once it finds itself confronted by both being and non-being, is capable only of asking the question, not of supplying the answer. But love has been celebrated in the romantic tradition as conquerer of all, even of the last foe, death. In the stoic tradition, courage has sometimes been found adequate to carry man through the tribulations of his world. Love, courage and God; these three have been what western man has turned to for the strength to endure what otherwise has seemed unendurable.

Yet, there also has been a fourth way of dealing with the mess: laughter. It lacks the dignity, the pathos, the heroism, the nobility of the other ways; but it too has worked impressively. Man does not fit to his world. The world is like an overcoat that is much too long or a pair of boots that are too small. But the sight of a man tripling over his own

overcoat is funny. Incongruity is the basis of the comic, and a metaphysical incongruity is the basis of metaphysical laughter. Yet laughter is not the final word either, for in Beckett's world there is no final word. His world is a syzygy and for every laugh, there is a tear, for every position, an opposition, for every thesis, there is an antithesis, for every affirmation a negation. His art is a Democritean art, energized precisely by the dialectical interplay of opposites – body and mind, the self and the other, speech and silence, life and death, hope and despair, being and non-being, yes and no. each of his major works is built upon such contraries and oppositions. Murphy is built on the opposition of mind and body; Watt on the relation between the knower and the known, lover and the beloved; Waiting for Godot is built on the contrast between the actuality of the contingent, inauthentic self and the possibility of the self-grounded, authentic self. In the trilogy Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable the effort to be and say what one is, gets opposed by the inadequacy of languages, the annihilating effect of time and the reflexive structure of consciousness.

Waiting for Godot explores a static situation. Vladimir and Estragon have complementary personalities. The opposition of their temperaments is the cause of endless bickering between them and often leads to the suggestion that they should part; yet, being complementary natures, they are also dependent on each other and have to stay together. Pozzo and Lucky represent the relationship between the body and mind, the material and the spiritual sides of man with the intellect subordinate to the appetites of the body. Godot has become the objective of a quest for identity. It has been suggested that it is a weakened form of God. It suggests the interventions of a supernatural agency capable of altering the situation. The subject of the play is not Godot but waiting. The act of waiting is an essential condition of life, and in our life we wait for something. It is in the act of waiting, we experience the flow of time in its purest, most evident form. As Beckett points out in his analysis of Proust,

There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday, because yesterday has deformed us or been deformed by us. Yesterday is not a

milestone that has been passed but a daystone on the beaten tracks of the years and irremediable part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday. The flow of time confronts us with the basic problem of being – the problems of nature of the self, which being subject to constant change in time, is in constant flux and therefore even outside our grasp – personality whose permanent reality can only be apprehended as retrospective hypothesis. The individual is the seat of constant process of decantation, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of the past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours. (4-5)

We are subject to the process of time flowing through us and it changes us. In doing so, we are at no single moment in our lives identical with ourselves. Hence we are disappointed at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment. Attainment is the identification of the subject with the object of the desire. The subject has died and perhaps many

times on the way. If Godot is the object of Vladimir's and Estragon's desire (waiting), he seems naturally beyond their reach. It is significant that the boy who acts as go-between fails to recognize the pair from day to another day. We can never be sure that the human beings we meet are the same today as they were yesterday.

Waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change. 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 tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops" (Godot 33). One day is like another and when we die, we might never have existed. Pozzo exclaims,

... have you not done tormenting me with accursed time?  
One day, is that not enough for you, like any other day, he  
went dumb. One day I went blind, one day we will go deaf,  
one day we were born, one day we will die, that same day,



the same second. They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams as instant then it's night once more (89).

Vladimir and Estragon live in hope. They wait for Godot. His coming will stop the flow of time. It will bring them peace of rest from waiting. They are hoping to be saved from the evanescence and instability of the illusion of time and to find peace and permanence outside it. The routine of waiting for Godot stands for habit. The habit presents us from reaching the painful but fruitful awareness of the full reality of being. In his work on Proust, Beckett comments,

Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit, life is habit or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals. Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects. The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptation represents the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious painful, mysterious and fertile when

for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being. (qtd. in Esslin, Absurd 58)

The suffering of being is the free play of every faculty. The pernicious devotion of habit paralyses our attention and drugs our senses of perception. As Esslin remarks, “Waiting for Godot opens vistas on so many different perspectives. It is open to philosophical, religious and psychological interpretation; yet above all, it is a poem on time, evanescence and the mysteriousness of existence, the paradox of change and stability, necessity and absurdity” (Esslin, Absurd 60). Endgame is a drama that reflects the constituent part of one’s ego, the different aspects of a simple personality. It is a monodrama depicting the dissolution of a personality in the hour of death. It has become a shaft driven deep down into the core of being. The short mime play Act Without Words is a commentary on Beckett’s views about the inter-relation between material wants and a feeling of restlessness and futility.

Krapp’s Last Tape deals with the flow of time and the instability of the self. All That Fall and Embers deal with waiting, guilt and futility of pinning our hopes on things or human beings. Beckett’s plays reveal the

experience of temporality and evanescence. His sense of the tragic difficulty of becoming aware of one's own self in the merciless process of renovation and destruction that occurs with change in time is expressed. The difficulty of communication between human beings, the unending quest for reality in a world in which everything is uncertain and the tragic nature of all live relationships and the self deception of friendships also find expression in his plays.

Reality, he argued, is a perpetuum, a random continuum of phenomena, devoid of any meaningful design. Human beings usually obscure this fact, for to accept that reality is without order, would be to acknowledge that human existence is without purpose or meaning. This would cause us to experience existential anguish, what Beckett calls 'the suffering of being'. (Counsell 113)

Everything beyond the subjective consciousness of the individual is illusory. Even the consciousness itself may be illusory. It may not be possible to know anything beyond that illusion. For him, the self is not stable but a continually shifting phenomenon.