INTRODUCTION

A form of art — literary or cultural or sculptural — always has a medium of expression. The manipulation of the art object/medium, according to the intellectual sway of the artist, creates art forms which are expressive in themselves. Just as a writer would create his art form through the medium of words, a painter the brush and paint, so in drama, body movement, body rhythm, body language and facial expressions are manipulated in creating characters, in building up heroes and heroines or in destroying villains. Figuring the body, in conformation with the theme of the play, is therefore the prime task of a dramatist and his major preoccupation. It is easy to see that a certain obsession with the body, with the processes of birth and death, its varied reactions and responses, its psychological influences, its spiritual development, and its emotional strengths and weaknesses, has kindled the spirit of enquiry of literary artists, philosophers, religious thinkers, scientists and
cultural artisans from time immemorial to the present. The concepts of body and soul have been relentlessly debated, discussed and decreed upon, often assigning a superior status to the former and an inferior position to the latter, by various thinkers at particular periods in history, while still others have established beliefs in stark opposition to the former, debasing the body and glorifying the soul. This process of thought has been observed as cyclic in nature and not linear. It is possible to argue that the present school of thought has culminated in the lap of the pioneers of such thinking. Thus it is a back-to-the-body trend that is prevalent among literary and cultural artists. And Samuel Barclay Beckett's (1906-1989) theatre is predominantly concerned with the human body and of the vexed question of its representation.

A prolific writer, Beckett has essayed his creative faculties in every genre in a career spanning six decades, but it is as a dramatist that he has been widely acclaimed. In the field of drama he is known as the dramatist of the absurd and is positioned invariably among the outstanding. The theatre of the absurd is the basic criterion by
which his plays have been judged. The literature of
the absurd emerged after World War I as a rebellion
against the essential beliefs and values both of
traditional culture and traditional literature.
Central to the earlier tradition had been the
assumption that man is a rational creature who
lives in a partially intelligible universe, that he
is part of an orderly social structure and that he
is capable of heroism and dignity even in defeat.
But the disillusionment that crept in after the
wars marked the turning point of the existing
beliefs. Henceforth man was viewed as an isolated
being cast despisingly into an alien universe.
Therefore, the theatre of the absurd represented
the feeling of nothingness which circumscribed his
life and the frustration that he experienced in the
face of such feeling. Existence was thus seen as
anguished and absurd, and life was viewed as
irrational, purposeless and out of harmony with its
surroundings. Thus disillusioned with life, man
alienates himself from society, from fellow human
beings, and awaits a slow uncertain extinction as a
relief from the languid and weary existence. Albert
Camus observes the human condition in a world of
scattered beliefs thus:
In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light man feels a stranger: his is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of the memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity. (Hinchliffe 67)

Eugene Ionesco reinforces the same idea in the following manner:

Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost, all his actions become senseless, useless, absurd. (Esslin 5)

Representing this sense of the absurdity and meaninglessness of life, led to the depiction of illogical, irrational and absurd things on stage. To this form of literature, which depicted the absurdity of existence, was given the name absurd by the theorist Martin Esslin. In it he included the works of such authors as, Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco who shared a certain attitude towards the predicament of man and believed in the irrationality and purposelessness
of existence and in the truth that man was out of harmony with his surroundings. Beckett who is among the outstanding dramatists of the theatre of the absurd has been ranked with the three masters, Shakespeare, Moliere and Ibsen:

Just as Shakespeare explored the political and moral dilemmas of the Renaissance or Moliere adjusted the anarchic world of comedy to new classical and rationalistic norms or Ibsen created and transformed patterns of naturalism to give effective expression to the psychological ghosts that haunted the bourgeoisie in the age of imperialism and high capitalism. ... (Fletcher and Fletcher 22)

In the same way, argue the authors, Beckett found the means by setting out the metaphysical doubts that torment us now in forms that like all radical innovations, surprise at first and then in a short space of time seem natural and inevitable. (Fletcher and Fletcher 22)

Bertolt Brecht, Luigi Pirandello and others have also been acknowledged for their contributions and for the revolutions they brought about in the
theatre world. However it has been argued and stated that the changes that they brought about are not as long lasting nor does it have any far reaching significance as those provoked by Beckett and this has captured for him an immortal position in the theatre world. Establishing his rank among the absurdists it has been boldly stated that

It would be difficult to name a single important playwright of the younger generation from Albee to Stoppard, be it in Britain, America, France or Germany who has not been deeply affected by Beckett’s example or influenced by his practise. . . . there is no doubt. . . . that he is one of the most important innovators of the modern stage. (Fletcher and Fletcher 22)

As an absurd dramatist Beckett’s name has been chiselled on the rock tablet of the theatre. And the criticism available on him in this context is exhaustive. The vast corpus of the existing critical works has x-rayed his works from every angle placing them within the framework of the absurd. This has reached a point of stagnation and there is no area of the absurd left unexplored. The trend now is to reassess his works in relation to
the new theories that have gained importance in the late twentieth century. There have been attempts to re-read Beckett’s works within the context of feminist theories, and with those of Foucault and Derrida. Stanton B. Garner Jr. observes that

Within a year of Samuel Beckett’s death (in 1989), a critical movement was already well underway to re-assess the relationship of his career to its twentieth century philosophical and aesthetic contexts. Rejecting the traditional placement of Beckett’s work within the “theatre of the absurd”, such books as Steven Connor’s *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (1988), *Rethinking Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1990) and Thomas Trezise’s *Study of Beckett’s Prose, Into the Breach: Samuel Beckett and the Ends of Literature* (1990) have attempted to resituate Beckett’s literary and dramatic canon within the theoretical milieu of post-structuralism and to find within his art an epistemological and linguistic critique closer to Derrida and Deleuze than to Sartre and Heidegger.

(Worthen 443)
Beckett's works have thus been exhaustively explored within the critical framework of existentialism, the theory of alienation, and the theory of the absurd, and the present trend is to analyse his works within the theoretical formulations of psychoanalytic, feminist, post-structuralist, deconstructive and post-colonial criticism. An examination of recent studies reveals theoretical attempts to re-read Beckett from the perspective of feminist theories and the concept of sexuality. Ruby Cohn has an essay on "The Femme Fatale on Beckett's Stage," Peter Gidal's "Beckett and Sexuality," Lois Oppenheim's "Female Subjectivity in Not I and Rockaby," Dina Sherzer's "Portrait of a Woman: The Experience of Marginality in Not I" and Martin Esslin's "Patterns of Rejection: Sex and Love in Beckett's Universe" are some of the notable ones. Though there is a growing interest to read marginality, sexuality, subjectivity and the like in his works, not much work has been done focusing on the body. The question of the body and its representation in Beckett's theatre, therefore, demand more critical attention. Two doctoral dissertations exist in this area of research: Reading the Body in Samuel
Beckett (Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Ireland) by Nishi Chawla of The George Washington University (1997) and Compulsion and Confinement: The Female Stage Body in the Plays of Samuel Beckett (Ireland, France) by Katherine Martin Gray of the same University (1995). Nishi Chawla draws on the writings of two body theorists, Bakhtin and Foucault, and Katherine Gray examines only the female body in the dramatic works of Beckett. The present thesis aims to look at the bodies on Beckett's stage irrespective of gender. The subject of the body here would be interpreted within the framework of feminist, psychoanalytic and post-colonial theoretical perspectives.

Beckett's works revolve round the question of the body — not in terms of the great characters or personalities of Aristotelian norms but in the sense of what Martin Esslin calls "mechanical puppets." Beckett distorts the image of the human body, reduces it to parts, confines it in urns, mounds and sacks, debases it, depersonalises it and degenders it. The body is the raw material that he manipulates for the stage. Very often it is fragmented, deprived of movement, immobilized like a statue, or hidden from the spectators view.
Sometimes, the fragmentation of the body is achieved not by amputation or natural physical ailment, but by concentration on one position, gesture or movement. The bodies are also made to exist in a state of lack or negativity, unable to be seen, or to move or to see or to hear. This deprived body in a state of lack or negativity is the most powerful element on Beckett’s stage. The body in good health, with the conventional beauty of the conventional stage, does not really exist. Rather Beckett portrays aged characters, suffering physically and nearing extinction. Most of them suffer from some physical ailment or the other: either they are crippled and handicapped or greying and decaying to a horrifying image. At times he even depicts the bodies in a comical manner, invoking laughter from the spectator. Beckett thus distorts the image of the body as projected on the traditional stage, destroying its wholeness and unity, and he dismembers it, fragments it and creates a grotesque image. The body is never witnessed in its palpable wholeness but in a state of deficiency. All of Beckett’s plays from Waiting for Godot to What Where represent this on stage. Waiting for Godot opens on a bare stage with a
barren tree on it and two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, waiting for a nebulous figure Godot whom they have never seen and who in fact never appears. Two other characters, Pozzo and Lucky the slave, appear. The play is static with no development in the course of action other than the fact that Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot. The presentation of the human body here is done in such a way as to invoke laughter from the audience. Vladimir and Estragon appear clownish dressed shabbily with their trousers always slipping down, and Estragon is seen constantly struggling with his boots. He is made to walk with short stiff strides, legs wide apart, giving an undignified appearance. Lucky is tied to a rope passed round his neck driven by Pozzo and carries a heavy load on his back, creating a picture of the slave system in Africa. In Endgame we encounter four characters, Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell. They are like outcasts, untouchables in a dying world and waiting for the end. Beckett, through his depiction of the human body, gives us a horrifying picture of suffering humanity. All the characters in the play are cripples: Hamm, the son of Nagg and Nell, cannot rise from his chair; Clov, the servant, cannot sit
down, while Nagg and Nell, crippled and confined in dustbins, cannot step out. The body in this play is distorted to the maximum. Crippled and imprisoned, there is a complete reversal of the depiction of the human body on stage.

Happy Days opens on an expanse of scorched grass with a low mound in the centre. Winnie, a plump, well-preserved woman of about fifty, is buried above her waist at the exact centre of the mound. To her right is Willie her husband partly hidden by the mound. The play presents

No building up of dramatic situation, no conflict of characters, no significant action, no denouement... we are just presented with a given symbolic situation which remains to the end substantially what it was at the beginning. (Barnard 120)

The woman delivers a stream-of-consciousness monologue and Willie speaks a word occasionally. There is a reversal of roles here in terms of gender — the woman occupying a commanding position as against the man who is subsumed by the woman. The body of the woman is trapped in earth. We are not made aware of the completeness of Winnie's body
but she is bound to the earth and is helpless. Willie is also caged in his hole.

Krapp's Last Tape has Krapp, 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. 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.

*Act Without Words I* is a short mime for one actor. The actor is a man who is flung violently on stage (which is pictured as a desert) from the wings; he retreats but is flung back again. He is confronted with various tantalizing objects but is arbitrarily removed when he is about to reach them. The play captures the futility of man's efforts and his despairing situation. The body of the man becomes an object of ridicule and mockery, an object that is victimized. *Act Without Words II* is again a brief mime and shows two players A and B in two large sacks on the stage. Both A and B are prompted to movement and action at the point of a goad. They resume their endless cycle of routine activities at the point of the goad. The presentation of the human body is again clownish and derogatory.

*Rough for Theatre I* features A, a blind man, and B, a cripple. They meet by chance and B hatches the idea that they might form a symbiotic partnership: he could serve as the eyes and A as the legs, and between them they could form a whole being with a better chance of survival. Here too
the human body is in a helpless condition, depreciated and handicapped. In Rough for Theatre II, two men A and B, arrive to assess the life of C who stands motionless, back to the audience, ready to jump out of the apartment window. They seem, however, just as interested in the erratic electric light and the lovebirds they find in a cage as they are in C's predicament. This creates a peculiar impression of their attitude towards the life of C. He is trivialized or seen as any other object on earth. Human life and body, thus, get devalued.

Come and Go is a very brief play and show three women, Vi, Ru and Flo, sitting on a bench and facing the audience, reminiscing about old school days. Their faces are as identical as possible and their bodies are obscured with full-length coats and hats that shade their faces. The play is made of what they do not say: of silences. Breath, a "dramaticule," has no protagonist, no action and no words. Against a scene of miscellaneous rubbish on stage we hear the cry of a baby (taped) followed by a deep inhalation of breath while the lighting increases; then an exhalation with diminishing light and finally a repetition of the baby's cry.
Though the body is not physically seen on stage one imagines/visualizes it in the mind's eye.

*Not I* is a monologue spoken by a Mouth to an Auditor, who is of indeterminate sex, dressed in a loose black djellaba with hood, and the Mouth is lit with a spot. Mouth speaks of a child born prematurely, abandoned by her parents, loveless — now seventy years old. The body is made totally invisible except for the mouth. Through the technique of minimalism, Beckett here negates the body. That Time has on stage an old man with only his face surrounded by a shock of white hair made visible. He listens to three voices, A, B, C, which are presumably his own recounting his past. Here too all bodily movement and action is nulled and only the face is captured. *Footfalls* is a dialogue between May and her mother whose voice we hear but whom we never see. The mother is bedridden and May, who never leaves the house, looks after her. The most striking aspect of the play is May's pacing. Stage directions indicate that the lighting is strongest at the floor level, less on the body and least on the head. The body is again denied appearance or visibility.
A Piece of Monologue is a monologue spoken by a white-haired old man dressed in a white night gown and white socks giving him a ghostly appearance. The Speaker though the subject, is always referred to in the third person and he keeps reminiscing his past. As in the previous plays the body is that of an aged man and is not given a specific identity. In Rockaby the sole figure on stage is a prematurely old woman with unkempt hair and huge eyes in an unblinking gaze in a white expressionless face. She is dressed in a long-sleeved, black lacy high-necked evening gown. Her sole activity is rocking slowly and she speaks just one word "more" and each time she prompts it her recorded voice tells of a woman who spent her days looking for "another like herself," searching until "time she stopped." Each time it is repeated, it reduces the woman's hopes and in the end she lowers the blinds and waits for death. The body here, like in any of the previous plays, is in a state of near-extinction and is deprived of any physical movement or action. Ohio Impromptu presents two identical figures on stage, a Reader and a Listener, both clad in black with long white hair that hides their faces. They sit on white chairs at
adjacent sides of a white table. The Reader reads a story from his book, which begins with the last attempt made by a man to obtain relief after the loss of a dear one. Throughout the piece, the Listener listens and regulates his companion’s reading by knocking on the table. In keeping to the normal presentation on Beckett’s stage the bodies here are also depreciated, old and worn out.

Catastrophe shows the Director and his Assistant moulding the Protagonist for an exhibition. The Director sits in an armchair and barks orders at his obedient Assistant and the Protagonist stands on a chair shivering slightly. He is in a black dressing gown up to the ankle and his age and physique are unimportant. The figure of the Director’s creation that emerges is a skull-like image, stripped, silenced and dehumanized. In What Where four figures Bam, Bom, Bim and Bem appear. They have long grey hair and wear ragged grey gowns. Each figure is interrogated by Bam. This pattern of action is repeated a number of times. As before the bodies are depreciated, greyed and worn out. No bodies we notice on Beckett’s stage are vigorous and enthusiastic. They are all greyed, passive and disillusioned. Very often the
body is presented in part or rather only the parts are made visible. They are either crippled, handicapped or nearing extinction.

Such theatrical representation forms the basic character of Beckett's stage and raises important questions. Why has Beckett portrayed man in such a degraded and deformed manner? What is the message highlighted behind his obsession with portraying parts of the body? Is he using it as a technique to create various effects? If so, what are its implications? This study purports to address these questions in the light of feminist, psychoanalytic and post-colonial theoretical formulations pertaining to the question of the body. The first task would be to trace the history of the body from the first records of history to the present, to observe the various changing attitudes towards the body at different periods in history. Was the body glorified by all civilizations of the world? Was it always acclaimed as the most beautiful and wonderful of creations and was it always assigned a superior status or was it considered as insignificant when debating over the subject of mind/body dualism? Were there fluctuations, rise and fall in man's attitude towards his body? If so,
when and how did the fluctuations occur? And how was it regained?

The present-day focus of body theorists is on the human body and what it represents. The attempt here would be to analyse Beckett's bodies in the context of contemporary body theories to study what it discloses. Conventional criticism privileges the spirit or soul over the body and this has resulted in less than satisfactory readings of Beckett since on his stage the body figures forth in a prominent manner. From the vast corpus of critical theories available on the subject of the body and its figuration, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, Maurice Charney's *Sexual Fiction*, Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, Naomi R. Goldenberg's *Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Resurrection of the Body*, Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo's *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* and Sandra Lee Bartkey's *Femininity and Domination* would be the major theoretical books used for the analysis here. Each of these books examines the question of the
body from various angles. In *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir explores every aspect of femininity — sexual, social, biological and historical — and she analyses what it means to be a woman in body, in mind and in spirit. Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo's *Gender/Body/Knowledge* maps out new territories that feminists are exploring within their discipline and also introduces some of the most important debates that have emerged in western feminism. The book is divided into 3 sections and the first section focuses on the body — the body as cultural medium, the body as a mirror and the body as reflecting subjectivity. In *Real and Imagined Woman*, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan applies post-colonial theory to a wide range of feminist concerns and explores a number of fascinating and important theoretical questions for feminists and examines woman's subjectivity and victimization physically and sexually. Apart from these, certain recent studies on Beckett — *Women in Beckett, Performance and Critical Perspectives* by Linda Ben Zvi, *Rethinking Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* by Lance St. John Butler and Robin J. Davis, *Samuel Beckett: Time and Self in his Plays* by Lalitha Ramakrishna, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition*,
Theory and Text by Steven Connor and All Life Long: The Same Questions, The Same Answers, Reinterpreting Samuel Beckett by Chaman Ahuja would be used to substantiate the theoretical stance. Linda Ben Zvi’s Women in Beckett concentrates on the question of gender in Beckett, while Lalitha Ramakrishna illuminates the scenes of disease and degradation on Beckett’s stage, thereby perceiving the body as a victim.

The ensuing chapters would be a concentrated effort to address questions such as: What is the body? What does it signify and what do Beckett’s bodies signify? His bodies would be troubled out of their conventional role and formulated and represented in relation to contemporary theory. The argument on the question of representation of the body would diverge into three lines of analysis, that is, that of the body as objectified, the body as mirror to the self and the body as a cultural tablet. But they converge on the point of argument that the body, though treated as an object, is indeed the “all” that makes a man’s life complete. It is never to be ignored, debased or trivialized — its feelings, emotions, reactions and responses
are to be respected for it is the vital factor in a man's life.