

# TOWARDS AN INACTION DRAMA: WAITING AND THE CRISIS OF COMMUNICATION IN SELECTED PLAYS OF SAMUEL BECKETT

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## INTRODUCTION:

Samuel Beckett as a playwright prefers shedding light upon the meaninglessness and absurdity of Man's life through the unusual form and the characters' dialogues. The present study holds the view that life is absurd without meaning or purpose, very conscious. Beckett's plays address issues which concern all people around the world and emphasizes the absurdist themes as well, such as the meaninglessness of human existence, alienation of individuals, loss and death, lack of communication and feelings of anxiety, hopelessness and boredom.

His plays are not restricted to a certain philosophy; rather, they are texts widely open to interpretations in many ways. While Beckett renounces limiting the readings of his plays, he did not say a lot about them, their meanings and their backgrounds, his answer to Alan Schneider, the first American director of *Waiting for Godot*, on the most nagging question of "Who is Godot?" to which Beckett answered "If I knew, I would have said so in the play"<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, disappointing many critics who assumed a clear insight of what he intended his stage in *Endgame* to be, he rejected "the idea completely that the stage in *Endgame* is a skull" and the action "takes place in the mind of one man"<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, critics' imaginations or readings go to different directions from those at which Beckett has aimed. rather, he considers his plays to be "attempts to depict the confusion, distress and impotence of humanity in basic dramatic forms which work effectively on stage"<sup>3</sup>. Beckett's plays could be better approached on the basis that literature, generally speaking, is allegory. these plays are essentially comprehensible within that literary frame. Places and time, seem to be reduced to

the allegorically given features existing in the theatrical dimensions.

## STAGE, LIMITATION AND INTERPRETATION:

The Beckettian stage is designed in a way that makes it difficult for the observer to decide whether the characters on it, are free or encircled by uncontrollable factors. In fact, it becomes obvious that the road in (*Waiting for Godot*), the outer place in (*Endgame*) or the area in (*Happy Days*), are not as they seem for the eye, they turn to be a kind of entrapment where it is difficult, almost impossible, for the characters involved to decide which choice is possible for

them, living in these places, or leaving them, this is not to ignore the bitter question of whether living there is an option or obligation. The setting in *Waiting for Godot*, as "a country road," where there is only "a tree," and it is the "evening" time.<sup>4</sup> stimulates multiple observations and consequent interpretations, there is just one tree standing on the stage, empty of leaves, void of green. As Helen L. Baldwin says "there is sufficient evidence to constitute a presumption that Beckett deliberately chose the tree to be his setting and symbol"<sup>5</sup>. Excluding the tree the setting is a bare stage. This given, almost, naked stage background becomes eventually an inseparable part of the action; it is indicatory surrounding of helpless situation in both time and place. In *Endgame* the stage setting, which is regarded as a "shelter" stage, has raised hard discussions due to the metaphorical indications that can be assumed from this symbolically significant stage. One can see is a bare shelter set with its centered wheelchair and off-centered two ash bins, with the two high windows that Clov can reach only by means of a ladder to see the outer world, the world that is seen by Hamm through the eyes of others, and a door leading to an off-stage kitchen, to

which Clov can go when required, a place that he describes in measures as “ten feet by ten feet by ten feet,” as an illustration of his kitchen quite early in the play, Hamm, Nagg and Nell are also restricted in a no less painful way made worse, additionally, by virtue of their physical inabilities and the element of time. It is no less complicated and even ambiguous setting in *Happy Days* where there is detailed portrayal of the spot and the surrounding of where the two characters are located, it is an:

expanse of scorched grass rising centre to low mound. Gentle slopes  
down to front and either side of stage. Back an abrupt fall to stage  
level. Maximum of simplicity and symmetry. Blazing light. Very  
pompier trompe-l'oeil backcloth to represent unbroken plain and sky  
receding to meet in far distance. Imbedded up to above her waist in  
exact centre of mound, WINNIE”.<sup>6</sup>

The scenery here is almost deadly silent, picturing loneliness and infertility with an unending view, a symbol of the endless expanse amidst which two individuals (Winnie and Willie) are stuck, or perhaps lost. In this barren atmosphere the mound, which “actually occupies the centre of the stage,” where “the 'heap of time' in which Winnie is buried, up to her waist, later up to her neck- the heap which always promises, yet never actually grants, a death, an end”.<sup>7</sup> the stage in the plays is the area that bears all the conceptual framework of the theatricality of showing the limitations that force the characters to be in places. the characters are very much controlled and helpless in their ability not only when attempting to do something against the harsh realities amidst which they find themselves but also hardly succeed in making their cries of frustration and suffering heard outside those specified locations. Thus their endless suffering are continuous disappointment are encircled specifically within those tiny places. Nevertheless, these settings provide unique conditions that play significant roles in making the characters continue coping with what seems an endless state of misery, waiting, and frustration. The bare open stage in *Waiting for Godot*.<sup>8</sup> provides a strong image of sad homelessness and isolation. This atmosphere of isolation

and loneliness is, perhaps, what furnishes for a special relationship between Vladimir and Estragon. living within the same place and experiencing the same conditions of agony, having similar desires, hopes and aspirations. Being together, the two achieve a lot, and their relationship becomes a sort of homely place. Critics have always tried to pick up points on the way Beckett presents his characters, themes, dialogues, the obsession of his characters, their internal relationships and their connection to everything around, which strikes the attention to see some sort of what we can call gaps. for some critics tried to find biblical origins in them while many others were speaking of skepticism and uncertainty in this world; others referred the plays to individual experiences, and some others maintained that these plays, actually, express the endless suffering of all human kind.

#### WAITING, COMMUNICATION AND ISOLATION:

In Beckett's plays, there is one dominant, permanent fact in them, it is the state or condition which human beings endlessly experience, it is aimless, endless, hopeless, meaningless absurd waiting. In the three plays “waiting” enables us to move imaginatively, and to examine the impact of waiting, to see whether it is a choice or an obligation. In *Waiting for Godot*, the situation seems to be simple enough where two men, Vladimir and Estragon, are joined at a place where they seem to have been before the play began: “Vlad. I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever”.<sup>9</sup> And, in the same place they remain also when the play ends. their presence in that location should be for a reason which must be “waiting.” It is for the promised arrival of “Godot.” that gives them hope and energy to cope with the difficulties encountering them. as they are placed at positions where they are, confused, lost and uncertain. Vladimir and Estragon do not know where that road would lead them to, therefore they convince themselves that Godot will come, even when this has been repeated frequently without Godot arriving. They attempt to find excuses by blaming themselves and speaking of uncertainty of the exact days where he is supposed to arrive, or even suspecting that there must be some kind of misunderstanding regarding the tree, precisely whether there is another tree or the very bare tree nearby which they keep waiting.

In *Endgame*, we are with two generations, the old parents Nagg and Nell struggle at a difficult point where they are neither capable of reaching exactly their end, nor they can move outside the dustbins where they are situated. They can neither arrive nor depart because they cannot “go in; they can only wait”.<sup>10</sup> The other generations are represented by Hamm and Clov. Hamm is depicted as a “king”, with Clov as his servant, and this dark, or grey, lighted room is described as “my house”, “my service”, and even “my kingdom”, What the two achieve, despite everything, is their co-operation. When Beckett was once asked to give his interpretation of *Endgame*, he illustrated that it is “interdependency -that man must depend upon his fellow man in some way no matter how awful; a love-hate relationship between Hamm and Clov which exists right through the play”.<sup>11</sup>

A very similar situation the audience meets in *Happy Days*, where Winnie’s life is almost spent, symbolized by her buried lower half in a mound of earth, still she can neither reach her end nor can she be productive, thus her life is devoted, or rather reduced, to checking her stuff which is gathered in one bag. It is worth stopping at the point of whether the objects Winnie has got in her bag are what actually anchor her mentally and psychologically or rather that is all what she has got of choices to empty the bag and have a look! Still, her way of taking the stuff out of the bag, brushing her teeth and looking at her face in the mirror can be considered a self reassurance when everything else seems to reveal the opposite. Willie, her husband, spends most of his time reading in a newspaper. In short, *Happy Days* has got the same Beckettian mode of thinking; Winnie, like other characters in the two other plays we examine, is waiting. Despite the similarity in presenting the objectives of “waiting”, Beckett, in one critic words, obviously changes the kind of metaphor he presents where Winnie “alternates between the compulsion to wait and the desire to die”.<sup>12</sup> Beckett’s characters remain a puzzle which each individual viewer must solve. They are clearly in physical, or mental, contrast to each other The act of waiting combines them and makes each one think that the relationship with the other is crucial. The relationship between Vladimir and Estragon can be labeled as mysterious. Their communication echoes their relationship with the broader spheres. Thus, words and sentences such as “nothing;” “nothing to be done,” “nothing to be shown;” “boots must be taken off every

day”( p.10), are frequently repeated. Their combination can be described as the love-hate relationship In the same way, their movements, their gestures all seem to the audience as insignificant “Estragon has so many nightmares; he must have someone to talk to. And Vladimir could not bear to be alone, because he cannot find any answers to the questions he is seeking. He hopes Estragon will provide the answer”.<sup>13</sup>

Beckett groups his characters in pairs; for example, we have Vladimir and Estragon, or Didi and Gogo, Hamm and Clov, Pozzo and Lucky, Nagg and Nell. In *Waiting for Godot*, one is tall and thin the other is short and fat, one has got a stinking mouth, the other has got stinking feet, one has got a problem with the shoes, the other appears to have a problem with the hat, Vladimir is drawn as more dynamic than Estragon and so on. In *Endgame*, Hamm cannot stand while Clov cannot sit. The contrast between the bodies used is a source functionally highlighted in an exaggeratedly physical appearance such as a fat figure or slim. Yet, they have a lot in common, and their existence is dependent on each other: they appear in couples and pairs complementing and integrating each other. They attack each other, embrace each other, they cannot leave each other though they respectively express the need to depart or to be separate, they cannot live without one another. They are different in their social identities, as one dominates the other, but they are together and none of them could cope with “waiting” on his own, and as it has been noticed “they quarrel, get irritable, wonder about separating; as Vladimir says ‘One isn’t the master of one’s moods.’ But they have tolerance, understanding, continuing care for each other”.<sup>14</sup> However, despite all the contradictory mental and physical characteristics, they feel the necessity to live with each other. Lenin’s entails the relationship between the couples in Beckett’s plays; they are “opposites, yet they are essentially recipient of, and to, each other. The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world is their ‘self-movement’, in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the ‘struggle’ of opposites”.<sup>15</sup> When Pozzo and Lucky appear in the first half of the play, the audience immediately recognizes the nature of the connection between them, which is the master-slave relationship: “Lucky carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a greatcoat. Pozzo a whip”. Pozzo addresses

Lucky as “pig”, “hog”, etc. (p. 21) Although Pozzo seems more slave owner than anything else, he could be labeled as well, in terms of social classes, as a capitalist figure in whom domination is typically exemplified: “I am bringing him to the fair, where I hope to get a good prize”( p.31) However, Pozzo having treated Lucky like the lowest sort of slave reveals that it was Lucky who taught him “all these beautiful things”( p.33) “I can't bear it...any longer...the way he goes on”( p.30). In the second half of the play, Pozzo's dependence on Lucky is even strengthened due to the fact that Pozzo greatly needs him as he has gone blind, however, the signs of physical aging are manifested on Lucky as well since he becomes “dumb,” the effect of which is to indicate worsening of “communication” between both characters. However, “they remain interdependent”.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the mutually dependent relationship between the two figures makes them integrate each other, that is Lucky becomes Pozzo's eyes since the latter lost his sight. Nevertheless, Pozzo's blindness might be interpreted symbolically as the lack of vision because he can see nothing but himself.

In *Endgame*, the couples are very similar to those in *Waiting for Godot* that is, they intend to depart from each other but they cannot. This is quite obvious in the very remarkable question Hamm asks in the very first scenes of play “Why do you stay with me?” to which Clov answers by an astonishing question as well “Why do you keep me?”<sup>17</sup> Hamm needs Clov for various reasons. Hamm, cannot do on his own such as moving around the chamber and bringing him to the exact point he wants to be in, watching outside for him, checking on his parents, checking the time for taking his pain killer etc. The relationship between Hamm and Clov is very astonishing, both hate each other and have the will and desire to leave each other, yet they both know they need each other to survive; Clov needs Hamm's store of food to live as it is the only source left for him, equally Hamm needs Clov's help to live as the latter is the only one left for him to help in everything. Absurdly, and oddly enough, Hamm does not acknowledge his need for Clov or tries to change his behavior towards him, he uses various methods to keep Clov under his control; he tries to use a dialogue of convenience for himself which is no less than threatening Clov of the risks of leaving him and going outside.

Hamm: Gone from me you'd be dead.

Clov: And vice versa

Hamm: Outside of here it's death. (p. 47)

Hamm is separated from the outer world, it is a fact that he often seems to ignore or avoid acknowledging, rather he paradoxically tries to prove the other way round as he insists on being located in his wheel-chair exactly at the centre of the shelter, this occupies a main part of the demands he makes to Clov. This is a socio-psychological positioning, constructed by, and based on, some kind of illusion. However, Clov is not only the servant but also, like Lucky to Pozzo, he is the mind, or the “eyes” or “the mind's eyes” to Hamm. “unity and struggle of the opposites: in the prison-like shelter where they are; these characters are on diametrically opposite sides in their actual placement, yet they are very close, they contradict, and quarrel with, each other, still they are unqualified for leaving each other, they act as “wanting to leave each other, at war with each other, and yet dependent on each other”.<sup>18</sup> Though the relationship between Hamm and Clov is shaped by awkwardness, and despite the will and desire to part, they remain bound to, and stuck with, each other. yet, the question of whether or not Clov will leave Hamm creates the dramatic tension throughout the play, as Martin Esslin remarked, if Clov is to leave Hamm, it is not only killing the latter but it is also suicidal on Clov's part: “He will thus succeed where Estragon and Vladimir have failed so often”.<sup>19</sup> Only at the end, when Clov informs Hamm that he sees a little boy approaching, the latter spells out his inner self and states that he needs him no longer, it is a bitter implication that he will replace him with the boy. Beckett writes of *Endgame* that it is “more inhuman than 'Godot' and Hamm's cruelty earns the play this adjective”.<sup>20</sup> Nag and Nell, who are a couple and, also close to each other, obviously suffer from the lack of interaction between them, they are geographically close but mentally distant. Nag is interested in stories while Nell is nostalgic for the times when she was young. They are kept hidden in the ashbins – which symbolize tombs - on the stage. Beckett architects a scene in which they both try unsuccessfully to kiss each other: “their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again”. (p.18) ; yet they are neither able to “go in” nor fit to reach each other. They ask similar questions to those posed by Vladimir and Estragon:

Nagg. (...) Do you want to go in?

Nell. Yes.

Nagg. Then go in. (Nell does not move.) *Why don't you go in?*

Nell. *I don't know.* (p. 16)

In *Happy Days*, the audiences are with two typical characters that are combined together, Willie, the husband, is most of the time silent and if he talks, that would be reduced to only a few words. Winnie, on the contrary, speaks continuously. Basically, they are husband and wife and, also, they are needed to each other, however they do not have the same interests, they are not bothered about the same things either. The way these two characters are connected, they are paired, although they are not matching in reality; to express the issue differently, it is the unification of the opposites in specific conditions of time and place. Winnie's extreme location is very indicative of the state of helplessness in the sense that she is alone and the closest to her is not sharing anything with her or even understanding her. Willie cannot be simply seen by Winnie, rather, the latter "has to bend back sideways to see him [and] despite everything he is necessary for her; he is the indispensable witness to her own personal existence; without him she would lose her identity".<sup>21</sup> Beckett uses "interdependent response and judgment of the spectator as an important factor in the drama".<sup>22</sup> Winnie combines both impotence and effectiveness in one single body. This unification of both the buried and exposed halves is compared with another being Willie who is, though not half buried, not largely different from Winnie as far as activity is concerned; for a comparison of the positioning of this figure to Winnie there is a similar environment where a half-buried character in the mound, hardly active or in the circle of focus, and her husband is in a hole reading his newspaper and occasionally utters a few words.<sup>23</sup> The relationship between Winnie's two opposite parts is as complicated as her relationship, as a unified body, not only to her husband but also to the outer -off stage- world at large. Winnie attempts to resolve the coldness which she experiences with her husband. Throughout the play, Beckett tries to teach us that sometimes in life; all we need is a little communication with our loved one. So in Act II of the play, Winnie is seen buried up to her neck in the mound, a sign that her condition has worsened. While the man in her life is undesirable she fights continually to

revive her lost love. Mendel in her study explores the relationships between Beckett's characters. She finds that in each play, there is a strong relationship between the characters and their past memories. They long for the past days of their life and always need to remember them. She also finds that interdependence is essential in each of the three plays. Mendel points out that:

It is their togetherness which supports the survival they crave,

however grim its reality may be. Togetherness has the very essence of existence for the people of Beckett's three plays. In constant pain,

Beckett's characters long for peace and refuge. It is within the strife

of their relationships that they are closest to ever finding such a haven.

She adds:

While the characters wait for their fates to unfold, they have another

who stands beside them, and it slowly becomes clear that each individual has little power of survival without his partner.<sup>24</sup>

Beckett's works are concerned with the failure of communication in modern society which leaves man alienated; and all dramatists of the absurd are concerned with the lack of communication and individuality. Moreover, they use the dramatic elements of time and place to imply important ideas. This concern with communication is finally carried to its illogical extreme in Beckett's plays which give the impression that man is totally lost in a disintegrating society. His characters are tied together by a fear of being left entirely alone, and they therefore adhere to one last hope of establishing some kind of communication. as in *Endgame*, that man is left alone after society has disintegrated. In *Waiting for Godot*, two characters are seen conversing in a repetitive, strangely fragmented dialogue, while they are waiting for Godot, never-defined being who will bring them some communication about — what? Salvation? Death? is that the two are probably waiting for someone or something which will give them meaning to continue living and direction to their lives. Everyone leaves the

theater with the knowledge that these tramps are strangely tied to one another; even though they bicker and fight, and even though they have exhausted all conversation notice that the second act is repetitive and almost identical, the loneliness and weakness in each calls out to the other, and they are held by a mystical bond of interdependence. The other two characters, Pozzo and Lucky, are on a journey without any clear goal and are symbolically tied together. One talks, the other says nothing. The waiting of Vladimir and Estragon and the journeying of Pozzo and Lucky offer themselves as contrasts of various activities in the modern world, all of which lead to no fruitful end; therefore, each pair is hopelessly alienated from the other pair. For example, when Pozzo falls and yells for help, Vladimir and Estragon continue talking, although nothing is communicated in their dialogue; all is hopeless, or as Vladimir replies to one of Estragon's long discourses, "We are all born mad. Some remain so." (p.12). In their attempts at conversation and communication, these two tramps have a fussy correctness that suggests that they could be socially accepted; but their appearance is extremely comic. Vladimir and Estragon, as representatives of modern man, cannot formulate any useful action; and what is more pathetic, they cannot communicate their helpless longings to one another.

Generally, Beckett explores all the possible relationships between words and the body. For immobility of the body in Beckett's theatre is always active, dynamic, moving and theatrical; it enables us to recognize another body, even to the movements of articulating words; Beckett's aim is not, to reduce the stage to words alone, but rather to concentrate upon those words that are pronounced by the body. His is a theatre of elementary things, of words and bodies, words in a body, words expelled by a body, words epitomized by a body. The immobility odd to the Beckettian stage is, then, paradoxical. Beckett's attention remains focused upon what is relevant to the body, for example, in *Happy days*, the tiny movements made by Winnie (the smile, the sticking out of her tongue, the look to the side), movements which take on full dramatic value because of the immobility they define themselves against. According to Wright: "The plays of Samuel Beckett graphically present us with images of bodies, or parts of bodies, sometimes comically, sometimes desperately, struggling to channel their desire through speech".<sup>25</sup> Beckett

continues to experiment with incapacity and confinement in later plays. Perhaps the ash cans that contain Nell and Nagg in *Endgame* inspired the confining mound of earth in *Happy Days*. Throughout the play, Beckett's protagonist Winnie remains implanted within the inescapable mound. The play opens with Winnie, asleep, hunched over the ground, buried to her waist within a mound of earth. Winnie's partner Willie is, like Clov, able to move about, but not without physical limitation. Beckett restricts Willie's movements to crawling between his hole and Winnie's mound. Unlike Clov, however, Willie does very little to aid his counterpart and barely speaks. From Winnie's confined position, she can lead only a simplified existence: sleeping, waking, rummaging through her bag, cataloguing her things, brushing her hair and teeth and talking to Willie. She wonders, "Perhaps some day the earth will yield and let me go, the pull is so great, yes, crack all around me and let me out"(p.15). However, the second act opens with "Winnie imbedded up to neck.... Her head, which she can no longer turn, nor bow, nor raise, faces motionless throughout the act"

Waiting holds a special connotation in Beckett's plays as the characters wait for some significant change in their lives, is that they wait endlessly for that special something to happen in their lives. Godot itself is nothing but this special something that we all wait to happen. The world that Beckett depicts a world of physical, moral, and spiritual degradation in which humans, terribly estranged from one another, emotionally alienated and drained and reduced to the bare minimum conditions required for survival, are waiting hungrily for a solution to their suffering and desperately seeking to find refuge in hope. It is only hope that keeps Winnie optimistic. Throughout the play she says: "Oh this is going to be another happy day!" She articulates: "This is going to be a happy day! Another happy day"(p.16). Buttner explains "In Beckett's great plays there are always some glimpses of hope".<sup>26</sup> They still have a little hope of the coming future, which makes them prefer delaying to the complete resignation of life. This can be clearly seen in *Waiting for Godot* more than in *Endgame*. The characters in *Waiting for Godot* are waiting for someone who is seen as a savior, so there is hope of survival, while in *Endgame* the characters are waiting for death; they don't wait for anybody to help, because they believe that nobody can help. The characters in these plays have nothing to do, except delaying their end by doing

senseless and useless actions. As Beckett said to the actor who played Hamm "He is only trying to delay the inevitable end. Each of his gestures is one of the last useless moves which put off the end".<sup>27</sup> Cohn also comments on Beckett's plays saying that: "although Beckett's plays sometimes hover at death's threshold, he is more widely known for the theatre trilogy that is absorbed in life".<sup>28</sup>

In *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days*, the main action is waiting. The tramps, Didi and Gogo, in *Waiting for Godot*, which has no story or plot to speak. They waste their time waiting for the unknown, and know at heart that their task is impossible. A similar attitude is taken toward the tramps in *Endgame*. Hamm is blind and he cleans his sun glasses. Clov, the prisoner, can move freely but cannot sit, and he wants to leave, but he stays; he is unable to leave Hamm fearing of the outside world, which seems to be completely destroyed. The father and mother are sitting in trash cans and acting like machines; even their love which is seen as a sign of life is seen as a dark comedy. One may laugh at their foolishness, irrational behaviors, fruitless actions and even at their models. But what is presented on the stage is only a parody of life. As Styan suggests "we laugh at their antics of mind and body, but under the growing realization that what they are doing is only a modest parody of what we do ourselves; we know before the piece is done that they are ourselves".<sup>29</sup> In brief, Hamm and Clov's actions are meant to reflect the futility of life.

Beckett reduces not only language, but also his characters, actions and settings as well. For instance, his characters are severely limited by their own physical disabilities. They are very helpless characters waiting alone in the middle of nowhere for death or an impossible Godot. They are not seen as men, but rather as remnants of men, who represent mankind reduced to the lowest level; Man reduced to the role of helpless, homeless, and purposeless. They represent their fellow humans not only in agony, confusion and impotence, but also in despair. Yet, the characters hard attempting and struggling to do something, to change something, to move outside, and beyond, an enclosed circle and above all to act and be productive. One of the most obvious dilemma with characters like Vladimir and Estragon, Ham and Clov, Nagg and Nell, Winnie and Willie is the sharp contrast between limitations and aspirations, between desirability and availability. In *Waiting for Godot*, the formula (let's go/ Why don't we go?) is repeated verbally. Vladimir and

Estragon do not actually leave, except in the break between the two acts, but they think of going, and while they are there, their minds curiously try to explore everything around and to make the best use of what is there despite the limitations of what they really have on the stage. they show us helplessness, frustration, and limitation. Esslin states that: "Beckett's creative intuition explores the elements of experience and shows to what extent human beings carry the seeds of...depression and disintegration within the deeper layers of their personality".<sup>30</sup> Beckett's characters have much in common with us, they reveal our own selves. Their "waiting" is an actual sketch of our enduring condition; we wait, aspire and anticipate a movement or a change to take place eventually, and like them, our life is continuously structured by uncertainty and contradiction; hope shapes the details of waiting together with frustration and oppression. Our experience in life helps us trying to regard the possibility that Godot is purely an illusion of Vladimir and Estragon's minds; they invented Godot, gave him characteristics and added further fantastic qualities to him, they imagined Godot, and they believed their own imagination. Thus they convinced themselves that he would come and rescue them. Meanwhile, they also persuade themselves that they are making time while waiting for "Him" when they are actually killing time and recognizing that "there is nothing to be done!"

In *Endgame*, Clov is being repeatedly frightened of the unknown outer world; therefore he stays with Hamm and the known inside, where darkness with weak grey light are universal, and nothing is pleasant in this gloomy atmosphere. Still, their relationships with each other are shaped, and structured by, cooperation, that is the wheelchair on which Hamm sits symbolizes a paralyzed being, is, somehow, to ignore the existence of a capable being moving around. they are, by no means, equal. The physically disabled figure offers a sheltering place to Clov who, in return, gives back the required movement of the former and observes the outer set to report. Regardless of the difficulties, the relationship between the two is dependency and coordination

*Happy Days* offers a stream-of-consciousness monologue delivered by the middle-aged woman Winnie who is on the stage with her "uncommunicative" husband. Winnie's view of her own world is even darker than the others in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, to

her, there is “no better, no worse, no change”. and “nothing to break the silence of this place”, therefore she wonders whether “Should I happen to see the old joke again?”( p.18). The repetition and the long time waiting affect Winnie to whom there is almost no more nature. Winnie's days have no nights, and significance. When incidents seem to occur, they do not happen naturally, and natural functions of Winnie and Willie, like objects, are 'running out'.<sup>31</sup> Winnie's long time speech tells about her misery and it is corresponding with “hellish fire” revealed by the lighting. Willie's presence does not make so much difference to Winnie. While she struggles to pass time by drawing the attention to herself trying to find quotations and rummaging for her old tooth brush, he is engaged in reading silently. Winnie's case has been “seen as variations of “waiting” and “ending” games in Beckett's two full-length plays”.<sup>32</sup> The difference between waiting in the two other plays and the one in *Happy Days* is that in the latter Winnie “shows signs of distress and a growing awareness of the nature of plight”.<sup>33</sup> Winnie's salvation remains her own decision since she is handy with a revolver. Likewise, departure or death in *Endgame* is a change but to take the first step. No matter how valueless time is for the characters, there is fear of endless time of suffering and torment in the three plays which destroys calmness of the characters. In the nightfall, Vladimir and Estragon see a sort of rest they seek.

Vlad. It'll fall all of a sudden, like yesterday.

Estr. Then it'll be night.

Vlad. And we can go.

Estr. Then it'll be day again (pause. Despairing)

What'll we do. What'll we do!...( p. 73)

Vladimir and Estragon's pattern is, perhaps, the state of being which they created for themselves in connection to time, waiting, and changing. It is, therefore, unclear what their real intention is; hence one may ask “Will they wait for the 'night to fall'? Or for 'Godot to come'? Or will they struggle to discover a mode of being which would place them in such bearable relation to Time”<sup>34</sup> Given all the conditions within which characters wait, where hope vanishes. the present becomes almost identical with the past, so would the future appear to be, the old is new and the new is old, the plays end with the same problem they began with, and the characters' minds and interests are gradually sized,

the long time waiting affects the characters to the extent that they become “unable to find new words, new gestures, they are reduced to repeating the things they have already done and said many times before”.<sup>35</sup>

In fact “waiting” is not a practice, conception, or activity to which the audience is introduced at the beginning of a play, rather one senses that it had been going on before the actual start of the plays and what we see is only a very limited period of time restricted within the theatrical limitations where a play opens and ends. Beckett starts *Waiting for Godot* with Vladimir and Estragon having already met before, they are on the stage and the first scene to the audience is not actually where both beings maintain that “nothing to be done” (p.9), because they are kept in the boring repetitive actions in life where the way out seems far beyond reaching: “Est. Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!” (p.41). If taking off and putting on the shoes seem to be nothing but simply senseless acts that bring about laughter, they, at the same time, show an investment of time. Despite the awful acts the characters do while waiting, they serve to give them the feeling of making time first, and second to explore everything they have around, and above all they function as entertaining elements while they are there, waiting. Among the games Vladimir and Estragon busy themselves with is playing the tree which is, symbolically. To view this game as playing or drawing upon the paradox where the tree changes -while they do not- is a denial of not only the essence of the human nature but also to the essence of nature itself which contains the “tree” and the “humans,” and it is a denial that nature is ruled by the law of “motion.” Although the claimed promise of Godot's appearance is not made from without but by the characters themselves, the audience is left with the feeling that something is yet to be done since arrival remains an unfulfilled promise in the two acts of *Waiting for Godot*. To this fact, Beckett's *Endgame* has been observed as a third act where waiting is still the main issue and the characters have got the same attitude. Hamm always orders Clov to wait, he says “Nothing you can do about it, just wait for it to come. (Pause) No”( p.40).

Thus, all characters have the same mode of thinking where their existence, with everything around, is mysterious and does not enable them to know much about themselves and the world around. Their self-given

promise that something is going to happen, or someone is going to appear, is an attempt to self-comforting together with an inner assumption that some kind of interruption to their way of life embodies fruitfulness; it is the dream by which they reward themselves. Hamm and Clov think that they nearly said all what they might and “There is nothing to say”(p.50), and:

This is not very much fun (pause.) But that's always the way at the end of the day, isn't it, Clov?

Clov: Always.

Hamm: It is the end of the day like any other day, isn't it Clov?

Clov: looks like it. (p.17)

To this extent, Clov's answer to Hamm's enquiry about the weather “The same as usual” (p.51), though might be true for inside the shelter, is an observation that sees things in isolation from each other; for the weather, unlike what is being uttered by Clov, is certainly not the same outside. Moreover, the way Clov, in his confused way of preparing himself for departure, is dressed in the last scene, as he is ready to leave, suggests that he is not prepared for any one single sort of weather since he is not fully dressed for any, it is, in effect, an inner acknowledgement of various weathers, “he is dressed for the road. Panama hat, tweed coat, raincoat over his arm, umbrella, bag.” (p.52)

It is the time in which the tree puts few leaves in *Waiting for Godot*, a symbol of renewal and change; and the flea appearing in *Endgame*; and the Emmet progressing through the grass in *Happy Days*. It is the time when Vladimir and Estragon move, come and go thinking “What'll we do?” And try to leave in the last scene. It is the time in which Winnie thinks that “something must happen, in the world, take place, some change” (p.28), and, it is the time when it does not take Winnie long to state in a manner of self-realization: “stop talking and do something for a change” (p.31). In particular, Winnie wants to change something but she can't, so, she stumbles between her desire and her distress and keeps wishing and hoping It is, as well, the consciousness which motivates Clov to express his desire to see the world of “order” and starts preparing to leave Hamm. It is the attempt to re-“order” his own thinking by asking himself: “I never refuse, why?” The time in the

three plays is where silences and pauses are relative and temporary. It is the time that is labeled by change despite the state of hopelessness. Vladimir can notice that “Things have changed since yesterday” (p.60). Indeed, for decay or renewal, nothing remains the same. In *Happy Days*, “the threads of the three discomforts: the tube of toothpaste is running out; her teeth are in a bad condition, and Willie, her partner for life, has no zest left for anything.”<sup>36</sup> In *Endgame*, when it is time for Hamm to take his pain-killer for which he has been nervously calling and nagging since the beginning of the play, he hears the shocking news that “there's no more pain-killer.”, like Winnie's permanent situation; she has nothing except misery and suffering : she “turns to the real business of the day which is to produce the illusion of happiness by killing the time until the bell shall ring again to tell her the day is over and she can sleep”.<sup>37</sup>

To tackle the issue of time and waiting from a different side, it is worth asking whether the situations and modes of relations between the characters in each play are connected to what is called “waiting.” Are they suffering because they are waiting? Or they are waiting because they are suffering?. It has been long argued that waiting in Beckett is neither pointless nor barren because nothing freely comes to a complete standstill on the pretext of waiting. Waiting does not weaken daily activities, but rather it is part of them. It has been discussed that:

Waiting is a condition which does not necessarily affect one's daily projects but which underlies all of them- while performing one's job or gardening or even while asleep one could be described as “waiting”for instance waiting to get married or waiting to die.<sup>38</sup>

Between the two acts of *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon are not merely waiting and the way they talk suggests that their life is not reduced to, or confined within waiting. The state of waiting seems to be fixed, frozen, trapped and stuck in nowhere, where the time loses its value for those who are waiting; they are all waiting and waiting for someone to come, for something to happen; they are waiting for some kind of change till

eventually waiting becomes an aim in itself, Beckett's plays eventually present or at least hint to the younger generation. In *Waiting for Godot*, the arrival of the boy symbolizes youth and continuity. Beckett portrays that something:

is taking its course in *Endgame* begins to look like a movement towards birth as well as death; a difficult act of generation. The generations are very much there in the room. And outside a small boy. Coming [sic!] late into the play to suggest young life continuing.<sup>39</sup>

The waiting continues. Loneliness begins to close in around Vladimir during the several moments that Estragon falls asleep upon the stage. He has certainly experienced some terrible nightmare which he tries in vain to relate to Vladimir. One sees immediately that this terrible dream, perhaps the dream of their fruitless existence, is also familiar to Vladimir, and he cannot bear to hear it retold. They cannot separate; they must go on this way forever. They are bound to each other just as they are bound in life to wait for Godot; nothing can separate them from this waiting, while, at the same time, they know that Godot will never arrive. In *Happy Days*, Willie, who has not moved throughout the play, moves at the end crawling on all fours round the mould trying to climb. This is to signify the movement of man in the spot before walking, yet there is a reference to a boy; Willie reads "Wanted bright boy" (p.36). The only thing left for man is to wait. Martin Esslin makes the following comment:

The subject of the play is not Godot but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. Throughout our lives we always wait for something, and Godot simply represents the objective of our waiting—an event, a thing, a person, death. Moreover, it is in the act of waiting that we experience the flow of time in its purest, most evident form. If we are

active, we tend to forget the passage of time, we pass the time, but if we are merely passively waiting, we are confronted with the action of time itself.<sup>40</sup>

We leave Godot just as we began it. Vladimir and Estragon have arrived nowhere, solve no problems, found no happiness. Godot remains a stale promise. At the end of the play, they decide to leave, but, the stage direction states that they do not move.

Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?  
Estragon: Yes, -let's. go  
*They do not move ( curtain)*

Clark conducts a study which aims to show if isolation exists in Beckett's plays. He finds many examples of isolation and alienation. For him, emptiness, nothingness, meaningless actions and dialogues, death which hovers around the characters, bare setting, the character's awareness of time, suffering and violence are all seen as indications of the character's alienation from the society, others, nature and self. Clark points out that:

There is the stasis of Vladimir and Estragon; the constant movement of Pozzo and Lucky who go no farther than their static counterparts; the isolation of Krapp; the immobility of Hamm; the servitude of Clov. All of these are portrayals of alienated individuals who spring from a society much like our own and have no hope of escape.<sup>41</sup>

The characters are paralyzed, helpless and trapped in a static and meaningless world. They spend time searching for the meaning of life or the essence of their existence. They have no power to continue, no desire to express or to live even "there is nothing in the world I love more" said Nagg (p.56). They cannot make a decision about their present situation or future, fearing the unknown. They cannot think or stop complaining, even as Clov says that he does "not complain" (p.4). Although they act like tramps, their speech and actions seem to be useless and funny, they are very expressive.

They portray the general state of Man. They convey a similar sense of what we feel outside, the futility of life and the horror man has to face, through the use of the illogical, irrational, nonsensical and contradictory words and actions. In other words, they show us what man longs for and what he finds in reality. He longs for love, peace, happiness, company and order, but finds hatred, wars, sadness, disintegration, isolation and chaos.

Hamm: What in God's name do you think you are doing?

Clov: I'm doing my best to create a little order. (p. 57)

Or as Hamm asks:

Hamm: Did you ever have an instant of happiness?

Clov: Not to my knowledge. (p.62)

However, the idea of moving remains latent and the characters stick to watching the outside world, and the whistle is believed to be the means of a hard effort to compensate for the frustration resulted from the failure to achieve the aim. Thus Hamm whistles to exercise his local domination over Clov. Yet, time is the hammer that strikes heavily; it is symbolized by the presence of the alarm clock. In a sense Beckett is, apparently, choosing his stage objects as a striking reminder of time and the gaps within the world and the limitations of the figures involved.

## CONCLUSION:

With some other writers, we have the problems being resolved and the happy endings are expected, while in Beckett there is a gap sort of problem that is neither totally filled nor remained without clues for better expectations: the plays begin with a problem and end with the same problem (or a problem of the same nature). Moreover, all of the characters in the above-discussed three plays are longing for something to come, to change a situation, to answer some of the puzzling questions they have about themselves and the world around, but this desire remains unrealized.. In the end, they all get older and, naturally, weaker, and the mysteries of life continue for them and for us. Beckett's characters have recognized the harshness of their situation and while they do not always strive to face their existence they do not deny its

awfulness. Although the characters suffer from both physical and spiritual problems, they do not commit suicide or end their life. They endure their suffering, the painful and the incomprehensible reality, and manage somehow to go on even as they say they cannot. When we look from perspectives of comparative literature, the concepts like; ambiguity, complexity, separation, fragmentation and silence in dialogue, irony, meaninglessness of the world and life, alienated individuals, purposelessness, death, helpless and endless waiting are basic common aspects of Beckett's works. As a conclusion, Beckett's plays emphasize the characters' waiting for salvation at both the beginnings and ends of the works. They reflect the meaninglessness and absurdity of individual's life and universe promising no hope for humanity rather than Godot. We can say that the three plays have expressed something fundamental about human life. They reveal to us the state of the characters, and how they are confused and unable to make a decision. The plays have many things in common, such as the repetition of words and the fruitless action; the neutral or suspended time, which serves to avoid any progress, and emphasizes the habitual nature of life; the unspecified plot and theme, the bare setting, the few number of the characters, the boredom of man's life, the illogical language, which reflects reality and man's failure to communicate and to understand himself or the world around him, and finally the suffering and endurance are all features the three plays have in common.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Alan Levy, "The Long Wait for Godot," *Theatre Arts* XL8(August 1956), p.34.

<sup>2</sup>Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre* (New York: 1988), p.175.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.13

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956),p.7.

<sup>5</sup>Helen L. Baldwin, *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence* (Pennsylvania: 1981), p.108.

<sup>6</sup>for this and all other subsequent references to the text are taken from this edition. Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (London: 1961), P.9.

<sup>7</sup>Richard N. Coe, *Samuel Beckett* (New York: 1964), p.90.

<sup>8</sup>Some critics have argued that this bare open stage stands for what is geographically French.

<sup>9</sup>for this and all other subsequent references to the text are taken from this edition. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: 1955), p.9.

<sup>10</sup>Ross Chambers, "An Approach to *Endgame*". p.75.

<sup>11</sup>McMillan, Dougald, and Martha Fehsenfeld, p.173.

<sup>12</sup>Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theatre* (New Jersey: 1980), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>Jack MacGowran, "MacGowran on Beckett". (An Interview by Richard Toscan in *Theatre Quarterly*, July -September, 1973), p.17

<sup>14</sup>Katharine Worth, "The Space and the Sound in Beckett's Theatre" in *Beckett the shape Changer*, ed. Katharine Worth (London: 1975), p.188.

<sup>15</sup>V.I. Lenin, "On the Question of Dialectics" in *Collected Works* (Vol.38), p.360.

<sup>16</sup>For a broader discussion on the issue, see McMillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre*. p.67.

<sup>17</sup>for this and all other subsequent references to the text are taken from this edition. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (London: 1958), p.45.

<sup>18</sup>Martin Esslin, "Samuel Beckett: The Search for the Self", in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame*, ed. Bell Gale Chevigny (New Jersey: 1969), p. 26.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>20</sup>Antony Easthope, "Hamm, Clov, and Dramatic Method in *Endgame*" in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame*, ed. Bell Gale Chevigny (New Jersey: 1969), p.63

<sup>21</sup>G.C. Barnard, *Samuel Beckett: A New Approach*, (London: 1970), p. 122.

<sup>22</sup>James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull* (London: 1979), p.97

<sup>23</sup>Barnard, p.120.

<sup>24</sup>Mendel T. Angela. (1988). *A study of Samuel Beckett's people and of their relationships in the plays Waiting for Godot, Endgame and Happy Days*, (MA thesis), Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. (p. 4)

<sup>25</sup>Wright, E (2013). *Psychoanalytic criticism: Theory in practice*. U.k: Routledge

<sup>26</sup>Buttner, G. (Ed). (2001). *Samuel Beckett: Endlessness in the year 2000. Schopenhauer's recommendations to Beckett*. (New York: Rodopi

<sup>27</sup>qtd. in Pilling, J. (Ed.). (1994). *The Cambridge companion to Beckett*. (New York: press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge. P, 71)

<sup>28</sup>Ruby Cohn (1991). Samuel Beckett: Overview. *Literature Resource Center*. (Online), available:<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420000648&v=2.1&u=rtlopacplus&it=r&p=LitRG&sw=w&asid=a3c5b1d7a01520c21844b4e7a6660992>

<sup>29</sup>Styan, J.L. (1981). *Modern drama in theory and practice: Symbolism, surrealism and the absurd*, volume 2. (London: Cambridge University Press).p. 20

<sup>30</sup>Esslin, p. 28.

<sup>31</sup>Cohn, p.26.

<sup>32</sup>Kennedy, A. K. (1975). *Six dramatists in search of a language*. (London: Cambridge University Press)., p.76.

<sup>33</sup>Knowlson and Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull*, p.98

<sup>34</sup>Edward S. Brinkley "Proustian Time and Modern Drama: Beckett, Brecht, and Fugard", in *Comparative Literature Studies* 25 (1988),p. 353.

<sup>35</sup>Chambers, pp.77-78.

<sup>36</sup>Kennedy, *Samuel Beckett*, p.77

<sup>37</sup>Barnard, p.120

<sup>38</sup>Lance St. John Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being* (Hong Kong: 1984), p.177

<sup>39</sup>Worth, "The Space and the Sound in Beckett's Theatre", p. 191.

<sup>40</sup>Martin Esslin. *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961) p. 18.

<sup>41</sup>Jerry.L. Clark (2000). *Accounts of the concept of alienation and its role in selected plays of the theatre of the absurd*, (MA thesis), California State University Dominguez Hills, USA. (p. 65).

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