CHAPTER FIVE

BECKETT'S LIMBO-LIKE UNIVERSE
His is a sparsely populated planet where the loneliness and desolation of man is shown through pairs of human beings who live a knock-about, cut-and-thrust type of comic-pathetic life which sometimes makes us laugh and sometimes creates pathos. In this world there are no certainties of faith, religion, science or the strength of heroic deeds. Everything has been denuded of meaning; therefore, the laughter sounds hollow; pathos is not so pathetic; one feels a kind of vacuum where man's voice or human sound is bereft of its richness; as if we were in some kind of limbo. He mixes theology with slime and philosophy is made to wear a fool's cap. There's a war of nerves between the sublime and the ridiculous. The dialectic between derision and compassion, the sublime and the ridiculous does not lead to any new synthesis. Rather, it remains explosive and keeps Beckett's theatre alive.

They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more (he jerks the rope) on!

Pozzo in Waiting for Godot.

This is a poetic expression of Beckett's vision which he presents as a dramatic experience in Waiting for Godot.
considered to be a standard of measure in modern drama. This sense of the futility and meaninglessness of life in modern drama has already found an archetypal poetic expression in the tragedies of Shakespeare and the discourses of sages of different religions:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time.
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools,
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

*Waiting for Godot* has become a landmark in modern drama because this vision, the experience of waiting, of hope deferred, of the "won't come this evening but surely tomorrow" is communicated in dramatic terms which are radically different from those of the traditional drama. The play holds the attention of the audience and the readers and that is the key to communication inspite of the fact that characters express their inability to undertake any meaningful action (Estragon: 'Nothing we can do about it'), and find it difficult to believe that even their presence
is meaningful (Sattagon: 'We always find something, eh, Didi, to give us the impression').

Traditionally, a dramatist conceives a firm and rational structure for his play to convey his meaning. The actions of his characters follow a pattern. The dramatic critics talk of the Exposition delineating the main traits of the protagonist, the significance of whose actions is realized later on through the rising Action, the Crisis, the Falling Action and Denouement. This linear development of action in traditional drama is integrated into a coherent whole. The movement of action takes place with a relentless inevitability which along with poetic intensity of language or heightened prose, communicates the meaning of the play. This pattern of action is not found in Waiting for Godot and still the play communicates its meaning in dramatic terms and holds the audience spell-bound, showing a possibility that there could be drama without traditional action. Kenneth Lynan has expressed the same opinion very aptly:

A special virtue attaches to plays which remind the drama of how much it can do without and still exist. By all the known criteria, Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot is a dramatic vacuum. If the critic who seeks a chink in its armour for it is all chink. It has no plot, no climax, no denouement; no beginning, no middle, and no end. Unavoidably, it has a situation, and it might be accused of having suspense, since it deals with the impatience of two tramps, waiting beneath a
tree, waiting for a cryptic Mr. Godot to keep his appointment with them: but the situation is never developed, and a glance at the program—shows that Mr. Godot is not going to arrive. Waiting for Godot frankly jettisons everything by which we recognize theatre. It arrives at the custom-house, as it were, with no luggage, no passport, and nothing to declare; yet it goes through, as might a pilgrim from Mars. It does this, I believe, by appealing to a definition of drama much more fundamental than any in the book. A play, it asserts, is basically a means of spending two hours in the dark without being bored.

Of course drama is much more than keeping an audience glued to its seats for two hours—because various other the forms of popular entertainment like circus, music hall, the variety and several popular mass entertainments achieve the same effect. Waiting for Godot does much more than that. Through its farcical facade the play lifts the audience to a metaphysical plane.

What are Beckett's techniques of communication which not only avoid theatrical boredom but cause high excitement the in the theatre? Primarily, the dramatic nightmare that is Waiting for Godot is presented through a "screen of laughter" drawn from the ancient sources of pantomime, farce, comedy, charade, vaudeville, circus, music hall and Comedia Dell' Arte. It is like a tennis match played on a burning marl, or, as J.H. Styan says, "the clowning exhibits the life and death tension of the fool on the high wire."

The laughter evoked is similar to that of Chaplin in
Cold Rush and his other silent movies. The antics of Gogo and Didi remind one of Laurel and Hardy. Pozzo is like a ring master shouting "on, on." Their laughter sounds like a guffaw. Their activities are antics stretched, exaggerated into caricature. When they think they squeeze their heads, they shake hands with exaggerated affection; they embrace and ricochet violently, feel and smell, reflect, concentrate, mimic, sigh, search with nose to the ground as any circus clowns do.

Vladimir: Go ahead
Estragon: After you
Vladimir: No, no, you first
Estragon: Why me?
Vladimir: You're lighter than me
Estragon: Just so!
Vladimir: I don't understand
Estragon: Use your intelligence, can't you.

(Didi uses his intelligence)

In both the acts, patterned on the movement of the pendulum, the circus gesture, the clownish antics, the splitting laughter and the simplicity of everyday speech about mundane things like eating, defecating, pain etc., the communication with the audience, through the senses, is immediate because there is a lot in Didi and Gogo which we recognize in ourselves and a lot that differentiates us from them. Again,
the communication reaches a deeper level when there is a pattern of repetition of certain phrases (It hurts?) with which the characters try to involve the audience by direct address. The audience's and the readers' imagination leaps to complete the half-remembered sentences, or at least they are tossed into thinking. Even Lucky's aphasic speech communicates well in the theatre because disjointed sentences remind the audience of various experiences from rapid life. Sometimes the tempo of cross-talk is so that we are breezily thrilled and swept along. Consider the following dialogue which grips us with meaning even when it does not serve the need of action because there is no apparent action in the play.

Vladimir: Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand.

Estragon: On the other hand it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes.

Vladimir: I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it.

Estragon: What exactly did we ask him to do for us?

Vladimir: Were you not there?

Estragon: I can't have been listening.

Vladimir: Oh... nothing very definite.

Estragon: A kind of prayer.

Vladimir: Precisely.

Estragon: A vague supplication.

Vladimir: Exactly.
Estragon: And what did he reply?
Vladimir: That he'd see.
Estragon: That he couldn't promise anything.
Vladimir: That he'd have to think it over.
Estragon: In the quiet of his home.
Vladimir: Consult his family.
Estragon: His friends.
Vladimir: His agents.
Estragon: His correspondents.
Vladimir: His books.
Estragon: His bank account.
Vladimir: Before taking a decision.
Estragon: It's the normal thing.
Vladimir: Is it not so?
Estragon: I think it is.
Vladimir: I think so too. (silence).
Estragon: (anxious) And we?

In the whole play every burst of conversation, as above, into crescendo of clownish activity, declines silence to rise again to similar activity in keeping with the oscillating motion of a pendulum. Nothing is conclusive except the silence, waiting for Godot, to which everything returns.

For instance in Act II Godot suggests that they should talk to avoid thinking and hearing. A meaningless chatter
follows which again returns to silence - silence which haunts them and which they want to escape.

Estragon: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.

Vladimir: You're right, we're inexhaustible.

Estragon: It's so we won't think.

Vladimir: We have that excuse.

Estragon: It's so we won't hear.

Vladimir: We have our reasons.

Estragon: All the dead voices.

Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Vladimir: Like sand.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Silence

Vladimir: They all speak together.

Estragon: Each one to itself.

Silence

Vladimir: Rather they whisper.

Estragon: They rustle.

Silence

Vladimir: What do they say?

Estragon: They talk about their lives.

Vladimir: To have lived is not enough for them.

Estragon: They have to talk about it.

Vladimir: To be dead is not enough for them.
Estragon: It is not sufficient.

Silence

Conversation pulsating between two silent points is the recurrent pattern throughout the play. It is like the repeated yawns of a bored man, when time stands still. It communicates the sense of emptiness, nullity, void.

Apart from this overpowering silence which seems to swallow the play, the dialogue moves from the mundane to the mysterious. For instance:

Vladimir: There's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet. This is getting alarming. One of the thieves was saved. It's a reasonable percentage.

In the whole play the dialogue modulates continuously from the commonplace to the esoteric. Pozzo's night speech jerks from sublime to ridiculous, from lyrical to abysmal gloom and finally to silence.

Pozzo: (They stop looking at the sky). What's there so extraordinary about it? Qua sky. It is pale and luminous like any sky at this hour of the day. (Pause). In these latitudes (pause). Then the weather is fine. (Lyrical) An hour ago (he looks at his watch, prosaic) roughly (Lyrical), after having poured fourth ever since (he hesitates, prosaic) say ten O' clock in the morning (Lyrical) tirelessly torrents of red and white light it begins to lose its effulgence, to grow pale (gesture of the two hands lapping by stages), pale over a little paler, a little paler until (dramatic pause, ample gesture of the two hands flung wide apart) pppfft* finished!
it comes to rest, but — (hand raised in admonition) — but behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is changing (vibrantly) and will burst upon (snaps his fingers) pop! like that! (his inspiration leaves him) just when we least expect it.
(Silence, Gloomily) That's how it is on this bitch of an earth.

Long silence

After this long silence Gogo and Didi begin to chatter, exchanging vaudeville remarks. The violent shift in tone cannot be missed, and accentuates the sense of absurdity of language itself because nothing is being said, nothing is meant.

This sense of void is communicated through the meaningless of relationship between characters. In traditional drama the relationship between characters changes, but in Waiting for Godot the relationship between characters is static. In Act I Gogo-Didi relations are as sterile as in Act II. It would seem that Pozzo-Lucky relations change in Act II, but they, in fact, remain the same — they are tied together, though Pozzo has become blind. His blindness does not change the relationship.

Since there is no change or development in character relationship, there is no change in time — time, qualitatively speaking, as a meaningful intervention in human affairs — though in . . . Act II the tree has leaves and Pozzo goes blind. Of course Vladimir and Estragon
devise fun to pass time (How the time flies when one has fun! Didi) - that is the movement of a pendulum; chronological time does change. The characters are involved in a web of meaninglessness which reinforces the meaninglessness of time. Pozzo does not remember having encountered anyone yesterday and he wouldn't remember anything tomorrow, and he remonstrates angrily with Didi and Gogo: "One day, is that not enough for you?" That's how horror and futility of existence seep in through the "screen of laughter." Behind the comic mask there is the void, Nothingness, which we experience dramatically - tomorrow and tomorrow, from womb to tomb. This void is not the same as that of St. John of the Cross which is a meaningful stage, towards God-realization. Beckett's void is just past, just Nothing. This Nothing has no religious significance though Waiting for Godot is suffused with religious imagery.

The religious imagery used does not communicate any sense of hope. It is, on the contrary, profaned in such a manner that it too becomes a part of continuous meaningless chatter.

Vladimir: Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?

(Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life. Proverbs, XIII,12)

The presence of such half-remembered Biblical quotes
accentuates the absence of religious feeling. Miki and Gogo wait for Godot without any religious faith. It is this waiting without faith which communicates the sense of absurdity. As Horsh Zeifman says:

Far from offering hope of religious consolation, Beckett's drama is a 'kyrie eleison' of suffering and despair, in which anguished cries of spiritual emptiness alternate with a bitterly outraged and frequently outrageous indictment of the extent of divine malevolence. Instead of providing support for a Christian interpretation, the presence of Biblical imagery in the play serves rather to undermine such an interpretation through ironic counterpoint. For the thrust of Beckett's religious references suggests that man is the victim of a heartless metaphysical ruse, trapped in the midst of an alien and hostile world, his life a protracted and painful crucifixion without hope of transcendence. Each element of Beckett's dramatic art isolates, and thus re-enforces, these same central thematic issues: the universality of suffering and the impossibility of salvation.

Dramatically, it is the blend of this horror with the farcical elements of the circus and other popular performing arts, that make the end product so exhilarating and so exciting in theatre. The horror and farce are not juxtaposed but they are mixed - from the terrible cry of the first entrance of Pozzo-Lucky to the last when Gogo tries to hang himself with a string from his trousers which fall to the ground. You laugh even when you bleed.

One cannot successfully pinpoint with certainty that this is the heart of the mystery in Waiting for Godot.
and without an impending sense of mystery the play would not have such a wide appeal - but it is this mystery which the characters of the play do not parody or make fun of. In the play whatever is touched is parodied, ridiculed and reduced to nothing. The idea of suicide, waiting, religious grace, the language itself, whatever is sacred is profaned by them. Like a juggler playing with balls they toss everything into air and weave new patterns but the mystery of Godot is not burlesqued though his promise of doing something for them is burlesqued. If Godot had been turned into a certainty or conceptualized, the play would not have existed because the tramps would have parodied him threadbare. It is this impending mystery which enthralls the audience.

This mystical experience is communicated not through any well-arranged structured system, but the play as a whole, when its experience is complete, communicates the feeling of Godot as something for which the tramps will continue waiting even though their lives may turn out to be the round story of the dog related in Act II.

This mystery is comprehended in totality, in a flash, when the play experience is over. Like a symphony it reveals its meaning in totality though for the sake of analysis we might say that the planes of comicality criss-cross and mingle with the plane of perpetual silence to which everything has a tendency to be reduced. It might be said that it is to escape this awful silence - of Godot -
that Gogo-Didi turn themselves into tramps. But they don't know how to burlesque this silence. Hence the waiting.

(II)

Oh! Lower! ... Don't be afraid! We're past the age when...there! Now... Get your shoulder under it ... Oh! ... (Giggles) ... Oh glory! Up! Up! Up! Ah! ... What will Dan say when he sees me?

This monologue is not the expression of the ecstasy of the sexual orgasm of a young girl or dream of a person climbing the stairway to heaven but the description of a seventy year-old fat rheumatic woman Maddy Rooney being lifted and pushed into the car by Mr. Slocum when she calls him her admirer in Beckett's radio play All that Fall. Behind this bright surface of the play, as in Waiting for Godot, we find the essential loneliness and misery of Maddy (Oh I am just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness). She is making a slow dragging movement towards the railway station to receive her husband Dan Rooney who is due to arrive by the twelve-thirty train. And during this seemingly long journey she talks to herself but is glad to interrupt her monologue in order to communicate with people who meet her on the way, but every time she makes such an attempt she finds communication impossible and shrinks back into her shell of isolation, into her monologue. "I estrange
them all," she says. Forty years ago she had lost a daughter, Minnie, who would have been "girding her loins for a change," she muses sorrowfully. In this mood of misery she attempts to talk to Christy the cart-driver who asks her if she "needs any dung. She replies him with such vehemence that further possibility of talking to him ceases and she reverts to her monologue, self-talking to self. Till she reaches the railway station this oscillation between monologue and duologue continues. It is her duologue with others which provides the colourful tapestry woven by spoken words and rural sounds through which Maddy's grief surfaces. She is essentially a mother whose motherhood has been nipped in early life.

After her first monologue she meets Tyler, a retired bill-broker, and there is a titillating conversation with him.

Mr. Tyler: Perhaps if I were to lay hand on your shoulders Mrs. Rooney, how would that be?

Mrs. Rooney: Mr. Rooney, Mr. Tyler I mean, I am tired of light old hands on my shoulders and other senseless places, sick and tired of them.

But the conversation is flexible enough to change from trifling to serious, as she says, "It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution." But this does not last long. She tells him to stop molesting her and go his way. But when
The ride away, she longs to call him back and uses language which thrills; "Oh cursed corset! If I could let it out, without indecent exposure. Mr. Tyler! Mr. Tyler! Come back and unlace me behind the hedge!" Then follows the encounter with Mr. Slocum, Clerk of the Racecourse who gives her a lift to the railway station where a brief dialogue takes place with Mr. Barrow, the station master. When at the railway station there is a chorus of voices and she is excluded, she says, "Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is going on." But when no one cares, she continues, "Do not flatter yourself for one moment, because I hold aloof that my sufferings have ceased." The excitement of the play is heightened because the train is delayed, may be because of some accident, and the anxious hysterical inquiries when such a danger is perceived. This is a second pattern in the play — the first being the alternate movement of monologue and dialogue. As Daddy takes a return journey home with her blind husband Dan, the play assumes another pattern because Dan represents a destructive force in contrast to his wife's lost motherhood for which she yearns. Of course he, like Daddy, is essentially lonely and sick. In reply to Daddy's inquiry about his health he says, "The day you met me I should have been in bed. The day you proposed to me the doctors gave me up ... The night you married me they came for me with an ambulance ... No, I
cannot be said to be well."

He hates children while Maddy always talks of her lost child. But the bright surface of the play still continues!

Mrs. Rooney: Kiss me!

Mr. Rooney: Kiss you? in public? On the platform? Before the boy? Have you taken leave of your senses?

... ... ... ...

Mr. Rooney: Have you been drinking again? (Pause) You are quivering like a blanc mange. (Pause) Are you in a condition to lead me (pause). We shall fall into the ditch.

... ... ... ...

Mr. Rooney: I think Effie is going to commit adultery with the Mayor.

The back home journey continues through this Dan-Maddy patter. Maddy has not stopped wondering why the train was hold up. Dan keeps mysteriously silent. When the children jeer at them, Dan lets out a note of horror which chills the audience:

Mr. Rooney: Did you ever wish to kill some young fool in the bud (pause) Many a time at night, in winter, on the back road home, I nearly attacked the boy. Poor Jerry! (pause) What restrained me then? Not fear of man.

After some time, he says:

Mr. Rooney: ...I had the compartment to myself, as usual. At least I hope so, for I made no attempt to restrain myself....
At the end of the play the boy Jerry comes to Dan to return a ball-like thing which he says belongs to Dan. At that time Maddy asks him why the train was delayed. Jerry replies that a little child fell out of the train and was crushed.

Jerry: It was a little child Ma'am

(Mr. Rooney groans)

Mrs. Rooney: What do you mean, it was a little child?

Jerry: It was a little child fell out of the carriage, on to the line, Ma'am (Pause), under the wheels, Ma'am.

Did Dan push the child out? Is that why Dan said that he did not restrain himself?

The play has a disturbing end which is not merely that of a whodunit. Like life All That Fall poses questions to which there is no answer. Maddy and Dan are husband and wife yet are isolated like desolate islands. "The Lord uphold all that fall..." Dan and Maddy break into wild laughter when they learn about the subject of the sermon. Will the Lord lift the child who fell? Dan and Maddy laugh at its absurdity, may be.

(III)

The "screen of laughter," the clowning and the music-hall cross talk of Waiting for Godot or the bright
conversation of *All that Fall* through which penetrates the serious purpose of the dramatist are all missing in *Endgame*. There is naked cruelty, suffering and death, "Rather difficult and elliptic, mostly depending on the power of the text to claw, more inhuman than Godot," says Beckett.

*Endgame* is a total retreat from humanity. It is a living hell and is presented to the audience without being muffled or softened by humour. Hamm is a degraded tyrant whose future lies in the dustbins in which he has imprisoned his "accursed progenitors," Nagg and Noll.

From the very outset a claustrophobic atmosphere is established. In a small room with two (curtained) windows opening out onto the world, four people are condemned to live out their lives in occasional bursts of mutual hatred. Hamm is blind, cannot stand and is confined to a wheelchair. Clov cannot sit and has to keep standing all the time. Nagg and Nell, Hamm's parents, lost their legs in an explosion and are confined to dustbins living on occasional biscuits. One feels that a gigantic explosion has killed all life except these four persons. Hamm is waiting for this game to come to an end. When Clov says that he has a flea, Hamm asks him to kill it lest mankind restart from the flea. A similar apprehension is expressed about the rat in the kitchen. When at the end of the play Clov looks out through the telescope and reports a small boy
walking, Hamm sarcastically laughs.

Clov: (dismayed) Looks like a small boy.

Hamm: (Sarcastic) A small-boy!

Clov: I'll go and see (He gets down, drops the telescope, goes towards door, turns) I'll take the gaff (he looks for the gaff, sees it, picks it up, hastens towards door).

Hamm: If he exists he'll come here. And if he doesn't...

There's no future. Outside, life is impossible, and inside, it is a lingering death. In this death-in-life Hamm asks for his pain-killer. Hagg wants pap or sugar plum and Clov wants to go away but there is nowhere. Nell dies in the middle of the play - and that is the only thing which happens. The whole play is full of banal talk but it is suffused with the "half-light of suggestion" which communicates this nightmarish experience. Through this superficiality and banality of talk we confront certain reminiscences of the characters which create the terror of loneliness. Hamm talks about a catastrophe in which several people perished. People begged for his help, "the place was crawling with them" but he refused to help. Now Hamm himself is being reduced to a state of helplessness. Hagg and Nell too relate their romantic past but in their present misery their romantic past looks grotesque. Again, Hamm tells the story of a madman who thought the world had come to an end:

I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter, an engraver...
I used to go and see him in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the
window. Look! There! All the rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring
fleet! All that loneliness! ... He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner.
Appalled. All he had seen was ashes... He alone had been spared. Forgotten... It
appears the case is... was not so... so unusual.

Earlier in the play Hamm, the would-be-writer, recounts the story of a man who asks him to take care of
his child whom he has saved from some catastrophe.

Such incidents and reminiscences amidst the
meaningless chatter and immobility of the play make one feel the death-in-life atmosphere of the play. *Endgame*
through might be interpreted in a different manner, but it is this
device of ruminating upon the past amidst the trivialities
and degradations of the present that the dramatic
experience of the end of everything, the end of the game
is communicated:

"Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have
done with losing."

If the play had ended like this, then there would have been no mystery. Beckett does not conclude his play
with any certainty. He leaves so many questions, but no
answers. At the end of the play we find Clov dressed for an
exit in a panama hat, coat/rain-coat hanging over his arm.
Would he leave Hamm? Would he start a new world? It is this uncertainty which gnaws and has yielded the play to many ingenious interpretations including the autobiographical one, comparing Clov-Hamm with Beckett-Joyce. But these are literary interpretations of scholars. However, the theatrical experience is different. The appearance of a little boy outside and Clov's readiness for departure contrast sharply with the cruelty and deadness of the past— that is the endgame.

(WINNIE BURIED IN A MOUND IN A SCORCHED EARTH IN THE BLAZING LIGHT OF THE SUN IS HAPPY, THOUGH SHE IS SINKING INTO THE EARTH. HER HUSBAND WILLIE IS IN A HOLE BEHIND HER MOUND READING A NEWSPAPER. HER CHEERFULNESS IS NOT A PUT-UP ACT, OR A WHISTLING IN THE DARK TO KEEP FEAR OUT. IT SEEMS GENUINE AND IT IS HER UNAWARENESS OF HER PLAGUE THAT CREATES THE PATHOS IN THE SPECTATORS WHO, WHEN THE EXPERIENCE BECOMES MEANINGFUL, BEGIN TO DOUBT THEIR OWN CONDITION. IT IS NOT CATHARSIS OR CALM OF MIND THAT ONE FEELS AFTER EXPERIENCING **HAPPY DAYS**, BUT A MUFFLED DISCOMFORT WHICH OCCASIONALLY BORDERS ON PANIC. THE PLAY **DOFAMILIARIZES US WITH OUR JADED EMOTIONS AND FATIGUED ACQUIESCENCE IN OUR OWN CONDITION. IT IS A METAPHYSICAL EXPERIENCE BECAUSE IT Rouses THAT ANGUISH IN OUR MIND WHICH TEASES US BEYOND THE**
material world. This dramatic illusion of desolation, of the irony of Winnie's happy days (Another heavenly day) is created through a few broad strokes of the cartoonist's art, or, the movement of an Indian juggler who though immobile creates the impression of something dynamic. Through a process called "reversible gestalt" or "closure tendency" the audience's imagination leaps upon several scattered references, half-reminiscences from Hamlet, Paradise Lost, Romeo and Juliet, Cymbeline etc. — so ably pointed out by Ruby Cohn. In Act II, Winnie is again buried — deep, up to her neck, and it is through the muscles of her face and her monologue that a pattern is woven which delights as well as creates desolation. As in Act I she has her bag and parasol, though the revolver, Brownie, is lying on her right on the mound. She calls it "Another heavenly day" with Hilton's "Hail, holy light." This happy day reaches its climax when Billie, suddenly, "dressed to kill — top hat, morning coat, striped trousers, etc., white gloves in hand," crawls towards Winnie (to kiss or kill, we don't know) and he utters the monosyllabic "Win" which causes a happy expression on the face of Winnie who sings a duet from Merry Widow as the curtain falls on this "happy ending" of two miserable persons who constitute a dramatic metaphor for the human condition to which we have become blind. As Peter Brook says, "... this is not only a vision of our fallen condition, it is an assault on our fatal blindness."
Beckett could not have created this world unless in a flash he had seen the same situation existing in our midst. His characters tied to each other with rope or without, shut in dustbins or confined to chairs, buried in mounds or hurtling to and fro, pushing sacks, leaping towards carafe of water, listening to the past or talking to the past - all inhabit a rarefied planet which looks meaningful because it is a distorted projection of our own world. As Peter Brook says in the same essay,

Before Oedipus and Hamlet were born in their authors' minds all the qualities these characters reflect must have been in existence as nebulous formless currents of experience. Then came a powerful generative act - and characters appeared giving shape and substance to these abstractions. Hamlet is there - we can refer to him. Suddenly Jimmy Porter was there - we can't throw him off. At a given moment Van Gogh's Provence came into existence - inescapably - as did Dali's desert. Can we define a work of art as something that brings a new "thing" into the world - something we may like or reject, but which annoyingly continues to be and so, for better or for worse, becomes part of our field of reference? If so, this brings us back to Beckett. He did just this with those two tramps under a tree. The whole world found something vague made tangible in that absurd and awful picture. And those parents in the dustbin.

That is how Beckett communicates his vision, not through the burgeoning, proliferating abundance of a language (which he regards as dead, and uses this excuse to create it anew) but through archetypal scenic images which haunt us and become part of our heritage. The
stage images of Winnie buried in her mound under a scorching sun, of Haddy Rooney dragging herself towards the railway station, of blind Hamm's face covered with a bloody handkerchief, of Pozzo-Lucky, Gogo-Didi, are so visually powerful that they make it possible for us to grasp the arc of dramatic experience in a flash of revelation.

In the expression of this dramatic experience, what is the role of language? Language in Beckett's plays exists inside a system of mutually conditioning elements. It is a conditioner and is conditioned. It takes its specific and concrete form through a dialectical differentiation from the other elements, and also incorporates what it differs from. Words can have a specific meaning only if human activities have significance. When all human activities are parodied, as, for instance, in Waiting for Godot, and values are derided, language can hardly bear any value. It cannot show any rich flights of poetic fancy. As has been mentioned earlier, everything runs into silence in Waiting for Godot. The language too has this tendency to repeat itself aimlessly and then run to sand. It is not that any particular philosophical attitude towards language is incorporated in the play; rather, the choice and visualization of the subject have dictated the language. If language has an intrinsic inadequacy to communicate the unnameable, then the artist has recourse to the theatre to make poesie de theatre to
communicate his meaning. He may dispense with words altogether as Beckett did in the two mime plays, *Act without words I*, *Act without words II*, but there he is obliged to make his meaning too explicit. If words have the power to clarify they have also the power to mystify. That is why Beckett's mime plays do not claw, they do not leave a sense of mystery as his other plays do. "Let's go" say the tramps but they do not move. The effect of the contrapuntal relationship of speech and action on the audience could have been produced neither by a flood of poetry nor by total silence alone. The knock—about comedy, mimetic elements and silence become significant and in turn make the words significant—how bare and denuded they are. Their poetic evocation is due to the backdrop of gestic acting. Through the very disintegration of language and the breakdown of dialogue Beckett reveals his artistic purpose and vision. He manipulates the elements of the theatre, including language in such a harmonious manner that ultimately a sense of awe hangs over his plays, and that explains his universal appeal.
Notes

7. Ibid., 165-166.