CHAPTER II

Nature of the Absurd: Basic Philosophy behind Beckett's Drama
NATURE OF THE ABSURD— Basic philosophy

Behind Beckett's drama.

During and after World War II, as
man's basic faith was badly shaken the
chief concern of the creative thinkers
turned to be the futility of life. Not only
life itself looked absurd, but also all the
devices used by man to make life manageable
looked equally purposeless and ridiculous.
The crux of the issue was how to go on
existing between the two fundamental truths
— birth and death, or in Beckettian terms
between the womb and the tomb. If the
universe is deprived of its purpose of
living, Man is all alone in a world, deprived
of the generally accepted integrating
principle, which has become disjointed,
purposeless, absurd. It has been significantly
observed that Beckett and Ionesco write their "highly subjective drama from the middle of the void".

After World War I Dada and Surrealist movement tried to give voice to the war-ravaged, frustrated mood of man. In France the War had paralysed the community devastatingly. The questions which shook the writers and thinkers as well as each sensitive person of our century were: Was man really responsible for this orgy of evil which had consumed nations? Who is to blame for the gas-chambers, or the massacre of the innocents by bombings? Who is responsible for the torture of the patriots, the lynching of collaborators, the ravishing of women in the German and Japanese concentration camps, the ignominy of starvation, the sad
collapse of morals and morale? Many believed that man could only find hope in his return to religion, and in the realization of human inadequacy. In any case when God is excluded from the scheme of life, the pessimism of the age brings about an equally marked atheistic reaction: that man is nothing except his being alive and that, consequently, he is fully responsible for all his actions. Man can save himself only through himself. He must choose for himself his own course of action; and in doing so, he automatically chooses for everyone in a collective sense. He is not given the choice of inaction. In an existentialist world man is committed, whether he wants to be or not.
Just as a movement Dada had set itself the task of seeking a new order from anarchy; and Surrealism had sought the Existentialist writers condemned man to his liberty. Expressionists, Dadaists and Surrealists externalized the unconscious fears, urges, obsessions and dreams. This was the natural reaction to the artificial symmetry imposed upon the otherwise unmanageable and chaotic experience of life. In the wake of scientific progress, dislodgement of God from the centre of the universe, pervasive scepticism and the growing feeling of purposelessness of human existence made man aware of the absurdity of his situation. An ever-growing, pervasive and obsessive feeling at this time was that man is a mere actor (in the sense that he has to act) with a definite
role assigned to him. Self-awareness developed into self-derision and self condemnation became a means to vicarious satisfaction. This realization demanded new artistic (for our purpose dramatic) devices for authentic delineation of their experiences.

Theatre of the Absurd is one of the expressions of this search. It bravely faces up to the fact that for those to whom the world has lost its central explanation and meaning, it is no longer possible to accept art -- forms still based on the continuation of standards and concepts which have lost their validity; that is, the possibility of knowing the laws of conduct and ultimate values, as
deducible from a firm foundation of revealed certainty about the purpose of man in the universe. Albert Camus (1913–60) has pointed out in Le Mythe de Sisyphe, The Myth of Sisyphus (1942) how reason is pushed away from its traditional position by all the prominent thinkers of the present age:

"From Jaspers to Heidegger, from Kierkegaard to Chekhov, from the phenomenologists to Scheler, on the logical plane and on the moral plane, a whole family of minds related by their nostalgia but opposed by their methods or their aims, have persisted in blocking the royal road of reason and in recovering the direct paths of truth."2

In expressing the tragic sense of loss at the disappearance of ultimate certainties, the Theatre of the Absurd is also a symptom of what probably comes nearest to being a
genuine spiritual quest in our age. Absurd drama should be estimated as an effort to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, to instil into him, once again, the lost sense of the cosmic wonder and primeval anguish, to shock him out of a trite, mechanical, complacent existence deprived of the dignity of awareness. Common masses live from day to day having lost all contact with the basic facts, and all mysteries, of the human condition with which, in the days of yore, they were in touch through the living ritual of their religion, which made them parts of a real community and not just atoms in an atomized society. Martin Esslin has aptly called it "the search for man's own identity". The critic further says:

"Such a quest, despairing and nihilistic as it may appear (for at
the centre of being there is a void, nothingness) is nevertheless a very lofty enterprise -- for it is totally fearless, dedicated and uncompromising; it is, in the last resort a religious quest in that it seeks to confront the ultimate reality. If it has more in common with Buddhism, Indian mysticism (or some forms of Christian mysticism as well) rather than with the commonly accepted forms of religious thoughts in the West, this does not alter its basically religious quality.

Absurd Theatre forms part of the unceasing endeavour of the genuine artists of our time, to scale down the high wall of complacency and automation, in order to re-establish a palpable awareness of man's situation when confronted with the ultimate reality of his precarious condition. The central concern of the Absurd playwrights is to explain the irony of alternatives in a world that offers limited choice to a mortal man. Though Absurd drama is essentially a post-
war contemporary phenomenon, it is indebted to such earlier playwrights as Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936), August Strindberg (1849-1912) and Alfred Jarry (1873-1907). Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896; Eng. trans. 1951; Eng. Stage adaptation: London, 1966) prefigures the irrational characteristics of the Absurd theatre, being a savage farce in which monstrous puppets castigate the greed and emptiness of bourgeois society, through a series of grotesque stage images. The Theatre of the Absurd was influenced by Dadaism and Surrealism because these movements aimed at exposing the grotesque turmoil within the human consciousness. Dadaist and surrealist techniques use very suggestive icons as the enormous foot and mushrooms and huge bandaged violin in Eugène Ionesco's *Amélie* (or, How to Get Rid of It, 1953). In fact, iconization is an
important aspect of the absurdist technique.

In France the two leading exponents of this type of drama were Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) and Roger Vitrac (1892-1952). Artaud was the champion of the 'anti-literary' theatre having coined the term 'Theatre of Cruelty'. His conception of theatre was designed to shock the spectators into a full awareness of the horror of human condition. Therefore anything that is provocative in technique and in theme or approach to the human problems of character and experience have come under the purview of Absurd drama. This is clearly the avant-gardist (pioneering) influence on this kind of drama. When Ionesco opened the 8th International Theatre Congress at Helsinki, Finland in
1959, he expressed his views that:

"the avant-garde is a theatre vanguard, a small shock force of dramatists and sometimes directors followed at a certain distance by the main body of actors, playwrights and producers".5

Absurd drama has at bottom much in common with the Existentialist philosophy as enunciated by Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55) and Martin Heidegger (1889- ) and later on postulated by Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Franz Kafka. The term Existentialism means 'pertaining to existence'. Philosophically it applies to a vision of the condition and existence of Man, his place and function in the world, and his relationship or lack of relationship with God. It is generally agreed that Existentialism derives from the thinking of Kierkegaard as expressed in his books *Fear and Trembling* (1843)
and The Concept of Dread (1844). Kierkegaard felt it necessary to expound the theoretical basis of his method. In his Concluding Unscientific Postscript (trans. W. Lowrie and D.F. Swenson, 1941) the Danish philosopher and theologian explained the background of the pseudonymous books, and laid the foundation for the Existentialism of Heidegger and Sartre, by showing that there can be no abstract truth divorced from the existential experience of the individual. He also pointed out that any abstract statement about the nature of the world, by having been abstracted from the living experience of an individual, is necessarily dead, the mere empty shell of a living truth. Thus existence precedes essence, subjective thought is of a higher order than objective thought:

"While objective thought is indifferent towards the thinking individual and his existence, the subjective thinker, as an existing being is vitally interested in his own thought, within which he exists
... While objective thought attaches supreme importance to results and enables all mankind to practice deceit by copying and repeating results and summations, subjective thought puts all its store on the process of becoming and omits the result, partly because this, precisely, is a matter for the thinker himself, he being the one who knows the way it is reached, partly because he is in a constant process of becoming..."6.

This view of Kierkegaard comes closer to Beckett's view, outlined in his essay on Proust, as well as practiced in all his writings. Albert Camus is another important name in this context, because he has tried to formulate the absurd sensitivity in a logical manner and to derive from it a practical philosophy (in his The Myth of Sisyphus). Camus begins with serious contemplation of the problem of suicide:

"Judging whether life is, or is not, worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest -- whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories -- comes afterwards"7.
Camus knows that human desire cannot be satisfied by life as it is. The individual must, consciously or unconsciously, experience anxiety, disappointment, a sense of estrangement from life and horror and feel that his existence is a scandal. He observed:

"in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and 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, is properly the feeling of absurdity. All healthy men having thought of their own suicide, it can be seen without further explanation, that there is a direct connection between this feeling and the longing for death."

Camus points out that there are two ways of escape from the absurd, suicide and the leap of faith. By killing himself man can escape
the scandal and incongruity of existence. The other way may be annihilation of the consciousness by a spiritual intoxication which Camus calls "philosophical suicide" and which he finds in the existential philosophies, beginning with that of Kierkegaard. But the proper approach to the meaninglessness is to maintain the tension between the world and the mind, the two aspects involved in experience, and not to destroy one of them. The lucid contemplation of the absurd is to a great extent a solution of it. The absurd may be said to be some kind of a wager to the individual for recognizing the nature of existence with utmost clarity. This urges the wisest man (of whom Camus considered Sisyphus to be the archetype) to revolt continually against the world:

"One of the only coherent philosophical position is thus to revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and
his own obscurity... It challenges
the world anew every second"10.

He further says:

"He (the absurd man) can then decide
to accept such a universe and draw
from it his strength, his refusal
to hope, and the unyielding evidence
of a life without consolation"11.

Camus, therefore, turns a very bewildering
feeling of uncertainty and incoherence, to
practical uses by preaching the doctrine of
revolt and recognising the value of
individual activity. Many features of Camus'
theory occur in Beckett, and since Beckett
is so sensitive to the modern condition of
uncertainty having chosen to make absurdity
the source of his humour, it is unlikely
that the playwright has remained uninfluenced
by Camus' interpretation of the Absurd.
Sartre’s Existentialism, which is 
atheistic in its character, is certainly 
traceable in Beckett as well as other 
absurd dramatists. It follows from the 
decline of the religious absolute, God. 
For man, existence precede essence, 
because any common human essence is 
inconceivable — "there is no human essence 
because there is no God to conceive it".12. 
Man, therefore, in Sartrian philosophy, 
takes the place of God and becomes what 
he is, only through his own action.13 Such 
absolute freedom on the part of man entails 
a state of anguish or anxiety. The Sartrian 
hero is haunted by an abysmal nothingness, 
consequent upon his absolute freedom.14 
Atheistic Existentialism ends by offering 
the spectacle of a universe deprived of all 
values except the ultimate value of a 
subjective choice. The absurd is thus the
fruit of the maladjustment of the mind to reality or experience. The absurd playwrights, more so Samuel Beckett starts from this maladjustment in order to explore the nature of reality and consciousness, and realizes in his own way the completely incommunicable character of the Ultimate Reality. Camus and Sartre restrain themselves to the realistic level, having turned the absurd to practical uses, by making it the spring-board of individual responsibility and choice of fate Beckett, on the other hand, makes the absurd the very starting point of a quest for super-reality. His dramatic treatment is that of an artist and not of a philosopher as Sartre's is. Beckett himself elaborates:

"When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right, I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that is simply a mess."
Beckett's refusal to be more than a painstaking recorder of his modes of existence, his strong reluctance to allow any philosophical meaning, or thesis, to be attributed to his work, is precisely his core activity which elevates his precarious enterprise into a sphere of significance, much beyond the scope of other dramatic artists. Beckett's poems, prose narratives and plays are highly successful as literary creations with rich, powerful structures of verbal forms and images. On the top of that, through their very uncompromising concentration on existential experience they are also capable of claiming attention as human documents of great value. His literary works constitute an exploration of the nature of one human being's mode of existing on an almost unprecedented scale, and thereby no less into the nature of human.
existence itself. Beckett's writings are much more accomplished than mere illustrations of the point-of-view of some existential philosopher, such as Heidegger or Kafka or Sartre had been. His literary works constitute the culmination of existential reflection itself, precisely because these are free of abstract concepts or generalized ideas, thus escaping the inner contradiction of the platitudinous existentialist statements. In this respect, Beckett's writings are certainly superior to those of Sartre, Camus or Kafka, wherein the philosopher has followed the logic of his own position to the point where he puts his ideas into the form of fiction or drama. Beckett works on the level of an intense artistic creativity, which gives his compositions the profound immediate experiential validity.
Thus, we may say that Beckett and other playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd express their sense of confusions and restlessness in absurd terms and manners, unlike that of Sartre and his ilk who strove to tear the diaphragm of absurdity by means of the conventional logical reasoning based on intellectual exercise.

On their first iconoclastic appearance the plays of Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov and Eugene Ionesco created a stir in modern experimental drama. The conventional dramatic pattern falls far too short of the requirements of this new sort of puzzling, incongruous and rather uncanny theatrical experiment. All still-familiar methods and means of play making have been menacingly rejected by this new
drama, so much so that:

"in some of these plays dialogue seems to have degenerated into a meaningless babble".  

The essential function of drama is communication -- dramatist's language must communicate his subjective thought. The playwright must attain the distilled quintessence in the use of words.

Absurdists hold that the fossilised forms of worn-out language fail to come up to their essential requirement. It may be said that at this point the Theatre of the Absurd stands at the intersecting point of maximum realism. Esslin holds:

"For if the real conversation of human beings is in fact absurd and nonsensical, then it is the well-made play with its polished logical dialogue that is unrealistic, while the absurdist play may well be a tape recorded reproduction of reality".
The word "Absurd" in the context of post World War II theatre condition does not mean precisely the same as it does in ordinary usage (where it is, for example, used in the sense of 'ridiculous', 'senseless', and 'incomprehensible'), but refers to a concept with regard to Man's existential relationship to the Universe and Nature. The "Absurd" involves humanity's plight as purposelessness, in an existence out of harmony with its surroundings (the word "absurd" literally means 'out of harmony'). Awareness of this lack of purpose in all we do produces a state of metaphysical anguish which becomes the central theme of the writers in the Theatre of the Absurd. It is neither Man who is "absurd", nor the Universe which is "absurd", but it rather is Man's relationship to the Universe. It could be argued that the feelings of purposelessness,
anxiety and abandonment by God, engendered by thinking of man in this way were partly a product of the holocaust of World War II, felt most acutely in France. Theatre of the Absurd is the most realistic presentation of the human reality, a reality devoid of all traditional meanings, because they do not stand the test of life at a particular time-frame.

Therefore the emphasis in drama has shifted away from traditional forms towards complex and suggestive images. Theatre of the Absurd often puts a dream situation on the stage. Dreams defy rules of any realistic theatre, because they do not develop logically, but by association only, communicating images, not ideas. Absurd drama is indeed a far cry from the Shawian drama of ideas, and can perhaps best
be understood in terms of a dream-image or poetic imagery which is capable of carrying
"a multitude of meanings at one and the same time".18

However, not all the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd, like Edward Albee's The American Dream (1960) or The Zoo Story (1963), can be interpreted as dream images as they are rooted deeper into reality.

Since the Theatre of the Absurd was not a planned movement, the playwrights were all separately engaged in dramatizing their sense of futility using their individual techniques. But they, almost in a body, opposed prevalent bourgeois realism and naturalistic techniques. All these absurd dramatists have tried to understand the predicament why man, self-centred and alienated as he is, fails to communicate
with others. In plot-centred plays spectators could consciously or unconsciously identify themselves with heroes and heroines because of essential similarity between ideals and ambitions. In contemporary life, values by which those heroes used to swear are doubted and suspected. Therefore it is rather impossible to sympathise with a hero who shows readiness to sacrifice everything for his cherished values. What is troubling the whole modern world to the hilt is the separation of ideals from reality, and values from the living tenor. This makes absurdity the central experience and justifies the absence of heroes or heroines (in the traditional sense, as embodiments of certain values and virtues) from the absurd plays. Even if a character is accorded some central place and importance, his appearance, manners, talks and codes do not elicit any taken-for-
granted admiration and sympathy from the spectators. There is a good distance between the absurd stage and the spectators thereof. This distance is necessary to help the spectators to maintain their identity while witnessing unwanted, illogical, absurd, or vulgar or crude situations on the stage. Only from a distance they can see how a disintegrated, demoralized and diffused life is. Leaving the auditorium, then they reconstruct their broken memories of the performance in their lonely moments, they might perceive how it was their own life that was dramatized. Therefore, the absurd plays expect the spectators to use their imagination in order to arrange together the inchoate and absurd experiences into sensible concepts. Black humour, so commonly used in absurd plays, indicate this tendency. Incongruities and
absurdities can be drowned only in crude laughter. This is why there is a queer combination of tragedy and farce, pathos and brutal humour in the absurd plays. As a consequence of this, in the most serious moments or pathetic situations the spectator pierce through the frost of anxiety with his free and indifferent laughter.

Thus, we may say that the Theatre of the Absurd is neither concerned with conveying information nor with presenting the problems of the destinies of characters, nor even with any thesis to be expounded. It is not at all concerned with the representation of events or action in the Aristotelian sense. Instead, it presents the individual's basic hopeless predicament. It neither investigates nor solves problems nor dictate any morals or norms of any ideal behaviour.
Theatre of the Absurd delves deep into the disintegrated apprehension tormenting the character's mind. Ionesco has summarised Artaud's views which tend to define the exact nature of the Absurd:

"As our knowledge becomes separated from life, our culture no longer contains ourselves, for it forms a 'social' context into which we are not integrated. So the problem becomes that of bringing our life back into contact with our culture, making it a living culture once again. To achieve this, we shall first have to kill 'the respect for what is written down in black and white' . . . to break up our language so that it can be put together again in order to re-establish contact with 'the absolute' or as I should prefer to say 'with multiple reality', it is imperative to 'push' human beings again towards seeing themselves as they really are".19.

This is the reason why in the Theatre of the Absurd the communication between the homo sapiens is so often shown to be in a state of breakdown. Language, therefore is made to take its authentic
place of communication in these plays. But it can be possible only if language is divested of all its traditional cliches which dominate thought, and it is used as an authentic language that conveys a true meaning. Almost all important dramatists of the Theatre of the Absurd shared the feeling that drama of the post World War II period required a new mode of expression. Thus, there is a tendency in these playwrights to discard the worn out cliches and stereotyped lingual jargons.

The Theatre of the Absurd uses everyday speech with such precision that it creates the horror of a life devoid of emotion. Since, life is reduced to sterility, barren relations and selfishness, it becomes difficult for an artist to impose a form on the chaotic experiences, and to colour them
with some sense. This is why the language they employ is meant to conceal feelings, rather than to reveal them. Our conversation, communication and social-interaction are mere repetition of cliches and platitudes. The continual monotonous expressions manifest inertia and indifference towards learning new ways of self-expression. But this may, however, be conceded that it facilitates social existence.

Language can only be an approximation of feelings and thoughts but even this is not always possible since much depends on who the listener is. The same expressions, in different circumstances, are changed with different modulation of voice and emphasis. Ionesco has been chiefly concerned with the problem of communication. The inability of the Orator in The Chairs (1952) may be said
to be a common experience for anyone of us who has certain ideas to express. The difficulty of learning the language which helps communication, is presented in the 

The Lesson (1951) where the professor kills the student only with words. Genet's effort has been to show the essential identity of meaning and intention, even though different words may be used from different view-points. Ionesco's major problem is to retain man's essential self in the world of cliches. In connection with the language of the Absurdist playwrights Esslin has said:

"The Theatre of the Absurd, ... tends towards a radical devaluation of language, towards a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself. The element of language still plays an important part in this conception, but what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken by the characters. In Ionesco's The Chairs, for example, the poetic content of a powerfully poetic play does not lie in the banal words that are uttered but in the fact that they are spoken to an evergrowing number of empty chairs."20.
The disintegration of perception leads to a devaluation of language in Absurd drama. Its language, therefore, does not speak like the conventional theatre-language, but suggests like poetry, which is ambiguous and associative. The theatre of the Absurd, in carrying the poetic endeavour into the concrete stage images, seems to go further than poetry in dispensing of logic and of the discursive speech. It allows the use of visual elements and movements. Therefore it is particularly suited to the communication of complex images of sub-conscious mind. By setting the words in contrast to the action, by reducing it to a meaningless pattern, by abandoning both a logical syntax and an accepted semantic indication, the Theatre of the Absurd has opened up a totally new dimension for drama.
For an immediate effect and a sensitized awareness of human predicament Absurd theatre uses poetic images and situations. A moment's illuminating experience just before death, or a moment of most intensified acute feeling of horror is enough to fill the stage with effective scenes and to keep the spectators involved. Ionesco's Amedee (1953) depends for its effectiveness on the central image of the growing corpse, and the consequent horror generated in the mind of Amedee and his wife. In Beckett's Endgame (1958) the vision of a dying world is presented. In 'The Zoo Story' (1958) by Albee a man Jerry, with a purpose to establish contact with another man Peter, enrages him and ultimately gets himself stabbed. In Ionesco's Rhinoceros (1959), the idea of surrender to dictatorship is depicted through the reversal of normal
human situation and poetic juxtaposition of man's alienation and isolation among his own people.

Such situations recur, and almost every absurd play is a new poetic image through which the existential anguish gets manifested. Even when routine dialogues between friends or families are used, they are so pointed, exact and matter-of-fact that they reveal the horror of normal-looking situations. The scenes or dialogues may not lead the spectators to any philosophical conclusions about motives and attitudes of characters, but they do lay bare the essential nature of their contact. In Beckett's Waiting for Godot Vladimir and Estragon try to establish communication by abusing each other. In Pinter's The Birthday Party (1958) the
preciseness of exchanges between husband
Petey and wife Meg is so grotesque that
though comic on the surface, the dialogue
offers a concealed threat which makes the
audience uneasy:

"Meg: Have you been working hard this
morning?
Petey: No, just stocked up a few of
the old chairs. Cleaned up a bit.
Meg: Is it nice out?
Petey: Very nice. (Pause)
Meg: Is Stanley up yet?
Petey: I don't know. Is he?
Meg: I don't know I haven't seen him
down yet?
Petey: Well then, he can't be up.
Meg: Haven't you seen him down?
Petey: I have only just come in.
Meg: He must be still asleep. (She
looks round the room, stands,
goes to the sideboard and takes
a pair of socks from a drawer,
collects wool and a needle and
goes back to the table). What
time did you go out this morning
Petey?
Petey: Same time as usual.
Meg: Was it dark?
Petey: No. It was light.
Meg: (Beginning to dark) Sometime you
go out in the morning and it is
dark.
Petey: That's in the winter.
Meg: Oh, in winter.
Pete: Yes, it gets light later in winter.
Meg: Oh#21.

Here the phrases are the commonest in human speech, but they are used with extreme care, and the dialogue flow like waves rising and falling with the strong undercurrent of palpable dramatic tension. In the Absurd plays, the language is a subjective one. Thus, it is devoid of any active process of integration in the mind of the audience. Human beings in their daily lives confront a world that has become out of joint, but they are no longer aware of this disintegration, and are brought face to face with a heightened representation of a schizophrenic world. The spectator in the Absurd theatre is compelled to entangle himself in the mystery of this mad world. He feels that his own experiences are very similar, as those of the characters presented on the stage. The stage becomes almost a jigsaw puzzle in which audience is provided with
a disjointed pattern out of which it is imperative for him to trace out a meaningful design.

Beckettian Absurd is a vivid representation of the ache in the psyche of modern man, projected through grotesque, unconventional stage devices. The American absurdist playwright Edward Albee observes:

"The Theatre of the Absurd is an absorption in the art of certain existentialist and post-existentialist philosophical concepts having to do in the main, with man's attempt to make sense for himself, out of this senseless position in a world which makes no sense, because the moral, religious, political and social structures man has created to 'illusion' himself have collapsed"22.

Pathos and humour, ecstasy and terror are the two sides of the same life. Therefore, absurdist playwrights try to present the reality of life by composing
pathetic farce or humorous tragedy. J.L. Styan holds in this connection that the techniques of the Theatre of the Absurd are based on the use of comical farce, devised primarily as a means "of breaking down resistance to the horror of content, and the Absurdists use Pirandello's feeling of the opposite in order to twist the knife in the wound."23.

Beckett perfunctorily adopts this technique, forcing the audience to laugh helplessly at suicide, mortality and despair. Styan further says that Absurd drama is primarily the drama of man's dark pessimistic imagination:

"this is a fully conventional theatre of the imagination to shake us into the real business of existence."24.

This theatre is uncommitted to any socio-political ideology which belongs to the
positivist approach of earlier decades. In Absurd plays, the shift from the objective reality of the outside world to the subjective reality of the inner world, indicates the gap between the traditional and the modern; between the representational and the expressionist projection of mental realities.

The Swedish expressionist playwright August Strindberg (1849-1912) anticipates this absurdist outlook in the introductory note to The Dream Play (1902):

"Anything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist. On a slight groundwork of reality, imagination spins and weaves new patterns made up of memories, experiences, unfeathered fancies, absurdities and improvisations. The characters split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystallize, scatter and converge. Not a single consciousness holds, stays over them all — that of a dreamer."
Strindberg's influence on this new mode of drama is evident from the psychological curiosity with which the self of the character is probed and laid bare before the audience. Similarly, Ionesco's observation constitutes the central concern of the human self in modern world, which the absurd dramatists have chosen as their essential theme:

"this theme of man lost in a labyrinth, without a guiding thread, is basic . . . yet if man no longer has a guiding thread, it is because he no longer wants to have one. Hence, his feeling of guilt, of anxiety, of the absurdity, of history."

Behind the realistic exposure of the absurdity of inauthentic ways of life, the theatre of the absurd also reveals the absurdity of the human condition itself, in a world where the decline of religious belief has deprived man of certainties and
shelters. When it is no longer possible to accept the closed systems of values and revelations of a divide purpose, life must eventually be faced in its ultimate stark reality. Man is viewed here as stripped of the accidental circumstances of social position or historical context. However frivolous, grotesque and irrelevant it may appear, Absurd drama tend to represent a return to the function of classical theatre which showed the confrontation of man with the spheres of myth and religious reality. As is seen in the Greek tragedies or in the medieval Mystery plays or in the allegories, the audience, in Absurd drama, is made aware of man's precarious and mysterious station in the universe. The difference from the Greek tragedies, or comedies and from the medieval Mystery plays, is that in them there is always a sense of a universally
accepted metaphysical reality. On the other hand, the Theatre of the Absurd does not make such a claim. It only presents, with derisive humour, man's conception about the ultimate reality through experiences and the consequent presentation of human situation. This is the material of the Absurd playwrights, out of which its formlessness originates.

These playwrights are not concerned with the problems and destinies of the characters, which exist outside the author's inner, i.e. psychic world. This is why they are also not concerned with the representation of events, the narration of the fate or the adventures of the characters. On the contrary, they indulge themselves in focusing on the basic situation of one individual. The theatre of the Absurd may
be called a theatre of situation, as against a theatre of events in sequence. Hence, it takes resort to a language based on patterns of concrete images, rather than of argument and discursive speech. Since it tries to throw light on a sense of being, it can neither investigate nor solve the problems of human conduct or morals.

Absurd drama looks objectively valid characters, because it projects its author's personal world. It shows neither the clash of opposing temperaments nor does it cure to study the human passion locked in conflict. As such, it can hardly be called dramatic in the accepted sense of the word. The Theatre of the Absurd is not intended to tell a story in order to communicate some moral or socio-political
lesson, instead, it tries to make a pattern of poetic images. For example, in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the things happen, but these happenings do not constitute any plot or story, but appear to be images of Beckett's intuition that nothing really ever happens in man's experience. The whole play is a quite complex poetic image made up of a complicated pattern of subsidiary images and themes, which are subtly interwoven like the themes of a musical composition. *Godot* does not present a systematic development of events like a well-made play, but it makes a complex impression of a basic and static situation in the mind of its spectators. Martin Esslin aptly observes:

"the endeavour to communicate a total sense of being is an attempt to present a truer picture of reality itself, reality as apprehended by individuals."
The Theatre of the Absurd is a part of a rich and varied tradition. What is new in it, is the unusual way in which various familiar attitudes of mind and literary idioms are grafted. It does not reflect despair or a return to dark irrational forces, but expresses modern man's endeavour to come to terms with the world in which he lives or unravels. It attempts to make him face up to the human condition as it really is, to free him from illusions that cause constant maladjustment and disappointment. The dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness, and at the same time to accept it bravely without any fear or illusion or inhibition, and also to be able to laugh at it. This is the lesson which the absurdist playwrights want to convey to the humanity. This precisely is the basic philosophy behind the Theatre of the Absurd.
References—Nature of the Absurd: Basic Philosophy behind Beckett’s Drama.


4. Ibid., p. 65.


8. Ibid., p. 13.

9. Ibid., p. 38.
10. Ibid., p. 47.

11. Ibid., p. 53.


13. Ibid., pp. 28-34.


16. Tom P. Driver, "Beckett by the Madelines", 


19. Ibid., p. 10.


25. Ibid., p. 220.
