

Beckett as an Avant-garde: His Plots and Characters in Absurdity

T.M. Thomas “A study of Samuel Beckett's plays in relation to the theatre of the absurd” Thesis. Department of English, St.Thomas College Thrissur, University of Calicut, 2003

Chapter Three /

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In chapter two, Beckett's early life, his education, early influences in life and his indebtedness to various writers have been dwelt at length. Moreover, light has been thrown on his attitude to art, music, nature and religion. In fact it seems that in his vision, Beckett is revealing his own struggle to find a way to express the dilemma of man's inexplicable mortality in the face of the universe and a 'non-existent' God. We may now look at the plots and characters of Beckett.

The drama is considered a specific form of compound literary art. Its very existence owes to the interest of the people in it. To rouse the interest of the people, it should express human passion and action. The events and action in the drama constitute its plot. Therefore, the success of a play depends upon the clear and effective disposition of

the raw material. The nature and the quality of the material should have universal applicability also. The themes must possess a substantial value and a genuine human meaning. But in the case of Beckett, his plots do not fulfil any of these conditions. Instead, his stories are incomplete. The subjects of his plots may be a situation, a condition of human life, the sound of the sea or the movement of a tape etc. A glance into the plots of Beckett's plays will reveal the various features and contours of his thematic treatment, especially in juxtaposition with the themes in the Scriptures.

The term 'Absurd' has been popularised by Martin Esslin. In his book The Theatre of the Absurd (1991) he makes a full study of the drama of Ionesco, Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov and others. He traces the intellectual and philosophical backgrounds to this type of drama. We do not find any deliberate literary movement or any intellectual argument behind Beckett's plays but a modernist feeling widely diffused in our time is noticed. The notion that God is dead, is especially significant in this context. This feeling deprives man of the sense of a transcendental purpose in life. It inculcates a sense of the futility of life whose only object seems to be death. Man has only his

own puny resources to attempt to give significance to the void left by the 'disappearance' of God.

The American dramatist Eugene O'Neil (1888-1953) locates the root of the sickness of our time in "the death of the old god and the incapacity of science and materialism to give a new god to the still living instinct. The dramatist's task is to find a new meaning of life with which to allay man's fear of death" (Esslin 117). Beckett is a dramatist who asserts that the duty of an artist is to express the totality and complexity of his experience regardless of the public's lazy demand for easy comprehensibility. He states:

'And if you don't understand it, Ladies and Gentleman it is because you are too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other. This rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense is made possible by what I may call a continuous process of copious intellectual salivation. The form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon can fulfil no higher function

than that of stimulus for a tertiary or quartary conditioned reflect of dribbling comprehension' (qtd. in Esslin 31).

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Beckett's dramatic craft is its utilisation of the theatrical medium. His plays effect their signification using little more than the basic resources of theatre itself. All his works employ bare or sparsely furnished stages, the fictional loci consist only of their spatial dimension, which are represented by the real height, breadth and depth of the playing area, the space contained by wings, flies and rear flat or wall. Often, space is further shaped with light. Beckett's instructions for the set of Waiting for Godot are minimalist for it requires the depiction of only a country road, a tree, or an evening. The play is to be enacted on a stage representing place. Apart from a leafless tree, the only sign that is used to indicate the play's hypothetical other place, is the real place for stage. In Krapp's Last Tape, Rockaby (1981) and Footfalls (1976), the action occurs in an illuminated area on a darkened stage. The 'known' world of the play is sculpted out of obscuring darkness with directional theatrical lighting. Even spot lights are employed in this fashion.

The locus of That Time (1976) is comprised of an old man's spotlighted face hanging in the air in a pitch dark void while in Not I (1973) the scene is further reduced to that of an illuminated mouth. When we examine the play Waiting for Godot we come to know some of the dramatic methods Beckett uses. The play's setting is vague and unlocalised. Vladimir, a Russian name, Estragon, a French name, Pozzo, Italian and Lucky, English, or American stand in favour of the general rather than the local. By creating the two tramps in the play he strips them of jobs, a social role, a family, all of a paraphernalia of existence. They are even deprived of their memory. They are not sure of their identity, or others' identity, even place or time. In the opinion of Esslin, "An artist like Beckett does not concern himself with abstract and general varieties even if there is room for them in this view of the world" (Esslin 4).

The theatre of Samuel Beckett can be described as a theatre of absence. The sacred and the rationalistic paradigms impute a purposeful design to the universe. They assume that the material world conforms to an immaterial order and outcome. It is on this basis that they credit reality with meaning. When we ascribe to objects and

events a place in their design, such paradigms grant them a higher conceptual significance. This effects a transcendence of their identity as mere material things. But Beckett challenged these principles. In his view, we do not see the world objectively but annex it, make sense of experience to manufacture the illusion of a knowable universe. For this purpose we use religion and science and effect a comparable ordering of our world in our day-to-day actions. Thus we organise existence in the very process of living. It is this proposition that lies at the core of Beckett's theatre. His stage, therefore, offers a vision of reality which is composed of brute things. It depicts a universe in which all supposed meaning is manufactured in the eyes of its beholders.

It is not that Beckett's stage is meaningless. It offers, as its meaning, that there is no meaning. He depicts a realm composed solely of the material one without a conceptual dimension. This absence is literalised in Beckett's dramatic craft. Each of his works lacks several of the elements we expect of theatre. With minimal sets or none at all, his plays lack defined place. None has a narrative in the usual sense. Dimensions of movement are often missing from his

stage. Dialogue may be similarly lacking for words, may be severed from any tangible speaker by being recorded by tape, which is denied response in Beckett's actual monologues. Even the most basic component of the live medium, the human figure, appears in partial form. His plays deal less in plots than in situations because they entail placing characters in situations, in markedly restricted circumstances. The fictional lives of Beckett's protagonists are dictated by the circumstances in which they are depicted. We generally assume that our lives have a meaning or purpose; they transcend mere physical survival because they are part of a higher order. But the lives of Beckett's characters are determined by the brute material circumstances of their dramatic situation which dramatises human kind's encounter with extraordinary physical limits. Beckett illustrates the earth-boundness of human existence, the merely material level at which life is lived.

In some of his plays, disability takes more abstract forms with characters reduced to faces or mouths, immobilised or shown maniacally speaking or pacing the stage. Such images figure an existence shaped by privation, the lack, loss, or the absence of some

fundamental faculty or dimension of human experience. Such images function in an oblique way. Darkness, silence, disability, immobility, scarcity – each of these is negative. We understand the significance of darkness as the lack of light, read immobility as a loss of free movement, perceive physical impairment in reference to an ideal of the able body and so on. Our experience of interpreting Beckett's work, therefore, entails an implicit comparison in which it is found lacking the cultural situation in which we have placed ourselves. Thus reading his stage itself involves the recognition of an absence, his loci as worlds of the negative.

Beckett rejects the use of the sequential plot, the idea of telling a story. Waiting for Godot is a play in which nothing happens twice. It presents only a basic condition or situation where temporal notions like beginning, middle and end inextricably linked with the concept of story, have no place. Similarly Beckett has a wonderful gift for creating vivid dialogue but he is not interested in the subtleties of characterisation and motivation. He lays emphasis on the need for relationship rather than on psychological individuation. Beckett reveals man's helplessness even in his delusion that some power

outside him exists that would give meaning to his life. In other words, it is the hopeful hopeless fiction that ties him to an inauthentic existence. For instance in Waiting for Godot each time Pozzo enters he is temporarily mistaken for Godot himself. It is not that Godot is Pozzo but rather that Godot might, if he exists, be very much like Pozzo. We must remember that Pozzo has not enslaved Lucky or at least that is not the whole truth. Lucky may have chosen his enslavement. The Pozzo-Lucky relationship may then be seen as a parallel to the Vladimir-Estragon relationship with the illusory Godot. It indicates Beckett's idea of the Christian relationship of man with his arbitrary and illusory God.

Beckett is of the view that we always find something to give us the impression that we exist. Beckett implies that there is no Godot to give purpose and point to the 'immense confusion'. Waiting for Godot, therefore, is an empty and sterile activity. Its main purpose seems to disguise from the tramps the void and the nothingness in which their lives are lived out, which is the reality. It is in the various and unceasing strategies that the two old men adopt to hide from themselves the awareness of the encompassing void. As Esslin

remarks, “This dread of the void behind the feelings of doubt and bitterness alternating with the resignation is the realm of existence where the suffering of being might lead to transition” (Esslin 127). Estragon sums up the point of all this: “We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?” To this, Vladimir retorts “Yes, yes, we’re magicians!”(P 69). If their game gives them the illusion of purpose and activity their very words serve to blot out the awful silence.

The relationship between the habit and the void is very often dealt with in his plays. Habit is seen as a sort of shield which protects one from reality conceived as nothingness but there are moments in the life of every individual when the protective habits break down and he becomes aware of true reality. Beckett clearly implied that such moments should be cherished, so that one may be able to begin living authentically or genuinely (being) instead of merely existing in the boredom of living. This is painful because giving up any habit is painful.

Another point central to Beckett’s dramatic proposition is that with no possibility of purpose or a future goal, human action cannot

move forward in time. Habit therefore lacks development. It merely repeats. In a world without purpose, time becomes a dimension of pure decline. We face that inevitable descent into deterioration and death that begin as soon as we are born. Beckett's work is filled with testaments to time as a corrosive force. With no possibility of meaningful development, time in Beckett's theatre describes a path of circularity, a continual present without the potential for change. For Beckett, the sense we make of our world, the order we project upon it, is illusory; all supposed meanings are constructs fostered by habit. Thus we find that the world of Samuel Beckett is full of paradoxes – deliberate contradictions which negate every possibility of movement, knowledge, rationality, understanding and coherence on the part of the creatures that inhabit that curious world.

Thematic Curves in Beckett's Plays

Waiting for Godot is a tragi-comedy in two Acts. Two men, Vladimir and Estragon dressed as tramps remain on a blasted heath and they are waiting to keep an appointment with somebody called

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Godot. All on a sudden, two men appear. They are Pozzo, a master and Lucky, his servant. Lucky has a rope tied round his neck and driven with a whip. At last, the master and the servant move towards a fair where Lucky is to be sold. Soon afterwards, a boy comes with a message from Godot. He will not come that night but surely come the next day. The boy disappears. The two old men talk for a while, consider hanging themselves, decide to move on but motionless near the tree as the curtain falls. The same situation with slight variations is repeated in Act II. The tree has sprouted four or five leaves overnight. Pozzo and Lucky re-appear but now Pozzo is blind and Lucky is dumb. Godot's messenger, apparently the same boy insists that this is the first time that he has come. The message remains the same. Vladimir and Estragon talk for a time, consider hanging themselves, decide to move on but are still sitting motionless near the tree as the curtain falls.

This play crystallizes inaction into a dramatic action. Vivian Mercier opines that in this play, "Nothing happens twice" (Hayman 4). It does not tell a story. It explores a static situation. Waiting is to experience the action of time which is constant change. And yet as

nothing real ever happens, 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. Everyone knows that this is the play about waiting for one who does not come. The play constructs about its two actors the conditions and the quality of waiting so much so that no one blames the dramatist's perverse whim for the withholding of Godot and the disappointment of their expectations. According to Hugh Kenner the world of this play resembles France occupied by the Germans in which its author spent the war years (Kenner 30). A ravaged and blasted landscape, a man of property and his servant in flight and the anxiety of the two who wait are pointers in this direction. The substance of the play is waiting amid uncertainty. It is a common human experience. We have all waited perhaps not by a tree at evening or on a country road for someone, but merely waited. Each of us has had his Godot if only in someone from whom for several days, we have expected a letter. Beckett makes the audience share the waiting and explicates the quality of the waiting not with a plot but with an event. He fills the time with beautifully symmetrical structures. The two Acts are symmetrically constructed, a

Pozzo-Lucky incident and the appearance of the boy whose report is that Godot will not come that day, but surely the next day. The stage is divided into two halves by the tree, while the human race is divided into two, Didi and Gogo, and then into four, Didi-Gogo and Pozzo-Lucky, when with the boy's arrival into two again, 'our sort' and Godot's sort. The play converges on certain stark statements, as that of Pozzo:

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It is abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we will go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? They give astride of a grave, the gleams an instant, then it is night once more (89).

We are not sure that the play's two days are successive. There are many days like these, that all waiting and all journeying are endless.

Let us examine how the theme of Waiting for Godot has bearing on the Bible. When we try to establish the identity of Godot who is

pictured as a saviour, we cannot put turn to the Scriptures for further clarifications.

The play essentially is a prolonged and sustained metaphor which makes a particular appeal to the mood of liberal uncertainty prevailing in the modern world. It is a modern morality play on certain established Christian themes. The total effect of this play is not to lower but to raise our idea of human dignity.

The purpose of human life is a question that requires our answer. Since we do not know where to look for an answer, it may appear to be a difficult question. Some unknown force has imposed on us this existence. We suffer as a result of this. We try to impose meaning on our existence even when our situation is hopeless and the world appears chaotic. It is in this context that Waiting for Godot captures our imagination and leads us to the view of the world with its archetypes that represent humanity. Efforts are made to prove that a human being's life is dependent on chance and, by extension time is meaningless; but at the same time, there is an affirmation of the fulfilment of hope.

Hopelessness and hope are juxtaposed in the play. The title of

the play itself is a declaration of the faith from which hope emanates. Waiting is the result of hope. Hope is to be reposed in someone or something. At the very outset of the play, there is the mention of the savior and the parables of the two thieves from the Bible. Therefore, the title itself, among other things may have its roots in the Biblical verse: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Christ is here pictured as the author and the fulfilment of the believer's faith. The dramatist by alluding to the salvation of a thief and the role of the Saviour in this episode weaves into the texture of the play biblical threads. Salvation and damnation are the two basic tenets of the Christian faith. It will be appropriate to relate the context when Christ revealed himself as the Saviour of the world.

The time was noon and Christ was wearied with his journey. He sat down at Jacob's well. But along with his weakness, there appeared his omniscience and He read the heart of a Samaritan woman. In the long conversation between the two, there was a progression of spiritual development. It finally ended in her coming

to the knowledge of Christ, the Saviour. With his master-skill, the Lord exposed her whole wanton career and like a lightning flash, fastened guilt upon her conscience, which resulted in her honest confession. The Lord vindicated the Jews by saying, "It is from the Jews that salvation comes" (John 4:22). Indeed the Messiah, the son of God and Saviour would rise from among them. Salvation is equivalent to the saviour. Many Samaritans of that town came to believe in him because of the woman's testimony. It was no longer because of what she said but because they had heard him and they knew that he was in truth, the Saviour of the world. This was the first time the phrase "Saviour of the World" was used in the Bible to describe the Lord.

There is a theory that the play is about the second coming of Christ. This claim is to be looked into on the strength of the clues and the evidences available in the play. Even when we are told by Beckett not to read anything into his work, we are not prevented from it. If the play is an existential piece, there will be an implied aspect of religion and the questioning thereof because this is a facet of human society and it helps us deal with existential dilemma.

To find an answer to the question ‘Who is Godot?’, we may subject the following lines to scrutiny:

VLADIMIR. (softly) Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?

BOY. Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR. Fair or ... (He hesitates) ... or black?

BOY. I think it’s white, Sir. (92)

When we think of God or Christ, very often the portrait of Jehovah / Christ as a Caucasian male with a long flowing beard comes to our mind. The boy has seen Godot and his report sheds ample light on the identity of Godot leading to the picture of Christ.

On one occasion, Godot is pictured as one who is capable of punishment. This reflects the character of the Judeo-Christian-Islam God:

ESTRAGON. And if we dropped him? (pause) If we
dropped him?

VLADIMIR. He’d punish us. (93)

At the same time, we notice the redemptive power of Godot in the following lines:

VLADIMIR. We'll hang ourselves tomorrow (pause)
 unless Godot comes.

ESTRAGON. And if he comes?

VLADIMIR. We'll be saved. (94)

Godot will be a source of relief to them from this empty and boring stage. The stage represents life. We always fill in the time waiting and hoping for something. This is the subject of the play. If life has no meaning this play also has no meaning.

The word 'God' as a part of the word 'Godot' has some significance. Waiting for Godot seems to assume meaning. Further, the title in French includes the pronoun 'En' which has the connotation of meaning 'people'. Therefore, humans are waiting for Godot i.e. we are waiting for God. In the play, Vladimir is the one who consistently remembers who they are waiting for. Estragon always wants to leave although he never does. Vladimir always tries to bolster up the lagging faith of Estragon like a preacher. He tries to equip us to face Judgement Day. In this context, it is worth examining the following quote.

ESTRAGON. Give me a carrot ... It's a turnip!

VLADIMIR. Oh pardon! I could have sworn it was a
carrot. (2)

‘Carrot’ figuratively means a reward or advantage promised to somebody to persuade him to do something. If Estragon waits until he meets Godot, it will definitely be a reward or advantage for him to get salvation or in other words, Vladimir makes a carrot and stick approach.

The boy being the harbinger of the advent of Godot, represents the angel sent from heaven to inform us about what is going to take place. The time of the Second Coming is marked by the presence of the Arch Angel: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of Arch Angel and dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16). The background before the arrival of the messenger boy is described by the following words:

VLADIMIR. Was I sleeping, while the others
suffered? Am I sleeping now?
Tomorrow when I wake or think I do,
what shall I say of today? (...) Astride of
a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the

hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens) But habit is a great deadener. (He looks again at Estragon). At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (pause) I can't go on! (Pause) what I have said? He goes feverishly to and fro, halts finally at extreme left, broods. Enter Boy right. He halts, silence. (90-91)

This quote gives us sufficient clues to the signs of Christ's second coming. 'Sleep', 'birth from the grave' (resurrection), cries in the air, are pointers to this.

Moreover, Beckett has created a character called Lucky whose sufferings resemble the sufferings of Christ. Lucky's actions amount to a criticism of Christianity to the effect that Christianity does not serve the purpose it was intended for. Lucky is in chains and he is

humiliated. Estragon beats, curses and even spits on him. Jesus also was subjected to the same type of humiliation at the hands of the Roman soldiers. The picture of Lucky carrying the burden of Pozzo's bag and being led to a public fair for sale is similar to the parading of Christ on the hill for public scorn. Estragon wipes Lucky's eyes and Pozzo's words: "wipe away his tears, he'll feel less forsaken" (32), can allude to Jesus' cry from the cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me"? (Mark 15:34). When rope cuts into Lucky's neck he chokes. Jesus, too, suffocates as a result of crucifixion.

Pozzo's words: "Why he doesn't make himself comfortable?" (31) is similar to the taunt, the spectators hurled at Jesus, "Save yourself, why don't you? Come down off the cross if you're God's son" (Matt. 26:40). Pozzo states that Lucky always carries the luggage because "he wants to mollify me, so that I will give up the idea of parting with him" and Lucky "imagines that when I see how well he carries I'll be tempted to keep him on in that capacity" (31). In the same manner, Jesus carried his burden of crucifixion to awaken man's faith in God for time to come. His apostles were entrusted with the mission to "make disciples of all nations ...

teaching them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always” (Matt. 28:18-20).

Jesus also desired that humanity should accept him as a teacher, a comforter and a deliverer of sinners. In the same vein, Pozzo wanted that Lucky should “understand beauty, grace, truth of the first water” (33). But Pozzo feels that both Lucky and Christianity have outlived their usefulness:

VLADIMIR. After having sucked all the good out of him, you chuck him away like a ... like a banana skin. Really ...

POZZO. (Groaning, clutching his head) I can't bear it ... any longer ... the way he goes on ... you've no idea ... It's terrible ... he must go ... (he waves his arms) ... I'm going mad ... (he collapses, his head in his hands) ... I can't bear it ... any longer ...

POZZO. (Sobbing) He used to be so kind ... so helpful ... and entertaining ... my good angel ... and now ... he's killing me (34).

In the past Pozzo got benefit from Lucky. Now the benefits are gone. Something that occurred in the time between the past and the present has led to the reduction of Lucky's capabilities and their overall effect. Lucky can no longer soothe or satisfy Pozzo's spirit. Instead he torments it. The acts on the part of Lucky constitute spiritual abuse. He has become a liability to Pozzo. Therefore, he considers him a banana peel, a mere trash. If Lucky is considered a parallel to dying Christ, this dialogue reveals two things. First the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus is no longer worth what it was once. Second, this failure has led to spiritual failure. Just as the value of Jesus' sacrifice has diminished, the actions and words of Lucky have also degenerated: "He used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, fandango, the horn pipe. He capered. For joy. Now that's the best he can do" (40).

The sacrifice of an articulate Christ as a suffering man is now a mechanised action for amusing bored men. Further, it will be tossed like a banana peel. Like the dance, the religion also has changed in its character. Lucky "used to think prettily once" (39). But now he speaks in a running babble and his verbal tirade conceals meaning:

“Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattman of a personal God qua qua qua qua with a white beard ... who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphaisa loves us dearly...” (42).

The complexity of Lucky’s talk in the scientific style, though incoherent, gives rise to the subject of his discourse: Christ, the personal God. The belief of the Christian is that Christ is God as well as human. He is literally God as a person and he lives among heights away from humanity’s shortcomings. The words ‘divine apathia’ ‘divine athambia’ and ‘divine aphasia’ can allude to the verse, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). A God with divine unconcern and apathy does not mean that He is callous or cruel but he is a provider of gifts and lights and not prone to variableness and turning. It can also mean that Christ was introduced into a world of apathia, athambia and aphasia and he with his words and miracles was forced to fill man’s hollow.

All That Fall is a play for Radio. Beckett states that it is a text written to come out of the dark. There is nothing to see. It offers us mental pictures. An old woman Maddy Rooney is on her way to Boghill, a country station, to meet her blind husband, Dan, returning from his office in the city. She passes a ruined house in which a woman is playing an old record of "Death and the Maiden". Then she is overtaken first by Christy, a local carter who wants to sell her some dung, next by Mr. Tyler, a retired bill-server whom she sends away so that she may mourn her dead daughter. Then she comes across her old admirer Mr. Slocum, clerk of the local race course. He is driving in his car. He offers her a lift and after great exertions by both of them, the fat and garrulous lady is hoisted into the car and they get off for the station, killing a chicken on the way. When they arrive, there is the same trouble in getting Mrs. Rooney out of the vehicle but now Mr. Slocum is helped by a porter.

Mrs. Rooney is reluctantly assisted up the steps to the station by the sanctimonious Miss. Fitt. A conversation ensues with the station master Mr. Barrell who cannot explain why the train should be so late. The train arrives fifteen minutes late. Rooney finds her husband. They

start off home. When she tries to find out what delayed the train, he is at first evasive. Then he gives a dramatised but quite uninformative account of the journey. This is interspersed with all kinds of talk about his possible retirement, the number of steps from the station to the road, etc. At one point Dan admits to a desire to murder a child, confessing that he has often considered attacking Jerry, the boy who usually leads him home from the station. Presently Jerry comes running after them with an object like a ball which Mr. Barrell says Dan has dropped. At first Dan denies this, then he violently takes it and offers no explanation beyond the phrase, "It is a thing which I carry about with me". Jerry starts back for the station but is recalled by Maddy who wants to know why the train was so late. Jerry tells her that a child had fallen from it under the wheels and had been killed. He then runs off and Mrs. Rooney trudges on home through a tempest of wind and rain.

The play ends ambiguously according to the daytime logic but it ends logically according to the laws of a world where all reality is merely audible. Dan Rooney has pondered how it would be to murder a child – 'nip some young doom in the bud' – and his train came in late

because a child, as we learn at the end, slipped down under the wheels, and yet it seems meaningless to ask whether he pushed her there for the very journey. Since it occupies no air, time is sheer illusion conjured up for us by his telling of what he chooses to tell, a telling according to which he did nothing at all except experience bladder distress. This epistemological point remains faintly irritating however intimate our acquaintance with the play is; but it interferes little with the play's enchantment as the enchantment is dependent on language, notably the vowel-rich language of the blind man's wife, in counterpoint to her husband's frigid rhetoric. Beckett has lavished all his resources of eloquence on shaping the speeches.

The play conveys for its theme a sense of transience. The poor woman's existence is attested by a record she is playing 'Death and Maiden'. Maddy Rooney is herself in decay, destroyed with sorrow and pining and by gentility, church going, fat, rheumatism and childlessness reflecting that it is suicide to be abroad and a lingering dissolution to be at home. Though she is a great fat jelly and though one of the high points of the play is the desperate exertion required to set her into a motor car and then get her out of it, we are oddly aware

that all this is a tour de force of illusion. For, her body or the car or anything does not exist for our senses at all; but there are only objurgations and sounds of effort. All have faded into sound and incomparable language and the language itself has only the richness of decay. In Mrs. Rooney's brief duet with the landscape, we sense her terrible isolation: "All is still. No living soul in sight. There is not one to ask. The world is feeding. The wind scarcely stirs the leaves and the birds are tired singing. The cows and sheep ruminant in silence. The dogs are hushed and the hens sprawl torpid in the dust. We are alone. There is no one to ask" (14). In the words of Esslin, "Instead of establishing a bridge of friendliness Mrs. Rooney's attempts to communicate with the people she meets on the road in All That Fall merely serve to make her more estranged from them" (Esslin, Absurd 86).

Our experience of Dan is what is important, an experience solely of his voice and words from which we learn that he is a killer at heart and has killed love and still keeps his hands clenched about love's throat. Our experience in this work to come out of the dark is of more important than an implied plot.

Beckett gives this play a melodic contour:

Rural sounds, sheep, bird, cow, cock, severally then together.

Silence.

Mrs. Rooney advances along country road towards railway station. Sound of her dragging feet. Music faints from house by way. "Death and the Maiden" The steps slow down, stop. Mrs. Rooney: Poor woman. All alone in that ruinous old house.

Music louder. Silence but for music playing. The steps resume. Music dies. Mrs. Rooney murmurs, melody. Her murmur dies. Sound of approaching cartwheels. The cart stops. The steps slow down, stop. (7)

The sound effects in All That Fall are abstractions of the objects they represent. They create mood rather than verisimilitude. The prelude of rural sounds does not simply evoke the image of a farm but establishes the connection of the play which is a mixture of realism and poetry, frustration and farce. The succession of sounds created by the various vehicles like Christy's cart, Mr. Tyler's bicycle, Conolly's van and Mr. Slocum's car, is clearly organized in a logical progression

towards the volume and danger, associated with the train. The sound effects generated by Mrs. Rooney's panting and the slow, regular rhythm of her dragging feet provide the first movement with its tedious undertone. The music in the opening sequence of the play is Schubert's Death and the Maiden (7). By inserting this particular piece Beckett introduces a tragic theme which he returns to in intervals in the play, namely, the theme of the death of a child. At the end of the play we find Rooney's pass by the house where the music from Death and the Maiden is still playing. Mr. Rooney instinctively identifies it and a silence follows. The emotional beats that are accented throughout the play underline Beckett's concern with the vivid depiction of an emotional state.

The play depicts the framework of a journey. All the characters in the play are on the move. It has a melodic contour rather than dramatic curve. Life creates an illusion of a goal-oriented journey and the dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Rooney displays their vision of a life in which suffering is the norm. A narrative description of Mr. Rooney's train journey in which the delay of the train, though an important thing, remains inexplicable till the end of the play. It is

only in the end we are told that the train was delayed because of an accident. The death of a child that fell out of the train was the mishap. The journey has three stages. First one is Mrs. Rooney's journey to the railway station to meet her husband. The second stage is the arrival of the train and the confusion Mr. Rooney experiences and the third stage is the return of Mr. and Mrs. Rooney along the country road. Mrs. Rooney sets out to meet her husband. On the way she encounters Christy a local carter, Mr. Tyler, a retired bill server and her old admirer Mr. Slocum, a clerk of a local race course. But, unlike the situation in Waiting for Godot, the expectation of Mrs. Rooney to meet her husband is fulfilled. If we examine the saga of Mrs. Rooney's life we can find that her life all along has been tragic. Barring the occasional flashes of happiness her life has been one of "lingering dissolution" (11).

Beckett delineates Mrs. Rooney as a woman who is hysterical and destroyed with sorrow and pining. Her longing for love and sighting wistfully at the lovely laburnum are expressed in the following words:

Mrs. ROONEY. ... Love, that is all asked, a little love

daily, twice daily, fifty years of twice daily
 love like parihorse – butcher's regular, what
 normal woman wants affection? A peck on
 the jaw at morning ... There is that lovely
 laburnum again. (9)

Images of sterility, decay, suffering and deaths are created by the description of the local details of a rural village in Ireland. A ruinous old house by the side of a country road, an impotent hinny with its cart of dung, a ditch filled with rotting leaves and the very name of the village itself, Boghill, are examples of scenic images that illustrate the theme of decay. Pain and suffering are predominant emotions in the play. The blindness of Mr. Rooney, the rheumatism of Mrs. Rooney, the illness of Christy's wife and daughter and the thoughts about the death of Mrs. Rooney's unborn daughter arouse feelings of pathos. Christy's cart filled with dung, Mr. Tyler's burst cycle tyre, the starting trouble of Mr. Slocum's car, the music 'Death and the Maiden' emanating from an old gramophone smack of decay. Beckett exhibits in this play the backdrop of pain and suffering. The sufferings of Mrs. Rooney are manifold. She is afflicted with disease.

The memories of her past always hunt after her. The feelings of her childlessness torment her. The blindness of her husband and her solitariness oppress her. The poignancy of her desperation can be felt when she utters the words:

Mrs. Rooney: (In anguish) Mind the hen! (Scream of brakes. Squawk of hen) Oh, mother, you have squashed her, drive on, drive on! (The car accelerates, pause) What a death! One minute picking happy at the dung, on the road, in the sun with now and then a dust bath, and then – bang! – all her troubles over (Pause) All the laying and hatching (Pause). Just one great squawk and then ... peace. (15)

When Mr. Barrel, the Station Master states that it was nice to see Mrs. Rooney up after her confining to bed for a long time, she replies that she would have preferred to lying stretched out in her comfortable bed just wasting slowly, painlessly away, keeping up her strength with arrow root and calves – foot jelly till in the end she would be seen under the blankets merely as a board. Mrs. Rooney's pessimistic view of life is expressed when she says to Mr. Tyler:

This dust will not settle in out time. And when it does
 some great roaming machine will come and whirl it all
 skyhigh again. (12)

Mrs. Rooney's oppressive loneliness is given expression in her
 words:

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 chirp) –
 are tired singing. The cows – (brief moo) – and sheep –
 (brief baa) – ruminant 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)

The background of pain and suffering in the play can be seen
 as a consequence of man's condition in an absurd world or it can be
 seen as the result of the Second World War. Over and above,
 Beckett's suffering on a personal or sentimental level also can be
 seen here. He was a sensitive person and a number of events must
 have caused pessimism in him. The 1916 Easter rebellion in Dublin

which he watched along with his father, a simple incident from his childhood in which he saw a policeman literally beating a dog to death and the undue punishment he got at school are all the events he recounted in his later life. Moreover, the death of his father and his first love Peggy Sinclair disheartened him. His frequent visits to a hospital in Dublin where his friend Dr. Gooffrey worked provided him with first hand experience of physical and mental suffering of the patients. Beckett himself had to suffer stab injury in Paris. In the fifties his mother and his brother Frank both died. His brother died of lung cancer who like Beckett had been an energetic sportsman. Beckett himself was prone to unending health problems. So the problems of pain and suffering which are so central in Beckett's works appear to have roots in direct personal experience.

Let us now try to relate the theme of suffering and transitoriness of life in this play, to the Bible. The very title 'All That Fall' takes its root in the Bible as it forms a part of the verse, "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and riseth all those that be bowed down", (Ps. 145:14). It is in the background of this verse that the suffering of Mrs. Rooney is to be viewed. Mrs. Rooney is destined to suffer and

moves from one suffering to another but there is no relief to her. This verse in the Bible becomes quite irrelevant to her. This verse is meant only to give expression to cynicism combined with despair which the human voice is capable of projecting faced with the prospect of constant pain and inescapable death.

Though Mr. Rooney used to attend sermons he could not subscribe to the view of the clergy that it was the human lot to suffer. He developed a cynical attitude towards the idea of suffering as being a part of some divine plan and preparation for the after life. This is done in order to give expression to cynicism combined with despair which the human voice is capable of projecting faced with the prospect of constant pain and inescapable death.

The train in which Mr. Rooney travelled was delayed. Mrs. Rooney tries to find out the cause of the delay but Mr. Rooney dodges all her questions. He states emphatically that she will not move until the reason for delay is given. He is evasive and drags his conversation centering on other subjects. At this juncture a boy comes and announces that the death of a child was responsible for the delay. Whether Mr. Rooney is personally responsible for the death of

the child is a debatable point. But his evasive replies and the protracted dialogue point to his involvement in the murder. When Jerry comes and reports the news about the death of the child that fell out of the carriage, he carries along with him a ball like thing which Mr. Rooney had lost. It was something that Mr. Rooney always carried with him. Mr. Barrell, the Station Master, vouches that the ball like object belongs to Mr. Rooney who was a regular commuter. Mr. Rooney had a killer instinct in him as is evident from the following words:

Mr. ROONEY. Did you ever wish to kill a child?

(Pause) Nip some young doom in the bud

(Pause) Many a time at night, in winter, on

the black road home. I nearly attacked the

boy. (Pause) Poor Jerry! (Pause) What

restrained me then? (Pause) Not fear of

man. (Pause) Shall we go on backward now

a little? (31)

On another occasion when Mrs. Rooney insists on the reason for "Fifteen minutes late! On a thirty minute run" (30), Mr. Rooney

desires that “two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat” (30) is got rid of. When they move forward, we notice that their contrapuntal monologues intersect with each other. The situation provides a tension between the two. Mrs. Rooney is mourning her lost life while Mr. Rooney is mourning the obligation to live:

Mrs. ROONEY. What is the matter, Dan? Are you not well?

Mr. ROONEY. Well! Did you ever know me to be well? The day you met me. I should have been in bed. The day you proposed to me, the doctors gave me up. You knew that, did you not? The night you married me with an ambulance. You have not forgotten that, I suppose? (Pause) No, I cannot be said to be well. (31)

The above passage shows various dualistic forces at work. The shift between cynicism and childish simplicity is a disguise for the turbulence of his emotional suffering. Mr. Rooney’s account of everything that ails him may also be parodic expression of physical decay. He is blind. He walks in darkness and commits deeds of

darkness. Because of his sinful nature he is a fallen person and it is in tune with Christian theology. Almost all the protagonists in the play are deformed in their character. Mrs. Rooney admits that she is a hag. On her way to meet her blind husband she encounters three men of her village Mr. Christy, Mr. Tyler and Mr. Slocum. They are all men of dubious morals. Tommy and Barnell, according to Mrs. Rooney are cads. Miss Fitt is hypocritically virtuous. They are all fallen in some way or other.

When Mrs. Rooney exclaims, “What is wrong with me, What is wrong with me, never tranquil, seething out of my dirty old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms, in atoms!” (13), we can understand that she is able to diagnose the root cause of her pathetic condition. Even her longing for physical love also does not alter the situation. For her “it is suicide to be abroad” (10) and “lingering dissolution” at home (11). To redeem the situation, she calls “Jesus! Jesus!” In response to the request of Mrs. Rooney to Miss Fitt to proffer her arms, Miss Fitt’s words: “Well, I suppose it is the protestant thing to do” (21) can allude the ritual of proffering hands (kiss of peace) practiced in the church worship of the protestants.

Mrs. Rooney waits for the train that brings her husband home. The late running of the train brings to her mind a host of various thoughts including collision but the train carrying her husband finally arrives removing her embarrassment. He returns losing something that looks like a ball but that is retrieved and given back to him by a boy who acted as his guide on the railway platform. The boy may represent some divine agency who is prepared to make sufficient recompense for the guilty conscience as a result of the crime Mr. Rooney is believed to have committed. Moreover Mr. Rooney's statement that he does not know the number of steps to the platform despite the fact that thousand times he has climbed them reveals man's inability to grasp the meaning of life despite his physical life on the earth. Mrs. Rooney's words: "Just cling to me and all will be well" (29) point to the fulfilment of the hope of the faithful in the Saviour. Mr. Rooney's words: "the loss of my sight was a great fillip. If I could go deaf and dumb I think that I might pant on to be a hundred" (32), also are relevant in this context. Mrs. Rooney's words, "Oh, no coughing or spitting or bleeding or vomiting just drifting gently down into the higher life" (18) refer to life after death

since death is considered to be a mere slumber as far as Christian belief is concerned.

Endgame (1958) is a play in one Act. According to Beckett the play is rather difficult and elliptic, mostly depending on the power of the text to claw, and more inhuman than *Godot*. Hamm, blind, sits in an arm chair. He wears dark glasses, a gold toque, a dressing gown and thick socks. He has a whistle with which he calls Clov, his servant. Clov brings him a dog with only three legs. Hamm's parents Nell and Nagg, both legless as the result of a cycling accident are in the ashbins. Among them, Clov alone can walk but he cannot sit down. However he is trying to leave Hamm because he bullies Clov. Nell probably dies. Hamm goes on narrating a story. Clov kills a flea on his person and a rat in his kitchen, off-stage. Clov retires to change into travelling clothes while Hamm discards his possessions one by one and settles back in his chair covering his face with a bloodstained handkerchief. Clov appears at the door with umbrella and bag, all ready for the road but as the curtain falls, he is still standing motionless on the threshold watching Hamm.

When Clov gazes through the windows and sees nothing he reports that the outdoors has been condemned by some unimaginable catastrophe. The text itself alludes to the room before us as ‘the shelter’ outside of which is death. We are to imagine a fallout shelter perhaps, and the last of ours of the last morsels of human life, after perhaps an H-Bomb explosion. The Bomb was much in the mind of Europe in 1957 when the play was published. Philip Toynbee (1889-1975) has observed:

Most of us have paid involuntary visits to hell and this is what it looks and feels like. A Beckett’s hell is everybody’s hell, though everybody is alone in it. Beckett’s world is the world of a battered heavy weight twitching and groaning on the canvas. It is the twitches and the groans, the confused memories of having once stood erect and the dazed hope of rising again – which give movement and pathos and truth to his remarkable plays. (blurb inside, Waiting for Godot)

The players are simply on stage. When all the world is a stage, conversely, the Beckettian stage is all the world including the

vanishing world. Hamm is a blind man who tells stories. His blindness is like Lear's or Homer's and he is like a James Joyce whose heroism is recognizable always in pain, in tribulation, always doggedly synthesizing the gaieties of his verbal world. Hamm may represent the dying God of whom we have been hearing since Nietzsche or a god blind and tyrannical like fate or a god with demiurge whose work is not complete as revealed from the assembly of a toy dog with three legs in the play. The play provides a stage-world where the players are kept by the dialogue and cannot go about their affairs until every night they have recited every word to the end. Theirs is the doom of perpetual re-enactment until such time as the faceless public have lost interest and the run may close. Clov's first words are a longing to be released from this ritual: "Finished, it is finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. Grain upon grain one by one and one day, suddenly there is a heap, the impossible heap. I can't be punished any more" (12).

In this play there are clues to the world's deprivations when Clov speaks that here are no more bicycle wheels or that there are not even any bicycles. For the old man in the trash-can there is no more

pap. Hamm in his lofty misery concludes that Nature has forgotten them. There is the mention of a little order in the words that Clov utters, “I love order. It’s my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust” (39). Order is immobility or else absence. A loveless world is depicted in the play. Hamm curses his father for engendering him. Hamm’s father curses him, considering the life in which Hamm maintains him. The desolation in Endgame seems more than natural. Hamm’s big world tends toward entropic featurelessness and he is glad enough of dreams that restore the old world. The big world is one in which there is no peace.

Endgame is a play that deals with the pathos of human life. Though Clov, Nagg and Nell are clownish, Hamm is the central character who creates the overall tone of the play. Hamm is the master and Clov is the servant. Their relationship is similar to the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky in Waiting for Godot. They can be cited as example for the inevitability of interdependence. Even in the face of hardships, Clov continues to maintain his allegiance to his master. The magnitude of his mounting problems is

revealed through Clov's words: "Grain upon grain, one by one and one day, suddenly there is a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap (Pause) I can't be punished any more (Pause)" (12). Job in the Bible compares his sufferings to the weight of the sand of the sea (Job 6:3). It is very selfevident that Beckett has the sufferings of Job in his mind when he creates his characters Hamm and Clov.

Moreover, the play is set in the background of a number of Biblical stories like the story of the creation of the world, the story of prophet Daniel's prophecy in the palace of King Belshazzar, revelation by St. John in the island of Patmos, the parable of the sower of the seeds, the Flood and Noah's arc, Joseph and his brothers, Adam and Garden of Eden, John the Baptist and Christ's crucifixion on the Cross at Calvary. These stories are meant to show the sufferings and misery of the major characters in the play.

In Krapp's Last Tape (1959) a table and a chair can be seen standing in a pool of strong light. The rest is in darkness. A tape recorder, a microphone and some boxes containing spools of tape are on the table. Krapp, an old man dingily dressed, white faced with a purple nose, grey haired, dishevelled, near sighted, hard of hearing is

seen walking laboriously. He begins by eating two bananas kept in a locked drawer of the table then shambles off into the darkness where he noisily uncorks a bottle and drinks. He returns, consults a ledger and finds a tape "box 3, Spool 5" lingering with great satisfaction over the word 'spool'. According to the ledger entry, this tape contains sections "Mother at rest at last, The black ball, The dark nurse, slight improvement in bowel condition, Memorable equinox and Farewell to love". Krapp puts on this tape made of his thirty ninth birthday the voice is strong, pompous yet unmistakably his at a much earlier time. Then he starts making the tape, on his sixty ninth birth day. He begins briskly enough but soon gets tired of his task and sinks back into memories of the past. Presently, he abandons the attempt altogether, replaces the earlier tape, plays over the final section again and as the curtain falls he is sitting motionless, staring before him while the tape runs on in silence.

In this play, Beckett explains that the perceiving mind is itself changing so fast that the realisation of yesterday's aspirations can provide no gratification to the self of today. As Esslin remarks, "In Krapp's Last Tape, the well turned idealistic professions of faith

Krapp made in his best years have become empty sounds to Krapp grown old” (Esslin, Absurd 86). In it he has produced the perfect slide-rule for measuring a character’s past against his present self. Beckett has created an old man who for over forty years has been keeping a sort of diary in tape and is now in the habit of playing his past tapes to help him set through the day. When he talks back at his old tapes, it produces a dialogue between two Krapps at a considerable remove from each other in time. It is a device for confronting oneself with its old self and the audience with the both.

Beckett’s belief in moments where involuntary memory is in operation is stressed here. These moments of illumination give us the only genuine insight into reality. Everyday reality as we experience is a fiction. For Beckett, there is no possibility of grace, no escape from the deadening awareness of the meaningless passage of time. For Krapp, the only reality is words. His own past self is only real for him in the form of words on a tape and the pleasure he enjoys most in the present is the pleasure of words.

Krapp’s Last Tape is the monologue of a wearish old man, 69, rearsighted and hard of hearing. He listens to his past life with the

help of recorded tapes and he realises that the Krapp on the tape is different from what he is at present. He has changed and regrets his past actions. The tape that rotates in front of him contains the activities of his life at the age of 39. It is hard to believe that he was ever that young whelp engrossed in sexual life in pursuit of carnal life with unattainable laxation. He sneers at his youth and thanks God that it is over. The tape unfolds his life in retrospect. To the extent that Krapp views his life in retrospect and resolves that he does not want to repeat that sort of life, is akin to the life of a person who falls into the mire of sin and later rises up through repentance and resolves to lead a virtuous life. This is in tune with Christian theology.

In Happy Days (1963), Winnie, a woman of about fifty stands buried to her waist in the exact centre of a mound. At the back of the mound her husband Willie, a man of about sixty, lives. He can, only move on all fours. He passes his days by reading news papers or looking at a naughty post card. Winnie spends her time talking, reminiscing, looking at Willie and taking care of her appearance. Occasionally, she breaks down but always manages to pull herself together and put a brave face on things. In Act II, she is embedded to

the neck and cannot even move her head. She now invents stories to while away the time. Willie suddenly appears in front of the mound “dressed to kill” and makes a great effort to crawl up to Winnie who can no longer give him a hand as she might have done previously. Willie falls back twice but Winnie tries to make his visit one more happy day singing a song. Willie stares at her from the foot of the mound as the curtain falls.

In the play Beckett presents us with a static situation. Winnie is trying to pass the time between walking and sleeping as pleasantly as possible in a world where the opportunities for physical movement are steadily diminishing. Winnie at first buried to her waist, is later found embedded to her neck. These changes are not explained. No new situation is produced. Winnie can no longer count on external objects to help her pass the time, but she must draw more and more upon herself. Many people complain that Beckett’s plays are sordid, repetitive, meaningless, have no story, have none of the glitter we associate with the world ‘theatrical’. Above all, they have no relation to life as we know it. We do not come across well preserved ladies buried to their waist to their necks in mounds of earth under a blazing

sky as we do in this play. But, Beckett is not concerned with reproducing what we call life as we know it. He is trying to chart a whole zone of being in the individual hitherto left severely alone by the artist. It is a play based on impact.

In Happy Days Winnie is the main character and she is a well preserved, fifty year old woman. She is embedded up to her waist in the exact centre of mound. Initially she is embedded to her waist. Later she is found embedded to her neck. Willie, her husband is at her right and lies asleep on the ground hidden by mound. Winnie is also asleep. The ringing of the bell wakes her up. "Another heavenly day" (9) greets her. She begins the days with a prayer: "For Jesus Christ sake Amen", "World without and Amen" (9-10). At the very outset of the play, we find a Beckettian character saying prayers to God. She radiates happiness and joy throughout the play. She does so even in a situation where the very proximity of her husband is no relief to her. Her husband Willie has no zeal for anything, no "interest in life" (11). Still she is inclined to pray "prayer perhaps not for naught" (12). Unlike other characters Beckett here introduces a character with a different mood. Her prayerful attitude, jovial disposition and optimism give us

a new insight into the outlook of the dramatist. The optimism of Winnie is coupled with pathos also, as her inexhaustible capacity for happiness will make any other reasonable creature miserable. Even when her body is buried in sand she finds pleasure in her small trifle actions. We see her cleaning her teeth, filing her nails, putting on lipsticks and adjusting her hat and similar other actions that are part of anyone's daily routine. Through these small actions she dissipates her anxieties and sorrows and tries to make her life happy:

WINNIE. What day? (Pause) Head up, (Normal voice)
What now? (Pause) Words fail, there are
times when even they fail. (Turning a little,
towards Willie) Is that not so, Willie?
(Pause. Turning a little further) is not that
so, Willie, Willie, that even words fail at
times. (Pause Back front) What is one to do
then until they come again? Brush and
comb the hair if it has not been done or if
there is some doubt trim the nails if they are
in need of trimming, these things tide one

over. (20)

In human life one always desires happiness but it is elusive. It is the most precious thing also. We always tend to believe that worldly gains contribute to our happiness but in the case of Winnie, a talk from the side of Willie can make her happy!

WILLIE. Oh you are going to talk to me today, this is going to be happy day! (19), Winnie always smiles when she thinks about her new style of life, but her smile goes off when she thinks about her life “in her old style”. (18)

Play (1964) is a drama in one Act. The curtain rises on a dark stage. There are three urns containing W1, M and W2. These characters have no names. They are first woman (W1) second woman (W2) and man (M). No indications are given as to place or time. These characters are in the same position with their necks held fast in the urns' mouths. They do not speak to each other. The man and the two women are all talking about a triangular relationship in which they were involved together but each one of them has a separate series of

memories about it. Their speeches are counter pointed. The minds behind them aren't even aware of each other, except in the past tense. These speeches are not made in reply to any previous speech, they are made into the void and this is too in accordance with the growing tendency for Beckett's monologues to be less and less addressed to anyone in particular. It represents the culmination of a steadily developing tendency in Beckett's stage plays to call on the actor to do less and less except talk. The playwright uses a spotlight to the speeches by focusing on the character who is to talk. Most of the time, the light settles on a single face but even when it is spread over all three, they are still quite oblivious of each other. In fact the star performer is the lighting operator. With the light flashing on, from one face to the next and with the quick toneless delivery of speech by the actors it is theatrically a very confusing experience. Beckett's interest in the story is his study of what happens to the three consciousnesses once the man opts out of both the relationships, condemning all three of them to solitude. Treated as it is, very little is communicated.

The three characters in Play are M (Man) W1 (First Woman) and W2 (Second Woman). It seems that the man is married to the

first woman, but he keeps an adulterous relationship with the second woman. They quarrel with one another because of the infidelity. Finally, the man disappears out of the lives of both the women. All of them feel a sense of isolation and suffer from guilt and anxiety. The first woman thinks of “penitence, yes at a pinch, atonement, one was resigned but no, that does not seem to be ten points either” (156). She wants to speak the truth about her life and be left in peace but she fails to get the strength. Meanwhile the second woman wishes that she becomes mad as a release from her self-consciousness. The man becomes increasingly aware of his guilty consciousness with the help of the light. The theme of adultery and infidelity lends colour to the religious character of the play. The peacelessness, isolation and loneliness are the results of sinful deeds. The verse, “The wage of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23) is relevant in this context but in the case of the man the spot light from the stage goes inside him and removes the darkness in him partially. It will be appropriate to recall the scene in the Bible in which the woman caught in adultery was brought before Christ who enlightened her with the words, “I am the light of the

world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Embers (1959) is a play in which Beckett marks the central character as mad but the madness spreads from the character to infect the whole body of the play that contains him. Henry, the protagonist sees only shingle and sea but spends his time conjuring with sounds and voices in his head to ward off aloneness. We are to learn that he always hears the sea whether he is near it or not and has the habit of talking to drown its persistent murmur. In Esslin’s words, “And in Embers the old man’s musings are equated with the beating of the waves upon the shore” (Esslin, Absurd 86). We hear the voice of a woman, Ada, Henry’s wife. We are not told, however, whether she is actually present sitting beside Henry or whether she is an abstraction in his mind like his dead father whom he also imagines as sitting beside him but whose voice is never heard. Ambiguity, abstraction—these are the possibilities peculiar to radio which Beckett is exploiting here to the full. Embers may be taken as the paradigm of everything Beckett has done since late 1950’s. It is unusual in presenting so

explicitly, albeit, enigmatically the elements of the past situation, the past happening from which the present agony is a recoiling.

Embers presents a tormented soul who longs to end his suffering. Beckett's familiar concerns are obvious in this inner narrative of Henry, the protagonist in the play. Henry is seen obsessed with his attempts to remember events from the past connected with his family and his wish to communicate with his father who is presumed as drowned. He tells himself a story about a man called Bolton, who sends for a doctor Holloway so that Henry may be given a lethal injection. But he is prepared to give only an anesthetic that will numb his pain for a limited period. The play ends with no solution and like other Beckett's characters, he is also obliged to go on with the knowledge that the next day will be the same as the previous one.

The idea that is illustrated in the play is that the present agony of an individual is what recoils from his past actions, as is expressed in the holy verse: "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction" (Gal. 6:8).

Henry seems to possess a sense of guilt with regard to the death of his father and he tries to go into his past attempting to plumb his mind for this very reason. He goes near the sea and hears its sound. By doing so, he thinks that the panic in him can be controlled by the sound of the sea.

Through Henry, Beckett presents a character who is obsessed with a sense of guilt and longing for reconciliation with his father. Henry is considered a washout by his father as is revealed by his own words: "Father! (pause) you wouldn't know me, You'd be sorry you ever had me, but you were that already, a washout that's the last I heard from you, a washout" (25). Henry is very eager to know the truth about the past catastrophe and get a new awareness of his own guilt. His wife Ada helps him in this regard by her description of the events that led to the suicide of his father by drowning. She acts as a messenger to reveal the truth as a palliating presence for him. The sense of guilt in a person leading to his repentance and reconciliation with his adversary is a Christian approach for cultivating and maintaining human relationship. We find that Henry too is moving along this path.

Words and Music (1962) is a radio play. It plays around humorously with the possibilities of the medium but not in order to make any kind of statement. In fact it is not so much a play as a sketch. In this play Beckett hits upon a very imaginative device, breaking up an interior monologue into separate voice and making Music into a character with a will of its own. This is skittish and amusing. 'Words' known as Joe, and Music known as Bob are both at the disposal of a character called Croak who has not yet arrived when the action begins. We hear a small orchestra tuning up and we hear words giving himself a trial run on the theme of sloth. The sentences that come are repetitive and almost meaningless. Croak's arrival is heralded by the sound of shuffling carpet slippers. He announces the theme for the night which is love. Words responds substituting love for sloth. Croak expresses his displeasure. Music is given a chance. Music expresses its response in sounds and we hear soft music. Words protests and Croak has to make Music play louder which ruins all expression. Words is given a second chance but over-plays his part and Music, at a second attempt, does no better. Disappointed, Croak proposes an alternative theme, 'age'. After abortive attempts from

both Words and Music, Croak gets them to collaborate, Words singing and Music accompanying. After a number of false starts and a great deal of prompting by Music, they come out with a simple little song about age. This play resembles an intricate rich symbolist poem composed in a medium of pure audition.

In Words and Music the themes of love, sloth and age come under discussion. The passage on love given in the text is as follows:

Love is of all the passions the most powerful passion and indeed no passion is more powerful than the passion of love. (clear throat). This is the mode in which the mind is most strongly affected and indeed in no mode is the mind more strongly affected than this (Pause). (128)

It has a contrasting bearing on the chapter on love in the Bible which reads:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is nor rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always preserves ... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (I Cor. 13:4-13)

Cascando (1963) means diminishing volume or decreasing tempo. In it there is a man who is very confident of his command of both the verbal and the musical faculties, opens them, closes them, singly and together, and is aware that he is incomprehensible to censorious folk called 'They'. His life is the familiar one, the telling of stories in a voice that hopes at last, to be achieving the last story. The story is about Woburn who is fleeing, stumbling, sprawling in mud, then, sprawling face down in a boat drifting by night, oarless, tillerless, his back to the stars, out to the open sea. The story is not the theme. The theme is the contrast between the self-wrapped-detachment of the presiding mind, his awareness of what 'they' say, his studied indifference to 'them' between this and the impassioned anxiety of his narrative voice to catch up with Woburn.

Cascando has a structural similarity with Words and Music. The outline of the play reveals a mind that opens and closes the never-ending stream of words, on the one hand, and on the other, shows an

inexhaustible source of individual musical phrases and motifs that appear to be composed according to the streams of voice. Moreover, Voice and Music are presented as separate creative faculties of the mind. In this play Beckett focuses on the steady tune and tempo of voice balancing the music with the voice as that they become two melodies in counterpoint. The word 'cascando' is a musical term equivalent to *calando*, referring to the end of a piece. It involves the decrease of volume and the deceleration of tempo. The shape of the narrative itself is indicative of the mind already in the process of degenerating towards an impasse. In Cascando Voice's low, panted, monotonous, rapid lyrics seem devoid of any human expression, and thus, the mechanical rap seems to be closer to a musical instrument than a human voice. For Beckett, music serves as tool for his reductionist method. His protagonists perhaps radiate pure feeling instead of words and their closest expressions get to musical expressions. Sometimes we may not be able to perceive the structure and rhythmic qualities of his plays by reading alone. The pauses and the silent echoes that resonate in these pauses cannot be explained satisfactorily. Furthermore, Beckett very often uses musical terms

such as piano, fortissimo, andante, allegro, da capo, cadenza to produce the desired effect. It is not through emotionally charged lines that Beckettian characters reveal their suffering but through musical notations. We often come across an intricate pattern of discordant points giving his plays a rhythm.

Come and Go (1967), Breath (1970) and Not I (1973) are three short plays. Come and Go is a brief and rather sketchy piece about the reunion of three elderly spinsters who used to be friends at school and are now reaching the end of their unsatisfying and pointless-seeming lives. Come and Go is a brief and rather sketchy piece that is noted for its poignancy and directness. It depicts the meeting together of three elderly spinsters who were friends at school. There are at the end of their unsatisfying and meaningless lives. It was expected of them that they should not broach the secret of their love affair. They have a past common to them and now they have a common present. But they were found guilty of broaching the secret subject and suffused in disappointment. Now they decide to enjoin reticence and out of their reticence, they make their life's finest achievement.

In this play each character defines herself by what she does not say. Each one is doomed. One character talks to the second one about the nature of the third one. If we examine this play in the theological perspective, we can see an attempt to span the space between birth and death. Just as each of the three characters exists on the stage, in turn, every human being comes to their world and leaves, making room for others to live. Finally, all depart. The guilt of the characters lead to their disappointment and eventual doom. Moreover, transitoriness of human life is also highlighted through the title of the play. As the Bible says, “We are aliens and strangers on earth” (Heb. 11:13).

In Breath a brief cry is followed by an intake of breath that continues for ten seconds. There is another cry identical with the first and taking place after five seconds of silence. The sketch is over. Some critics opine that it is a masterly summary of the whole life span between birth and death.

Breath is a sign of life, or in other words, is the beginning of life. The Biblical theme of God creating the first man and breathing

life into his nostrils and man's short span of life with all his attendant misery overshadow the play.

Not I is substantial by a better achievement. It vindicates Beckett's application of his reductionist methods to the theatre. The playwright creates the most striking images of modern drama. Space is in complete darkness. In mid air we see a human mouth and about two inches of surrounding flesh. Very dimly at the side, we see a listening figure, covered from head to foot in a loose djellaba, its head slightly higher than the mouth. It makes four slight movements and then becomes motionless. The audience's attention will be riveted by the movements of the lips, teeth and tongue as the words pour urgently, desperately and pathetically out of the mouth. The sound will seem to come in flashes creating pictures inside our imagination. All four movements of the listening figure are movements of 'helpless compassion'. The effect of depersonalisation is heightened by the ambiguity about whether she is alive or unborn or even dead. Beckett also goes beyond what he did with all the maimed and paralysed creatures in his earlier works. He makes 'her' ignorant of whether she is standing or sitting or kneeling or lying. The brain and the insistent

voice that seems to come from it are given an existence which scarcely depends on the body.

In Not I, we are presented with a mouth in mid-air, about eight feet above the stage level. At down stage, another figure in loose black djellaba intent on Mouth is seen standing. The story spanning the whole of a creature's life is narrated in the play. From the very beginning of the play, a child is introduced before us evoking our sympathy. The child is born before its time and it was denied of love and affection by its parents. Mouth talks about her in the third person and it is the story of a woman who has lived up to seventy years and unfortunately led a sinful life. A feeling of compassion is aroused every time she narrates her hallowing tale.

Her wanton life and the consequent traumatic experience, insentient condition and the sense of guilt, and fear of punishment are expressed through these words:

first thought was ... oh long after ...

sudden flash ... she was being punished ..

for her sins ... a number of which then ... (217)

Her sinful nature leads her to the realisation that there is “some flaw in her make up” (218) and her inner voice urges her to give up her habit.

The play is clothed in Biblical atmosphere as the theme of God and sin dominates it. Over and above, the title also comes from the Bible. The musings of the woman about her past, her sense of fear regarding punishment, her remorseful attitude and her turning towards God for mercy make the story. God is presented as merciful and loving. Moreover, the motif of the forgiving God is recurrent.

The Catastrophe (1984) is a short play where there are only four characters – the protagonist, the Director, Assistant and Luke. The figure of the protagonist is static. The rehearsal setting of the play presents a complex of relations among the characters and a complex of meanings for the changes imposed upon protagonist. The play is open to various readings. So long as there are a director, Protagonist and other two characters it points to the hierarchical scheme of theatre personae. It may also refer to the egoistical will of the creator to control what he has created. It may either be God or the

artist. Beckett bases the play on the story of the woes described in Revelation (Rev. 8:7-13).

Beckett's Characters

Beckett's characters are always subject to drives which tend to isolate them from the world of relationship and activity. They live in "A universe where love has been frozen them, an insidiously plausible universe, a universe that bubbles up into visible grotesques" (Kenner16). They are all repellent grotesques. In Waiting for Godot, we have Vladimir who has bad breath and weak bladder. There is Estragon whose feet are small. Krapp is constipated. Willie in Happy Days can only crawl on all fours. He eats his mucus. Nell in Endgame is a toothless cripple. Hamm is a blind hemophiliac and he cannot stand up while Clov cannot sit down. Hamm remarks, "Every man his speciality" (16). By it he means his deformity. Being bereft of all physical dignity, Beckettian characters have few pleasant character traits. They are for the most part cruel, violent, obscene, blasphemous, finding a corrosive pleasure in their own squalor and the abject helplessness of others. Krapp describes the world as 'this old muck ball' and life at sixty nine "as the sour cud and the iron stool" (18).

Even Winnie in Happy Days, the gentlest of them asks, “How can one better magnify the Almighty than by sniggering with him at his little jokes, particularly the poorer ones”? (24). Nell in Endgame is more direct and she speaks: “Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that” (20). Vladimir seems to speak for all of them when he refers to this “foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us” (79). Beckett never dissociates himself from his people. Hamm tells Clov, “You are on earth. There is no cure for that” (44).

It is yet remarkable that Beckett reveals through his characters, unexpected virtue like charity, compassion, love and an unbreakable determination to endure. As the famous critic Madeline Renauld says:

‘I do not know what Beckett thinks of women, but I know that he understands them profoundly from inside. If his plays manage to affect us (and if they did not succeed in invading our sensibilities, they would not be played throughout the entire world), it is because Beckett, in spite of his modesty, manages to express his immense compassion for all human life and because he is one of

those exceptional man to whom love and lucidity are on the same level'. (qtd. in Calder 83)

Estragon though eager to die will not hang himself first. Vladimir's greater weight might break the branch leaving him to face the world alone. Vladimir is deeply protective watching over Estragon as a fond parent watches over a sleeping child. For Winnie, the mere knowledge of Willie's proximity is adequate reason for going on, while a sound or even a sign from him is more than enough to make her day meaningful. Nag and Nell in Endgame apart in their dustbins speak a love duet, heart piercing is its tenderness. Even the nameless heads in Play, emptied, ruined, impotent creatures can each feel pity and hope for the others. They save themselves from despair, saving us with them. If pity and hope are possible in such a place and in such a word for such people, then they are possible anywhere for anyone.

In the whole world of his work, there is not one unfeeling man or woman. They all suffer and their anguish finds an echo in us. Habit, as Vladimir says, is a great deadener but anguish is a great reviver. The moment we sense that what Beckett is presenting corresponds to something in ourselves, apathy is no longer possible. We feel and feel

deeply. Further more, he is working from inside his material and we have been drawn into it with him. The more we understand Beckett's characters the more do we realise that the magnitude of our vital and harrowing problems need not be a tortured secret but can really be understood and shared.

Beckett's characters use ordinary words and very short sentences. They do not indulge in philosophical or moral arguments. They seldom soliloquise and they never preach. He keeps his characters busy. To borrow Hugh Kenner's words,

They are live actors, living people whose feet resound on floor boards, whose chests move as they breathe and we must learn to understand, with a corner of our attention, that they are imprisoned inside this play. They are people with opinions and digestions, but their freedom tonight is restricted. They are not at liberty to speak any words but the words set down for them which are not inspiring words. (Kenner 27)

Their actions may not be spectacular but every move is part of the overall experience, as eloquent as any work.

All of Beckett's characters are either old or even very old. Except in his early novels and short stories, we do not come across adolescent or young or middle aged adults in his works. Youth is represented only by memories of a girl on a boat or of the time when one was not too decrepit to be refused admission to the Eiffel Tower. In his plays, there is no chance of any development of character through relationships. Sometimes his characters are like children who have time to play games. Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot play a game of being Pozzo and Lucky. They play by being very polite to each other, by abusing each other and they stagger about on one leg trying to look like trees.

Of the four characters in Endgame, Hamm is confined to his arm chair, while Nag and Nell are confined to their dustbins. Clov is the only character who can move about. The restriction of movement heightens the obvious interdependence of the characters. It also limits the possibilities of knock-about comedy. Hamm's world is coming to an end. In this play, Nature is dead. Nag is crying. Therefore, he is still alive. Hamm is a sort of a saviour: "All those I might have helped. Helped! Saved, saved! The place was crawling with them" (44). At the

same time, he rejects all the suppliants who came to him for help. He plays the part of a destroyer too. He wants the end to come. He asks Clov to destroy all types of life which are threat to him. Under his dark glasses, the eyes have gone all white and seeing nothing he can see Nothingness. Hamm has a number of tracts seen as schizophrenic. His paralysis and his blindness are seen partly controlled by his own will power. We think of his schizophrenic traits when we learn about his consignment of his parents to dustbins, his asexuality, his hints of godlike powers, his longing for the end, his cultivation of a relationship with absolute nothingness and his belief that everyone else is dead.

Beckett's characters represent humanity in terms of broken down old creatures. As Colin Counsell remarks, "Most of them are in some way physically and sensorily impaired, suffering blindness or amputation, paralysis, dementia, speechlessness or decrepit old age" (Counsell 117). Some of them start from immobility. Others who can move often come to find movement more and more difficult as the action progresses. Molloy in the novel Molloy starts off hobbling friskily about on crutches. By the end of his narrative, he can hardly

move at all. Moran is not a lame when he starts off in pursuit of Molloy but the longer he goes on looking for him the more he comes to resemble him. Malone is unable to get out of bed. The unnamable is static. Bom in How It Is can only crawl about on the mud and he becomes more and more a voice, less and less a body.

Beckett puts a female character called Winnie at the centre of the picture in Happy Days. She is extrovert and unintelligent. The chief function of her husband Willie is to provide a strictly theoretical possibility that he is listening to his wife. He usually utters only a syllable. He has no zest for anything, no interest in life. Winnie has inexhaustible capacity for happiness in circumstances that would make any reasonable person miserable. The triviality of Winnie's mind is underlined by the triviality of her actions. Most of her actions are part of anyone's daily routine. But because of her situation, they all appear utterly incongruous and pointless. She is entirely a victim of time. She is no longer able to expect any freedom in the future as she is imprisoned in her own past. In Play, there are three characters imprisoned up to their necks in urns. They represent three persons trapped and passive in a limbo created by their own consciousness.

For Beckett the recognition that reality is ultimately devoid of meaning is a positive act. But it enables us to extract maximum value from our lives, to experience the fertile diversity of existence in a phenomenal world. Alan Schneider in his reminiscence “Waiting for Beckett” states:

‘Beckett’s plays stay in the bones. They haunt me sleeping and waking, coming upon me when I am least aware. Sometimes a stray bit of conversation heard by accident on a bus or in a restaurant brings home one of Vladimir’s and Estragon’s ‘little canters’. Sometimes I find myself actually like Clov or like Hamm or, more often like both simultaneously. Sam’s characters seem to me always more alive and more truly lasting than those in the slice – of – life realistic dramas with which our stages today abound. His words strike to the very marrow – the sudden sharp anguish of a Pozzo or of a Hamm crying out for understanding in an uncertain universe; Clov’s detailed description of the bleak harsh landscape of our existence on earth. While against and in spite of the

harshness and the uncertainty, there is the constant assertion of man's will, and spirit, his sense of humour, as the only bulwarks against despair; the constant 'glimmers of hope', even in the dark depths of that abyss in which we find ourselves'. (qtd. in Calder 51)