SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET* AS A PRECURSOR OF THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

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ABSTRACT

SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET* AS A PRECURSOR OF THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

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Being regarded as a dramatist of all times, Shakespeare and his work is studied with a modern view point by many critics. Every historical period finds in him what it is looking for and what it wants to see. Shakespeare is part of a modern tradition trying to mirror human psychology and condition in all its absurdity. The innovations that the theatre of the Absurd has brought to the stage not only provide an influence for the works of the later generations but also, they make it possible to look back at the past works of the theatre with a contemporary critical eye. Shakespeare's vision of the world is similar to that of the absurdists, mainly due to their shared confidence in humanity's capacity to endure, and the precarious nature of human existence. This thesis analyzes Shakespeare's masterpiece *Hamlet*, mainly the drama of its protagonist, as a precursor of Absurd drama. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare represents man's existential anxiety and precarious condition in a nonsensical world, which is stripped of all logical explanations and accounts. To examine the play in the context of the theatre of the Absurd, it will be discussed in relation to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* with regard to their common concerns for the themes of the theatre of the Absurd such as uncertainty and inertia.

Keywords: Uncertainty, Inertia, Futility, Nihility, Arrested Action and Speech.

ÖZ

ABSÜRD TİYATRONUN ÖNCÜSÜ OLARAK SHAKESPEARE' İN *HAMLET*'İ

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Tüm zamanların oyun yazarı olarak nitelendirilen Shakespeare ve eserleri birçok kritik tarafından modern bakış açısıyla incelenmiştir. Her tarihsel dönem aradığını ve görmek istediğini kendisinde bulmuştur. Shakespeare insan psikolojisini ve durumunu tüm anlamsızlığı ile yansıtmaya çalışan modern geleneğin bir parçasıdır. Absürd tiyatronun sahneye getirdiği yenilikler sadece gelecek nesillerin eserleri üzerinde etki yaratmakla kalmamış aynı zamanda tiyatronun geçmiş eserlerine de modern eleştirel bir gözle yeniden bakabilmeyi mümkün kılmıştır. Shakespeare'in ve Absürd oyun yazarlarının hayata bakışı başlıca insanın katlanma kapasitesine ve varoluşun istikrarsız doğasına ortak inançları nedeniyle benzerdir. Bu tez Shakespeare'in başyapıtı *Hamlet*'i, özellikle baş kahramanın dramını, Absürd tiyatronun öncüsü olarak analiz etmektedir. Shakespeare *Hamlet'*de tüm mantıklı açıklama ve sebeplerden yoksun olan bu anlamsız dünyada, insanın varoluşsal endişesini ve istikrarsız durumunu betimlemektedir. Oyunu Absürd tiyatro bağlamında incelemek için, Absürd tiyatronun temaları olan belirsizlik ve atalet ortak öğelerinden dolayı Samuel Beckett'in *Waiting for Godot* ve *Endgame'*i ile ilişkili olarak tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Belirsizlik, Atalet, Yararsızlık, Hiçlik, Tutuk Eylemler ve Konuşmalar.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Theatre of the Absurd

"Absurd" as an avant-garde term of the 1950s is defined in Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary as follows:

> Absurd 1: ridiculously unreasonable, unsound, or incongruous.
> 2: having no rational or orderly relationship to human life:
> MEANINGLESS also: lacking order or value.

The definition of the term does not exactly reflect the sense that the term is used in the theatre of the Absurd, yet it can still suggest an insight to grasp the idea lying behind it. Eugéne Ionesco, a leading figure among the playwrights of the Absurd, construes the term as follows:

> Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose…Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless. (in Esslin 23)

The term is firstly used by Albert Camus in the same sense that is used in the theatre. He pinpoints man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe, which is stripped of all logical explanations and accounts. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus explains the term Absurd with the aid of a myth, in which Sisyphus offends gods due to his love for life and hate for death and he is unreasonably sentenced to realize a constant routine task day by day without any single change. Forming a direct analogy with Sisyphus's divine retribution and man's repetitive modern tasks, Camus tries to diagnose human's hopeless condition in the modern world:

> A world that can be explained by reasoning, however, faulty is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light,

> man feels a stranger. He is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come.This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. (in Esslin 23)

What man experiences in today's world, in which former assumptions have all been annihilated, is nothing but insecurity and alienation from his familiar world. Undergoing the void of logical explanations, man feels rootless and disconnected. He tends to search for the answers to existential questions such as his identity or role in his life in vain. Consequently, due to his slippery condition in the world, the existential anxiety strikes him severely, and all his efforts turn out to be futile and irrational.

So as to mirror man's plight, a new form of theatre, which merely presents the absurdity of existence, is required since the traditional forms of theatre are unlikely to stand for the dilemma of the modern man with their reasonable presumptions. What the theater of the Absurd has altered on the stage is stated by John Russell Taylor:

> All semblance of logical construction, of the rational linking of idea with idea in an intellectually viable argument, is abandoned, and instead the irrationality of experience is transferred to the stage. (in Hinchliffe 1)

Subverting the laws of the traditional theater, which highly depends on logical reasoning and causality the theater of the Absurd makes use of certain devices. Language is the most significant item which "tends toward a radical devaluation" (Esslin 26). Language which has been used to convey messages to the audience in traditional theatre has almost lost its function and has become a symbol of non-communication. The language of the theatre of the Absurd serves its aim to reveal the absence of sensible explanations and to express nihility even in communication.

Renowned playwrights, whose works are regarded as examples of the theatre of the Absurd are mainly Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugéne Ionesco, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter. Their common starting point has been the Camusian understanding that absurdity occurs due to the "discrepancy between what man wants and what the world offers" albeit some marked differences in their works (in Trundle 27). Ionesco

> does see himself as part of a tradition including Sophocles and Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Kleist, and Büchner, precisely because these authors are concerned with the human condition in all its brutal absurdity. (Esslin 199)

Believing in the universality of the themes that the theater of the Absurd emphasizes, Ionesco manages to see the affinity of different authors from wide ranging periods. In order to appreciate and understand the essence of the works of these writers, it is not necessary to take a historicist position, which sees the genuine appreciation and grasping the core of a work of art in seeking its history and culture in which it is created. The issues that the theatre of the Absurd focuses on are not peculiar to a certain era or a country, rather, they reflect humanity's plight of all times and in all places. Similarly, William Demastes enunciates that absurdist movement is significant not only as "influence on later generations of writers" but also "providing insight into re-visionary past works of theatre" (56). Another fundamental aspect that Ionesco ponders over is the function of language, which has affected many playwrights: "The very simple, luminously clear statements… after a while lost their original identity" (in Esslin 138). The language that is used in the theater of the Absurd is full of clichés and truisms, which undoubtedly has ceased it to be an original means of communication. Yet, extending the importance of the language in the theatre, Ionesco believes that "behind the violent mockery of fossilized language, there stands a plea for the restoration of a poetic concept of life" (Esslin 196). In short, playwrights of the Absurd try to expose man to the reality of their absurd existence, and to display man's yearning for a more meaningful life.

1.2. Samuel Beckett as the Playwright of the Theatre of the Absurd

Among the principal playwrights of the theater of the Absurd, Samuel Beckett has been regarded as the forerunner of the movement. He is a revolutionary figure in the history of the theater and his plays have been acknowledged as esoteric, known and understood by only a few educated people, by many critics of the period. Analyzing Beckett's plays, Esslin has formulated the main idea in Beckett's works:

> [His] inevitable and perpetual concern with finding his own answer to the question 'Who am I?',…is surely far from providing a complete explanation for the deep existential anguish that is the keynote of Beckett's work. (29, 30)

Focusing his mind on vital existential questions, Beckett is aware of the absurdity of leading a life without having any hope of happiness. Life that is full of uncertainties, disillusionments, and irreducible ambiguities inescapably gives rise to existential anxieties. In his entire canon, he senses that "human reason is bankrupt and incapable of resolving any of its own significant questions" (Crosby 3). The reflections on absurdity become even far more unbearable when it is accompanied by the destructive force of time. With the passage of time, nothing seems to improve; on the contrary, man turns out to be more estranged, isolated, and ruined.

Lacking plot and characterization in the realistic sense, Beckett's plays have aroused bewilderment and astonishment. In his masterpiece *Waiting for Godot*, the whole play revolves around two undistinguished tramps who are waiting for a man named Godot who has never arrived, and whose identity they are not sure about. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett "explores a static situation", where nothing of consequence happens (Esslin 46). In his *Endgame*, the whole play whirls around the deferred actions of two men, whose both present and future actions are arrested. Neither Hamm nor Clov realizes what they have promised to do all throughout the play. Beckett pictures man's entrapment in the wake of not being able to do what he pledges, and presents the miserable condition of human beings in life, which can only be a long stretch without a beginning or an end. As Rosette Lamont asserts "Beckett's... plays are circular in structure evolving from point zero in limbo, and returning to that point or its vicinity" (201). Pointing out the circularity of life, Beckett displays that change and time are mere illusions. Likewise, in *Waiting for Godot*, waiting is the only action throughout the play and any move forward is just a delusion. "The ceaseless activity of time is self-defeating, purposeless, and therefore null and void" (Esslin 52).

Another noteworthy element of Beckett's drama is in the way he uses language. Beckett's plays are full of strange and nonsensical dialogues which convey the inability of people to communicate with each other. He does not believe in the possibility of genuine communication in such a world full of absurdities, by the same token it is inconceivable that language on its own can provide genuine communication. Discrediting the function of language in communication, Beckett reduces "language to clichés, non-sequiturs, obsessive repetitions and refrains"

(Paolucci 294). Sensible dialogues "are replaced by incoherent babblings" (Esslin in Hinchliffe 10).

Beckett is a universal playwright and his characters do not belong to a certain social class or a type in absurdist fashion, which "does not reflect merely topical preoccupations, more enduring because it is unaffected by the fluctuations of political and social circumstances" (Hinchliffe 4). Beckett tries to reflect the existential problems of man on to the stage. His plays depict futility in human actions and irrationality of human condition since man does not have the control of his life. The playwright exhibits nihility, and he also shows the circularity of life. His plays deal with change in time.

1.3. Shakespeare as a Forerunner of the Theater of the Absurd

Shakespeare, a most prominent figure in literature, has been widely appreciated in all times, despite having been written in the 1600s. Shakespeare is not for the Renaissance only, but he has gained a universal esteem in all times and cultures. In Ben Jonson's words, "He was not of an age, but for all time" (in Norton 1228). John Barton states that

> Shakespeare is timeless in the sense that he anatomizes and understands what is in men and women in any age, and what he is to say is always true and real. (in Scott 125)

He has been esteemed as a literary wit for any period of time as his works represent anxieties, excitements, or dilemmas of human beings of various times. He is regarded among modernists by many critics and, by the same token Esslin dates the Absurd back to him. Shakespeare's plays are rich with the elements of the Absurd such as "inverted logical reasoning, false syllogism, free association, and the poetry of real or feigned madness that we find in the plays of Ionesco, Beckett, and Pinter" (Esslin 332). What Shakespeare has achieved on stage suggests parallelism with what the tradition of the Absurd puts forth:

> [I]n his treatment of character, in his rich use of symbolic overtones, in his paradoxical juxtaposition of certain themes, in his subtle allegorical shadings,

> Shakespeare anticipates the dramatic habits and practice of contemporary dramatists such as Camus, Ionesco, Beckett and Albee. (Paolucci 232)

In order to analyze Shakespeare's plays, Robert Hapgood suggests that "one way to place Shakespeare's view is to put it in the context of absurdist theatre" (in Schwindt 4). In modern works, even in avant-garde ones, there is a conversion to the literature of old times, which can also provide appreciation of the classics with a contemporary perspective. Referring to Shakespeare with a modern view point can procure a new analysis of Shakespearean works. "Shakespeare is in dialogue with some of the most radical innovations of modern drama" (Perry 103). A close reading of the absurdist plays makes it possible to detect that the novelties the theatre of the Absurd brings can be found in Shakespeare's plays:

> By stripping familiar surroundings and reducing organic wholeness to states of mind, fears and doubts, desires, opposing and often contradictory impulses the theatre of the Absurd succeeds in creating before our eyes a dissolving reality…[I]t was Shakespeare who led the way (Paolucci 234)

One of the most important aspects that makes the critics regard Shakespeare as the harbinger of the Absurd and compare his works with the playwrights of the Absurd is that he handles universal aspects of human life by posing gripping existential questions, which have been asked for centuries. The link between "existential world of the Absurd [and] the tragic world of Shakespeare" can be inferred from these inquiries (Paolucci 239). Not only absurdist but also Shakespearean characters raise questions which sound out their plights about their roles or missions in life.

While questioning life with all its serious aspects, Shakespeare tries to envision the absurdity of the human condition like the absurdist playwrights do. Esslin observes "a very strong sense of the futility and absurdity of the human condition", in Shakespeare's plays (333). Shakespeare already defined the world that we live in as non-sense, in *Macbeth*, another great tragedy of him: "it is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (5.5.26). "The tragic core of *Hamlet* - like that of *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Othello* – has much in common with the existential premise at the heart of the Absurd" (Paolucci 238). Being regarded as the

dramatist, who appeals to the audiences of all times, Shakespeare has been declared as the predecessor of the Absurd by Ionesco.

> Didn't he say of the world that 'it is a tale told by an idiot' and that everything is but 'sound and fury'? He's the forefather of the theatre of the absurd. He said it all, and said it a long time ago. Beckett tries to repeat him. (in Perry 85)

Feeling the footsteps of the Absurd in Shakespeare, Jan Kott handles Shakespeare's works with a modern perspective and compares *King Lear* with Beckett's *Endgame*. These two plays similarly treat of the corruption in familial relationships, moral values such as mercy and self-esteem, and in man himself. "In both Shakespearian and Beckettian *Endgames* it is the modern world that fell" (Kott 128). Although Beckett and Shakespeare have dissimilar theatrical visions, it is interesting how much Shakespeare is mentioned upon criticizing Beckett. The word Shakespearian evokes "Beckett's new Theatrum Mundi", a metaphor which emphasizes that life itself is a theatre, and one's own will or decisions have of no value or validity (103). Similarly, Michael Scott is aware of the fact that "of all modern drama Beckett's work has probably been bandied about more than any one else's in parallels being drawn with Shakespeare's work" (60). Many analogies have been drawn between these two playwrights since their plays are equally universal that can address to different eras and cultures due to their struggle to embody man's timeless predicaments and dilemmas.

1.4. *Hamlet* as a Precursor of the Theater of the Absurd

A great deal has been written on *Hamlet*, and it has been analyzed from many different view points. One of the most problematic plays of literature, it is "almost universally considered to be the chief masterpiece of one of the great minds the world has known" (Jones 24). Kott views *Hamlet* with a contemporary aspect and appraises it as "our modern experience, anxiety, and sensibility" (48). Although Hamlet is a Renaissance hero, the problems he encounters are universal. Kott likens the play to "a sponge" and "unless produced in a stylized or antiquarian fashion, it immediately absorbs all the problems of our time" (52). Camus lists Hamlet in his

catalogue of heroes among "Quixote, Don Juan, Sisyphus, Prometheus, and Jesus Christ" (in Jackson 359). They are examples of "the image of man as the absurd" because they all have "the absurd sensibility, [which] is an acute consciousness of human crisis" and they all exert "to order the moral universe without recourse to powers outside of [themselves]" (Jackson 159). When the problems that Hamlet confronts are observed closely, they do not differ much from the ones that the theater of the Absurd attends to. What Hamlet experiences and what the theatre of the Absurd conveys are similar issues:

> The theatre of the absurd expresses the anxiety and despair that spring from the recognition that man is surrounded by areas of impenetrable darkness, that he can never know his true nature and purpose, and that no one will provide him with ready-made rules of conduct. (Esslin 425-6)

The theatre of the Absurd tries to reflect the plights the modern man faces up to. Uncertainty is one of the predicaments that he is surrounded with. Being not able to rely on the assumptions formerly presumed, he cannot assure himself of anything around him. Beckett aims to reflect human being's quest for the certainty in all spheres of his life by presenting the harsh reality of its impossibility. He reveals this very aim of his: "The key word in my plays is 'perhaps'" (in Worton 67). Likewise, Lawrence Graver states that

> Beckett dramatizes doubt and unknowingness in countless ways…and much that we might expect to be told about the characters and their situation is denied to us. (24)

Beckett prefers not to disclose any background information about his characters, or their identity. Shakespeare puts the same feeling of uncertainty at the heart of his play. "Hamlet is overwhelmed by a sense of the essential uncertainty and incompleteness of man's life" (Roberts, Jr 368). Hamlet's desperate need to apprehend the world, its people, moral values, and his own identity begins with his doubts about the identity of the ghost. Hamlet is surrounded by irrationality and a lot of questions to which he tries hopelessly to find answers. He wavers about everything throughout the play, in a similar way to Beckett's absurd characters.

The theatre of the Absurd handles the notion of inertia, a state of not wanting to do anything to change a situation. Man does not have the motivation to change a situation in a world directed by absurdity. His efforts in any action are futile because they have no chance of being successful; so man does not see a reason to act. Since almost nothing is in the control of man himself all his actions seem to be purposeless and vain. Hamlet is burdened with this sense of futility. His exertions to set the things right all prove to be futile. He pins all his thoughts to avenge his father's death, yet his actions are arrested, and he ends up leaving himself to the fate. Lester G. Crocker identifies Hamlet's unavailing efforts:

> Killing the king will not set the world aright, or touch the deeper evil incarnated in his mother's lust. No mere vengeance can change the wrong, past or future, that is inherent in the cosmic order, or in the human station. (283)

Whatever Hamlet does, he will not be able to set the world or the people right, even if he saves himself from inertia, because all efforts of human beings are futile in a world directed by absurdity.

The theatre of the Absurd deals with the concept of nihility in man's life, which stresses that existence is meaningless since all values are groundless, and there is decay in all spheres of life. The absurdist fashion is chiefly judged as an introspection of the modern man; that he looks into his inner self and explores his hopelessness and disconsolateness. He feels bounded by nothingness. Graver's analysis of *Waiting for Godot,*

> 'Nothing' will be performed, executed, accomplished on the stage for the next two hours; we will witness what human beings can do when confronted by nothing,

rings true for *Hamlet*, as well (26). Hamlet can neither avenge his father's death nor console himself for a better future. Being at the heart of a stalemate, Hamlet does not give importance to anything in his life and he does not take pleasure in anything. He feels greatly depressed in a world that does not support him. His vacillating mood swings are unproductive and achieve nothing. He has no genuine faith in or dream about the future; time works as a destructive force by bringing him closer to death.

Shakespeare as a forerunner of the theatre of the Absurd handles the keynotes that the absurdist playwrights deal with in his great work, *Hamlet*. A close reading of Beckett's plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* procures the similarity between the two playwrights of different eras. All three works ask the vital existential questions trying to enlighten man's eternal quest to identify his being, his roles and his insecure position in life. While searching for the answers of such essential questions, the characters are struck by the harshness of the kind of existence they experience. They are all surrounded by the darkness of the unknown and uncertain aspects of life, which generate their alienation and isolation from their environment. They struggle in vain to find a meaning to their existence, but all their actions prove to be futile and irrational, and nothing makes any sense at the end.

1.5. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to propose that Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, particularly the drama of its protagonist, is a precursor of Absurd drama in the way it embodies man's existential anxiety and precarious condition in a senseless world by employing the themes of the theatre of the Absurd such as uncertainty and inertia. To define the play as such, it will be discussed in relation to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* with regard to their common concerns in these themes. Beckett's plays will be referred to as *WFG* and *EG* respectively when in brackets in this study.

CHAPTER 2

UNCERTAINTY

Uncertainty is one of the most important themes of the theatre of the Absurd. Man has experienced many disillusionments when he notices that the old familiar world is no more like it was and the theatre of the Absurd puts its disbelief in the possibility of well-defined solutions to the existential problems of the human condition. Inconsistency, irrationality, and uncertainty hold sway in man's life. Human's struggle to be in quest for definiteness in a world ruled by the laws of precariousness and mystery is as absurd as the world itself. The theatre of the Absurd aims to present the disconsolate situation of man rather than to discuss and find solutions for it. Such a theatre then exhibits "anxiety and despair, a sense of loss at the disappearance of solutions, illusions, and purposefulness", which means facing up the reality itself (Hinchliffe 12). Thus, man is locked in uncertainty about the course of events and the people around him. He has problems with his identity and the purpose of his existence. He is no longer sure of his moral values. He finds the world and the people irrational.

2.1. Uncertainty and Duality in Circumstances

Uncertainty and duality pervade the circumstances in *Hamlet*. From the outset of the play, uneasiness and apprehension permeate through the atmosphere of Denmark. Upon his arrival at Elsinore from Wittenberg, Hamlet also feels doubts over the circumstances that he comes across and finds himself surrounded by uncertainties and ambiguities. He experiences insecurity when he meets unnerving situations; such as his father's death, and his mother's hasty marriage. The grief Hamlet feels over his father's death is almost unbearable for him and leads him into a severe depression. Since his father's death and his mother's marriage succeed one another, Hamlet combines these two events in his mind, which should indeed be the

opposites. Furthermore, he is assigned a repugnant task by the alleged Ghost of his father to avenge his father's murder by killing his uncle. The puzzle of the Ghost makes Hamlet question the image of his father in his mind. Once lofty image of his father has been blurred and doubled by the appearance of the Ghost from the purgatory, since good spirits are known not to come back from there. He starts to suffer from insecurity in Elsinore, where his father's alleged Ghost walks at night, asserting that he was killed by his own brother. The Ghost's appearance in the play produces a disruption and a crisis of certainty for Hamlet.

The guards of Elsinore, Francisco and Barnardo, try to make sense out of the bewildering events that they experience. They feel apprehensive about the current war-like state of the country. Marcellus questions the rigid nightly watch they have to keep:

> Good now sit down, and tell me he that knows,
> Why this same strict and most observant watch
> So nightly toils the subject of the land. (1.1.70)

Francisco unburdens himself to Barnardo while reporting his watch: "I am sick at heart" (1.1.8). Even though no reason is given for Francisco's melancholy, it contributes to the feeling that all is not well. The scene foreshadows the later scenes where Hamlet feels sick.

When the guards see an apparition, which resembles to the late King, they are perplexed. The appearance of the Ghost induces uncertainty into the play. It instigates the identity problem; the similarity between the Ghost and Old King Hamlet makes Old King's identity problematic. On his first appearance he creates confusion with his similarity to the late King Hamlet. This similarity "harrows [Horatio] with fear and wonder" (1.1.44). Puzzled by this likeness of the apparition to the late King, Horatio asks him "What art thou?" rather than "Who art thou?" (1.1.47). In spite of the strong resemblance of the Ghost to old Hamlet in appearance, Horatio and the other watchmen have great difficulty in figuring out his identity. When the two watchmen and Horatio talk about the Ghost, they call him "this thing" or "it" (1.1.21 … 28). This form of address not only creates suspense at the very

beginning of the play, but also discloses the problem in the Ghost's identity. Until the Ghost introduces himself as the late King Hamlet to Hamlet, he is referred to as an object, rather than a person. When they encounter the Ghost, they get mystified and bombard him with questions. These questions "show how problematic the Ghost's identity is" (Leggatt 55):

> What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
> Together with that fair and warlike form
> In which the majesty of buried Denmark
> Did sometimes march? by heaven I charge thee speak (1.1.47)

The Ghost's coming gives rise to absurd ideas of uncertainty in a play as the precursor of the theatre of the Absurd. The Ghost is seen armed with the soldier uniform that the late King used to wear, yet he is a tormented sinner sentenced to walk at nights with uneasiness. They get puzzled as they remember having buried King Hamlet vividly with a religious ceremony. They resemble the Ghost's frowning and his military attitude to King Hamlet's while fighting with the Norwegian King (1.1. 62). The appearance of the Ghost is indubitably identical to King Hamlet, yet they cannot make sense out of his "having crossed the border between life and death in the wrong direction", as he is known to be a perfect man and a King (Leggatt 58).

Horatio struggles hard to read the Ghost in order to liberate themselves from the uncertainty and the ambiguity that the Ghost has created:

> If thou art privy to thy country's fate
> Which happily foreknowing may avoid,
> O, speak! (1.1. 133)

They try to understand the aim of the Ghost; whether he has come to warn them against the frightful events that may take place in the future. They cannot relieve their uncertainties as the Ghost in the guise of King Hamlet gives no definite answer to their questions. Seeing a ghost of a dead body, Horatio and the two watchmen feel perturbed anticipating that it cannot be for good. Horatio bears a resemblance to the horrifying events that preceded the death of Julius Caesar in Rome and the ones in the state of Denmark:

> In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
> A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
> The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead
> Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets, (1.1. 113)

The restless atmosphere of Rome during Caesar's reign is similar to Elsinore in that, in both, the dead bodies are seen hanging around, which can be interpreted as apocalyptic for the states of the countries.

After the guards inform Hamlet about the Ghost's appearance, he decides to keep watch with them. He gets terrified upon encountering the Ghost, whom he likens to his dead father. Like the others, Hamlet tries to establish a definite identity for the Ghost: "I'll call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane. O, answer me!" (1.4.44). He seeks for definite answers to perplexing questions:

> Why thy canonized bones hearséd in death
> Have burst their cerements? Why the sepulchre,
> Wherein we saw thee quietly inurned,
> Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws
> To cast thee up again? (1. 4. 47)

Hamlet cannot understand the reason why the Ghost is wandering; he senses that something wrong is going on and that the Ghost has come out in order to request something from them: "Say why this is? Wherefore? What should we do?" (1.4.57). Hamlet hopes to clarify all the strange events, such as his father's unexpected death and his mother's hasty marriage. When the Ghost calls Hamlet to talk to him privately, Horatio and the other watchmen get anxious since they cannot be sure about the intention of the Ghost:

> And there assume some other horrible form,
> Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason,
> And draw you into madness? Think of it – (1.4. 72)

They are afraid that it may be a bad spirit and may want to harm Hamlet. However, Hamlet is determined to find out the Ghost's identity, and follows him.

Hamlet considers the appearance of the Ghost as a foreboding: "My father's spirit (in arms!); all is not well, / I doubt some foul play" (1.2. 256). From the very first

appearance of the Ghost, his resemblance to the late King Hamlet is emphasized over and over. Yet, "even as the late King Hamlet, the Ghost poses a problem of interpretation" (Leggatt 56). Hamlet's noble and idealized father's image has been veiled by the Ghost being a sinner condemned to stay in the Purgatory during the day and to walk the whole night. Hamlet puts his father on a pedestal and thinks him as unique in his merits: "'He was a man, take him for all in all, / I shall not look upon his like again" (1.2.187). Upon learning of his mother's marriage to his uncle, Hamlet gets furious with his mother, who prefers "a satyr" to his "Hyperion" father (1.2. 140). Once Horatio calls him as "a guilty thing" (1.1.148). When the Ghost announces to Hamlet, "I'm thy father's spirit" (1.5.9), it appears that "beneath the armor is another violated body" (Leggatt 55) who is

> [d]oomed for a certain term to walk the night,
> And for the day confined to fast in fires,
> Till the foul crimes done in [his] days of nature. (1.5. 10)

This image of a tormented sinner does not fit in with Hamlet's idealized image of his father. There is a duality in late King Hamlet's image and "the idealized father and the tormented sinner are, like one's two hands, mirror-opposites, and Hamlet never tries to reconcile the two" (Leggatt 56).

Hamlet, as Anna Nardo has written, is a play of contradiction and paradox, and Hamlet himself is "a true victim of double binds" (in Kastan 4). He suffers from the uncertainty and duality about which he cannot take any action without learning what is definite. The alleged Ghost of King Hamlet's visit to his son clouds his so called natural death. He "claims to come from a place that according to the official religion of Shakespeare's England does not exist" (Leggatt 56). King Hamlet broke out of his grave and returned to the world. His seemingly natural death for the Queen, "'tis common, all that lives must die," (1.2. 72), and for the King, "common theme / Is death of fathers", turns out not to be a natural one (1.2. 103). The Ghost's rendering of his circumstances implies the unnaturalness of his death. Since he cannot have the chance to repent for his sins, he has to be purged of his offences. The Ghost calls his death the "most unnatural murder" (1.5. 25) since he is "by a brother's hand, / Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched" (1.5. 74). Moreover, as the mother's

marriage succeeds his father's unnatural death quite soon, these two events "are tangled in his mind" (Leggatt 58). Due to the short period of time between these two contrasting incidents, Hamlet casts doubts on their naturalness, and the Ghost brings out the so-called truth about these cases. With the mingling of death and marriage, the family relationships become perverse. For Hamlet, the Queen becomes both a mother and an aunt, while the King turns out to be both his uncle and father. The marriage can very well be called incestuous, since it gives rise to unnatural and complicated familial relationships.

This duality and uncertainty in the circumstances, especially about the identity of the Ghost, "grounds the main action of the play in uncertainty" (Leggatt 59). The crucial unanswered question for Hamlet is "Did Claudius kill his father?". The main action of the play, that Hamlet's father was murdered by his uncle and Hamlet should avenge his father's death, is delivered by an apparition, whose identity is uncertain and problematic. Such an indefinite source cannot put the protagonist into action. Coleridge explains this inactive state as

> endless reasoning and hesitating – constant urging and solicitation of the mind to act, and as constant an escape from action. The whole energy of his resolution evaporates in these reproaches. (in MacCary 103-4).

Hamlet experiencing uncertainty about the identity of the alleged Ghost of his father. At times, he seems to have believed the Ghost and is decisive to take action: "thy commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and the volume of my brain," (1.5.102). At another instance, when he seems to retreat into himself, he justifies himself that he has to test the Ghost's authenticity:

> The spirit that I have seen
> May be devil, and the devil hath power
> T' assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps
> Out of my weakness and melancholy,
> …
> Abuses me to damn me, (2.2. 582…586)

Lester G. Crocker analyzes Hamlet's dilemma; he vacillates between trusting the Ghost's words and deciding to take action and feeling too uncertain to realize his task:

> Anguish is born of uncertainty and of inner conflict. It appears within us when our situation requires decisive action and a direction for action cannot be found. This is likely to occur when a complacent world-view has been shattered, and no new synthesis has yet been reconstructed from the chaos. (310)

Hamlet acts as "the instrument of the Ghost, not acting on his own" (MacCary 102). In order to test the certainty of the Ghost's words, Hamlet decides to organize a play, something like the murder of his father, in order to make the King reveal his guilt:

> …I have heard
> That guilty creatures sitting at a play
> Have by the very cunning of the scene
> Been struck to the soul, that presently
> They have proclaimed their malefactions
> For murder, though it has no tongue, will speak
> With most miraculous organ: (2.2. 572)

Planning to observe the King closely during the play, Hamlet hopes to find the evidence to confirm the Ghost's story:

> …I'll observe his looks,
> I'll tent him to the quick; if'a do blench
> I know my course.
> …
> … I'll have grounds
> More relative than this – the play is the thing
> Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king (2.2. 580…588)

Throughout the play that he organized, Hamlet believes that he can infer whether the King has murdered his father or not as the alleged Ghost of his father asserted. Merely watching the King's reaction carefully, Hamlet supposes that he can construe if he is guilty or not. On the other hand, if the King does not show any reaction to the play, he will come to the conclusion that the Ghost is an evil spirit. "Hamlet strives unsuccessfully to reduce the complexities he observes so that he can manipulate them" (Demastes 142). Hamlet's quest for certainties leads to misunderstandings. With a mind fully preoccupied with the Ghost's words, Hamlet is already going to construe any reaction of the King as a sign of his guilt. By the same token, the King's crying for light at the very moment of his father's death scene is a perfect proof for

the King's guilt in Hamlet's logic. For all we know, Claudius may have found the scene distasteful and reacted as such. "The dead king's ghost dominates the tragedy of *Hamlet*" as he leads his actions with what the Ghost has related to him (Horst 231).

Hamlet's former orderly and peaceful student life with his happily married parents, all of a sudden, becomes ruined. "His serenity has been destroyed and he must reconcile these events somehow with a worldview" (Levine 541). Yet, within the turmoil in his life he experiences doubts and he cannot form another world view that leads to action. What he experiences so far leads to confusion and indefiniteness. Hamlet's being a humanist, believing in science rather than religion or superstitions in solving problems, triggers his uncertainty even more. As Demastes points out

> Hamlet puts his academic, scientific skills to work to understand the forces he confronts, but Hamlet's "scientific process", exhibited here in its modern infancy, shows its failings from the start. (141-2)

For Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, performance of the task that Hamlet has been assigned to is hard to realize in Hamlet's character, who values human life (in Jones 30). He defines Hamlet as such:

> A too pure, noble, highly moral nature, but without that energy of nerve which constitutes the hero, sinks under a burden which it can neither bear nor renounce. (in Jones 31)

Considering the nature of the task, which is already difficult for many, it is even harder to realize for Hamlet. "The momentum of the revenge is slowed down" throughout the play mainly with the uncertainties that the protagonist experiences (Leggatt 60). The presence of the Ghost challenges the main action of the play and directs the play towards inaction.

Uncertainty is also the backbone of Beckett's work.

> In *Waiting for Godot*, the feeling of uncertainty it produces, the ebb and flow of this uncertainty - from the hope of discovering the identity of Godot to its repeated disappointment – are themselves the essence of the play. (Esslin 45)

In *Waiting for Godot*, two undistinguished tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, or Gogo and Didi for short, wait for a man named Godot in an indefinite place, for an indefinite period of time, and for an indefinite reason. They are unsure about the place they are in. Even the simple road they are on can be uncertain when Pozzo arrives, and claims that they are "on [his] land" (*WFG* 23). Later, Pozzo returns as a blind man. He inquires abut the place they are in. Vladimir calls the place "indescribable. It's like nothing. There's nothing. There's a tree" (*WFG* 87). Their answers are far from creating a definite picture about the place in the blind man's mind. Estragon cannot explain the exact place where he spent the previous night when Vladimir asks him where he has been:

> VLADIMIR: May one enquire where His Highness spent the night?
> ESTRAGON: In a ditch.
> VLADIMIR: (*admiringly*). A ditch! Where?
> ESTRAGON: (*without gesture*). Over there. (*WFG* 9)

Estragon and Vladimir are not sure about the place where they should wait for Godot. When they find out that Godot has not arrived yet, they test the details of the meeting, such as the venue or the time:

> ESTRAGON: You're sure it was here?
> VLADIMIR: What?
> ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.
> VLADIMIR: He said by the tree. (*They look at the tree*.) Do you see any others?
> …
> VLADIMIR: What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?
> ESTRAGON: He should be here.
> VLADIMIR: He didn't say for sure he'd come.
> ESTRAGON: And if he doesn't come?
> VLADIMIR: We'll come back tomorrow. (*WFG* 14)

They cannot figure out whether they are waiting for Godot in the right place. When Vladimir asks Estragon if he recognizes the place, where they have been waiting for ages, Estragon gets furious: "Recognize! What is there to recognize?" (*WFG* 61). They are supposed to wait by the tree. Now Vladimir is shocked to see some leaves on the tree, which was bare in the first act:

VLADIMIR: But yesterday evening it was all black and bare. And now it's covered with leaves.
ESTRAGON: Leaves?
VLADIMIR: In a single night.
ESTRAGON: It must be the Spring.
VLADIMIR: But in a single night!
ESTRAGON: I tell you we weren't here yesterday. Another of your nightmares. (*WFG* 66)

They are baffled by the tree producing leaves in a short time. They are not sure about the passage of time; they cannot be certain if they have spent a night or a season. Perhaps, they were not even there the day before. They are occupied with a static action, that is waiting, for a long and indefinite time, which makes their concept of time blurred.

In *Endgame,* the survival of the characters is all uncertain. Inside their cell they are about to run out of food and medicine. Nagg wants Hamm to give him "pap" persistently getting out of his ashbin and Clov replies to him firstly with "not just yet" and then "there's no more pap" (*EG* 7). When he insists on getting his pap, Hamm repeats Clov's words to his father "Do you hear that? There's no more pap. You'll never get any more pap" (*EG* 7). Rather than pap, Hamm wants Clov to fetch him a biscuit, yet it is too hard for Nagg to eat. At another instance, Nagg wants a "sugar-plum" in return for listening to his son's story. However, Hamm cancels their bargain after he tells his story because "there are no more sugar plums!" (*EG* 39). It is doubtful how they will be able to survive since none of them goes out to get food. They are in danger of dying of starvation. Outside the cell, it is uncertain if there is life or not, since no one has tried to go out. They are also exhausting the medicine in their cells. Hamm keeps asking Clov "Is it not time for my pain-killer?", "Give me my pain-killer.", yet Clov's answer is always the same "No, not yet", "Too soon", (*EG* 6, 18). Clov's answer finally changes:

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?
CLOV: Yes.
HAMM: Ah! At last! Give it to me! Quick! (*Pause*.)
CLOV: There's no more pain-killer. (*Pause*.)
HAMM (*appalled*): Good…! (*Pause*.) No more pain-killer!
CLOV: No more pain-killer. You'll never get any more pain-killer.

HAMM: But the little round box. It was full!
CLOV: Yes. But now it's empty. (*EG* 49)

They are running out of food and medicine at an alarming rate, and how they will solve the problem is undetermined. In both cases, they have come face to face with the possibility of death. Whether Clov will leave Hamm or will choose to stay with him is another uncertainty about their conditions. Clov is the only one that can move, while all the others are paralyzed. What will eventually happen in their lives is dubious.

Outside the cell, Hamm and Clov experience another uncertainty. There is a sense of deadness outside. At the opening of the play, Clov gets upon a ladder in order to see the outside world out of the windows. Outside is a sterile world, which he calls "death" (*EG* 7). From time to time, Hamm wants Clov to look out of the window and to inform him about what he sees outside. Clov reports what he has seen as "zero" or "corpsed" (*EG* 21). Hamm is curious about "the sea" or "the ocean", yet Clov answers "Never seen anything like that" (*EG* 22). Hamm still wants to learn about the time of the day: "And the sun", "is it night already?" (*EG* 22). Clov's answer, "Gray!" (*EG* 22), is too vague to be able to understand the exact time. Hamm occasionally wants Clov to bring him under one of the windows to be able to feel the weather outside or the light on his face. When he cannot feel anything under one window, he wants Clov to put him under another. It does not differ under which window they are as "there's no light", and "no ray of sunshine" anywhere on earth (*EG* 44). What is more, he "wouldn't hear the sea…even if [Clov] opened the window" (*EG* 44). For the last time Hamm wants Clov to get on the ladder and to see the outside. However, Clov again sees "Nothing…nothing…good…nothing…goo-" (*EG* 53). Although there is no life outside, suddenly Clov notices a boy outside, which puzzles him; the chance of the boy's survival is nil.

Estragon and Vladimir are unsure about the time when they are going to meet Godot:

ESTRAGON: You are sure it was this evening?
VLADIMIR: What?
ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.
VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. (Pause.) I think.

…
ESTRAGON: (*very insidious*). But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? (*Pause*.) Or Monday? (*Pause*.) Or Friday? (*WFG* 15)

In order to test the time of the meeting, they have to be certain about the present time or the present day. Yet, they cannot decide on the day. All the characters have a vague and problematic concept of time. When Pozzo decides to leave the tramps, he wants to consult his watch to "be getting along…to observe [his] schedule" and Vladimir tells him that "[t]ime has stopped" (*WFG* 36). Estragon and Vladimir live with the same routines everyday, so time does not have any significance. When Pozzo wants to learn the time again on their next encounter, Vladimir tries to guess the time by checking out the sky:

VLADIMIR: (*inspecting the sky*). Seven o'clock…eight o'clock…
ESTRAGON: That depends what time of year it is.
POZZO: Is it evening?
Silence. Vladimir and Estragon scrutinize the sunset.
ESTRAGON: It's rising.
VLADIMIR: Impossible.
ESTRAGON: Perhaps it's the dawn.
VLADIMIR: Don't be a fool. It's the west over there.
ESTRAGON: How do you know? (*WFG* 85)

They are totally lost as far as time is concerned. Once more, they are unable to give definite answers to Pozzo's questions about the time. For Beckett characters time is the same each day, "This farce, day after day" (*EG* 11). The same routine reduces the time to nothing:

HAMM: What time is it?
CLOV: The same as usual…zero. (*EG* 3)

Time is also one of Hamlet's problems. It has been first "two months", then "a little month", and later "two hours" since his father died (1.2.138, 147; 3.2. 122). Hamlet "ignores or remarks time passing, and uses clock or calendar or falsifies or neglects them" (Barker 28). For him "the time is out of joint" (1.5.188), in other words, in disorder. He is no less at a loss with time than Beckett's characters.

The past is also blurred for Beckett's characters; they cannot remember anything in the past vividly. Pozzo has difficulty in recalling past events, and he is doubtful about remembering anything in the future, too:

> VLADIMIR: We met yesterday. (*Silence.)* Do you not remember?
> POZZO: I don't remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won't remember having met anyone today. So don't count on me to enlighten you. (*WFG* 88)

Graver analyzes the ambiguous concept of time in *Waiting for Godot*:

> [I]f tomorrow is uncertain, yesterday turns out to be more so: not only are they unable to agree that they were here a day earlier, but they cannot remember what they did then. With the future and the past so decisively thrown into question, the only thing that seems to retain its solidity is the present. But when Vladimir concludes 'Nothing is certain when you are about', his cunning word play reminds his friend and us that the present, too, rests on a precarious foundation (38-9).

In *Endgame*, too, time is one long, featureless stretch. "Why this farce, day after day?" asks Nell when they try to reach each other out of the dustbins they are in, and fail (*EG* 11). The past is reduced to "yesterday" (*EG* 14):

> HAMM: Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!
> CLOV: That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. (*EG* 31)

The stories the characters try to remember belong to an ill-defined past:

> HAMM: I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come.
> …
> CLOV: A mad man? When was that?
> HAMM: Oh way back, way back. (*EG* 31)

The characters' concept of past, future, and present seems to be interwoven. They do not have a purpose or a hope for the future, and their present actions are all inconsequential. Their past does not bear any noteworthy memory to remember. Pozzo gets angry with the tramps when they keep asking the time:

> Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calme*r.) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (*WFG* 89)

For him, life-time is just an "instant", so it is not worth bothering about the past or the future, and the present is so short that it becomes insignificant.

Estragon and Vladimir do not know why they are waiting for Godot. They brainstorm on the reasons for waiting for him:

> VLADIMIR: I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it.
> ESTRAGON: What exactly did we ask him for?
> VLADIMIR: Were you not there?
> ESTRAGON: I can't have been listening.
> VLADIMIR: Oh...nothing very definite.
> ESTRAGON: A kind of prayer.
> VLADIMIR: Precisely.
> ESTRAGON: A vague supplication.
> VLADIMIR: Exactly. (*WFG* 18)

They are expecting Godot to make an offer so that they can reply to it. In this way, they shift the responsibility of finding a reason to Godot. In one of their games that they use in order to pass the time, Vladimir acts as if he sees Godot and exclaims: "It's Godot! We're saved!" (*WFG* 73). Yet, it is dubious how they are going to be saved. Furthermore, they are even uncertain about his name:

> ESTRAGON: His name is Godot?
> VLADIMIR: I think so. (*WFG* 21)

They find it difficult to bear Godot's name in their minds. They do not know whether they have met Godot beforehand or not. When Pozzo enters the stage they take him as Godot, and Estragon admits that: "Personally [he] wouldn't even know him if [he] saw him" (*WFG* 23). Godot is more like an illusion, whom they have not seen or talked before. Since almost everything is uncertain about Godot, Estragon keeps forgetting that they are waiting for Godot:

ESTRAGON: What do we do now?
VLADIMIR: I don't know.
ESTRAGON: Let's go.
VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON: (*despairingly*). Ah! (*WFG* 48)

This very same dialogue takes place many times, throughout the play, which is both because their memory fails them, and because Godot is the very source of uncertainty for them. In spite of this, they do not give up waiting. "The substance of the play is as common a human experience as you can find… waiting amid uncertainty" (Kenner 32). Mr. Godot has never appeared to the tramps throughout the play. The tramps go on waiting for him, without knowing why, as if they do not have any other choice but to wait. Graver states that

> in the literal terms of the plot, Godot is the man Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for on a country road and who does not come; but in the broader linguistic universe of Beckett's play, Godot becomes an absent person or object that human beings desire and for whom (or for which) they feel obliged to wait. (45)

The identity of Godot is problematic and it casts doubts over the play. An analogy between *Hamlet*'s Ghost and Mr. Godot can be drawn since both of their identities are ambiguous, and both of them are the main spring of the uncertainty. Hamlet tries to establish the Ghost's identity; Estragon and Vladimir are anxious to define an identity for Godot:

ESTRAGON: That he couldn't promise anything.
VLADIMIR: That he'd have to think it over.
ESTRAON: In the quiet of his home.
VLADIMIR: Consult his family.
ESTRAGON: His friends.
VLADIMIR: His agents.
ESTRAGON: His correspondents.
VLADIMIR: His books.
ESTRAGON: His bank account.
VLADIMIR: Before taking a decision. (*WFG* 18)

That is how they are trying to attach an identity to Godot with a family, friends and business association. Yet, as J. P. Little has observed, "Godot as an existent being is of dubious reality, but their wait is the very fabric of their lives" (in Graver 54). There is no indication why Godot is important for them, either. Brook Atkinson calls Godot "a mystery wrapped up in an enigma" (in Coots 23). Hamlet's obsession with the identity of the Ghost, which results in his inability to act, finds its counterpart in Gogo's and Didi's uncertainty about whether Godot will arrive or not, which results in not acting; so their "Let's go" (*WFG* 94) ends up in their sitting down. In *Endgame* Beckett takes the theme of immobility and passivity further; Hamm, Nagg and Nell are physically immobile; Clov, who wants to leave Hamm and go away, does not have the courage to leave, and comes back:

> Enter Clov, dressed for the road…He halts by the door and stands there, impassive and motionless, his eyes fixed on Hamm, till the end. (*EG* 56)

The uncertainty that the characters lead about their conditions renders them almost motionless.

2.2. Uncertainty about Other People

Within the general atmosphere of uncertainty in Hamlet's world, he is unsure about the people around him. By the same token, other characters try to define Hamlet throughout the play. His father's unexpected death and his mother's hasty marriage induce Hamlet to start doubting the people around him. Having been totally preoccupied with what the Ghost has related about Claudius killing his father, Hamlet, above all, is uncertain of the King. Since he hasn't verified the Ghost's story, he does not want that secret to be revealed, either. Feeling disillusioned and all alone, neither can he trust his own mother. He is doubtful about his school friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern after their sudden arrival in Elsinore. His girlfriend, Ophelia, does not seem reliable, either. He is indeterminate about relieving his dilemma to his assumed soul mate as he is not sure if she can understand him or if she really loves him. Hamlet has the "desperate need to ferret out, to know and to

confront, the truths of our human lives", yet he is surrounded by people, whom he is uncertain about (Newman 15).

When Hamlet first appears, he is still grieving for his father's death, "the clouds still hang on" him, with his "vailéd lids / Seek[s] for [his] "noble father in the dust", and he still wears his "nighted colour" of mourning (1.2.66…71). His mother's rash marriage to Claudius, coming soon after the old King's funeral, puts him in a joyless and gloomy mood, which he cannot really explain. He adopts a negative attitude towards Claudius. His reply to Claudius' friendly address, "my son", is "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (1.2.64…5). Claudius' "attempts to address Hamlet as his son are particularly galling" (Leggatt 58). Upon their first encounter, Hamlet gives a clue about the ill-disposed nature of their relationship. Although now the uncle and the nephew are closely connected in the family, Hamlet does not have the same "kind", close feelings for Claudius. Yet, Claudius, in his first public speech after their marriage, is portrayed as a good and an efficient King, who puts the benefits of his country before his own interests:

> Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
> The memory be green, and that it us befitted
> To bear o hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
> To be contracted in one brow of woe,
> Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature,
> That we with wisest sorrow think on him
> Together with remembrance o ourselves: (1.2.1)

As Victor L. Cahn suggests "these words do not seem those of a villain" (71). After the late King Hamlet's death, Denmark is faced with the threat of Norway. A legitimate reason can be found for Claudius marrying the Queen, that of preventing turmoil in the country. Furthermore, he has asked the court's advice on this marriage as a democratic and respectful King (1.2.8…15). His words "in retrospect sound oily,… and too balanced to be natural" (Cahn 71). However, apart from his accomplishment in dealing with public affairs, Claudius also proves himself in resolving private matters. When Laertes, his right hand man Polonius' son, requests the King's permission to leave Elsinore, Claudius advises him to ask for his father's permission first (1.2.57). He shows that he gives great importance to familial

relationships. Although his hypocrisy is recognized later, “initially Claudius appears a reasonable man” (Cahn 71).

Despite all Claudius’ merits, Hamlet does not seem to be content with the King. Hamlet emphasizes their difference in character since Claudius got married to his mother under such questionable circumstances, which Hamlet will not do. Although Hamlet is doubtful about Claudius, Claudius as a seemingly loving father is pleased at the news that Hamlet will stay in Elsinore with them. When the Queen wants her son not to go back to Wittenberg, Claudius gets delighted upon Hamlet’s abiding by her mother’s wish: “This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet / Sits smiling to my heart,” (1.2.123). Yet, Hamlet feels that Claudius tries to manipulate him by making a show of his love towards Hamlet. Hamlet simply cannot accept Claudius either as a father or a husband figure because he is “no more” like his father than Hamlet is no more like Hercules (1.2.152).

After Hamlet talks to the Ghost privately, he has more serious doubts about the King. “The disruption of identity the Ghost embodies releases a force of uncertainty into the play, to which [Hamlet] responds with desperate attempts to make sense of the people” (Leggatt 61). Hamlet’s doubts about Claudius as a murderer start to disturb him; he cannot be sure whether or not he is safe in Elsinore. When the Ghost reveals that Claudius is a murderer, Hamlet’s exclamation of “O, my prophetic soul!” (1.5.40) makes it evident that he “has suspected as much all along” (Cahn 77). Claudius may well be a usurper of the throne, in spite of his public announcement of his grief for his brother’s death, his love for Gertrude, his fatherly attitude towards Hamlet, and his being an efficient king. Hamlet can see the duality in Claudius’ appearance and reality: “That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain” (1.5. 108). Hamlet keeps the Ghost’s story a secret. He does not want anyone else to know about the Ghost’s appearance, either. He makes Horatio and the guards swear to secrecy many times: “Never to speak of this that you have seen, / Swear by my sword.” (1.5.154). Unable to make sense of what he has seen and heard, Hamlet decides to feign madness, “To put an antic disposition on”, in public, and he warns them not to reveal his disguise to others (1.5.172). He has to verify the Ghost’s story first. He

needs secrecy to be able to do that. Since Hamlet is not sure about anyone "he must bear his agony alone and he cannot tell no one of his anguish" (Cahn 74).

The Ghost has assigned Hamlet an enormous task: "If thou didst ever thy dear father love- / … / Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5. 23…25). Although Hamlet solemnly promises to take revenge, how he should avenge his father's death is an ultimate problem for Hamlet. In order to become certain about Claudius' guilt, he organizes a play, in which a scene similar to his father's murder will be acted, in order to "catch the conscience of the king" (2.2.589). During the performance of the play, Claudius' abrupt reaction and exit from the auditorium, at first, make Hamlet very elated; he thinks he is sure of Claudius' guilt now: "O good Horatio, I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pound" (3.2.277). Yet he does not seem so certain afterwards. When he finds Claudius alone at prayer, he immediately wants to kill Claudius, "Now might I do it pat" (3.3. 73) but just as quickly he finds reasons for not killing him at prayer, not to send him cleansed from his sins to heaven. His reasoning seems to screen his feelings of uncertainty.

While Hamlet is suspicious of Claudius, Claudius is suspicious of Hamlet. The King's concerns about Hamlet as a danger to the King are increased when Hamlet inadvertently kills Polonius. Hamlet is no longer safe in Elsinore. Seeing Hamlet's madness as dangerous Claudius decides to send him to England. He thinks that"[m]adness in great ones must not unwatched go" (3.1.191). Hamlet is doubtful about the journey; he senses a devious collaboration between the King and his two friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He expresses his doubts to his mother:

> I must to England, you know that?
> …
> There's letters sealed, and my two school-fellows,
> Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged, (3.4.199)

Throughout the play, Hamlet does not spend even a second without doubting Claudius. Even when Hamlet is challenged to an ill-starred fencing match, organized by Claudius who killed his father, with Laertes, whose father Hamlet killed, he is suspicious; he tells Horatio, "Thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart" (5.2. 198). Although Horatio, his loyal friend, advises him to obey feelings

and decline to perform in the match, Hamlet does not hesitate to accept the challenge in spite of his foreboding instinct (5.2. 203).

Hamlet is also puzzled by his mother, who did not hesitate to get married to his uncle soon after her husband's death. He keeps questioning her motives over this unnatural marriage:

> A little month or ere those shoes were old
> With which she followed my poor father's body,
> Like Niobe all tears, why she, even she-
> O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
> Would have mourned longer- married with my uncle,
> My father's brother, but no more like my father
> Than I to Hercules, within a month,
> Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
> Had left the flushing in her galled eyes
> She married. (1.2.147)

He thought that his mother loved his father so much that she could not get married to another man immediately after his death:

> Why, she would hang on him
> As if increase of appetite had grown
> By what it fed on, and yet within a month,
> Let me not think on't. (1.2. 143)

That image of his parents' ever increasing love is now shattered. All through the play this marriage boggles his mind and he cannot stop thinking about it. Moreover, meeting the Ghost has reinforced Hamlet's doubts about his mother's loyalty to his father, as well. The Ghost also alludes to the Queen's wrongdoings: "O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power / So to seduce; won to his shameful lust / The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen;" (1.5. 45). Apparently, she was tempted by Claudius, but she was inclined to temptation, too. This is another uncertainty for Hamlet, her mother was "seemingly virtuous". He questions his mother's decision of why she got married to Claudius, in her closet:

> You cannot call it love, for at your age
> The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
> And waits upon the judgment, and what judgment
> Would step from this to this? (3.4.68)

He wants to believe that the Queen is old enough not to act with the dictations of sexual desire. He cannot understand how she chooses a man, whose qualities are far below than those of her previous husband. He shows her the pictures of both husbands, and asks her to compare them: Her first husband was a man "Where every god did seem to set his seal / To give the world assurance of a man" (3.4. 61). However, the second one, "like a mildewed ear," (3.4.64) is diseased. He cannot accept the fact that the Queen no longer fits in his idea of a mother. He would rather think that the devil dictated and blinded his mother: "What devil was't / That thus hath cozened you at hoodman- blind?" (3.4.76).

Hamlet also suspects his mother of cooperating with Claudius to kill his father. With his organized play, Hamlet not only aims to catch the conscience of the King but also his mother's as well. He makes the Player Queen articulate his doubt about his mother: "In second husband let me be accurst, / None wed the second, but who killed the first." (3.2.172). He tries to gauge his mother's reaction to the play. Gertrude's realistic reply, "The lady doth protest too much" (3.2.223), is not the confession he expects. After the play, when his mother requests to talk to him in her closet privately, Hamlet tries to display his despair to his mother: "Mother, you have my father much offended" (3.4. 10). He prefers to call her as "[her] husband's brother's wife" (3.4. 15). His intends to make his mother admit that she has wronged his father:

> You go not till I set you up a glass
> Where you may see the inmost part of you. (3.4.19)

Gertrude's reply, "What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me?" (3.4. 21) is ambiguous. She is really puzzled that Hamlet, the lunatic, is going to kill her for no reason; or she admits to the crime of having killed the old King; or she agrees with Hamlet that her second marriage is unforgivable; so in all cases Hamlet has a reason to kill her. At that instant, Polonius, hidden behind an arras, shouts out, and Hamlet, thinking it is the King, stabs him to death. Gertrude's shocked exclamation, "O what a rash and bloody deed is this?" (3.4.25), makes Hamlet speak out his suspicion:

A bloody deed- almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king, and marry his brother. (3.4.27)

Gertrude is highly confused; her questions, "As kill a king? ...What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy tongue / In noise so rude against me? ...Ay me, what act, / That roars so loud, and thunders in the index?" (3.4.29 … 53) are far from verifying Hamlet's suspicion. Although Hamlet directs many accusations to the Queen about his doubts, she cannot give any explicit answers since his accusations are not very clear themselves:

such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love
And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
As false as dicers' oaths, (3.4.40)

He is so preoccupied with the supposed hypocrisy and disloyalty of his mother's second marriage that he seems to have forgotten to find out if Gertrude had a hand in Old Hamlet's death. So by the end of the scene Hamlet's doubts and uncertainties remain still unenlightened.

Hamlet finds it hard to rely on Ophelia as his soul mate. Laertes warns Ophelia that Hamlet may only try to have an affair with her. He tells her that Hamlet belongs to royalty and is not free to choose his wife. He advises her not to "lose [her] heart, or [her] chaste treasure open" to Hamlet (1.3.31). Ophelia chooses to believe in Laertes and assures him that she will keep her promise: "I shall the effect of this good lesson keep / As watchman to my heart" (1.3. 45). When her father, too, warns her about being careful with Hamlet and forbids her to see or talk to him, she reassures her father, as well: "I shall obey my lord" (1.3.136). Later she keeps her promise to both her brother and father by shunning Hamlet.

Hamlet, after his encounter with the Ghost, appears in Ophelia's closet in a highly disturbed mood, "As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors" (2.1.80).

Maybe his intention is to unburden his troubled mind to his beloved, but she "did repel his letters, and denied / His access to" her, as instructed by her father (2.1.105). His long and searching look at her face is to find out from her expression if he can trust her love and loyalty. The way he leaves her, with "a sigh so piteous and profound / As it did deem to shatter all his bulk" (2.1. 91), suggests he has not found any proof of trust. Upon learning of Ophelia's rejection of Hamlet, Polonius construes Hamlet's madness as due to his rejected love towards his daughter.

Meanwhile Claudius is worried about Hamlet's changed behaviour. When Polonius informs him that Hamlet's madness must be because of having been rejected by Ophelia, Claudius wants to put this idea to test. Polonius makes a plan: when Hamlet walks in the lobby, he will send Ophelia to him, and the King and Polonius will watch them behind an arras. The meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia is very strained; the opening words are formal; Ophelia returns his gifts. His reply, "No, not I. I never gave you aught" (3.1.95), implies that Hamlet sees Ophelia as a changed person from the girl he has loved. His "I did love you once" becomes "I loved you not" (3.1.115… 119). He is no longer certain of her love for him, or his love for her.

Hamlet thinks that he cannot confide in his friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the very reason of his depression. Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Hamlet have long been friends since their childhood as the King reminds them: "That being of so young days brought you up with him, / And sith so neighboured to this youth and haviour," (2.2.11). The Queen also appreciates their being close friends: "And sure I am two men there are not living / To whom he more adheres" (2.2.20). Although Hamlet seems to be happy to see them, he senses an ulterior motive in their visit. Hamlet directs many questions to them in order to understand their genuine motive:

> were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, come, deal justly with me, come, come, nay speak. (2.2.27)

Since everything and everybody around him is uncertain, he cannot decide whether he can rely on them and unburden his problems, or whether they are sent for by his uncle in order to disclose the reason for his melancholy. When they admit being sent for by the Queen and the King, he understands that he cannot rely on them and

cannot disclose his secret to them. He tells them, "I know a hawk from a handsaw" (2.2.370), warning them that he can distinguish one thing from another, and so he can see through the false pretences of his friends. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to the King and the Queen to report their talk with Hamlet and their impressions.

> Nor do we find him forward to be sounded,
> But with a crafty madness keeps aloof
> When we would bring him on to some confession
> Of his true state. (3.1.6)

In Hamlet's uncertain world, best friends can easily inform against their close friend.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern continue staying in the palace with the commands of the King and the Queen in order to disclose the reason of Hamlet's transformation and melancholy. They further force Hamlet to unburden his problems to them: "You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty, if you deny your griefs to your friend" (3.2.325). By now he feels he cannot trust them. He refuses to confide in them. Hamlet shows that he is aware of their aims: "why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?" (3.2.335). He senses that they try to set traps for him. He tells them that they cannot learn anything from him and their struggle to read him is all in vain. Finally, Hamlet confides his uneasiness and lack of confidence in his friends to his mother when Claudius decides to send him to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "whom I will trust as I will adders fanged, / They bear the mandate – they must sweep my way / And marshal me to knavery: let it work," (3.4.203). Hamlet is completely lonely and surrounded by people he can never be sure of.

Beckett's characters, too, tend to be in quest of reaching the truths and certainties about the world and the people around them. However, they are surrounded by irreducible uncertainties and vagueness in the world and the people. As Berlin suggests

> Beckett and Shakespeare, in his tragedies, occupy the same ground. They posit vulnerable men in a world of cries, questioning and puzzlement in a world of mystery. (61)

The primary uncertainty in *Waiting for Godot* is Godot's identity. Estragon's and Vladimir's identities are closely connected to Godot's identity. In their uncertain world, he is the one to save them. If he comes and saves them, they will become people being saved, which will make an identity for them. If they can only solve Godot's identity, they can solve their own and can become certain about each other. However, they are unsure about Godot's name or appearance. When Pozzo appears, they think he might be Godot:

> ESTRAGON: (*undertone*.) Is that him?
> VLADIMIR: Who?
> ESTRAGON: (*trying to remember the name*.) Er…
> VLADIMIR: Godot?
> ESTRAGON: Yes.
> ...
> ESTRAGON: (*timidly to Pozzo*). You're not Mr. Godot, sir? (*WFG* 22)

Estragon discloses that Godot is no acquaintance of them and that they "hardly know him" (*WFG* 23). Not being able to set a definite identity for their saviour to whom they tie themselves, Vladimir and Estragon find it difficult to define themselves, as well.

In both *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, characters have difficulty in trusting one another. Although they keep living together, they are unsure whether they should rely on one another or not. Each is afraid of being deserted by the other. The characters take refuge in each other's company, as they do not have anything in order to prove their existence rather than one another. "Since nothing in certain, the two friends [in *Waiting for Godot*] prefer the greater certainty of staying together" (Lamont 213). At the outset of *Waiting for Godot*, when Vladimir and Estragon see each other in the morning, Vladimir is very happy: "So there you are again…I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone for ever" (*WFG* 9). The tramps live in fear of not seeing each other again. Upon meeting one another the next day, they feel relieved and want to "celebrate this" by embracing each other (*WFG* 9). Each is anxious that the other might leave him:

> ESTRAGON: (*coldly*). There are times when I wonder if it wouldn't be better for us to part.
> VLADIMIR: You wouldn't go far.

ESTRAGON: That would be too bad, really too bad. (*Pause*.) Wouldn't it, Didi, be really too bad? (*Pause*.) (*WFG* 16)

They are dependent on each other. Estragon has a foot ache; he cannot put on his boot without Vladimir's help. Also, they keep forgetting things, especially Estragon; they cannot remember almost anything without the other's help. Vladimir has to remind Estragon of their aim of being there:

ESTRAGON: Let's go.
VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We are waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON: Ah! (*WFG* 14)

They put their doubts about being abandoned into words:

ESTRAGON: I wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself…We weren't made for the same road.
VLADIMIR: (*without anger*). It's not certain.
ESTRAGON: No, nothing is certain. (*WFG* 53)

Even while planning their suicide by hanging themselves on the tree, they are apprehensive that one of them might fail in dying and the other might be left alone: "Gogo light- bough not break- Gogo dead. Didi heavy- bough break- Didi alone" (*WFG* 17-8). They compare their weights, so that they can understand if they can both die successively by hanging themselves on the same tree. They would rather die than be left alone; dying is not so tragic as being left alone. Hamlet, too, suffers from being left alone in his hostile world.

Estragon and Vladimir need each other especially when they sense any menace from outside: "*Huddled together, shoulders hunched, cringing away from the menace*" (*WFG* 21). They take shelter in each other. When Estragon finds Vladimir singing after they pass their nights separately, he feels offended thinking that Vladimir enjoys being alone. He reproaches Vladimir for his fun. He makes childish gestures:

ESTRAGON: Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!
VLADIMIR: Did I ever leave you?

ESTRAGON: You let me go.
…
ESTRAGON: …I heard you singing.
VLADIMIR: That's right, I remember.
ESTRAGON: That finished me. I said to myself, he's all alone, he thinks I'm gone forever, and he sings.
…
ESTRAGON: (*sadly*). You see you piss better when I'm not. (*WFG* 58-9)

Vladimir and Estragon are paranoid about each being left alone by the other and they try hard to gauge each other's reaction to these reproaches or questions.

Pozzo and Lucky is another pair that needs each other's company in *Waiting for Godot*. On their first appearance Lucky is tied to Pozzo with a piece of rope, so that Pozzo can direct him. Lucky carries all his baggage without even having a rest. Vladimir is curious about the reason why he never puts down his baggage. Pozzo answers: "He wants to impress me, so that I'll keep him…He wants to mollify me, so that I'll give up the idea of parting with him" (*WFG* 31). Lucky is afraid of being deserted by Pozzo and in order to prevent this he "imagines that when [Pozzo] see[s] how well he carries [he]'ll be tempted to keep him on in that capacity" (*WFG* 31). Vladimir feels uncomfortable about Pozzo's exploitative attitude towards Lucky and infers about their relationship that: "After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like a …banana skin" (*WFG* 34). Vladimir's banana skin metaphor finds its counterpart in Hamlet's sponge metaphor to describe the King's attitude towards his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet likens his friends to a sponge

> that soaks up the king's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the king best service in the end, he keeps them like an apple, in the corner of his jaw, first mouthed to be last swallowed – when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again. (4.2.15)

In both cases the one in the authority exploits the other. When he does not need the other any longer, he simply discards him. In each case the one who sets out to serve the one in authority cannot be certain to be rewarded; he can easily end up believing exploited, then discarded. On Pozzo's and Lucky's second appearance, Pozzo becomes blind and Lucky dumb; this time Lucky is in charge and Pozzo is master.

The master-servant relationship, too, is uncertain; it can change any time. Their disabilities make them dependent on each other like Gogo and Didi.

Vladimir and Estragon feel insecure about and frightened of outsiders. Estragon keeps being beaten up by unknown people each night in the ditch, where he claims that he spends his night. In *Waiting for Godot*, "people can't be known, shadowy figures beat at one night, one doesn't know why, and there is nothing to be done" (Graver 25). When Pozzo appears on the stage with Lucky, who falls down with all the baggage, Vladimir and Estragon "*turn towards him, half wishing half fearing to go to his assistance*" (*WFG* 22). Although Vladimir attempts to help Lucky, Estragon "holds him back by the sleeve", as he cannot be sure about the motive of a stranger (*WFG* 22). Lucky is also wary of strangers: he "*kicks [Estragon] violently in the shins*", when Estragon approaches to give him a handkerchief to wipe his eyes (*WFG* 32). Pozzo explains Lucky's reaction: "I told you he didn't like strangers" (*WFG* 32). When they try to help Lucky to put his hat on his head, they are more careful. Vladimir "*picks up the hat and tenders it at arm's length to Lucky…he goes round behind Lucky, approaches him cautiously, puts the hat on his head and recoils smartly*" (*WFG* 42). Similarly, Pozzo is still cautious about them on their second encounter; he asks them, "but are you friends?" (*WFG* 85). Beckett's plays reveal "the unending quest for reality in a world in which everything is uncertain" and full of the "self-deception of friendship" (Esslin 70).

Vladimir tries hard to understand and assure himself about everything around him. He can be regarded "as an honest doubter in search of certainty, [and] a man caught up between ignorance and a need to know" (Graver 37). When the Boy arrives with a message from Mr.Godot, Vladimir asks many questions to ascertain the Boy's identity: "Are you native of these parts? Do you belong to these parts?...I have seen you before? It wasn't you came yesterday? This is your first time?" (*WFG* 50). Yet, the Boy's short answers do not give Vladimir a well-defined picture of the Boy's life:

VLADIMIR: You work for Mr. Godot?
BOY: Yes, sir.

VLADIMIR: What do you do?
BOY: I mind the goats, sir.
VLADIMIR: Is he good to you?
BOY: Yes, sir
…
VLADIMIR: You're not unhappy? (*The Boy hesitates*.) Do you hear me?
BOY: Yes, sir.
VLADIMIR: Well?
BOY: I don't know, sir.
VLADIMIR: You don't know if you're unhappy or not?
BOY: No, sir.
VLADIMIR: You're as bad as myself. (*WFG* 51)

On the Boy's next arrival, Vladimir tries to learn more about Mr. Godot so that he can dispel the uncertainty about Godot's identity:

VLADIMIR: (*softly*). Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?
BOY: Yes, sir.
VLADIMIR: Fair or…(*he hesitates*)…or black?
BOY: I think it's white, sir.
…
BOY: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, sir?
VLADIMIR: Tell him…(*he hesitates*)…tell him you saw me and that …(*he hesitates*)…that you saw me. (*WFG* 92)

At the end of this interrogation, Vladimir is no more certain about Godot or the Boy. Likewise, Hamlet's rhetorical questions and reflexive comments to get into the heart of Gertrude's, Claudius', Ophelia's and his friends' identities indicate the uncertainty of his world.

In *Endgame*, Hamm, the disabled master, is uncertain about his slave Clov and he is afraid of being deserted by him. It is uncertain for Hamm and his parents whether Clov will leave them or not, which is "the source of the dramatic tension of the play" (Esslin 63). They need Clov because none of them can move. Yet, if Clov leaves "Clov also must die, as there is no one else left in the world" (Esslin 63). Hamm is anxious and keeps asking Clov to give a definite answer: "You're leaving me all the same" (*EG* 5). Clov's answer makes Hamm even more apprehensive: "I'm trying" (*EG* 5). Neither Hamm nor Clov seems happy to stay together, yet they do not leave each other. Clov has been wavering in his plan to leave Hamm for ages:

HAMM: I thought I told you to be off.
CLOV: I'm trying. (*He goes towards the door, halts*.) Ever since I was whelped. (*EG* 10)

Although Hamm commands Clov to be off, he does not really want Clov to desert him. Whenever Clov informs him:

CLOV: I'll leave you, I have things to do.
HAMM: Do you remember when you came here? (*EG* 27)
…
CLOV: I'll leave you.
HAMM: Did you ever think one thing? (*EG* 27)
…
CLOV: I'll leave you.
HAMM: Is my dog ready? (*EG* 28)
…
CLOV: I'll leave you.
HAMM: Have you had your visions? (*EG* 29)

Hamm tries hard to repress the idea of being deserted. He overrides what Clov says by an irrelevant question to change the subject. As his final move to prevent Clov from leaving them, Hamm reminds Clov that "outside of here it's death" and "gone from me you'd be dead" (*EG* 49, 48). Clov vacillates between going on living inside the cell by dealing with the problems that he is already accustomed to, and going outside the cell, which is death that he has not experienced before. Clov's dilemma to leave the known place for the unknown rings true for Hamlet, too; Hamlet cannot decide whether to bear the problems that he has already known such as "Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, / The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay" or to choose to struggle with the unknown ones after death (3.1.71). Hamm cannot be sure about what Clov will do; finally he resigns to Clov's leaving him; but Clov, at the end, is not sure about going away. Each of these three pairs of Beckett characters "is linked by a relationship of mutual interdependence, waiting to leave each other, at war with each other, and yet dependent on each other" (Esslin 67), never being able to resolve the uncertainties in their relationships.

2.3. Uncertainty about Moral Values

Hamlet tends to have a skeptical view about the world, its people, and the moral values that govern it. He starts questioning the world, which was once beautiful to him but now is devoid of spirit and humanity. He is unsure about the effectiveness of moral values in such a senseless world. Hamlet's active mind perpetually questions several moral values. "Owing to his highly developed intellectual powers, Hamlet could never take a simple or single view of any question, but always saw a number of different aspects and possible explanations with every problem" (Jones 35). Hamlet has doubts about whether avenging his father's death will work in solving the problems, and bringing peace of mind, or not. He is also uncertain about whether real love can take place in the world since he is disillusioned by both his mother and girlfriend. He accuses them of betrayal and sinning. He is doubtful about loyalty in friendship. He is disillusioned by the breach of friendship in his two friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet questions the role of kingship in his relationship with his uncle. Apart from the ruling values in human relationships, Hamlet has doubts about religion. His religious reasoning keeps fluctuating throughout the play; on the one hand he seems to have a certain view on a religious point, on the other hand he feels doubtful about it. Hamlet cannot feel a compelling urge to realize his decision of taking revenge, while he has already been enveloped by doubts and uncertainties.

The most crucial moral value that Hamlet is uncertain about is undoubtedly revenge. He has been assigned to avenge his father's "most unnatural murder" (1.5.25). To what degree he should realize his so-called filial duty, or if it will solve all his problems are all uncertain in his mind. After his talk to the Ghost, Hamlet displays a firm and decisive attitude. He takes a solemn oath to avenge his father's death:

> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pleasures past
> That youth and observation copied there,
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain (1.5.98).

To be able to focus solely on his task, he decides not to be engaged in anything other than his mission.

Although Hamlet swears to take revenge by killing his uncle many times he has not been able to do so throughout the play. He has either accused or scorned himself without stating any reason for his delay: "what a rogue and peasant slave am I!...I, / A dull and muddy-mettled rascal…I am pigeon-livered,…what an ass am I." (2.2.533…566). He detects his inaction himself and resents it, yet he does not bring forth any reasonable argument. Ernest Jones states that "the meaning of Hamlet's hesitancy in seeking to obtain revenge of his father's murder -has been called the Sphinx of Modern Literature" (26). Hamlet's "hesitancy" in avenging his father's death is a riddle and difficult to be analyzed. Paolucci analyzes Hamlet's process of self accusations and scorns each time he delays his action:

> He vows at the outset to avenge his father's death, but with each succeeding soliloquy he moves further and further away from that original intention. His verbalizing is a sign of his doubt; we sense it with his very reaction: instead of going about the business asked of him, he takes out his notebook and jots down a Machiavellian observation about how a man can smile and still be a villain. (237)

Rather than concentrating on realizing his task, Hamlet prefers to ask questions to form opinions about the nature of the world, its people and the values that dominate it. Hamlet verbalizes his confused mind. In the scene where Hamlet witnesses the player to deliver a speech about Queen Hecuba, the player acts out Hecuba's grief for her murdered husband so realistically and strikingly that Hamlet cannot help comparing himself with the player:

> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> …
> …and all for nothing!
> For Hecuba! (2.2. 534…541)

He accuses himself of not taking any action though he has the rightful motivation to act:

That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words. (2.2.574)

While Hamlet is vacillating to act, the Ghost appears to him again in order to remind Hamlet of his task, and to tell him that he has procrastinated his task too long: "Do not forget! this visitation / Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose-" (3.4.110). Hamlet cringes in front of the Ghost because he is aware that he has "lapsed in time and passion lets go by / Th' important acting of [the Ghost's] dread command" (3.4.107).

Hamlet is preoccupied both with taking revenge and with his inaction. As he is about to board the ship to take him to England, he sees Fortinbras' army passing by on their way to Poland. They are on their way to conquer a worthless piece of land, and in the process will endanger the lives of twenty thousand men. Everything around Hamlet reminds him of what he has to do: "How all occasions do inform against me, / And spur my dull revenge!" (4.4.31). He is confused and cannot explain his passivity:

I do not know
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do',
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,
To do't. (4.4.41)

Hamlet cannot help comparing himself to Fortinbras, who can be urged to act even by a slight reason that is not as significant as that of Hamlet:

How I stand then,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep? (4.4.55)

Prior points out that "the purpose and end of human action have become uncertain, and before he can act again to any purpose he finds it necessary to search for some conviction which will endow choice with meaning and human action with dignity" (268). Until the very end of the play, he is in search of a "conviction" that will assure him about the certainty of the end of his action. He does not give up reasoning and

verbalizing his confusion even in his last soliloquy, as he has not been able to procure an answer so far. Levine analyses Hamlet's dilemma:

> Hamlet has promised the ghost that he will avenge his father's murder. However, from this point to the conclusion of Act IV, Hamlet, the avenger, is incapable of straightforward action. He cannot willfully act because he is uncertain as to the final end of action and he cannot resolve that uncertainty. (541)

Hamlet as a humanist, who believes in science or law in order to solve problems, finds it hard to envisage a positive result out of taking revenge. Bernard Shaw draws an analogy between Hamlet's and Christian perceptions:

> what happened to Hamlet was what had happened fifteen hundred years before to Jesus. Born into the vindictive morality of Moses he has evolved into the Christian perception of the futility and wickedness of revenge and punishment, founded on the simple fact that two blacks do not make a white. (in Jump 47)

Hamlet like Christ does not believe in violence to solve the problems, and he tries hard to replace the current moral value with his own ideal one. However, by trying to repair the absurdity that is existent in life, Hamlet becomes the victim of his over-active mind.

Love is another moral value that is doubtful for Hamlet. Above all, he is disillusioned by his impatient mother's marriage to his uncle shortly after his father's death: "A beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourned longer" (1.2.150). Hamlet starts to have doubts about the strength of her love towards his father, and he comes to the conclusion that his mother's love was not a long-lasting one. Her mother, as a woman, has set a bad example for Hamlet, and he reaches a generalization about the weak nature of women: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (1.2.146). Hamlet thinks that his mother has betrayed his father. Hamlet has been thinking that nothing can negate his parents' love. He remembers his father's attitude towards his mother: "so loving to my mother, / That he might not beteem the winds of heaven / Visit her face too roughly" (1.2.141). He cannot forget the passion in her mother's love:

> Why, she would hang on him
> As if increase of appetite had grown
> By what it fed on. (1.2. 143)

It pains him to see and admit that his idea of the ideal marriage is shattered: “Let me not think on’t” (1.2. 146).

Hamlet, using his method of questioning, tries to figure out why his moral-code has failed in her mother. He makes comparisons between his father and Claudius. His father is like a God, “Hyperion” (1.2.140), “Jove…Mars…Mercury” (3.4. 56) whereas Claudius is a despicable creature, “a satyr” (1.2.140), “a mildewed ear: … [an animal] on this moor” (3.4.64…67). He wants his mother to share the shame of her second marriage. He is suspicious of his mother to have a hand in his father’s murder: “O throw away the worser part of [your heart], / And live the purer with the other half” (3.4.157). He tries hopelessly to reverse the situation so that the uncertainty in the ideal marriage is repaired: “go not to my uncle’s bed” (3.4.158).

Hamlet doubts Ophelia’s love, as well. He does not know to what extent he can trust her love; he is uncertain whether she is prone to betrayal and sinning, like his mother. As he is disappointed by his mother, he has started to have doubts about trusting another woman. He tries to understand whether she really loves him or not, when he comes to her closet, and looks at her face very carefully. Ophelia reports what has happened to her father:

> He took me by the wrist, and held me hard
> Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
> And with his other hand thus o’er is brow,
> He falls to such perusal of my face
> As ’a would draw it. (2.1.84)

He tries hard to read any traces of love to show on her face. He has a strong wish to clear away his doubts about his girl friend. His doubts about Ophelia are further increased when she suddenly returns his gifts, with the ambiguous reason that “their perfume lost” (3.1.99). This can mean Hamlet does not love her anymore, or Ophelia does not love him any longer. Both interpretations baffle Hamlet. He is now even

unsure of his love for Ophelia: his "I did love you once" (3.1.115) turns into "you should not have believed me" (3.1.117).

Hamlet has come to the conclusion that it is impossible that love may take place in this world after he has been disillusioned by the women in his life. The only way to prevent any changes in a love relationship is for the woman to avoid the man. So he orders her, "Get thee to a nunnery, why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" (3.1.121). If she ever gets married, she should "marry a fool" who would not be aware of the fact that women make "monsters" of men (3.1. 140 …141). As Kott asserts, "for Hamlet and Ophelia it means that in the world, where murder holds sway, there is no room for love" (50). Hamlet no longer believes in love, also he mistrusts marriage. "I say we will have no more marriage" (3.1.149), he announces; he sees no point in getting married since women have the tendency to either betrayal or sinning. His mind is full of women's dishonesty. He even draws a parallel between the short prologue of the play-within-the play and the short duration of a "woman's love (3.2.146).

Hamlet is uncertain about the values that may be effective in his relationships with people; such as friendship. When he sees his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Elsinore he asks them:

> But, in the beaten way of friendship, what makes you at Elsinore? … by the rights of our fellowship, by the constancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, … be even and direct with me. (2.2.265… 283)

Hamlet expects them to give the genuine motive of their visit to Elsinore, emphasizing that he trusts in their friendship wholeheartedly. However, they do not treat their friend as honestly as Hamlet does, and conceal the real reason for their visit: "To visit you, my lord, no other occasion?" (2.2.267). When Hamlet guesses the reason of their visit correctly, they evade the issue:

HAMLET: I know the good king and the queen have sent for you.
ROSENCRANTZ: To what end, my lord? (2.2.276).

They would not confess that they have accepted to spy against their close friend. However, Hamlet is a very intelligent man, and he guesses the purpose behind his friends' presence in court: "I will tell you why … I have of late … lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises" (2.2.289 … 292). He realizes that their task is to figure out the change in Hamlet. Hamlet suffers from a breach of friendship when he suspects the disloyalty of his friends. Yet, he announces that they cannot make him confide in them: "You are welcome: but my uncle-father, and aunt-mother, are deceived" (2.2.366) to think that they can read into Hamlet's mind and heart. Hamlet has lost faith in his friends. When they attempt to talk to him he will act prudently from now on. After the performance of the play that Hamlet has organized, Guildenstern wants to talk to Hamlet about the King's displeasure of the play. Hamlet makes some cutting remarks, so Guildenstern asks him to give some explanation: "Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame" (3.2.297). Rosencrantz presses further on: "Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend" (3.2. 325). Hamlet no longer regards them as his friends, so he will not oblige them: "though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me" (3.2.360).

Hamlet is aware of his friends' ulterior motive, so he treats them not as his friends but as tradesmen who are trying to exploit him: "Have you any further trade with us?" (3.2.321). He is thoroughly disappointed in them: "They fool me to the top of my bent" (3.3.371). "Hamlet is alone, quite alone, battling giants without help, standing unsteadily on shifting ground among folk once familiar, but now strangers, menacing and unrecognizable" (Newman 20).

Another moral value that Hamlet keeps questioning is kingship. He is never sure about to what extent Claudius is appropriate to be the King of Denmark. Hamlet despises the King's character traits of fondness for drinking and showing off with celebrations. Whenever there is any good news Claudius is prone to celebrating it with drinking and fun. Upon Hamlet's decision not to go back to Wittenberg and to stay in Elsinore, Claudius wants a glorious celebration:

> This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet,
> Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof,
> No jocund health that Denmark today,
> But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
> And the king's rouse the heaven shall bruit again,
> Re-speaking earthly thunder; (1.2.123)

When Hamlet meets Horatio, he implies that Denmark is famous for its feasts and celebrations: "We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart" (1.2.175). He is discontented with the current state of the country and he does not approve of making so much merrymaking. When Hamlet, Horatio and the watchmen wait for the Ghost, Horatio asks about the reason of the trumpets playing. Hamlet tells him about the custom:

> The King doth wake tonight and takes his rouse,
> Keeps wassail and the swagg'ring upspring reels:
> And as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
> The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
> The triumph of his pledge. (1.4. 7)

However, Hamlet disagrees with the custom and does not think it is proper for a country like Denmark. He would rather have it changed:

> This heavy-headed revel east and west
> Makes us traduced and taxed of other nations.
> They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase
> Soil our addition, and indeed it takes
> From our achievements, though performed at height,
> The pith and marrow of our attribute. (1.4.17)

Hamlet claims that the present state of the country, full of gaieties and drinking, is humiliating because it overshadows Denmark's successes and glories. Hamlet judges the situation as "the moral degeneration" (Cahn 75). The other nations taunt and ridicule them as they overindulge in alcohol. Claudius as the king of the country has not attempted to improve the prestige of the country by organizing these kinds of entertainment less frequently. "Such revelrous behaviour offends" Hamlet and he implies that "Claudius is responsible for this degeneration" (Cahn 76). When Guildenstern comes to inform Hamlet that the King is not well after the play that

Hamlet has organized, Hamlet says mockingly, it can be only due to "drink" (3.2.292).

Hamlet sees Claudius as a low character. In a very subjective way, Hamlet describes him with such base, despicable and disgraceful adjectives that such a man should not be the king. He labels the King as "bawdy / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain" (2.2.563). When he compares Claudius with his father he thinks that "now reigns here / A very, very – peacock" (3.2.274 … 275) at his father's throne. Moreover, he calls him as "a slave that is not twentieth part the tithe" of his father and "a vice of kings" (3.4.97… 98). Hamlet tells Horatio about how he has discovered the King's secret plan for Hamlet to be killed by the King of England, and he calls the devious plan "royal knavery" (5.2.19), Horatio is shocked "Why! what a king is this" (5.2.63). Hamlet unburdens himself to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he lacks "advancement" (3.2.328); they remind Hamlet of the King's promise: "let the world take note / You are the most immediate to our throne" (1.2.108). Although the King has assigned Hamlet as the successor to the throne, Hamlet cannot trust in such a King.

Hamlet experiences ambiguities about religion, as well. His views about his religious knowledge keep changing throughout the play. When he yearns "O that this too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew" (1.2. 129), Hamlet wants to escape from the disconcerting situations in his life by committing suicide. He has a strong death wish as he does not want to endure all the sufferings of a "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable" (1.2.133) world. Yet he laments that he cannot fulfill his desire due to religious constraints: "Or that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (1.2.131). As a religious man, he does not wish to go beyond God's orders by acting in a way that He prohibits. He seems sure about the rules of the religion. He knows that self-slaughter is a sin, and sinners go to hell. He is not sure either the terrestrial or the celestial world.

Hamlet's powerful "death-wish is suppressed by the Christian canon against self-slaughter (Levin 70); the idea never leaves his mind. However, he "now asks

himself, should one passively submit or actively resist" (Levin 70) one's insufferable problems:

> To be or not to be, that is the question,
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing, end them. (3.1.56)

Hamlet regards death as a sublime end, when he compares it with the anguishes of life. Since one can end all his/her agonies in life with death, Hamlet portrays death as something desirable:

> To die, to sleep-
> No more, and by a sleep to say we end
> The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
> Devoutly to be wished to die to sleep! (3.1.60)

For Hamlet "only one philosophical problem is really serious, and that is suicide" (Levin 70). He has to "decide whether or not life is worth living [which] is to answer the most fundamental question of philosophy" (Camus in Levin 70). Weary of life, disillusioned by its falsities and faced with a dilemma demanding a decision against which his morals revolt, Hamlet finds the salvation in suicide.

However, Hamlet is further hampered by another reason for not taking his life. He gets confused when he thinks what will happen after death:

> Ay there's the rub,
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
> When we have shuffled of this mortal coil
> Must give us pause- (3.1.65)

He cannot be sure about what may happen after death as no one has come back to inform others after having died:

> But that the dread of something after death,
> The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
> No traveler returns, puzzles the will, (3.1.78)

He fears that what happens after death will be worse than bearing all the corruptions and tortures of life:

> For who would bear the whips or scorns of time,
> Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
> The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,
> The insolence of office, and the spurns
> That patient merit of th' unworthy takes, (3.1.70)

The uncertainty of after life "makes us rather bear those ills we have, / Than fly to others that we know not" (3.1.81); thus Hamlet resigns "To grunt and sweat under a weary life," (3.1.77).

On the other hand, Hamlet seems to believe in some religious teachings to cope with his delay. Although he finds a suitable occasion to kill Claudius while the King was praying, he decides not to kill the King; because he thinks that Claudius would go to heaven if he killed him praying and repenting. The result of being killed at confession would be "hire and salary, not revenge" (3.3.79). Hamlet remembers Claudius having killed his father without giving the old king a chance to repent; that is why his father is suffering in the Purgatory. Hamlet seems to have definite idea about the result of a confession. However, "Claudius attempting to pray and Hamlet watching him kneeling, both accept for the moment an orthodox scheme of damnation and salvation, contradicting the uncertainty of the famous [to be or not to be] soliloquy" (Leggatt 65). Hamlet's religious reasoning keeps fluctuating according to the occasions that he comes across. He tries to look at his moral values from as many different angles as possible, and he questions each and every value. However, he is not aware of the fact that in a world directed by the laws of absurdity, there cannot be clear answers as he would like to have.

In Beckett's plays the characters are sceptical about the effectiveness or existence of common human values. They are not sure whether these values have the mission to govern human relationships or their lives. In *Endgame*, Hamm's and his parents' relationship is quite problematic. Hamm's and his parents' attitudes towards each other are devoid of love and trust. Hamm tends to ignore his filial responsibilities to

his paralyzed parents who live in ashbins. Above all, Hamm is displeased with his particular life, and he accuses his parents of procreating him:

HAMM: Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?
NAGG: I didn't know.
HAMM: What? What didn't you know?
NAGG: That it'd be you. (*EG* 34)

He keeps verbalizing his rage against his parents. He calls Nagg, his father, an "accursed progenitor"; when Nagg asks for some food, Hamm scolds him as an "accursed fornicator" (*EG* 7).

When Nagg complains about the hard biscuit that Hamm has given to him, Hamm wants Clov to simply "bottle him" (*EG* 8), that is to put his father back into an ashbin as a punishment. This world is monstrous and it "spun about one man who is accustomed to dominate" (Kenner 14). It is atrocious for his parents to have to live in those ashbins. Hamm makes his parents suffer from neglect; he used to put sawdust in their ashbins, but now they have sand. Yet, as it is impossible for Hamm to be able to get to the shore in order to fetch sand, they must have been forced to live in the same sand for an indefinite period of time. The play personifies a "solipsist's world", who does not care about any other one apart from himself (Kenner 14). He is not anxious whether his parents are dead or alive, but he wants Clov to check whether they are dead or not by opening the lids of their ashbins. Although Clov finds Nell, the mother, dead, and reports: "Looks like it", Hamm asks an irrelevant question afterwards: "Did you ever have an instant of happiness?" (*EG* 43). Hamm does not bother to show concern for the current situation of his parents. The uncertainty and insecurity dominates the play to such an extent that even a parent cannot rely on his son.

Hamm's parents' attitude towards their son is as unconcerned as Hamm's. When Hamm wants to tell a story, he wants his father to listen to his story. Nagg accepts to listen to it in return for a "sugar-plum" (*EG* 34). His parents have treated Hamm in the same indifferent way since his childhood; they could not even bear their child's voice. Nagg admits ignoring Hamm's cries when he was frightened of the dark: "we moved you out of earshot, so that we might sleep in peace" (*EG* 39). They ignored

taking care of their son when he needed his parents most. The relationship between Hamm and his parents is mutually impassive; neither side struggles to own up any responsibility for the other.

Friendship as a moral value is uncertain to be effective in *Waiting for Godot* as it is in Hamlet's relationship with his so-called friends. Vladimir and Estragon keep each other's company not because they really value friendship but because they need each other.

> All of Beckett's pairs are bound in friendship that are essentially power relationships. Above all, each partner needs to know that the other is there; the partners provide proof that they really exist by responding and replying to each other. (Worton 72)

One way of exerting their existence is to fill in the time altogether. They cannot pass the time without one another since they do not have anybody else apart from themselves. They either talk nonsense or play games. When Estragon refuses Vladimir's request to tell him a story, Vladimir reminds him "It'll pass the time", which makes Estragon agree to listen to his story (*WFG* 12). Their essential motivation in their actions is to be able to pass the time. Whenever one rejects continuing their blathering "that's been going on now for half a century" (*WFG* 66), the other immediately warns: "Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you?" (*WFG* 12). Apart from their talking about unimportant things they have games that they have invented: "We could play at Pozzo and Lucky", which would certainly pass the time (*WFG* 72).

Vladimir and Estragon are desperately in need of each other to be able to bear the precarious nature of their existence. A solitary existence would be unbearable. They greet each other when they see one another in the morning:

> VLADIMIR: So there you are again.
> ESTRAGON: Am I? (*WFG* 9)

Even being physically in the same place together does not always overcome this loneliness. Beckett often quotes Bishop Berkeley's philosophical concept, which is

also central to his own drama, “to be is to be perceived” (in Graver 55). Vladimir cannot bear loneliness when Estragon is asleep:

> ESTRAGON: Why will you never let me sleep?
> VLADIMIR: I felt lonely (*WFG* 89-90).

The answer to Vladimir’s question to Estragon: “why do you always come crawling back?” is that they cannot assert their identities without one another’s presence (*WFG* 59).

Another ambiguous moral value in Beckett’s plays is the nature of master and slave relationship. In *Waiting for Godot*, Pozzo as a master is harsh with his slave Lucky. He hits Lucky with his whip to make him do what he wants or he directs him with quite rude commands: “Up pig”, “Up hog” (*WFG* 23). Although Pozzo calls himself “liberal”, who should be willing to understand and respect other people's ideas, opinions, and feelings, he does not act in that way (*WFG* 39). While he himself eats the chicken, according to his theory “the bones go to the carrier” (*WFG* 27). Lucky never puts down the baggage that he has been carrying even when Pozzo wants to have a rest. Yet, Pozzo thinks that by doing so Lucky “wants to impress [him], so that [he]’ll keep him” (*WFG* 31). However, Pozzo senses that the authority in his hands can be temporary. Pozzo’s remarks foreshadow that power is on a slippery ground, and it can change at any moment randomly: “Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed otherwise. To each one is his due” (*WFG* 31). Pozzo turns out to be right about the precarious nature of power. On their second appearance, they appear to have changed their roles. Now he is the one who falls down and who asks for “help” and “pity” (*WFG* 81). Lucky is now the master. Yet, before their final exit, the roles are changed once more; Pozzo retrieves the “whip” and the “rope”; Lucky ends up carrying the bags and tied to Pozzo (*WFG* 89).

Another master in the play is Godot, whose slaves are the two brothers that come to inform Vladimir and Estragon about Godot’s delay. When Vladimir questions the Boy about Mr.Godot:

VLADIMIR: What do you do?
BOY: I mind the goats.
VLADIMIR: Is he good to you?
BOY: Yes, sir.
…
VLADIMIR: Does he give you enough to eat? (*The Boy hesitates*.) Do you hear
me?
BOY: Fairly well, sir. (*WFG* 51)

Mr.Godot seems to be kind and a generous master, a benevolent protector, to his employee. Yet, he does not act in the same way to the Boy's brother:

VLADIMIR: He doesn't beat you?
BOY: No, sir, not me.
VLADIMIR: Whom does he beat?
BOY: He beats my brother, sir.
VLADIMIR: Ah, you have a brother?
BOY: Yes, sir.
VLADIMIR: What does he do?
BOY: He minds the sheep, sir.
VLADIMIR: And why doesn't he beat you?
BOY: I don't know, sir.
VLADIMIR: He must be fond of you.
BOY: I don't know, sir. (*WFG* 51)

It is puzzling why Godot looks after one boy well but not the other one even though they are identical, and they both serve Godot.

The master-slave relationship between Hamm and Clov is also shaky. Hamm provides Clov with food and a shelter; Clov looks after Hamm who is immobile and blind. Clov has been with Hamm since Hamm took him from his father, as a little boy. At the time of the play, Clov is almost a middle-aged man; it has been a long time since they first met. However, Hamm seems not to have been able to look after Clov well. Clov has become a handicapped man and he has to stand all the time as he cannot sit. "Hamm is selfish, sensuous, domineering" (Esslin 63). Hamm threatens not to give food to Clov unless he follows his orders.

HAMM: I'll give you nothing more to eat.
CLOV: Then we'll die.

HAMM: I'll give you just enough to keep you from dying. You'll be hungry all the time. (*EG* 4)

Hamm not only shirks from his responsibilities to his slave, but also enjoys being needed by him.

Clov hates Hamm and wants to leave him, "but he must obey his orders. 'Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?'"(Esslin 63). The answer is because Hamm provides Clov with food and shelter. However, Clov, too, has some power over Hamm; he threatens Hamm saying that he would leave Hamm. So, Hamm is in an unsettled situation all the time because of the risk of having no one to care for him. Sadly he resigns himself to the idea:

HAMM: You won't come and kiss me goodbye?
CLOV: Oh I shouldn't think so. (*EG* 32)

Hamm and Clov's relationship does not have moral values of love, loyalty or selfless caring; on the contrary, they are together out of their own interests:

HAMM: Why do you stay with me?
CLOV: Why do you keep me?
HAMM: There's no one else.
CLOV: There's nowhere else. (*EG* 5)

They are aware of the fact a power relationship such as a master-slave one is uncertain and it can suddenly change hands. When Hamm asks Clov: "Why don't you kill me?", Clov answers: "I don't know the combination of the cupboard" (*EG* 6). Hamm does not tell Clov the combination of the cupboard as this information may make Clov both the master of the food and of Hamm. They can never be sure about one another since the power rests on a slippery ground.

In *Waiting for Godot*, religious values are uncertain. Vladimir and Estragon refer to the religious identity of Jesus Christ as "our Saviour", then ask "Saved from what?" (*WFG* 12). Estragon cannot figure out what being saved means when he sees their current situation, surrounded by all desperation and helplessness. If they had been saved as the holy book suggests, they should not have been in that miserable

condition. While they are waiting for Godot, they do role play in being Godot to pass the time; they act as if they have seen Godot and exclaim: "We're saved" (*WFG* 73). Although they refer to Christ as the Saviour, later on they hope Godot will save them, which does not materialize. The conventional religious ideas become perplexing.

The other question about the conventional religion is why they are suffering in the world. When Vladimir sees Estragon suffering from his boots, he seems to remember the concept of the original sin. Man is born in sin, thus man is condemned to suffer. The only way to escape the suffering is to repent or to die. Vladimir recalls the thieves crucified with Christ:

> VLADIMIR: One of the thieves was saved. (Pause.) It's a reasonable percentage. (Pause.) Gogo.
> ESTRAGON: What?
> VLADIMIR: Suppose we repented.
> ESTRAGON: Repented what?
> VLADIMIR: Oh . . . (*He reflects*.) We wouldn't have to go into the details.
> ESTRAGON: Our being born? (*WFG* 11)

They are not sure what they have to repent about, so they decide to sit down and to wait for Godot to come and save them.

Like Hamlet, Estragon still wants to believe in the certainty of the ideas that religion offers. Vladimir warns him not to go barefoot when he decides to leave the place barefoot without wearing his boots. Yet, Estragon remembers Christ going barefoot when he was about to be crucified. Vladimir tries to remind him of the difference between Christ and him:

> VLADIMIR: What's Christ got to do with it? You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!
> ESTRAGON: All my life I've compared myself to him.
> VLADIMIR: But where he lived it was warm, it was dry!
> ESTRAGON: Yes. And they crucified quick. (*WFG* 52)

The inference is that the conditions of Christ's life may not be applicable to those of their own.

Vladimir and Estragon refer to God, Christ, or the Bible, yet they cannot form a certain opinion on the roles of these religious references in their own lives:

> VLADIMIR: Did you ever read the Bible?
> ESTRAGON: The Bible… (*He reflects.*) I must have taken a look at it.
> VLADIMIR: Do you remember the Gospels?
> ESTRAGON: I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Cloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.
> VLADIMIR: You should have been a poet. (*WFG* 12)

The holy book is something they remember vaguely. Estragon dreamily refers to it as if it were a picture book. The Holy Land has the promise of happiness, but it is not specific.

In spite of Estragon's and Vladimir's loose references to religion, they have a vague fear of God. Once they decide to "do the tree, for the balance" to pass the time; Estragon feels anxious if God sees him or not (*WFG* 76). Vladimir suggests that he close his eyes in order not to think on God or religion. Yet, afterwards, both Estragon and Vladimir ask for God's pity.

> ESTRAGON: God have pity on me!
> VLADIMIR: (*vexed*). And me?
> ESTRAGON: On me! Pity! On me! (*WFG* 77)

They long for God's protection, but God does not respond to them. They also yearn for Christ to "have mercy on" them; when the Boy, informs them about Godot's delay in arrival, without giving any definite information about Godot, he becomes unreliable as a saviour (*WFG* 92). Although there are religious connotations that embody their hope of salvation, "prayers go unanswered" (Innes 431). They cannot form a firm attitude towards religion. They need protection and mercy as they feel lonely and hopeless while being exposed to many uncertainties and absurdities in their life. However, in Beckett's world "God is absent or at best unknowable" (Innes 431). Hamlet, Estragon and Vladimir, Hamm and Clov, all need something to hang to, despite their uncertainties.

The atmosphere in *Endgame* is more hopeless and gloomier than in *Waiting for Godot*. The characters have nothing to wait for. They are in their cell and they can only wait for death. The characters do not appeal to God or to a more lofty being. The references to God or religious allusions are almost non-existent. They are almost certain about the uselessness of religion and the non-existent God. They use clichés and common phrases that include God or Christ. When Hamm wants Clov to report to him what he sees on the horizon, Clov finds this wish absurd: "What in God's name could there be on the horizon?" (*EG* 22). When Hamm wants Clov to kill the flea that he has seen in the kitchen, he orders Clov to "[c]atch him, for the love of God" (*EG* 24). Clov refers to Christ, when he sees something extraordinary out of the window: "Christ, she's under water" and "What for Christ's sake does it matter?"(*EG* 50, 51). They refer to God or Christ not because of their belief in God or religion but out of habit. Using these words in cliché expressions erodes their meanings.

Hamm wants Nagg and Clov to pray after he tells his story to them:

HAMM: Let us pray to God.
CLOV: Again!
NAGG: Me sugar-plum!
HAMM: God first! (*Pause*.) Are you right?
CLOV: (*resigned*) Off we go.
HAMM: (*to Nagg*) And you? (*EG* 38)

They try hard to pray to God, but they cannot even do that. When they finally do, Nagg starts to utter unintelligible words and he cannot carry on even the most important prayer of the Christian religion, Lord's Prayer: "(*clasping his hands, closing his eyes, in a gabble*) Our Father which art –" (*EG* 38). Hamm immediately reacts to Nagg:

HAMM: Silence! Silence! Where are your manners? (*Pause.*) Off we go. (*Attitudes of prayer. Silence. Abandoning his attitude, discouraged.*) Well?
CLOV: (*abandoning his attitude*) What a hope! And you?
HAMM: Sweet damn all! (*To Nagg*.) And you?
NAGG: Wait! (*Pause. Abandoning his attitude.)* Nothing doing!
HAMM: The bastard! He doesn't exist. (*EG* 38)

They are all discouraged seeing that they are not motivated to pray. Clov realizes that praying is such a false hope that they try it in vain. Finally, Hamm speaks for them all: they cannot accomplish praying because God does not exist. Hamm tells Clov when he is abo*ut to leave:* "You prayed- *(Pause. He corrects himself.)* You CRIED for night; it comes-" (*EG* 57). Hamm thinks that one does not gain anything through prayer, and the world operates on its own accord anyway. Hamm pronounces his final judgment on God: "The bastard! He doesn't exist" (*EG* 38).

Nagg's story also tells their discontent about the situation of the world. When a tailor has not been able to sew a pair of trousers in three months, the customer gets angry with the tailor and compares the trousers with the world: "In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world…And you are not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months" (*EG* 16). The tailor replies to him: "But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look – (*disdainful gesture, disgustedly*) – at the world- (*Pause*.) and look- (*loving gesture, proudly*) – at my TROUSERS! (*EG* 16). The story compares the horror of God's creation, the world, with the beauty of man's creation, the trousers, which is the indication of God's failure.

2.4. Uncertainty and Duality of Self Identity

Within the general atmosphere of indefiniteness in *Hamlet*, Hamlet embodies a protagonist whose self-identity is uncertain. Throughout the play, he has plenty of introspections about himself; he questions how and what he feels on each occasion. When Hamlet assigns himself the mission of redressing the problems that he encounters, he also questions himself, his mind, his soul and his heart. In *Hamlet*, "we are confronted with a projection of a psychological reality"; his desires, fears, and doubts are all disclosed (Esslin 417). Shakespeare created a self-doubting character with Hamlet. These doubts and uncertainties produce a dual personality in Hamlet. His "personality is seen…as a mosaic of impulses and feelings" (Paolucci 235). What he tries to answer is one of the most basic existential questions; *who am I?* , the one that Beckett struggles to find out the answer for his deep existential

anguish. In quest for the fundamental existential question, two different Hamlets have been put onto the stage. The one that is thoughtful by nature and that questions each and every issue from as many different angles as possible, and the other Hamlet who can act impulsively without generating any plan. The duality in his identity makes Hamlet waver between different course of action and inaction.

The thinking and questioning Hamlet has doubts about everything, the circumstances that he experiences, the people that he is surrounded by, and the moral values that are not clear enough to be effective: "From the first line, 'Who's there?' (1.1.1), this play concerns identity. Hamlet's primary dilemma is that of every human being: given this time and place and these circumstances, how is he to respond? What is his role in the world? What is his responsibility?" (Cahn 69). His dilemma is overwhelming. He has difficulty in setting his role within this complicated world. He cannot help vacillating between ideas because

> they shift constantly, like colours in a kaleidoscope, and from every perspective they may be interpreted differently. At many moments Hamlet tries to establish certainty about how and where he fits. Thus we along with Hamlet ask questions that lead to other questions that lead to still other questions. The answers grow ever more difficult to ascertain. (Cahn 69)

Trying to find a way to act amid uncertainties, he appears as a "double image" (Paolucci 235). The first Hamlet with his "soliloquies is driven by a kind of 'floating anxiety' which is never fully understood or defined" (Paolucci 235).

The first Hamlet contemplates over the events that he experiences. He broods over his grief after his father's death, which seems excessive. He discusses the difference between the genuine grief and the seeming one:

> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, motes, shapes of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play, (1.2. 78)

His mother advises him not to mourn for his father's death too long because death is a natural occurrence for her. Hamlet explains to his mother that his outward appearance, such as black clothes or tears, is not enough to show his grief. Anyone can play the part of a grieving man. "But [he has] that within which passes show, /These but the trappings and the suits of woe" (1.2.85). Hamlet feels even deeper anguish than the appearance can show, yet he cannot name it.

The thinking Hamlet emerges, especially, in his soliloquies. The Hamlet of the soliloquies experiences "a psychological paralysis"; he is anxious about the meaning of life, the place of men in the cosmic picture and the purpose of heroic commitment (Paolucci 235). He thinks about the position, motives and features of man in the world:

> Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and god-like reason
> To fust in us unused. (4.4.35)

Hamlet thinks that God has furnished human beings with the ability to think and reason, which human beings should use to assess both the past and the future; they should not let it rot by not using it. However, this thinking capacity in Hamlet does not help him when it comes to action for taking revenge. Hamlet does not want to kill the King at the moment of praying but he plans to:

> Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent,
> When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
> Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,
> At game, a-swearing, or about some act,
> That has no relish of salvation in't, (3.3.88)

His rational thinking does not produce results, but his impulsive nature does. He envies Fortinbras, whose actions he considers as "heroic commitments". Fortinbras can take great risks even for a small piece of land for the sake of his honour:

> Rightly to be great
> Is not to stir without great argument,
> But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
> When honour's at the stake (4.4.51)

While Hamlet is good at contemplating and reasoning, he cannot use his reasoning capacity to act. He wastes the God-given ability of thinking. He makes ample promises to act, "O, from this time forth / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth" (4.5. 63); yet he is severely hampered in keeping his promises. He keeps moving from "high resolution to relapsing doubts" (Hapgood 132).

Hamlet cannot identify himself with the roles that have been set for him.

> Hamlet spends much of the play bemoaning the fact that he being asked to play roles that he can never quite believe in. The play presents him as always non-identical to any part supposed to define him. He is the [non]-revenger in a revenge play, the [non]-heir to the throne, the [non]-lover of the heroine, the [non]-son to [non] –father. (Palfrey 281)

His constant self analysis does not eliminate his confusion about his identity. He questions himself whether he is the man for the job or "a rogue and peasant", "a coward", a "pigeon-livered" man, "an ass", or a whore who "unpack[s] [his] heart with words" (2.2.533…569). He wonders whether he is a beast whose "chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed?" since he neglects his duty to his father's command (4.4.33). His questioning ends up in self accusations, and self-degrading; he portrays a voluble protagonist, who does not stop accusing and insulting himself. Hamlet is not very successful in the roles he sets for himself, either; that is playing the roles of

> a fool, a comedian, an actor/director/playwright, a preacher, an assassin, a philosopher, a clown, a fencing knight, and, in his own estimation, a 'drab' (whore). He is and he is not each such type; he is the aggregate of them all and none of them at all. (Palfrey 281)

His "antic disposition" (1.5.172) aroused Claudius' suspicions. The performance of his *play* ended up chaotically. His philosophical renderings prevented him from becoming an assassin. He got wounded fatally in the fencing match. The confusion of his roles made him more agonized and self-alienated.

This Hamlet is also genteel, and a humanist; he can apologize for his wrongdoings when he composes himself. He asks for Laertes' forgiveness before the fencing

match. He accuses “an enemy within, an enemy bearing his own name” of killing Laertes’ father (Leggatt 80). He implies the duality in his character:

> What I have done
> That might your nature, honour and exception
> Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
> Was’t Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.
> If Hamlet from himself be ta’en away,
> And when he’s not himself does wrong Laertes,
> Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
> Who does it then? His madness. If’t be so,
> Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong’d;
> His madness is poor Hamlet’s enemy. (5.2.216)

Hamlet defines his impulsive state as his madness. He is aware of the fact that he may not have acted in the same way if he had not been forced to react immediately when he killed Polonius. “There are in fact two Hamlets, one of whom has wronged Laertes, and one of whom has not” (Leggatt 81). The Hamlet that killed Polonius and the one that is asking for forgiveness are quite different from each other. In this duality, Hamlet’s identity becomes blurred and moves to the realm of uncertainty.

The second Hamlet “of the outer action is energetic and ready for action – all but the one deed which the ghost has asked him to perform” (Paolucci 235). The other Hamlet, contrary to the first one, acts immediately and impulsively. Throughout the play, Hamlet is observed behaving in both ways alternately. When Hamlet sees the alleged ghost of his father for the first time, he decides to follow the Ghost in order to talk to him privately. Horatio and Marcellus try to prevent Hamlet from meeting the Ghost alone, lest it may be an evil spirit. Yet, Hamlet rashly opposes them as he wants to talk to the Ghost: “By heaven, I’ll make a ghost of him that lets me!” (1.4.85). In such occasions, when he has to act immediately, and without having time to think, Hamlet tends to behave impetuously. When the Ghost assigns him an unexpected task, he displays an impulsive and decisive attitude:

> Haste me to know’t, that I with wings as swift
> As meditation or the thoughts of love,
> May sweep to my revenge. (1.5. 29)

Hamlet is determined to follow the orders of the Ghost: "And thy commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and volume of my brain" (1.5.102). He bears the responsibility of rectifying the wrongdoings in the Danish court willfully and bravely. When his contemplating mood remembers his task, he feels decisive enough to "drink hot blood" (3.2.378). He even declares that his "thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth" (4.4.64).

This Hamlet "makes impossible demands of his mother and repudiates the girl who was to be his bride, for no apparent reason" (Paolucci 236). He wants his mother to "go not to [his] uncle's bed, / [and] Assume a virtue if [she has] it not" (3.4.159). He also rejects his girlfriend without giving any reason to her: "You should not have believed me, … I loved you not" (3.1.117). However, when he sees Ophelia's funeral procession, he cannot control himself, and comes out of hiding. Seeing Laertes embrace Ophelia's dead body in her grave, Hamlet jumps into the grave and has a row with Laertes. He becomes, once more, a passionate man, challenging Laertes to prove his love for Ophelia:

> I lov'd Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
> Could not with all their quantity of love
> Make up my sum. What will thou do for her? (5.1.259)

Then he lists some atrocious deeds that he would do to prove his love; he would even "be buried quick with her" (5.1.269). The congregation becomes really worried about his mad act; the King asks Horatio to look after Hamlet. He describes the duality in his identity:

> For though I am not splenitive and rash,
> Yet have I in me something dangerous,
> Which let thy wiseness fear; (5.1.251)

Although he is not hot-tempered, he may go into rage when he is agitated.

Hamlet explains this limitation to his identity in his famous *recorder speech*. He asks Guildenstern to play a pipe. Guildenstern does not know how to play it, so he refuses to play; but Hamlet forces the issue:

> Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass- and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me. (3.2.352)

Hamlet knows that he is under close investigation, but "Hamlet himself hates being interpreted" (Leggatt 62).

This Hamlet can act on occasions that need instantaneous reactions. Hamlet could easily kill Polonius thinking that he is eavesdropping in his mother's closet. Gertrude is shocked that her son can commit such "a rash and bloody deed" (3.4.26). Hamlet also "emerges as a shrewd Machiavellian realist who can quickly size up the treachery of his erstwhile friends" (Paolucci 236). When he secretly intercepts the letter his friends are to take to the English King, he learns about the wicked plan on his life. So, he does not hesitate to exchange the letters with the ones he writes ordering their deaths. "He is not a master of his acts; occasion dictates them; he cannot plan a murder, must improvise it" (Taine in Jump 34). The impulsive Hamlet "does not procrastinate, does not brood about what is to be done, does not have pangs of conscience about what he does" (Paolucci 236). Feeling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as threats to his own life, he was able to send them to their deaths with the spur-of-the-moment decision. He justifies his action, putting the blame on them:

> Why, man, they did make love to this employment.
> They are not near my conscience, their defeat
> Does by their own insinuation grow (5.2.57)

Hamlet finds it difficult to define his identity. When others try to figure out who he is, he gets even more frustrated because that brings another definition to his identity.

Hamlet finally kills Claudius at the end of the play, but not because of remembering to fulfill the Ghost's command. He witnesses his mother's death before his eyes, which is traumatic enough for him. Gertrude's dying words, "The drink, the drink! I am poison'd" (5.2.297), pushes him into a rage. Then Laertes exposes the plan Claudius has engineered with Laertes to kill Hamlet: "the King, the King's to blame"

(5.2.307). What is more, Hamlet is already wounded by Laertes' poisoned sword. In a violent rush, he attacks Claudius and stabs him with the same sword. The brief sentence, "Then, venom, to thy work" (5.2.309), and the simple stage direction, "*wounds the King*" (5.2.309) present Hamlet's last unpremeditated act. As Hamlet is about to die, he is worried about his identity:

> O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
> Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me! (5.2.332)

He wants Horatio to stay alive and "report [him] and [his] cause aright / To the unsatisfied" (5.2.326) and also to "tell [Fortinbras], with th'occurrents more or less / Which have solicited" (5.2. 345). He wants his story to be revealed when he is about to die. With two distinct identities,

> Hamlet marks the turning point in the history of dramatic characterization. We see for the first time the integrated or seemingly-integrated character collapse in slow stages before us through an ever more intense oscillation between what it is and what appears to be. (Paolucci 238)

Throughout the play, Hamlet's character has been disjoined. The thinking man and the raging man have not reconciled. In Hamlet, the two contrasting identities is the trademark of the Absurd (Paolucci 237).

Beckett and Shakespeare occupy a similar ground. Beckett's characters, like Shakespeare's are uncertain about their self identities. Much of the information about the characters has been denied; they do not have any background information about themselves, such as surnames, families, or jobs. They are conscious of their selves and their uncertainty. They cannot answer many basic questions about themselves; how long they have been together or how they have been passing their time so far. They are presented as "human archetypes shrouded in perpetual mystery" (Esslin 417). Presenting merely the place of man in a universe full of dilemmas and plights is "the element that the Theater of the Absurd has tried to make the core of its dramatic convention" (417). Beckett's characters look into themselves, their hopelessness, and disconsolateness.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon cannot be sure anything about themselves as they are amnesiac. They are uncertain about their existence and their past, they cannot even decide on what they did a day before. While trying to find out more about Godot's identity, Estragon asks a crucial question about their identity:

> ESTRGON: Where do we come in?
> VLADIMIR: Come in?
> ESTRAGON: Take your time.
> VLADIMIR: Come in? On our hands and knees.
> ESTRAGON: As bad as that? (*WFG* 19)

They do not have a direct answer even to such a fundamental question. Vladimir takes his time in order to build a past for Estragon. He finds out that when they came into the world they were not in the upright position. They have been in the lowest level of existence since they were born. They keep nourishing themselves with carrots and turnips, grown in the mud, just like them (*WFG* 19). Estragon asks another question:

> ESTRAGON: We've lost our rights?"
> VLADIMIR: (*distinctly*). We got rid of them. *Silence. They remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the knees.*
> ESTRAGON: (feebly). We're not tied? (*Pause.)* We're not-
> …
> ESTRAGON: I'm asking you if we're tied.
> VLADIMIR: Tied? (*WFG* 19…20)

Vladimir announces that they have no rights, which makes them uneasy. Since their "memory is defective, amnesia heightens their anxiety" (Worton 72). To be able to justify that they have rights they check whether they are tied by the arms and the legs or not. "*Waiting for Godot* is no longer a play but a condition of life" (Schneider in Cohn 13).

The simplicity of the play is quite deceptive, in that they cannot even themselves be sure about their own existence and identities. They are everybody, "Adam, Abel, Cain" (*WFG* 83), or "Albert" (*WFG* 91), which indicates their identity problem. When Vladimir acknowledges his friend's presence "So there you are again", Estragon answers "Am I?" (*WFG* 9), which is "an amusing yet oddly ontological

response that subverts the solidity of presence and further feeds our doubt about the 'reality' of this dramatic situation" (Graver 25).

In *Endgame*, Hamm and Clov have a vague idea about their identities. Hamm questions Clov about Clov's past:

> HAMM: Do you remember when you came here?
> CLOV: No. Too small, you told me.
> HAMM: Do you remember your father?
> CLOV: (*wearily.*) Same answer.
> …
> HAMM: It was I was a father to you.
> CLOV: Yes. (*He looks at Hamm fixedly.*) You were that to me.
> HAMM: My house a home for you.
> CLOV: Yes. (*He looks about him.)* This was that for me. (*EG* 27)

As Clov was too small to be able to remember his father or his previous home, he has to depend on what Hamm composes for him. If he knew about his past, he would form a clearer identity for himself. However, Hamm, too, is doubtful about his identity. He "*proudly*" (*EG* 27) compares himself with Clov: "But for me, (*gesture towards himself*) no father. But for Hamm, (*gesture towards surroundings*) no home" (*EG* 27). Hamm dispels the existence of his own father, who is alive and in the same room with him, which gives him an indeterminate identity. In both Beckett plays, his characters are "in an infinite quest of their inner essence" (Lamont 205).

Vladimir and Estragon's defective memories make them uncertain about their past. "Beckett's creatures have a prodigious talent for forgetting even their own names. Every statement made by the Beckettian voice is likely to be invented rather than remembered" (Federman 105). They try to construct a past for themselves:

> ESTRAGON: Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhone?
> VLADIMIR: We were grape-harvesting.
> ESTRAGON: You fished me out.
> VLADIMIR: That's all dead and buried.
> ESTRAGON: My clothes dried in the sun.
> VLADIMIR: There's no good harking back on that. Come on. (*WFG* 53)

In this uncertain period of time, they want desperately to prove their existence by remembering fragmentary stories of their past, so that they can form an identity that

they can cling onto. If they can prove their existence, they can also prove their identities.

Beckett's characters have the existential need for the other to mirror, that is to define, their identities. Hamm tries to make Clov resemble himself; in that way he can define his identity:

> HAMM: One day you'll be blind like me. You'll be sitting here, a speck in the void, in the dark, forever, like me. (*Pause*.) One day you'll say to yourself, I'm tired, I'll sit down, and you'll go and sit down. Then you'll say, I'm hungry, I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up. You'll say, I shouldn't have sat down, but since I have I'll sit on a little longer, then I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up and you won't get anything to eat. (*Pause*.) (*EG* 25-6)

If Clov becomes blind and crippled like Hamm one day, Clov will be reflecting what Hamm is, and that should prove Hamm's identity.

> HAMM: You'll look at the wall a while, then you'll say, I'll close my eyes, perhaps have a little sleep, after that I'll feel better, and you'll close them. And when you open them again there'll be no wall any more. (*Pause*.) Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. (*Pause*.) Yes, one day you'll know what it is, you'll be like me, except that you won't have anyone with you. (*EG* 25-6)

First Hamm gives Clov his own identity, then takes it away by pointing out that Hamm will not be there to give Clov a mirror-identity; then Clov will be nobody, but just "a bit of grit". Clov's reply, "It's not certain" (*EG* 26), negates Hamm's wish to assert his identity by creating the same one for Clov.

Pozzo asks Vladimir and Estragon what they think of him:

> POZZO: How did you find me […] Good? Fair? Middling? Poor? Positively bad? […] I have such a need of encouragement. (*WFG* 38)

He is anxious for them to define him so that he will know who he is, but does not get the answer he needs. In spite of all their efforts to make an identity for themselves, the Beckett's characters remain without clear definitions: Pozzo asks "Who are you?", Vladimir answers, "We are men" (*WFG* 82). They have no other definitions for themselves. Hamlet, asks what being just "a man" entails, "If his chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed?" (4.4.32…34). His answer is: "A beast, no more" (4.4.34). The existence of Beckett's characters is reminiscent of Hamlet's definition of *man as beast*, especially that of Vladimir and Estragon who "crawled in the mud" (*WFG* 61) like animals.

CHAPTER 3

INERTIA

The theatre of the Absurd poses fundamental existential questions of man. Absurdist plays spring from "the disillusionments and loss of certitude" (Hinchliffe 10). Once the recognizable conditions or values have been annihilated, man is lost. The senselessness or removal of former ideals leads him into immobility and inertia. Lethargy and inaction take hold of him and his life. He is entrapped in a vicious circle; so all his actions turn out to be arrested and in vain. The language becomes an illusory vehicle to promote speech. Finally, his actions are paralyzed, and his speech communicates nothing.

3.1. Futility

Hamlet as a harbinger of the theatre of the Absurd portrays a man with existential anxieties. Hamlet has been disillusioned by unexpected disconcerting events of his father's death and his mother's remarriage. His previous tranquil and untroubled life has been shattered, and the values that he believes in prove to be useless. He tries to solve the mystery of the essence of life, love and death, which triggers his anxiety even more. He finds out that human endeavor is futile to put things right. He surrenders himself to inertia and inactivity. Even though Hamlet appears to be resolute in avenging his father's death, he does not take any action towards his aim. He wastes his time on feigning to be a lunatic, or promising himself to act, or accusing himself of not acting. Hamlet generates most of the non-communication with too many repetitions in his speeches. Yet, the problems of the play remain unresolved. In his soliloquies, he keeps expressing his decisiveness, yet when he does not act, all his promises turn out to be futile.

Hamlet's life has been transformed after his father's death, when his mother got married to his uncle. He realizes that his parents' love was not as long-lasting as he

has thought of. As all his values about love and loyalty in a marriage have been overwhelmed, he loses his zest for life: “How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!” (1.2.133). He sees all the blessings of the world as useless and fruitless. He regards the world as “an unweeded garden / That grows to seed … [which] possess[es] … merely ... things rank and gross in nature” (1.2.135…137). While he has this negative attitude to the world he lives in, the watchmen and Horatio inform him about his father’s Ghost’s wandering at nights. He gets perplexed, and he construes his father’s “spirit in arms!” as a “foul play” and he senses that “all is not well” (1.2.257…258). When Hamlet sees his father’s Ghost, who wants to talk to Hamlet privately, Horatio and the watchmen try to stop Hamlet to follow the Ghost in case he harms Hamlet. Hamlet is already disillusioned and weary of life. He does not value his life as he cannot do anything to rectify the wrongdoings that he has witnessed so far: “I do not set my life at a pin’s fee,” (1.4.65). He does not fear that the Ghost may harm him since his life is futile in a world where love and loyalty are already dead. “And for [Hamlet’s] soul, what can [the Ghost] do to that / Being a thing immortal as itself” (1.4.66). He is not afraid of his soul being harmed or dominated by the evil as a man’s soul cannot be destroyed.

Hamlet is shocked to learn of his uncle’s villainy from the Ghost. When finally the Ghost assigns him the task of dealing with this villain, Hamlet finds out that what he has busied himself with so far is all in vain and unproductive. So he decides to “wipe away all trivial fond records, / All saws of books all forms, all pressures past” from his memory (1.5. 99). He makes a special note “That one may smile and smile, and be a villain” (1.5.108). Now, he has learned that there is also villainy in his wretched world, and he has to replace this new information with his former learning. When he meets Horatio after the Ghost leaves him, he implies how their former beliefs are useless in his present situation: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” (1.5.166). His former learning is no use in understanding the murder of a brother.

Since the encounter with the Ghost, Hamlet’s has been uneasy about not having taken any action towards his revenge. He feels more alienated and isolated from the people “man delights not [him]”; the world, “this most excellent canopy the air, this

brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, …[as] a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours" (2.2. 295…304) no longer gives him pleasure. His former feelings about the world as "excellent" or "majestical" are overcome by the ones that describe their emptiness. He feels that his hands are tied as all human endeavors are abortive in such a world. He cannot even end his sufferings by committing suicide. His attempt to do that would be in vain because of the uncertainty and "the dread of something after death" (3.1.78). His ideal world has been shattered with his uncle's evilness. He should have reacted to the evil long ago. However, Hamlet chooses not to act despite his promises to do so all through the play. "He is overwhelmed by the futility of any gesture he might make" (Crocker 283). He cannot respond to the evil by doing the same kind of evil as he comes to realize that all acts of man are worthless. Attributing no value to anything in his life, he believes that his charge, too, has no use or has no value just like other things in his life.

Hamlet comes to the conclusion that there is even a loftier power than all human beings that shapes their lives. Thus, man's exertions to plan his life are all vain since there is a sublime being that is mightier than him. Hamlet happens to kill Polonius in his mother's closet. Although he reasons that he "took [Polonius] for [his] better", and he really wanted to kill Claudius (3.4.33), later he admits that there is a mightier power who controls or shapes his actions:

> I do repent; but heaven hath pleased it so,
> To punish me with this, and this with me,
> That I must be their scourge and minister. (3.4.174)

Hamlet not only punishes Polonius for being an interfering busybody, but also he does harm to himself, by committing a great sin by taking life. "What further complicates Hamlet's predicament is that not only does he react to his world, but his world reacts to him" (Cahn 69).

Towards the end of the play, Hamlet surrenders himself to the divine power as he becomes sure that he cannot control the things in his life. He finds it bootless to insist on planning his life himself: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew

them how we will" (5.2.10). He even appreciates acting without thinking sometimes: "Our indiscretion sometime serves us well, / When our deep plots do pall," (5.2.8). His mind is freer when he does not plan for action, as he will not hold himself responsible for the outcome of his action. "These statements clearly emphasize the futility of our planning, of our opposing, of our striving for our ends" (Crocker 302). He notices that "he does not need to provide his own scenarios; he is part of the providential plan" (Charney 75). Hamlet explains to Horatio how he has reached such knowledge on his way to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet accidentally finds Claudius' sealed letter to England that asks for Hamlet's death, and he feels "being thus be-netted round by villainies –" and "they had begun the play" (5.2.29…31). He replaces the letter with a new one he has written to ask for Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's deaths. "Even in that was heaven ordinant" (5.2.48). He has suddenly noticed that he has his "father's signet" in his purse to seal his new letter. Hamlet has had a chance to generate a spontaneous plan with the help of divinity. He has realized that it would have been impossible for him to devise a plan to overcome both the King and his servants, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, without this help.

Hamlet's long journey, through which he has led an incessant introspection as to how he is feeling, thinking or behaving at any given moment, prevents him from realizing his task. "Hamlet interrupts the chaotics pattern of life" rather than accept the helplessness of human beings, who are not able to redress the absurdities in life" (Demastes 141). On the one hand, he wills "to set [the problems] right" (1.5.189). On the other, he becomes as vicious as Claudius, who wants Hamlet's "head should be struck off" (5.2.25). Then he is disgusted with life and he "devoutly [wishes] to die to sleep!" (3.1.64). Also, he does not like man any longer who is "noble in reason, … infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god: the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals…quintessence of dust" (2.2.299…303). He has an aversion for the world and its people including himself. He loathes himself; he calls himself "A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, [who peaks] / Like John-a-dreams" (2.2.550). Finally, Hamlet surrenders to his fate, and generates indifference towards his task and everything in his life. "The result is the feeling of futility, which we can see

growing throughout the play. Action loses purpose, direction and meaning if human beings are condemned to fluctuate endlessly between baseness and unsuccessful idealism" (Crocker 301).When he is invited to an ill-starred fencing match, Hamlet accepts to participate in it without dispute; he comes to realize that "there is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come – if it be not to come, it will be now – if it be not now, yet it will come" (5.2.205). Hamlet lets his task rest, and he decides not to make subtle plans any more. All of his questions and his introspections become meaningless towards the end of the play.

> Only when Hamlet accepts the paradoxical and allows himself to fall into the sweeps and patterns of a spontaneous nature fully capable of self-organization and independent regeneration, of a nature capable of rising and organizing out of its own disorder, only then does Hamlet fulfill his "destiny". The turn occurs late, in act 5. (Demastes 142)

He is calm and ready to accept his end. In his own words, "Readiness is all" (5.2.208).

Beckett's characters all suffer from inertia, due to the want of reasonable and valid motives to promote action. They find every action inconsequential and they cannot see a genuine incentive to act. They have already come to the conclusion that human endeavour is vain; it cannot initiate a new frame of reference. For Estragon there is "[n]othing to be done" with the very first sentence, and from then on all their acts are nonsensical (*WFG* 9). Vladimir agrees with Estragon: "I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (*He broods, musing on the struggle*)" (*WFG* 9). They know that their situation will not improve as "[t]he essential does not change" and there is "[n]othing to be done" (*WFG* 21).

Beckett's characters generate a series of activities to make their lives meaningful. Hamm wants others to listen to his story:

> HAMM: Do you want to listen to my story?
> CLOV: No.
> HAMM: Ask my father if he wants to listen to my story.

CLOV: He's asleep.
HAMM: Wake him. (*EG* 39)

He wants his existence to be witnessed. He makes unrealistic and hopeless plans for the future. He suggests to Clov: "Let's go from here, the two of us! South! You can make a raft and the currents will carry us away, far away, to other…mammals! " (*EG* 25). When Clov does not want to take part in Hamm's plan, Hamm revises his plan: "Alone, I'll embark alone! Get working on that raft immediately. Tomorrow I'll be gone forever" (*EG* 25). Hamm is a *non-can-er*; he is a handicapped man, who cannot move or see. Hamm's effort to generate a plan for the future is of no earthly use, so he stops talking about his future, and goes back to his daily routine: "Is it not yet the time for my painkiller?" (*EG* 25).

These characters are engaged in activities, which serve only to fill in the time. Vladimir reminds Estragon that "[b]oots must be taken off everyday" (*WFG* 10). Estragon finds it hard to take off his boots, yet he goes on pulling them. When finally he succeeds in taking off his boots, he "*looks inside it, turns it upside down, shakes it, looks on the ground to see if anything has fallen out, finds nothing*" (*WFG* 11). There is nothing to show to Vladimir, so Vladimir immediately suggests to him to "try and put it on again" (*WFG* 11). They occupy themselves by taking off and putting on a hat. "*Estragon takes Vladimir's hat. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Estragon puts Vladimir's hat in place of his own which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes Estragon's hat*…" (*WFG* 71). The same exercises go on many times without being able to reach a fruitful end.

Though these activities are inconsequential, the characters continue until they find an alternative to replace them to fill their time. Vladimir without delay invents another one. They "play at Pozzo and Lucky"; while Vladimir acts as Lucky, Estragon acts as Pozzo (*WFG* 72). Their role pay goes on until they decide to "abuse each other" (*WFG* 75). Engendering unavailing activities, they are doomed to create new farcical ones to fill in the time. When they are visited by Pozzo and Lucky they are happy because "that passed the time…so rapidly" (WFG 48). However, since their acts have not achieved anything worthwhile but filled in the time, they ask: "What do we do now?" (*WFG* 48).

Nagg and Nell struggle in vain to make a move towards each other:

> NAGG: Kiss me.
> NELL: We can't.
> NAGG: Try. (*Their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again*.)
> NELL: Why this farce, day after day? (*EG* 10)

Their efforts always have the same result, with no successful action. Hamm wants Clov to "bring [him] under the window" since he wants to "feel the light on [his] face" (*EG* 43). When he does not feel "a ray of sunshine" or does not hear the sea, he wants Clov to change the window (*EG* 44). Yet, he already knows that "it's not worth opening it" as it does not differ no matter from which window he is looking out (*EG* 45). Their lives are made up of superfluous actions. As Hamlet has identified, they are "crawling between earth and heaven" (3.1. 128). Estragon, too, is aware of their hopeless condition: "All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud!" (*WFG* 61).

Beckett's characters invent activities to dispel their passive state. Estragon and Vladimir decide to hang themselves "while waiting" (*WFG* 17). They think that "it'd give [them] an erection" (*WFG* 17). Yet they cannot manage even hanging themselves from the tree. Beckett calls their attempts *the experience of a non-can-er*. They cannot take any progressive actions as they are still waiting for Godot and they are tied to Godot:

> ESTRAGON: I'm asking you if we're tied.
> VLADIMIR: Tied?
> ESTRAGON: Ti-ed.
> VLADIMIR: How do you mean tied?
> ESTRAGON: Down.
> VLADIMIR: But to whom. By whom?
> ESTRAGON: To your man.
> VLADIMIR: To Godot? Tied to Godot? What an idea! No question of it. (*Pause*.) For the moment. (*WFG* 21)

Not having achieved anything, immediately after their senseless actions, yet again they ask: "Well? What do we do?" (*WFG* 18).

Hamm and Clov also generate some empty routines. Each time Clov tells Hamm that "I'll leave you, I have things to do", Hamm asks "In your kitchen?" (*EG* 9). What Clov does is to go to his kitchen and wait for Hamm to call him (*EG* 2). As soon as Hamm wakes up, he wants Clov to make him ready for sleep:

> HAMM: Get me ready, I'm going to bed.
> CLOV: I've just got you up.
> HAMM: And what of it? (*EG* 3)

Hamm sees the futility of his getting up as nothing changes in their lives in every single day. At another instance, Hamm tries to make Clov and his parents pray, yet he backs down "abandoning his attitude" and exclaims "Nothing doing!" (*EG* 38). They all realize the futility of doing anything. Lucky's endeavour to try to carry all the baggage effectively proves to be worthless as well. Pozzo wants to get rid of Lucky though he accepts that Lucky is a good slave: "He imagines that when I see him indefatigable I'll regret my decision. Such is his miserable scheme. As though I were short of slaves!" (*WFG* 31). Pozzo does not state any reason why he wants to get rid of him. Lucky struggles in vain to appear hardworking to Pozzo because he may be thrown away at any moment as Pozzo "can't bear" him any longer (*WFG* 34). Lucky starts to cry when Pozzo tells Vladimir and Estragon that he does not want Lucky anymore. To console Lucky, Pozzo suggests to Estragon to help him wipe his eyes. Yet, when "*Estragon approaches Lucky and makes to wipe his eyes [,] Lucky kicks him violently in the shins. Estragon drops the handkerchief, recoils, staggers about the stage howling with pain*" (*WFG* 32). It is useless to help somebody who is in need of help as the world is unsafe and one cannot rely on others.

In a barren world, even the act of a tree producing leaves becomes a futile effort because Estragon and Vladimir do not recognize the potential of the tree:

> VLADIMIR: The tree, look at the tree.
> ESTRAGON: Was it not there yesterday?
> VLADIMIR: Yes, of course it was there. Do you not remember?
> […]
> ESTRAGON: You dreamt it.

VLADIMIR: Is it possible that you've forgotten already? (*WFG* 60-61)

It is vain for them to have an environment full of hope as it does not mean anything to them. Vladimir has another look at the tree, he notices that "yesterday evening it was all black and bare. And now it's covered with leaves" (*WFG* 66). However, Estragon "see[s] nothing" (*WFG* 65). All Vladimir can utter is a "half-remembered fragmented [proverb]…'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life. ' Not surprisingly, Vladimir forgets the heart (symbol of life and emotion) and the tree (symbol of life and desire)" (Worton 77). Beckett's world is similar to that of Hamlet's "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" (1.2.133).

3.1.1 Speech and Non-communication

The theatre of the Absurd has been called many different names, one of which is "the drama of non-communication" as it presents the impossibility of genuine communication between people (Hinchliffe 2). It mirrors the huge gap between the world and the man who finds it hard to define the world with his language. While dealing with the problem of communication, it "rel[ies] on language enormously" (Hinchliffe 3). Language cannot be a reliable means for communication as it may not reflect the genuine message or the intention of the speaker. Therefore, it is hard to be able to have a healthy communication. In absurdist plays, "what *happens* on the stage transcends, and often contradicts the *words* spoken by the characters" (Esslin 26). As an early example of the theatre of the Absurd, *Hamlet* also deals with the problems of non-communication due to the inadequacy of language.

In *Hamlet*, words are thought to be futile and not to be depended on. Horatio does not believe in the watchmen who claim they have seen the Ghost of the dead King Hamlet, and thinks that "'t will not appear" (1.1.29). They have struggled hard to make Horatio believe that they have seen the Ghost: "And let us once again assail your ears, / That are so fortified against our story, / What we have two nights seen." (1.1.31). Horatio finds it hard to rely on the others' words, so he prefers to test their words himself by joining them in the watch. Also for a philosophy student it is hard to believe in ghosts. Similarly Polonius is also hesitant to depend on the words rather

than the actions. He warns his daughter not to believe in Hamlet's words of love as words are not reliable enough to direct one's actions. Polonius is aware of the fact "how prodigal the soul / Lends the tongue vows." (1.3.116). The Queen is also suspicious of words. When Polonius comes to give the news that the reason for Hamlet's lunacy is his love towards Ophelia, and produces a love letter written by Hamlet as evidence, she cannot believe what the words convey: "Came this from Hamlet to her?" (2.2.114).

Another character who does not trust the reliability of words is Claudius. When Laertes wants to avenge his father's death, to provoke Laertes more against Hamlet, Claudius asks Laertes what he will do "to show [him]self [his] father's son in deed / More than in words" (4.7.125). It is not enough for Claudius just to hear that Laertes will "cut his throat i' th' church" (4.7.127), he has to act. With the fencing match he will have to take his revenge and prove his love and filial duty towards his father. Claudius himself is aware of the futility of words without taking any action. While praying for forgiveness for his sin, he senses that: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go." (3.3.97). As long as he possesses the Queen and the throne, for which he committed murder, his words of forgiveness are all in vain. "Hamlet and Claudius both use words to declare the emptiness of the words" (Leggatt 65).

Hamlet himself is also sceptical about the trustworthiness and the validity of words. On feigning to be a lunatic, he encounters Polonius while he is walking in the lobby. "When Polonius asks Hamlet what he is reading, he replies 'Words, words, words' (2.1.l91), as if to express their futility" (Norford 562). Although Hamlet portrays a voluble protagonist, he is conscious of the ineffectiveness of words. When he happens to see Ophelia's funeral in the graveyard, he bursts into anger. Yet, he knows very well that these kinds of shows are far from exhibiting genuine love. By the same token, he thinks that uttering assertive words to display their love for Ophelia is fruitless as well: "Nay, an thou'lt mouth, / I'll rant as well as thou." (5.1.273). "Hamlet distrusts words…for equivocation plays with truth … In Hamlet's world (and indeed in Shakespeare's) equivocation is not a trick of language, it is *the* language of that world-a world in which the relations between within and without,

between the truth and the sign, the meaning and the word, have suffered a formidable disturbance" (Heller in Norford 562). Words cannot be effective devices to be able to signify actions in a world full of absurdities. Hamlet has difficulty in believing in the words of others, so he has decided to test the Ghost's words with a play. Thereby, "murder, though it have no tongue, will speak / With most miraculous organ" (2.2.577). He plans to gauge Claudius' guilt with his reaction to the play, not with the Ghost's words. Words are useless for Hamlet. He compares them to air when Claudius asks him how he feels: "Excellent i'faith, of the chameleon's dish, I eat the air, promise-crammed" (3.2.96). He implies that he has been given empty words, so he does not believe Claudius' promise that Hamlet is the next to the throne.

Hamlet's soliloquies "suggest, together, one long continuous monologue, the expression of some deep-rooted difficulty never fully diagnosed" (Paolucci 296). His soliloquies are the openings for Hamlet to verbalize his disturbed and vacillating mood. In the absence of his loyal friends Hamlet does not trust anyone to talk to. Yet, they do not have a consistency with his actions. "Hamlet's undirected nervous energy comes through in his obsessive need to talk: he is the precursor of Lucky and Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*" (Paolucci 297). When he notices that the alleged ghost of his father calls to him to talk privately, he feels "each petty artere in this body / As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve" (1.4.83). Similarly the Ghost also thinks that as soon as he tells how he has been killed by his brother, it "would harrow up [Hamlet's] soul, freeze [his] young blood, / Make [his] two eyes like stars start from their spheres" (1.5.16). Hamlet has been distressed by the Ghost's story, and begs his "sinews, grow not instant old, / But bear [him] stiffly up" (1.5.94). Unfortunately, these bombastic words will not find application in action. He gets angry with himself as he "like a whore [unpacks his] heart with words" (2.2.569).

Hamlet despises himself when he compares himself with the player acting Hecuba's misery so strikingly. The player, "But in a fiction, in a dream of passion" can move to act, "And all for nothing! / For Hecuba!" (2.2.535…541). However; "Hamlet attacks himself not for doing nothing, but for saying nothing, as though words, if he could use them properly, would have some value after all" (Leggatt 65-6). At the same time, he has still questions in his mind about the reliability of the Ghost's

words. He has to collect his thoughts, “About, my brains” (2.2.572) to be able to find a solution to assure himself about what the Ghost has told him.

Each one of Hamlet’s soliloquies is full of self-questioning in eloquent language; but what the words try to express is never put into application. Hamlet questions more universal and transcendental issues such as life and life after death in his soliloquy, beginning with the line, “to be or not to be”: “Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing, end them” (3.1.57). He seeks an answer for the right way to fight against the problems in the world or to end them by committing suicide. Yet, neither does he seem to fight with the troubles of life, nor does he attempt to commit suicide. In another soliloquy, Hamlet again decides on a course of action: “now could I drink hot blood, / And do such bitter business as the day / Would quake to look on” (3.2.378). However, there is no follow-up action consistent with his thoughts. Again in another soliloquy, he is hesitant to kill the King while praying: “That would be scanned: A villain kills my father, and for that / I his sole son do this same villain send / To heaven” (3.3.75). He has decided to postpone killing the King to a time when Claudius will commit sinful actions. Yet, Hamlet does not have a contingency plan to kill Claudius. In his final soliloquy, Hamlet comments on his encounter with Fortinbras’ army, and scolds himself for just talking but not doing anything: “I do not know / Why yet I live to say ‘This thing’s to do’” (4.4.41). Leggatt points out that “his offence is not just failing to do the deed, but saying he *will* do it, deferring it through speech” (66). In the closure of the soliloquy, Hamlet is again decisive that “from this time forth, / [His] thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!” (4.4.63). Nonetheless, when he does not perform any bloody action, all his promises turn out to be unproductive and clichés.

Hamlet has got a fire of speech in himself. His love for talk hinders genuine communication and it arrests the speeches of both himself and those of others, which makes the puzzles of the play remain unresolved. Hamlet’s burning speech reveals his disturbed and distressed mind about his assigned task. He cannot bring his words and actions together; in *Hamlet*, there is “a breakdown of communication between the inner and the outer worlds” (Norford 561). When Gertrude sends for Hamlet after

the performance of the play that Hamlet has organized, she is angry with him: "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended" (3.4.9). Hamlet addresses his mother with the same accusation: "Mother, you have my father much offended" (3.4.10). Hamlet does not ask his mother the reason why he has offended the King, which may generate a genuine communication between the mother and the son. Thus, with this wrong start, the whole scene develops in misunderstandings. After Hamlet kills Polonius, he hopes to have killed the King: "Is it the king?", and his mother calls it "a rash and bloody deed" (3.4.25… 26). Hamlet has had a chance to put his suspicions into words about his father's death, and his mother's remarriage, yet he elaborates on the deed: "A bloody deed – almost as bad, good mother, / As kill a king, and marry with his brother" (3.4.28). His mother becomes bewildered and exclaims, "As kill a king!" (3.4.29). He immediately turns his attention to Polonius after a short confirmation to his mother "Ay, lady, it was my word" (3.4.30). Rather than clarifying his speech to his mother, he makes a closing speech for Polonius, who has wronged enough by interfering with others' businesses.

After Hamlet kills Polonius he has a chance to stay alone with his mother. Although Hamlet has an opportunity to ask his mother what he has actually suspected, that if she has cooperated with the King to kill his father, his raging speech enforces him to form many ironical and ornate sentences when his mother asks him the reason for his rudeness to her. Hamlet explains that he suffers from

> Such an act
> That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
> Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
> From the fair forehead of an innocent love
> And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
> As false as dicers' oaths, (3.4.40)

Hamlet only defines what he is suspicious of by referring to it with many despicable words, yet he does not put a direct question to his mother. When Gertrude asks for a direct answer to her question: "Ay me, what act, / That roars so loud, and thunders in the index?", Hamlet misses his chance again as he is fully preoccupied with his mother's remarriage. He "*leads her to the portraits on the wall*" and compares his father with his uncle (3.4.52). While his father is "a combination and a form indeed, /

Where every god did seem to set his seal", his uncle is "blasting his wholesome brother" (3.4.60… 65). Being tempted by Hamlet, the Queen admits that: "Thou turn' st my eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grainéd spots / As will not leave their tinct" (3.4.89). However, Hamlet does not question or comment on these stains in her heart but he goes on trying to convince his mother that his mother's and uncle's love-making is dirty " In the rank sweat of an enseaméd bed / Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty" (3.4. 93).

After Hamlet expresses that he finds their marriage obscene, the Queen feels distressed and she gives Hamlet another chance to ask what he has suspected her of: "O speak to me no more, / These words like daggers enter in mine ears, / No more, sweet Hamlet" (3.4.93). This time, he goes on accusing his uncle of stealing the throne by killing his father: "A cutpurse of the empire and the rule, / That from a shelf the precious diadem stole / And put it in his pocket" (3.4.99). This is, once more, an oblique reference to the King's crime. When, finally, Hamlet openly calls Claudius "a murderer and a villain", he is stopped by the appearance of the Ghost (3.4.96). He cannot ask whether the Queen has cooperated with Claudius to kill Old Hamlet or not. After the Ghost's departure, Hamlet advises his mother to: "Confess yourself to heaven, / Repent what's past, avoid what is to come, / And do not spread the compost on the weeds / To make them ranker" (3.4.149). Gertrude has been distraught by Hamlet's talk and confesses to Hamlet that: "thou hast cleft my heart in twain" (3.4.156). However, Hamlet is unable to stop his torrent of speech to ask Gertrude clearly one of the main questions of the play. Hamlet keeps arresting her speech. He either talks about Polonius or gives her advice on how to behave towards Claudius. "Hamlet's excesses are quite similar to those of the protagonists of the Absurd, who pushed to the brink of consciousness, fail to communicate in those terms we all accept by force of habit. In such cases, as in Hamlet's, communication is reduced to monologue, language is splintered into a mosaic of impressions, irony takes on a tragic-comic aspect that is funny and pathetic at the same time" (Paolucci 298).

In Beckett's plays, like most absurdist plays, the characters tend to exchange words or sentences without any concern for real communication. Their aim is not to

communicate. They use language as a device to pass the time since they cannot bear silence. When they are silent they tend to think of their disconsolate or miserable situation in the universe. Language is a tool to prove their existence; when they stop talking they cannot prove that they exist. They can do anything with the language, just to avoid silence. They take refuge in the dialogue. They repeat the same lines with each other or they contradict what they have said a second before. They have verbal exercises and fights in which they tend to produce totally senseless words. However, they know that words are useless to change their hopeless situation. Words themselves create uncertainties and ambiguities.

> The central problem they pose is what language can and cannot do. Language is no longer presented as a vehicle for direct communication or as a screen through which one can see darkly the physic movements of a character. Rather it is used in all its grammatical, syntactic and – especially – intertextual force to make the reader/spectator aware of how much we depend on language and of how much we need to be wary of the codifications that language imposes upon us. (Worton 68)

In *Waiting for Godot*, the tramps utter the same lines to each other interchangeably. Estragon suffers from his boots; he has difficulty in putting on and taking them off. While Estragon is trying to take off his boots, Vladimir asks: "It hurts?" and Estragon gets furious about this question: "Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!" (*WFG* 10). Immediately after Estragon replies to Vladimir angrily, Estragon asks about Vladimir's problem with his bladder: "It hurts?" and Vladimir answers Estragon with identical lines with Estragon: "Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!" (*WFG* 10). Similarly, in *Endgame*, Hamm and Clov exchange the same lines. Once Hamm asks "Don't we laugh?" and Clov answers "I don't feel like it" (*EG* 8). Yet, at another instance, Clov asks the same question and Hamm gives the same answer (*EG* 21). Their usage of identical lines with one another is not a meaningful way of using the language. Rather than creating their own sentences through which they can express themselves, they prefer to imitate or repeat each other's sentences. Hamm and Clov also repeat the same questions and give the same answers. Clov complains about it: "You've asked me these questions millions of times" (*EG* 27). Thus, the question-answer mode never progresses into anything with meaning.

There is another device used by the characters not to answer questions, and that is either to reverse the question into an exclamation, answer with another question, or repeat the same question. Hamm asks Clov several questions about what he sees outside the window:

HAMM: No gulls?
CLOV: Gulls!
HAMM: And the horizon? Nothing on the horizon?
CLOV: What in God's name could there be on the horizon?
HAMM: The waves?
CLOV: The waves? (*EG* 22)

The method arrests speech and prevents it from developing further. One way for Beckett's characters to break silence is to find various comments on the same idea. When Vladimir and Estragon see Lucky's neck that has been hurt by the rope around it, they do not miss the opportunity to talk:

VLADIMIR: A running sore!
ESTRAGON: It's the rope.
VLADIMIR: It's the rubbing.
ESTRAGON: It's inevitable.
VLADIMIR: It's the knot.
ESTRAGON: It's the chafing. (*WFG* 25).

Although they are talking about the wound in Lucky's neck, they refer to it with as many different vocabulary items as possible. They struggle to resume their so-called conversation. They have other verbal exercises throughout the play. When they try to decide what to do while waiting for Godot, they generate a verbal exercise:

VLADIMIR: We could do our exercises.
ESTRAGON: Our movements.
VLADIMIR: Our elevations.
ESTRAGON: Our relaxations.
VLADIMIR: Our elongations.
ESTRAGON: Our relaxations.
VLADIMIR: To warm us up.
ESTRAGON: To calm us down. (*WFG* 76)

The words are more like a shopping-list than a verbal interaction. They can also create a verbal fight:

VLADIMIR: Ceremonious ape.
ESTRAGON: Punctilious pig.
VLADIMIR: Finish your phrase, I tell you!
ESTRAGON: Finish your own.
VLADIMIR: Moron!
ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's abuse each other. (*WFG* 75)

They have another round of this verbal fight, and they end up, once more, not knowing what to do with themselves: "What do we do now?" (*WFG* 76).

Beckett's plays are full of nonsensical dialogues. In *Endgame*, when Nell says that she is trying to cry, Hamm makes a totally irrelevant comment on it:

HAMM: Perhaps it's a little vein. (*Pause.)*
NAGG: What was that he said?
NELL: Perhaps it's a little vein.
NAGG: What does that mean?
NELL: That means nothing. (*EG* 15)

Hamm does not care to clarify his meaning; the words are already ambiguous and a source of uncertainties.

Estragon's and Vladimir's dialogues sometimes get very foggy, even when they talk about an insignificant issue like the taste of a carrot:

ESTRAGON: Funny, the more you eat the worse it gets.
VLADIMIR: With me just the opposite.
ESTRAGON: In other words?
VLADIMIR: I get used to the muck as I go along.
ESTRAGON: Is that the opposite?
VLADIMIR: Question of temperament.
ESTRAGON: Of character.
VLADIMIR: Nothing you can do about it.
ESTRAGON: No use struggling.
VLAIDMIR: One is what one is.
ESTRAGON: No use wriggling.
VLADIMIR: The essential doesn't change.
ESTRAGON: Nothing to be done. (*WFG 21)*

They try hard to carry on talking as long as they can initiate a new topic. When they cannot find one to blather about they construct a totally imaginary context for

talking. They meet Pozzo and Lucky for the first time, yet they talk as if they have seen them before. They try to compare Pozzo's and Lucky's former and present conditions:

> VLADIMIR: How they've changed?
> ESTRAGON: Who?
> VLADIMIR: Those two.
> ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's make a little conversation.
> VLADIMIR: Haven't they?
> ESTRAGON: What?
> VLADIMIR: Changed.
> ESTRAGON: Very likely. They all change. Only we can't. (*WFG* 48)

As Vladimir and Estragon know that talking "prevents [them] from thinking" (*WFG* 64), they try to invent as many strategies to talk as possible. They even utter words of a foreign language, which they do not really know:

> ESTRAGON: Que voulez-vous?
> VLADIMIR: I beg your pardon?
> ESTRAGON: Que voulez-vous?
> VLADIMIR: Ah! que voulez-vous. Exactly.
> *Silence.*
> ESTRAGON: That wasn't such a bad little canter.
> VLADIMIR: Yes, but now we'll have to find something else. (*WFG* 65)

As soon as they have spent their words, they feel anxious to find new ones.

Beckett's characters tend to sing songs or to tell stories to each other so as not to keep silent. When Estragon wants to tell a story of "the English man in the brothel", Vladimir does not want him to go on with the story (*WFG* 16). Yet, Estragon does not want to be silent and keeps asking Vladimir: "You wanted to speak to me? (*Silence. Estragon takes a step forward.*) You had something to say to me?" (*WFG* 16). Similarly, Nagg wants to tell a story to Nell, who does not want to listen. Nagg needs to tell the story of a tailor as he does not want to bear the silence (*EG* 16). While Nagg is telling his story, Nell is talking about the day they spent on Lake Como: "It was deep, deep. And you could see down the bottom. So white. So clean." (*EG* 16). Just like Nagg, Hamm is anxious to tell stories to be heard by the others. He keeps telling that: "It's time for my story. Do you want to listen to my story?" (*EG* 34). Although nobody listens to his story, he goes on telling it despite many

contradictions in it. He cannot make up his mind about the weather. Once it is "zero by the thermometer", then it is "fifty by the heliometer", and it becomes "a hundred by the anemometer" (*EG* 36).

Pozzo is another anxious character, who never wants to stop talking. He becomes "sincerely happy…to have met [Estragon and Vladimir]", so that he could "dally with" them for a moment (*WFG* 24). Yet, before Pozzo leaves, he confesses that "there wasn't a truth in" what he has talked so far (*WFG* 34). The characters do not care about the truthfulness of what they have said; they talk for the sake of talking. They sometimes contradict what they have just said. Vladimir and Estragon define the evening of Pozzo's arrival as "charming", or "unforgettable" at first; then after a short while, they call it "awful" or "worse than the pantomime" and "the circus hall" (*WFG* 34-5). Vladimir and Estragon want Pozzo to order Lucky to think loudly. Lucky utters a long passage of totally meaningless sentences, part of which he has heard from somewhere some time ago. Yet, Pozzo tells to the tramps that he "could listen to him for hours" (*WFG* 39). They are all happy because the dialogue, whether or not it is meaningful, "passed their time…rapidly" (*WFG* 48).

Beckett's characters have a feeling that words are futile to improve their conditions. When a Boy comes to inform the tramps about Mr. Godot's delay, Vladimir asks some questions to find out more about the Boy and Mr. Godot. Yet, Vladimir regards the Boy's answers as merely "words, words", with no meaning behind them (*WFG* 50). Vladimir's reply echoes Hamlet's musing about the futility of the words: "words, words, words" (2.1.191). For Estragon, the words that the Boy has uttered are "all a pack of lies" (*WFG* 50). Like Hamlet, they are aware of the fact that words cannot be depended on to tell the truth. Clov points out that words are nothing more than the meaning one denotes to them. When Hamm does not understand what yesterday means, Clov gets angry with Hamm: "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others." (*EG* 31). "We are condemned or 'damned' to construct ourselves through the discourse of others" (Worton 81). Hamm and Clov are not sure if they have any meaning, which they cannot articulate:

> HAMM: We're not beginning to… to… mean something?
> CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (*Brief laugh.)* Ah

that's a good one! (EG 23)

They sense that they are unable to express themselves in a genuine communication. When Estragon and Vladimir have departed for the night, Estragon feels very sad. Vladimir tries to talk about his feelings when they are separate:

VLADIMIR: I missed you…and at the same time I was happy. Isn't that a queer thing?
ESTRAGON: (*shocked*). Happy?
VLADIMIR: Perhaps it's not the right word. (*WFG* 59)

Vladimir and Estragon continually sense the inadequacy of words to interpret their feelings. They try to diagnose what they feel about being together again:

VLADIMIR: You must be happy, too, deep down, if you only knew it.
ESTRAGON: Happy about what?
VLADIMIR: To be back with me again.
ESTRAGON: Would you say so?
VLADIMIR: Say you are, even if it's not true.
ESTRAGON: What am I to say?
VLADIMIR: Say, I am happy.
ESTRAGON: I am happy.
VLADIMIR: So am I.
ESTRAGON: So am I.
VLADIMIR: We are happy.
ESTRAGON: We are happy. (*Silence*.) What do we do now, now that we are happy? (*WFG* 60)

Vladimir and Estragon try to define the meaning of the word "happy". Although they say that they are happy, they do not know what it means or what to do with that "happy" state. "Both the denotative and symbolic functions of language are exposed as unstable modes of communication" (Worton 77).

When Pozzo is about to leave the tramps in the first act, he summarizes what he has done for them: "I have talked to them about this and that, I have explained the twilight, admittedly" (*WFG* 39). Pozzo has passed a great deal of his time talking, but he is still uneasy: "But is it enough, that's what tortures me, is it enough?" (*WFG* 39). Pozzo thinks that merely talking does not achieve much. Pozzo's talk should have made an impression on the tramps; but when he appears in the second act, they barely remember who he is:

ESTRAGON: Is it Godot?
…
VLADIMIR: Poor Pozzo!
ESTRGON: I knew it was him.
VLADIMIR: Who?
ESTRAGON: Godot.
VLADIMIR But it's not Godot.
ESTRAGON: It's not Godot? (*WFG* 77)
…

Speech is not contained in the memory. Therefore, it becomes useless.

Words generate ambiguities and misunderstandings rather than interaction. They may not always convey the correct message intended by the speaker. When Clov finds a flea in his trousers, he puts some powder on it, then checks it to see if he is dead:

HAMM: Did you get him?
CLOV: Looks like it. (*He drops the tin and adjusts his trousers*.) Unless he's laying doggo.
HAMM: Laying! Lying, you mean. Unless he's lying doggo.
CLOV: Ah? One says lying? One doesn't say laying?
HAMM: Use your head, can't you. If he was laying we'd be bitched. (*EG* 24)

Even a single word may produce disagreement.

Language often camouflages the sense of nothingness for Beckett's characters. When they talk, they prevent themselves from thinking and hearing the deadness that surrounds them:

ESTRAGON: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
VLADIMIR: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
ESTRAGON: It's so we won't think.
VLADIMIR: We have that excuse.
ESTRAGON: It's so we won't hear.
VLADIMIR: We have our reasons.
ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.
VLADIMIR: They make noise like wings.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
VLADIMIR: Like sand.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
…

VLADIMIR: Like ashes. (WFG 62-3)

Just like Hamlet, the consummate speech-maker, once they start a rapid flow of words, they cannot stop:

VLADIMIR: They all speak together.
ESTRAGON: Each one to itself.
VLADIMIR: Rather they whisper.
ESTRAGON: They rustle.
VLADIMIR: They murmur.
ESTRAGON: They rustle. (*WFG* 63)

However, the lengthy exchange of words brings no satisfaction; right after this exchange Vladimir asks Estragon to "say something…say anything at all!", to which Estragon replies, "I'm trying" (*WFG* 63). So, the aim of their talking is not to communicate, but to stop themselves thinking.

All Beckett's characters have a rapid fire of speech. Vladimir admits having spent their time blathering about this and that without achieving anything. When Pozzo falls down, Vladimir wants them to help Pozzo: "Let's not waste our time in idle discourse! (*Pause. Vehemently*.) Let us do something while we have the chance!"; they have wasted the time with blathering about everything rather than taking any action (*WFG* 79) to bring a change to their situation. They share the same predicament of talking but not acting with Hamlet. "Certainly the allusion to *Hamlet* in *Waiting for Godot* seems very much at home" (Hapgood 144).

3.2. Arrested Action

The theatre of the Absurd epitomizes man's irremediable unsafe position in life. He does not have the chance to improve his conditions as everything in the world is on a slippery ground. All his hopes, attempts, and struggles prove to be thwarted, and his actions remain arrested. Hence, the characters of the theatre of the Absurd "do not believe in action…or reason" (Esslin 58). *Hamlet* is dominated by the rhythm of the arrested actions. "The play takes place in the shadow of three events - the murder of King Hamlet, the marriage of Claudius and Gertrude, and the death of Polonius"

(Hapgood 132). Numerous actions start, yet they are frustrated before fulfilled. So the whole play seems static, and it has tableaus rather than actions.

Almost no single action can take place without delay in a world where direct action is almost impossible. Each and every action is arrested before it is realized. Before the Ghost appears to Hamlet, it emerges two times to the guards and Horatio. In his first appearance "*a ghost appears; it is clad in armour from head to foot, and bears a marshal's truncheon*" (1.1.38). Although they try hard to talk to the Ghost, he does not make an attempt to talk to them. Yet, "*the Ghost reappears*" (1.1.126). This time, "It lifted up it head, and did address / Itself to motion like as it would speak" (1.2. 218). However, his attempt to talk is arrested when "*a cock crows*" (1.1.138). "It was about to speak when the cock crew" (1.1.147). After the Ghost meets Hamlet, his leave taking is arrested by his long speech. Even though he wants to be, "Brief let me be", he goes on talking more than fifty lines (1.5.59). "Every step in transmitting the truth about King Hamlet's death is marked by delay" (Hapgood 139). He even comes back to make others "swear by [Hamlet's] sword" so that they would not reveal his appearing to anyone. Both his entrance and exit are marked by delay.

Hamlet's exits are also arrested; in his mother's closet he bids farewell three times before he leaves his mother: "Good night…once more good night…Mother, good night indeed" (3.4.159…217). His dying exit is delayed three times, as well. He informs Horatio that he is dying several times: "I am dead Horatio … Horatio, I am dead … O, I die, Horatio … the rest is silence (*Dies*) (5.2. 330 … 355).

Fortinbras is another character whose actions are delayed. Claudius reports Fortinbras' intent of "importing the surrender of those lands / Lost by his father [to Old Hamlet], with all bands of law," (1.2.23). Fortinbras' wish to invade Denmark is arrested after Claudius sends a diplomatic letter to the king of Norway, Fortinbras' uncle, who directs his nephew's attention away from Denmark. Fortinbras "makes vow before his uncle never more / To give th' assay of arms against" Denmark (2.2.70). Fortinbras' actions have been delayed twice; he conquers Denmark at the end of the play, "with sorrow [he] embrace[s] [his] fortune" (5.2.375) because all the Danish royal family are now dead.

Another angry young man whose actions are arrested is Laertes. When he learns that his father has been killed, he becomes suspicious of "His [father's] means of death, his obscure funeral, / [with] No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones, / No noble rite, nor formal ostentation" (4.5.210). However Claudius pacifies Laertes' rage and wants him to "Be … content to lend [his] patience [to him], / And [he] shall jointly labour with [Laertes'] soul / To give it due content" (4.5.206). Claudius makes Laertes delay avenging his father's death; he has a plan to get Hamlet killed by Laertes: "I will work [Hamlet] / To an exploit, now ripe in my device, / Under the which he shall not choose but fall" (4.7.62). Laertes can avenge his father's death after they have applied their plan. "His rage is soon calmed, and he willingly becomes the king's organ" (Hapgood 133).

Claudius delays his plan to get rid of Hamlet. "It is true that Hamlet dies because he postpones too long the killing of the king. But it is equally significant that Claudius dies because he postpones too long the killing of Hamlet" (Elliott in Hapgood 133). When Claudius eavesdrops Ophelia's and Hamlet's talk in the lobby to check whether Hamlet's lunacy is due to Ophelia's love, he reasons that Hamlet's change is not because of love but because "there's something in his soul / O'er which his melancholy sits on brood" (3.1.167). Claudius wants to send Hamlet to England at once; he "doubt[s] the hatch and the disclose / Will be some danger; which for to prevent, / [he] ha[s] in quick determination / Thus it set down: [Hamlet] shall with speed to England" (3.1.169). Yet, Claudius' decision is arrested by Polonius' suggestion that his mother should talk to Hamlet privately: "after the play / Let his queen-mother all alone entreat him" (3.1.184). After Claudius watches the play, he once more decides to send him to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "And he to England shall along with you" (3.3.3). However, this time his decision is arrested with the news of Polonius' death. Finally after Polonius' death, Claudius manages to send Hamlet to England; this time he instructs Hamlet's friends to hurry: "tempt him with speed abroad, / Delay it not – I'll have him hence tonight" (4.3. 53). Ironically, this journey is also arrested, Hamlet comes back. Claudius' last arrested action is a fatal one for the Queen. When Gertrude attempts to drink the poisoned

cup, Claudius' poor warning "Gertrude, do not drink" is too late to make her quit drinking (5.2.276).

Hamlet's wishes and actions are all arrested to the end of the play. After his father's death and his mother's remarriage, Hamlet wishes to kill himself: "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew" (1.2.129). Yet, his strong longing for death is arrested by "the Everlasting [who] had … fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (1.2.131). After he talks to the alleged ghost of his father, his yearning for ending his life gets even stronger. He has experienced corruption in every sphere of life, so he wants "To die, to sleep - / No more, and by a sleep to say we end / The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to" (3.1.60). However, his desire to die and not to have to deal with all the wickedness of the world is arrested by the uncertainty about life after death: "in that sleep of death what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil / Must give us pause" (3.1.66). As Hamlet reasons on almost everything "he is said by Schlegel to be 'thought-sick.' The whole of the play is intended to show how a calculating consideration which aims at exhausting as far as human foresight can, all the relations and possible consequences of a deed, cripples the power of acting" (Roberts 367). Only at the very end of the play, Hamlet has a chance to realize his wish for death. "His unhesitating decision to enter a fencing match with the man whose father he has killed, sponsored by the man who has killed his father and ordered his death, comes close to the self-slaughter he earlier longed for but gave pause to" (Hapgood 138): "Let the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the king hold his purpose, I will win for him an I can; … if not I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits" (5.2.165…168). If he competes in the match he will lose his life, which has already been "nothing" for him.

Hamlet's assigned task is also arrested by his different reasoning. Hamlet promises "that [he] with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love, / May sweep to my revenge" (1.5.29). His decision to avenge his father's death after he talks to the Ghost is arrested by another decision, "To put an antic disposition on" (1.5.172), but he does not give the reason why. "Immediately the ghost departs, he devises his operational tactic, the antic disposition, which, on the unconscious level, is possibly a

device to delay and avoid action" (Crocker 281). As he feigns to be a lunatic, he finds a chance to speak up his genuine thoughts about people. He can easily insult Polonius by veiling himself under the guise of madness. When Polonius asks Hamlet what he is reading, he explains that old men "have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams" (2.2.196). Hamlet insults old men as if he is reporting what is written in the book that he is reading. Polonius, being an old man, is exposed to the same insults, as well. Hamlet can also voice his disillusionment about women with the help of his lunacy. He suffers a lot from women's pretentiousness and the discrepancy between their appearances and real characters. Hamlet displays his mad rage to Ophelia: "God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another… Go to, I'll no more on it, it hath made me mad" (3.1.145…158). His confusion about the time interval between his father's death and his mother's rash marriage is maybe another cover-up: "how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within's two hours" (3.2.121). "His madness is therefore a conscious and deliberate device used to protect his life, gain time, and postpone action until circumstance is ripe" (Roberts 364).

Hamlet's decisive attitude to realize his task is halted with his uncertainty about the Ghost's reliability. He devises the play during which he will "observe his looks, / [He]'ll tent him to the quick" (2.2. 580). Although he challenges that: "if'a do blench / I know my course", he does not act (2.2.581). "The cause of delay ... comes from a positive desire to marshal evidence whereby he can accuse and convict the king of his guilt in the world's eye" (Roberts 364). When Hamlet sees Claudius at prayer, his task is delayed by Hamlet's religious reasoning. "[Claudius'] soul may be as damned and black / As hell whereto it goes" (3.3.94). To send Claudius to hell, Hamlet prefers to postpone killing Claudius. "One moment he pretends he is too cowardly to perform the deed, at another he questions the truthfulness of the ghost, at another-when the opportunity presents itself in its naked form-he thinks the time is unsuited, it would be better to wait till the King was at some evil act and then to kill him, and so on" (Jones in Gottschalk 157).

As Hamlet has been inactive too long about his task he feels "Denmark' a prison" and also the world "in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons" (2.2.241…244). He feels as if he is physically arrested. "He gives us at once, on our first sight of him, a picture of a frustrated energy, of force held in check…he is motionless with the immobility not of repose but of arrested movement" (Gilder in Hapgood 135). He is not pleased with his inaction, and he tries to find out the reason for it. He reasons that his inaction may be due to either "bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple / Of thinking too precisely on th' event" (4.4.38). Whatever may be the reason for Hamlet's inertia, he is uneasy about his lethargy. "Hamlet is raising these questions to try them on and, finally, to reject them: he does not know" (Gottschalk 159). Hamlet is aware that it is not possible to take direct action in a precarious world. "He has no firm belief in himself or anything else. . . .He loses himself in labyrinths of thought"(Roberts 367).

In an absurd world, man's actions are all inconsequential and thereby arrested. Beckett's characters' similar to Shakespeare's, suffer from their inert existence. They are trapped in a vicious circle, in which their hopes, plans, and actions are arrested. Estragon and Vladimir are overwhelmed by not being able to act. Their words and actions are incompatible. At times they wish to leave each other, but they do not. Estragon saying, "I am leaving", contradicts with the stage direction that "*He does not move*" (*WFG* 12). He questions whether it "wouldn't be better for [them] to part" (*WFG* 16). However, Estragon himself arrests the idea of leaving by offering to tell a story to Vladimir: "You know the story of the Englishman in the brothel?" (*WFG* 16).

Nell is another character whose actions are arrested. She tells Nagg: "I am going to leave you", but she does not go into her bin to leave him (*EG* 14). Nagg interrupts her, "Could you give me a scratch before you go?" (*EG* 14). Nell suggests, "Rub yourself against the rim" (*EG* 14). Nell's decision to leave is further diverted with Nagg asking her to "tell the story of the tailor" (*EG* 15). Nell would rather talk about the time they "once went out rowing on Lake Como" (*EG* 15). Eventually Nagg goes into his bin, but Nell still does not move. She disappears only after "*Clov lets go her hand, pushes her back in the bin, closes the lid*" (*EG* 17).

Clov also keeps telling that he will leave Hamm:

> HAMM: You're leaving me all the same.
> CLOV: I'm trying. (*EG* 5)
> …
> CLOV: …Ever since I was whelped. (*EG* 10)

Clov's decision to leave Hamm has been arrested since he was born. He announces many times that "[he'll leave [Hamm]" (*EG* 29, 34, 40, 54). At the very end of the play, Clov seems to be decisive about leaving, and even calls his act as "making an exit" (*EG* 56). However, he cannot manage to make an exit when he "*halts by the door and stands there…till the end*" (*EG* 56). "Clov prepares for 'making an exit' but the end is statis" (Scott 67).

Hamm's dreams of action are arrested due to his crippled state. He dreams of leaving their cell and wishes that: "if I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods" (*EG* 13). Hamm is paralyzed both physically and spiritually. Since he has been inactive for a long time, he feels that they were "down in a hole" (*EG* 27), the way Hamlet feels that he is in a prison and condemned to a passive life (2.2.241).

Estragon also suggests to Vladimir that they leave the place:

> ESTRAGON: Let's go.
> VLADIMIR: We can't.
> ESTRAGON: Why not?
> VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.
> ESTAGON: (despairingly). Ah! (*WFG* 14, 48, 68, 71, 78, 84)

The very same dialogue takes place many times throughout the play. They rationalize that they are not able to leave because they are uncertain about where and when to meet Godot:

> ESTRAGON: You're sure it was here? […] That we were to wait.
> VLADIMIR: He said by the tree. […] Do you recognize the place?
> […]
> ESTRAGON: You're sure it was this evening?
> […]

VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. (*Pause*) I think. (*WFG* 14…15)

So as not to miss Mr. Godot, they cannot leave the place. They are bound to wait for an unknown man for an unknown reason. They are arrested in a vicious circle of uncertainty that they cannot break:

ESTRAGON: And if he doesn't come?
VLADIMIR: We'll come back tomorrow.
ESTRAGON: And then the day after tomorrow.
VLADIMIR: Possibly.
ESTRAGON: And so on.
VLADIMIR: The point is.
ESTRAGON: Until he comes.
VLADIMIR: You're merciless. (*WFG* 14)

Grillet emphasizes their static state: "Didi and Gogo will be there again the next day, and the next, and the day after that…without future, without past, irremediably there" (in Cohn 18). When both of them forget their mission of waiting and decide to go away, Pozzo reminds them why they should stay:

VLADIMIR: Let's go.
[…]
POZZO: Think twice before you do anything rush. Suppose you go now …what happens in that case to your appointment with this…Godet…Godot … Godin. (*WFG* 28… 29)

Their attempts to take any action are all frustrated before their fulfillment. Their performance on the country road, waiting hopelessly, can also be called, "The Net", the name of Lucky's dance, when "he thinks he's entangled in a net" (*WFG* 40). Each action in Beckett's plays is entrapped in delay. When Pozzo decides to leave the tramps, he does not move even after many farewells:

POZZO: Adieu.
VLADIMIR: Adieu.
POZZO: Adieu.
Silence. No one moves.
VLADIMIR: Adieu.
POZZO: Adieu.
ESTRAGON: Adieu.
Silence.
POZZO: And thank you.
VLADIMIR: Thank *you*.

POZZO: Not at all.
ESTRAGON: Yes yes.
POZZO: No no.
Silence.
POZZO: I don't seem to be able … (*long hesitation*) … to depart.
ESTRAGON: Such is life. (*WFG* 47)

When finally Estragon and Vladimir decide to leave at the end of both acts, their action is arrested:

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?
VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.
They do not move. (*WFG* 54, 94)

They do not even try to reason why they do not move. They have resigned themselves to the fact that immobility is a part of life. The struggles of Beckett's characters for other activities are also arrested. To pass the time Estragon suggests to Vladimir: "What about hanging ourselves?" (*WFG* 17). They cannot make up their minds about who hangs himself first; then they decide to deflect their attention to, "Don't let's do anything. It's safer", which is undoubtedly "wait and see what [Godot] says" (*WFG* 18). Later, they have another attempt to hang themselves; then they complain that they "haven't got a bit of rope" (*WFG* 93). When they eventually try Estragon's belt for a rope, it breaks and aborts the idea of hanging all together (*WFG* 93). "Beckett uses the genre of paradox as a means of reminding us that in metaphysical terms we can never arrive at our chosen destination (death)" (Worton 70).

Hamm tries to get his household members to pray. Although he asks them, "Let's pray to God" twice (*EG* 38), he is interrupted and distracted by irrelevant wishes or comments:

NAGG: Me sugar-plum!
CLOV: There's a rat in the kitchen.
HAMM: A rat! Are there still rats? […] And you haven't exterminated him?
CLOV: Half. You disturbed us.
[…]
HAMM: You'll finish him later. Let us pray to God.
[…]
NAGG: Me sugar-plum.
[…]

HAMM: Silence. In silence! […] Off we go.
(*Attitudes of prayer. Silence. Abandoning his attitude, discouraged.)"*
(*EG* 38…39)

Estragon and Vladimir are unable to help Pozzo who has cried out for help for twelve times. Estragon seems to emphasize the impossibility of their helping any other one, as they cannot do anything for themselves:

POZZO: Help!
VLADIMIR: To help him-
ESTRAGON: *We* help *him*? (WFG 79)

Vladimir thinks that they should try to act by helping Pozzo: "Let's not waste our time in idle discourse! (*Pause. Vehemently*) Let us do something while we have the chance" (*WFG* 79). Then, they spend a long time blathering about whether the need for help is addressed to them or to the whole mankind (*WFG* 79). "Vladimir's remark in the course of 'raising Pozzo' – 'But that is not the question. What are we doing here, *that* is the question'- helps to confirm that the whole sequence parodies *Hamlet*'s rhythm of arrested action" (Hapgood 144). Vladimir, like Hamlet, yearns for action so as not to waste his God-given capacities: "A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. Come, let's get to work! (*He advances towards the heap, stops in his stride.*) In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness! *He broods*" (*WFG* 81). As Estragon doubts, Vladimir fails to help Pozzo when Vladimir "*stumbles, falls, tries to get up, fails*" (*WFG* 81). Similarly, Estragon "*pulls, stumbles, falls*" (*WFG* 82). They help Pozzo to get up, they let him fall again to be picked up by Lucky later (*WFG* 89). "The dramaturgy of the delay contributes to our sense of a world in which direct action and speech are extremely difficult, almost impossible" (Hapgood 143).

3.3.Nihility

The theatre of the Absurd adopts the philosophy nihilism which puts forth that nothing exists, there is no basis for knowledge or truth, and that there is no ultimate meaning to anything in the world. The Absurdist playwrights pose the trials of man trying to exist in a world, which lacks any unifying principles. Man is paralyzed by

nothingness, so his actions have no apparent motivations. He has come to the conclusion that what he possesses in his life is of no value. He finds himself in a meaningless and hostile world, which is indifferent to his misery and problems. In this world he is totally alienated and lonely. The passage of time has destructive effects on his life, as well. He leads a life encircled by "the feeling of the deadness and mechanical senselessness of half-unconscious lives" (Esslin 400).

Nihility, a dominant theme in the theatre of the Absurd, entails an oppressive force for vacancy. Hamlet is engulfed by this force. He has come face to face with many disconcerting events, and his experiences reduce the effectiveness and the beauty of everything around him into nothingness: "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to [him] all the uses of the world" (1.1.133). Hamlet is disillusioned in his mother's remarriage. He is shocked at his father's murder. He finds the task the Ghost has given him repugnant. So he has "lost all [his] mirth, forgone all custom of exercises… [and] this most excellent canopy air … this majestical roof … appeareth nothing to" him (2.2.292…297). He has come to the conclusion that what he possesses in his life is of no value. Hamlet cannot overcome his melancholy, and he sees everything around him as unprofitable. His melancholia "drains the world of value and dissolves it into nauseating nothingness" (Eagleton 71). His thoughts hover over suicide. All Hamlet wants is to be nothing, to "resolve … into a dew" (1.2.130), and he does not "set [his] life at a pin's fee" (1.4.65). As long as "misery is constant" in the world, as Ionesco asserts, nothing can be valuable and fruitful for Hamlet (in Hinchliffe 4).

Beckett's characters are also seized by the oppressive force for vacancy. They are aware that they are surrounded by nothingness. Estragon and Vladimir admit that there is nothing that they can do to improve their situation:

> VLADIMIR: We've got nothing to do here?
> ESTRAGON: Nor any where else. (*WFG* 52).

They experience what it is like to be conscious of one's self and one's nothingness. Although Estragon protests that "[he] can't go on like this", Vladimir reminds him

that "there's nothing to be done" (*WFG* 68). Since they know that any struggle will not lead to progression in their lives, they prefer not to make any efforts for anything. They do not have any other choice but to "wait and see what [Godot] says" (*WFG* 18), which is the counterpart of doing nothing. To be able to go through the day is achievement enough, as Estragon points out: "Another day done with" (*WFG* 59). When Vladimir insists on Estragon's carrying on walking up and down merely to pass the time, Estragon would rather "be stuck there doing nothing" as he knows that all their actions are inconsequential (*WFG* 71).

In *Endgame*, the characters feel this oppressive force for vacancy more intensely; what they wait for is solely death and they are aware that they are engulfed by "infinite emptiness" (*EG* 26). From the very first sentence on, "it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (*EG* 2), there is nothing to do for Hamm and Clov. Hamm's story also begins with the same lines: "It's finished, we're finished" (*EG* 35). Being surrounded by nothingness, they also question one another about whether it is enough for them to lead that particular life:

> HAMM: Have you not had enough?
> CLOV: Yes! (*Pause.)* Of what?
> HAMM: Of this … this … thing.
> CLOV: I always had. (*Pause*.) Not you?
> HAMM (*gloomily*): Then there is no reason for it to change. (*EG* 4)

They know that they are in the world not to enjoy it or to have a good time, but to suffer and to get bored. Their present life is not very different from death:

> HAMM: I'll give you nothing more to eat.
> CLOV: Then we'll die.
> HAMM: I'll give you just enough to keep you from dying. You'll be hungry all the time.
> CLOV: Then we won't die. (*EG* 4-5).

They will go on with the meaningless and miserable life they have. When Clov reports to Hamm that he has found a flea, Hamm wants Clov to kill it lest "humanity might start from there all over again" (*EG* 24). They seem to be the last inhabitants of the world and they try to prevent the regeneration of life, which can only be a start for a new series of sufferings.

When Vladimir and Estragon encounter Pozzo, Estragon summarizes their dreadful condition: “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful!” (*WFG* 41). Within all this nothingness they find consolation in speech so as not to be exposed to the dreadful silence of nothingness. In Hamm’s and Clov’s world, everything is extinguished. Outside of the window, the sea, ocean and “[a]ll is … zero [and] corpsed” (*EG* 21). There are no gulls and no more tide. There is “nothing … nothing” outside (*EG* 53). All they can see is “ashes” (*EG* 31). They are approaching their end gradually. Each day “something is taking its course” (*EG* 10). Hamm is already a handicapped man, and Clov’s condition starts to deteriorate, as well:

> HAMM: How are your eyes?
> CLOV: Bad.
> HAMM: But you can see.
> CLOV: All I want.
> HAMM: How are your legs?
> CLOV: Bad
> HAMM: But you can walk.
> CLOV: I come … and go. (*EG* 25)

Outside the cell “the light is sunk” and inside Clov sees his “light dying” (*EG* 9). Also, they start to feel that “the whole place stinks of corpses” (*EG* 32). They are shut in by nothingness; they do not have any other choice but to go on living in their gradually perishing world. In both Shakespeare and Beckett, “the nonsensical [has] quite a respectable and generally accepted tradition” (Esslin 332).

In a world of nihility the world is hostile, indifferent and meaningless. Hamlet is totally alienated and lonely in this world. In fact, Hamlet is the loneliest of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes. At the outset of the play, Hamlet defines the world in utter disorder: “time is out of joint”, and he sets himself the mission to redress the problems that he has encountered: “That ever I was born to set it right” (1.5.188…189). Unfortunately, he soon realizes that this meaningless world is full of evil, and he cannot correct it. He realizes that “to be honest as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand” (2.2.178). Hamlet believes that if “the world’s grown honest…then is doomsday near” (2.2.235). There is no guarantee for avoiding the wickedness of this irrational world. So, Hamlet advises Ophelia to stand

aloof from this world as it is impossible for her to lead a life without the risk of her name being blackened: "be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny; get thee to a nunnery" (3.1.137). Human beings' acts are of no significance no matter how honest they are; the world is predisposed to wickedness.

Hamlet also suffers from the unjust acts of fortune. He calls fate a "strumpet" (2.2.234). It does not have any principles, and it enforces people to accept the inevitable. Moreover, Hamlet finds fate a formidable opponent to fight against, to bear "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (3.1.58). Everything is in the control of this force. As Ophelia tells the King: "we know what we are, but know not what we may be" (4.5.41). No one can know for certain beforehand how one would react in any given situation. All efforts of human beings may turn out to be simply nothing in a world which gives no support to its occupants.

In a world of uncertainty, the world without support also annihilates the importance of worldly divisions. Even a King and a beggar may come to the same end. Hamlet "mocks the futility of the worldly divisions" (Crocker 302). The high or low status that one has in life makes no difference after death, which equalizes everyone: "Your fat King and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table – that's the end" (4.3.22). What's more, a beggar may even be superior to a King: "A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that", thereby "a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (4.3.26…30). The title of a "courtier", a "lawyer", or a "king's jester" does not make any difference after death, which demote all their efforts and statuses into nothing (5.1.79…171). Alexander, Caesar, Yorick all prove to have had an illusion of grandeur importance. Death is the universal end which makes all people equal, even the great names and not so great. Hamlet reduces Alexander's existence to a "bung-hole", after death:

> To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander, till 'a find it stopping a bung-hole? … Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer - barrel? (5.1. 195…202)

Hamlet demonstrates the futility of earthly recognition by giving an extreme example of Alexander's end. Also, death invalidates the gender of a person. When Hamlet wants to find out for whom the gravedigger digs a grave, the gravedigger expresses that the grave is neither for a man nor for a woman but it is for "One that was a woman, sir, but rest her soul she's dead" (5.1.127). Death negates all classifications used in life. Death, the common end for all people, reduces the value of everything in life into nothing. "Death is viewed as nullifying whatever is done in life" (Crocker 302). So, man's struggle for anything in life becomes senseless. "Starting from Act IV, the futility centers less on the effect of virtuous action among men, more on the futility of all endeavor, and of life itself, when viewed in cosmic terms" (Crocker 302).

In Beckett's plays, the characters are enforced to live in a world, which does not give any support. "The world is an existential nightmare from which reason, forgiveness, and hope are absent: a place less to live in than to endure" (Hinchliffe 6). The world is a place where all human beings are to suffer. When Estragon groans about his ill-fitting boots, Vladimir gets angry because suffering is not only for Estragon but it is for all humanity: "No one ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have" (*WFG* 10). In this world, one suffers for no reason at all. Estragon was beaten by unknown people although he "wasn't doing anything" (*WFG* 59). Lucky bursts into tears when he hears that his master wants to get rid of him although he carries his master's bags like "Atlas, son of Jupiter" (*WFG* 31). Estragon tries to comfort Lucky, but he kicks Estragon. Estragon's leg starts bleeding. Pozzo construes bleeding as "a good sign" (*WFG* 32). Pozzo thinks that it is Estragon's turn to cry now: "You have replaced him as it were. (*Lyrically*.) The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops" (*WFG* 33).

Beckett's characters define life with pain and sufferings. At the outset of *Endgame*, Hamm wallows in his misery: "Can there be misery - (*he yawns*) – loftier than mine?" (*EG* 2). He cries out his suffering and compares his agony with his father's, mother's, and his dog's: "Oh I am willing to believe they suffer as much as such creatures can suffer. But does that mean their sufferings equal mine?" (*EG* 2). He

wonders if one suffers more or less than the others. Beckett provides the answer in *Waiting for Godot* in Pozzo's words: "our generation, it is not any unhappier than its predecessors" (33). Clov's life is one long suffering, as well:

> HAMM: Did you ever have an instant of happiness?
> CLOV: Not to my knowledge. (*EG* 43)

They are doomed to suffer in the world, in which to relieve the pain of living is not possible. Thus, it is never time for Hamm's painkiller. Suffering has become the sign of life. When Hamm asks Clov to check his father's bin to see if he is dead or not, Clov reports that Nagg is crying:

> HAMM: What's he doing?
> CLOV: He's crying.
> HAMM: Then he's living. (*EG* 43)

They keep reminding each other that "[they] are on earth, there's no cure for that" (*EG* 47). A life with happiness and in order can only take place in dreams. Clov yearns for "[a] world where all would be silent and still, and each thing in its last place, under the last dust" (*EG* 40).

Similar to Hamlet, Beckett's characters suffer from the unjust acts of Fortune, as well. While Hamlet defines fortune as "outrageous" (3.1.58) or a "strumpet" (2.2.234), Pozzo characterizes it as "blind" (*WFG* 86). "The 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' that assail Hamlet may not be the same as those that case Hamm to suffer, [yet] in the views of both men, [Shakespeare and Beckett], we view characters trying to rid themselves of the plague" (Drew xiv). Estragon and Vladimir try everything to stop leading such a miserable life. They try "turn[ing] resolutely towards Nature" (*WFG* 64). Yet, their suffering does not stop. "Nature is indifferent in Beckett's work" (Innes 431). Nature is hostile and does not care for people. Even if Nature remembers them, it is not to answer their plight, but to destroy them gradually:

> HAMM: Nature has forgotten us.
> CLOV: There's no more nature.

HAMM: No more nature! You exaggerate.
CLOV: In the vicinity.
HAMM: But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!
CLOV: Then she hasn't forgotten us. (*EG* 8)

When Pozzo falls, he is in a dire situation and calls for help, it takes too long for Estragon and Vladimir to help him. Estragon and Vladimir decide to call out to him with different names, "Abel" and "Cain" (*WFG* 83). When Pozzo does not respond, the tramps come to the conclusion that "he's all humanity" (*WFG* 83). Fortune is blind and dumb to all humanity's cries for help.

Time, a vacuum, is another destructive force deteriorating man's condition. The passage of time weakens all promises and plans. Hamlet's mother's marriage vow for eternal love has been destroyed even "within a month" (1.2.153). Similarly, when the Player Queen gives a solemn vow for her long lasting love to her husband, the Player King is aware of the fact that time blunts all strong feelings: "I do believe you think what now you speak, / But what we do determine, oft we break" (3.2.179). The passage of time has negative effects on Hamlet. It blunts Hamlet's ambition to take revenge. The alleged ghost of his father has to pay a "visitation … to whet [his] almost blunted purpose" (3.4.110). Finally, being inactive for a long time causes Hamlet's own death, and also many people's ends, Polonius', Ophelia's, Laertes', and Gertrude's.

One has to "bear the whips and scorns of time" (3.1.70) in the world. The young boy actor who plays Player Queen will soon quit the part, because his voice will change in time. Hamlet is aware of the danger: "Pray God your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring" (2.2.38). Hamlet observes how time negates human life more clearly when he goes to the graveyard with Horatio. They see a gravedigger amusing himself singing and throwing skulls. One of the skulls belongs to Yorick, the King's jester. "A fellow of infinite jest" (5.1.175) no longer has any meaning. Nothing can prevent people from turning into nothing, not even make-up, with the passage of time: "Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come" (5.1.183), concludes Hamlet. All humans are annihilated in time.

In Beckett's world, too, time acts as a destructive force. Almost all Beckett characters feel nostalgic about the past. Seeing that the passage of time has nullifying effects on their lives they try taking refuge in the old days. Vladimir and Estragon talk about their so-called sweet past remembrances. Once they were on the top of the Eiffel Tower: "We were presentable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up" (*WFG* 10). They remember their past wistfully. When they play hide-and-seek, they happen to stand "back to back like in the good old days!" (*WFG* 74). Pozzo remembers himself as a good-looking man: "That was nearly sixty years ago… (*he consults his watch*) … yes, nearly sixty. (*Drawing himself up proudly*.) You wouldn't think it to look at me, would you? Compared to him I look like a young man" (*WFG* 33). Also, Pozzo asserts that in the past he was on good terms with Lucky, who "used to be so kind … so helpful … and entertaining … and now … he's killing [Pozzo]" (*WFG* 34). All Beckett characters have "an acute sense of time passing, or the recognition that time is a destructive force" (Hinchliffe 36).

The characters in *Endgame* have waves of nostalgia at times. Taking refuge in the nostalgic past alleviates the problem of enduring existence in such an absurd life. They all talk about the past zestfully HAMM: "I love the old questions. (*With fervour*.) Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them!" (*EG* 27). In the past, questions were all legitimate with definite answers, yet at present nothing is certain. Clov accuses Hamm of not being able to realize the value of anything in the past:

> HAMM: Go and get two bicycle-wheels.
> CLOV: There are no more bicycle wheels.
> HAMM: What have you done with your bicycle?
> CLOV: I never had a bicycle.
> HAMM: The thing is impossible.
> CLOV: When there were still bicycle wheels I wept to have one. I crawled at your feet. You told me to go to hell. Now there are none. (*EG* 6)

Time has destroyed many things that used to exist in the past. "There are no more sugar plums ... [;] Turkish delight … no longer exists" (*EG* 39). Time annihilates almost everything that they take pleasure in. Also, soon they will not be able to meet their essential needs such as feeling warm as "there are no more rugs" (*EG* 46).

"There are [even] no more coffins" to be put in after death (*EG* 53). Hamm tells Clov about a mad man he knew in the past, "who thought the end of the world had come" (*EG* 31). Clov deduces that God must have existed then: "God be with those days" (*EG* 31). Clov infers that God is dead now. Time has also obliterated the notion of God as the omnipotent protector and saviour of human kind.

Nagg and Nell, living in adverse conditions in those ashbins, refer to the past with a nostalgic look more than the others. As soon as Nagg utters the word "yesterday", Nell repeats it with a sigh: "(*elegiac*). Ah yesterday" (*EG* 11). They are overpowered by the past remembrances. Nagg remembers when he first told Nell the story of the tailor:

> NAGG: It always made you laugh. (*Pause*.) The first time I thought you'd die.
> NELL: It was on Lake Como. (*Pause*.) One April afternoon. (*Pause.*) Can you believe it?
> NAGG: What?
> NELL: That we once went out rowing on Lake Como. (*Pause*.) One April afternoon. (*EG* 15)

They are also puzzled by how time has destroyed their lives by and by. Hamm recalls his mother as "bonny … like a flower of the field" (*EG* 30). Clov generalizes the pleasant past remembrances to all: "We too were bonny – once. It's a rare thing not to have been bonny once" (*EG* 30). Time has applied its destructive effect on all beings, so it is impossible for one to have been worse in the past than one is in the present.

As time passes everything becomes even worse; time is the enemy. Pozzo in his second appearance becomes blind although he "used to have wonderful sight" in the past (*WFG* 85). Lucky, too, has deteriorated as time passed. Now, "he's dumb" (*WFG* 89) and he cannot sing or think loudly any more. Nagg and Nell's "sight [and hearing] has failed" (*EG* 11). Finally, Nell "died of … darkness" (*EG* 52). Also, the Boy's brother has become sick as he informs Vladimir and Estragon on his second appearance. The wound on Estragon's leg is "[b]eginning to fester" (*WFG* 67). Time does not even heal the wounds, but makes them infected. Time does not make the seeds Clov planted sprout either. Clov is hopeless about them: "If they were going to

sprout they would have sprouted. (*Violently*.) They'll never sprout" (*EG* 10). Witnessing the unpleasant effects of time, Vladimir is aware of the fact that "[o]ne daren't even laugh any more" (*WFG* 11). In the Absurd World, where nihility reigns, the characters are stuck in a sterile and inert existence. Such a world has no support to offer to them. It is an unreliable world, as well. Time relentlessly works against the characters to destroy them. The characters are overwhelmed by "a feeling that being itself is unnervingly mysterious, that life is resistant, precarious, sometimes sinister, and ultimately unfathomable" (Graver 25).

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In this study, the analysis of *Hamlet* in the light of Beckett's two plays, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, has affirmed that *Hamlet* is a forerunner of Absurd Drama. Shakespeare and Beckett have the common despondent world view; humanity is sentenced to live in a senseless world. Their characters are cognizant that their position in the universe is insecure, which leads them to sense a deep existential anxiety. Uncertainty engulfs Shakespeare's and Beckett's protagonists. Hamlet cannot find answers to his questions, even to the most crucial one, that is whether Claudius killed his father as the alleged ghost of his father asserts. For Hamlet, conditions are never clear; they keep changing. Being at the heart of a dilemma, he cannot trust anyone around him. He finds it hard to confide in his mother, his girlfriend, or his friends. Hamlet cannot take refuge in the values that have been alleged to govern the universe. These values are not certain for Hamlet to base his actions on. Revenge cannot be a conclusive value that has the power to trigger Hamlet into action. Among all uncertainties, Hamlet has difficulty in defining himself. He acts with a dual personality; while he sometimes reveals his contemplative nature, he also acts impulsively, as well.

Beckett's characters are also uncertain about everything around them. Estragon and Vladimir are always doubtful about their situation. They do not exactly know the time and the place they have been waiting for Godot, whose identity is another ambiguity for them. Hamm and Clov are, too, enveloped by uncertainties both inside and outside of their cell; in both cases they are in danger of imminent death. In both *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, the characters are afraid of being deserted by the other. The values that are present in these plays are all of a slippery nature. Power can change hands at any time. For Beckett's characters, to form an identity for themselves is another uncertainty; they are hazy about their past, too.

The existential anxiety brings about inertia in characters. Hamlet as the harbinger of the absurd characters cannot see any genuine motivation to be able to act. He comes to the conclusion that the efforts of all humanity are futile. The tramps in *Waiting for Godot*, and Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*, cannot initiate action, either. Both Hamlet's and the absurd characters' actions are arrested; direct action is almost impossible in such a world. Not only the actions but also the speeches of the characters are all deferred. Since there is no real communication between the characters, words are of no earthly use to convey messages. Nihility with all its aspects permeates into all three plays. Seeing that they are unable to achieve anything, the protagonists of the three plays do not regard anything as worthwhile in the world, which never gives any support to them. In their static journeys, time acts as their enemy, which annihilates the importance of everything in their lives.

The following points are further conclusions arrived at in the study. In *Hamlet* no change is aimed at, neither is it in Beckett's plays. In fact, neither Hamlet nor Beckett's characters welcome change. The protagonists of the plays continue their immovable and stable lives though they complain about being inactive for too long. In *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir do not abandon their plan to wait for Godot or to leave one another; they do not dare take the risk of any change, which means uncertainty. They prefer the greater certainty of staying together. ESTRAGON: "They all change. Only we can't" (*WFG* 48). In *Endgame*, Hamm and Clov are not happy with their present condition in their cell; they call all their routines as "farce", yet they do not attempt to change anything. In these two absurd plays, the protagonists do not know what will happen if they change anything, so they prefer to stay together in the same place. Yet, Hamlet is lonelier than these absurdist characters; he suffers from "[a] sense of isolation from other beings", which is known to be a theme of the theatre of the Absurd, more than the others (Hinchliffe 36). For Estragon and Vladimir, they have one another to depend on; the same is true for Hamm and Clov, as well. Yet, Hamlet has nobody to depend on. Even Horatio is just an observer of his agonies; he learns about everything after Hamlet tells him.

In *Hamlet*, Hamlet, too, is resistant to change. He has been disturbed by the changes in his life. He overreacts to his father's death and abandons himself to intense grief. With his mother's hasty marriage his former well-ordered family has been broken, which is a too radical change for Hamlet to accept. Furthermore, he cannot cope with the change in his relationship with Ophelia. When she refuses Hamlet to see her and decides to give his presents back with Polonius' direction, he cannot handle the transformation in Ophelia's attitude. He is deeply disturbed when he finds out that his friends have shifted their loyalty to his uncle, whom he detests. It is hard for Hamlet to be able to cope with such a dramatic change in his intimate friends. Hamlet likes stability in his life. He admires constancy in Horatio:

> thou hast been
> As one in suff' ring all that suffers nothing,
> A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
> Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those
> Whose blood and judgment are so well co-meddled,
> That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please: give me that man
> That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
> In my heart's core, ay in my heart of hearts,
> As I do thee. (3.2.64-73)

Hamlet, like Beckett's plays, is about waiting because of Hamlet's inability to act. In *Waiting for Godot*, the tramps are waiting for Godot, whom they think will be their saviour, and in *Endgame*, Hamm and Clov are waiting for the game and/or their lives to finish. "Man stripped of the accidental circumstances of social position or historical context, confronted with the basic choices, the basic situations of his existence; man faced with time and therefore waiting, in Beckett's plays … waiting between birth and death" (Esslin 401). Waiting is a common point in all three plays, with the protagonists talking to fill in the period of waiting. Estragon and Vladimir talk to fill the time while waiting for Godot; Hamm and Clov use language to fill in the time while they are waiting for their end. By the same token, Hamlet uses speech as a device to fill in the time that he is waiting for to be able to act.

Both in *Hamlet* and Beckett's plays language is inadequate for self expression. "Throughout the play Hamlet is almost never speechless" (Ewbank 60). However,

language is not used for communication. Since language is used not to generate communication, it is problematic in both Beckett's plays and in *Hamlet*. In both writers' works, questions and answers do not match each other. Words "falsify whatever they approach" (Beckett in Berlin 56). The questions and answers do not correspond with each other in *Hamlet*. Hamlet avoids giving direct answers to questions. Hamlet tries to replace his inability to act with using language in lengthy speeches. "Everything Hamlet says and does is a substitute for the delayed act of killing the king" (Hapgood 143). Hamlet also uses language to baffle the people around him. Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia, Polonius and his friends are all confused with his elliptical answers or comments.

In Beckett's plays and in *Hamlet*, there are no specifically religious references. Beckett's absurd plays do not advocate religious beliefs; his characters resign themselves to an absurd mechanism. Although Hamlet resigns himself to a mysterious divinity at the end of the play he, too, does not resign himself to a specific religious reference.

Hamlet has struggled to construe all events and the people around him within the framework of reason and certainty, yet "in [his] search for spiritual certainty and the conviction that comes with it Hamlet [is] destroyed" (Paolucci 237). He tends to deal with the events that he experiences with his essential rationality. However, the world he occupies is an irrational absurd world.

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