CHAPTER I

Introduction
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett (1906-89) took pains to create a new form of poetic drama through his epoch-making play _Waiting for Godot_ (produced in Paris in 1953, and translated by Beckett himself into English as _Waiting for Godot: Tragi-Comedy_, produced in London in 1955; New York, Grove Press, 1954; London, Faber, 1956). The play is unique in more sense than one, especially from the standpoint of Beckett's great experiment in dramatic language. _Waiting for Godot_ strongly represents the radical aim of the modernist art in view of the role of language in drama, which T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) had envisaged at an earlier stage of the century. However, Beckett's thematic output stands far apart. Beckett in the Theatre of the Absurd in his drama. His pursuit is towards the
essential absurdity and meaninglessness of human life under the shadow of Existentialism which holds Man primarily responsible for his actions. The sine-qua-non of Beckett's drama is that it moves forward to attain an expressive medium which partakes of the absurdity of life and tends to abstraction as well as to compression. Waiting for Godot puts forward seemingly counter-rational dramatic language. It is important to note that Beckett's absurdistic plays created stir in the circle of world-drama, because the playwright endeavoured to consolidate in an amazingly appropriate manner the content as well as the form of drama. In Beckett, the content and the form merge into each other in a fine blend by dint of his intricate pattern of lingual manoeuvring.
The theme of the Existential anguish came up in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), Albert Camus (1913-60) and Franz Kafka (1883-1924); yet their content weighed pretty more heavily than what their form could comfortably carry forward, having achieved a sound objective-correlative. It is worth-while to note that the Theatre of the Absurd, as Martin Esslin aptly points out, does not believe in "arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being ... in terms of concrete stage images"². Initially writers tried to present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition through logically constructed conversational language. On the contrary Beckett has made efforts in Waiting for Godot to express the senselessness of the human condition by showing the
inadequacy of the rational approach, and by open rejection of the rational devices of discursive lingual pattern. Esslin is right in holding that "while Sartre or Camus express the new content in the old convention, the Theatre of the Absurd goes a step further in trying achieve a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed". Beckett's theatre endeavours to achieve a strong and close co-relation between the matter and the manner, by which the matter is expressed or presented. In Beckett there is an artistic consummation as regards both the texture and the structure of his plays.

*Waiting for Godot* was presented on 19th Nov. 1957 by the San Francisco Actors' Workshop, before an audience which consisted of the convicts at the San
Quentin Penetentiary. Although the organisers were worried about the success of the play, the convicts, strangely enough, did not find it difficult to understand the play. They knew what was meant by waiting and also that "if Godot finally came, he would only be a disappointment". John Orr rightly points out that "Beckett's placing of Didi and Gogo's waiting is one which goes far beyond existential presence. It incorporates the waiting of boredom with the waiting of unvalued labour and the regress of play. The ways of killing time which have made the play so compelling also strike a raw nerve with long-term prisoners in our own culture".

Beckett as an absurdist writer knew what he was doing. He asked nothing in particular, nor forced any dramatized
didactic moral on the audience. He simply showed man's waiting for God and that the waiting is only a continual, unending one. There is no specific hope, and there is no place to go. The absurdity of human situation has been brought forward in the play by means of such a dramatic expression which amounts to a private system of language. The play Waiting for Godot simply wants to penetrate deep into the human psyche disturbed by the Existential predicament. The situation presented in Waiting for Godot is in some ways almost identical with the situation of the audience. According to Bamber Gascoigne:

"The four characters of the play try to draw a picture of humanity at large. Waiting for Godot, above all, is about mankind's way attempts to fiddle its way through life, setting up a wall of hopes and pretences between itself and despair. The greatest of these hopes -- that there is some point to existence that we are keeping some mysterious
appointment on earth and are therefore not random scraps of life -- is symbolised by Godot." Therefore, such a play as Godot which is often discarded as non-sense or abstruse, has something to say and something to communicate. The apparent incomprehensibility and the bewilderment occur from the fact that the presentation of such a play, either by Beckett or by Eugene Ionesco (1912- ) or by Harold Pinter (1930- ) or by Arthur Adamov (1908-70) happens to be a new phenomena in the world of Twentieth century theatre and drama. New demands are made on the stage conditions, requiring brand-new idioms of expression. It becomes imperative therefore that such plays cannot adopt the conventional well-made play approach, made over characterization or motivation or plot-construction. Waiting for Godot, persues an end which is diametrically
apposite to that of a hitherto known
conventional play. As such the method
and technique of how an Absurd play is
to be presented, must essentially be
different. A play like Beckett's *Waiting
for Godot* can be examined and estimated
only by the standards and parameters of
Absurd drama.

A critical survey of Twentieth
century drama shows that after the period
of William Somerset Maugham (1864-1965),
Arnold Bennet (1867-1931), John Galsworthy
(1867-1933) and George Bernard Shaw (1956-
1950) -- who may be said to be the fore-
runners of the modern playwrights -- there
came a gradual but distinct change in the
dramatic milieu caused and attained through
the changing interpretation of man as well
as the socio-moral metamorphoses of human
situation seriously concerned over the
search for the self. Twentieth century world has passed through a speedy transformation heretofore unseen by man in any bygone generation. In fact, ages and generations do change as a rule following the Tennysonian maxim -- "Old order changeth, yielding place to new" (The Passing of Arthur). Yet what is significant and undeniable, is the fact that the volume and velocity of the stupefying transformation of the Twentieth century cannot be compared in any way with the change occurred in any past century in respect of tempo, gusto, range and spirit. Accordingly the literary world has witnessed continued new and newer literary experiments. Interestingly these experiments have been directed at finding some new content through the discovery of some new forms capable of holding that content.
A pointed theatre culture started growing. In this connection Gamini Salgado observes that "among many changes brought about by the first World War was a transformation in the economic organization of the theatre and its capacity to serve as a centre for the sort of serious drama which shaw envisaged". The time needed a new consciousness, and along with it a new idiom of expression. It required a proper theatrical dimension. In a way the writers tread to catch the stress of the social change. But they were still to attain the imaginative awareness, depth of vision and precise medium of expression. Twentieth century had been in transition in many drastic, subtle and complicated ways. The response of the writers to their time has also moulded their approach not only in themes but also in their objective presentations. In order to reflect or illuminate life, as the dramatist himself
has perceived in and around him, he tries to make the theatre speak identically. Dramatists in their own ways have made ceaseless efforts to control "theatrical reality in words, actions and time, so that the plays say what the authors want to say now, to present audiences and in present theatrical conditions".

Beckett is the dramatist who cares to translate thematic content into appropriate verbal dramatic terms. He is a modern dramatist who as Fraser points out,

"makes use of pauses, silences, stage grouping, sudden transitions from one mood to another, which, to a reader unfamiliar with the theatre, convey nothing on the page".

In Beckett's hand the language of the play has undergone a treatment where spoken words take us nowhere in their face value. The undertone and overtone of dramatic
dialogue, the silence, pauses, movements, insinuations, symbols, lightings and stage decor have to contribute considerably towards the voice of the play. Therefore it may be said that "the development of drama, . . . is not strictly a literary development"\(^{10}\), but a complex one.

Ionesco in his play *Rhinoceros* (1960) tries to present his view that human life, being without meaning or coherence is chaotic. Therefore man has no way of any meaningful communication. Hence, playwrights like Ionesco or Beckett holds that in its bid to project a genuine reflection of life, a play has to adopt a medium effective enough to lay bare the whole gamut of absurdity, incorporating the essential incongruity, meaninglessness, nonsense and non-communication. In drama the audience avidly intends to get communicated an idea, and as
such it is necessary for the audience to
decode the latent message of the
playwright. Beckett tries continually to
find out an appropriate form through
which his sense of the absurdity of life
can be communicated. Incidentally Beckett's
novel 'Watt' (1944) may be cited. Watt's
bitter experience of life has become
integrated with the sense of the absurd
which, in fact, is far from any intellectual
indulgence. Along with the passage of time
Watt's eagerness to pierce his absurdistic
experiences with any plausible meaning dies
down. He is overtaken by an indifference:

"What has he learnt? Nothing. What did
he know of Mr. Knott? Nothing. Of his
anxiety to improve, of his anxiety to
understand, of his anxiety to get well,
what remained? Nothing. But was not
that something?" (Watt, p. 147).

Beckett therefore is essentially
concerned with the search for self of a
human being. Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* points to the bold assertion by Marcel Proust (1871-1922) which is indicative of the modern predicament:

"We are alone. We cannot know, and we cannot be known. Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself, who knows others only in himself and who, if he asserts the contrary, lies."

It is significant here to refer to Arnold Hinchcliffe who considers that, "Absurd drama was not an answer to the ills of modern life nor the only description of those ills, but it was an adventure; and Beckett's *Godot* was as much a landmark as a tombstone". Beckett pursues the theme of isolated or solitary existence in the face of the acuteness of absence of communication between the homo-sapiens, as there is no concrete way for the expression of personality. Beckett's characters have no antecedent and no identity. *Waiting for Godot*
shows how man groans in the throe of an awareness which points to the fact that he suffers from such an isolation which he can in no way cut-through. Sember Gascoigne has aptly observed:

"Beckett's Waiting for Godot was one of the very best plays of the decade. Its two tramps, with their boredom, their fear of pain, their shreds of love and hate, are a surprisingly effective version of the whole human condition -- a condition for which action is no answer, chiefly because there is no obvious action to be taken, 'nothing to be done'".13

Beckett has been pre-occupied with the problem of 'being', the isolation of self and a search for identity. This refers to Man's deep existential anguish the playwright had found around him. This Existential anguish is the key-note of Beckett's artistic work. In his plays and novels and poems Beckett reveals himself as one of the tormented, lonely and very sensitive persons.
As an Anglo-Irish Beckett came down to Paris from Dublin in Ireland and settled there finally. In Paris Beckett came to be associated with James Joyce (1882-1941) and the Joycean circle. Beckett's work


culminates in a spirited assertion of an artist's duty to express the totality and complexity of his experience, so much so that he does not bother much for any easy comprehensibility. What is therefore important for Beckett is the artist's absolute freedom to come out with his very own expression. Beckett writes:

"Here is direct expression — pages and pages of it. And if you don't understand . . . 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. . . . The form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon can fulfil no higher function than that of stimulus for a tertiary or quaternary condition reflex of dribbling comprehension."14
In the light of this observation by Beckett himself, it is to be remembered that he has put into practice his own conviction as a writer, showing an uncompromising consistency in expressing his experience. He has been intrigued with the issue of effective communication, and considered that an attempt to communicate, where no communication is possible, is absurdly and horribly comic:

"like the madness that holds a conversation with a furniture"\(^{15}\).

Beckett's main concern is for the spiritual development of an artist. He believed that "the artistic tendency is not expansive but a contraction. And art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication"\(^{16}\).

Beckett was much attracted to the work of Joyce, whose inclination to silence touched
him. We know from Richard Ellmann that Beckett and Joyce held "conversations which consisted often in silences directed towards each other, both suffused with sadness, Beckett mostly for the world, Joyce mostly for himself".17

Godot's playwright was influenced by Joyce's devoted experiments with language as a medium for the discovery and communication of metaphysical truths. He also took down passages of Finnegans Wake (Published as a whole in 1939) dictated to him by Joyce, who was having problems with eye-sight.

It could be that Beckett chose to write in French because he might have felt the need for artistic discipline, which could be well imposed on him by an acquired language, then by a native one. John Orr has pointed out in this connection that -
"... like Joyce before him, necessary exile spurred him to artistic greatness. . . . Exile entailed a mortification of the spirit through the forsaking of native language and its idiom, the curing of verbal excess by a double translation -- from novel to play and from English to French, whence the actual text could be translated back again in triumph. This double exile of culture and language which Beckett found in Paris, and his Paritanic resolution of it made him more of a genuine successor to Joyce and Synge than when he consciously tried to imitate them. Through the French language Beckett became one of the three great Irish dramatists of the twentieth century."18.

It is said that to the query of a research-scholar, who was doing his thesis on Beckett’s work, as to why Beckett wrote in French, the author said that the “use of another language may force him to divert the ingenuity that might be expended on mere embellishments of style in his own idiom to the utmost clarity and economy of expression."19.

However, when Beckett translates himself into English, we find that he is equally
capable to excercise discipline in his expressions. This happens majorly due to the fact that Beckett's work emanates from the "deepest strata of the mind and probe the darkest wells of anxiety". Therefore, it is to be boldly underlined that Beckett's plays deal with the deepest core of human mind, where man is formidably isolated, being under the thrust of the Existential angst. In order to get hold of a form that can match the inner content, Beckett is at pains to find an appropriate medium of expression, and accordingly had determined his own logic of language and its articulations. As a writer who concerns himself with the unsayable, he must be on the highest alert so as not to say -

"what the words make him say against his will, but to express instead what by their very nature they are designed to cover up: the uncertain, the contradictory, the unthinkable".
In his work Beckett has made continuous efforts to remain engaged in a constant struggle, in a difficult wrestling with language. He has been cautious all along not to be caught unawares by the unconsciously accepted meanings and associations. Beckett's plays continually refer to this hard struggle with meaning, language and expression. When *Waiting for Godot* was staged first in the Art's Theatre Hammersmith, London on August 3, 1955, it created a furore by its unintelligibility. It was considered to be an outrage, that people could be asked to come and see a play which could as well be a hoax. The play appeared to be "pointless and meaningless to those who did not realize that it was a play about waiting and not about something happening". In *Waiting for Godot* Beckett wanted to distil a feeling which underlies most of our lives and of time that passes continually
without a purpose. The dialogue which
Beckett worte in everyday spoken vocabulary
is typical of the language which any group
of clochards might use while talking to
each other sitting on a bench in a park.
Harold Hobson commented in The Sunday Times
on August 7, 1955 that —

"strange as this play is and curious as
are its processes of thought it has a
meaning; and this meaning is untrue. To
attempt to put this meaning into a
paragraph is like to catch the Leviathan
into butterfly net, but nevertheless the
effort must be made"23.

Waiting for Godot was even considered to be a
"parody of Joyce"24.

Beckett always believed that the form, structure
and mode of an artistic statement cannot be
separated from its meaning or its conceptual
content. Because the work of art constitutes
its meaning only in its totality. What is said
in Beckett's play is inseparably linked with
the manner in which it is said. No other manner or pattern is capable to give out the meaning.

The primary requirement of a play is the most concise statement of its meaning and message. The uncertainty and the irreducible ambiguities are essential elements of the total impact of the play. John Russel Taylor is right therefore in holding that in Absurd drama -

"the ideas are allowed to shape the form as well as the content".

He further elaborates his point explaining that -

"all semblance of logical construction, of the rational linking of idea with idea in an intellectually viable argument, is abandoned, and instead the irrationality of experience is transferred to the stage"24".
In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* the confusion, inexplicable plight and irrationality of experience have all been transferred to the stage by means of an intricate patterning of verbal expressiveness. The playwright has never tried to create the irrational by any overt exploration of the rational or logical elements. Bamber Gascoigne has rightly remarked that:

"critics have asked many questions about the precise nature of Godot, but they are irrelevant question. The play is not about Godot, but, as its title states, about the waiting for him. It is about life on earth, not hereafter"\(^25\).

In writing his absurd play Beckett has been preoccupied mainly with anxiety, despair and the sense of loss at the disappearance of any purposeful solutions. If we have to consider Absurd drama as "a kind of modern mystical experience"\(^26\) as Arnold P.
Hinchliffe does, we should strive to recognize Beckett's pragmatic achievement. This is why Waiting for Godot has often been labelled as obscure. It is to be emphasized that we do not so much understand a play of this type as Waiting for Godot is. Hence we tend to respond to it similarly as we respond to a complex piece of poetry or a complex classical musical composition. Absurd drama grows on the multiple relationship among the component parts included in the dramatic language. The treatment of language, as we find in Waiting for Godot, reveals its special nature, laying bare some intrinsic quality of the type.

In analysing the language of Waiting for Godot we should categorically explain that in a conventional drama or well-made play, language occupies a central
position, and as such it can not afford to be at cross-purpose to the action. Whereas in an Absurd play it may appear that the playwright does not wish to pay heed to the centrality of language, which is the conventional practice. However, this is not the case. Language has indeed been devalued to a considerable extent by the absurdist playwrights, owing to their feeling that language conceals more things than what it reveals. Yet it is a convenient mask for taking a cover and keep people engaged at playing a word-game in respect of what is implied and what is suppressed. Nevertheless, in the Absurd drama, as it is the case with both Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, there is a strong centrality of language as demonstrated by the dramatic dialogue. In Waiting for Godot, Beckett is interested in probing the reality
behind language.

It is to be remembered here that Twentieth century happens to be an age of crucial transition almost in every respect, wherein the basic tool of our thought and emotion -- which is verbal expressions through language -- is being considerably dismantled. A playwright like Beckett is contributing no less the share in the process of this debunking of language, besides putting in a gesture of positive communication. He is acutely aware that language alone is not enough to be capable of effective communication. An absurdist playwright tries to show by several manoeuvres, the debased quality of verbal communication and the vacuum of meaning. Ionesco the Romanian-French dramatist has pointed out this "tragedy of language" in
play after play. Commencing with The Bald Prima Donna (1950) Ionesco gets to
comic situation evoked in The Lesson (1951), where the audience witnesses
with horror how carefully the philologist
overpowers his pupil with an absurd
lecture on language. In Amedee (1954) a
unique use of language has been made.
Though the situation of the play registers
seriousness, the language used by the
characters is deliberately ridiculous. The
opposite movement of the language and
action produce a definite impact.

In Beckett we notice an even
more systematic dislocation of language,
because in a world which carries little
significance the communicative medium is
also a suspect. Questions arise if we have
really anything to communicate or if our
pitiful existence is not a mere shadow play!
In *Waiting for Godot* Pozzo exclaims, "They
give birth astride of a grave, the light
gleams an instant, then it’s night once
more". If this is how life goes, we should
rather exclaim with Clov in *Endgame*: "Mean
something! You and I mean something". To be
alive is to be aware of oneself, to be
aware of oneself is to hear one’s thoughts,
that endless stream of words which come to
the mind. As a living being Beckett suffers
from this compulsion, and rejects language.
But as a literary artist he is compelled
to work with language. This is the source
of the ambivalence of his attitude to
language. Sometimes he looks upon it as a
divine instrument, sometimes as a mere
senseless practice.

In the radio plays, *Embers* and *All
That Fall*, this compulsive talking blends
into a background of natural sound. In *Embers* it is the sound of the sea; in *All That Fall* it is The Sound of the road. Articulate sounds of language is equated with the inarticulate sounds of nature. Beckett’s Molloy says at one point:

"... the words I heard, and heard distinctly, having quite a sensitive ear, were heard a first time, then a second, and often even a third, as pure sounds, free of all meaning, and this is probably one of the reasons why conversation was unspeakably painful to me."27

In Beckett's plays, nature of dialogue is more important than any hint at the disintegration of language and meaning. Language breaks down again and again because there occurs no truly dialectical exchange of thought in it, Godot's boy messenger, when asked if he
is unhappy, replies, "I don't know, sir" (I, 51) characters are also unable to remember what has just been said:

"Estragon: Either I forget immediately or I never forget" (II, 64).

In a purposeless world which has lost its ultimate objectives, language becomes a mere game to pass time, as Mamm points out in *Endgame*:

"... babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together and whisper together in the dark... moment upon moment, pattering down..."

It is time which drains language of any meaning. In Krapp's *Last Tape*, the idealistic faithful professions, Krapp had made in his early years, have become for him only empty sounds as he has grown old. Mrs. Rooney's attempts in *All That Fall* to
communicate with the people she meets on
the road does not befriend her, but only
serve to make her more estranged from them.
In Embers the old man's musings are equated
with the breaking of waves on the sea-shore.

Beckett's verbal communiveness is
aimed at devaluing language, either as a
carrier of conceptual thought, or as a means
for communicating answers to the problems of
human condition. Yet his continued use of
language should then be regarded, rather
paradoxically, as attempt to communicate an
incommunicable essence. To recognize the
illusoriness and absurdity of all easy
solutions, and of all pre-fabricated
meanings, is the starting point of a new
kind of consciousness. It faces the mystery
and terror of the human condition with a
powerfully liberated thought.
"For to know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in, to the soul of the incurious seeker."29

Leventhal has noticed the philosophical base of Beckett's rejection of logically meaningful speech, in the teachings of Gorgias of Lentini (483-375 B.C.) a Sicilian rhetorician and sophist. Leventhal has quoted his teachings from Encyclopedia Britannica in his article:

"1. There is nothing which has any real existence.
2. That even if anything did exist, it could not be known.
3. That supposing real existence to be knowable, the knowledge would be incommunicable".

In arguing over the third of these propositions, the philosopher says that language is inadequate to convey the ideas, and that it is impossible for any idea to
be the same in different minds. Leventhal restates Britannica's orthodox metaphysical language in a simpler form:

"1. Nothing is.
2. If anything is, it cannot be known.
3. If anything is and cannot be known, it cannot be expressed in speech"30.

According to Leventhal, Beckett grapples with this third proposition. After all, a playwright is a creative artist and hence the written word must necessarily be his medium. Beckett has been concerned especially with the crucial question of how to express the inexpressible, with what he said the "only real and incommunicable essence of oneself"31.

It is some thing beyond gesture and speech. Beckett says "the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible, is
merely... the madness that holds the conversation with furniture."32.

Therefore his language is beyond any logical interpretation. Too many words pour themselves out in a shower of both affirmation and denial. It is an effort to withhold or stay the fleeting thought.

With an eye to Beckett's craftsmanship in *Waiting for Godot*, we may remember the question raised by George Steiner:

"Are we passing out of an historical era of verbal primacy, out of classical period of literary expression into a phase of decayed language of 'post-linguistic forms' and perhaps of partial silence?"33.

Beckett shows that absurdity of human situation has made verbal expressiveness out of tune with any thing seriously significant. He accepted the failure of language as the source of his creative
energy. The total texture of Beckett's language is created out of his sense of the failure of language on the rational plain. Beckett says:

"there is no communication, because there are no vehicles of communication. Even on the rare occasion when word and gesture happen to be valid expressions of personality, they lose their significance on their passage through the cataract of personality that is opposed to them. Either we speak and act for ourselves -- in which case speech and action are distorted and emptied of their meaning by an intelligence that is not ours, or else we speak and act for others -- in which case we speak and act a lie."34.

Beckett further elaborates the point by saying that:

"We are alone. We cannot know, and we cannot be known."35.

The famous French philosopher Andre Malraux (1901- died in the 80s) has written that at the centre of European man,
dominating the great moments of his life, there lies an essential absurdity. Beckett wanted to carry into effect his deep-felt sense of life believing that art is discovery of truth embodied in a symbolic equivalence of its experience. With reference to Beckett's theatre we tend to agree with Joseph Chiari that:

"Photographic reproductions and imitation of life are always life-less; life always remains embedded in the original and cannot be conveyed through a photograph of its phenomenal appearance; it can only be intuited through the essential music which makes this appearance. Photographic naturalism can only catch the shadow of a substance which pertains, not to the world of senses, but to that of the imagination. That is why, meticulous concentrations on details and naturalistic descriptions of circumscribed sections of society, do not, can not, amount to a living thing, and they generally imply non-aesthetic ends."36.

The characteristics of Beckett's Waiting for Godot defines the very nature
of the absurd drama. There are in the play the substitution of an inner landscape for the outer world, and the lack of any clear divisions between fact and fantasy. A free attitude is discerned towards time which can expand or contract according to the subjective requirements, and there also is a fluid environment which projects mental conditions in the form of visual metaphors. Besides, the play holds up an ironic precision of language and construction, serving for the playwright's only defence against the care-worn living experience.

Beckett discovered the emptiness of the established values. He sought to portray reality on the canvass of drama in strange, unexpected depths of human isolation. Thus Beckett represents an important dimension of the Twentieth century afflicted with the rejection of
the old values as well as all moral and ethical considerations. He adopted new dramatic forms in order to embody the new approaches of ideas.

Beckett has an original outlook on language. He stresses the inadequacy of words and his language becomes the exact vehicle of thought being a careful precision eliminating exaggerated decoration. In his plays Beckett registers meaninglessness of human existence, underlined by the irremediable weight of man's isolation vis-à-vis the inadequacy of language. In the &hth &e (1959) which is considered to be the grimmest of Beckett's plays, there is a prophetic vision of the nihilistic future in store for man, added to a serious moral condemnation of man's cruelty and self-
centeredness. Beckett concentrates on man's awareness of the solitude, which is also reflected as a common theme in many modern writers. Traces the breakdown of traditional values in the background of political uncertainties, and explores the absence of a meaningful pattern of existence owing to the said breakdown. These, as Beckett shows, have given rise to 'anguish' in the modern mind. Waiting for Godot is called Beckett's Waste Land because the play presents the most accurate transcript of the modern mood of boredom and ever-growing anxiety. The tramps of the play Vladimir and Estragon are the symbolic ruins of the past civilization. Vladimir informs that they came down "hand in hand from the top of the Eiffle Tower, among the first" (p. 10). The fact that they had to give up the respectable life about fifty years
back, and have been living in squalor ever since, identifies them with the lost generation of the twentieth century Europe. These two tramps have nothing else, to give meaning to their lives, except an endless waiting for Godot, or, for a spiritual salvation which never comes. Here Bamber Gascoigne’s critical observation about the play is noteworthy:

"Vladimir and Estragon successfully establish themselves as true lowest common denominator of humanity. Their warmth in the middle of despair is the world’s. This, together with its theatricality and the brilliance of its rhythms and language, makes Waiting for Godot a great play which will last. Beckett has not since reached such heights."57.

The image suggests a possible conclusion to the present state of disintegration as the play delineates the end of civilization, with the entire world population reduced to only four cripples.
The *Endgame* stresses on physical decay implying a drastic and unnatural end of the world in the wake of an atomic explosion:

"in *Endgame* the despair has become so all pervading that the characters are no longer recognisable symbols of humanity"38.

Life's sufferings are held meaningless by Beckett. His drama confronts the similar crisis of values in the European culture as Joyce's fiction and Eliot's poetry do. But Beckett's drama does so thirty years after Eliot's *Waste Land*. John Orr significantly observes that in Beckett, as in Eliot, there is:

"a stifled anguish at the prospect of a desolate world without redemption. If Eliot is minimal and Heidegger abstract, Beckett is both"39.

As his verbal strategy shows Beckett often
tries to laugh away the sting of tragedy; but he never attains it completely. Because occasional comedy only deepens the sense of darkness. The only revelation, that comes out of Beckett's verbal expressiveness, is that there is no revelation, and no salvation at all. In Beckett's plays dramatic dialogue show that climaxes repeat themselves, and yet nothing happens. The emphasis of Beckett's drama is much more on a manner of hearing the verbalization of thought than on themes or subjects. In Beckett the manner is very close to being the matter, and the manner is pursued through his intricate pattern of verbal expressiveness.

Beckett's work as an innovator is remarkable, for the discovery of a tone which depends on the earlier world of Strindberg or James Joyce, but is also
closely contemporary, being an expressionist form in a naturalist theatrical language. Jacques Lémarchand's views about Beckett and his magnum opus *Waiting for Godot* are worth-mentioning here:

"The extraordinary success of Samuel Beckett is primarily due to, the artistry with which he gives life and presence to this waiting -- we know what it represents. We do it too, we participate in it completely . . . . A profoundly original work; because of this it will necessarily be a disconcerting one. Either it will charm the public or arouse contempt, even fury."

39. Ibid., p. 188.


References and notes: Introduction

1. **Existentialism**: By and large most of the philosophies and theologies have supposed that man's actual existence in the world is far less significant than some pre-existing, anti-natal essence. **Existentialism** is a philosophical proposition which emphasizes the importance of existence. It originates with the works of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, to find a full expression in the works of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. The French philosopher, critic, novelist and playwright Jean-Paul Sartre strongly adhered to this tenet.

Although Kierkegaard attempted a religious approach towards **Existential philosophy**, yet in general terms **Existentialism**
adopts the view that the universe is an
unspeakable, meaningless and dangerous
place for an individual's 'being' or
existence. As such, everyone has to
assume the responsibility of making a
choice which in variably determines the
nature of this existence. This freedom of
making choice puts man into a state of
anxiety or ANGST, surrounded as he is by
infinite possibility, while remaining
ignorant about his future. This much he
knows that his life is finite and it will
come to an end, just as it once began, in
nothingness.

2. Martin Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd


4. Ibid., p. 20.


10. Ibid., p. 50.


16. Ibid., p. 47.


20. Ibid., p. 38.


26. Gascoigne, *Twentieth Century Drama*, op. cit., p. 188.


30. *Molloy*, p. 64.


33. Ibid., p. 47.


35. Proust, op. cit., p. 47.

36. Ibid., p. 49.