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Redefining Tragedy in the Modern Context: A Study of Beckett's Plays

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Abstract

This paper explores the redefinition of tragedy within the modern context through an in-depth analysis of Samuel Beckett's plays. Beckett's plays give an ultimate expression to the sense of absurdism of modern life in which he revolutionized traditional notions of tragedy by imbuing his works with existential themes, absurdity, and a profound sense of disillusionment. The plays like *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Krapp's Last Tape* portray the human suffering, futility, and the search for meaning in an increasingly fragmented contemporary world. By situating Beckett's works within the broader landscape of modernist and postmodernist literature, this paper elucidates how he challenges conventional tragic paradigms, offering a unique perspective on the human condition. Moreover, this study investigates the influence of historical and philosophical contexts on Beckett's conception of tragedy, highlighting the ways in which his plays resonate with contemporary audiences grappling with existential angst and societal upheaval. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of Beckett's artistic vision and his enduring relevance in the exploration of tragedy in the modern age. Whereas traditional theatre attempts to create a photographic representation of life as we see it, the Theatre of the Absurd aims to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams. The writings of this nature in a sense attempt to reestablish man's communion with the universe to achieve it by shocking man out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical and complacent.

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Introduction

This paper argues that literature documents the condition of its production grounded in the socio-political realities of the time. Since literature is produced in a complex social matrix, it cannot escape being influenced and shaped to a certain extent by the then social conditions. This view of literature ascribes certain determining influence of the context upon the work produced. Speaking of the situatedness of literary works like *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* have their absurdist protagonists as representatives of the modern and postmodern humanity. In this context, the literary category of tragedy also has undergone a change. Thus, the three plays studied here, despite their nonconformity with the Aristotelian prescription of what characteristics a tragedy should have, are genuine tragedies of the modern times.

In an age beset by world wars and the subsequent chaos, where there is little prospect for heroism and nobility, it will be unusual to expect the birth of classical tragedies. Modern tragedies are thought to represent the modern, absurdist plight of humanity. Beckett did that and thus pioneered what came to be well-known as the theatre of the absurd and the absurdist tragedies. The Theatre of the Absurd exposes the feelings of nothingness and frustration after the great two world wars. Albert Camus in the *Myth of Sisyphus*, presents the human predicaments of the time:

> In a universe that is suddenly divested of illusions and of lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes is properly the feeling of absurdity. (6)

Representing the contemporary nothingness, absurdity and meaninglessness of life, the Theatre of the Absurd depicts the illogical, irrational and absurd life on stage. This plight was named as absurd by the theorist Martin Esslin in the following words, "cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost, all his actions become senseless, useless, absurd" (5). It firmly relies on the irrationality and purposelessness of existence and in the truth that man was out of harmony with his surroundings. The defining features of the new theatre, the Theatre of the Absurd in a world political context is dealt to show how the theatre of the times was unfit for

noble characters and actions. At such times the theatrical world seemed to be deeply affected by the contemporary political upheavals.

Tragedy, Tragicomedy and Absurdist Tragedy

The mode of most absurdist plays is tragicomedy. Besides his multifaceted influence in other areas, Esslin cites William Shakespeare, the first great playwright to use tragicomedy as an influence on the absurd drama. Shakespeare's influence is acknowledged directly in the titles of Ionesco's *Macbett* and Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Though layered with a significant amount of tragedy, the Theatre of the Absurd echoes other great forms of comedic performance, according to Esslin . . . that cites early film comedians such as Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, The Marx Brothers, and Buster Keaton as direct influences (Simpson 2).

Aristotle defined tragedy at length in his treatise *Poetics*. For the sake of comparison between his conception of tragedy and modern tragedy, one can begin with a synopsis of what Aristotle meant. He stipulated that tragedy is the "imitation of an action", according to "the law of probability or necessity" (Adams 53). Aristotle indicates that the medium of tragedy is drama, not narrative; tragedy "shows" rather than "tells." According to Aristotle, tragedy is higher and more philosophical than history because history simply relates what has happened while tragedy dramatizes what may happen, "what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity." History thus deals with the particular, and tragedy with the universal. Events that have happened may be due to accident or coincidence; they may be particular to a specific situation and not be part of a clear cause-and-effect chain. Therefore, they have little relevance for others. Tragedy, however, is rooted in the fundamental order of the universe; it creates a cause-and-effect chain that clearly reveals what may happen at any time or place because that is the way the world operates. Tragedy, therefore, arouses not only pity but also fear, because the audience can envision themselves within this cause-and-effect chain.

In a perfect tragedy, character will support plot, i.e. personal motivations will be intricately connected parts of the cause-and-effect chain of actions producing pity and fear in the audience. The protagonist should be renowned and prosperous, so his change of fortune can be from good to bad. This change "should come about as the result, not of vice, but of some great error or frailty in a character" (Aristotle 54). Such a plot is most likely to generate pity and fear in the audience, for "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves"

(Aristotle 57). In the ideal tragedy, claims Aristotle, the protagonist will mistakenly bring about his own downfall-not because he is sinful or morally weak, but because he does not know enough. The role of the hamartia in tragedy comes not from its moral status but from the inevitability of its consequences. Hence the peripeteia is really one or more self-destructive actions taken in blindness, leading to results diametrically opposed to those that were intended, and the anagnorisis is the gaining of the essential knowledge that was previously lacking.

Tragedy depicts the downfall of a noble hero or heroine, usually through some combination of hubris, fate, and the will of the gods. The tragic hero's powerful wish to achieve some goal inevitably encounters limits, usually those of human frailty (flaws in reason, hubris, society), the gods (through oracles, prophets, fate), or nature. Aristotle says that the tragic hero should have a flaw and/or make some mistake, hamartia. The hero need not die at the end, but he or she must undergo a change in fortune. It is argued that "it is doubtful whether he ought to be considered as an Absurd dramatist at all" (Hinchcliffe 84).

It is in this context that one can make sense of the absurdist play as a modern day tragedy. There is a whole plethora of norms and principles of tragedy redefined and adapted to the spirit of the age. Now one cannot hope to find a tragedy featuring some knight or prince in a fatal battle against the invincible forces of fate or destiny or some superhuman powers such as gods and goddesses. Rather, it is in very common, everyday setting that a common person suffers, and without much meaning either. That is what makes modern tragedies so painful. Looking at the plays under this study, one can infer that the plots of many absurdist plays, modern tragedies, feature characters in interdependent pairs, commonly either two males or a male and a female. The two characters may be roughly equal or have a begrudging interdependence (like Vladamir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* or the two main characters in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*); one character may be clearly dominant and may torture the passive character (like Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* or Hamm and Clov in *Endgame,* and Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape*); the relationship of the characters may shift dramatically throughout the play. The concept of nobility has been replaced by the commonplace. Added to this is the sense of futility or meaninglessness, which makes an absurdist tragedy so painful for the audience. It reminds them of their own plight in a seemingly chaotic, meaningless world.

Absurdist Plays as Modern Tragedies

Since the human society and condition has gone down in dignity and nobility, the search for an ideal character in the role of protagonist has gone down too. In this reference, there is the need of redefining our conception of tragedy. In a post war era, it was not logical for a writer to come up with a very positive view of human nature. Human capacity for rationality, communicability, and sense making was in question. In the meaningless and Godless post-Second-World-War world, it was no longer possible to keep using such traditional art forms and standards that had ceased being convincing and lost their validity. The Theatre of the Absurd openly rebelled against conventional theatre. Indeed, it was anti-theatre. It was surreal, illogical, conflictless and plotless. The dialogue seemed total gobbledygook. Not unexpectedly, the Theatre of the Absurd first met with incomprehension and rejection. One of the most important aspects of absurd drama was its distrust of language as a means of communication. Language had become a vehicle of conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. Words failed to express the essence of human experience, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. The Theatre of the Absurd constituted first and foremost an onslaught on language, showing it as a very unreliable and insufficient tool of communication. Absurd drama uses conventionalized speech, clichés, slogans and technical jargon, which it distorts, parodies and breaks down.

By ridiculing conventionalized and stereotyped speech patterns, the Theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically. Conventionalized speech acts as a barrier between us and what the world is really about: in order to come into direct contact with natural reality, it is necessary to discredit and discard the false crutches of conventionalized language. Objects are much more important than language in absurd theatre: what happens transcends what is being said about it. It is the hidden, implied meaning of words that assume primary importance in absurd theatre, over and above what is being actually said. The Theatre of the Absurd strove to communicate an undissolved totality of perception, therefore, it had to go beyond language.

The Theatre of the Absurd is totally lyrical theatre which uses abstract scenic effects, many of which have been taken over and modified from the popular theatre arts: mime, ballet, acrobatics, conjuring, music-hall clowning. Much of its inspiration comes from silent film and comedy, as well as the tradition of verbal nonsense in early sound film. With newer experimentations and challenges to conventionality, it has come to cover a wide range of theatrical modes ranging from apparently

nonsensical to playfully comical to somberly tragic. These elements can be seen in *Waiting for Godot, Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* as well.

Structurally, *Waiting for Godot* is a two-act play which is primarily cyclical. It begins with two lonely tramps on a roadside who are awaiting the arrival of a figure referred to as Godot and ends with the same premise. Many critics have concluded that Act Two is simply a repeat of Act One. In other words, Vladimir and Estragon may forever be waiting for Godot. We are never given an answer to their predicament. As an audience, we can only watch them do the same things, listen to them say the same things, and accept the fact that Godot may or may not come. Much like them, we are stuck in a world where our actions dictate our survival. We may search for an answer or a meaning to our existence, but we most likely will never find it. Thus, this play is structurally arranged in such a way as to make us believe that Godot will probably never come, and that we must accept the uncertainty of life.

The two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, spend their days reliving their past trying to make sense of their existence, and even contemplate suicide as a form of escape. As characters, however, they are the prototypical absurdist figures who remain detached from the audience. They essentially lack identities and their vaudeville mannerisms, particularly when it comes to contemplating their suicides, have a more comic effect on the audience than a tragic one. This is perhaps best observed in the beginning scene of the play when they contemplate hanging themselves:

> VLADIMIR: What do we do now?
>
> ESTRAGON: Wait.
>
> VLADIMIR: Yes, but while waiting.
>
> ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves?
>
> VLADIMIR: Hmm. It'd give us an erection.
>
> ESTRAGON: (highly excited). An erection! (*Waiting for Godot* 12)

What follows is a discussion of who should hang himself first. Vladimir suggests Estragon go first since he is lighter and therefore won't break the bough and leave the other one alone and alive. This comical scene, replete with the image of death, ends up making the audience laugh rather than take the two tramps seriously. And, the fact that Estragon and Vladimir choose not to hang themselves suggests a much more existentialist, absurdist view of death and a less tragic one. Death will have no meaning or enchantment either, because life does not have any.

Endgame carries on the same kind of thinking but is much more tragic and serious in its metaphor for death than *Waiting for Godot*. There is no apparent action in the play. Hamm and Clov, the two main figures, are even more isolated than Vladimir and Estragon. Confined to a small, bare room, the blind and disabled Hamm postulates on the subjects of life and death, while interacting with and depending on his servant/son Clov to fill in meaning where there appears to be a void. Resembling Estragon and Vladimir are Hamm's parents Nagg and Nell, who are confined to trash bins at the front left of the stage. They, like the two tramps, exchange memories of a once coherent world and spend their time eating pap and biscuits. However, unlike Godot, Endgame is not absolutely cyclical. Instead, it emphasizes only one cycle and works its way toward some kind of ending, or in other words, has the vague feeling of a finale. Even though death does not come at the end of Endgame, there is a strong sense that it is nearby and the waiting will not be as long, as suggested by the chess-like title.

Like *Godot, Endgame's* comic quality keeps it from being too tragic in its metaphoric message. The characters popping out of ashcans, the jerky, repetitive motions with which Clov carries out his master's commands, and often obscene vaudeville pattern accompanied by appropriate gestures, all provide a comic perspective that keeps the play from sinking into tragic despair. However, the seriousness with which Hamm talks about death and ending in his soliloquies is not entirely undercut by the comedy. References to death are abundantly scattered throughout the play. While Godot emphasizes survival, no matter what the cost, Endgame is doing virtually the same, but with a much more serious, empathetic tone. The audience is still somewhat detached from the characters on stage, but at the same time there is more of a feeling of sorrow for the characters in Endgame than the other play.

The metaphor for death or coming to the "end" of something is apparent in the very first lines of the play as Clov states, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (*Endgame* 456). Hamm's response to Clov's ramblings as he awakens is "Me to play." Hamm's reluctance to die, however, follows shortly after as he says, "And yet, I hesitate to end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to-to end" (*Endgame* 457). This beginning scene suggests something that is quite common in most absurdist plays, the unwillingness to end or to die. Yet, there remains a struggling to understand death, to give it some meaning so that life has meaning. So as not to completely depress his audience, Beckett begins the play with a fairly comical musing on death. For example, two scenes in the first four pages

concerning death are actually quite funny. Clov and Hamm discuss the connection between food and death:

HAMM: I'll give you nothing more to eat.

CLOV: Then we'll die.

HAMM: I'll give you just enough to keep you from dying. You'll be hungry all the time.

CLOV: Then we won't die. (*Endgame* 1052)

Certainly, the theme of the play resides in Nell's concluding words about life and meaninglessness. Nevertheless, the comedic aspects of the play help the actors and the audience deal with the potentially negative issue about death in a more positive, cathartic way. Another absurdist element that is present in *Endgame* is the love/hate, dependent relationship of Hamm and Clov. Like their predecessors Vladimir and Estragon, Hamm and Clov need each other emotionally, and more so, physically. Hamm's disabled state makes him need Clov more than Clov needs Hamm, but Clov needs Hamm simply because Hamm's home is the only home he has, and even if he did leave, there is no place for him to go in the void which exists outside. Whereas in Godot, Vladimir and Estragon may have the luxury of meeting others should they choose to leave one another, Hamm and Clov do not appear to have that option in *Endgame*. They cannot leave each other. Actually, they cannot restart their life anew, and the old mode of life is not worth living in any meaningful way. That is the trauma of existence.

Similarly, Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape* is a wearish old man in his seventies, on stage. His chief occupation is to recall on his tape-recorder his recorded youth and youthful activities. He is racked with disease, almost blind, with grey tousled hair sweeping over his ghost-like face. His beard is badly shaven on his white face and his nose is purple. The dirty white shirt with no collar and the dirty white boots show his negligence in dressing. Unlike other Beckett stage characters, observes Ruby Cohn, "Krapp is rooted in familiar world whose every detail is realistically plausible" (167). Krapp's figure emerges as that of a shabby old man and not that of a grand old man. His disillusionment with life is captured in his physical appearance. Play presents on stage three identical urns and confined in them with only the heads protruding out are three characters, a man M1 and two women W1 and W2. The faces are those of very aged people and they seem part of the urns. They are absolutely immobilized and are unconscious of each other's presence. The story that emerges from their remarks is of the man's adulterous relationship with the two

women. Here, in a sense, there is no depiction of the human body. It is, instead, an absolute negation with the body hidden from the spectator and with only the face to identify the human figures.

Absurdist Tragedy and Modern Protagonists

Absurdity is a key word in Beckett's dramatic writings as well as of the whole Theatre of the Absurd. One of the most basic philosophical questions is whether there is any meaning in our existence at all. The human necessity of a unifying explanation of the world has always been satisfied by religion and creators of the philosophical systems who made the human life meaningful. The natural desire to get to know and understand the world in its most hidden spheres was fulfilled by religious dogmas about the existence of God, which guaranteed the meaningful contingency of human life.

Since *Waiting for Godot* was first performed, there has been a flood of criticism, probing not only the "real" meaning, but the influences, the symbols, the style, and the method of Beckett's dramatic work. As to Beckett himself, he was quite unwilling to illuminate his writings by providing any comment explaining the meaning of his novels and plays. Therefore, it remains the job of readers and critics to figure out the meaning of his plays in their historical contexts.

Theatre, in its original ancient meaning theatron (Greek for 'place of watching', auditorium), is a special artistic form, one of the three literary modes, narrative, lyric, dramatic, which is constituted not only of words, but also by exclusively dramatic visual components such as movement, physical gestures, scenes, etc. It does not occur inside the human soul as other forms like novel, poem, essay do, the author's own vision of the world. This is the proper subject of absurd theatre determining its specific form, which is naturally different from the epic theatre form. The Theatre of the Absurd does not show man in a historical, social, or cultural context, it does not communicate any general views of human life. It is not concerned with conveying information or presenting the problems or destinies of characters that exist outside the author's world. It is not concerned with the representation of events, the narration of fates, or the adventures of characters. It is instead interested in the presentation of an individual's basic situation. It presents individual human being's intuition of his basic situation as he experiences it.

In classical tragedies, the human condition is presented with meaningfulness despite the odds one had to face in life. The universe is indifferent and merciless but

not necessarily meaningless. Since the epic character is situated in a historical and social context, he is influenced and formed by the world he lives in. He is surrounded by successive events that create his story in time and place which is within reach of the events around him. This chain of events surrounds the epic character who becomes the likeness of the world he lives in, and so tells the story. This concept of the human position in the universe opens up questions looking into the nature of the world. Human nature is being understood through the knowledge of the nature of the world.

It is possible to understand the Theatre of the Absurd as a return to what it was, for the first time in Greek philosophy formulated by the Sophists. They diverted human interest from nature and directed it at man and his thinking. This interest in a subject, individual human thinking, and the individual's situation corresponds with the philosophy of existentialism which is focused on the subjective, individual's experience in a concrete fatal situation. While the philosophers deal with the absurdity of human existence rationally, using philosophical language, the absurd dramatists express it in concrete dramatic pictures. They offer us the opportunity to not only think about absurdity, but to feel it and experience it simultaneously with the actors and the author, who transforms his mind into a symbolic dramatic language.

Absurdity arises from moments when all the facts of life that flow mechanically stop, life has been opening in the only one and when consciousness starts to wake up and move. This means that the non-sense of incomprehensible feeling. Beckett illustrates this situation in his play *Endgame* through the character of Hamm:

> HAMM: One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, forever, like me. (Pause.) One day you'll say to yourself, I'm tired, I'll sit down, and you'll go and sit down. Then you'll say, I'm hungry, I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up. You'll say, I shouldn't have sat down, but since I have, I'll sit on a little longer, then I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up and you won't get anything to eat. (Pause.) You'll look at the wall a while, then you'll say, I'll close my eyes, perhaps have a little sleep, after that I'll feel better, and you'll close them. And when you'll open them again there will no wall anymore. (Pause.) Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe . . . (1068)

Absurdity consists in permanent conflict; it is a contradiction and a struggle. It can be faced only through struggling with it and disagreeing with it. It seems that it is impossible to escape from the absurd fate, to stay here means to face it, to commit suicide means to consent to it, and therefore it must be accepted. That is the basis of human freedom. Absurdity does not have any sense; it does not have any reasons, any aims, that is why it does not reflect yesterday, nor tomorrow. The absurd man misses hopes, plans, and troubles about his future. He is offered only an instant moment and that is what his freedom consists of. The only way how to paralyze absurdity is to not ask for reasons.

Beckett did not view and express the problem of absurdity in any form of philosophical theory; his expression is exclusively the artistic language of theatre. Beckett's characters are such subjective thinking substances surrounded by mechanical material nature; and the subject-object connection is one of the major motifs Beckett deals with. He uses dramatic symbols, to express the barriers and the walls between the worlds "in" and "out" as to demonstrate their incompatibility. His characters are physically isolated from what is happening "outside", and the space they are imprisoned in is their inner subjective world. Hamm and Clov are closed in a small room separated from the external reality by the walls. Nell and Nagg, the human fragments vegetate in two ashbins; their space is reduced absurdly, as though they are constantly getting closer to death. In addition, all of the characters are immobile. Hamm cannot stand up and walk, and although Clov can, he can even see the world out of the windows giving onto the sea, he is unable to escape from the room, unable to open the door and run away:

> Clov: So you all want me to leave you.
>
> HAMM: Naturally.
>
> Clov: Then I leave you.
>
> HAMM: You can't leave us.
>
> Clov: Then I shan't leave you. (*Endgame* 1070)

Vladimir and Estragon are in the same situation. They are in an open empty road surrounded by the natural world, but unable to move on:

> CLOV: It's not worthwhile now. (Silence)
>
> HAMM: No, it's not worthwhile now. (Silence)
>
> CLOV: Well, shall we go?
>
> HAMM: Yes, let's go. (They do not move.) (*Endgame* 52)

Although they are not limited by any barriers waiting in an open space, surrounded by nature (tree), they are indifferent to this world as it is indifferent to them. Their time passes in a very different way from the world around them. The limitation and isolation of man from the world, having its roots in Descartes' dualism, is, at the same time, the foundation of the Sisyphusean feeling of the absurdity as it is described by Camus.

The world, at which Clov and Hamm are looking through the windows, is empty, dead, deprived of everything which could make it familiar, intimate, or intelligible. Beckett gives this voided world, an image of inanimate country with the horizon of the Dead Sea. Its alienation, strangeness, and remoteness are also the world surrounding Estragon and Vladimir. They have a possibility to walk away, but cannot take such an opportunity being seemingly "deaf" to what nature offers them. They are physically free in the open country, but still infinitely remote - homeless strangers. They could return, go away, but never make a move tied up by the false hopes and belief in the coming of Godot, who will solve this deadlock. Thus, Godot, infinitely remote, fuses with an infinitely alien world.

It seems that Beckett's characters are aware of nothing but the will they have inside, which impels them to live. It is an unsurpassable instinct, a blind, and groundless power, operating in them, out of time, space, and causality. They are propelled to life by unmotivated power - the will to live - which always wants to go on - to transform itself into the living being or objects. Human intellect and reason are the will's servants and that is why it cannot stop this strong inclination towards being. Consciousness is only a surface of our being, because the real essence lies in the depths of human personality.

Clov and Hamm are suffering, persisting in their existence. They long for an end, a death, but cannot kill themselves, being driven by their nature - the will to live.

> HAMM: Why don't you finish us? (Pause) I'll tell you the combination of the larder if you promise to finish me.
>
> CLOV: I couldn't finish you.
>
> HAMM: Then you shan't finish me. (Pause) (*Endgame* 1075)

Even Hamm's parents Nell and Nagg, can never die, although they are half-existing fragments of human beings "living buried" in their ashbins. Their suffering is their desire to die. Clov wants to leave, but cannot; Hamm is blind and wants to see, but cannot; and all of them want to die but cannot.

Vladimir and Estragon are flirting with the idea of death too. They cannot die, although they can intellectually come to the conclusion that this is the only way how to escape from suffering.

> VADIMIR: Let's hang ourselves immediately!
>
> ESTRAGON: From a bough? (They go towards the tree.) I wouldn't trust it.
>
> VADIMIR: We can always try.
>
> ESTRAGON: Go ahead.
>
> VADIMIR: After you.
>
> ESTRAGON: No, no you first. (*Waiting for Godot* 26)

They are very close to death; to be does not mean to live for them, but to last and continue on. They are human beings existing as the will itself. The ceaseless will to be realizes itself through Estragon's and Vladimir's expectation, their need to meet with Godot, who should be a solution. Godot is not any person, any event, anything, embodiment of human wishes, desires, expectations and attempts for at least something "better". Their waiting is blind, because Godot, representing non-existing happiness, fulfillment, satisfaction, will never come, in fact, it does not exist. Their waiting has no motive, as the will has not.

Although both sides, the actors and the audience, are waiting for Godot, it would be rather silly to identify the characters' experience of time with the audience. At the end of the play the audience's expectations are finished: the curtain falls, even though Godot did not come. The audience expected him/it, he/it not to come, the play is over. That is the solution for the on-lookers, that is the end of their expectations: the curtain.

Krapp manipulates the external environment to preserve memories in the form of recorded tapes. This allows for tapes to be played, so that particular memories are made available to consciousness. Menary argues, "human memory is no longer restricted to the boundaries of the body, but is now extended by external memory systems" (*Krapp's Last Tape* 57). The repeatability of these 'external memory systems' constitute a material aspect of the mind that works in a dialectical relation with the neurological capacities of the biological brain. The tapes and writing of thoughts in the play are 'external memory systems' for Krapp. Beckett's writing of the play evidences a moment at which a shift occurs in his thinking through the workings of the mind, "Sat by the firse looking into the fire with closed eyes turning

over in my mind winnowing, out as it went separating the grain from the chaff. Jotted down a few notes, on the back of an envelope" (*Krapp's Last Tape* 14) These two syntactic units are taken from the section when Krapp first plays the tape, and his 39-year-old self is relating how he has spent his birthday.

Conclusion

Samuel Beckett's plays like *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* command attention as the ultimate expressions of modern absurdism that got the limelight after the ravages wrecked by the World War Second. The selected plays contend, through their seemingly nonsensical characters and plots, that the purpose of human life is an unanswerable question. It seems impossible to find an answer because we don't know where to begin looking or whom to ask. Existence, to us, seems to be something imposed upon us by an unknown force.

Waiting for Godot is a play that captures this feeling and view of the world, and characterizes it with archetypes that symbolize humanity and its behaviour when faced with this knowledge. According to the play, a human being's life is totally dependent on chance, and, by extension, time is meaningless; therefore, a human's life is also meaningless, and the realization of this drives humans to rely on nebulous, outside forces, which may be real or not, for order and direction. Absurdism helped to liberate playwrights from outmoded conventions, and gave rise to some powerful theatrical metaphors. Beckett's image of two tramps waiting beside a tree in a barren landscape became a universal icon of futile existence. *Endgame* also shows that life as a game can come to a knot when it neither moves forward not is it possible to go backward. One is stuck up, as in the game of chess. Likewise, *Krapp's Last Tape* captures the human suffering, futility, and the search for meaning in the contemporary world.

The Theatre of the Absurd, which made Paris the dramatic capital of the world, was the major theatrical phenomenon of the 1950s. It was played out against the backdrop of the Cold War and under the shadow of Hiroshima, a period which climate is best captured by Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. At such times, the world could not expect to see a more hopeful version of life. Thus, absurdist plays, as here in the context of Beckett's plays, are the expression of the pain of the age. They represent the common existence. Hence, they have protagonists but not necessarily from the noble class or royalty. They do not conform to the Aristotelian notion of tragedy. Yet they are tragic in their comically pitiful representations of modern life.

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