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THE CONCEPT OF “*TIME*” AND “*NOTHINGNESS*” IN SHAKESPEARE’S
HAMLET, SAMUEL BECKETT’S *WAITING FOR GODOT* AND SUFISM

MASTER THESIS

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Advisor

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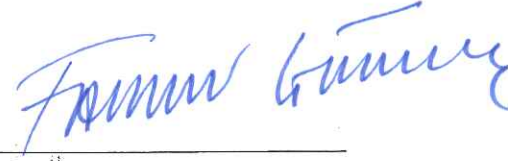
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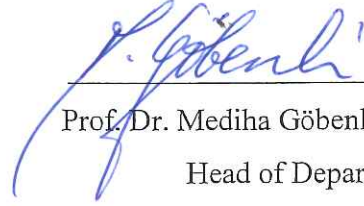
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I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of
Master of English Language and Literature.



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Özlem Karakuş

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand the concept of “*time*” and “*nothingness*” in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* by adopting a comparative approach between these plays and Mawlana Jalal Din Rumi’s *Masnawi*. No matter in which period these works of literature were written, they all reflect two important elements of life – time and nothingness- from Eastern or Western Literature. This study focuses on these writers and these two concepts in the framework of absurdity. The Theatre of the Absurd is a kind that was used post-World War II for particular plays in the 1950s. It is especially used by Samuel Beckett and its elements can be observed in almost all of his plays. Absurdist pieces of work concentrated on the idea of existentialism and stated what happens when human existence has no meaning or destination, so, all communication breaks down and it gives way to illogical speech and its inescapable conclusion, silence. Before 1950s, this “silence” also takes place in William Shakespeare’s tragic play *Hamlet* as the tragic hero Hamlet wants to restore the order and finds peace in life. Even his last sentence in the play is “...*the rest is silence*”. Likewise, in Sufism, Sufist dervishes were always looking for divine peace in “silence”. The worldwide known Mawlana Jalal Din Rumi emphasized that “*Silence is the language of God. All else is poor translation*”. How absurd experiences and speeches in the life of Man is covered by “silence” in *Masnawi*, *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot* is examined in this study.

Key words: the Theatre of the Absurd, time, nothingness, Masnawi, Hamlet, Waiting for Godot

ÖZET

Bu tezin amacı, William Shakespeare'in *Hamlet*, Samuel Beckett'in *Godot'u Beklerken* ve Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi'nin *Mesnevi* eserlerinde karşılaştırmalı bir yaklaşım kullanarak “zaman” ve “hiçlik” kavramlarını anlamaya çalışmaktır. Bu eserler hangi zaman diliminde yazılmış olurlarsa olsunlar, hepsi de Batı ve Doğu Edebiyatı'ndan bu iki önemli kavramı –zaman ve hiçlik- yansıtır. Bu çalışma, bu yazarlara ve bu kavramlara “absürd” tanımı çerçevesinden odaklanmıştır. Absürd Tiyatro, İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında 1950'li yıllarda belirli oyunlar için kullanılan bir türdür. Özellikle Samuel Beckett tarafından kullanılmış olup eserlerinin çoğunda Absürd Tiyatro özellikleri gözlenebilmektedir. Absürd Tiyatro özelliklerini kullanan eserler varoluşçuluk kavramı üzerinde durmuşlar ve insanın varoluşunun anlam taşımadığı ya da bir varış noktasının olmadığı zaman neler olabileceğine bakmışlardır. Böyle bir durumda bütün iletişimin bozulduğunu, yerini mantıksız konuşmalara bıraktığını ve bunun kaçılmaz sonucunun da “sessizlik” olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. 1950'lerden önce William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* adlı tiyatro oyununda trajik kahraman Hamlet düzeni yeniden kurma ve huzuru bulma çabası içinde olduğundan Shakespeare bu “sessizlik”ten yararlanmıştı. Hatta oyunun sonunda Hamlet'in son cümlesi “Sonrası sessizlik...”tir. Aynı şekilde Suifzm'de Sufi dervişler İlâhi huzuru “sessizlik” içinde aramışlardır. Dünyaca tanınan Sufi Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi “Sessizlik Tanrı'nın dilidir. Geriye kalanı sadece sahte tercümesidir” demiştir. Absürd deneyimlerin ve konuşmaların *Mesnevi*, *Hamlet* ve *Godot'u Beklerken* içinde “sessizlik” ile nasıl kaplandığı bu çalışma içinde incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Absürd Tiyatro, zaman, hiçlik, Mesnevi, Hamlet, Godot'u Beklerken

To “*Godot*” whom we have been waiting for ages...



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1. INTRODUCTION

The ideas of “time” and “nothingness” have always been used as popular themes in literature, especially in theatre. While some playwrights mirror their era others choose not to confine themselves to a certain time or place. William Shakespeare and Samuel Beckett are among those usually considered to be ‘universal’. Their plays can be said to mirror any country, people, or place.

This thesis examines the birth of the Theatre of the Absurd and in the way which I will examine Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* reflects the features of the Theatre of the Absurd. Examining *Waiting for Godot*’s absurdist features, the production of the play; to what extent it reflects the sociological aspects in terms of the time it was written and the place and the nihilistic features of the play. Next, I will consider the relation of Shakespeare’s role to the Theatre of the Absurd and the reasons for Shakespeare to be considered as “universal” and then I will examine one of his masterpieces, *Hamlet*, in terms of absurdist features, time and place.

While questioning life with all its serious aspects, Shakespeare tries to envision in the absurdity of the human condition like the absurdist playwrights do. Martin Esslin undertakes, for the first time, the effort of finding the right term to describe a body of plays which treat differently the actual realities of their time. He also critically analyzed some samples of those plays to infer the common criteria and principles on which such playwrights focus in their depiction of reality. Esslin, in fact, coined the term “the theatre of the absurd” in his groundbreaking book *The Theater of the Absurd* (1961). For Esslin the Theatre of the Absurd “has become a catch-phrase, much used and much abused” (Esslin, 2004, 17). Esslin observes “*a very strong sense of the futility and absurdity of the human condition*”, in Shakespeare’s plays

(Esslin, 2004, 333). Shakespeare already defined the world that we live in as nonsense, in *Macbeth*: “it is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing” (5.5.26). “The tragic core of *Hamlet*, like that of *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Othello* – has much in common with the existential premise at the heart of the Absurd” (Esslin, 2004, 238). Being regarded as the dramatist, who appeals to the audiences of all times.

Beckett is regarded as a universal playwright and his characters do not belong to a certain social class or a type in absurdist fashion, which “does not reflect merely topical preoccupations, more enduring because it is unaffected by the fluctuations of political and social circumstances” (Hinchliffe, 1969, 4). Beckett tries to reflect the existential problems of man on to the stage. His plays depict futility in human actions and the irrationality of the human condition since man does not have control of his life. The playwright exhibits nihilism, and he also shows the circularity of life.

After that, the thesis will have a look the relationship between the absurdist tradition as it is represented by Western figures and the idea of nothingness, a major concept in Absurdist Theatre, and the most celebrated Sufi poet Mawlana Jalal Al Din Rumi. It is clear to see to what extent Rumi’s understanding of nothingness verges on the existentialist and absurdist conceptions of it. I have studied some of Rumi’s poems to understand his theories about man, God, the universe and existence although I think their views on the concept of nothingness may differ from one literary genre to another. The drive behind my attempt to bring Rumi into critical inquiry with regard to the absurdist tradition lies in my belief that most of the Sufi spiritual leaders, Ibn Arabi, Ibn Al Farid and Sahrawardi, did not restrain from experimenting with different religious sects and school in their attempt to reach the ultimate truth, if any exists, about existence, universe, God and Man. Rumi therefore can be considered as

an existentialist poet in the sense that he is constantly striving to fathom the meaning of his own existence, the nature of divinity and the eternal paradox existing between soul and body.

My critical analysis of *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot* demanded that I venture into Sufism as a disciplinary school of spirituality, especially in its understanding of the importance of poetry in liberating the person from the rigidity of the binary opposition of right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable. Finally, I hope in this way to take some steps in the direction of a comparative study of the Eastern and Western traditions in world literature.

2. WHAT IS THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD?

2.1. Preliminary Definitions

Before discussing any two given literary works, under study one should explore first the nature of the literary movement or philosophical background with which they are affiliated. The general argument of this research presupposes that William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* subscribe to the theoretical foundations and conceptual standards of what is known in literary theory and criticism as the theatre of the absurd. This research shall start first by attempting to define the theatre of the absurd itself to help in localizing the two literary works under study. It will also look into the concepts and literary terminologies used by the pioneers of the theatre of the absurd as a literary trend. Such preliminary theoretical definitions will pave the way for a consistent critical analysis of *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot*. So, what does the category 'the theatre of the absurd' mean? What philosophical foundations does it have originally affiliate with? Does it have a consistent body of analytical terminology and literary theory

which allows for a structural study of the literary work? How can we apply it to critically explore *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot*?

Although a few literary critics have attempted to define it, the theatre of the absurd as a distinct category in the world of literature is still relatively elusive. Thus, my attempt will be very ambitious in the sense that it tries to construct a definition relying on various critical works done in this field. I shall first consider definitions offered by the outstanding drama critic Martin Esslin. According to Esslin the Theatre of the Absurd is that kind of theatre which “attacks the comfortable certainties of religious and political certainties” (Esslin, 2004, 32). In this sense it is a revolutionary literary trend that strives to question what people take for granted as being the only solution for their daily problems both in politics and religion. It does not follow the same rules as the other forms of 20th century drama which tended to conform by rigid rules of realism. It rather sets for its principal role the critique of the actual political situation of the people and all the repressive religious rules and codes that hinder freedom of self-expression in all its forms. Thus, the Theatre of the Absurd defies these religious and political orthodoxies by inciting people to challenge their “human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, nobly, responsibly” (Hinchliffe, 1969, 12). By doing so it gives people a second chance not to surrender to fatality as being the decisive precursor of every little action they take in this life. The Theatre of the Absurd drives people to question what they have received from their ancestors as being the only possible truth. It opens other horizons by giving people alternative ways of living this life without having recourse to remorse or despair especially when they cannot fathom the nonsense in life.

Through its performances on stage absurdist plays have this cathartic feature to them as they allow their audience to experience a different world where nobody is

in fact responsible for the absurdity which permeates our world. The Theatre of the Absurd according to Esslin “does not provoke tears of despair but rather laughter of liberation” (Esslin, 2004, 43). This joy is felt when the actors/readers of the absurd plays realize by the end of the play that in fact nobody is responsible for the damage that is caused by what people normally call metaphysical powers. Nobody is to be blamed for the fatality that seems to be governing everything. One is free from all the existential shackles that push individuals to assume responsibility for an absurd life. Individuals cannot help but laugh and feel free from any feelings of repentance.

There is a direct connection between the advent of the Theatre of the Absurd and the human condition born after the Second World War. Esslin contends that there is a sense of total disillusionment experienced by post-war generations with regard to religious faith. He argues that “the decline of religious faith was masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies. All this was shattered by the war” (Esslin, 2004, 26). Playwrights subscribing to this trend reflect the general feeling of the post-second world war era when people struggled to understand their existential conditions. It was unbelievable for many intellectuals to see how much destruction and torture Man can inflict on his fellow human beings. The pioneers of the Theatre of the Absurd such as Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco reflect this sense of loss and disenchantment that individuals experience when they confront unfathomable daily realities.

Interestingly, with the advent of the Absurdist philosophy the term “absurd” gains a new meaning different from what it normally signifies in the daily usage. Both the Oxford and Merriam-Webster dictionary meaning of the word ‘absurd’ defines it as “widely unreasonable, illogical, ridiculous, or inappropriate” or “out of harmony” when we speak about music. Linguistically, the word ‘absurd’ remains attached to

simple descriptions of silly and funny actions carried out by certain people in certain situations. It depicts more the behavior of an individual rather than his or her intellectual or existential standpoints. The word 'absurd' in the daily usage as shown by the dictionary meaning does not reflect a deeply thought with regard to one's existential condition. It rather focuses on the shallowness of some acts or behavior of people identified as being banal and inappropriate. Gradually, the term "absurd" moves from a simple use to describe the ridiculousness of certain acts or situations to express a consistent view of one's existential condition. It is loaded with connotations that try to understand the problematic existence of individuals in this life and the challenges they face.

In Eugene Ionesco's words the term "absurd" is understood on a different level: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. Cut off his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless" (Camus, 1991, 23). The focus here is on the existential condition of the subject. The exponents of the Theatre of the Absurd such as Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett and Arthur Adamov have understood that Man reached that point when he cannot anymore attribute his own acts to a detached power. Man is left on his own if he is not at all connected to an intangible supreme power. Meaning is lost in this world and one cannot assume responsibility for his own acts. One acts without necessarily waiting for any recompense for his actions. It does not matter what you are doing anymore. Man is left on his own without any purposes. Esslin calls this "a sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of human condition" (Esslin, 2004, 28). An Absurdist drama questions the significance of an individual's role in his or her own life and the relative importance their actions make on the world at large.

Absurdists focused on the irrationality of life and the impeding ‘post-life’ or ‘afterlife.’

Despite the fact that the Theatre of the Absurd has moved miles away from the previous theatrical traditions and Renaissance, one can still perceive palpable influences from the great figures and pioneers of the world theatre such as William Shakespeare. This kind of attachment to the founding fathers of the theatre legitimizes the study I am undertaking here. In his seminal book on the Theatre of the Absurd Esslin recognizes the remarkable influence that Shakespeare has on the aspects of the Theatre of the Absurd (Esslin, 2004, 11).

2.2. Characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd

Undoubtedly, the absurd theatre rose up against mainstream theatre that was dominant in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. It was against the traditional dramatic writings in the sense that it opted for other forms of self-expression that went beyond the chronological and diachronic categories of beginning, climax and denouement as well as stylistic and rhetorical devices of story, plot and characters. The Theatre of the Absurd in the twentieth century was, as Ionesco called it “anti-theatre” because it distinctively distances itself from the theatre of day. Twentieth-century drama witnessed a great metamorphosis imposed by the cultural changes of the era after the Second World War. There was a huge challenge to the conventions of theatrical representation; resulting in the advent of various forms of theatre, including impressionism, modernism, expressionism and engaged theatre in addition to the already established forms such as realism and naturalism. Gradually, developments in issues of gender and sexuality theory also introduced new ways of treating the social issues of the

current historical period in a different way, pushing the audience to raise questions about their consciousness.

I will try here to present some of the major characteristic of the theatre of the absurd. First, one of the main underlying characteristics of the theatre of the absurd consists in that it is illogical, fragmentary, unharmonious and usually shocking to its audience. The dialogue between characters apparently takes the form of an incomprehensible banal chatter. Its illogicality and inharmonious aspect originates from the general belief of its main dramatists who believe that our existence is absurd because we come and leave this life without having any second choices. We did not choose to be born and we also do not choose to die. We live this life ensnared in these dualities of body and soul, will and reason, freedom and choice in the face of which we remain powerless. We are thrown into this life in which we struggle to live between nature and culture thinking that we are more important than other elements.

Secondly, the Theatre of the Absurd violates the archaic dramatic standards of exposition, complication, and denouement. The absurdist plays usually refuse to tell a straightforward, complete, connected story with a clear plotline if they have any. In Esslin's words the Theatre of the Absurd "disregards such traditional axioms as that of the basic unity and consistency of each character or the need for a plot" (Esslin, 2004, 40). Potential readers of the absurdist drama will notice the lack of traditional dramatic forms and techniques of scenes and units since absurdist playwrights are all preoccupied with the absence and failure of communication in modern and industrial society which eventually leads to the alienation of man from his own milieu. Moreover, these dramatists are all interested in criticizing forms of conformity in modern society and they stress the lack of individuality among members of the same society. This sense of conformity represents a form of deformity that modern man is

characterized by and it eventually turns him into 'one-dimensional man'. Such thematic concerns are figured in the techniques and forms of absurdist writing.

Thirdly, the absurdist dramatists make a different use of the dramatic elements of time and place to indirectly express their subversive ideas. Time in the absurdist drama is non-linear and it never follows a consistent chronology. Absurdist play does not follow the normal scheme of beginning, middle and end. It rather surprises the reader/audience by taking him or her to a different dimension of time which often includes dreams, mythology and hallucinations. Similarly, space/place is also non-consistent with the actual time within which the action takes place. The absurdist drama is usually set in a space which stands in total contrast with the timing of the incidents/action presented to the audience. This incongruous overlapping between time and place is part of the absurdist rejection of logic and it implies an absurdist view towards the nature of the universe. The universe has been created without necessarily having a choice to define its beginning or end. Man follows in this process in almost a mechanical way. Thus, the space and time duality does not necessarily define the appropriate behavior of the individual and it does not determine the set of values a society follows. Time and place in the absurdist play are ambiguous and fluid. Reason and effect relationship in time and space are usually disrupted in absurdist drama.

Fourthly, the Theatre of the Absurd pioneers' use of language is peculiar when compared to their predecessors. Esslin contends that it tends "toward a radical devaluation of language, toward a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself" (Esslin, 2004, 42). There is a striking discrepancy between the language used by the characters and what actually happens on the stage. In some examples of Absurdist drama, the dialogue is merely a

bombastic speech of some specialists whereas in others, it tends to oppose the actions happening onstage.

In Ionesco's *The Chairs*, for example, the lyrical beauty of the play does not lie in the gibberish spoken by its characters but rather in the fact that those banal words are directed to empty-chairs on stage. Absurdist playwrights distrust language as a means of communication. To them it has only developed into meaningless words which do not reflect the reality of human experience and it has therefore become an unreliable means of communication. Absurdist dramatists would thwart ordinary jargon, clichés, speech and phrases to prove that one can communicate more authentically by transcending everyday language.

Finally, as one cannot trust language, all of the absurdist dramatists are concerned with lacunas caused by communication problems. There are constantly trying to understand each other on stage, a situation which only intensifies their alienation from each other and life in general. In Ionesco's plays, this failure of communication often leads to even more drastic results. In Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, for example, the lack of communication between members of the same society leads an entire race of rational human beings to be metamorphosed into a herd of rhinoceroses. The groaning of the rhinoceroses signifies the absence of an intelligible medium of self-expression between humans. In Adamov's *Professor Taranne*, the professor, in spite of all his desperate attempts, is unable to get people to acknowledge his identity because there is no communication.

3. THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

The Theatre of the Absurd was largely inspired by the existentialist philosophy which was at the time widely celebrated as a consistent school of thought capable of explaining the spirit of the post-war era. Absurdist playwrights borrowed basic existentialist philosophical precepts and merged them with new dramatic elements to create a form of theatre which struggled to present a complex world that was born in the post-war era. These playwrights base their writings and treatment of reality on existentialist thought as it is formulated by famous thinkers and philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre and Camus. They were mainly influenced by these philosophers because of their novel standpoints in which they differently questioned the nature of existence, human condition, the universe, God and Man. These existentialist philosophers question the meaning attributed to human action in relation to interaction within society, religion and politics, an issue which preoccupied the pioneers of the Theatre of the Absurd as they struggled to dissect the *Zeitgeist* of post Second World War.

The most influential existentialist philosopher, who can be said to have established the absurdist movement, is the French-Algerian writer Albert Camus. He established the absurdist movement with such oeuvres in the *Myth of Sisyphus* published in 1942. In this essay, Camus argues that man's constant pursuit of meaning and truth is indeed unavailing. He contends that Man's struggle to fathom the meaning of the world and his attempts to understand that this life resembles in many ways those of Sisyphus', a legendary figure in Greek Mythology condemned to roll a huge boulder to the top of a steep hill; each time the boulder reached the top it rolled back down. Camus also maintains that the post-war era cannot be explained basing on what human beings call rational

thinking. In fact, this current state of the world tends to alienate Man causing a total disengagement and absence of communication. Camus writes, “[man] is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity” (Esslin, 2004, 56). We have come to this world without being asked and according to Camus “our desires will not be met by the realities of the world”. Here, Absurdist Theatre borrows the existentialist premise that man’s quest for meaning is a futile exercise because life is inherently meaningless and truth is a subjective matter. Some critics believe that *Waiting for Godot* is in fact “a recast myth of Sisyphus” (Graver, 1989, 8). The striking difference is that playwrights do not philosophize these ideas, but they rather present them as such on stage (Esslin, 2004, 63). The absurdists seek to provide an aesthetics that would match the thought of existentialist philosophers as Esslin puts it: “the Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought” (Esslin, 2004, 67).

Another philosopher to whose ideas most of the absurdist playwrights adhere is Nietzsche who claimed that “God is Dead,” meaning that “the time has come to overcome man” (Austin, 1997, 146). Nietzsche was the first to point to the disquieting feeling that modern man has come to totally disassociate himself from an eternal need for the idea of God. Nietzsche suggests that the concept of ‘God’ is devoid of meaning in a world that is governed by chaos, wars and will to power exercised by the powerful. How can one believe in the idea of God in a world devoid of rational thinking? It appears that God has created the world to watch it destroy itself. Gradually, modern man becomes lost in a society where God does not play any

further role. On the other hand, Nietzsche is important to the absurdist playwrights when he discusses the concept of truth as being “a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms; in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished” (Nietzsche, 2010, 16). The Theatre of the Absurd makes use of language in its figurative level and focuses mostly on its metaphorical dimensions. The communication is broken, so a character in the absurdist drama never communicates his thought directly.

When it comes to Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre the Absurdist theatre borrows their ideas about existence/essence, man/universe, time/being and freedom/responsibility. The binary oppositions of a number of absurdist plays borrow Heidegger's concept of “*Geworfenheit*” and implement it in their dramatic productions. By the idea of “*Geworfenheit*” Heidegger means that to exist as humans we are all “thrust into a world whose meaning is already constituted and thus to confront circumstances beyond one's control. In Heidegger's words: “Dasein is something that has been thrown, it has been brought into its ‘there’, but not of its own accord” (Heidegger, 2010, 18). This concept emphasizes the idea that man is cast into this world without necessarily having chosen it. Man exists by chance in time and place. On the other hand, Absurdist playwrights, in addition to other ideas, borrow from Sartre his concept of inauthenticity which he analyzes in terms of our only way to escape from self-deception. Inauthenticity means basically the attempt of the subject to “avoid acknowledging one's freedom and responsibility as a self-determining being” (Heidegger, 2010, 18). It also entails the attempt of the subject not to be his real self due to stereotypes and constraints imposed by one's social context. In Sartre's words “to be authentic is to realize fully one's being-in-situation”.

4. ABSURDIST DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES IN *WAITING FOR GODOT*

Samuel Beckett's theatre leaves us so astonished that we are not quite sure where to begin our analysis of it. All the way through Beckett's plays are excellent and he proves to be that master with an exceptional ability to say much with so little. He mostly shows this aptitude through his special techniques based on what I would call dramatic sparseness. Ekbom claims that this technique's uniqueness relies "actors, or parts of them. sets, occasionally action, less and less often" (Ekbom, 1998, 24). Undoubtedly, Beckett has started a new trend in the history of the modern theatre, a trend which would come to be known as the theatre of the absurd. Such new absurdist dramatic techniques permeate all of his literary works, if not only his plays, in different stages of his life. However, perhaps no other Beckettian play has strikingly exhibited all these new dramatic techniques than his widely celebrated play *En Attendant Godot (Waiting for Godot)*, staged for the first time in 1952. Its uniqueness simply lies in being "a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats" (Weiss, 2012, 25). Not only had he managed to dissect and understand the spirit of the "new age", but he also succeeded in establishing a completely new literary form essential for an adequate expression of this spirit (Innes, 1992, 4). The aim of this chapter is to explore some of the underlying dramatic techniques of the absurdist theatre in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

One of the first distinctive aspects of the Theatre of the Absurd is the destruction of the dramatic sequential logic itself (Ekbom, 1991, 12). Beckett shifted the conventional understanding of the beginning, the middle and the end. In his play *Waiting for Godot* Beckett displaces traditional routines of what the audience calls the foreground and the background. The audience does not anymore sit in front of a linear set of incidents on the stage; rather everything that takes place before their eyes,

everything that the characters say or do is shockingly subverted. We are faced by a banal performance, but it is not entirely devoid of meaning. The situation that the characters find themselves in, their existence is what the center of the drama becomes. The play *Waiting for Godot* is an excellent example of dramatic ambiguity. The identity of Godot is irrelevant. The questions “Why”, “How” and “Who” are also irrelevant. All we know is that two seemingly clownish tramp characters Estragon and Vladimir with their shabby faces and clothes happened to be on the stage somewhere by the side of a road in the middle of nowhere where they are waiting for a certain Godot who never comes. There is no clue that can point out the location of the whole act except the author’s indication that two men are waiting on the country road by a skeletal tree (*WFG*, Act I, p.9). The audience is not provided with any hints pointing to the beginning in time or space. All directives of beginning/foreground, middle/climax, end/dénouement are disrupted and all we listen to are incomprehensible conversations between two seemingly neurotic characters who seem to be living outside their actual time. Just because they have nothing else to do both Estragon and Vladimir found themselves waiting for a Godot who promises to be their savior. Yet, we do not know from what they will be saved. To pass the time that heavily weighs on their existence, these two crabby characters resort to childish games only to find themselves ending in the same condition as their beginning. To alleviate their apparent sufferance and anxiety two other cranky and psychopathic characters appear on the scene: Pozzo and Lucky. Their conversation is nothing more than funny gibberish which does not relate to the general preoccupations of the protagonists and in the end nothing has been achieved. The sense of meaninglessness is everywhere in the play. Pozzo treats Lucky like an animal as he ties a rope around his neck and whips him. Furthermore, there are many interpretations about Pozzo-

Lucky relationship; such as, these two men represent master and slave or capital and labour. However, whatever the relationship between them, it can easily be observed that they are mutually interdependent. All characters of the play cannot leave each other alone in that depressed time or world; for instance, in Act II Estragon cries “Don’t touch me! Don’t question me! Don’t speak to me! Stay with me!” They are waiting for Godot or good things to happen all together. The whole dramatic action is stagnant and it seems that all the characters and their audience are stuck in vicious circle.

Such focus on the ridiculousness and banality of the character is distinctive of *Waiting for Godot* as an epitome of the absurdist play. Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo and Lucky are depicted to have unstable and grotesque personalities on the stage from the beginning to the end. This strangeness of characters is directly related to the sense of absurdity that governs people’s daily reality and through it Beckett tries to explore these characters’ sense of hopelessness with regard to life and society. As readers of traditional drama we know that characters are given personalities that comply with normal common sense. Their conversations, actions and behaviors are also reasonable and easily understood within the code and regulations of what we see as normal. However, in *Waiting for Godot* we notice that the protagonists are shaped with personalities that do not fit in the natural model of sanity. Estragon and Vladimir sometimes talk to themselves continually or repeatedly about issues that are devoid of interest to someone who is in his total control of his or her mental capabilities. Most of the time their phrases are messy and sentences are pronounced in disorder and they sometimes interrupt each other in the middle of long unfinished stretches of speech. In *Waiting for Godot* the characters lack a sense of direction and it greatly affects rules of logic in their talk. Such disorder in linguistic expression has indeed an explanation

in the instability of the characters' emotional life. In fact, they also seem to be lost and we do not possess any other information about them, such as their origin, family or even their roles in society. Additionally, there is a big gap between the external observed acts of the characters and their emotional age. This discrepancy is illustrated by the kind of childish games that Estragon and Vladimir engage in. All in all, absurdist characters give us an illusion that they have no personalities, but in fact, they are provided with a typical personality by their author. This kind of personality is different from that of the protagonists of traditional drama.

Another distinctive feature of the Absurdist Theatre lies in the ambiguity of thematic unity itself. In contrast to other traditional plays *Waiting for Godot* has got no clear and consistent plot built on logical action that develops into a climax before it finishes with a dénouement. The only important thematic element in the play is the act of waiting for someone who never comes. Thus the whole plot is built on inaction, represented by the act of waiting, instead of action. The fact that Beckett chose to write a play that lacks a well-constructed logical plot also reflects the same absurdist beliefs which Albert Camus advance in his philosophical works. The general construction of *Waiting for Godot* on the idea of waiting relates directly to an absurdist standpoint which claims that through ennui or waiting people think seriously about their identity and its complications. Through techniques of repetition of similar actions and dialogue, Beckett illustrates this concept of ennui in a universe that is ruled by incomprehensible laws. This absence of plot was substituted for by a plot against each other: Estragon and Vladimir are fooling each other despite the fact that deep inside they know something is wrong. Their *Angst* is reflected in their reoccurring questions: Who is Godot? What are we waiting for? Who beats Gogo? To beat this boredom the two crabby characters repeatedly inspect the inside of their

bowler hats, an act which reflects man's constant search for answer in the vacuum shape of the universe. Finally, the play ends just as it started and nothing really changes. Estragon and Vladimir like all the other human beings start with questions and expectations which are never answered in this universe. Man is surprised by the end of his time and he only realizes one thing that his existence is absurd and that he may never find answers to his questions.

The third distinctive aspect of the absurdist theatre consists in distrust of language. Language in an absurdist play does not lead anywhere and it fails to connect its speakers who seem to communicate nonsense comprehensible only to them. To face the absurdity of man's reality on this earth Beckett uses "a language that he himself deems to be ultimately ineffectual" (White, 2009, 47). As we read or attend the performance of the play we notice that Estragon and Vladimir speak a language that they can only understand. Estragon sometimes asks a question to which Vladimir responds with a different answer and none of them really bothers to check if the other understands. Their language makes sense to them because they both share the same existential framework from which they see their actual reality. They do not anymore bother to understand. In George Steiner's words their sole aim is to avoid silence which "so far as a model of language is palpably a dead end" (Steiner, 1998, 20). Gradually, communication between the characters breaks down, but they do not really seem to care. Both characters do not realize how different they sound to a normal audience when they repeat unintelligible phrases and sentences. For Estragon and Vladimir language has become meaningless exchanges through which they strive to beat the absurdity of time they waste while waiting for something that may not come. Words and sentences in Estragon/ Vladimir or Pozzo/Lucky's conversation do not reflect a specific human experience they lived in a particular time. They rather use

the language to avoid a logical inquiry into their roles and the purpose of their existence. Language becomes a medium to live through the absurdity of an incomprehensible reality. In place of meaningful speech, words and phrases, the physical objects associated with the characters become more important than the language they use. What actually happens through physical objects used by Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo and Lucky substitutes for what is being said. By transcending language as it is used by daily characters *Waiting for Godot* proves that “There is no greater virtuoso of strangulation than Beckett, no master of language less confident of the liberating power of the word” (Steiner, 1998, 127). In *Waiting for Godot* the characters do not properly understand themselves or give space to each other. There is a chronic absence of internal consistency in their conversations which essentially serve the purpose of filling the silent void with noise.

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

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

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

VLADIMIR: We have that excuse.

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

VLADIMIR: We have our reasons.

ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.

VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

VLADIMIR: Like sand.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

(WFG p. 52-53)

In these cases language functions as a tool for covering up rather than revealing truth. “[The characters] cannot communicate, cannot even remember events, statements, or each other from one day to the next. Social conventions are transparently selfish. There is nothing, or no one, out there. And while realizing this, they have nothing better to do than wait” (Corcoran, 2000, 143).

My claim that language in *Waiting for Godot* does not take us anywhere leads me to an interesting discussion introduced by the famous linguist J.L. Austin in his book *How to Do Thing with Words*. Austin claims that “it was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact,' which it must do either truly or falsely” (Austin, 1997, 92). To subvert this traditional linguistic view Austin distinguishes between constative which depict the state of affairs and performative statements which entice the subject to effectively act. Interestingly, *Waiting for Godot* is based essentially on statements that do not only describe the state of affairs, but rather on performatives which push the characters to act and react to certain premises having to do with the existential condition of man in general. Indeed, in *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for eventuality or action which would be effective with the coming of Godot.

Godot’s coming does not happen and the whole play is mere repetitive and silly conversations between two tramps. What is the significance of this new dramatic technique? It is obvious that Beckett’s intention in this play focuses on the use of language to circulate certain messages about reality, man and universe without necessarily having recourse to palpable and meaningful actions performed on the stage. In doing so Beckett confirms Richard Bigam’s contention that “*Waiting for Godot* is obsessively concerned with the rhetoric of performativity, but it seems to be

a peculiarly ineffectual performativity, one in which nothing happens” (Begam, 2007, 50). Consequently, one understands that linguistic performativity in *Waiting for Godot* remains at the level of rhetoric since nothing really happened outside the space and time of the play. Austin comments on this kind of performativity when he observes with regard to the onstage speech act: "a performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage" (Austin, 1997, 31). Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* contends at this stage that performative statement loses their effect when they become part of the realm of aesthetic discourse. Estragon and Vladimir appear to be playing what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls language game in which, by denying the capacity of language to function transitively, they succeed in doing things with words. An illustration of this concern with making something happens or what Austin call performativity is largely expressed in Act Two of *Waiting for Godot*. The following act focuses on performing performativity through commands that direct actors to carry out specific actions. In one such instance, Vladimir urges Estragon, "Say something!" and Estragon exhorts Vladimir "Sing something!". Later on what follows is a series of encouraging expressions that trigger precisely what the characters say they cannot produce:

ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's contradict each other.

VLADIMIR: Impossible.

ESTRAGON: You think so?

VLADIMIR: We're in no danger of ever thinking any more.

ESTRAGON: Then what are we complaining about?

VLADIMIR: Thinking is not the worst.

ESTRAGON: Perhaps not. But at least there's that.

VLADIMIR: That what?

ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's ask each other questions.

VLADIMIR: What do you mean, there's that?

ESTRAGON: That much less misery.

VLADIMIR: True.

ESTRAGON: Well? If we gave thanks for our mercies?

(*WFG*, p.70-71)

5. THE CONCEPT OF TIME IN *WAITING FOR GODOT* AND *HAMLET*

At a certain moment in their waiting time Estragon screams in Vladimir's face: "Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When!" (*WFG*, p. 33). This cry says a lot about Beckett's conception of time in *Waiting for Godot*. It is a heavy load which weighs on the characters' consciousness. It drives them to think about their unbearable condition in this meaningless life. Time in this manner only intensifies the absurdity of life that Estragon, Vladimir, Lucky and Pozzo live in a miserable place. Beckett's conception of time is somewhat similar to Nietzsche's. It is not "a priori condition of appearance – a 'form of sensibility' that lies 'at the basis of the empirical,'" Beckettian time "is not a condition preceding experience, but a conclusion drawn from experience and a means of expressing that experience" (Levy, 2011, 74). This state of affairs becomes clearer when we look at the action and theme of the play. Estragon and Vladimir have reached a final point where they are waiting for a certain Godot. Action does not start from a specific beginning, but it rather bases on the act of waiting to consider the heaviness and intensity of time. Beckett's perspective with regard to experience "construes awareness in terms of the unremittingly uniform unpleasantness of suffering it" (Steiner, 1998, 69). Thus, the experience of waiting for Godot produces

itself a different conception of time and not the other way. In Beckett “time is relegated to the status of illusion, as the driving aim of Beckettian texts is to express an abiding mentality or attitude toward experience which does not change and remains impervious to local circumstance” (Steiner, 1998, 69). Rather than progressing in a linear flux, time is arranged so that “succession becomes addition. Moments do not pass, in the sense of elapsing once their momentary duration expires. Instead, they accumulate and cumulatively encumber experience with their aggregation” (Steiner, 1998, 70).

There is an absence of chronological order of time in its relation to action, which is naturally stagnant as it only consists in waiting. The past thus intrudes upon the present since there is no hope in the future or even in thinking about it. Vladimir and Estragon are tortured by an obscure memory of the past while extending their hopes for redemption into the future in order to reduce the unendurable agony of the actual present, or state of incessant becoming. Instead of allowing his characters to plunge into an adventure in the unknown future, Beckett “displays a tendency to formulate the future as a revisiting of the past – not in the sense of regret or nostalgia, but in the sense of removing the possibility of change” (Steiner, 1998, 72).

By pointing to the circularity of life through an obliteration of the distinction between past, present and future, Beckett remarks that change and time are mere illusions. Similarly, in *Waiting for Godot*, waiting is the only logical action to take in the face of time throughout the play and any move forward is just an illusion. Additionally, changes in nature do not correspond to the change in time. Estragon and Vladimir are astonished by the tree producing leaves in a short time. They cannot be sure about the passage of time and they cannot be sure if they have spent a night or a season waiting. Perhaps, they were not even there yesterday. They are preoccupied

with a static action that is waiting for a long and indefinite time, which blurs their concept of time. Sometimes they comment on the movements of the moon to relocate their presence and existence in time and space, but it is usually useless. Time is meaningless as it does not really change the absurdity of life and man's condition in this universe. It moves forward, but it does not really bring a meaningful change in man's actions. Esslin's comment on time in Beckett's play is relevant here: "the ceaseless activity of time is self-defeating, purposeless, and therefore null and void" (Esslin, 2004, 87). Estragon and Vladimir experience the same routines every day, so time does not have any significance. When Pozzo wants to define the time again on their next meeting, Vladimir tries to guess the time by checking out the sky:

VLADIMIR: (inspecting the sky). Seven o'clock...eight o'clock...

ESTRAGON: That depends what time of year it is.

POZZO: Is it evening?

Silence. Vladimir and Estragon scrutinize the sunset.

ESTRAGON: It's rising.

VLADIMIR: Impossible.

ESTRAGON: Perhaps it's the dawn.

VLADIMIR: Don't be a fool. It's the west over there.

ESTRAGON: How do you know?

(*WFG*, p.85)

Estragon and Vladimir are totally lost as far as time is concerned. They are unable to answer Pozzo's questions about time. For Beckett's characters, time is unchangeable and stagnant. The same routines repeated the same day end up reducing time to nothing. Time disappears in the act of waiting for something that never comes. The characters do not even "fall" in time in the Heideggerian sense. For him, "falling

in time itself has its existential possibility in a mode of its temporalization which belongs to temporality”, in other words, the “fall is from time into time, one time into another” (Heidegger, 2010, 82). However, in *Waiting for Godot* time is incredibly stable and immobile because of the sense of waiting. There is not any ongoing action in the play like *Hamlet*, in which time is also a big issue. Hamlet seems to be inconsistent while talking or thinking about his father’s death. First, he believes it has been “two months”, then “a little month”, and later “two hours” since his father died (*Hamlet*, Act I. Scene II. p.138, 147; Act III. Scene II. p.122). Under the effect of such a tormenting dilemma, Hamlet “ignores or remarks time passing, and uses clock or calendar or falsifies or neglects them” (Bennett, 2011, 28). For him “the time is out of joint” (*Hamlet*, Act I. Scene V. p.188), in other words, in disorder because of the psychological hardships Hamlet goes through. He lost his sense of direction in time like Beckett’s characters.

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

VLADIMIR: We met yesterday. (Silence.) Do you not remember?

POZZO: I don’t remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won’t remember having met anyone today. So don’t count on me to enlighten you.

(*WFG*, p.87)

In *Waiting for Godot*, the characters are not sure about tomorrow, let alone yesterday. Vladimir and Estragon are unable to agree that they were together at a particular place a day earlier and they cannot remember what they did then. With the absence of a clear distinction between the past and the future only the present seems

to make sense to Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot*. However, when Vladimir remarks that 'nothing is certain when you are about', the reader realizes, basing on the tricky word play, that even the present is based on a shaky ground (WFG, p. 38-9).

For Beckett's characters, the relation between time and life in general consists in mere "instants". It is futile to worry about the past or the future, and the present time elapses swiftly to the extent that it becomes insignificant. The general feeling that we have as we watch *Waiting for Godot* is that we exist in a world that has seemingly passed on, a post-apocalyptic world inhabited by two protagonists living in a post-apocalyptic milieu where time is unchanging. The only scenery is a leafless tree and a country road. In Pozzo's word:

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

(WFG, p.89)

The exclamation above, spoken by Pozzo, demonstrates the maddening effect time has on the mind. This phenomenon is one of the many issues of time in *Waiting for Godot* and begins with Vladimir and Estragon playing the game of waiting. This act of waiting itself entraps them in a cycle of futility which leads to an anxiety that results from fear and boredom.

In his book *Beckett and Joyce* Barbara R. Gluck writes that for Beckett time is a "double-headed monster of damnation and salvation". This choice as a literary critic

shows that Beckett was deeply fascinated and tormented by issues of time. His concentration on the act of waiting would effectively demonstrate the submission of one's life to the will of a monstrous time, which he investigated in *Waiting for Godot*. This heavy burden of time on men's life was also reflected in Beckett's application of the mathematical notion of infinity to the number of acts in the play, and by doing so he emphasizes the idea of eternal waiting. Michael Worton explains:

“Beckett originally intended to make Godot a three-act play, but finally decided that two acts were enough...Beckett was fascinated by mathematics...and especially by the paradoxes that can be made by (mis-)using mathematic principles. He knew that in mathematical theory the passage from 0 to 1 makes a major and real change of state, and that the passage from 1 to 2 implies the possibility of infinity, so two acts were enough to suggest that Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky and the boy, will go on meeting in increasingly reduced physical and mental circumstances but will never not meet again”.

(Worton & Bloom, 2008, 112)

Beckett's respect for the number of units in *Waiting for Godot* reflects his awareness of these mathematical categories. His sense of ad infinitum also represents his conception of time as an entity which is composed of infinite sequences.

It is as if in *Waiting for Godot* the characters in the play kill time because they feel bored, yet in *Hamlet* it seems time kills the characters of the play. It is relative such as in the theory of Einstein. For him, the conception of time depends on the situation people experience for which he suggests “Put your hand on a hot stove for a minute, and it seems like an hour. Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, and it seems like a

minute. That's relativity." Time is in slow-motion because of waiting all the time in *Waiting for Godot*, in contrast, in *Hamlet* everyone is in the middle of an exciting tragic action which seems to happen in the blink of an eye.

6. THE CONCEPT OF NOTHINGNESS IN *WAITING FOR GODOT AND HAMLET*

Although works of the theatre of the absurd, particularly Beckett's, are often comical, their underlying premises are wholly serious. They discuss important questions relating to man's existence, universe, god and values. This underlying seriousness stems from "the epistemological principle of uncertainty and the inability in the modern age to find a coherent system of meaning, order, or purpose by which to understand our existence and by which to live" (Hutchings, qtd. In Bair, 1978, 30). This feature is also common in Shakespeare's plays dealing with existence, man and loss, especially in *Hamlet* where the protagonist strives to fathom this dilemma reigning over father's death. So, what is nihilism in the first place? What are its manifestations in *Waiting for Godot* and *Hamlet*?

Nihilism is a radical philosophy which claims that things (or everything, including the self) do not exist; a sense that everything is unreal. It also denies all established authority and institutions, and it stresses that the world and the people in it exist without meaning, purpose, truth or value. Nihilism as a movement or view of life is born with the postmodern society where man has lost all his faith in God as being the source of all meaning. Thus the post second world war order of the contemporary society is characterized by the "disappearance of the realm, of meaning, of the individual, of the social and so on" (Ekbom, 1991, 36). People

destroyed each other in wars which god watched from above without any intervention. All human social values lost their meaning in a world left on its own.

Nihilistic thinking was intensified with the advent of postmodernism as a school. According to Levin (2001, 5), the modern epoch brought into being a world in which the effects of nihilism are spreading. There is a tendency to destroy the very being of humans with the absence of meaning. It seems that postmodern individual launches a useless struggle in which he or she looks for a supreme power to which he or she can attribute all his acts, both the positive and the negative, for a better solace. Being most of the time disappointed, postmodern man opted for a nihilistic standpoint which radically strips being of meaning or any values that could save humanity from a possible demise. Thus, Nihilism is a radical renunciation of values, meaning and it is often associated with despair, self-destruction and bend towards nothingness. According to Nietzsche nihilistic thought “has many related manifestations: ontological, epistemological, existential, political and moral elements” (1968, p.7), which are also situated in *Waiting for Godot* and *Hamlet*.

If we explore *Waiting for Godot* from an existentialist perspective, we will notice that it illustrates the existential conception of God as a nonexistent entity and suggests that the problem of God’s existence is meaningless for a human being. The act of waiting in Beckett’s plays is not merely of two people, but of all human beings. The person Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for, represented by Godot, stands for God who by the end does not show up to save his creatures from the boredom and despair inflicted by existence itself. The general idea of *Waiting for Godot* stresses the feeling of existential destabilization that people experience when they realize that their reality and lives are in fact irrelevant. It displays the deceptiveness and futility of actions that people take in their day to day actions facing a disturbing reality to which

they cannot find explanations. Estragon and Vladimir's irrelevant trickery, frequently repeated linguistic plays and silly moves in the play seem to have one purpose only, to reflect a general feeling of chaos that possess the people when they realize that they are left on their own to decide upon their fate and destiny. Additionally, *Waiting for Godot* illustrates a nihilistic feeling experienced by people when they realize that the world is moving towards an inevitable end, giving space to disharmony, chaos, and nonsense. Estragon and Vladimir stand as two striking examples of the last Man on a wasted land waiting for a God that does not come. Apocalypse is the only possible result coming from such a futile waiting and it seems that Estragon and Vladimir wasted their lives thinking about a supreme being instead of thinking about what makes their very essence.

In the face of nothingness, a general feeling of incertitude reigns over the characters in *Waiting for Godot*. This sense of incertitude is illustrated by the inertia that possesses Beckett's characters in this play. Estragon, for example, urges Vladimir: "don't let's do anything. It's safer" (Beckett, p.11). He also repeatedly sighs that "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" (p.27). Because of this existential incertitude, the characters in *Waiting for Godot* are remarkably debilitated, unable to make any movement, so they remain quiet. At certain moments of heavily weighing ennui, which only makes them realize the futility of their existence, Vladimir contends "nothing is certain when we are about" (p.8). This last sentence expresses the degree of nihilism which Estragon and Vladimir have reached. Nothingness is the only reality that seems available to their sense and mind while thinking about actions to take. It is better for them to remain inactive in the face of events taking place in front of their eyes than to try to do something about the insignificance of their daily events. Even in the process of trying to do something the

only prior outcome of their attempts to understand their existence is “nothing”. So, they would rather sit calmly and watch the wheel of existence turn until they meet their ends. Consequently, essential things in this life become uncertain, in other words, nothing is certain, death, illness, hell or heaven are nothing. In one of the most striking scenes Estragon wonders: “Wait! (He moves away from Vladimir) I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself. (He crosses the stage and sits down on the mound) We weren't made for the same road.” Gradually, this sense of nihilistic delusion is accompanied by a certain kind of fluctuation when it comes to faith in future. We notice that almost all the conversations between Estragon and Vladimir are tinged with a loss of faith in future and even the stage directions allude to this absence of faith in future, the tree which was dead in Act I, while it blossomed in the second act, though only a few leaves were visible on the tree.

Waiting for Godot manifests a number of nihilistic moods in characters. The general atmosphere of the play itself is nihilistic. As we observe Estragon and Vladimir face an absurd situation we also get depressed and which to get rid of this boredom or we will end up committing suicide. To temporarily avoid the ennui inflicted by a profound feeling of nihilism Estragon and Vladimir insist on chatting about meaningless issues only to kill time. Beckett's use of nonsensical language exposes the existentialist theme of man's incapability to understand the world only by the means of language. Another mood of nihilistic feelings is illustrated by the Beckett's characters' twist towards suicide. As we read *Waiting for Godot*, we notice that Estragon and Vladimir become desperate with life and cannot resist anymore this idea of ending a meaningless life of wait for something that never comes. In one of their significant dialogues, Estragon exclaims, “why don't we hang ourselves?”

(Beckett, p.41). Estragon and Vladimir's life has indeed become monotonous with no interesting events to make worth living to the extent that they become inclined to hang themselves. Would this act of self-immolation end their sufferance on this earth? It is possible that it will not, but this act of suicide in Beckett's view implies something different. Suicide as a conscious act of putting an end to one's life can be explained by Nietzsche's standpoint which maintains that: "suicide is the deed of nihilism" (Nietzsche, 1968). Suicide in this case seems to be the ultimate result to which a monotonous, meaningless life leads to. It is also a final result to which a subject with a nihilistic view of things succumbs in a world devoid of values. This chronic mood of nihilism in *Waiting for Godot* seems to assume the role of a vital character. It manipulates capricious feelings of characters that are lost. Let us look at Estragon and Vladimir trying on the boots:

VLADIMIR: What about trying them?

ESTRAGON: I've tried everything.

VLADIMIR: No, I mean the boots.

ESTRAGON: Would that be a good thing?

VLADIMIR: It'd pass the time. [Estragon hesitates] I assure you, it'd be an occupation.

(WFG, p.59)

Thus, ad infinitum Estragon and Vladimir find something to distract them from a life of wait devoid of meaning and values. When they finish with an activity and cannot resort to another one to substitute for it, the characters become aware of their unbearable existence and they therefore cannot avoid its heavy weight. We seem here to have reached that world Nietzsche prophesied, a world where God is dead and nihilism predominates. However, this world turns out to be a different one from what

Nietzsche expected. It is not as positive as he expected it to be. The godless world Nietzsche visualized is supposed to bring success and optimism to modern man. Instead, the post-apocalyptic world Beckett depicts in *Waiting for Godot* is characterized by a loss of hope and obscurantism. The world Beckett depicts in *Waiting for Godot* inspires primarily lifelessness and a melancholy. The characters have indeed lost hope in dead God in Nietzsche's sense, who cannot save them from this unbearable despair. This sense of being left alone to face nothingness is clear in the conversations of Vladimir and Estragon about the essence of religion:

VLADIMIR: Did you ever read the bible? Estragon: The Bible... [He reflects.]

I must have taken a look at it.

VLADIMIR: Do you remember the Gospels?

ESTRAGON: I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were.

Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty.

That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon.

We'll swim. We'll be happy.

(*WFG*, p.6)

Interestingly, Vladimir and Estragon constitute examples of the "last men" who, according to Nietzsche, are the people of this nihilistic world. Vladimir and Estragon are endowed with certain distinctive characteristics of Nietzsche's "last men". Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot* are representative of "Nietzsche's sick ones, utterly baffled and marginal. Their hopes and expectations are absurd" (Nancy, 1989). The only problem is that Nietzsche's "last men" are content with themselves, totally accepted this insignificant existence as they claim they found in the world of comfort they created. On the other hand, Vladimir and Estragon are anything but happy with their situation. They wish to change it, but are utterly unable

to do so. Indeed, they seem utterly unable to do almost anything. The characters of *Waiting for Godot* are as strikingly far removed from the overman ideal as can be imagined. They are weak and frail, mentally, physically and spiritually. They are uncertain, unsure of themselves and their surroundings, alienated, dislocated, and unable to make decisions or take decisive action on anything. They have trouble remembering things, even things that happened the day before, and the things they do remember seem to weigh them down. They don't have a clear conception of why they are there or why they are waiting. Their consciousness seems fragmented and broken, and they are thus unable to will, unable even to decide on what to will, and when they do will something, they are unable to act, either out of timidity, uncertainty or sheer physical exhaustion. The scene in the second act where Pozzo has fallen and calls for help exemplifies this. Instead of helping him right away, Vladimir and Estragon debate the situation endlessly, unable to come to a decision.

VLADIMIR: Perhaps we should help him first.

ESTRAGON: To do what?

VLADIMIR: To get up.

ESTRAGON: He can't get up?

VLADIMIR: He wants to get up.

ESTRAGON: Then let him get up.

VLADIMIR: He can't.

ESTRAGON: Why not.

VLADIMIR: I don't know.

(*WFG*, p.68-69)

In the face of this nothingness Beckett's characters try to help each other, but they unfortunately all fail. Estragon and Vladimir try to help Pozzo when he started to

feel desperate, but no use. They did not have any practical knowledge to solve social or existential problems. This failure pushes the audience to reflect upon the limits of the “overman” will to power as theorized by Nietzsche. Vladimir and Estragon lack a will to do anything at all. This absence of will to power can be attributed to their despair and loss of hope in life, world and themselves in the first place.

The other two main characters, Pozzo and Lucky, provide us with an interesting exploration as well as a curious parody of Nietzsche’s master and slave dialectic. Pozzo, while in a sense being the representative of the “master” type, is very far removed from being concurrent with the master type as described and idealized by Nietzsche. Far from being self-sufficient, he is quite as dependent on others as are the other characters, perhaps even more so. He depends on Lucky for his every need, and he is eager to make an impression on Vladimir and Estragon. He comes across as a rather contemptible character, cruel and self-centered, which may or may not be characteristics fitting in with Nietzsche’s idea of the master type, but he is utterly lacking in the positive characteristics Nietzsche associated with such a type. His dependence on Lucky has rendered him helpless, and indeed dependence is a common characteristic of all the characters in the play. Lucky is just as dependent on Pozzo as Pozzo is on him. It is even suggested that he remains Pozzo’s servant merely because he cannot bear to leave him and thus be alone with himself. Vladimir and Estragon are equally dependent on each other. This all-encompassing dependency seems to refute a central aspect of Nietzsche’s ‘Superman’, since a key feature of this higher type is a sort of glorious independence. The play seems to suggest that this independence is a mere fantasy. We may dream of it, but ultimately we need the other, if only to validate ourselves, and to provide us with the diversions we need in order to avoid facing up to the unbearable state of mere existence.

Similarly, nothingness is a very important and reoccurring subject in *Hamlet* and it overlaps with man's endeavor and role in this universe. In fact, it is at the centre of the general issue raised in the play itself. Shakespeare, through the perspective of his main character Hamlet, questions the meaning of life itself when it becomes threatened by grudge and greediness. Perhaps the first instance which illustrates the preoccupation of the play with nothingness is Hamlet's long and famous soliloquy in Act III scene I. Hamlet enters, musing "To be or not to be, that is the question," and by being doing so he disturbs the linearity of action which was monotonous. Many literary critics consider this monologue to be one of several existential manifestos in *Hamlet*. By voicing his own inner thoughts about the existential condition which led to his own procrastination, Hamlet opens the door to a fundamental issue which questions man's very existence in this universe.

In this soliloquy, Hamlet problematizes basic concepts of being and nothingness by affirming a fundamental assumption that man's existence is very limited; man comes into being, lives and dies at a certain time without necessarily deciding about when or where to die. This death remains problematic itself because man has never reached that point where he understands its intricacies. No one has returned from the outer world to report on the aftermath and dissect the notion of death itself. Because we are limited as humans we remain ignorant of the time death takes place and we cannot hinder its occurrence. Hence, Hamlet's dilemma reflects a general state of all humans and it raises fundamental existential questions: does a human being have any effect on his or her own destiny? Are we capable as human beings to take action against an inflicted sorrow or should we just surrendering to it? Can a human being put an end to his trouble only by facing the invisible power that inflicts? Is death the end of man's suffering? Is there any other possible way to

divinely retaliate from an oppressor after having died? Why should the living individual or subject assume the moral responsibility of straightening out a wrong deed that has been done if a divine power promises a rightful compensation? Such questions lead to think about the absurdity of life and drives gradually to a nihilistic condition that sees the essence of things in their nothingness. Life is easier to live when we realize that beyond lies nothing. Hamlet as a character in this life is entrapped in an existential dilemma concerning the murder of his father. He loses his sense of the value of life and the material world and in fact this act of murder is seen as a precursor to an existential awakening.

Since he reaches an impasse while trying to fathom his father's death, Hamlet hopes that death is itself the end of man's constant suffering, and by extension that death may save from any remorse because it leads to nothingness. Hamlet associates death with nothingness when he hopes that it will "end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to". Hamlet seems to be worried about the aftermath of death. He does not want to suffer and he hopes that death itself is the final step to nothingness. The death of Hamlet's father troubles his previous concept of Christian understanding of life and the afterlife as we can see. He only sees death as an impending state of human, rational processes of reasoning, understanding, and memorizing. Hamlet is frightened by the possible fact that when he dies he will wake up to remember all the pain he endured in life. Ultimately, he states that this is the reason why human beings are horrified by the idea of death. We fear that our consciences will constantly torture us even when we die. Thus, man reluctantly chooses life with all its torment and tribulations, chiefly to avoid death as much as he can. However, death is like life, both unavoidable. Hamlet exasperatedly curses the

moment he was born. Being born is itself a burden and it is better to be nothing right from the beginning.

Hamlet's dilemma dominates the general feeling of the entire soliloquy. If he kills Claudius, he will certainly subject himself to death. Hamlet is not ready to die because he does not know anything about death or what it leads to. The idea of death as the unknown or the epitome of nothingness deters him from taking any action. Further, his conscience is not capable of assuming the responsibility for murdering another human being. Although he knows that his father was murdered according to testimony of the ghost, he is still procrastinating because he knows that he condemns himself to the same fate if he kills Claudius.

After his monologue Hamlet resorts to asking his seemingly beloved Ophelia to pray for him. It seems that even love could not save him from a gradual descent into nothingness. After Hamlet talks with the ghost of his father, he becomes painfully aware of the limitations of humanity. Human beings exterminate each other for banal, materialistic reasons having to do with greediness for power over other people. He gradually becomes very despising of life and desiring of nothingness:

“How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable

Seem to me all the all the uses of this world!”

(Hamlet, Act I. Scene II. p. 133-134)

Hamlet's indeterminacy drives him to change his mind about the essence of a human being and his value in this universe. In his conversation with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, he defines a human as a "quintessence of dust," a creature who delights him not. In his fourth soliloquy, Hamlet is seriously considering a suicidal act to put an end to his suffering on this earth. He started as an individual who thinks of his own problem as being personal, but he ended up as a subject who ponders the

meaninglessness of Man's existence. The only dream that he really wants to realize in this life is to get rid of the very idea of being alive. The following verses reflect this existential perplexity:

*"... To die, to sleep—
To sleep, perchance to dream, ay there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
Must give us pause".*

(Hamlet, Act III. Scene I. p.64-68)

The idea of suicide seems to be the last resort, but it is not an easy step to take. Hamlet is lost between two extremes: Should he endure this existential and absurd suffering? Or should he put an end to his suffering by committing suicide, and then be punished forever? At this critical moment Hamlet becomes an existential hero when he started to think of his authenticity in this universe. He has to decide on his own and construct very essence as an independent subject. His own choice to define his authentic essence as an existential hero is illustrated by his conversation with Fortinbras in Act V, Hamlet does so by declaring himself—"This is I, Hamlet, the Dane". Hamlet decides right away to consciously assume responsibility of avenging his father's death. As an existential hero Hamlet has to let go of his own consciousness because it seems to be the only quasi-religious factor that deters him from taking a moral action, family being the first entity for which one has to sacrifice. By deciding to avenge his father Hamlet ceases to present himself as a kind of religious hero. He also demonstrates that a tragic hero, one who provokes fear and sympathy in his audience, is also an existential hero since he does not have any religious doubts. Hamlet is by no means a religious hero because "he is too full of

morbid reflection ever to be able to make a proper leap of faith” (Kearney, 2004, 48). Hamlet’s existential condition as an individual who is divided between familial duty towards his father and a respect of a divine power is more complicated because of his “embodiment of the in-between condition” that Soren Kierkegaard emphasizes in his commentary on Hamlet. Kierkegaard contends that Hamlet is “too religious to fit into the aesthetic category of Climacus but not religious enough to meet the religious category of Anti-Callimachus” (Steiner, 1998, 29).

All in all, both *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot* deal with the subject of nothingness as being something towards which man gravitates. Nothingness is unavoidable because life itself is absurd and does not subscribe to any logical or rationalized ways of thinking. Man as an entity is divided between rational and emotional parts which make his life unbearable in this universe. If one decides to procrastinate as Hamlet, one loses his authenticity as a free and responsible subject. If one decides to wait as Estragon and Vladimir, one risks to waste his life without necessarily arriving to any clear or logical answers to man’s suffering in this universe. The protagonists of both plays face death because it stands as symbol of nothingness. Hamlet dies by the end, a condition which in a way destabilizes his authenticity as an existential hero whereas Estragon and Vladimir still linger behind enduring their worldly suffering.

7. NOTHINGNESS IN THE WORK OF MAWLANA JALAL DIN RUMI AS AN ASPECT OF SUFISM

Sufism is in general represents a special movement which appeared in Islam in attempt to distance oneself from the material world and its debilitating greediness. It saw the light during times when different Muslim tribes and groups fought each other for political reasons. The Sufis became known as social “recluses [who] adopt the system of wandering all over the globe, and are divided into three classes” (Porter, 1868, 7). The Order of the Whirling Dervishes is one branch of the widely practiced Sufi tradition. The universal values of love, kindness and solidarity shared by all Sufis are very much relevant to the immediate and actual social and political realities of today. These universal values are dissipated through practical rituals performed by the Order of the Whirling Dervishes, who symbolize ultimate compassion and unconditioned sharing in the hearts and minds of millions throughout the world. One of its widely celebrated spiritual leaders is Mawlana Jalla Din Rumi. This latter has been depicted as “the most eminent Sufi poet whom Persia has produced” (Browne, 1999, 5). His presence as a leading figure is celebrated both by the young and the old. Muhammed Iqbal acknowledges that “the world of today needs a Rumi to create and attitude of hope, and to kindle the fire of enthusiasm for life” (Iqbal, 2014). When Mawlana was a teenager, he was inspired by the poet and teacher Fariduddin Attar, who was the author of his own *Ilahinama (The Book of God)*. After his father’s death, Rumi became head of the *madrasah* (school) which reportedly had over ten thousand students. Meanwhile, he met Shams Tabriz about whom Rumi believed his real life and poetry started with. Their meeting was the central point in Mawlana’s life. Being close fellows for about four years, in 1248, Shams suddenly disappeared, yet he was believed to have been killed or driven away by some of Rumi’s students. The loss of

his companion led Rumi to outpour forty thousand lyric verses including odes, quatrains and poems. His poems have been very inspiring for many subsequent generations in the East and the West, especially his widely read and cited mystical *Mathnawi*.

This chapter will be appendix to the general topic as I see that there are possible convergences between the pioneers of Western theatre and drama and an eminent figure of Sufism in the eastern culture and thought. In this stage of my research, I intend to concentrate on the concept of nothingness as it manifests itself in Rumi's poetry and thought.

Rumi's poetry reveals that he is a poet with a tolerant perspective on issues relating to religion, God, universe, existence and Man, reflecting a similar position to many of his predecessor Sufi fellows. Sufism as a mystic part of religion portrays a philosophy of inner thoughts and feelings in the framework of existentialism and nothingness. Jean Paul Sartre reflects this idea as "Whatever being is, it will allow this formulation: Being is that and outside of that, nothing" (Heiddegger, 2010, 25). Similarly, Sufis think nothingness is a revelation of being. Rumi's poetry is full of significant signs and standpoints which would associate his work with the existentialists who believe in the idea of nothingness. However, he still differs with the existentialist in the sense that he does not totally "picture nothingness as a kind of force that impedes each object's existence". Similarly, just like Mansur al- Halaj (10th century Persian Sufi) Rumi contends that the idea of freedom itself is rooted in nothingness because once we do not have any higher powers to measure our deed with we become totally free. Mansur al Halaj signifies it in one of his poems:

“I wonder at this You and I

You are all there is

And I am all annihilated.

There is an I

No longer exists”.

(<https://ias.org/sufism/practical-sufism-philosophical-sufism/>)

Also in one of his poem, Rumi contends “Existence is a means to reach absence” (Ergin, 2014, 9). This verse summarizes his view of existence as phase through which we pass to absence which would mean the disappearance of body and soul into nothingness. Later, in the same poem Rumi ponders on the nature of Man’s essence:

*“When you are with everyone but me,
you are with no one.*

*When you are with no one but me,
you are with everyone.*

*Instead of being so bound up with everyone,
be everyone.*

*When you become that many, you are nothing.
Empty”.*

(Barks, 1997, 44)

In this poem, Rumi starts by enumerating the constituents of Man as a creature to end up with a paradoxical conclusion suggesting that the individual must by the end disassociate himself or herself from whatever elements that constitutes his or her spirit towards nothingness. Interestingly, Rumi clearly assumes that the soul of Man is imprisoned in this life and it has to go through constant absurd anguish just like many

existentialists. In his view, this world itself in which Man is imprisoned has the solution to his freedom and it is through nothingness. In another poem Rumi goes on to emphasize this possibility of existing through emptiness or nothingness:

*“You think of yourself
as a citizen of the universe.
You think you belong
to this world of dust and matter.
Out of this dust
you have created a personal image,
and have forgotten
about the essence of your true origin”.*

(Steiner, 1998, 19)

In these verses, Rumi emphasizes through his use of binary oppositions the contingent relationship existing between existence and emptiness, existence and the void, presentness and absence. Existence and nothingness are intricately related in Rumi’s mind, which favours the spiritual over the material. Rumi assumes that one cannot exist if he does not disappear in the void which permeates the universe within which the body of the individual is imprisoned. He positively favours the void which negates the existence and he celebrates the vacuous which leads to his ultimate freedom to be only himself without any interference from divine judgments. While attempting to realize such a move, language itself loses its meaning when it tries to explain existence that realizes itself in emptiness. Here is another poem in which Rumi again associates existence with emptiness and nothingness:

*“This we have now
 is not imagination
 This is not
 grief or joy.
 Not a judging state,
 or an elation,
 or sadness.
 Those come and go.
 This is the presence that does not”.*

(Barks, 1997, 261)

Just like Beckett’s principal characters Vladimir and Estragon, Rumi stresses in the verses above the importance of believing in nothingness as a possible way out of all the daily tribulations that Man face while trying to understand the absurdity of his life. Remarkably, Rumi seems to invite his readers to a new religion which is not based on the monotheistic teachings and precepts, but rather on void, emptiness and non-existence. We may ask non-existence of what exactly? Perhaps the absence of meaning in Man’s actions towards his close divinity or towards his fellow human beings with whom he shares this universe. This reminds us of the constant answer the Vladimir and Estragon repeat all the time: nothing to be done. However, such an invitation to non-existence should not be understood as surrender to the imprisonment of Man in this world, but rather a forgetfulness of feelings of sin and indebtedness to enjoy life in its completeness.

As a possible way to contribute human creativity Rumi believes that music, dance and singing are activities that bring together the body and the soul at the same time to positively interact with nature, life and the universe. The music in his opinion

represents the voice messages the universe uses to break the codes of the soul while it interacts with the world on a daily basis. The dervish dances are valuable forms of attempt to connect with universe without necessarily having to show divine connection or need through mechanical prayers. The continuous turning of the dervishes represents the desire of the individual to lose himself or herself in the multilayered constitution of this material universe that surrounds the physical body. The existing symbiosis between the body and the spirit finds a unique and appropriate atmosphere in the dervish dances since it helps to disassociate from the conscious limitations imposed on the body by the onlookers in times of consciousness. As Haney suggests that “there is interconnectedness between utopia and transcendent states of consciousness. Materially, the world around us may transform into a more utopic one, but unless our inner state of consciousness is harmonious with it, utopia is not being experienced. Our consciousness determines our experience of the world around us, whether it be a utopic world or a dystopic world” (Haney, 2011, 8). In addition to this, Sufis believe that in order to get rid of the materialistic world, they need some art (music and dance) for being in the “eternal world’ which does not have any ‘sense of time’ but ‘nothingness’. To sum, we might consider the Sema dance of the dervishes as an attempt to lose themselves in nothingness when the body disassociates itself from the spirit and flows into the unlimited spiritual dimension.

The Sema ritual as theorized and practiced by Rumi himself subscribes to a scientific assumption put to practice side by side with music as a form of entrancing the self to rid it of all its material shackles. In the Dervish Order it is believed that the natural state of our existence is to revolve. There is no being or object which does not revolve, because all beings are comprised of revolving electrons, protons, and neutrons in atoms. Everything turns constantly in an orbit, and the human being lives

by means of the revolution of these particles, by the revolution of the blood in his body, and by the turn of season in various stages of his life, by his coming from the earth and his returning to it. Nothing is stagnant and everything moves around renewing itself in a vast universal. This idea of constant revolving in an endless orbit also allows for the multiplicity of human consciousness towards things that exist outside it.



CONCLUSION

Consequently, existence of mankind has always been a subject for several writers, thinkers and philosophers. In fact, every single person might have been questioning of his/her own as a living creature for ages. There are countless questions that can be asked about “existentialism”. Especially, the “-Wh” question “Why?” comes first. This seems most likely that human beings generally do something for an intentional purpose or subliminally, but for a reason. That’s why so many philosophers inquire knowledge about “being” for so many reasons. Existentialist philosophers encourage us to lead a meaningful life in an absurd and unfair world. In his book, *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that the meaning of our being must be tied up with time. We are temporal beings – and were born into a world that existed before us with its culture, traditions and religion, its history already typed, and to make sense of this world we engage in multiple pastimes to get by. We might have a family, a house, property or build a career and in doing so we place ourselves on a trajectory towards some kind of future. But there is a limit for our plans, a point at which everything comes to an end, whether finished or unfinished, and that limit is our death. Yet, we are so addicted to our pastimes and distractions that we simply forget that there’s an outermost limit to our pursuits; and in so doing, says Heidegger, “we live an inauthentic life”. It’s not until we project our lives onto the horizon of our death that authentic life can be found. As Heidegger points, human beings could follow their dreams and projects in their lives, but death has always been a reality in front of their eyes. When we think of twentieth century which observed two World Wars, it is inevitable to escape from this reality. Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* has always been a reflection of the century. Beckett introduced the concept of meaningless of life and nothingness in his play. The play is structured on “nihilism”

with its leafless tree, deserted road and uncertain Godot who never appears. The main characters of the play, Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for “nothing”, actually. Moreover, “Nothing to be done” is repeated many times and dominated on the play’s atmosphere. The only action that seems to be happen is in Act I Pozzo and Lucky’s entrance to the stage. Lucky is driven by a rope as if he is Pozzo’s slave. This is a symbolic reference of social explosion of humanity in that time. Pozzo’s statements as “I am Pozzo (Silence.) Pozzo! (Silence). Does that name mean nothing to you? (Silence). I say does that name mean nothing to you?” (Act I, p. 23) brings this so-called action to “nothingness” again. Compared to *Waiting for Godot*, in *Hamlet* Shakespeare cultivates “nothingness” in some points, too. Yet, unlike *Waiting for Godot*, *Hamlet* is a moving play, but Hamlet’s state of mind during the play takes towards the themes nihilism and “nothingness”. Whenever Hamlet is alone in the play, from his soliloquies, such as, “We are born, we live and we die” (Act IV: Scene II) he emphasizes on meaningless life. Hamlet hopes death will end all pains, fear and chaos of this world. He has lost his belief in humanity since his father is killed and his uncle is married to his mother. This situation indicates his uncle’s very “ego” in a way. He does not feel any disturbance from egoism or want to sacrifice his kingdom for any reason. In contrary, for Hamlet, the way to tranquility passes from “silence” as in the end of the play he says “the rest is silence”. All these nihility, nothingness, meaninglessness of life, ego and silence concepts bust out in “Sufism”, which is considered as a sect of Islam, but in fact, it is a mystical way of drawing near the Islamic faith. However, the most outstanding feature of Sufism is its spirituality. The law of Qur’an must be known, but it is only the first step to reach the degree of approaching God and understanding the nature of world. It carries its own philosophy in itself. It handles these themes –mentioned above- from different aspects. First, in

Sufism “ego” is one of the most dangerous enemies for human beings. “In God presence, there is no room for two egos. You say “ego,” and he says “ego”? Either you die in his presence, or he will in your presence, so that no duality may remain. Yet it is impossible that he should die either in the universe or in the mind, for “He is the living, who does not die” (Our’an 25:58). There is no place for “ego” or “self” on the road that is leading to God. Mansur al Halaj, one of the Sufists, says “Ene’l-Hakk” sentence in Arabic which can be translated as “I am God”. By this, he means one should become one flesh with God. This kind of love demands purification, to peel off the layers of self and submit the soul totally. Rumi expresses this feeling of surrender as:

*“I speak of plural souls in name alone –
 One soul becomes one hundred in their frames;
 Just as God's single sun in heaven
 Shines on earth and lights a hundred walls
 But all these beams of light return to one
 If you remove the walls that block the sun
 The walls of houses do not stand forever
 And believers then will be as but one soul”.*
 (Masnavi 4: 415-18)

The unity with God desires slaying the self and separate from selfishness to reach divinity. Second, not only killing the self but also stay in silence is required. Silence provides to be free from mental faculties, despair and noise of everyday life. It is an opportunity to escape from problems and listen to inner voice. In addition to this, to discover strengths and weaknesses as human beings, live in harmony and have tolerance and respect in life. In Sufism it is a necessity to be isolated from inner

“noise” while at the same time fulfilling the responsibilities of the world. To do this, the state of silence is needed to attain. Therefore, the meaninglessness of life melts in silence and leads the person to “nothingness”. For instance, Rumi conveys his emotions and ideas on nothingness as:

“I died to mineral, joined the realm of plants

I died to vegetable, joined animal

I died from animal to human realm

So why fear? When has dying made me less?

In turn again I'll die from human form

only to sprout an angel's head and wings

and then from angel-form I will ebb away

For all things perish but the face of God

And once I'm sacrificed from angel form

I'm what imagination can't contain.

So let me be naught! Naughtness, like a fugue

sings to me: We verily return to Him”.

(Masnavi 3: 3901-3907)

In Sufism everything is an illusion that human beings should stay away because “everything” hypnotes minds and stick them to the world. So, the right way is to walk on the way of “nothingness” in order not to get stuck in passions, “self” and worldly desires. All forms of rigid religious categorizations of what is right or wrong disappear when Man start to believe in his own capability to deduce the meaning of his own existence from his essence as a conscious entity composed of soul and body, mind and spirit. Man’s full living of his existence lies in making this existence disappear in the absurdity of being. As Rumi says “anything you lose comes round in

another form". Also music is very significant and helpful in this sense because music and dance assist (unshed) on facilitating the process of dissipating one's worries about existence, destiny and the end of the world. Rumi was perhaps one of the first who considerably encouraged the use of creative and performance arts for spiritual reasons. This proves the openness of Rumi's spiritual practice to all forms of spiritual endeavors. It does not necessarily see itself as the only provider or owner of truth, but rather a tradition or a way towards free experimentation with spirituality without necessary subjecting oneself to measures of categories of right or wrong. The dervish dance assists in bridging the existing gaps between the material world governed by the physical and the spiritual world to which the soul or the spirit constantly aspires. Perhaps dramatic performance in Shakespeare and Beckett also constitute forms of spiritual purification, especially when they treat issues and topics having to do with human condition and possible ways of curing Man from all kinds of "inner" and "mental" diseases.

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