CHAPTER IV

BODY AS A CULTURAL TABLET

The body is the instrument of our grasp upon the world.

— Simone de Beauvoir

The society of every age is comprehended through the figuring of the human body. From the early Stone Age to the twentieth century, the people of each age and civilization are identified through the external representation of the human body. Their dress code, habits, tools, the food they eat, and their mannerisms mark them as being "civilized" or "barbarians" as the case may be, or as belonging to a particular cultural group in the specific period in history. The body is thus the cultural tablet on which the norms of a culture are inscribed.

The bodies of Beckett's theatre give us an insight into the culture to which they belong and
can be said to be the gateway to Beckettland. The philosophy of life and the psychological and sociological condition of the society are made known to the spectator through the presentation of the body of his characters. The significance of Beckett's theatre, and its philosophical, psychological and sociological aspects are communicated through the body. Adhering to the tradition of the Absurd Theatre Beckett's works are devoid of "meaningful" dialogue and hence the "message" of his theatre is conveyed through stage props and the body. Martin Esslin observes:

The Theatre of the Absurd, on the other hand, tends towards a radical devaluation of language, towards a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself. (26)

The body is barred of normal theatrical actions, but the physical appearance of the body speaks volumes of Beckett's theatrical story. The medium of expression in conventional theatre is dialogue and dialogue is normally supported by action. Both are not given much importance on Beckett's stage. Instead what the spectator often witnesses is a gallery of deformed bodies. This forms the most
prominent image on Beckett's stage, some of the implications of which have been discussed in the previous chapters. This chapter aims at viewing the body as a cultural tablet: Beckett's bodies as belonging to a particular group in society which displays traits of their cultural influence. As Susan R. Bordo states,

The body, what we eat, how we dress, the daily ritual through which we attend to the body is a medium of culture. The body, as anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued, is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body. The body may also operate as a metaphor for culture. (Jaggar and Bordo 13)

An examination of Beckett's bodies from Waiting for Godot to What Where reveals them as representative of a civilization that is on the decline. Men and material seem to be disintegrating from the face of the earth. They represent a culture that has lost its values and is on the verge of extinction. Psychologically,
sociologically and physiologically it is a picture of disintegration that is captured on his stage. Often the scene is nightmarish, with the dying and the dead, the blind and the lame, the deaf and the dumb, and the deformed and the distorted figures, reflecting their mental and emotional turmoil and the break-up of culture and of society at large. Martin Esslin states that,

If a good play is judged by subtlety of characterisation and motivation, these are often without recognisable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets . . . . if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares. (22)

Beckett's plays adhere to these notions in terms of stage images and reflect the intended meaning, that of the degradation of man in a world of lost beliefs and values and the sense of loss and lack of identity that man is confronted with in a disintegrating world. The progress of man, culture and civilization seems to be a hopeless dream in the face of nothingness. Man appears a loner in his
homeland and out of harmony with his surroundings. Culture, and the refinement of which marks the progress of man, are an unreality in Beckettland; everything seems to be on the decline. His bodies thus become the tablet on which the message of the disintegration of the world is inscribed.

Krapp's existence in *Krapp's Last Tape* indicates the fact of man's isolated existence in the face of disintegration. His deliberate confinement within his room, cut-off from any form of social or cultural activities, signifies his loss of faith in socio-cultural values and norms. It also denotes the disintegration of a culture with humanitarian values and the emergence of a non-humanitarian one. Here there is no progress of civilization and man, and man exists for the sheer fact that he is born and has no escape from it. There is no building of human relationships, rather a destruction of it. A one-to-one identification of such a period in history is difficult. But as an artist Beckett magnifies his perception of society and presents to us on stage a picture of the world to come in a prophetic manner. As Sylvia Paine comments,
The artist walks the same earth we all walk, but he meets us in a different world, one that is familiar yet extra-ordinary, an exaltation or intensification of what we see, feel and think everyday. Art takes root, as D. G. James says, in that wonder and surmise with which an artist confronts the limits of his sensuous perception and imagines what lies beyond. (3)

Beckett wrote his plays in a post-war world and the decline of religious faith, the destruction of belief in social and cultural progress, and the loss of sense of control over rational human development had disturbed him deeply and are reflected in his plays. He portrays a picture of society where man has lost faith in man, and where he no longer seeks solace or companionship in the company of other human beings. Relationships are a nightmarish experience to him. Krapp is an apt representation of such an experience. He recoils from establishing a permanent relationship with Bianca and decides to separate. We learn from his tape-recorded voice that he has been leading a lonely and isolated existence for the past thirty years. Such shocking facts raise questions as to
the existence of a society. Isn't there a society in Krapp's world? What kind of culture exists there? Why is it that there is no interaction between people? And we draw conclusions to these striking questions.

Krapp's intended separation with the women in his life has germinated out of a negative attitude towards life as a whole, which affects all aspects of his daily life. Since it is society and culture that contribute a major share in building up one's personality it can be deduced that their influence on Krapp is negative. As the play unfolds it is seen that Krapp at all stages of his life harboured no illusory feelings about love and life and every time he had a chance to admit a woman in his life he withheld himself. At the age of twenty-nine he gave up Bianca rationalising that it is meaningless to get involved. His rejection of Bianca is prompted by his awareness that it will turn out to be a "hopeless business."

TAPE: At that time I think I was still living on and off with Bianca in Kedar street, well out of that, Jesus yes! Hopeless business. . . . (218)
Krapp at thirty-nine too follows the same principle of detachment from love and life.

His "farewell to love" and his tape recorder as human substitute are also indications of his lost faith in man and human culture. He does not adhere to the man-made social institution of family and does not believe in establishing human relationships; rather he chooses to live in his self-imposed isolation with his recorded voice for companionship. Krapp serves to elucidate Beckett's idea of human isolation and his body serves as a cultural tablet where the disintegration of a culture is inscribed.

The bodies of Winnie and Willie in Happy Days confined in a mound of earth are also symbolic of the fact of their alienation from society and culture. The physical barrier posed by the mound is suggestive of the fact of their separation from each other. It prevents them from any form of physical contact signifying the absence of any warm relationship between each other. These strange depictions of the human body are suggestive of a culture which is on the decline. The foundation of any culture or civilization is human relationship and the absence or the disintegration of it
signifies the perishing of that culture and society. The failure of human relationships moves from the personal to the public. The indifference of the couple who pass by Winnie and Willie without any enquiry to their physical state, or without any attempt to rescue them from it, connotes the loss of humanitarian values and the emergence of a non-humanitarian culture. This recalls the existence of Krapp in his den, cut-off from any form of human relationship and leading an isolated life.

Beckett's bodies thus represent the disintegration of a culture. The representation of the bodies of Nagg and Nell in Endgame is also similar to that of Willie and Winnie. Their confinement in ashcans is symbolic of their alienation both bodily and emotionally. Here it is not a self-willed separation as that of Willie and Winnie; instead, it is Hamm who forces them into the situation. Hamm is the destructor and destroyer of human relationships. He reigns over the inhabitants of the room like a tyrant and exhibits traits of an inhuman nature. There is no attempt at establishing human relationships nor is there any form of filial gratitude. Hamm accuses his parents as "Accursed fornicator" (96) and "Accursed progenitor" (96).
These indicate the loss of human values and disrespect for human relationships and bonds of blood relationships. The housing of old people in containers which normally hold refuse signifies the progress of their relationship towards extinction and furthermore of the destruction of the culture to which they belong.

Apart from the disintegration of human relationships which indicates the degradation of culture and civilization, the stage settings also contribute to creating an atmosphere of the destruction of civilization and culture. Waiting for Godot opens on an isolated road with only a barren tree. Happy Days raises the curtain to an expanse of scorched grass and so does Breath where the stage is littered with miscellaneous rubbish. By creating an image of ruin, destruction and gradual extinction, Beckett sets the background to the vanishing culture of a society. The world of Endgame is also similar to the others, one nearing its end and in the process of decline. The opening lines of the play state, Clov: . . . Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished . . . (93). The play thus portrays the
last stages of a civilization where everything is nearing its end. As Chaman Ahuja states,

*Endgame*, I suggest, presents the story of that stage of human existence when man is fed up with a certain civilization after it has failed to yield the desired results. The play thus depicts a dark and stagnant phase in human history when one civilization is dying but the other is not yet in. Thus seen, Hamm is Homo, the genus of man, Clov being the civilization that sustains him. Indeed, Clov speaks for every civilization when he says, “I love order. It’s my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in it’s last place under the last dust” (*Endgame* 39). Later too, he refers to what is expected of a typical civilization — love, friendship, beauty, order and compassionate attention for the suffering. (61)

It is the lack of this that is portrayed in Beckett’s theatre. There is no order, no beauty, no friendship and no love, which are the essentials of culture and civilization. Duty is replaced by nightmarish scenes — the stage setting, which gives a skull like appearance in *Endgame*, and the
expanse of scorched grass in Happy Days, the three faces in Play — "faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem part of urns" are scenes which foretell the message of destruction and ruin. Stage and stage props are here interpreted symbolically — mounds of earth, ashcans and urns as representing alienation and isolation as well as immobility and imprisonment.

Other than the body being the cultural tablet on which the disintegration of a culture is inscribed with, there are other indications too in the course of the play which highlights this fact. The story, which Nagg tells Nell, throws light on this.

NAGG: Let me tell it again. [Raconteur's voice.] An Englishman, needing a pair of striped trousers in a hurry for the New Year's festivities, goes to his tailor who takes his measurements. [Tailor's voice] 'That's the lot, come back in four days, I'll have it already. Good. Four days later. [Tailor's voice.] 'So sorry, come back in a week, I've made a mess of the seat'. . . . A week later. [Tailor's voice]. 'Frightfully sorry, come back in ten days, I've made a
hash of the crutch.' . . . Ten days later, [Tailor's voice.] Dreadfully sorry, come back in a fortnight, I've made a balls of the fly'. Good, at a pinch, a smart fly is a stiff preposition. . . [Customer's voice] 'God damn you to hell, Sir, no, it's indecent, there are limits! In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world, Yes Sir, no less Sir, the WORLD! And you are not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months!' [Tailor's voice scandalised.] 'But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look — [disdainful gesture, disgustedly] — at the world — [pause] — and look — [loving gesture, proudly] — at my TROUSERS! (102-103)

Thus the story which the characters tell each other have reference to the state of the world in which they live.

The disruption of the natural order of living and a reversal of the situation are also indicative of the decline of culture. To Vladimir's enquiry, "May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?" (11) Estragon replies, "In a ditch." This indicates the degraded state of man. Estragon's
impatience to eat the remains of the chicken bone which Pozzo has thrown away also conveys the same message.

EASTRAGON: Er . . . . You've finished with the . . . er . . . . you don't need the . . . . er . . . . bones, sir?. . . .

POZZO: Do I need the bones? [He turns them over with the end of his whip.] No, personally I do not need them any more.

[ESTRAGON takes a step towards the bones.]

But . . . [ESTRAGON stops short.] . . . but in theory the bones go to the carrier.

POZZO: Mister! [LUCKY bows his head.] Reply! Do you want them or don't you! [Silence of LUCKY. To ESTRAGON] They're yours. [ESTRAGON makes a dart at the bones, picks them up and begins to gnaw them]. (27-28)

The degradation of man and the loss of human dignity and self respect gained through culture and civilization are depicted here. The existence of man, the master and the most supreme of all creatures on earth, in a ditch creating a pathetic image and also the image of man gnawing at the remains of a chicken bone signify man stooping down to the level of animals.
Act Without Words I is solely about the lost status of man. Man is flung on stage like a worthless bundle and is later confronted with various tantalising objects, which are also taken away from his grasp or are raised beyond his reach. The protagonist is stripped of all human dignity and is reduced to the status of a mere puppet. There is no trace of a glorious culture which celebrates man, the hero of civilisation, rather it signifies a deteriorating culture where man has lost his dignity and self-respect. Man here appears as the clown of the universe rather than the ruler of it. He is stripped of the grandeur that once was his. It is a similar scene in Act Without Words II where the two characters A and B are goaded into action. Their confinement in sacks reveals the case of ashcans in Endgame, the urns in Play and the in Happy Days where they serve as a barrier from all forms of contact with the outside world. It signifies the existence of a culture which is not appealing, and hence they seek refuge from it.

Catastrophe too portrays the negative aspect of a culture. The representation of the body of the protagonist, humiliated and presented in an undignified manner, speaks of a culture which is
unrefined or which is disintegrating. P, the protagonist, represents the victimised section of society and D, the director, the tyrant. He has P under his command and has the authority to mould his body to his satisfaction. Such a cruel and inhuman treatment assigns no place for human feelings and indicates the inhuman cultural background to which they belong. It is a culture in which man has lost respect for man and where the physically powerful reign supreme and the weak are made silent under their colossal strength. Chaman Ahuja states that,

P was not to speak anything but sit silently like a lifeless object — a miserable posture that is universally associated with the dispossessed and dehumanised sections of humanity. (129)

Love and compassion, the values of a highly refined culture, are absent in the depiction of the characters, rather it is tyranny and inhumanness that reigns supreme in the nature of the Director. As a cultural tablet, the body of the protagonist makes it very clear that the cultural background revealed in the play exhibits traits of barbarism. The Director barks orders at his Assistant.
D: Get going! Get going! [A puts back the pad, goes to P, stands irresolute.] Bare the neck. [A undoes top buttons, parts the flaps, steps back.] The legs. The shins. [A advances, rolls up to below knee one trouser-leg, steps back.] The other. [Same for other leg, steps back.] Higher. The knees. [A advances, rolls up to above knees both trouser-legs, steps back.] And whiten.

A: I make a note. [She takes out pad, takes pencil, notes.] Whiten all flesh. (460)

The Director’s attitude towards P is that of a master towards his servant. He considers the Protagonist’s body to be his personal possession sans all human feelings and emotions. Michael Guest observes that,

The catastrophic Protagonist is created as a "poor, bear-forked animal" so as to provide . . . . an egoistic gratification for Director, for the creative will. (2)

Michael Guest also makes an observation on the Director’s fur coat, which he says is not only an indication of bourgeois luxury and elegance but also suggests the comforts afforded at the expense of an animal’s life. This is also indicative of the
cruel nature of the Director and further of his cultural background. *Endgame* is another play on inhumaness and Hamm is the tyrant here. He dominates not only over his servant Clov but also over his parents Nagg and Nell. There is no love or filial gratitude nor any compassion for the physically handicapped. Hamm indecently mocks at Nagg’s request for his food.

NAGG: Me pap!

HAMM: The old folks at home! No decency left! Guzzle, guzzle, that’s all they think of.

(96)

Towards the later part of the play when Nagg and Nell engage in a very entertaining conversation, Hamm very furiously asks them to maintain silence and shouts at Clov to dump them into the sea.

[Pause. He looks at Nell who has remained impassive, her eyes unseeing, breaks in to a high forced laugh, cuts it short, pokes his head towards Nell, launches his laugh again.]

HAMM: Silence!

[NAGG starts, cuts short his laugh.] -- -

HAMM: [Exasperated.] Have you not finished? Will you never finish? [With sudden fury.] Will this never finish? [NAGG disappears into
his bin, closes the lid behind him. NELL does not move. Frenziedly.] Clear away this muck! Chuck it in the sea! [CLOV goes to bins, halts.]

HAMM: Damn busy body! Is that all?

CLOV: No

HAMM: What else?

CLOV: I didn’t understand.

HAMM: Have you bottled her?

CLOV: Yes.

HAMM: Screw down the lids. (103)

The scene is an epitome of inhumanness. Culture, if ever there exists any in their world, is infested with evil. Man, culture and civilisation progress only when there are mental, physical and spiritual development, growth and maturity. The absence of any of these stalls progress and signals the destruction of that personality or the culture to which he belongs. In Hamm there is to be noticed an absence of mental and spiritual development. His emotions are always negative — anger, contempt, violence, humiliation, derisive laughter, impatience, indifference, cruelty etc. which are signs of barbarism. Or if one is to take the entire scene of Endgame, there is an absence of all three,
which clearly signals the end of a cultural era. Hamm's confinement of his parents in ashcans are further signs of his inhumanness. His anger towards his parents could be because of the fact that he hates his life and the fact of his birth. The reasons for his hatred and distrust of life could be his negative experience in life and the world. There are several hints and instances indicating the decay and degradation of culture and civilisation and it is Hamm's dissatisfaction with life that is expressed through his words and actions. His horror at the continuation of the existing civilisation is expressed in his fear over the sign of a flea.

CLOV: [Anguished, scratching himself.] I have a flea!

HAMM: A flea! Are there still fleas?

CLOV: On me there's one. [Scratching.] Unless it's a crablouse.

HAMM: [Very perturbed.] But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!(108)

Inhumanness and disrespect for human beings also form the subject of Waiting for Godot. The relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is that of a
master and slave and Pozzo's character is an example of the brute in man. Pozzo signifies the shrinkage of humanness in man. His entry into the stage, Lucky held by the rope and the whip in hand, symbolises his power and authority on one hand and on the other hand it speaks of their culture devoid of brotherhood and compassion. Power and authority reign supreme over basic human feelings and Lucky represents the victimised section of an inhuman culture. Stage directions state:

[Enter POZZO and LUCKY. POZZO drives LUCKY by means of a rope passed round his neck, so that Lucky is the first to appear, followed by the rope, which is long enough, to allow him to reach the middle of the stage before POZZO appears. LUCKY carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a greatcoat. POZZO a whip.](22-23)

Lucky is portrayed as a tamed animal of a circus man or as a beast of burden. He is deprived of basic human dignity and is treated as less than man. This connotes the decay of a culture where one man fails to see the other as himself. Lucky is also addressed as the most base of all animals.
POZZO barks. . . . [He jerks the rope.] Up pig! [Pause.]. . . . [Jerks the rope.] Up hog! (24)

The fact that Pozzo does not consider Lucky to be a human being is evident when he tells Vladimir and Estragon "... I am bringing him to the fair, where I hope to get a good price for him. The truth is you can't drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill" (32). He refers to Lucky as a "creature," an animal and not a human being. Lucky's body, bruised and beaten and infested with a running sore round his neck caused by the rope and sagging under the heavy load, bears the mark of his culture and unprogressive civilisation. Francis Doherty states:

We, unsuspecting, see the grotesque bourgeois Pozzo arrive, triumphantly whipping on Lucky, who is tethered by his neck and burdened with Pozzo's multifarious travelling equipment. So we read the signs of social order, oppression, the slavery of the working class, exploitation, inhumanity. (90)

Rough For Theatre II also illustrates the theme of man's indifference to man. C, tired of the complexities of living and ready to jump out of the
window, is treated with indifference by A and B who have come to divert his mind from his depression and suicidal resolve. As the play progresses we learn that A and B are not sincere in their endeavour and make no desperate attempt to rescue C, instead they engage in light and humorous conversation. During the course of examining C's papers A looks out the window and examines the stars, indifferent to his grave task.

A: [ Turning towards window.] Worse outlooks. [Pause.] Is that Jupiter we see?

[Pause.]

B: Where?

A: Switch off. [They switch off.] It must be.

B: [Irritated.] Where?

A: [Irritated.] There. [B craves.] There on the right in the corner.

[Pause.]

B: No. It twinkles. (219)

C's body serves as a cultural tablet and speaks of a civilisation that has failed to sustain its citizens. His problem represents that of humanity at large — work, family, fatherland, finances, art and nature, heart and conscience, health, housing condition, God and man. C's testimonies as read out
by A and B thus reveal his problems and are also pointers towards that of humanity. Apart from these indications, the indifference of A and B towards C speaks of their inhuman nature and of the culture to which they belong. We learn that it is a civilisation devoid of basic human compassion and love.

The rejection of conventional marriage and motherhood and the reversal of social order which followed in the wake of women's liberation is a noticeable phenomenon of the 20th century and an aspect of culture which is deciphered from the presentation of the human body on Beckett's stage. The break-up of traditional patriarchal monogamous marriage and the traditional family set-up is the most striking after effects of the liberation of women. Traditional patriarchal family offered only a submissive position to woman in the family and society. Under patriarchal supremacy, women were seen as bodily beings with no intellectual or spiritual capacity; and they were considered as being designed only for sexual and reproductive functions. They were denied any form of social interaction and were confined within the four walls of the home. Women of the early twentieth century
longed for social, political, economic, intellectual and sexual freedom and fought for equality with men. This led to the women's liberation movement, the sexual revolution and thereafter the feminist movement which gained freedom for women. Family, the basic unit of society, lost its sanctity and there was a gradual disintegration of family ties and relationships. Women considered as burdensome the duties of child rearing and family chores. They refused to be submissive to men and reached at par with men in public places through the new economic, educational, intellectual freedom granted to them. When this threatened male authority in terms of power politics in society, the sexual revolution brought an end to "traditional sexual inhibitions, particularly those that threatened patriarchal monogamous marriage, that is, homosexuality, illegitimacy, adolescent, pre and extramarital sexuality" (Millett 86). The new freedom thus gained shook the foundation of the family and signalled its gradual deterioration. This engulfed the people with a sense of insecurity both materially and emotionally. The male concept of home was shattered and men and women sought solace
and companionship in their own sex rather than in their male or female counterparts. Beckett's theatre portrays such a shattered picture of society, and the existence of his bodies in sacks and urns, in ditches and ashcans raises questions as to the whereabouts of their homes. Family as an institution seems to have vanished from the face of Beckettland or appears to be in its disintegrating stages.

Both men and women appear to have rejected conventional marriage, motherhood and the family. They exist for the sheer fact of having been born and do not live a fulfilling life. Krapp leads an isolated life, confined in his "den" and detached from any form of human contact and relationship or any form of social activity. His place of inhabitation is not described as a room in Krapp's house, but as "Krapp's den." The concept of home does not exist on Beckettland. It is a similar atmosphere in almost all the other plays. Waiting for Godot opens on a deserted highway and Estragon speaks of having slept in a ditch. His companion Vladimir too leads a vagabondish life and appears to be the victim of a ruined family. In Endgame it is a "bare interior" with "grey light" and the
setting of the room gives it a skull-like appearance. It does not offer the comforts of a home and its most aged occupants, Nagg and Nell, are confined in ashcans. In Act without Words II sacks replace the ashcans where the two characters A and B seek refuge after having performed their daily routine. Winnie and Willie are confined in mounds, which open on an expanse of scorched grass. Thus the stage settings themselves throw light on the fact that no place on Beckettland feels like a home. It is bare, dry, scorching interiors, giving a wasteland like appearance and symbolising the destruction of culture. The degradation and disintegration of the family, the basic unit of culture and society, also indicates at large the disintegration of that culture as a whole.

Lalitha Ramakrishna observes that "Beckett's characters die without reproducing themselves" (17), highlighting the fact that the concept of family does not exist. The focus of attention or the major occupation of the characters is on the End. Since the end is the goal, there is absolute lack of concern for the future or what lies beyond. It is dissatisfaction with the present that kills all hopes of a better future and hence they look
forward to its destruction. Their refusal to partake in life is their form of protest against life and the culture which bred them. Hence Beckett's characters live in isolation. And the bodies on stage are represented in this manner. Lonely and isolated characters are the most striking aspect on his stage. Winnie and Willie are husband and wife but live separated from each other and they do not have any children. There is also a reversal of roles here. Winnie seems to be occupying the dominant position as against the male Willie. She orders him about and he responds like an obedient wife.

Winnie has also rejected the conventional role of motherhood, as we comprehend that they do not have any children. Their bodies as cultural tablets portray the fact that they have lost faith in mankind and do not wish for the propagation of the species which would mean handing over the chair of suffering to the next generation and the flourishing of the culture which bred them. Any evidence of life or birth perturbs her and she recoils at the sign of the emmett with its eggs. There is a reversal here in terms of the destruction of traditional patriarchal family. It
is an upturned picture of the family here with Winnie in the dominant position. Willie occupying a secondary position next to Willie creates the picture of a ruined patriarch.

The isolated existence of A and B in Rough for Theatre I and B's attempt to seek a life-long companion in A indicates the story of their loneliness and isolation. Like the other Beckettians they too are deprived of a home and the warmth and companionship of a woman. The stage setting in a "street corner" in "ruins" tells us that the characters on stage do not have the comfort of a home. They pour out their tales of woe to each other for sympathy and companionship.

B: We had our women, hadn't we? You yours to lead you by the hand and I mine to get me out of the chair in the evening and back into it again in the morning and to push me as far as the corner when I went out of my mind. (225)

Later A tells B,

A: [Setting himself more comfortably.] What peace! [B pushes him roughly away. A falls to his hands and knees.] Dora used to say, the days I hadn't earned enough. You and your harp! You'd do better crawling on all fours
with your father's medal pinned to your arse and a money box round your neck. You and your harp! Who do you think you are? And she made me sleep on the floor. (233)

The dominant position of women is evident here. The traditional man-women relationship and the respect and reverence that a wife had for her husband have vanished. The play represents a culture where relationships flourish on the basis of money. Woman asserts her power and authority over man and shuns him to a derogatory position. Thus the family, which consists of man and woman, is shattered and this marks the ruin of the culture to which they belong. The isolated existence of A and B in street corners signals the break-up of family and culture.

Vladimir and Estragon too are lonely and isolated characters and the fact that they seek the companionship of each other indicates that they do not enjoy the comforts of a home or the warmth and companionship of a woman. It speaks of a culture where the family has vanished and men seek solace in the company of men. Estragon is very feminine in his affection towards Vladimir.

ESTRAGON: [Step forward.] You're angry?

[Silence. Step forward.] Forgive me.
[Silence, Step forward. ESTRAGON lays his hand on VLADIMIR's shoulder.] Come, Didi. [Silence.] Give me your hand. [VLADIMIR half turns.] Embrace me! [VLADIMIR stiffens.] Don't be stubborn! [VLADIMIR softens. They embrace. ESTRAGON recoils.](15)

It is a similar situation in Endgame. Hamm has by choice restrained from marriage and has for companionship his servant Clov. He has no fruitful plans for the future, but like the other Beckettians waits for the End. Though he has his parents, he looks at them with contempt and hatred and does not cherish his blood relationship with them. He hurls abuses at them and has them confined in dustbins.

The depiction of the parents bottled in ashcans, and the son seated at the centre of the room in an authoritative position, ordering his servant about and imprisoning his parents denying food and a normal living, is indicative of the loss of social and moral values. The picture portrayed is of an inhuman culture where there is a complete breakdown of the family, which signals the break-up of society, culture and civilization.
Extra-marital relations and the break-up of family ties also form the subject of Play. The three characters, the man, his wife and his mistress, M, W1, W2, and their clandestine meetings and relationships illustrate the loss of moral values that sustain a family and the relationship between husband and wife. That the man seeks the love and affection of women outside marriage bonds speaks of the loyalty between them. Like the other Beckettians there are no children in their world, which are all pointers towards the fact that the characters do not wish for the continuation of the species and of the propagation of culture, rather they pave the way for its destruction. Illegitimate sexual relationship and the suffering and pain of the child born of it form the theme of Not I. The picture of life as narrated by Mouth is that of a loveless life; deserted by her father before birth and by her mother after birth, she grew up in an orphanage without receiving any love at any stage.

MOUTH: . . . out . . . into this world . . .
this world . . . tiny little thing . . .
before its time . . . in a godforsaken . . .
girl . . . into this . . . out into this . . .
... before her time ... godforsaken hole called ... called ... no matter ... parents unknown ... unheard of ... he having vanished ... thin air ... no sooner buttoned up his breeches ... she similarly ... light months later ... almost to the tick ... so no love ...

(276)
The power of love which sustains life and relationships is absent in Beckettland and reflects the very mechanical culture in which the characters exist.

Thus we observe that almost all of Beckett's bodies serve as a cultural tablet and emphasise the theme of the break-up of family and the rejection of conventional marriage. His characters are either isolated, or indulge in loose immoral relations with no commitments. These are indicative of a deteriorating culture with no strong principles to sustain them and build a family, the fundamental unit of society.

Another aspect of culture which Beckett's bodies illustrate is its very mechanical and monotonous nature. Beckett's characters, we learn, are all tired of the complexities of living and
lead a very mechanical existence. They do not lead very fulfilling lives and restrain themselves from partaking in lively activities. Most of them contemplate death and suicide and wait endlessly for the end, which they know is inevitable and which to them is a source of comfort from the mechanical life. The plays do not narrate great events, or present political crises, nor do they narrate the adventures of heroes or the destinies of characters, rather they are concerned with the meaninglessness of existence and the futility of man's endeavours, and this is conveyed through actions which are equally meaningless and monotonous. Through constant repetition of meaningless and monotonous actions Beckett highlights the monotony of life and the absurdity of living. The mechanical actions of A and B in Act Without Words II illustrates this fact. Their actions are not creative or progressive but are those performed through constant repetition and habit. They have no aim or goal in life but just keep going till the end.

A, wearing shirt, crawls out of sack, halts, broods, prays, broods, gets to his feet, broods, takes a little bottle, puts bottle
back, broods, goes to clothes, broods, puts on clothes, broods, takes a large partly eaten carrot from coat pocket, bites off a piece, chews an instant, spits it out with disgust, puts carrot back, broods, picks up two sacks carries them bowed and staggering half-way to left wing, sets them down, broods, takes off clothes (except shirt), lets them fall in an untidy heap, broods, takes another pill, broods, kneels, prays, crawls into sack and lies still. (209-210)

It is a similar routine action performed by B and each gets into the sack and lies still once the routine is completed and waits for the next instigator to goad them into action. The action is repeated and the routine continues. Chaman Ahuja observes:

Indeed, this piece of mime seems to declare that no worthwhile evolution has been possible in man's progress because, in civilization after civilization, his thinking and acting have continued to be polarised — between actionless thinking (as in A) and thoughtless routine (as in B). (94)
Monotony and repetition also form the subject of *Happy Days*. It is a play on waiting — waiting for the end which would bring relief to the pain of living. There is no rise and fall of action, but the play presents the routine daily habits which help pass the time. The curtain rises with Winnie's opening words, "Another heavenly day," granting no novelty to it but expressing the bare truth that it is a day like any other day, and she immerses herself in her daily routine of saying her prayers, brushing her teeth, combing her hair, decking up her face and other personal activities to keep herself engaged and let pass the time. Winnie and Willie do not indulge themselves in any physical or intellectual activities; instead they keep themselves occupied with daily routine habits which are insignificant. By projecting this on stage Beckett highlights the purposelessness of existence and assigns to life no value and meaning. It is a similar atmosphere that is created in *Waiting for Godot*. The play is mainly on the act of waiting — waiting for Godot, a figure who does not appear. The characters Vladimir and Estragon engage in clownish actions and meaningless talk to kill time, which parallels the meaningless actions of Winnie
and Willie. Talking is their pastime, it reminds them of their existence, and so is the case with Winnie and Willie. The monotonous actions of these characters connote the decline of civilisation and culture. A society where the people do not engage themselves in any creative work or where the society does not offer any progressive projects is evidently declining. The purposeless action and meaningless talk of the characters are pointers towards this fact.

The disintegration of culture and the destruction of social relationships are evident from the lack of movement on stage. This technique of minimalism devised by Beckett projects the aspect of immobility. And immobility can be interpreted as lack of interest, inhibiting oneself from external activities, loss of faith in the world, disillusionment and any other negative aspect which would restrain one from interacting and partaking of the cultural activities of the society and the civilisation at large. Pozzo and Lucky are the only characters in Beckett's stage plays who move freely through the landscape. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting, and in that capacity rooted to one spot. In the last two lines
of the play they announce their intention to go away. But the final stage direction states that they do not move. The man in Act Without Words I, who is flung backwards onto the stage at the start of the mime play, demonstrates one of the processes by which immobility of this kind is induced; all his attempts to reach his objective, the carafe of water with which he might quench his thirst, are frustrated. Ultimately when "the carafe descends from the flies and comes to rest a few feet from his body. He does not move" (206).

In Endgame Hamm is immobile in his chair. Clov can move but he cannot sit. And he can move only within the narrow confines of the play’s circular room. If he leaves, he dies. At the end of the play he decides to leave but does not or cannot go. For the world has nothing pleasant to offer: "outside of here it is death." He halts by the door and stands there, impassive and motionless ... till the end. And Nagg and Nell are confined in their bins. Krapp moves freely within his room, but he never ventures out. And he listens to his own voice on tapes from the past.

In Happy Days Winnie is rooted in the earth like a tree and the three characters of Play are
stuck in urns. Flo, Victim and Ru, the three women in the dramatic, *Come and Go*, seem to be able to move, each of them in turn leaves the stage for a moment, but the pattern of their coming and going is so rigid that we understand that it is set for all time.

In his later plays, this movement is made stricter and stricter and in *Not I* our attention is focused on no more than a mouth from which words issue. In *That Time* we see no more than a face, that of a character termed by the author "the Listener," suspended "about ten feet above stage level mid-stage off centre." It is the face of an old man with long white hair. Three voices — all of them the Listener's own — are heard from three distinct sources at both sides of the stage and directly above him. The world is thus shrunk and circumscribed within the circumference of the person. As Martin Esslin states, "So thoroughly has the world been reduced to the essentials of consciousness and the self" (118). In *Footfalls* the process of concentration on the minimal essentials is different, but on very similar lines. Here the audience's attention is focussed on a narrow strip downstage, which allows exactly seven steps to be
taken. A woman, dishevelled, grey-haired, wearing a worn grey wrap which hides her feet, is pacing up and down on this strip, making a right-about-face turn when she reaches the left extremity, a left-about-face at its right limit. Movement in the play is thus condensed and it is a way of presenting the concentrated elements of life — elements which have made life a disillusioning experience and future a blank slate promising no hope.

Martin Esslin in his essay on the absence of action in Beckett’s theatre, states that

The stasis of these plays, far from being an absence of action, can thus be seen as, on the contrary, a concentration, condensation, and therefore maximal intensification of the tensions that make conventional plays dramatic. The real world has been left behind by these characters; . . . having fallen out of the world these characters carry within them the encapsulated essence of their life-experience fused into a minimal number of key images. It is because these key images fully sum up the experiences of a complete life and because their number is a bare minimum, that
they arrange themselves in rigidity structured patterns. (120)

Through the technique of reducing movement to the barest minimum, Beckett has set the boundaries of the world in which the characters exist. Their world is condensed to their immediate self, maximally intensifying the notion that interaction with the real or the outside world has been minimised. The bodies in the theatre of stasis illustrate no promising picture of the world, rather they hint at the break-up of that culture and civilisation.

Other than highlighting the fact of the disintegration of culture, there are instances in Beckett's plays which depict the lack of refinement and perfection attained in terms of basic human behaviour. Vulgarity and immodesty abound in the plays which are either symbolic of degradation or of not having attained a high level of perfection. Traits of barbarism inherent in the uncivilised man are projected in the behaviour of some of the characters. In the second act of Waiting for Godot, in the course of the conversation between Vladimir, Estragon and Pozzo, somebody farts, which is a very repulsive act.
ESTRAGON: [Recoiling.] Who farted?

VLADIMIR: Pozzo.

POZZO: Here! Here! Pity!

ESTRAGON: It's revolting! (76)

This very immodest action is connotative of the unrefinement of the culture in which the characters exist. It maintains no standard etiquette, exhibiting their vulgarity and lack of reserve, or their contemptuous attitude towards life. In another section of the play, Vladimir and Estragon talk uninhibitedly about an erection.

VLADIMIR: What do we do now?

ESTRAGON: Wait.

VLADIMIR: Yes, but while waiting.

ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves?

VLADIMIR: Hmm. I'd give us an erection!

ESTRAGON: [Highly excited.] An erection! (18)

Such blatant talk on sexual subjects reveals their attitude towards life and the civilisation which bred them. They speak in a humorous tone — a derisive tone on a subject, which includes in its depth a ridicule for culture, the derogatory attitude towards civilisation and contempt for marital relationship.
Willie in *Happy Days* too indulges in vulgar deeds like poring over a pornographic photograph. The existence of the pornographic picture, is symbolic of sexual and moral degeneration. It makes evident that the culture sustains no standard moral values and sexual taboos. There is an open indulgence in the immorality and vulgarity of sex.

**WINNIE:** [She sees postcard, bends lower.] What is that you have there, Willie may I see? [She reaches down with hand and Willie hands her card. . . . WINNIE turns back front and examines card.] Heavens what are they up to! [She looks for spectacles, puts them on and examines card.] No but this is just genuine pure filth! [Examines card.] Make any nice-minded person want to vomit! [Impatience of WILLIE’s fingers. She looks for glass, takes it up and examines card through glass. Long pause.] What does that creature in the background think he’s doing! [Looks closer.] Oh no really! [Impatience of fingers. Lost long look . . .] Pah! [Drops card.] Take it away! (144)

Willie relishing the pornographic post card not only symbolises his debased sexual impulses and his
bend towards pornographic vulgarity but also indicates the moral values of his culture. Maurice Charney in his book Sexual Fiction quotes the attitude of D. H Lawrence. According to him:

Pornography is the attempt to insult sex, to do dirt on it. This is unpardonable. Take the very lowest instance, the picture post card sold underhand, by the underworld, in most cities. What I have seen of them has been of an ugliness to make you cry. The insult to the human body, the insult to a vital human relationship! Ugly and cheap they make the human nudity, ugly and degraded they make the sexual act, trivial and cheap and nasty. (69) The prevalence of vulgar sex thus marks the downfall of the morality of that culture and a culture without moral values fails to survive.

Thus it can be concluded that the human body is a cultural tablet that exhibits traits the ups and downs and the prevailing standards of a specific culture. It is a medium of culture; a symbolic form inscribed with its cultural norms. In Beckett the body serves to illustrate the picture of Beckettland. He has manipulated the body for conveying the message of his theatre and in
capturing the degradation of the world and the disillusionment of its people.