

ANSWERS - Waiting for Godot

1. Do you think that the world of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a nihilistic world? Substantiate your answer with close reference to the play.

or

7) Do Vladimir and Estragon stand around killing time because they're waiting for Godot, or is their waiting for Godot itself just an act to fill the void? Explain.

Or

16) Analyse the theme of uncertainty in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

"Let's go."—"We can't."—"Why not?"—"We're waiting for Godot."—"Ah." With this infamous refrain, Samuel Beckett introduces the strange world of *Waiting for Godot*. The two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, have nothing significant to do with their lives other than waiting for the inscrutable Godot, or any significant place to be other than by the side of a road in the middle of nowhere.

Broadly defined, nihilism is a denial of any significance or meaning in the world. Deriving from the Latin word for "nothing" (*nihil*), it is a worldview centered around negation, claiming that there is no truth, morality, value, or—in an extreme form—even reality.

As Beckett's title "*Waiting for Godot*" indicates, the central act of the play is waiting, and one of the most salient aspects of the play is that nothing really seems to happen. Vladimir and Estragon spend the entire play waiting for Godot, who never comes. Estragon repeatedly wants to leave, but Vladimir insists that they stay, in case Godot actually shows up. As a result of this endless waiting, both Vladimir and Estragon are "bored to death," as Vladimir himself puts it. Both Vladimir and Estragon repeat throughout the play that there is "nothing to be done" and "nothing to do." They struggle to find ways to pass the time, so they end up conversing back and forth about nothing at all—including talking about how they don't know what to talk about—simply to occupy themselves while waiting. The boredom of the characters on-stage mirrors the boredom of the audience. Beckett has deliberately constructed a play where not only his characters, but also his audience wait for something that

never happens. Just like Estragon and Vladimir, the audience waits during the play for some major event or climax that never occurs. Audience members might at times feel uncomfortable and want, like Estragon, to leave, but are bound to stay, in case Godot should actually arrive later in the play.

The world of the play is largely emptied out of meaning, emotion, and substance, leading to characters who blabber on endlessly in insignificant conversation. Given the play's deep exploration of the absurd humour and feelings of alienation that arise from this nihilistic understanding of the world, one could say that *Waiting for Godot* is, at its core, about nothing. All of this waiting for nothing, talking about nothing, and doing nothing contributes to a pervasive atmosphere of nihilism in the play.

However, Günther Anders suggests that to say that the tramps are nihilists is not only incorrect, but the exact reverse of what Beckett wants to show.

Although scarcely an epistemologist or metaphysician, Vladimir has moments of lucidity in regard to their situation:

Vladimir: Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? (Estragon, having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again. Vladimir looks at him.) He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot. (Pause) Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens.) But habit is a great deadener. (He looks again at Estragon.) At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (Pause.) I can't go on! (Pause.) What have I said?1

However, at this exact moment when he seems poised to be conscious of the Heideggerian sense of *Geworfenheit* (or “thrownness”) and begin to fashion his own singular and creative world apart from Estragon and the rituals of waiting, the boy messenger returns and Vladimir once again lapses into the fate of waiting for the mysterious Godot. As Eva Metman suggests, “Godot’s function

seems to be to keep his dependants unconscious.” A critical moment passes and Vladimir slips again into habit, the action of inaction.

Estragon, the more passive and instinctive of the pair, although frequently living in a daze and subject to the lure of sleep and the thralldom of dreams, is not without insight into this abysmal world. After listening to Vladimir’s comment about the uselessness of reason, he pronounces: “We are all born mad. Some remain so.”³ And at the beginning of the play, he opines: “Nothing to be done.”⁴ This sets the tone for his frequent cynicism and suggests a sort of primordial intuition about his actual plight of being mired in nothingness (“There’s no lack of void”). But again, as in the case of Vladimir, this intuition is undeveloped and unpursued; Estragon prefers the constant escape of mindless conversations, silly games (“Boot on, boot off”), the delicacies of carrots or radishes, the distractions of Pozzo and Lucky, and the lure of quasi-narcolepsy.

Therefore, if by “nihilism” one means the doctrine or belief that life is utterly without significance of any kind, then ‘Waiting for Godot’ is not meaningless. The tramps have a meaning, albeit one that is repetitively deadened and empty. As Vladimir puts it: “Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—.” Vladimir and Estragon conclude from the fact of their existence that there must be something for which they are waiting; they are champions of the doctrine that life must have meaning even in a manifestly meaningless situation... What Beckett presents is not nihilism, but the inability of man to be a nihilist even in a situation of utter hopelessness. This is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s claim that “Any meaning is better than none at all.” Despite their sense that human life is nothing more than a brief and absurd interlude between the thrownness of birth and the darkness of death, the tramps cling to the notion that the mysterious and enigmatic figure of Godot will save them and give their lives significance. They will not allow themselves, therefore, to be nihilists for they refuse the one freedom the nihilist insists on—the freedom of suicide. The tramps play at suicide, and the constant stage presence of the tree suggests that the possibility of suicide is an a priori of the human condition. One is reminded of Camus’s assertion that suicide is the only serious philosophical problem, but the tramps can only joke about hanging themselves. In Act 1, suicide is contemplated as a distraction, which could result in “an erection...and all that follows.”⁹ This is followed by banter about who should be hanged first—who is lighter or heavier—but the tramps decide to do nothing (“It’s safer”). In Act 2, at the end of the play, the topic of hanging themselves re-emerges. This time they engage in a sort of vaudevillian routine

in which they try to use Estragon's trouser-cord as a rope, but Estragon's pants fall down and the rope breaks. A poignant dialogue ensues:

“Vladimir: Not worth a curse.

Estragon: You say we have to come back tomorrow? Vladimir: Yes.

Estragon: Then we can bring a good bit of rope. Vladimir: Yes.

Estragon: Didi.

Vladimir: Yes.

Estragon: I can't go on like this.

Vladimir: That's what you think.

Estragon: If we parted? That might be better for us.

Vladimir: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. Unless Godot comes. Estragon: And if he comes?

Vladimir: We'll be saved.”

Undoubtedly, there is a certain sadness in this interchange as well as another realization of their dependence on each other, but there is also a good deal of slapstick humor. The tramps do not seem to be in any danger of actually hanging themselves and thereby ending their plight, unlike many serious nihilists who have done so. Nor does there seem to be any progress made on the issue of realizing “thrownness” and developing their own singular, separate, and creative worlds, which would seem to be a pre-condition for so-called existential “authenticity.” From the context of the discussion of suicide in Act 1 to that of the same issue in Act 2, the tramps are acutely aware that all they can or are willing to do in life is just wait together endlessly—and rather mindlessly—for Godot. Such habitual, reflexive, and conformistic behavior is hardly what the existentialists have had in mind with the notion of authenticity.

But the tramps may indeed be nihilists in Nietzsche's precise sense of the term. That is, for Nietzsche, a nihilist is not one who believes in nothing, but one who

abandons belief in this world in favour of another world that is (according to Nietzsche) idealized, fictitious, and the product of the mechanisms of resentment. Nietzsche finds the source of such nihilism in the Platonic/Judeo-Christian worldview, and vigorously exposes this in many works using his genealogical method of analysis. Although Nietzsche does not use the word as such, the idea of a critique of eschatology—and specifically the Platonic/Judeo-Christian idea of the eschaton—figures prominently in his philosophy. Eschatology, of course, is the study of the end of time, classically in a religious sense, and the eschaton is the exact expectation of what that end time would involve. Following largely in the tradition of Zoroastrianism, the three Semitic religions of the West have postulated similar eschatons that share a common structure: the return of a messianic figure at the end of cosmic linear history, a final apocalyptic battle between the forces of good and evil, and the institution of a scenario of judgment which will be followed by eternal salvation or damnation. Nietzsche also traces the phenomenon of a philosophical eschaton by way of the Platonic denial of the world of becoming and the postulation of pure being in terms of abstract and eternal forms with which the human soul communes after death.

Thus, in either a specifically religious or philosophical sense, Nietzsche claims that the eschaton—the notion of another world besides this one—diminishes and devalues the real and present world of the senses. And those who come to believe in this other world are, he alleges, nihilists in the exact etymological sense of the word: they are believers in the “nothing” of a pseudo-world to come. Could this notion of the eschaton have applicability to *Waiting for Godot*? Many critics have thought so. Indeed, it seems obvious that Beckett has scattered many eschatological hints throughout the play. The list is extensive, but would include the following: Vladimir speaks of the Gospels and of one of the thieves who was crucified with Christ as being saved. (“One of the four says that one of the two was saved.”), The Bible is mentioned, although Estragon has only a halting memory of it and says he mainly recalls the coloured maps of the Holy Land. Christ is referred to as “our saviour.”, Estragon says that all his life he has compared himself with Christ, Pozzo claims that humans are “made in God’s image.”, In response to Pozzo, Estragon mockingly says that his own name is “Adam.”, Lucky delivers a rambling tirade in which the traditional God of Judeo-Christian metaphysics is satirized—a being with white beard, outside time, without extension, etc, Vladimir alludes to Proverbs 13:12 with his statement that “Hope deferred maketh the something sick...” (“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.”). The

tramps cry out later in the play for God and Christ to have mercy on them, Cain and Abel are alluded to as possible names for Pozzo and Lucky in Act 2.

2. What do you understand by absurdism? In what way is Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* an absurdist play?

The term Theatre of the Absurd derives from the philosophical use of the term "absurd" by such existentialist thinkers as Camus and Sartre. This term was coined by Martin Esslin in 1961 and it designates particular plays written by a number of European playwrights primarily between the late 1940s to the 1960s, as well as to the form of theatre derived from their work. The Theatre of the Absurd draws heavily on the existential philosophy, of Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus, which lays emphasis on the absurdity of the human condition and on the incapability of thought to provide an explanation of reality. The Theatre of the Absurd came about as a reaction to the Second World War. It took the basic premise of existential philosophy and combined it with dramatic elements to create a form which presented a world that was unexplainable and a life that seemed absurd.

The plays grouped under the label the Theatre of the Absurd express a sense of shock at the absence as well as the loss of any clear and well-defined systems of belief. Such a sense of disillusionment and collapse of all previously held beliefs is a characteristic feature of the post- World War II era. Suddenly man confronted a universe that was both frightening and illogical- in a word, absurd. Thus, the main idea of the Theatre of the Absurd was to point out man's helplessness and meaningless existence in a world without purpose. The Absurdist plays present a disillusioned and stark picture of the world. They are also quite 'realistic'. The realism of these plays is a psychological and inner realism- they explore the human subconscious rather than simply describing the outward appearance of human existence.

The Theatre of the Absurd has its origins in Dadaism, non-sense poetry, and avant-garde art of the first and the second decades of the twentieth century. Its roots also lie in Camus' 'The Myth of Sisyphus'. The Theatre of the Absurd tried to come to terms with the traumatic experience of the horrors of the Second World War which revealed the total impermanence of values, shook the validity of beliefs, and exposed the precariousness of human life and its meaninglessness. It also emerged as a response to the monotony of the conventional theatre. Nevertheless, it is also a kind of return to the old, even

archaic, traditions. The Theatre of the Absurd thus displays in new and individually varied combinations the age-old traditions of- 'pure' theatre; clowning; fooling, and mad scenes; verbal nonsense; and the literature of dream and fantasy (with strong allegorical component).

According to Martin Esslin, the four defining playwrights of the movement are Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov. Beckett is a prime example of an existentialist writer for the Theatre of the Absurd. His plays, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, are perhaps the finest examples of the Theatre of the Absurd. *Endgame* is a play where 'nothing happens, once', whereas in *Waiting for Godot*, 'nothing happens, twice'. These plays are read as fundamentally existentialist in their take on life. The fact that none of the characters retain any memory of their past clearly indicates that they are constantly struggling to prove their existence. The other major exponents of the Theatre of the Absurd include Jean Tardieu and Boris Vian in France; Dino Buzzati and Ezio d' Errico in Italy; Gunter Grass and Wolfgang Hildesheimer in Germany; Fernando Arrabal in Spain; Edward Albee and Tom Stoppard in America; Slawomir Mrozek and Tadeusz Rozewicz in Poland; and N. F. Simpson, James Saunders, David Campton, and Harold Pinter in Britain. The playwrights whose works can be considered as precursors to the movement include Alfred Jarry, Guillaume Apollinaire, Luigi Pirandello, the surrealists and many more.

The Theatre of the Absurd follows certain dramatic conventions:

While most of the plays in the traditional convention tell a story, the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd communicate a poetic image or a complex pattern of poetic images which are essentially static.

However, this does not imply that they lack movement. But the situation of the play remains static, whereas the movement we see is the unfolding of the poetic image. For instance, *Waiting for Godot* does not tell a story; it explores a static situation- that of waiting which emerges as a poetic image and the repetition of this pattern throughout the play leads the reader to the unfolding of this image (i.e. the revelation of the meaning) towards the end of the play.

The most important characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd are as follows:

There is often no real story line; instead, there is a series of 'free floating images' which help the audience to interpret a play.

The main focus of an Absurdist play is on the incomprehensibility of the world, or the futility of an attempt to rationalize an irrational, disorderly world.

The Theatre of the Absurd is, to a very considerable extent, concerned with a critique of language (which has become devoid of meaning) as an unreliable and insufficient tool of communication. For instance, in *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett parodies the language of philosophy and science in Lucky's speech. Also, the silences that punctuate the conversation between Estragon and Vladimir represent the emptiness that pervades people's lives. They talk to each other but they fail to comprehend what is being said. They often interrupt and repeat each other's dialogues.

In other words, the Absurdist drama creates an environment where people are isolated, clown-like characters blundering their way through life because they don't know what else to do. Though the Absurdist plays seem to be quite random and meaningless on the surface, one can trace an underlying structure and meaning amidst chaos. Another important feature of the Theatre of the Absurd is that it does not situate man in a historical, social, or cultural context; it is not merely a commentary on the general condition of human life. Instead, it delineates human condition the way man experiences it. For example, in *Waiting for Godot*, the tramps have a very blurred sense of time and history. This lack of knowledge of one's own culture and past symbolizes the breakdown of culture and tradition in the twentieth century.

Most of the dramatists whose plays are grouped under the label Theatre of the Absurd resisted and disliked any such classification and categorization of their plays. According to Martin Esslin, a term like the Theatre of the Absurd is just an aid to understanding (and is valid only insofar as it helps to gain an insight into a work of art). It is not a restrictive category. He says that a play may contain some elements that can be best understood in the light of such a label, while other elements in the same play may derive from and can be understood in the light of a different convention.

3) Do you think that Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a theatrical metaphor for the myth of Sisyphus. Explain.

Albert Camus' *The Rebel*, *The Outsider*, and 'The Myth of Sisyphus' are suffused with existential themes. But like many other writers, he too rejected the existentialist label and considered his works to be absurdist. 'The Myth of Sisyphus', written in 1942, is an important work in which Camus uses the analogy of the Greek myth to demonstrate the futility of existence. He saw Sisyphus as an "absurd" hero with a pointless existence. Eventually, 'The Myth of Sisyphus' became a prototype for the Theatre of the Absurd.

The theatre of the absurd is a phenomenon of the nineteen fifties. Absurd Theatre is a term applied to a group of dramatists in the 1950's. The term Theatre of the Absurd defines a special dramatic form that came up in the 1950s in France and it reflects the hopeless futility of human existence. It was thus a collective term for dramas with grotesque and surreal scenes. Martin Esslin, a theater critic from Hungary, coined the term by writing a book on this very subject.

These types of play present the philosophy of the French philosopher Albert Camus. Camus wrote in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* about the meaninglessness of the human condition and that the world must be seen as absurd since it is not possible to explain the universe in a fully satisfying way. Camus believed that boredom or waiting prompted people to think seriously about their own identity, as Estragon and Vladimir do in *Waiting for Godot*. In the play, waiting induces boredom as a theme. And Beckett succeeds in creating a similar sense of boredom in the audience by means of mundane repetitive dialogues and actions. Vladimir and Estragon constantly ponder and ask questions which are either rhetorical or are left unanswered.

A world event with disastrous effects would be needed to bring about the birth of this new type of play, such as World War II. Fascism, right-wing extremism and the resulting trauma from the war of living under threat of nuclear annihilation put special emphasis on the fragility of human existence. The absurdity experienced along the way became part of the everyday thinking of the average person. The resulting form of theatre from now on rebelled against existing theatre conventions and Eugène Ionesco even called it the "anti-theater" because it had no plot, was conflictless, illogical and surreal.

It is very clear from the very word "Absurd" that it means nonsensical, opposed to reason, something silly, foolish, senseless, ridiculous and topsy-

turvy. Moreover, a play having loosely constructed plot, unrecognizable characters, is called an absurd play. Actually the 'Absurd Theatre' believes that humanity's plight is purposeless in an existence, which is out of harmony with its surroundings. This thing i.e. the awareness about the lack of purpose produces a state of metaphysical anguish which is the central theme of the Absurd Theatre. In an absurd play logical construction, rational ideas and intellectually viable arguments are abandoned and instead of these the irrationality for experience is acted out on the stage.

Dramatists belonging to this group did not regard themselves as a school but they all seemed to share certain attitudes towards the predicament of the men in the universe. The theatre of the absurd presents anxiety, despair and a sense of loss at the disappearance of solutions, illusions and purposelessness. The chief practitioners of absurd drama includes Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Ionesco, Edward Albee and Genet.

Waiting for Godot is a representative play of the theatre of the absurd. It is a landmark in modern drama. It is a meditation upon the condition of man imprisoned within the obdurate and inexplicable dimension of time. In this play Beckett expresses his personal view of the human condition through symbolism which has its root in Freudian Psychology, the Christian Myth and Existential Philosophy.

In Waiting for Godot, Beckett deals with the absurdity of man's existence in this universe. In the very opening scene of the play, we are shown two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, waiting for Godot, that enigmatic figure who will decide their destiny, relieve them of the responsibility of living. They are not too sure whether they really have this appointment, nor whether this is the place or the time that have been agreed. They are dependent on each other and yet want to get away from each other. Both the tramps cherish thoughts about suicide. But each time they attempt to commit suicide, they fail through sheer incompetence. In each of the two acts Vladimir and Estragon meet another pair of characters: Pozzo and his slave Lucky. They too are in absurd human situation. The two pairs of characters meet in each act, try to communicate, fail and part: In the second act when Pozzo has gone blind, Lucky has struck dumb. The two tramps remain waiting and Pozzo and Lucky remain wandering. At the end of each of each act a little boy appears, he brings a message from Godot: Godot will not come today, but he will certainly come tomorrow. Thus Beckett presents life as an absurdity, full of odds, where nothing predetermined and logical happens. To Estragon and Vladimir, life is essentially meaningless, hence miserable.

Another feature of an absurd play is the lack of action. By all established canons of drama, a good play must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. But this play has no exposition, no middle and no end. The final situation is exactly the same as the opening one and the characters have been neither presented nor explained when the curtains fall. Either nothing or very happens in the play. Waiting endlessly is the central activity of the play. Estragon's comment, "Nothing to be done" sums up the entire action of the play. As the critic Vivian Mercier has said, *Waiting for Godot* is a play in which "nothing happens twice". Here the very purpose of the play is to say that nothing happens – nothing really happens in human life. *Waiting for Godot* is thus a living paradox: a drama of inaction.

In many respects, *Waiting for Godot* contains existential elements. Although Beckett himself is not aware of any such influence, his writings might be described as a literary exposition of Sartre's Existentialism. Existential philosophy starts from the rejection of the validity and reality of general concepts. Existentialism emphasizes man's responsibility for forming his own nature as well as his personal decisions. Writers like Sartre, Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marsen would argue that there is no predetermined action. They do not postulate an essence as source of action. Thus for the Existentialists, existence comes before essence i.e Existence precedes essence. The Existentialists regards human life as absurd. The two tramps presented before us are placed in a very unhappy predicament. The condition of the two is indeed hopeless. They even wish for death. Lucky, too, is no exception. Man has to be born and reborn to suffer endlessly. The whole atmosphere of the play helps to prove man's absurdity in a hopeless and helpless universe.

In an absurd drama, speech is reduced to a minimum, In the theatre of the absurd, rules are broken, conventions are flouted. As Martin Esslin states, "If a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings". With only one or two exceptions and not taking into account the pompous, meaningless speech of Lucky and the set speeches of Pozzo, the dialogues are brief and concentrated. Sometimes the dialogues attains a ritualistic quality, at other times it is poetic. Thus the playwright tries to convey the meaninglessness of life through such short, crisp dialogues. The protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, seem to represent the two voices of single being rather than two genuinely autonomous characters. The dialogue is maintained even though there is nothing to say, it is maintained by the single device of instant forgetfulness. Beckett is considered to be an important figure among the French Absurdist. "*Waiting for Godot*" is one of the masterpieces of Absurdist literature. Elements of Absurdity for making this play are so engaging

and lively. Beckett combats the traditional notions of Time. It attacks the two main ingredients of the traditional views of Time, i.e. Habit and Memory. We find Estragon in the main story and Pozzo in the episode, combating the conventional notions of Time and Memory. For Pozzo, particularly, one day is just like another, the day we are born indistinguishable from the day we shall die.

“Waiting for Godot” as an absurd play for not only its plot is loose but its characters are also just mechanical puppets with their incoherent colloquy. And above than all, its theme is unexplained. “Waiting for Godot” is an absurd play for it is devoid of characterization and motivation. Though characters are present but are not recognizable for whatever they do and whatever they present is purposeless. So far as its dialogue technique is concerned, it is purely absurd as there is no witty repartee and pointed dialogue. What a reader or spectator hears is simply the incoherent babbling which does not have any clear and meaningful ideas. So far as the action and theme is concerned, it kisses the level of Absurd Theatre. After the study of this play we come to know that nothing special happens in the play nor we observe any significant change in setting. Though a change occurs but it is only that now the tree has sprouted out four or five leaves.

“Nothing happens, nobody comes ... nobody goes, it’s awful!”

The beginning, middle and end of the play do not rise up to the level of a good play, so absurd. Though its theme is logical and rational yet it lies in umbrage.

Moreover, “Waiting for Godot” can also be regarded as an absurd play because it is different from “poetic theatre”. Neither it makes a considerable use of dream and fantasy nor does it employ conscious poetic language. The situation almost remains unchanged and an enigmatic vein runs throughout the play. The mixture of comedy and near tragedy proves baffling. In act-I we are not sure as to what attitude we should adopt towards the different phases of its non-action. The ways, of which the two tramps pass their time, seems as if they were passing their lives in a transparent deception. Godot remains a mystery and curiosity still holds a sway. Here we know that their endless waiting seems to be absurd. Though the fact is that they are conscious of this absurdity, yet it seems to imply that the rest of the world is waiting for the things, which are more absurd and also uncertain.

“Waiting for Godot” is an absurd play for there is no female character. Characters are there but they are devoid of identity. These two Estragon and Vladimir are old acquaintances, but they are not sure of their identity. Though they breathe, their life is an endless rain of blows. They wait for the ultimate extinction, but in a frustrated way. This thing produces meaninglessness, thus makes the play absurd.

Moreover, what makes the play absurd is its ending. We note that the ending of the play is not a conclusion in the usual sense. The wait continues; the human contacts remain unsolved; the problem of existence remains meaningless, futile and purposeless. The conversation between the two tramps remain a jargon, really a humbug and bunkum speech. So all this makes the play an absurd play.

Thus Waiting for Godot features all the elements of an absurd drama. The whole background reminds of man’s loneliness and alienation. The atmosphere of the play is a blend of wit and humour, farce, pathos and even, occasionally, anguish or the metaphysical angst which is akin to the tragic. Summing up, we may observe what Esslin says about this play. “It is the peculiar richness of a play like Waiting for Godot that it opens vistas on so many different perspectives. It is open to philosophical, religious and psychological interpretations, yet above all it is a poem on time, evanescence, the paradox of change and stability, necessity and absurdity”.

It is wrong to assume that the plays of Beckett, Pinter and other absurd dramatists confront their audience with a message of unmitigated gloom and deep despair. True enough, they confront us with the precariousness, the stark comfortlessness of the human condition; they remind us that we know little about our purpose in life and that there is no escape from the ravages of time and death. They hold out no illusion of social progress or compensation for our suffering in any beliefs, these dramatists are messengers of despair. But not for those others who feel that there is a dignity and a liberation in being able to live one’s life without any cheap comforts such as those provided by consoling and unverifiable beliefs.

4) Samuel Beckett described his play, Waiting for Godot, as a tragicomedy. Do you agree with Beckett's statement? Explain.

or

5) Analyse how the comic elements in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot enhance the impact of the play.

In the English edition of *Waiting for Godot*, the play is described as a tragicomedy. Tragicomedy is a literary genre that blends aspects of both tragic and comic forms. Most often seen in dramatic literature, the term can variously describe either a tragic play which contains enough comic elements to lighten the overall mood or a serious play with a happy ending. A dark comedy is a subgenre of comedy that makes light of terrible situations. *Waiting for Godot* never makes light of terrible aspects of life. There are several mentions of death in the play but the characters never make fun of death or for that matter any terrible things in the play. However, there are many incidents in the play that are hilarious and we can laugh watching those hilarious scenes without having any guilt.

The play opens with a negative thought- Nothing to be done. At first when we see Estragon struggling with his boots, the sentence appears funny, but as the play progresses and Godot is nowhere to be seen we gradually grasp the implication of the sentence- the helplessness of the tramps, their frustrations are all there in that first sentence itself. Thus Beckett quite skilfully mixes both tragic and comic elements even in the dialogues of the characters. There are many ways that Beckett makes *Waiting For Godot* comical. Sometimes it is the wit of the character that amuses us. When Estragon struggles with his boots, Vladimir wittily says- "There's man all over you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet." This witty single line is capable of eliciting laughter, more because immediately after saying this Vladimir does almost the same thing with his hat. Again, the words of the characters are funny to hear. Early in the play Estragon says that 'it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes' thus giving a twist to the familiar proverb: 'strike the iron while it is hot' The short sentences,

when said swiftly by the tramps are themselves comical even if there is no funny element in them-

Vladimir- Charming evening we are having.

Estragon- Unforgettable.

Vladimir- And it's not over

Estragon- Apparently not.

Vladimir- It's only beginning.

Estragon- It's awful.

Vladimir- Worse than the pantomime

Estragon- The circus.

Vladimir- The music hall.

Estragon- The circus.

The Chaplinesque-type costume prepares us for many of the comic routines that Vladimir and Estragon perform. The opening scene with Estragon struggling with his boots and Vladimir doffing and donning his hat to inspect it for lice could be a part of a burlesque routine. The resemblance of their costumes to Chaplin's supports the view that these tramps are outcasts from society, but have the same plucky defiance to continue to exist as Chaplin's "Little Tramp" did.

Another action which could come directly from the burlesque theater occurs when Vladimir finds a hat on the ground which he tries on, giving his own to Estragon, who tries it on while giving his hat to Vladimir, who tries it on while giving the new-found hat to Estragon, who tries it on, etc. This comic episode continues until the characters — and the audience — are bored with it. Other burlesque-like scenes involve Vladimir's struggles to help Estragon with his boots while Estragon is hopping awkwardly about the stage on one foot to keep from falling; another scene involves the loss of Estragon's pants, while other scenes involve the two tramps' grotesque efforts to help Pozzo and Lucky get up off the ground and their inept attempts to hang themselves. Thus, the two characters are tied together partly by being two parts of a burlesque act.

Often, the comedy is alloyed with more serious implications so that the total atmosphere is closer to that in dark comedy. For instance, when Pozzo and Lucky enter in act-I, Pozzo's military-style attitude elicits laughter. However,

the audience cannot roar with laughter as there is Lucky who is treated mercilessly by Pozzo in the same scene. The return of Pozzo held by Lucky on a rope seems to create a reverse image of the earlier situation. This image brings a certain satisfaction to the audience. The audience may laugh at this reversal of fortune but they are made acutely aware of how fickle fortune can be. Again, there is a scene which is inspired from circus where Vladimir and Estragon put on and take off each other's hat as well as that of Lucky again and again. While the act is funny but our laughter fades away when we finally understand that the scene is actually a comment on the repetitive and monotonous cycle of life. We are reminded of the myth of Sisyphus. We cannot judge the border between comedy and tragedy when the cord with the help of which the tramps are to commit suicide, breaks. The two men are not even given the chance to die in the bleak world where living is a curse.

There are also several moments or situations in the play which are outright sad without any comic touch in them. In the very beginning of the play we get to know that Estragon is regularly beaten by unknown men. And the most tragic thing is, Estragon has become somewhat used to this daily torment. The problems with Estragon's feet and Vladimir's kidneys do not let them stay in peace. In Vladimir's case, even his laughter hurts him. Their's is the world in which there is no hope to live for and no device to commit suicide by. The only comment that seems befitting for this world is "Nothing to be done". The situation of lucky too is quite pathetic, especially in view of his glorious past, as Pozzo describes it. However the most tragic thing in the play is the fact that the tramps must wait in order to evade the realization that there is actually no Godot, that there is nothing to wait for, that there is no saving. The conscious realization that they are the ones who have invented their own Godot might just snap the last thread that connects them to the world. Deep down Vladimir and Estragon know that Godot will never come but to have meaning to their existence, they have to wait for Godot.

Thus, Waiting for Godot never lets us have an uninhibited laugh at the acts of the tramps. We are constantly reminded of their helplessness, their circular life and the status quo that they are stuck in. But the comic and farcical elements give us the necessary relief. We never feel heavy with all the philosophical implications of the play because of the hilarious activities of Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky. So to conclude we can say tragicomedy is life enhancing because it tries to "remind the audience of the real need to face existence 'knowing the worst,' which ultimately is liberation, with courage and

humility of not taking oneself or one's own pain too seriously, and to bear all life's mysteries and uncertainties; and thus to make the most of what we have rather than to hanker after illusory certainties and rewards".

6) Analyse the significance of the opening statement of Estragon, "nothing to be done" in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot.

Sartrean existentialism states that the search for a rational order in human life is a futile passion. In *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir attempt to create some order in their lives by waiting for Godot who never arrives or perhaps who doesn't even exist. Thus, they continually resign to the futility of their situation, reiterating the lines- "Nothing to be done", "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" This corroborates the existentialist view that human beings exist in an indifferent and "absurd" universe in which meaning is not generated by the natural order, but an unstable, provisional meaning to life is provided by human beings' actions and interpretations.

Waiting for Godot is a representative play of the theatre of the absurd. It is a landmark in modern drama. It is a meditation upon the condition of man imprisoned within the obdurate and inexplicable dimension of time. In this play Beckett expresses his personal view of the human condition through symbolism which has its root in Freudian Psychology, the Christian Myth and Existential Philosophy.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett deals with the absurdity of man's existence in this universe. In the very opening scene of the play, we are shown two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, waiting for Godot, that enigmatic figure who will decide their destiny, relieve them of the responsibility of living. They are not too sure whether they really have this appointment, nor whether this is the place or the time that have been agreed. They are dependent on each other and yet want to get away from each other. Both the tramps cherish thoughts about suicide. But each time they attempt to commit suicide, they fail through sheer incompetence. In each of the two acts Vladimir and Estragon meet another pair of characters: Pozzo and his slave Lucky. They too are in absurd human situation. The two pairs of characters meet in each act, try to communicate, fail and part: In the second act when Pozzo has gone blind, Lucky has struck dumb. The two tramps remain waiting and Pozzo and Lucky remain wandering. At the end of each of each act a little boy appears, he brings a message from Godot:

Godot will not come today, but he will certainly come tomorrow. Thus Beckett presents life as an absurdity, full of odds, where nothing predetermined and logical happens. To Estragon and Vladimir, life is essentially meaningless, hence miserable.

Waiting for Godot contains existential elements. Although Beckett himself is not aware of any such influence, his writings might be described as a literary exposition of Sartre's Existentialism. Existential philosophy starts from the rejection of the validity and reality of general concepts. Existentialism emphasizes man's responsibility for forming his own nature as well as his personal decisions. Writers like Sartre, Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marsen would argue that there is no predetermined action. They do not postulate an essence as source of action. Thus for the Existentialists, existence comes before essence i.e Existence precedes essence. The Existentialists regards human life as absurd. The two tramps presented before us are placed in a very unhappy predicament. The condition of the two is indeed hopeless. They even wish for death. Lucky, too, is no exception. Man has to be born and reborn to suffer endlessly. The whole atmosphere of the play helps to prove man's absurdity in a hopeless and helpless universe.

9) Describe the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon. Why do you think they stay together, despite their frequent suggestions of parting?

or

10) Describe the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. What do you think is the symbolic significance of their characters and their relationship with each other in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot?

or

11) Compare and contrast the relationships between Estragon and Vladimir on the one hand and Pozzo and Lucky on the other in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. What do these relationships reveal about alienation and mutual dependence?

Theme of relationship is a prominent theme of "Waiting for Godot". Samuel Beckett portrays different types of human relationships. There are four kinds of individuals in it. Every character is a separate entity. Individually, they refer something but in a relationship they indicate something else. Vladimir's problems are mental; Estragon's physical. Pozzo and Lucky are presented to show two human races. But when these individuals are put into relations, they perform very important roles in the play.

Estragon and Vladimir are dependent on each other. Vladimir is eloquent, intellectual, cultured than Estragon. He knows Latin. He is politer than Estragon. On the other hand, Estragon is volatile. He likes telling funny stories. He is less intellectual as compared to Vladimir. Difference between both of them can be seen in a beautiful dialogue of Estragon. "He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet" Although their personalities are in contrast to each other but they both make a strong relationship. Samuel Beckett depicts relationship between two contrasting personalities. They fight each with other but still they are friends. Exact period of their friendship is unknown but we

know that their past is more promising than their future. Of course, there is a strange friendship between them. They are companions of a long journey. They fight but cannot live separate. There is a difference in their thinking, in their style of living, in their speaking and finally in their philosophy. Both don't know their future and waiting for hope i.e. Godot. Their life is miserable but strong relationship between both of them gives them hope. They can't survive if separated. Their bond is strong. Neither Estragon can leave Vladimir nor can Vladimir leave Estragon. Their relationship lays "somewhere between fatigue and ennui". Vladimir's dialogue in this regard is helpful. While recalling his memory he says:-

"In the nineties, hand in hand, from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were presentable in those days. Now its too late. They wouldn't even let us up."

Thus, they are friends. Since when? We don't know. But they need each other. It is evident from famous dialogue between the two;

"Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!"

When one gives up waiting for Godot, the second gives hope. When second gives up , first motivates him. Whole play goes on in this way. When Estragon is beaten by strangers, Vladimir shows kindness and pretends like he is protecting him. They need to fight and abuse each other in order to pass their time.

In first act of the play, Lucky is presented as a slave, whereas Pozzo as the master. Lucky presents the modern slavery system, which is worse than actual slavery. He is the representative of dog-like human race; a race which has no value at all. Lucky's character presents a miserable condition of humanity. Samuel Becket symbolizes Pozzo as a cruel master. More cruelty has been shown in the scene when Lucky eats bones. Gods are masters of the universe. They can do anything with humans. Pozzo is symbol of god and Lucky as a puppet in his hands. He can be cruel to him or merciful. Lucky has to accept his orders in any case. There is also one thing common between both of them; Lucky and Pozzo are interdependent. Pozzo cannot go anywhere without his slave. It also reveals that feudal class though is superior yet cannot do anything without slaves.

Vladimir and Estragon, and Pozzo and Lucky are more similar than it seems. The comparison between these two sets of characters holds a deeper meaning than what is presented out in the open. Vladimir and Estragon need each other, even when they have both said that they would be happier without the other, and compared to Pozzo and Lucky they are in many ways the same, especially with their need of domination and submission, which can also be interpreted as dependency. The reader will also find the Beckett never changes the scenery. This adds a sense of repetition, the never changing fact that he again links as to why the two can't leave each other. There are a series of events that unfold during the play that suggests there is a need for each other a sense that without their pairing, existence would be next to impossible.

Interpersonal relationships are the main key to understanding the complex union between Vladimir and Estragon. In the first scene the dependence that Estragon has for Vladimir is apparent immediately when he needs Vladimir's help, because he can't even take off his own boot. This also shows how Beckett deems one of the characters (that appear in pairs) as playing the role of an almost a child-like individual. He goes on to prove through the inflection of the characters that Estragon is more simple-minded and weaker. In this same way, Lucky plays the weaker, less self-sufficient role with Pozzo. When reading Beckett's work that is one of the first things you learn about their relationship. He very quickly makes clear how their entire existence is strongly based on each other. How one needs the other to survive.

Estragon depends on Vladimir to entertain him and remind him of the events that have happened as they wait for Godot, and Estragon portrays a life form of someone just for Vladimir to talk to. This would explain why Vladimir would voluntarily exchange his hat for Lucky's, and it shows his desire for someone else's thoughts. It is in this instance that Beckett incorporates everyday human feelings man needing man. Beckett uses the full extent of the stage to elaborate on Vladimir's role as entertainer. In several scenes, the actor is directed to move about the stage wildly, and in some instances is dragged around by Estragon, floating and being placed where Estragon's whims take him.

Both sets of characters represent the complex relationship of the boy within the man. Vladimir (the man) is more of an intellectual character, the problem solver, the patient one, while Estragon (the young boy) is more impatient and ready to jump at almost anything. Both need the other in order to be balanced and this balance is necessary for sustainability. The reader finds that Vladimir stands throughout the majority the play when Estragon sits down most of the time and

even falls asleep. Vladimir finds himself looking at the sky and talking about religious or philosophical matters. On the other side of things, Estragon is occupied with more base line activities like what is there to eat and how to stop the pain that he is in. He finds himself having a hard time remembering things but can recall certain matters when reminded. Estragon's short-term memory is thought to be one of the reasons that they do not leave each other. (Hutchings) It is also a way that Beckett shows the roots of who the character is.

The lighting and imagery used on the set coincides with the opposition of these two characters. In several instances, Beckett uses lighting to influence the mood of this tragicomedy and with the night and day metaphor in mind, one draws the conclusion that this play would not be complete without the tangible use of imagery to signal changes and transitions. In one scene the light suddenly fails...The moon rises back, mounts in the sky, stands still, shedding a pale light on the scene.

Beckett's theme of pairs continues with Pozzo and Lucky as well as the constant dependency of the boy within the man. Pozzo and Lucky are first introduced by in Beckett's play with Lucky entering on a leash made of rope with Pozzo behind him walking him. The reader will find that Beckett uses the rope around Lucky's neck as a symbol of how the pairs are tied to each other in more ways than one. Even though Pozzo is more than capable of carrying his own things, it's a sense of insecurity that makes him exaggerate his need for help. Beckett established just how badly Lucky is treated by directing the actor to pull on the rope till he falls. This leaves the reader (or audience) once again wondering why Lucky does not just leave.

Throughout these acts, Beckett uses stage direction to better illustrate the master and slave relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. In one scene, Lucky appears by himself only long enough to reach the middle of the stage before the audience (or reader) realizes that Pozzo is still behind Lucky as always, holding onto the rope and relying on him for direction, but still treating him very badly. They exit and enter together and follow each other around the stage for most of the piece, adding physical attributes to the inseparable relationship that is alluded to through their lines.

It is then revealed that they have been together almost 60 years and things have never changed. Lucky gets whipped and treated horribly because he is the horse pulling Pozzo's carriage. It is a relationship that seems to an outsider to be cruel and unfair, but still, Lucky stays by his side. Over the years it has been debated on whether Pozzo and Lucky are similar to Vladimir and Estragon. Although it is apparent that Pozzo and Lucky are more or less Didi and Gogo written on a

large scale, there is another thing happening in the background. Pozzo was mistaken for Godot by the two men, but when it came to Lucky, Pozzo is his Godot. Their coinciding themes are not as vivid as it comes across, however, upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that Lucky always possessed more influence in the relationship, for he danced, and more importantly, thought, not as a service, but in order to fill a vacant need of Pozzo.

In spite of the existential concept that man cannot take the essence of his existence from someone else, in viewing this play, we have to view Vladimir and Estragon in their relationship to each other. In fact, the novice viewing this play for the first time often fails to note any significant difference between the two characters. In hearing the play read, even the most experienced theatre person will often confuse one of the characters for the other. Therefore, the similarities are as important as the differences between them. Both are tramps dressed in costumes which could be interchanged. They both wear big boots which don't necessarily fit, and both have big bowler hats. Their suits are baggy and ill-fitting. (In Act II, when Estragon removes the cord he uses for a belt, his trousers are so baggy that they fall about his feet.) Their costumes recall the type found in burlesque or vaudeville houses, the type often associated with the character of the "Little Tramp," portrayed by Charlie Chaplin. Pozzo and Lucky represent the antithesis of each other. Yet they are strongly and irrevocably tied together — both physically and metaphysically. Any number of polarities could be used to apply to them. If Pozzo is the master (and father figure), then Lucky is the slave (or child). If Pozzo is the circus ringmaster, then Lucky is the trained or performing animal. If Pozzo is the sadist, Lucky is the masochist. Or Pozzo can be seen as the Ego and Lucky as the Id. An inexhaustible number of polarities can be suggested.

In the end, the reader realizes that the ongoing theme of this work is death, man's ultimate limitation. It is the fear that drives the characters, remains constant in the minds of the weaker minded, and is a force that creeps slowly towards us all.

12) Analyse the significance of the title of Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot.

or

13) Explain what Godot stands for in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot.

or

14) In Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, if Vladimir and Estragon are so filled with despair over the meaninglessness of life, why are they unable to commit suicide? Substantiate your answer with close reference to the text.

Or

8) Analyse the theme of waiting in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot

A lot of controversies have arisen since the publication of 'Waiting for Godot'. Critics have not been able to reach any kind of agreement about this play. Even Beckett himself did not offer much help to interpret the play. The chief concern of this absurd drama is 'waiting' and 'Godot' which are ever puzzling. Throughout their lives, human beings always wait for something, and Godot simply represents the objective of their waiting-an event, a thing, a person, death. Beckett has thus depicted in this play a situation that has a general human application.

The source of the title of the play has aroused a greater controversy than anything else connected with it. An earlier version of the play was simply called 'waiting'. Martin Esslin holds the view that the subject of the play is not Godot but waiting. There is a general agreement that Godot is of less importance in the play than waiting, but the source of the word Godot has excited much curiosity. Beckett himself was of little help and, when asked about the meaning of Godot he replied, "If I knew I would have said so in the play."

One of the critics, wishing to pinpoint the foolishness of trying to identify Godot too closely, said, "Godot is that character for whom two tramps are waiting at the edge of a road and who does not come." Yet those hunting for the meaning of 'Godot' have ignored the advice offered by this critic and by Beckett himself and have displayed much ingenuity in interpreting the word 'Godot'. It has been said, for instance, that the word has been formed from the English 'God' and French 'Eau' (water). Even 'Godo' is spoken Irish for God. Hugh Kenner has connected the name with his famous theory of the 'cartesian centaur' by mentioning the name of a French racing cyclist whose last name was Godean.

The source for the full title of the play caused similar anxiety. The most convincing suggestion, in this case, comes from Eric Bentley who traces the title to Balzac's play 'Marcadet'. In Balzac's play, the return of a person named Godean is anxiously awaited, the frustration of waiting is as much a part of Balzac's play as it is of Beckett's. According to yet another view of Martin Esslin, the source of the title for the play was Odets's 'Waiting for lefty'. It is believed that the name of 'Odets' might have itself suggested to Beckett the name Godot'. There is still another possibility Beckett's title may have its source in Tom Kromer's book called 'Waiting for Nothing?'

The play is a direct presentation of waiting, ignorance, impotence, boredom. We all are impotent and suffering from boredom, loneliness, and alienation. We have no sons, no daughters, and no women with us, we are all alone like Estragon and Vladimir. There is no one to accompany us, no one to relieve us of our misery, pain, and suffering. It is true, no system, no philosophy, person or even God that can deliver us free. We wait and wait, that finale, our relief or freedom does not come, probably Godot would never come whether we wait hopefully or not.

'Waiting for Godot' is a dramatization of the themes of habit and 'The sufferings of being'. Habit is a great deadener, says Vladimir, and by the time he says so, he and Estragon have had about ninety minutes on the stage to prove it. It is the sound of their own voices that re-assures the two tramps of their own

existence, of which they are not otherwise always certain because the evidence of their senses is so dubious. The tramps have another reason also to keep talking. They are drawing out those voices that assail them in the silence, just as they assailed nearly all Beckett's heroes.

Vladimir and Estragon, have travelled towards total nihilism, but they have not fully achieved it. They still retain enough remnants of hope to be tormented by despair. And in place of hope as a dynamic, they have expectancy. This is the main motif of the play. The two tramps are in a place and in a mental state in which nothing happened and time stands still. Their main preoccupation is to pass time night until night comes. They realize the futility of their exercises and they are merely filling up the hours. In this sense their waiting is mechanical, it is the same thing as not moving.

In another sense, it is an obligation. They have to remain where they are, though they resent doing so and would like to leave. This mood of expectancy has also a universal validity because whenever we wait we are expectant even though we are almost certain that our waiting will not be rewarded. The title of the play thus brings into our mind about the meaningless waiting and it is the waiting for Godot who may stand for God, or for a mythical human being, or for the meaning of life, or for death or for something else.

As Jeffrey Nealon puts it, *Waiting for Godot* is an attack on modernism with its ideologies and Grand Narratives that claim to interpret the world: "Estragon and Vladimir are trapped by their modernist nostalgia for legitimation in Godot."

What did Beckett intend by the symbol of Godot? A wide gamut of interpretations has been proffered. Godot is the unreachable God; he is death; he is some kind of future utopia; he is the panacea of plentiful food and shelter; he is the suggestion of the triumph of mass unconsciousness and social conformity over individual authenticity; or he is a strange sort of quasi-bureaucrat or administrator who has family, friends, agents, correspondents, books, and a bank account. Two issues complicate correct explication: (1) All suggested exegeses are underdetermined by the text itself and by the absence of any significant interpretation of the play by Beckett himself; and (2) Beckett claimed that he was more interested in the aspect of "waiting" in the play, and less concerned with the question of who or what Godot is.

It has been postulated that Godot is the equivalent of the Platonic/Judeo-Christian eschaton. This need not, of course, exclude strictly secular or political types of "end-time" scenarios, even though Beckett seems to have focused more on religious eschatology. Thus, it may be possible to suppose that in the

appearance of the antipodes, Lucky and Pozzo, we have a veiled allusion to the master/slave mode of Geist as explored by Hegel, or the historical phenomenon of class antagonisms as developed by Marx. Both of these secular eschatologies issue into a kind of determined waiting or expectation as to the consummation of history, whether in the form of the resolution of the dialectic in Pure Spirit and the Prussian state or its dissolution in the classless society. Either way, it is abundantly clear that the tramps are envious of Pozzo and his menial precisely because they have a direction and goal (at least in Act 1 of the play). There is a kind of historicity and driving “motor” of history that propels the antipodes, which Vladimir and Estragon clearly lack.

If Godot is plausibly understood as the Western eschaton in either a religious or political sense, then we must immediately return to Beckett’s primary interest in “waiting.” What does an eschatological structure do to the experience of time? Since each Western eschaton has seemed to be unreachable, the temporal phenomenology they share is that each moment of lived time can only have an instrumental value, not an intrinsic value. That is, each moment is “unterwegs”—on the way to—the end state that will justify and redeem it. Moments of time in this framework are not to be enjoyed as such; they are to be endured. The issue is complicated by the unreachability of the end in the sense that this very unreachability converts the active stream of time into a sort of quicksand or temporal mush. We see this conversion occurring constantly in *Waiting for Godot*. The tramps go through the dull routines of each day; nothing of any real consequence is accomplished, and all actions and conversations move in vast circles, the purpose of which is merely to jolt lived time ahead inch by inch. This explains why the tramps are desperate for diversions. Anything at all is fair game—including verbally abusing each other, silly routines, singsong divertissements, playing at being Pozzo and Lucky, speculating about Godot, and contemplating suicide. Their great despair is precisely a function of their mindless devotion to an end state that (in Beckett’s eyes) cannot and will not come. Because they merely exist, but do not experience the full richness of the temporal now, they lack a significant world and are doomed to the labor of constantly being forced to “kill time.” It is true that there are moments of genuine humor in the play, and the tramps do seem to have a kind of empathy for each other, but all this is overridden by the fundamental pessimism that forces them to live in the shadow of a pseudo-salvation that will never come. Their numbingly repetitive references to Godot are analogous to the final, weary efforts of men who no longer believe in anything significant at all in this world. They are doing nothing other than going through the motions of living in a manner not unlike the “last men” that

Nietzsche postulated as the dénouement of the inherent nihilism of the Western eschatological worldview. Of course, it is true that waiting is the fundamental project or meaning of the tramps' lives, as Vladimir realizes when he notes that "we are not saints but have kept our appointment." Thus, it might be argued that in realizing their being-as-waiting they have realized their authentic being. But the question from Nietzsche's point of view would be: what have the tramps accomplished by their deadened rituals, and what have they found out about themselves? The answer seems to be that they cling to a worldview that no longer has any life or vitality or even believability to it. They have not even ventured a beginning movement toward any significant individuality or creativity. Their hopeless stance is a kind of life-denying masochism of the sort that Nietzsche (and perhaps Beckett too) found all too often in Western eschatology.

That the tramps lack a significant world has not gone unnoticed by commentators. Günther Anders notes. That this real loss of a world requires special means if it is to be represented in literature or on the stage goes without saying. Where a world no longer exists, there can no longer be a possibility of a collision with the world, and therefore the very possibility of tragedy has been forfeited. Or to put it more precisely: the tragedy of this kind of existence lies in the fact that it does not even have a chance of tragedy, that it must always, at the same time, in its totality be farce...and that therefore it can only be represented as farce, as ontological farce, not as comedy.

Because of their stubborn and nihilistic attachment to an idealistic eschaton, the tramps cannot rise to authenticity. That is, they cannot, for example, be tragic heroes in the way Hamlet is, nor can they be Übermenschen in the way that Nietzsche thought of Goethe. This is because they lack the requisite depth of character and the singularity of creative and meaningful action. Even the strangely attractive world of Pozzo and Lucky in Act 1 is ultimately unavailable to the tramps in Act 2, where it is revealed that Pozzo is now blind and Lucky is dumb. This seems to be Beckett's way of insinuating that the proto-Hegelian dialectic of the antipodes has played itself out, and the two are just as helpless and lost as the tramps. Pozzo as a potential Tiresias or soothsayer (Hegel? Marx?) shows himself to be a tired and broken old man, and Lucky, we discover, is carrying nothing more than sand in his bags—sand, the very raw material of certain types of clocks. Thus, Lucky very literally has "time on his hands," and Pozzo is a confused fool—another type of dénouement for the Western eschaton in socio-political terms.

Paul Fiddes has put forward a very different interpretation of the characters of Pozzo and Lucky, albeit one that supports the critique of the play as a commentary on the decline of the religious eschaton. Fiddes argues that Pozzo's first appearance in Act 1 is a satire of the Judeo-Christian God: Pozzo is imperious and dominating, he drives his servant Lucky in front of him on a rope, and the tramps initially mistake Pozzo for Godot himself.²¹ Additionally, Pozzo has all the pretensions of the God of traditional metaphysics. He expects the others to know his name, and claims the open road as 'my land'. He greets them mockingly as 'Of the same species as myself...Made in God's image!', adding 'I cannot go for long without the society of my likes even when the likeness is an imperfect one'. He is the creator-impresario, a theatre director who absolutely controls his actors. Fiddes also points out that the very name Pozzo probably refers to the omnipotence of God, "as Pozzo sounds like the Latin verb posse, to be able, or to have the power to do something. Pozzo has all the power, all the ability, and he exploits it mercilessly."²³ In turn, Fiddes interprets Lucky's tirade as a rambling lament concerning the helplessness of the human condition in the face of God's supposed omniscience and omnipotence:

The tragic finale of the play, says Fiddes, comes in Act 2 when Pozzo returns as blind and helpless, and Lucky returns as mute: "In Act 2 Pozzo appears again, sadly changed. He is a wreck of his former self, blind, no longer omniscient (he used to have 'wonderful, wonderful, sight'). Lucky is dumb. The God of traditional metaphysics is dead to the modern mind." The "Personal God" that Lucky speaks of in his tirade at last seems to have devolved to the status of a habitual and irrelevant myth. The tramps throw themselves on Lucky in Act 1 to try to stop his speech, as they realize only too well the implications of what he is saying.

Obviously, the characters of Pozzo and Lucky are extremely enigmatic and many other critical interpretations of their symbolism have been ventured, ranging from the idea that the antipodes represent the inherent sado-masochism of human nature to the idea that they are thinly disguised shadow images or doppelgängers of Vladimir and Estragon.

Finally, inasmuch as the tramps and the antipodes lack significant existences in a meaningfully temporal world, the characters' sense of memory in the play is very problematical. Of the four, Vladimir has the best memory, but even he has

numerous lapses and moments of doubt when pressed on specifics by Estragon. Estragon's memory, on the other hand, is dubious in the extreme unless it relates to specific sensory stimuli, such as the taste of chicken bones or a bruise delivered by a kick from Lucky. As to the antipodes, Lucky seems incapable of any significant memory at all (aside from jumbled allusions in his tirade to various philosophers and philosophical stances), and Pozzo's memory has almost totally failed him in Act 2. Even though the play is entitled *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett does not seem very much interested in either future or past. For him, significant human fulfillment does not appear to be grounded in memory or expectation; there is no absolutely stable past or otherworldly future to discover. His existential perspective is grounded in the present: to exist is to live in the now, for the past is "the no longer" and the future is "the not yet" (endlessly deferred). The no longer and the not yet both reveal the futility of life. Thus, Beckett appears to be suggesting that memory and the eschaton as real forms of salvation are illusory.

Failure of memory constitutes a significant fragmentation of all four main characters. Beckett seems to be presenting them as reductions to absurdity of the plight of Everyman. Vladimir is the "realist" who disintegrates into a mere shadow self while hopelessly clinging to his "being-as-waiting." Estragon is the "dreamer" who prefers to sleep his way through life in a sort of life-denying stupor. Lucky is the erstwhile philosopher whose grand words and ideas have degenerated through a schizophrenic "word salad" phase on the way to absurdity and silence. And Pozzo is the master of manor and history who, in the end, finds himself blind and fallen in a heap in the middle of the road. The tramps in particular have been systematically victimized by their habitual allegiance to the Heilsgeschichtliche—or "salvation history"—of Western eschatology. Their devotion to an impossible world to come leaves them spiritually bereft in the here and now. Even though they exhibit pseudo-identification with apparently "important" values, they are nihilists in the sharpest, most Nietzschean sense imaginable precisely because they refuse to (or cannot) leave their bog and each other and engage in the existential project of re-creating themselves and their worlds as singular, meaningful phenomena. In a general way, all existentialists understand authenticity as a singular and lucid attempt to find one's own deepest values and projects in a way that precludes the deadness of habit and the capitulation to conformistic behavior. In this way, the tramps are paradigms of inauthenticity.

All that remains, perhaps, is to determine Beckett's own attitude toward these unfortunates. It can only be one of resigned compassion for the absurdity of the human condition, as is evidenced not only in *Waiting for Godot*, but also in later plays, such as *Endgame*, where the main protagonist is blind and paralyzed and awaiting death. The only consolation given to these fading characters is the dyadic relation to an Other who can share in their angst and decline. Hamm has Clov in *Endgame*; and the antipodes and tramps stagger on as pairs in *Waiting for Godot*. It is also apparently not coincidental that Beckett greatly admired the farcical character of Charlie Chaplin, the little metaphysical clown, who made an entire generation poignantly aware of the perils of being-in-the-world. Given Beckett's assumptions about the collapse or hollowness of Western eschatology, he seems to be suggesting that there is little consolation for humanity other than the companionship of the doomed and the pathos of gallows laughter. Meanwhile, one might suggest, the ethos of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* awaits as a different paradigm for being-in-the-world, one that seizes on the nihilism of Vladimir and Estragon as a pre-condition for transcendent creativity, joy, and the transvaluation of Western eschatological values. One imagines Goethe and Heine waiting in the wings offstage in contra pose to the sad spectacle of the tramps onstage in *Godot*.

15) Analyse the significance of Lucky's speech in Act 1 of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

Lucky's speech is initiated when Vladimir requests Pozzo to make Lucky speak. Pozzo asserts that Lucky needs his hat to do so. After Lucky has his hat placed on his head, Pozzo orders him to "Think!" Lucky does so, while he others generate a sense of confusion. Pozzo becomes gradually aghast by Lucky's words, while Vladimir and Estragon relinquish between thoughtfulness and revolted pain. On the other hand, Lucky's dance is a mere clumsy shuffling, which disappoints Vladimir and Estragon. That's why they request from Lucky to think. They protest against Lucky's brutal behavior and prepare themselves for the performance of thinking. The speech takes the form of a long, incoherent monologue and it's the jumble of words which seems to upset Vladimir and Estragon. The speech does not lack form, but it is abundant with a mixture of words. The form of the speech is that of a religious statement; it begins with "Given the existence ... of a personal God," but in fact it's a parody of this kind of statement since the senseless and the absurd elements are in the focus and the significant aspects of it are totally obscured, just like the God whom Lucky talks about. Through the repetition of certain sounds and meaningless phrases, it seems that God is ridiculed as much as it is criticized. This speech seems to be a vain attempt to make a statement about man and God since it acknowledges the

existence of a personal God, one who exists beyond time and one that loves us dearly, but has abandoned us. The repetition of “for reasons unknown”, Lucky emphasizes that this God seems to be lost in a maze or irrelevance, absurdity, and (just like the speech itself) coherence.

Lucky assumes a God as his foundation, pictured as the kind grandfather that looks over his grandchildren. The one who’ll always be there even if these grandchildren rebel against him. The father visualized is contrasted with the theological concept empty of real meaning: a being outside time. Such a being contradicts the benevolent and caring father. Even if it exists, it is described by “apathy, athamby, and aphasy”; and if it cares, many are omitted from its care. In this speech, this God has abandoned earth and humankind. Throughout his monologue, Lucky tries to deliver a perception into the human situation – that man has been abandoned by God but that God still has compassion for him.

The name Lucky is significant in this story and reflects upon his speech as well. Perception and inevitability are exactly the reasons Lucky is lucky—he doesn’t have to worry about what to do, when to do it, whether he ought to, what the consequence will be, and whether or not he’s happy. He has someone telling him what to do and when to do it. He’s free from any accountability or the anguish of choice. Just as Lucky is enslaved by Estragon, Estragon and Vladimir are equally enslaved to their concept of Godot, which is why they “can’t leave,” but they believe themselves to be free—they “give [themselves] the illusion that [they] exist.” They can’t break the bonds of their enslavement for they refuse to even admit that such bonds exist. The difference between them and Lucky is that the latter can see the rope around his neck, while Vladimir and Estragon cannot.

Lucky concludes his speech with the word “unfinished”. It discusses the unfinished speech as well as the incomplete dwindling process of humans. The course of deterioration of Lucky’s speech and the expressed course of diminishing of men is also shown in Lucky’s life: At first he was Pozzo’s teacher and controlled the mental dimensions to the completest degree as he was able to dance graciously. Now, his dance takes after his speech: he is caught in the mesh of clichés.

Lucky’s speech is delivered as a set piece, yet it is anything but a set piece. Under different directors, this scene can be variously played. For example,

Lucky most often speaks directly to the audience with the other characters at his back, while Vladimir and Estragon become more and more agitated as the speech progresses. Often Vladimir and Estragon run forward and try to stop Lucky from continuing his speech. As they try to stop Lucky, he delivers his oration in rapid-fire shouts. At times, Pozzo pulls on Lucky's rope, making it even more difficult for him to continue with his speech. The frenzied activity on the stage, the rapid delivery of the speech, and the jerking of the rope make it virtually impossible to tell anything at all about the speech and, consequently, emphasize the metaphysical absurdity of the entire performance. Lucky's speech is an incoherent jumble of words which seems to upset Vladimir and Estragon, for sporadically both rise to protest some element of the speech. Therefore, the speech does communicate something to the two tramps or else they would not know to protest. The form of the speech is that of a scholarly, theological address, beginning "Given the existence . . . of a personal God," but it is actually a parody of this kind of address since the nonsensical and the absurd elements are in the foreground and the meaningful aspects of it are totally obscured, as is the God whom Lucky discusses. Here, we have a combination of the use of scholastic, theological terminology along with the absurd and the nonsensical. For example, the use of *qua* (a Latin term meaning "in the function or capacity of") is common in such scholarly addresses, but Lucky's repetition of the term as *quaquaquaqua* creates an absurd, derisive sound, as though God is being ridiculed by a quacking or squawking sound. Furthermore, the speech is filled with various academic sounding words, some real words like *aphasia* (a loss of speech; here it refers to the fact that God from his divine heights now has divine *aphasia* or a divine silence) and some words like *apathia* or *athambia* which do not exist (even though *apathia* is closely aligned to *apathy* and thus becomes another oblique comment on the *apathy* of God in the universe). Other absurd terms are used throughout the speech, and there is also a frequent use of words which sound obscene, interspersed throughout the speech. As an example, the names of the scholars *Fartov* and *Belcher* are obviously created for their vulgarity.

Therefore, the speech is filled with more nonsense than sense — more that is illogical than that which is logical. If, however, we remove the illogical modifiers, irrelevancies, and incomprehensible statements and place them to the side, the essence of the speech is as follows-Lucky's speech is an attempt, however futile, to make a statement about man and God. Reduced to its essence, the speech is basically as follows:

-acknowledging the existence of a personal God, one who exists outside of time and who loves us dearly and who suffers with those who are plunged into torment, it is established beyond all doubt that man, for reasons unknown, has left his labours abandoned, unfinished.

It is significant that the speech ends at this point because man can make certain assumptions about God and create certain hypotheses about God, but man can never come to a logical conclusion about God. One must finish a discourse about God, as Lucky did, by repeating "for reasons unknown . . . for reasons unknown . . . for reasons unknown" And equally important is the fact that any statement made about God is, by its nature, lost in a maze of irrelevance, absurdity, and incoherence — without an ending. Therefore, man's final comment about God can amount to nothing more than a bit of garbled noise which contains no coherent statement and no conclusion. Furthermore, Lucky's utterances are stopped only after he is physically overpowered by the others.

After the speech, Pozzo tries to revive Lucky, who is emotionally exhausted, completely enervated by his speech. After great difficulty, Pozzo gets Lucky up, and amid protracted adieus, he begins to go, albeit he begins to go the wrong way. Pozzo's inability to leave suggests man's reliance upon others and his natural instinct to cling to someone else. But with one final adieu, Pozzo and Lucky depart. Lucky's speech, though it seems the most unusual, is in fact the most significant and spectacular part of "Waiting for Godot". This speech is given near the middle of the play and takes up nearly three pages of the play in itself. It is apparently an expression of absurd arabesque thoughts, babble and symbols. The speech is insightful of the rest of the play and therefore open to explanation. Lucky's speech is important in terms of form and style, but it is also highly regarded for its context, though it seems senseless.

To sum up, "Waiting for Godot" reveals that every man is enslaved to some sort of bondage. Lucky is a demeaned slave, tied with a rope by Pozzo. Vladimir and Estragon are slaves of time. They are clown-like characters lumbering their way through life because they do not know what else to do. They have no prospects or they're never put into a situation where they have to make decisions. They conform and follow what they're told. The passing of time becomes obvious as the characters wait in eagerness for Godot's arrival. The fact that they wait in vain, however, makes life seem as worthless as death itself. Time holds the characters prisoners of their conditions.

17) Explain why Act 1 and Act 2 in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot are almost the same.

or

18) What do you think was Samuel Beckett's purpose in making Waiting for Godot two-acts long, especially since the two acts are so similar? Does the structure of the play help in enhancing the theme or themes in the play? Explain.

or

19) One of the literary techniques used by Samuel Beckett in his Waiting for Godot is the technique of repetition. Analyse the significance of this technique?

"But what does it all mean?" is the most frequent statement heard after one has seen or finished reading a play from the Theatre of the Absurd movement. Beckett's plays were among the earliest and, therefore, created a great deal of confusion among the early critics.

No definite conclusion or resolution can ever be offered to Waiting for Godot because the play is essentially circular and repetitive in nature. The structure of

each of the two acts is exactly alike. A traditional play, in contrast, has an introduction of the characters and the exposition; then, there is a statement of the problem of the play in relationship to its settings and characters. (In *Waiting for Godot*, we never know where the play takes place, except that it is set on "a country road.") Furthermore, in a traditional play, the characters are developed, and gradually we come to see the dramatist's world view; the play then rises to a climax, and there is a conclusion. This type of development is called a linear development. In the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd, the structure is often exactly the opposite. We have, instead, a circular structure, and most aspects of this drama support this circular structure in one way or another.

The setting is the same, and the time is the same in both acts. Each act begins early in the morning, just as the tramps are awakening, and both acts close with the moon having risen. The action takes place in exactly the same landscape — a lonely, isolated road with one single tree. (In the second act, there are some leaves on the tree, but from the viewpoint of the audience, the setting is exactly the same.) We are never told where this road is located; all we know is that the action of the play unfolds on this lonely road. Thus, from Act I to Act II, there is no difference in either the setting or in the time and, thus, instead of a progression of time within an identifiable setting, we have a repetition in the second act of the same things that we saw and heard in the first act.

More important than the repetition of setting and time, however, is the repetition of the actions. To repeat, in addition to the basic structure of actions indicated earlier — that is:

Vladimir and Estragon Alone

Arrival of Pozzo and Lucky

Vladimir and Estragon Alone

Arrival of Boy Messenger

Vladimir and Estragon Alone

there are many lesser actions that are repeated in both acts. At the beginning of each act, for example, several identical concerns should be noted. Among these is the emphasis on Estragon's boots. Also, too, Vladimir, when first noticing Estragon, uses virtually the same words: "So there you are again" in Act I and "There you are again" in Act II. At the beginning of both acts, the first discussion concerns a beating that Estragon received just prior to their meeting. At the beginning of both acts, Vladimir and Estragon emphasize repeatedly that they are there to wait for Godot. In the endings of both acts, Vladimir and Estragon discuss the possibility of hanging themselves, and in both endings they decide to bring some good strong rope with them the next day so that they can indeed hang themselves. In addition, both acts end with the same words, voiced differently:

ACT 1:

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.

ACT II:

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

And the stage directions following these lines are exactly the same in each case: "They do not move."

With the arrival of Pozzo and Lucky in each act, we notice that even though their physical appearance has theoretically changed, outwardly they seem the

same; they are still tied together on an endless journey to an unknown place to rendezvous with a nameless person.

Likewise, the Boy Messenger, while theoretically different, brings the exact same message: Mr. Godot will not come today, but he will surely come tomorrow.

Vladimir's difficulties with urination and his suffering are discussed in each act as a contrast to the suffering of Estragon because of his boots. In addition, the subject of eating, involving carrots, radishes, and turnips, becomes a central image in each act, and the tramps' involvement with hats, their multiple insults, and their reconciling embraces — these and many more lesser matters are found repeatedly in both acts.

Finally, and most important, there are the larger concepts: first, the suffering of the tramps; second, their attempts, however futile, to pass time; third, their attempts to part, and, ultimately, their incessant waiting for Godot — all these make the two acts clearly repetitive, circular in structure, and the fact that these repetitions are so obvious in the play is Beckett's manner of breaking away from the traditional play and of asserting the uniqueness of his own circular structure.

20) If nothing actually happens in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, what according to you is that which makes the audience engaged and entertained right through the play? Explain.

or

21) Comment on the impact of Existentialist philosophy on the Theatre of the Absurd.

or

24) Analyse how the philosophical notion of human freedom is handled in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

or

25) Do you consider Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as a statement of hope or hopelessness regarding human existence?

Existentialism was formally introduced in the works of philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger and can be traced to the late nineteenth/early twentieth century writers like Fyodor Dostoevsky and Franz Kafka. But existentialism as a movement became popular in the mid-twentieth century through the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Jean-Paul Sartre is perhaps the most well-known existentialist. His version of existential philosophy developed under the influence of the German philosophers Husserl and Heidegger. His *Being and Nothingness* is a seminal work on existentialism. Sartre's *No Exit*, written in 1944, foresees the Theatre of the Absurd.

The 'existentialist theatre' differs from the Theatre of the Absurd in the sense that the existentialist theatre expresses the incomprehensibility and the irrationality of the human condition in the form of a comprehensible and logically constructed reasoning, whereas the Theatre of the Absurd abandons the old dramatic conventions and goes on to invent a new form to express the new content. In the Absurdist plays, incomprehensibility and irrationality are reflected even in the form. Sartre's *No Exit* establishes the philosophy of existentialism as he perceived it. But Martin Esslin notes that many Absurdist playwrights demonstrate the existential philosophy better than Sartre and Camus did in their own plays.

Sartrean existentialism argues that existence precedes essence, i.e. man is born in this world without a purpose and it is he who defines the meaning of his existence in his own subjectivity. The individual consciousness constructs an identity for itself, independent of any guidance from any external agency, including God. For Sartre, the individual consciousness is responsible for all the choices he/she makes, regardless of the consequences; and because our choices are exclusively ours, we are condemned to be responsible for them. Thus, existentialism proposes that man is full of anxiety and despair, with no meaning in his life; he simply exists until he makes a decisive choice about his own future. Since individuals are free to choose their own path, the existentialists argue that they must accept the risk and responsibility of their actions. For instance, in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir choose to wait without any guidance from anyone else, as Vladimir says- "He didn't say for sure he'd come" but decides to "wait till we know exactly how we stand". Also, much of their inactivity stems from the fear of the consequences of their actions. For example, Estragon says- "Don't let's do anything. It's safer."

A contradiction that surfaces in the context of the existentialist idea of freedom of choice is that although existentialism emphasizes action, freedom, and decision as fundamental to human existence, it argues against the capability of human beings to take a rational decision. Existentialism asserts that people arrive at a decision based on their subjective interpretation of the world. The existential thought thus concerns itself with the rejection of reason as the source of meaning, while focusing on feelings of anxiety, dread, awareness of death, and freedom of choice. This freedom to choose leads to the notion of non-being or nothingness and the natural corollaries of this theme of nothingness are the existentialist themes of alienation and death. These themes are evident in the Absurdist plays like Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (1958) which presents the predicament and the plight of Jerry, the outcast in a dehumanizing commercial world, who towards the end of the play provokes Peter into drawing a knife and then impales himself on it.

Sartrean existentialism states that the search for a rational order in human life is a futile passion. In *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir attempt to create some order in their lives by waiting for Godot who never arrives or perhaps who doesn't even exist. Thus, they continually resign to the futility of their situation, reiterating the lines- "Nothing to be done", "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" This corroborates (proves as true) the existentialist view that human beings exist in an indifferent and "absurd" universe in which meaning is not generated by the natural order, but an unstable, provisional meaning to life is provided by human beings' actions and interpretations.

Albert Camus' *The Rebel*, *The Outsider*, and 'The Myth of Sisyphus' are suffused with existential themes. But like many other writers, he too rejected the existentialist label and considered his works to be absurdist. 'The Myth of Sisyphus', written in 1942, is an important work in which Camus uses the analogy of the Greek myth to demonstrate the futility of existence. He saw Sisyphus as an "absurd" hero with a pointless existence. Eventually, 'The Myth of Sisyphus' became a prototype (an original model on which later forms are developed) for the Theatre of the Absurd.

Camus believed that boredom or waiting prompted people to think seriously about their own identity, as Estragon and Vladimir do in *Waiting for Godot*. In the play, waiting induces boredom as a theme. And Beckett succeeds in creating

a similar sense of boredom in the audience by means of mundane repetitive dialogues and actions. Vladimir and Estragon constantly ponder and ask questions which are either rhetorical or are left unanswered.

Thus, a close reading of the Absurdist plays would reveal how the existentialist themes have influenced much of the Theatre of the Absurd. Thus, on the basis of this brief analysis of existentialism and its influence on the Theatre of the Absurd, I would like to conclude that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the existential philosophy and the Theatre of the Absurd, nevertheless the existential thought is subtly woven into the Absurdist plays. The goal of the Absurdist drama is not to depress the audience with its pessimism, but an attempt to bring them closer to reality and help them understand their own meaning in life or the meaning of their own existence (whatever that may be). That is why the Theatre of the Absurd transcends the category of comedy and tragedy and combines laughter with horror. Beckett has, for example, very aptly called his play *Waiting for Godot*- ‘A Tragicomedy in Two Acts’.

22) Analyse the influence of existential philosophy on Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.

Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* is a play that presents conflict between living by religious and spiritual beliefs, and living by an existential philosophy, which asserts that it is up to the individual to discover the meaning of life through personal experience in the earthly world.

Günther Ander clearly points out the notion that the protagonists in Beckett’s plays, including Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, reflect humanity in general. He states that “the *fabulae personae* whom Beckett selects as representative of today’s mankind can only be clochards, creatures excluded from the scheme of the world who have nothing to do any longer, because they do not have anything to do with it” . While the argument here holds with the notion of Vladimir and Estragon representing humanity, it is necessary to note that Günther’s statement conflicts with the discussion that Vladimir and

Estragon have everything to do with the world, merely lacking proper perception of it.

Being more specific, it can be shown that Vladimir represents the portion of humanity who trusts in religion and spiritual beliefs to guide them, and that Estragon represents the more ideal existentialist portion of humanity who chooses to stop waiting and construct the meaning of life based on experience in the tangible and physical world around them. The following is an example of dialogue which supports this concept:

Vladimir: Let's wait and see what he says.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot.

Estragon: Good idea.

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

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

Here we see that Vladimir is depending on Godot to tell him what he needs to know regarding his existence, while Estragon asserts that they do not have the time to wait and that they should take action on their own before it is too late. The metaphor of the cooling iron suggests that humanity does not have enough time to wait for their spiritual ponderings to offer them enlightenment, that the chance will pass, and their efforts will not take effect once it does. Therefore, it can be concluded from this that Estragon's suggestion that he and Vladimir make their own way now, before it is too late, is the more ideal course of action advocated by the play. It is Estragon who follows the notion of no longer waiting on religion for answers and going to the philosophy of existentialism.

There is another instance in the dialogue between Estragon and Vladimir that plays on the idea of Vladimir as faithfully religious and Estragon as progressively humanistic:

Estragon: Charming spot. (He turns, advances to front, halts, facing auditorium.) Inspiring prospects. (He turns to Vladimir.) Let's go:

Vladimir: We can't.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.

Estragon: (despairingly). Ah!

Once again, the existential philosophy of human experience in the physical world is what Estragon seeks in his desire to leave for “inspiring prospects,” and the common human tendency to wait on religion to offer answers is inherent in Vladimir’s suggestion that they should stay and wait so that they can be enlightened by Godot.

Those who interpret the play often expend too much effort attempting to infer the identity of Godot. Even Beckett himself states that he has no idea who Godot is, and that he would have made it clear in the play if he did . Beckett makes the misdirection of people who seek to find out who Godot is in his statement that “the great success of *Waiting For Godot* has arisen from a misunderstanding: critics and public alike were busy in allegorical or symbolic terms a play which strove at all costs to avoid definition”. Beckett’s intention to not have the identity of Godot pondered reflects the underlying notion in his play that people should stop pondering the divine realm and focus on the human condition in physical existential terms. In this case, the entire play reflects the situation humans find themselves in. Godot does not have an identity, according to Beckett, and it is therefore erroneous to try to find out who he is. Considering the way in which this play reflects the human condition, one can also say that this means it is erroneous to ponder the spiritual realm which is beyond our ability to comprehend.

H. Porter Abbott also makes note of the idea that it should not be the focus of interpretation of the play to find out who Godot is. He notes that the audience should be most concerned with the fact that the identity and nature of Godot is never revealed, rather than trying to figure out his identity. Abbott states that “concealment, or conversely blindness, is one of the things the play is very much about” . His use of the word “blindness” may be taken into consideration as it can be related to the notion of blind faith. When the boy comes at the end of both acts and informs Vladimir that Godot is going to come, Vladimir never questions him about how truthful he is being about his knowledge of Godot. Vladimir only asks the boy superficial things about him, his brother, and his home life. The following section of dialogue in the second act is an example of this:

Vladimir: What does he do, Mr. Godot? (Silence.) Do you hear me?

Boy: Yes Sir.

Vladimir: Well?

Boy: He does nothing, Sir.

Silence.

Vladimir: How is your brother?

Boy: He's sick, Sir.

Here we have Vladimir questioning the boy about Godot, but he never goes so far as to question the reliability of the information the boy gives him, he just abruptly changes the subject when it would make more sense to push on the subject when he was given the suspicious answer that Godot does nothing. It seems from this that Beckett is making a statement about the case of blind faith in religion. Christians, for example, are taught to never question the will of God, and take what they are told about him for granted. Taking this notion as parallel with the case of Vladimir and the boy, it seems to be suggested here that blind faith in religion is equally as pointless as Vladimir's blind faith that Godot will come based on what the boy tells him.

Near the beginning of the first act, Estragon attempts to tell Vladimir what he had dreamed after waking from a nap. Vladimir forcefully insists that he keep it to himself, and then Estragon, gesturing towards the universe, asks, "This one is good enough for you?" . The following silence sets this quote apart from the rest of the line, it makes reference to the idea of looking to the supernatural, the universe, as one way of pondering the meaning of life. Estragon would rather discuss his dream with Vladimir, and maybe through interpretation, become more enlightened about the human condition. It seems as though Beckett makes use of this to say that one should place more emphasis on personal experience as a means of discovering profound truths rather than looking into a realm beyond human comprehension and certainty. In other words, instead of looking into a universe he could never understand, Vladimir should listen to Estragon's dream, focussing on human experience, which is the only thing humans can really comprehend.

The relationship between Pozzo and Lucky in the first act is an example of the notion that humanity must look away from religion as a source of the meaning of life. The dynamic between Pozzo and Lucky in the first act reflects the relationship some people have with their religion. When Estragon asks why Lucky does not relieve himself of the burden he carries once he and Pozzo have stopped to rest, Pozzo replies that it is because Lucky is trying to impress him so that he will not be sold at the fair. This reflects how a religious person would bear certain discomforts, such as rising early from bed every Sunday to attend church, in order to please higher beings, eternal bliss in the afterlife.

In the second act, it is revealed that at least one of the bags carried by Lucky is filled with sand. A bag of sand most often merely serves the purpose of

providing extra weight, such as sandbags often used to stave off flood waters, or to weigh down a hot air balloon. Given this, it can be concluded that the unnecessary nature of the bag filled with sand that Lucky faithfully bears in order to impress his master is symbolic of the unnecessary burden many religious people carry in their various rituals of worship. One can conclude from this that the situation with Pozzo and Lucky is an attempt by Beckett to express the notion that religious practices serve no actual practical purpose, that it is an unnecessary weight keeping them from noticing the enlightenment the physical world has to offer.

It appears as though Beckett misspoke when questioned about Lucky. In response to being asked if Lucky was named so because he does not have to wait for Godot like Vladimir and Estragon do, but that he has his own Godot in Pozzo, Beckett stated, "I suppose he is Lucky to have no more expectations" (Ben-Zvi 144). It is arguable, however, that Lucky actually does have expectations, and that he is equally, if not more, insecure than the two tramps who remain forever waiting for Godot. Lucky faces the uncertainty of whether he will end up remaining with Pozzo, or with a new master, in much the same way that most religious people are always waiting to find out what they have waiting for them in the afterlife.

David Hesla states in *The Shape of Chaos* that "[Vladimir] and [Estragon] are largely spared the burden of the past, for their memories are so defective that little of earlier time remains to them" The protagonists of the play certainly lack burden from the past as a result of not retaining it, but it is not the purpose of this discussion to suggest that it is more because they do not really have a past to remember, rather than the fact that they can not remember. Vladimir and Estragon spend their present finding ways to simply kill the time and focus their attention on the future, neglecting their present. Without paying attention to the present, one will not have sufficient memory of it when it becomes the past. From a spiritual perspective, this seems to say that people who spend their lives working to ensure bliss in the afterlife and to understand the meaning of life should instead focus on what they have before them so that they can make the most of life and not end up wasting it by building themselves up to spiritual expectations which are far less certain than the pleasures immediately obtainable in the physical world.

It can be concluded that the interpretation of instances from the dialogue, character dynamic, and second party interpretation of *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett offers much compelling evidence in support of the notion that the play makes reference to existentialist philosophy as a more suitable means

of the pursuit for the meaning of life than is following religion or making spiritual inferences. "Waiting for Godot" is an existentialist play because it has clear hints of existentialism in it. If we study the term existentialism we would come to know that it is a philosophical doctrine which lays stress on the existence with his concrete experience and solidities. However, "Waiting for Godot" is an existentialist play for it embodies Christian existentialism. Christian existentialism stress the idea that:

I God only, man may find freedom for tension.

For Christian, existentialism religious leads to God, whereas according to the Atheistic Existentialism, it is based on the idea of Jean Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger who state that:

Man is alone in a godless universe.

The comparative study of both philosophies helps us to prove "Waiting for Godot" as a Christian existentialistic play.

We know that man is confronting the problem of his existence as a being. He is striving for his survival and to control the bridle of the pacing time. He is struggling to save his "individuality" and this very idea leads to the philosophy of existentialism.

The word "Existentialism" stands for one's "awareness" of one's "beingness". It stands for a vital principal of life. "Waiting for Godot" resembles the existentialist literature because it deals not only with existence or identity but also with the momentary and the internal time. The time mentioned in "Waiting for Godot" is related to man's mental condition. For instance, the major problem for the tramps is to make time pass in such a way that they are least bothered by it. Vladimir and Estragon constantly complain of the slowness of time passing and do their best to hurry it with their futile diversions. Estragon says:

Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful.

But we know that outside the natural time, its consequences flow on. For example, the tree has grown five or six leaves. Pozzo has grown blind and Lucky dumb. Here Estragon remarks:

They all change, only we not.

It should be noted that waiting the natural course of time, they think they would believe themselves from all of their problems without doing any effort. They might die naturally and save the effort of hanging themselves.

There is a distinction between the momentary and eternal time for it deals with the question of existence and identity. This difference can also be seen in this play. In “Waiting for Godot” physical time is sometimes taken seriously and sometimes it is ridiculed or condemned. Estragon once succeeds in confusing Vladimir about the passage of time as well as about the day of week. In the same sentence the tramps speak of a million years ago and in the nineties. We have no reason to be certain that the second description is anyone factual than the first.

Doubts about time make the tramps doubtful about their existence and identity. One tramp claims to be of the part, it is doubted by the other. Their own identity and existence in time is also questionable. One day seems to have elapsed between the first act and the second, yet it becomes extremely difficult to differentiate this day with the previous by any important physical evidence.

The play “Waiting for Godot” has all the traits of existentialism both Vladimir and Estragon represent the man in general who is facing the problems of his existence in this world. They are interdependent like all other man. Hope for salvation is the subject of play and is the problem faced by the whole human race. Representing the man in general, the two tramps realize the futility of their exercise and we note that they are merely filling up the hours with the pointless activity. Hence their ‘waiting’ is mechanical and deals with problem of existentialism.

To conclude we say that the whole picture shows a pretty hopelessness. Neither time nor existence, neither reality nor memory or the past have any meaning or significance. Acts are meaningless, time does not flow consecutively, memory seems deceptive, existence is an impression or perhaps a dream and happiness is extremely and affliction is crystal clear through the situation of two tramps. They are on the point of becoming hollow philosophies of existence but demand no other equipment in an audience than the bond of common perception.

23) Analyse the existentialist themes in Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot.

Existentialism was formally introduced in the works of philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger and can be traced to the late nineteenth/early twentieth century writers like Fyodor

Dostoevsky and Franz Kafka. But existentialism as a movement became popular in the mid-twentieth century through the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Jean-Paul Sartre is perhaps the most well-known existentialist. His version of existential philosophy developed under the influence of the German philosophers Husserl and Heidegger. His *Being and Nothingness* is a seminal work on existentialism. Sartre's *No Exit*, written in 1944, foresees the Theatre of the Absurd.

The 'existentialist theatre' differs from the Theatre of the Absurd in the sense that the existentialist theatre expresses the incomprehensibility and the irrationality of the human condition in the form of a comprehensible and logically constructed reasoning, whereas the Theatre of the Absurd abandons the old dramatic conventions and goes on to invent a new form to express the new content. In the Absurdist plays, incomprehensibility and irrationality are reflected even in the form. Sartre's *No Exit* establishes the philosophy of existentialism as he perceived it. But Martin Esslin notes that many Absurdist playwrights demonstrate the existential philosophy better than Sartre and Camus did in their own plays.

Sartrean existentialism argues that existence precedes essence, i.e. man is born in this world without a purpose and it is he who defines the meaning of his existence in his own subjectivity. The individual consciousness constructs an identity for itself, independent of any guidance from any external agency, including God. For Sartre, the individual consciousness is responsible for all the choices he/she makes, regardless of the consequences; and because our choices are exclusively ours, we are condemned to be responsible for them. Thus, existentialism proposes that man is full of anxiety and despair, with no meaning in his life; he simply exists until he makes a decisive choice about his own future. Since individuals are free to choose their own path, the existentialists argue that they must accept the risk and responsibility of their actions. For instance, in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir choose to wait without any guidance from anyone else, as Vladimir says- "He didn't say for sure he'd come" but decides to "wait till we know exactly how we stand". Also, much of their inactivity stems from the fear of the consequences of their actions. For example, Estragon says- "Don't let's do anything. It's safer."

A contradiction that surfaces in the context of the existentialist idea of freedom of choice is that although existentialism emphasizes action, freedom, and decision as fundamental to human existence, it argues against the capability of human beings to take a rational decision. Existentialism asserts that people arrive at a decision based on their subjective interpretation of the world. The existential thought thus concerns itself with the rejection of reason as the source of meaning, while focusing on feelings of anxiety, dread, awareness of death, and freedom of choice. This freedom to choose leads to the notion of non-being or nothingness and the natural corollaries of this theme of nothingness are the existentialist themes of alienation and death. These themes are evident in the Absurdist plays like Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (1958) which presents the predicament and the plight of Jerry, the outcast in a dehumanizing commercial world, who towards the end of the play provokes Peter into drawing a knife and then impales himself on it.

Sartrean existentialism states that the search for a rational order in human life is a futile passion. In *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir attempt to create some order in their lives by waiting for Godot who never arrives or perhaps who doesn't even exist. Thus, they continually resign to the futility of their situation, reiterating the lines- "Nothing to be done", "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" This corroborates (proves as true) the existentialist view that human beings exist in an indifferent and "absurd" universe in which meaning is not generated by the natural order, but an unstable, provisional meaning to life is provided by human beings' actions and interpretations.

Albert Camus' *The Rebel*, *The Outsider*, and 'The Myth of Sisyphus' are suffused with existential themes. But like many other writers, he too rejected the existentialist label and considered his works to be absurdist. 'The Myth of Sisyphus', written in 1942, is an important work in which Camus uses the analogy of the Greek myth to demonstrate the futility of existence. He saw Sisyphus as an "absurd" hero with a pointless existence. Eventually, 'The Myth of Sisyphus' became a prototype (an original model on which later forms are developed) for the Theatre of the Absurd.

Camus believed that boredom or waiting prompted people to think seriously about their own identity, as Estragon and Vladimir do in *Waiting for Godot*. In the play, waiting induces boredom as a theme. And Beckett succeeds in creating a similar sense of boredom in the audience by means of mundane repetitive

dialogues and actions. Vladimir and Estragon constantly ponder and ask questions which are either rhetorical or are left unanswered.

Thus, a close reading of the Absurdist plays would reveal how the existentialist themes have influenced much of the Theatre of the Absurd.