

Conclusion

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Chapter Six

Conclusion

One may recapitulate the main points in the preceding chapters. It has been stated in the introductory chapter that the Theatre of the Absurd is not to be regarded necessarily a school but is related to a group of dramatists who seem to share certain attitudes towards the existential predicament of man in the universe. Humanity's plight is purposelessness in an existence out of harmony with its surroundings. The central theme of these writers is the state of mental anguish produced by the lack of purpose in all we do. In the writings of these writers the ideas are allowed to shape the form as well as content. The semblance of a logical construction, but with no rational thinking of idea with idea, and with no intellectually viable argument, is seen in their works.

In the second chapter entitled 'Beckett's Vision of Life and Art', we have learned that Beckett was born and brought up in a

middle class protestant family and had his education in Dublin, London. During his stay in France he came under the influence of James Joyce. Moreover, other thinkers like Descartes, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Geulincx and Camus influenced his thinking and writings. Alienation, suffering, solitude, privation, diseases and decay occur as themes in his works. His vision of life is Absurdity, the main ingredients of which are nihilism, Cartesian views, existentialism and phenomenology. In general he has a gloomy view of life, in comparison with the Christian promise of a life abundant in hope.

The third chapter under the caption 'Beckett as an Avant-garde: His Plots and Characters in Absurdity' presents Beckettian characters and plots in the Absurdist context. His characters are absurd, 'ancient' and crippled bums and destitutes. They are confused about time and space. They are beset with verbal difficulties and obsessed with fantasies and violence. They can only discover and be comprehended by means of perception and illusion. They state what they see remaining in ignorance. They do not try to impose meaning by stating what they think they should be. They are

noted for their similarity. His characters also vary in situations as much as in their character from crawling through mud to planning to write the account of one's death. Yet similarity grips our attention before diversity strikes us. The plots of his plays centre around human experiences.

The fourth chapter with the title 'The Motif of Time in the Plays of Beckett', is a gist of Beckett's views on Time as presented in his plays. He is always haunted by Time. Time is developed as a theme in his plays. The flow of Time causes sufferings to his characters. His characters fit into the scheme of linear time and vertical time. Their age and relationship show change effected by linear time. Their slowing down and tending to infinity reveal sameness represented by vertical time. Time and space are void and any particular time or particular space is only a part in the void.

Chapter five under the caption 'Biblical Imagery and Echoes in the Plays of Beckett' seeks to drive home the point that the Beckett's plays are replete with stories, litotes and references from the Bible against which his view of Absurdity is elucidated. In Waiting for Godot hope is juxtaposed with hopelessness. All That Fall with its

title from the Bible presents the tragic and dissolute life with flashes of hope here and there. Not I again with its title from the Bible depicts the helplessness of a human being driven to commit sin even against his wishes. When Endgame presents the pathos of human life, Embers expresses the desire of a person for the end of his suffering the result of which is his past action. Guilt finds expression in Play whereas Come and Go reflects the unsatisfying and meaningless life. Catastrophe deals with destruction and devastation. Love, sloth and age are woven into the fabric of Words and Music. Thus faith, hope, salvation, sin, repentance, Providential cruelty and dissolution are discussed with allusions to Biblical characters, stories and situations.

Moreover, it is only fit and proper to state that a detailed study of the religious imagery and echoes in the poems and the novels of Beckett would have been relevant to my present study. But as it falls outside the scope of this thesis it is not studied in detail though a few pages have been devoted to this purpose.

No doubt, the writings of Samuel Beckett have always presented a challenge to his audience and readers for their stunning effect and elusive meaning. His economy of structure and his vision

of human wants and cruelty, hope and despair have made him the 20th Century's most influential playwright. His works reputed for bleakness, intellectual difficulty and sheer weirdness are set in archetypal spaces with characters devoid of social context or personal history. His scholarship is revealed in the various kinds of problems his characters encounter and the various strategies he has used to organise their thoughts and actions. In order to investigate the loneliness of individual consciousness he has abandoned the traditional features of drama and has become the most puzzling and controversial of all modern dramatists. Even when Beckett is regarded as forbiddingly obscure, uninterested in plot and excessively narrow in range, still to many others, "he is the clearest, most limpid, most disciplined joiner of words in the English language today" (Kenner, A Reader's Guide 10).

Beckett perceives life to be inexorably chaotic. He gives the impression of a man who has experienced human deprivation with infinite irony and pain. Moreover, he reveals modern man's experiences and his desire to conceal from himself. He goes to the root of nihilism, to the question of Being and Nothingness and

touches on the darkened dread; the void. Exploring inner space, he maps out the stark region of human life. Nothing is ontologically whole in the world of Beckett. Objects and persons are pre-determined to be partial. All processes are subject to arbitrary or absurd rules. Nothing ends because potentiality overwhelms reality and alternatives proliferate. Nothing is, therefore, consummated. Time tends to be viciously circular. It worsens things without altering their nature. Its true function is to reveal essences in the courses of their disintegration. Epistemologically, all things are ambiguous. The senses are not given data sufficient for judgement. When the senses get them, the time lag between perception and expression makes the latter out of date. In a process of unending flux, each moment contains the negation of the preceding atom of time. In the words of Esslin,

In Beckett's work this tension between the transient, unendingly decaying nature of the material universe and the immaterial aspect of consciousness which incessantly renews itself in ever-recurring self perception plays an important part.^t Consciousness cannot

conceive of itself as non existing and is therefore only conceivable as unlimited without end. The more in Beckett's works the material envelope decays and is stripped away, the more painful becomes the tension between the temporal and the infinite. (Esslin, Beckett 7)

Beckett's art is ontological. His quest for the identity of man leads him to the treasure house of the ideas of the pre-Socratics, the rationalists of the 17th and 18th centuries and the existentialists of the 20th century. Man sees around him the confusion and the mess. They lead him to darkness, loneliness, despair, suffering and finally death. But even in the dark, there is a glimmer of hope but its nature and duration in the dark world of Beckett cannot be delineated clearly. For Beckett, darkness and light look alike creating a mess and making the situation inexplicable "And for all its dialectical brilliance, its logical elegance, its symmetrical proportions and its painful self consciousness, Beckett's art is profoundly and essentially human" (Hesla 229). Usually, the subject-matter of literature centres on the relationship between individuals, struggles for position and the conquest of sexual objects but these things appear to Beckett as

external trappings of existence. Discarding these 'inessential' questions, Beckett discusses the basic questions regarding man's categorical coming into being, 'who he is', the true nature of self and the meaning of 'I'. It is because of the stripping of reality to its bones that Beckett has been developed as a writer towards an ever greater concentration, sparseness and brevity. John Calder remarks:

The more he shrinks his world, the more he enlarges it. The more he hides himself the more he reveals himself and our situation takes on a new aspect. The more he wallows in the muck, the more he extends our idea of beauty. The more he removes his centre of gravity from the body physical, the soldier the shuddering flesh becomes. The more he plunges us to the depths of despair, the brighter burns our need to hope. The more abstract the more concrete, and the more apparently difficult the more rewardingly simple the content ... and the emotion. One could go on for ever. (Calder 3)

Beckett's pre-eminence among the writers of the Theatre of the Absurd is an accepted fact. His literary art is sufficient in itself. It is

not fettered to a particular philosophical system of religious belief but eclectic in nature. The artist in him moves into himself in search of a more universally valid self. An hitherto neglected realm of impotence and ignorance considered incompatible with art by many artists was chosen by Beckett for exploration. "He is there, looming large and inescapable on the literary landscape, the games which he has been playing with words for over thirty years have gradually become matters of immediate relevancy to us" (Fletcher, The Novels of Beckett 233).

What is attempted in this thesis is to explore the Absurd elements in the works of Beckett which he has, according to the hypothesis here, asserted chiefly against the message of the Bible. The influence of the Bible on him, the various religious images and metaphors he has used to shape his vision, the numerous Biblical references and allusions he has employed to produce paradoxical and ironical effects in his plays have been discussed. Beckett has leaned toward the Bible not for projecting a benevolent divinity but for presenting a divinity as a mystery of evil. Reason and justice prove the world absurd. Mercy is only a fiction. The tyranny of God the

Father, is felt everywhere. Even Christ is considered by Beckett as the suffering servant - himself a victim. The faith of God as Person does not seem to help anyone in crisis (as in the case of Beckett's brother and his mother). So faith is something irksome for Beckett and he lets it go. Yet he always turns to Christian symbolism and religious imagery for artistic purposes. A religious nostalgia is palpable in his writings. His 'heroes' certainly languish for the lack of any God to save them and frequently express their anguish in this regard.

A careful study of his writings will show that he was well-versed in the Bible. He has explored its riches to add to the material of his dramatic art. Moreover the Bible is a complex and lengthy book containing many different kinds of writing. It has helped Beckett much. It may be safely assumed here that the book 'Ecclesiastes' in the Bible dealing with the meaninglessness of life is a source of seminal influence on Beckett for the genesis of the kind of idea of Absurdity that is in him. Quotations from the Bible are very often twisted. Inversion of religious imagery is a recurrent feature. Ironic litotes is used in plenty. This profusion of Biblical

echoes contributes to the assertion of the Absurd. The entire spectrum of Beckett's works is sprinkled with clusters of religious metaphors, imagery and allusions. Many Biblical characters like Adam, Cain, Abel, Noah, Moses, Abraham, Joseph, Job, St. Paul and prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Habakkuk are arrayed in his works. Over and above, the figure of Christ haunts and overshadows many of his literary compositions. Jacobsen and Muller state that "One might truthfully say that to a reader completely ignorant of the Gospels and the Mass, a heavy proportion of Beckett would be lost" (Friedman 22).

We can, therefore, say in conclusion that the Bible has contributed much material to the making of Beckett's genre of literature. In other words, Beckett's writings would have lost their charm, strength and power if he had not fallen back upon the Bible. However, as an artist, Beckett is not expected to give solutions to human problems. Beckett is appreciated, on the other hand, for enlightening his audience and readers with a proper and impressively profound understanding of what the contemporary situation of humanity really is – that is, in the post-war era in which a complacent

belief in any god is a matter of suspect. The present-day human situation as is revealed through Beckett's works, seems to express the belief that in a godless universe human existence has no meaning or purpose and, therefore, all communication breaks down. Consequently, as his various creative renderings demonstrate, logical construction and argument give way to irrational and illogical speech and to its ultimate conclusion, silence.