UNIT 3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS-II

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this Unit is to complete the critical analysis of the play and relate the Second Act of the play to Act I.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we resume analysis of the text, we will raise some questions, which you will do well to answer so that you can follow the discussion of the play later in Units 4 and 5 better.

3.2 BRIEF COMMENTS AND IMPORTANT POINTS TO PONDER OVER: ACT II

As the curtain goes down on Act I, we find the two tramps frozen in their situation. Going by your experience of reading plays by other playwrights, what expectation do you have in this play when the curtain goes up in the second Act?

In the first Act we found Estragon and Vladimir waiting for the elusive *Godot*. Do you think the two tramps would not be *Waiting for Godot* as expectantly as they did in the first Act? You would recall that in the first Act, the two tramps do not state exactly what they expect *Godot* to do for them. Can you make a guess about their expecation?

Do they expect him to improve their life in any specific manner? Is there any indication about it in the play?

Or, do you think they will give up their wait for him?

If they terminate their wait, where would they go? Do they have anywhere to go?

As noted earlier, Beckett presents a starkly austere setting and deprives his characters of any antecedents, and gives them little human dignity. In view of this existentialist situation do you think the tramps will achieve anything even if *Godot* came? To put it differently, would their waiting or not-waiting for *Godot* make any difference to their life?

And, in the background of this existentialist situation, is any fulfilment possible in the life of Estragon and Vladimir?

We will discuss various aspects of the play in later units of the study material. However, to understand the structure of the play, please make note of repetitions and differences at all levels in the play, especially keeping in mind the situation of the two tramps and their relationship with each other.

Towards the end of both the Acts the two tramps propose to move and yet *don't* and the curtain in both cases, falls with the stage directions: "They don't move."

Is there any finality in the ends of the two Acts? Why or why not?

3.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ACT II

When the curtain goes up at the beginning of Act II, we see that the tree, which was leafless in the first Act, has four or five leaves. Vladimir, however, exaggerates on p. 60 and says "It's covered with leaves." The swift leafing keeps the tree at the centre of attention and speculation. Beckett gets a great deal from this visual image: it can stand for spring, as Estragon comments; for renewals, and the cycle of life. The leafing can stand for hope as well. Yet the tree is associated with death, since the two planed to hang themselves from it, and reminds us of Christ's crucifixion.

Vladimir moves about feverishly on the stage and suddenly begins to sign a dog song-- an old German ballad.

When we go through the seemingly circular dog song, it appears we could go on and on with it; it seems never-ending, but Vladimir's brooding repetition of the word "tomb" "tomb" "tomb" gives that idea a conclusiveness, a finality; the word itself conveys a final destination. The song is circular, but the effect is linear. Its syntax, using so simple a vocabulary, with its repetition and its emphasis on death, brings to mind Lucky's very different speech in Act I. The dog song ends with "tomb", Lucky's speech ends with " the labors abandoned left unfinished . . . so calm . . . cunard . . . unfinished . . .." We thus see presentation of balance and antithesis throughout the play.

Meeting of the two tramps in Act II begins on a note identical to the one we have at the beginning of Act I.

In Act I, Estragon was joined by Vladimir, it is vice-versa here. Also, Vladimir's invitation to embrace in Act II is slightly differently worded. At the end of the embrace Estragon who is no longer supported by Vladimir, almost falls. This manifests the complementary nature of their relationship. Nonetheless, their nagging continues and each claims to be better off without the other. Vladimir also questions Estragon about his tormentors and whether they beat him again. Their beating of Estragon defies all reason.

Both the tramps, nonetheless, feel happy having come together, and would wait for *Godot*. Things also seem changed since the previous day. But Estrogon's statement: It's never the same pus is a sick remark about living and the passage of time; it hints

also at its (life and time's) irreversibility/irreversible movement/unidirectional movement.

Estragon has forgotten everything which took place the previous day. Vladimir's attempts to remind him end up with another sick remark about his life condition. He has, he states, crawled about in the mud all his lousy life, and never stirred from the muck heap of lit. Vladimir unsuccessfully attempts to calm him down, but Estragon expresses his disgust at his failed life saying, "I've puked my puke of a life" (p.62). He also echoes Pozzo's words about Lucky (p.32) and wishes. "The best thing would be to kill me, like the other." Vladimir, however, reminds him of the Biblical saying, "To every man his little cross ... Till he dies ..... And is forgotten."

The two are inexhaustible in inventing new ways of passing time (see discussion of the play). They once again lapse into music hall cross talk wherein they speak of the dead voices, which according to Martin Esslin are "the rustling, murmuring voices of the past, are the voices we hear in the three novels of his trilogy; they are the voices that explore the mysteries of being and self to the limits of anguish and suffering. Vladimir and Estragon are trying to escape hearing them."

The cross talk here stresses that death is as inadequate as life, and at the end of it they once again fall back on *Godot*.

As a means of passing time they propose different things: to sing, to think or to contradict each other, or ask each other questions. They also agree that if they thought less, there will be that much less misery, since "to think is to be full of sorrow" – as Keats would have us believe.

To the two tramps the audience and the auditorium assume metaphorical and existentialist proportion. In another example of Brechtian influence, their remark, "Where are these corpses . . . skeletons . . . A charnel house! A charnel house" embraces the audience and the auditorium (wherein copses/skeleton and charnel house refer to audience and auditorium respectively).

Lucky's speech in Act I emphasized the failure of religion and science to help mankind in such a world, Estragon now suggests that they turn to Nature for 'succour'. But Vladimir knows that that too has failed.

Looking at the tree "covered with leaves" they become unsure about the place of their last visit. Their inability to recall the past truthfully is compounded by the fact that nothing has happened in their life for over half a century. Besides, there is nothing certain in Beckett's world. Estragon, by association, tries to recall their earlier visit through the kick Lucky gave him; he, however, does not remember the bones given by Pozzo. Vladimir wishes to confirm it by showing the wound Estragon had received, which has begun to fester in a day's time--so fast is the process of degenaration. The idea of the uncertainty is further underlined by Estragon's unsureness about the colour of his boots.

Throughout this exchange Vladimir has been patiently leading his friend towards what he hopes (vainly, as it turns out) will be an incontrovertible demonstration of the fact that they were in very truth at the same spot the previous evening. Such small insignificant and absurd situations in their life enable the two to have the "impression" that they exist. The use of the word 'impression' gives a feeling of vagueness about their existence; "the impression" means we believe that something is the case, often when it is not actually so. Such is their life.

In line with the motif of uncertainty (and vagueness about the identity of *Godot*, the exact time and place of their appointment with *Godot*) is their indefiniteness about the boots which Estragon had left behind when the curtain went down on the first Act. Further, the boots, which Estragon now finds "too big," reinforce what Lucky's speech had stated about human life. About the boots Beckett wrote to Duckworth:

'The second day boots are no doubt the same as first and Estragon's feet wasted, pined, shrunk and dwindled in interval,' as Lucky's speech had warned. This evokes further questions. How does it happen overnight? Is there a longer interval between the two Acts than is indicated in the play? Is the 'Next Day' being used metaphorically rather than literally?

Desiring to rest now Estragon angrily puts an end to discussion about the boots. He soon falls asleep in a foetal posture while Vladimir sings lullaby in a loud voice. The whole sequence brings out mother-child relationship between the two tramps, (cf. Shoes should be aired.) This is reinforced by Vladimir's laying his coat across sleeping Estragon's shoulder and his maternal assurance to the scared 'child' (Estragon), when the latter "wakes with a start," and, "casts about wildly." (p.70).

Tired, Estragon suggests they leave, but is reminded by Vladimir that they are *Waiting for Godot*. He also complains about the night that does not fall. Night which will bring only temportary relief followed by a long period of despair, the next day.

Vladimir rebukes him for always complaining about things. To be able to pass time and fill the void, the two, now, decide to re-enact the Pozzo-Lucky drama, with Vladimir choosing to play Lucky. He asks Estragon to curse him, as Pozzo cursed Lucky earlier in the play. Estragon begins with mild one and later calls him "Gonococcus! Spirochaete!" (p.73). In a huff Estragon exits left but rushes back to Vladimir fearing the arrival of his tormentors. He, however, is uncertain about their identity and their number. Vladimir, nonetheless, assures Estragon that it is *Godot,* and that they are saved. Estragon next rushes to the right and finds them coming there too. It is a "no exit" situation for him when Vladimir tells him: There is no way out there.

Beckett thus humorously exploits the fact of being in a theatre. Fletcher remarks, "the stage, in Beckett, has a particular reality. It is not a facsimile of a middle class living room as in a 'drawing room comedy', but a place in its own right . . . . The stage is an emblem of the notion of imprisonment."

In yet another example of Brechtian influence, Vladimir gestures towards the audience and remarks: There! Not a soul in sight! The statement further brings into focus the existentialist theme in the play.

Vladimir suggests Estragon to disappear, whereon the latter attempts to hide himself behind the tree, but fails. They now stand back to back to watch out for the 'coming' people. Once again they suggest to play game to pass time. Now they decide to abuse each other.

They call each other moron, vermin, abortion, sewer-rat, morpion, curate, etc. Estragon calls Vladimir "Critic" and silence's him. Beckett, the creative writer seems censorious of critic, using the term opprobriously. Using "critic" as an abuse seems the ultimate. Besides, from a highly formal note, their banter degenerates into personal abuse.

Soon they make it up. Vladimir acts maternally once again and invites him to his 'breast'. They, once again, lapse into a music hall cross talk, and then decide to do their exercises, including deep breathing. Estragon however is tired breathing. A seemingly innocuous remark, once more, points at the existentialist dimensions of the play and expresses Estragon's sense of futility of living. He shouts for God's pity and is joined in by Vladimir.

Pozzo and Lucky enter, Pozzo is blind and is now led by the latter Lucky. Rope has become much shorter. This too fits well in the scheme of things where humans shrink and dwindle. With distance between the two reduced, they seem to have come

closer to each other, existentially, too. One may ask: Has Pozzo, the master, become his servant's dependent? Are the roles reversed?

Pozzo-Lucky couple here seems to illustrate Gloucester's line in *King Lear*, "'Tis the time's plague, when mad men lead the blind."

Lucky and Pozzo fall and shout for help. With their arrival, Vladimir hopes, they will be able to see the evening out. While these two discuss whether to help the fallen Pozzo or not, the latter keeps shouting for it. Vladimir does not wish to waste time in idle discourse and wishes the two of them to avail of the chance to help Pozzo, as a representative of "mankind", the "foul brood to which a cruel fate has consigned us". (p.79).

Lost in diatribe against fate and humanity, Vladimir, goes tangential and does not hear Pozzo's cries for help. In this "immense confusion", that the world is, he finds only one thing certain that they are *Waiting for Godot.*

Vladimir is conscious of the unavailing nature of the games they play to fill the void while *Waiting for Godot*. It's a sort of self-deception. Vladimir looks at the chance to help Pozzo as a "diversion" in the midst of immense confusion, in the midst of nothingness.

Vladimir, finally, tries to pull Pozzo to feet, but fails and himself falls. He too shouts for help now. After a long dilly dallying Estragon extends a helping hand to Vladimir, but he falls on the "sweet mother earth," where he wants to have a little nap. "This multiple fall Beckett sees as 'the visual expression of their common situation and as being related to the threat in the play of everything falling" (Fletcher, p. 68).

Disturbed by Pozzo's cries, Estragon suggests Vladimir to silence him by kicking him in the crotch, which he does. Crying with pain Pozzo crawls away. Once again they invite Pozzo, who does not respond. They call him Abel, and Lucky Cain, and imagine the blind Pozzo to have the power to see into the future.

Together they hoist Pozzo, his arms around their necks. They cart him around, for a while. Vladimir uses Latin *Memoria praeteritorum bonorum* to describe Pozzo thinking of his past happiness. The two tramps, you will observe, can quote the Bible and Shakespeare, and speak Latin. How lightly they carry their erudition! Is Beckett ridiculing scholarly pursuit in much the same way as he ridicules a critic's vocation in *Godot*?

Speaking of his blindness Pozzo informs them that he "woke up one fine day as blind as fortune" (86). Pozzo questions them about their whereabouts and asks, "isn't by any chance the place known as the Board"--a humorous reference to theatre. Vladimir's faithful description of the stage and its properties, and Pozzo's response thereto on p. 87: "Then it's not the Board," is reminiscent critics' initial reactions to Beckett's avant garde theatre. It also shows how Beckett was able to anticipate critics' response to *Godot.*

Pozzo enquires about his menial and suggests ways of awakening him from his sleep, which will provide Estragon an opportunity to "revenge" himself. Finding Lucky breathing, Estragon begins to kick him, but in turn he hurts himself and comes limping and groaning. Pozzo who had till now not recognized Vladimir and Estragon does so now, and gets ready to leave. Lucky we learn carries sand, a symbol of burden and of time (in hour glass), in his bag.

Pozzo, in his blindness, has acquired a new insight into the meaning of life and human existence, which underlines the absurdity of life. Life is a mere series of meaningless repetitious activities. Journey from womb to tomb is full of miseries. Delivery is no deliverance.

Pozzo's last word "On!" as he leaves the stage, (on p. 88) now closely tied to Lucky, is leading them both to death. That "On!" is itself tied to Pozzo's most important last words: "They give us birth astride of a grave ...", which make the first significant existentialist statement on human life.

After Pozzo and Lucky leave Vladimir makes comments on his own condition, on the cries of tormented man and innocent babe, on watchers and watched, on those awake and those asleep. A series of seeming balances and anti-theses, and complementarities, but again the emphasis is on death. He repeats Pozzo's words, "Astride of a grave . . . puts on the forceps" (p.89). He uses the imagery of a child birth by forceps: Obstetrician becomes grave digger, and forceps correspond to shovel. Vladimir's journey is slower than Pozzo's; the crucial word is "lingeringly". His is a long day's journey into night--so painful that he says, "I can't go on!"

In a repeat of the first Act we have the Boy. Vladimir, unlike in Act I, asks the Boy no questions. Instead he makes statements. For the first time Vladimir asks him about *Godot*, and if he has a beard. The Boy replies, "I think it is white Sir" According to Beckett, the whiteness shows that *Godot* is very old: if he were less experienced there might be some hope" (Fletcher, p. 70).

Under these circumstances, Vladimir asks for God's pity for both, and possibly for the entire humanity. Disappointed with *Godot's* non-arrival and the futility of wait they think of leaving, knowing they can't go far away from here as they will have to come back to wait for *Godot* the next day. Estragon proposes 'Let's go," but "they do not move." The pattern is repeated. It further reinforces the static nature of action in the play. They have nowhere to move to. It is all a landscape of barrenness and despair, of *Dr. Faustus*:

Faustus:	Where are you damn'd?
Mephostopheles:	In hell.
Faustus:	How comes it then that thou art out of hell?
Mephostopheles:	Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it. (I, iii, 75-78).

Nor are the two tramps out of their hopeless situation in life.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

Waiting for Godot is a play with a difference and so it has been called an avant garde play. In units 2 and 3 we have analysed the play covering both the acts, highlighting scenes, sequences, characters, language and issues that the play raises.

3.5 GLOSSARY

Music Hall:

Variety entertainment of songs and comic turns at which the audience could buy drink. It developed from the tavern entertainments. Gradually with changes in the theatrical licensing laws, the pub connection vanished though it was normal for there to be bars around the main music hall so that the entertainment could be combined with alcoholic refreshment. The programmes of the music hall in its heyday were really 'variety' shows in nature. Songs and comedy were accompanied by acrobats, animal acts, and even interludes by legitimate actors, ballet dancers etc. The 1960s have seen something of a revival, however, starting, just where music hall did originally, as free entertainment in bars of working class public houses.

Cross Talk:

In 'cross-talk' two comedians swap gags or fail comically to understand each other. Nowadays it is no longer a living form of entertainment. Usually, of the two comedians, one is a 'straight' man and the other a 'funny' man. The comedy arises out of comedian 'A' trying, for instance, to explain to 'B', the complexities of the traffic system or income-tax rules, and feign exasperations at the latter's comic propensity for getting the wrong end of the stick. An echo of this sort of comedy can be heard frequently in the quickfire exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon in this play.

Myth of Sisyphus:

In Greek mythology son of Aeolus whence he is called Aeolides. He was married to Merope, a daughter of Atlas, became by her the father of Glaucus, Ornytion, Thersander and Halmus. In later accounts he is called a son of Autolycus, and the father of Ulysses by Anticlea; whence we find Ulysses sometimes called Sisyphides. He is said to have built the town of Ephyra, afterwards Corinth. As king of Corinth he promoted navigation and commerce, but he was fraudulent and avaricious. His wickedness was punished in the lower world, where he was condemned forever to roll uphill a marble block, which as soon as it reached the top always rolled down again.

Vaudeville:

More or less the American equivalent of British music hall, vaudeville consists of a series of comic, musical, acrobatic actions, deriving from the rough vulgar beer hall entertainments of the middle 19th century. The heyday of vaudeville was almost exactly contemporary with that of music hall, from the early 1890s to the mid 1920s; and in America as in Britain, it was ousted mainly by the cinema, particularly the talkies.

Existentialism -

May be defined as a school of thought based on the conception of the absurdity of the universe and the consequent meaninglessness and futility of human life and action; as Sartre has put it--all human activities are equivalent, all are destined. . . . to defeat. One of the basic tenets of Sartre's existentialism, is that man can shape his own destiny by the exercise of his will in the face of the given set of potentialities which is his life. The main premiss is the concrete fact that man exists; predetermination is denied. Man has freedom of choice and action; and each man's actions, while subjectively inspired, influence other people, so every individual is responsible to humanity as a whole. No dogmatic solutions of the eternal questions of ultimate origins or endings are offered. A man can choose his faith. An existentialist, says Sartre, can be Christian or atheist.

(From Everyman's Encyclopaedia)

Adamov, Arthur (1908-70) French playwright of Armenian origin. Adamov's twenties and thirties, were marked by loneliness and neurosis, chronicled in *L'Aveu (The Confusion*, 1946) and *L'Hommie et L'Enfant (Man and Child*, 1968). He began writing plays after the Second World War. The masterpiece of this period is *Professor Taranne* (1953). In 1955 when the theatre of the Absurd, with which his name had been linked, was becoming well known, Adamov's *Ping Pong* heralded a move towards a more politicized theatre. His other plays are *Paolo Paoli* (1957) *Off Limits* (1969) *If Summer Returned* (1970).

Balzac, Honore'de (1799-1850) depicted French society with utmost realism. His greatness lies in his ability to transcend mere representation and to infuse his novels with a kind of "suprarealism". Another aspect of Balzac's extreme realism lies in his attention to the prosaic exigencies of everyday life.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). During his early period in his career Brecht trained actors and began to develop theory of dramatic technique known as epic theatre. Rejecting the methods of traditional realistic drama, he preferred a loose narrative form in which he used distancing devices such as asides and masks to create a historical frame around the action. The technique prevents the spectator from identifying with the characters on stage. This is known as alienation effect.

Camus, Albert (b. Mondovi, French Algeria, 1913, died France, 1960). He was a philosopher, novelist, and playwright. He believed human beings are not absurd and the world is not absurd, but for humans to be in the world is absurd. Attracted by the theatre, he organized the *avant-garde* drama group Theatre de Equipe in 1935 and worked with it until 1938. Among his important plays are *The Misunderstanding, Caligula, State of Siege*, 1948, *The Just Assassins* 1950. His *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1955, brought immediate recognition to him. In 1957, Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, no mean achievement for a person born of humble parents -- an itinerant agricultural labourer for father and a charwoman for mother.

Heidegger, Martin (1889-1976), German philosopher, who developed existential phenomenology.

In *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*, 1927), Heidegger was concerned with the philosophical question: What is it, to be? What kind of "being" human beings are? They are, he said, thrown into a world that they have not made, but that consists of potentially useful things, including cultural as well as natural objects. Heidegger posited a fundamental relation between the mode of being of objects, of humanity, and of the structure of time. The individual, according to him, is however, always in danger of being submerged in the world of objects. The feeling of dread (*Angst*) brings the individual to a confrontation with death and the ultimate meaninglessness of life, but only in this confrontation can an authentic sense of Being and of freedom be attained.

Ionesco, Eugene (b.Romania, 1912, naturalised French citizen). At a performance of an Ionesco play, there is a considerable laughter in the audience: it is man laughing at his own emptiness, his own triviality. Ionesco's first few plays are *The Bold Soprano* and *La Lecon* (*The Lessons*, 1950), *Rhinoceros* and *Anedee* 1953. He calls his plays "comic dramas" or "tragic farces," because the elements of the comic and tragic are not fused. For Ionesco they co-exist, and each stands as a criticism of the other. In 1981, a new play *Voyages Chez Les Morts* (*Journeys to the Homes of the Dead*) recaptured the hallucinatory quality of early work.

Kierkegaard, Soren Aabye (1813-1855), Danish religious philosopher, whose concern with individual existence, choice, and commitment profoundly influenced modern theology and philosophy, especially existentialism. He applied the term existential to his philosophy because he regarded philosophy as the expression of an intensely examined individual life. Kierkegaard stressed the ambiguity and paradoxical nature of the human situation. The fundamental problems of life, he contended, were to defy rational, objective explanation; the highest truth is subjective.

Kierkegaard maintained that systematic philosophy not only imposes a false perspective on human existence, but that, it also, by explaining life in terms of logical necessity, becomes a means of avoiding choice and responsibility. Individuals, he believed, create their own natures through their choices, which must be made in the absence of universal, objective standards. The validity of a choice can only be determined subjectively.

Sartre, Jean Paul. First gave the term existentialism general currency by using it for his own philosophy. Sartre's philosophy is atheistic and pessimistic. He declared that human life is a "futile passion." Sartre, nevertheless, insisted that his existentialism is

a form of humanism, and he strongly emphasised human freedom, choice and responsibility. Much of Sartre's work focuses on the dilemma of choice faced by free individuals and on the challenge of creating meaning by acting responsibly in an indifferent world. In stating that "man is condemned to be free," Sartre reminds us of the responsibility that accompanies human decisions.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. What changes have Pozzo and Lucky undergone during the course of the play?

2. Do you observe any difference in Pozzo's demeanour in Act II? Does he seem to be more serious and more philosophical than he is in Act I? What do you think is the reason for it, and what is its significance?

3. Do you see any change in the language of Pozzo compared to that he uses in the first Act?

4. Does the language used in Act II express the sense of metaphysical anguish more explicitly than it did in the first Act?

5. What difference do you see in the relationship between Lucky and Pozzo? Is there a reversal of roles in Act II?

6. How far, do you think, is Act II a repeat of Act I? Do you see any development in terms of plot, theme and characters in Act II?

7. How does the ending of Act II compare with the ending of Act I? Do you find the end of Act II more optimistic or pessimistic than that of Act I? If so why? Give examples.