

The Comic in Samuel Beckett's Plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Footfalls*

Kljajić, Filipa

Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2018

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Zadar / Sveučilište u Zadru**

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-08-15**



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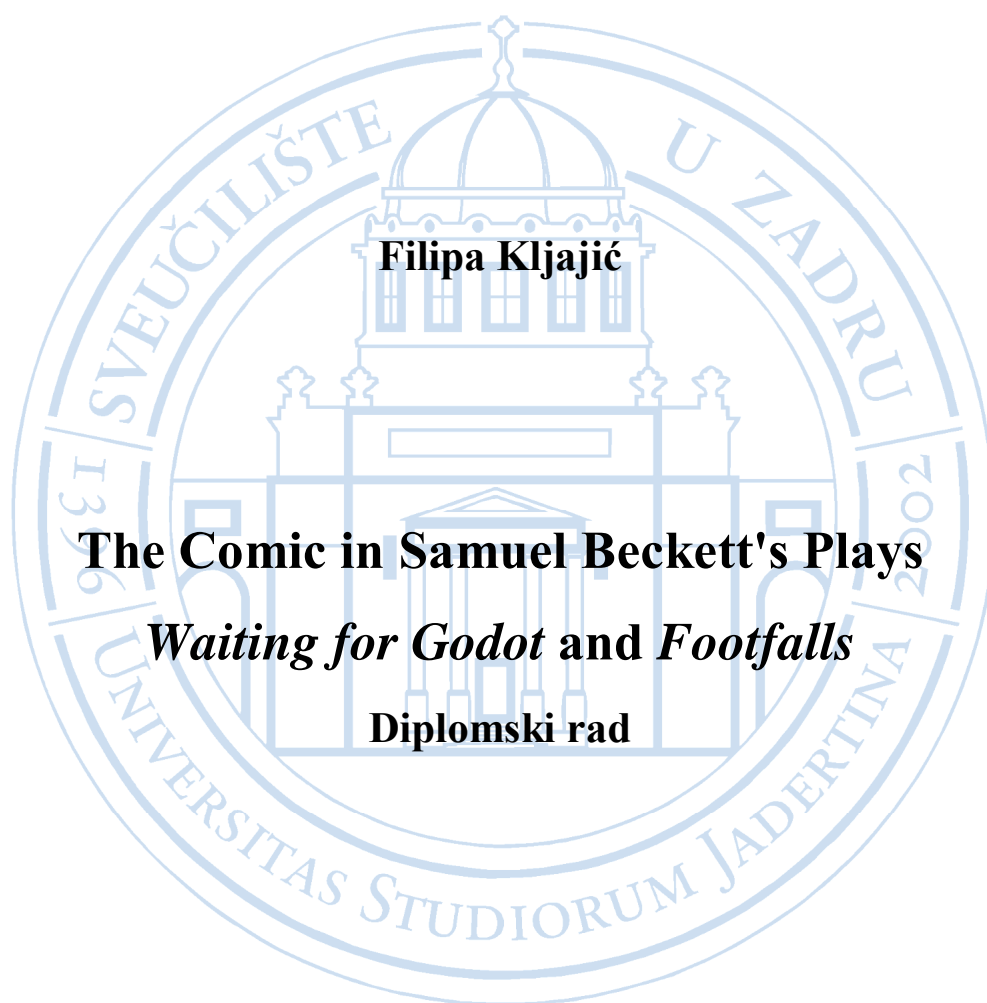


DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJI

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti; smjer: nastavnički
(dvopredmetni)



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The Comic in Samuel Beckett's Plays
Waiting for Godot and Footfalls

Diplomski rad

Studentica:

Filipa Kljajić

Mentor:

Doc. dr. sc. Mario Vrbančić

Zadar, 2018.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett lived in turbulent times, ranging from the times in which he witnessed horrors of the World War II, the Cold War, the threat of a nuclear war, to the Vietnam War. I believe that these disasters and other consequences of these and similar conflicts, together with social revolutions, scientific discoveries and the natural change of interests, left a significant mark on his work. His artistic work was influenced by different life experiences and I think that this is visible in the different way he treated the same themes at the peak and at the end of his career, especially when it comes to the comic aspects of his plays that are traditionally considered to be specific for Beckett and their significance in the Beckett's vision of the absurd world.

To demonstrate the differences and similarities in Beckett's work I have chosen to analyse the play *Waiting for Godot*, which belongs to the middle period of his work (1945-1960s) and *Footfalls*, the play that was created during his late period (1960s-1970s). The aim is to detect similarities and differences in these two plays regarding Beckett's treatment of comic aspects and their interconnection with existentialist philosophy, use of language and performance elements. The comparison of *Waiting for Godot* and *Footfalls* is supposed to provide a broad overview of the changes in Beckett's treatment of these aspects.

2. SAMUEL BECKETT

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) was an Irish novelist, playwright, theatre director and poet who is praised as being one of the most significant authors of the 20th century. He is particularly famous for his dramatic works, mostly categorized as belonging to the Theatre of the Absurd. Samuel Beckett's work is usually divided into three periods: until 1945, 1945-early 1960s and 1960s-1989. Each of these periods is characterized by certain specific traits, partly displaying different social and literary influences Beckett was exposed to during his life. (Freedman, Graver 134) One of very special experiences which no doubt left a trace on Beckett was probably the fact that he participated in the French Resistance during World War II, after the Nazis occupied France in 1940. He acted as a courier, and helped hide weapons, for which he was awarded several military decorations by the French government. (Knowlson 282) Beckett did not speak much about his work in the Resistance, but in my opinion, the horrors and the absurdity of World War II, which he witnessed so closely, made an impression on him, and changed his artistic framework in the same way they changed the whole world. His works written during the 1945-1960s period display the main themes of the existentialist movement and the Theatre of the Absurd – despair because of the absurd, impossibility of communication which leads to isolation, loss of the comprehensible world etc.

Maybe one of the most important literary influences that can be felt in Beckett's earlier works is the influence of James Joyce. They met around 1929, and became friends. Beckett also helped Joyce in his research. (Knowlson 65) However, after World War II Beckett completely re-examined his Joycean approach to literature, and chose another path. Joyce's works are rich in a style of writing different than Beckett's, and are known for the use of stream of consciousness, like in *Ulysses*. Beckett described this shift in the following words: "I realized that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, being in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realized that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding." (319) I think this statement gives an interesting aspect to Beckett's style after 1945. Although it was influenced by existentialist and absurdist themes, one might ask if the awareness that his style will never be as rich as Joyce's, nor better in this respect, somewhat contributed to the stylistic change towards simplicity and minimalism, which is so opposite from the style of James Joyce.

As far as some other early influences are concerned, I would just like to shortly mention Marcel Proust, since Beckett wrote an essay on Proust in 1930, as well as the critical study of Proust in 1931. (Knowlson 11 89)

Other influences on Beckett's early work could also include his interest in poetry. I would just like to say that in his early period Beckett wrote poetry and reviews on poetry. (208) I think this connection with poetry can be detected in many of his works.

In 1938, Beckett published the novel *Murphy* in which he used insane characters and pessimistic views, as well as some comic moments, all of which will reappear in his later literary works. *Murphy* begins with a very interesting sentence: "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new." (Beckett, "Murphy" 1) This shows a pessimistic view of the world in which there is no alternative and everything remains the same. The repetitiveness and nothingness in this sentence seem to announce many similar scenes in Beckett's plays. *Murphy* might be interesting from one more point. Although Beckett kept denying any connection with any philosophy, this early work shows that he was impressed by certain philosophical ideas, and that they penetrated and influenced his work in a direct way.

In the period 1945-1960s Beckett wrote his important plays: *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days*. In these plays, Beckett abandoned traditional plots and traditional approaches to place and time, and focused on the condition of his isolated characters. These plays are generally considered to be influenced by existentialist philosophy, and belong to the Theatre of the Absurd. It has already been mentioned that Beckett refused to admit any connections with philosophy, but in my opinion, it is undeniable that he shared certain themes with philosophy, especially existentialist philosophy.

Overall, in these plays Beckett presents desperate characters that keep living in spite of being completely lost in the universe they do not understand. I think it is safe to say that the concept of absurd created by Albert Camus shares similar position and approach to the world. However, Beckett develops a very special aspect of the absurd – the tragicomic approach. It is also somewhat optimistic because it is so close to life and, in my view, it might also symbolise life. For example, in *Endgame* the character called Nell says: "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that... Yes, yes, it's the most comical thing in the world. And we laugh, we laugh, with a will, in the beginning. But it's always the same thing. Yes, it's like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh anymore." (Beckett, *Endgame*).

Regarding Beckett's late period of work, it can be observed that his plays became more minimalistic and shorter than the previous ones. For example, there are only three

characters in funeral urns in *Play* (1962). His plays also became more abstract and he started to explore themes relating to memory. All of these characteristics can be observed in his plays *Footfalls* (1975). Beckett also dealt with themes of self-confined characters accompanied by another character that silently comments on the protagonist, using for example gestures that can be observed, like in *Not I*. This plays, as well as *Company* and *Rockaby*, explored positioning of bodies in space along with loneliness and futile desire to connect with others.

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

3.1. Historical context of *Waiting for Godot*

The French text of the play *En attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*) was written by Samuel Beckett between October 1948 and January 1949. It belongs to the literary genre of tragicomedy and, in my opinion; the time when this play was created, influenced the play and its genre very much. Furthermore, the tragic aspects of the play are very much related to the period following World War II, as well as World War I, two most catastrophic wars in human history. The Holocaust and the battles between the two opposing military alliances, the Allies (France, United States of America, United Kingdom, Soviet Union etc.) and the Axis (Germany, Italy, Japan) during World War II were terrible and shockingly violent. Also, many people died because of illnesses and famine. The official estimates show that during the war over 70 million people died. The madness of World War II ended with the disastrous effects of atomic bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The traditional moral standards were destroyed and human lives lost their values. Additionally, after World War II Europe was a physical and spiritual wreck, very much uncertain about its future. Due to their different ideologies, United States of America and Soviet Union developed another conflict - the Cold War - and Europe was soon divided again, by the Iron Curtain. More nuclear bombs were produced and the world had to face the fact that they could destroy the whole planet. The world was in crisis in all the areas, from philosophy to government. It seemed like humanity kept making the same mistakes again and therefore uncertainty, break with traditions, as well as the feeling of absurd became a part of everyday existence. World War II made people feel that the actions of an individual did not matter, that people were being used for political ends, and that an individual's existence had no purpose at all. People started questioning religion as it could no longer give answers to their existence.

The post-World War II art touches many philosophical and religious ideas of its time. The culture, religion and philosophy lost their traditional structure and artists dealt with these old and new religious and philosophical conflicts in their works. All these experiences revived many ideas of the philosophy of existentialism that could be felt in art even before the war. Emptiness and absurd isolation felt in Europe in 1948 can be detected in *Waiting for Godot*, as well. Of course, it also presents the existentialist position of waiting for God who does not come.

However, we might also say that when the world started from scratch in 1945 it also discovered a new type of freedom, and a new, ironic and comic view of extreme nihilism and individual search, or lack of search for a meaningful existence. This can also be detected in *Waiting for Godot* and lead to the analysis of the comic aspects of this tragicomedy.

3.2. Historical context of *Footfalls*

Samuel Beckett's play *Footfalls* was written in 1975, while Beckett was living in France. I think that this play was influenced by the historical context in which it was created, as well. Many aspects of this play seem to be connected to the atmosphere following the period full of political and social changes the world was going through between 1963 and 1974. This period brought many interconnected social and cultural directions, linked with many important events throughout the globe. One of the first significant events was the assassination of the American president John F. Kennedy in 1963, which generally felt like an assassination of the symbol of the bright new world that started to emerge. 1960s and early 1970s were full of both new trends and their relative defeats. One more war was particularly important in 1960s and early 1970s – the Vietnam War. It had been raging between communist North Vietnam and democratic South Vietnam since 1959, but the heavy involvement of the US troops in 1960s was followed by a large number of civilian casualties and strong reactions throughout the world. Most of the US soldiers were conscripted and their military service was compulsory. Morale declined among US soldiers and there were incidents of self-harming, insubordination and drug using. Opposition to the Vietnam War was high in the early 1970s. Many US citizens and people throughout the world did not believe that this war was justified and they protested against the government's policy of compulsory military service. The US army finally withdrew from Vietnam in 1975. The number of Vietnamese civilians and soldiers killed in the Vietnam War has been estimated to up to 3 million. Around 60,000 US soldiers also died in this war. The Vietnam War was one more mistake the world repeated.

In 1960s protests in many countries were elements of wider movements throughout the world, especially in the Western countries. There were protests against the war, but also protests against many other established views. This period was characterised by a revolution in social norms about morality, sexuality, role of women, clothing, music, drugs etc. and the world seemed to explore more freedoms.

However, by 1975 the freedoms from the previous decade showed their dark sides, as well. The decay of social order and irresponsible excesses did not exactly prove that the world had significantly improved. The West and the East were still divided by the Iron Curtain, Russian tanks invaded Czechoslovakia, East Germans were being killed on the Berlin Wall, Martin Luther King was assassinated, the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland started to

be dangerously mixed with terrorism, an economic crisis could be felt in many countries etc. The Watergate scandal in the USA in 1974 also showed that dirty illegal activities and abuses of power have never stopped being a part of the highest authorities. In this context, the protests and the new movements from 1960s seemed to be showing that one more revolution ate its children and that the planet had not learned much since World War II. The atmosphere seemed to be full of disappointment, disillusionment and indifference. I believe that the atmosphere of darkness, coldness and death that we can feel in *Footfalls* corresponds to many aspects of the world Beckett saw around him in 1975. It seems like he felt that he had nothing more to say, except to announce death.

I think that the period 1963-1975 opened several valuable paths for the future, although we cannot see or feel them in *Footfalls*. The racial segregation diminished, the concept of gender roles started changing and more women started coming into the work force. More people came to live in urban areas and the social classes started mixing and creating different ideas. Social sciences were developing, especially cognitive psychology. I think that new developments in psychology left a mark on Beckett's work, as well. He started to deal less with the themes relating to human existence and more with the themes relating to human mind, like memory, haunting pasts that are still present in characters' minds, child-parent relationship etc.

4. EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY

4.1. A Short Introduction to the Existentialist Philosophy

Existentialist philosophy is a philosophical movement that appeared in the late 19th century. It stresses the key importance of individual existence on the basis of the main philosophical questions relating to knowledge, morality, truth etc. Existentialism asserts that the philosophical analysis of existence requires new concepts that were not covered by the earlier philosophical schools. The older philosophical approaches claimed that human essence is predetermined and unchangeable, but the existentialists introduced the idea that *essence* is something we can choose, and this leads to new ways of philosophical analysis of human existence.

Existentialist philosophy originated with the works of 19th century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, the German philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Edmund Husserl, as well as writers such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Franz

Kafka. These philosophers and authors thought that the analysis of human existence had to start with a person who acts, has feelings, and lives her or his individual life, in other words, exists. The existentialists believed that people are lost and isolated from their surroundings and each other. They believed that we exist in the absurd universe without any meaning, but they also developed the idea that we have the freedom to live authentically, and this idea is close to the centre of the existentialist philosophy.

The beginning of existentialism and the sudden change this philosophy brought to the views of religion can be connected to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Existentialism claimed that an individual has to believe in himself or herself, not in God. This new aspect was the most obvious with Nietzsche, and it shaped the approach the existentialist philosophers had regarding human condition.

Søren Kierkegaard is considered to be at the roots of the existentialist philosophy. He thought that every person bears responsibility for living a meaningful and sincere life. The existentialists generally thought that it is crucial that an individual uses their freedom to choose the basic values of their life. Kierkegaard felt that a person should be a "knight of faith", and believe in God and in themselves. Kierkegaard decided to make the so-called leap of faith and trust that God will provide the meaning for his existence, and the consolation, which can allow him to escape the painful realization that everything is meaningless. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche thought that a man should avoid meaningless life, but Nietzsche had a different approach than Kierkegaard. Nietzsche advocated nihilism, which asserts the idea that life has no intrinsic value, and therefore the concept of God also has none. Moreover, Nietzsche claimed that human beings must not rely on notions such as God or an afterlife but must rise above it and bring forth the "Overman" (Übermensch) (Durant 467) who can become superior without God. The idea of the Overman shows, in my opinion, the possibility of man's victory or power over meaninglessness, without having trust in anyone else besides himself, which is in contrast with Kierkegaard's approach.

The existentialist philosophy was revived after World War II, and its main representatives were Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Martin Heidegger.

Sartre's main ideas are that a man is "thrown" into the meaningless world and that *existentia* (existence) comes before *essentia* (essence). Essence is considered to be a set of characteristics that make an individual what he or she fundamentally is. He presented the real world as something that prevents individuals from being free and reaching their purpose, because they attempt to apply preconceived systems on the universe that is not rational. Sartre thinks that living responsibly as a conscious individual is more important than fitting in some

predefined stereotypes that society sets for individuals. An authentic living would lead to "true essence", i.e. true meaning. This means that we, before everything else, exist. Nobody can tell us who we are but ourselves, we choose our essence.

Another prominent philosopher connected to existentialism was Martin Heidegger. In his work *Being and Time*, he discussed ontological aspects of existence like: Angst (anxiety) and *Dasein* which is human's way of being in the contemporary world. Heidegger wrote the following thought: "The nothingness before which Angst brings us reveals the nullity that determines *Dasein* in its ground, which itself is as thrownness into death". (Heidegger 285) This is one of the key ideas of existentialist philosophy- the realization of our own temporality can lead to Authenticity. This means that we come to realize how we must live fully and authentically without worrying about what others think.

Post-World War II period also brought absurdism, a philosophical school of thought deeply connected with existentialist philosophy. It stressed the extreme distrust in the world and its key concepts were that life is not rational, meaningful, moral, nor just and that true existence, objectivity and meaning cannot be reached beyond what individuals set for these concepts. The philosopher and author that influenced the development of absurdism the most was Albert Camus. Camus considered absurd to be an outcome of person's attempts to belong to the structured world, and the continual realization that the world does not have any structure, no matter how much we wanted it, and that there will never be one. Camus stressed the meaningless and absurd existence, but also showed the possibility of achieving meaning by constantly trying to approach it, by accepting absurdity and in spite of absurdity. His essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* was particularly important in this respect. In this essay, he explains what the absurd is, and how to defy it on the example of Sisyphus, his protagonist. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus concludes: "But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile..." (Camus, "Myth of Sisyphus" 24). Sisyphus chooses what to be, and how to act, and in this way he defies the meaninglessness, so the world is not futile for him anymore. Sisyphus represents Camus's concept of an absurd man who chooses to confront the absurd despite the crushing realization that this meaninglessness will never go away. In his own ways he is revolting against the absurd.

Generally, most existentialist philosophers believed that people exist alienated from the universe, but are nevertheless part of it. Human beings experience this anxiety stemming from the realization involving their own finality and the meaninglessness of their surroundings. But there is still hope, as this gives individuals a chance to fulfil their potential,

or self-actualize and create their own meaning and give it to the world. Existentialists argued that once the individuals realize they are leading inauthentic lives, and decide to make authentic actions on their own beliefs, then they have a chance for reaching deep realizations about who they are, and what kind of lives they are leading.

4.2. A Short Introduction to the Existentialist Philosophy in Literature and Theatre

The world of art, especially modern literature and theatre, found a lot of inspiration in existentialist ideas, even in the 19th century. However, it is not possible to say that all the authors who included existentialist ideas in their work belong to the group of existentialist writers, since they display many individual approaches, so I opted for a few of them which seemed to have the most obvious existentialist themes in their work.

One of the first writers who included some of the existentialist themes in his work was Fyodor Dostoyevsky. For example, in his novel *Crime and Punishment* he shows us a lonely character, Raskolnikov, whose choices lead him to an immoral catastrophe. His alienation comes from his choice of his own moral code to which he decided to live by. (Barnes 103) “Why has he killed? To establish his own law, to give himself meaning to himself!” (Barnes 103) Through him Dostoyevsky shows that existentialist ideas can be perverted, and that it can lead to ethical and personal ruin, like in the part where Raskolnikov is trying to decide whether to turn himself to the police or not: “They say it is necessary for me to suffer! What's the object of these senseless sufferings? Shall I know any better what they are for, when I am crushed by hardships and idiocy, and weak as an old man after twenty years' penal servitude?” (Dostoyevsky 917) In this quote we see Raskolnikov's moral decay produced by his conscious, free decision (which is advocated by existentialists) to do evil.

In the first half of 20th century several other writers included certain aspects of existentialist ideas into their works, especially Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Jean Anouilh etc.

Franz Kafka was influenced by certain existentialist ideas, especially since he witnessed the horrors of World War I. He wrote the novella *The Metamorphosis* in which the main character, Gregor Samsa, becomes a horrible creature who does not understand what happened to his world. In many of his works Kafka presented isolated characters lost in absurd structures and processes they cannot explain. In *The Metamorphosis* Kafka's hero accepts his nonsensical situation in life, but he also uses humour, which can also be found in the works of some other writers close to the existentialist philosophy: “Well, leaving out the

fact that the doors were locked, should he really call for help? In spite of all his miseries, he could not repress a smile at this thought.“ (Kafka 12) This quote shows the dark humour and the awareness of the absurd.

Jean-Paul Sartre is the most prominent existential philosopher and writer. His novel *Nausea* shows his philosophical ideas the best. In this novel Sartre presents a character, Antoine Roquentin, who has a unique existence, totally separated from the world around him. He is troubled with the feeling of nausea coming from his existence, and he cannot escape it: “My thought is me: that's why I can't stop. I exist because I think... and I can't stop myself from thinking... At this very moment, it's frightful, if I exist; it is because I am horrified at existing.” (Sartre, “Nausea” 99-100) Sartre’s play *No Exit* also shows how much it was influenced by his existentialist philosophy. The three dead characters, Joseph Garcin, Inès Serrano, and Estelle Rigault, literally lost to the world, have to watch themselves as objects in the eyes of the other two characters. This play is the source of the quote, "Hell is other people", which echoes Sartre’s concept of seeing our own individualities only as objectified by the persons surrounding us.

Albert Camus wrote several novels that are deeply inspired by existentialism, like *The Plague*. His protagonists, generally, do not have any influence on their positions in life and they are unimportant, alone, aimless and trapped. Camus stresses the absurdity of their situations: “Thus each of us had to be content to live only for the day, alone under the vast indifference of the sky.” (Camus, “The Plague” 73) However, Camus also introduces the concept of Revolt, the choice to live despite the depressing realization that everything is meaningless which represents a kind of response to the absurd. In his novel *The Plague* we can find this response to the absurd, the Revolt in the citizens who had to face death and become decisive enough to be able to fight back: “And Tarrou, Rieux, and their friends might give one answer or another, but its conclusion was always the same, their certitude that a fight must be put up, in this way or that, and there must be no bowing down.” (Camus, “The Plague” 127) This quote reflects Camus’ notion of Revolt.

Theatre shows a lot of connections with existentialist philosophy, especially the Theatre of the Absurd and its main representatives: Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Luigi Pirandello etc. Several of these writers claimed that they were not influenced by existentialism, but certain common themes cannot be denied. For example, the characters in the plays written by Ionesco and Beckett, and the situations they experience, display the existentialist thought that individuals are alienated, and that they are thrown in the meaningless and absurd world without any real communication.

The playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd eliminated most of the logical structures of traditional theatre. For example, in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* the plot is practically non-existent. It is circular, without beginning, middle or ending, featuring bleak characters without clearly defined personalities. Also, the language in an Absurdist play is often non-sequiturs, full of puns and repetitions, as to mirror the idea of the absurdity of life. However, the Theatre of the Absurd seems to offer some space for reaction to the absurd existence and the absurd world. I think this aspect was well presented by critic Martin Esslin in his text called *Absurd Drama* in which he stresses humour as one of possible reactions to the absurd:

"The Theatre of the Absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodoxy. It aims to shock its audience out of complacency, to bring it face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation as these writers see it. But the challenge behind this message is anything but one of despair. It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, nobly, responsibly; precisely because there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence, because ultimately man is alone in a meaningless world. The shedding of easy solutions, of comforting illusions, may be painful, but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief. And that is why, in the last resort, the Theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation." (M. Esslin, *Absurd Drama*)

Here it can be seen that Esslin explains how the Theatre of the Absurd tries to confront the audience with the harsh reality through shock. He also explains that the goal of Absurdist plays is to bring relief through laughter and in this way help us in the difficult task of accepting reality of the human condition.

4.3. Existentialist Philosophy in *Waiting for Godot*

Samuel Beckett tried to distance himself from existentialism and any philosophical structures on several occasions. For example, in 1961, in his interview with Tom Driver he said:

"What is more true than anything else? To swim is true, and to sink is true. One is not more true than the other. One cannot speak anymore of being, one must speak only of the mess. When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right, I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess." (Weiss 505- 506)

We can see that Beckett did not think that the ontological question of existential differentiation between Being and Existence is relevant for him, and that he can speak only of what is in front of him as an individual, not about the abstract themes of ontology that are “too philosophical”.

However, although it is true that Beckett neither developed his own philosophical structure, nor openly identified himself with any philosophical approach, the philosophical themes in his works, especially existentialist themes, cannot be denied. They are present, but he treated them primarily as a creative artist, without giving them a theoretical expression, like Jean-Paul Sartre or Albert Camus.

Generally it seems to me that Beckett kept raising and analysing a lot of key philosophical questions like “What?”, “Why?”, “How?”, “Where?” or “When?”, which could be considered as classical beginnings of some key philosophical questions. This shows that he thought about existence and explored it. In some dialogues in *Waiting for Godot* these questions seem to be the most important parts of the dialogue, more important than the answer they refer to:

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: What?

Estragon: What’s all this about? Abused who?

Vladimir: The Saviour.

Estragon: Why?

Vladimir: Because he wouldn’t save them. (Beckett, “*Waiting for Godot*” 9)

In my opinion many philosophical and existentialist elements can be detected already in the opening scene of the play:

Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before. Enter Vladimir:

Estragon: (*giving up again*). Nothing to be done.

Vladimir: I’m beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I’ve tried to put it from me, saying Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven’t yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (*He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon.*) So there you are again.

Estragon: Am I? (Beckett, “*Waiting for Godot*” 1)

Estragon tries and tries and gives up, concluding that nothing can be done to change his situation. Vladimir confirms that he tried and failed many times, as well. This approach

corresponds to the existentialist opinion that people are doomed to fail, and any efforts to change this lead only to absurd. I think that the entire play shows that they have given up on the idea of changing their situation. The sentence “Nothing to be done” is one of the leitmotifs of the play. Furthermore, Vladimir’s statement “So there you are again” seems to establish the fact of Estragon’s presence and existence, but Estragon immediately questions this fact: “Am I?” He makes his own existence relative; individuals in the uncertain, absurd world can be only uncertain in themselves. It will be shown that this feeling of doubt (and the absurd) is present in many similar situations throughout the play.

Another prominent existentialist idea that is constantly present in the play is the feeling of absurd. The concept of absurd was very important to Beckett. This is visible in the play even on the structural level, since the play does not have a plot in any traditional sense, and the characters are barely outlined. Also, the absurd can be seen in the situations where memory, time and space become uncertain, like in the following scene:

Estragon: We came here yesterday.

Vladimir: Ah, no, there you’re mistaken.

Estragon: What did we do yesterday?

Vladimir: What did we do yesterday?

Estragon: Yes.

Vladimir: Why... (*Angrily.*) Nothing is certain when you are about. (Beckett, “*Waiting for Godot*” 10)

In this scene the conversation is absurd and it might even suggest that the very idea of conversation is also nonsensical. They do not reach any answers, just anger and uncertainty. And absurd and uncertainty are two concepts very much connected in existentialist philosophy. The idea of another individual causing uncertainty also evokes Sartre and his idea “Hell is other people”, which infers that our own individualities are both confirmed, but also objectified and judged by others.

This leads to our own individualities being based on unstable perceptions of others. Because the two characters realize that their world is absurd they strive towards some kind of stability. Harold Bloom, in his *Modern Critical Interpretations*, says the following about Vladimir’s and Estragon’s need for certainty:

“Vladimir’s and Estragon’s only certainty is the terrible uncertainty of the world, together with their accompanying needs to assume that somehow and someday meaning will become manifest. That there must be a Godot who will provide the ultimate focus of their everyday activities,” (Bloom 125)

They do not bring certainty to each other but they hope Godot will. Bloom also suggests that Godot may be understood as a kind of an external world of which Vladimir and Estragon expect to provide them with meaning and stability. (Bloom 128) However, in the post-World War II universe Godot can also be interpreted as the God who disappeared and does not return. The concept of God in Beckett's world is close to Camus and his idea of God. For Camus, God is insignificant in the absurd world and therefore we should not rely on him. Even if he exists, we cannot prove it so we must face the absurd on our own, without avoiding it. But Estragon and Vladimir are *Waiting for Godot*, and therefore avoiding the absurd. Although this is the main goal of their waiting the two of them often forget about Godot, and have to remind each other who they are talking about - "Who?" asks Estragon and Vladimir replies: "Godot." This contributes to the idea that God is insignificant but at the same time he is important, after all Vladimir's and Estragon's actions revolve around waiting from him. This is one of many paradoxes in *Waiting for Godot*.

Furthermore, absurd was born in the universe without God because God means hope and there is none of it in the absurd, which reflects the existentialists' conclusion that there is no hope in religion. However, I think Beckett also gives another aspect to the idea of hope. In the following dialogue he shows that Vladimir and Estragon give hope to each other, but the absurd fact that Vladimir is hoping Estragon will help him commit suicide here basically destroys the very meaning of hope:

Estragon: Use your intelligence, can't you?

Vladimir uses his intelligence.

Vladimir: (*Finally*) I remain in dark.

Estragon: This is how it is. (*He reflects.*) The bough... the bough... (*Angrily.*) Use your head, can't you?

Vladimir: You're my only hope. (Beckett, "*Waiting for Godot*"¹²)

Although Vladimir and Estragon bring uncertainty to each other, they are the only ones that confirm each other's existence. They may be isolated and objectified by, what Sartre calls, each other's Look (Sartre, "Bitak i ništo" 338-340), but Vladimir and Estragon would go mad without each other. So they become each other's audience in order to avoid the torture of waiting.

The situation of pointless waiting in the meaningless world causes a lot of anxiety in *Waiting for Godot*. The concept of anxiety (Angst) can be traced to Heidegger and existentialism, and in the play we feel it through the awareness of the fact that the world is

absurd. The characters know their universe is absurd, and they feel the anxiety because of this awareness. But instead of freeing themselves in these moments of anxiety, the characters remain in this state indefinitely.

Anxiety and the absurd are not just present in their illogical conversations and pointless waiting, but also in their actions. Characters in *Waiting for Godot* seem to be free to do whatever they want, but they do not do anything, and even the actions they seem to take are not real. For example Pozzo enslaves Lucky, but he is not really the enslaver. Dobrez, the author of *The Existential and its Exits* says: "It is the very magnitude of their possibilities that cripples the tramps. The world is theirs to fill with significance, but where are they to begin? The vision of freedom with its naked austerity can only be expressed as angst..." (Dobrez 95) The endless possibilities of action block them and this causes anxiety.

The concept of freedom in *Waiting for Godot* closely resembles Sartre's idea of personal freedom. Sartre claims that the only thing keeping us from being truly free are arbitrary expectations from others and ourselves. Likewise, Beckett stresses the constraints that we impose onto ourselves, and considers them to be real obstacles that are impossible to overcome. In the following dialogue Vladimir says that they themselves took away their rights, their freedom:

Estragon: We've no rights any more?...

Vladimir: You'd make me laugh if it wasn't prohibited.

Estragon: We've lost our rights?

Vladimir: We got rid of them. (Beckett, "*Waiting for Godot*" 13)

This can also be seen in the form of Vladimir's and Estragon's waiting. There are many situations in which they talk about leaving but never leave. They sometimes try to discuss the fact that they do not have to wait, but irrationality takes over and they remain convinced they have to wait. Beckett shows this in the scene where Estragon asks if they are tied down to Godot and Vladimir answers: "To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it. (Pause.) For the moment." (Beckett, "*Waiting for Godot*" 14) It seems as if they convinced themselves that they do not have any other solutions, so they gave up on their freedom the same way they gave up on finding and giving meaning to the world. It also seems they find it tiring to choose an action and perform it, so they run in anxious circles.

Absurd can also be found in certain conflicts that exist in *Waiting for Godot*. For example, between Pozzo and Lucky, Godot and the Boy, and between Vladimir and Estragon. All of the complex relationships and their surroundings lead to absurd, and it results in unstable emotions of hate and love, as in the following dialogue:

Estragon: Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!
(Beckett, “*Waiting for Godot*” 37)

Vladimir: “I missed you... and at the same time I was happy. Isn't that a strange thing?”
(Beckett, “*Waiting for Godot*” 38)

Beckett’s expression of the absurd in *Waiting for Godot* has reached an almost extreme level, touching almost every aspect of the play, but it does not seem to be absolutely pessimistic. Immobile characters live in the destroyed world, but they do not die nor commit suicide – they just do not move. Their emotions are unstable, but they are still emotions, they still feel. They are each other’s consolation in madness and they are dependent on each other, which is shown through the scene in which Estragon trips without his friends support:

Estragon: Stay with me!

Vladimir: Did I ever leave you?

Vladimir and Estragon also show us that relationships between people are an absurd paradox, and that love does not lead anywhere, although it is possible to experience it. This is opposed to the concept of love as developed by Sartre, who claims that love is impossible, due to the objectification of the other by the Look. In Beckett’s view, although complex and pointless, love is indeed possible. He shows there is affection in the relationship between the two companions. Gogo and Didi, the nicknames they gave to each other, are almost romantic and sweet:

Estragon: You'll help me?

Vladimir: I will of course.

Estragon: We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us?

(Beckett, “*Waiting for Godot*”44)

4.4. Existentialist Philosophy in *Footfalls*

Footfalls shows that in 1975 Beckett was dealing less with the themes relating to existentialist philosophy, absurd and human existence and more with the themes relating to human psychology. However, I believe that some philosophical and existentialist elements can be detected in *Footfalls*, as well.

The viewer meets two characters: May and her mother, the Voice. While they talk, it is not quite clear if they are still alive. They are talking about some traumatic episode, but it is not clear what this episode actually was. It is possible that May is a kind of ghost who is not able to move to another world and is doomed to constantly remember her trauma and change

it in her mind. We could even think that this traumatic episode is just something they imagined, but it is clear that May experiences existential anxiety and does not feel authentic. Steve Connor, the author of *Modernism and the Material Imagination*, thinks that in *Footfalls* Beckett problematizes Heidegger's *Dasein* or being-in-world. In order for *Dasein* to be *Dasein*, it has to exist in the world and interact with it. It also has to be able to experience anxiety coming from the realisation that life is finite in order to achieve authentic life, to realise itself in some way. However, if May is not really being-in-the-world, if her interaction with the world is negligible how can she be *Dasein*? If a person is stuck within his or her own memories and traumas how can he or she experience the anxiety? Authentic life cannot be achieved in the world of Beckett; there is only endless stagnation for May, only endless being or *Sein*. In other words, it can be said that May is not present, she is nowhere, she cannot move and she can never become authentic. She is trapped in her limited situation, feeling pain and repeated loss.

Mother's Voice also confirms May's existence by counting her footsteps and talking about an obscure event that defined May. The same confirmation goes from May to her mother, who seems to exist only because May is talking to her. However, the conversation may have happened in the past and we might be seeing a ghost and repeated memories. We might even say that May's existence is confirmed by us, the audience. It seems that May is actually aware of the audience: "...the daughter's given name, as the reader will remember." (Beckett 403). May is defined by the Voice and the audience. This is reminiscent of Sartre's Look. May and the Voice need an audience, a listener that will confirm the existence of the other person. Nothing is certain in the absurd world, not even the existence, so there must be a confirmation of it by someone else. My existence is confirmed by the other's Look, but at the same time defined by it. In a way, this constricts our being, but the being cannot do without it. It brings confirmation of our existence, but it also brings uncertainty in which we are. This confusion caused by others is inevitable because we share this world with others.

In *Footfalls* the interaction between May and Voice brings additional confusion for May. May asks if her mother needs something and the mother's reply is not clear: "Yes, but it's too soon."

We can also say that Beckett gives special meaning to the experience of anxiety in *Footfalls*. It means something hopeless, final and leads to death. Steve Connor comments on this: "Finitude signifies a kind of privation in the heart of being, an awareness of the ever-present possibility of loss, and the looming necessity of death, which means that one is never 'quite there', as Beckett said of 'M' in *Footfalls*, and prevents one living wholly in the here

and now... Finitude here means not the certainty of coming to an end, but the certainty of ending unfinished, dying, as we all must, before our time, and consequently never being able to have, or inhabit, the time of our lives." (191) The characters in *Footfalls* are not able to communicate with their surroundings, nor lead real lives. They cannot become *Dasein*, they can only exist and be *Sein* - ghosts.

Connor also observes that the spectrality or the ghosting in the play has a connection with Sartre's feeling of nausea. He says that it does not have to do with the fact that the physical body is less manifested, but with the impression that the characters are, as he puts it, bodyhaunted. In other words, the feeling of nausea comes from us being aware of our body and identifying with it, but at the same time rejecting the body and identification with it. So nausea is not just a passive condition, to which I am subjected, and against which I may or may not revolt. It is the revulsion itself; it is the self-precipitated in revulsion from self. (34-35) I can never be other than myself. I am forced to experience the nausea of being myself. What Sartre is trying to tell us is: I am my nausea at what I am.

May is a representation of this existential nausea. She is disgusted with her body and rejects her physical existence, but she also identifies with it. This feeling is contradictory, it makes the characters in *Footfalls* go around in circles, unable to get rid of nausea and suffering. But their anxiety and nausea bring only death. The concept of Revolt, the choice to live despite the depressing realization that everything is meaningless seems to be completely absent in *Footfalls*.

Generally, the existentialist ideas are less prominent in *Footfalls* and Katherine Weiss offers an explanation: "Beckett's *Footfalls* is a complex exploration of the archive and May's failure to make her past move into the present to shape her future." (58). In *Footfalls* Beckett expresses more psychological imprisonment, coming from the past and the human mind.

5. USE OF LANGUAGE

5.1. A Short Introduction to Use of Language in Dramatic Texts

The development of the language used in dramatic texts has a strong basis in dramatic poetry which used the discourse of the characters to tell a story or to describe a situation. It was written down in dramatic verses. These verses were meant to be spoken in plays and their tradition goes back to the ancient Greece. The height of popularity of dramatic poetry was during the English Renaissance with playwrights like Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe who contributed to it by inventing new poetic forms and dramatic

structures. However, its use decreased in the 19th century because playwrights like Henrik Ibsen introduced their conversational style. But the verse drama continued to have an important role in the development of the theatre.

There was also the closet drama in the 19th century, which was a new kind of text that was intended only to be read, rather than performed. It was created by writers like Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. After this, opera gained popularity with its usage of verse libretto. During this time closet drama was becoming just a longer poetic form without much connection to theatre.

Generally speaking, even though the dramatic language and verse changed over the centuries, it can be said that dramatic language is poetic and more complex than everyday language. Its style depends on the situation in which it is performed, so we can say that the dramatic language is also performative language. Dramatic speech also has different functions. Generally, the dramatic statements are supposed to function as means of representing characters, things or events. The statements can also lead the audience through the dramatic text.

5.2. Use of Language in *Waiting for Godot*

The way Beckett uses language in his plays is rather specific. Linda Ben-Zvi said that in his plays speaking and thinking become one and the same, ego and language are inseparable and all language is metaphorical. Consequently, it causes the language to express paradoxes on every level of his plays. (187) Beckett uses language full of absurd contradictions and breakdowns and this causes confusion for the audience who is mainly focused on the language.

Beckett also shows us the limitations of language. They are characteristic for the Theatre of the Absurd in general, but Beckett shows them in a specific way. He wants to show us that language became inadequate and lost its function by using specific structures like repetitions, puns, contradictions, clichés, indelicacies, monologues, phatic communication, even silence and absence of language. Beckett sometimes uses them in a way that creates rhythm with musical aspects. He tried to develop a new language as "a system of sounds devoid of content which moves only within itself". Such a language in Beckett's plays serves to express the breakdown, the disintegration of language." (Rahimipoor, Edoyan, Hashemi 821) He also uses these structures to stress the hopelessness and lack of meaning in the lives of his characters.

Beckett uses the structures mentioned above to show a breakdown of language in various ways. The first one that we will mention is repetition. Repetition is not only evident in the dialogues and monologues of *Waiting for Godot*, but it is also present in the circular structure of the plot. Act I is similar to Act II, similar conversations and actions occur in both parts of the play and adding the repeating words on top of that emphasises the situation in which Vladimir and Estragon found themselves - the endless waiting. The use of repetitions on every level of the play summarizes several themes of the play: relativity of time and facts, faith in God, meaninglessness of human actions and so on.

Whenever the characters speak, they are uncertain about what to say, how to say it, and whether to say anything at all. Beckett's artistic expression with the use of illogical language depicts the tragic impossibility of communication and with that, isolation.

Characters often sound as if they are reciting, and their conversations are often repetitive. The repetition may reflect the tragic aspect of the uncertain world which constantly repeats its mistakes. However, on the other hand, it also evokes the feeling that we are watching funny parrots or even clowns. Both of these aspects are demonstrated in the following dialogue:

Estragon: Then adieu.

Pozzo: Adieu.

Vladimir: Adieu.

Pozzo: Adieu.

Estragon: Adieu.

Pozzo: And thank you.

Vladimir: Thank you.

(Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 31)

By repeating utterances Beckett creates an effect in which the meaning of the word becomes detached from the word itself. The meaning is not necessarily connected to the words that are spoken. It is not possible to establish the actual meaning of the words and they become irrelevant. The only thing that matters to the characters is the action of speaking. The questions do not really need answers and the characters forget what they said or asked. The language is broken, the dialogue has degenerated and the conversation is just a game to pass time. There is no real meaning in the words and the characters speak to avoid facing their meaningless lives.

Estragon: (Chewing.) I asked you a question.

Vladimir: Ah.

Estragon: Did you reply?

Vladimir: How's the carrot?

Estragon: It's a carrot.

Vladimir: So much the better, so much the better. (Pause) What was it you wanted to know?

Estragon: I've forgotten. ... (21)

The repetitions are even the reason for waiting. Whenever they start questioning their actions, Vladimir and Estragon repeat the sentence "We are *Waiting for Godot*" and they keep on waiting. After numerous repetitions this sentence loses the meaning and becomes an empty cliché.

Waiting for Godot is also full of questions and answers. Estragon and Vladimir ask questions mostly to make sure they still exist. Their conversations are examples of phatic communication, which is used to establish social connection and not for real exchange of information or ideas.

Beckett also uses a lot of contradictory statements and actions. This is also a way of representing conflicting behaviour.

Estragon: (Step forward.) You're angry? (Silence. Step forward. Estragon lays his hand on Vladimir's shoulder.) Come Didi. (Silence.) Give me your hand. (Vladimir half turns.) Embrace me! (Vladimir stiffens.) Don't be stubborn! (Vladimir softens.

They embrace. Estragon recoils.) You stink of garlic! (18)

The contradictions can be found in many parts of the play. For example, Vladimir and Estragon say that they would be better off without each other, but they stay together anyway. They also often say that they should go, but they do not go anywhere. The contradictions can also be found in the characters' descriptions of time and space that surrounds them:

Estragon: In my opinion we were here.

Vladimir: (Looking around) You recognize the place?

Estragon: I didn't say that. (16)

Estragon adds to the confusion by asking what day it is: "Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday (Pause.) Or Monday? (Pause.) Or Friday?" (17)

Through the repetitions, clichés and contradictions Beckett shows that the language became inadequate and that it can cause confusion in our everyday lives.

Beckett also uses stichomythia. The characters say single lines alternately, which gives the speech certain poetic and musical rhythm:

Estragon: All the dead voices.

Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Vladimir: Like sand.

Estragon: Like leaves.

(Silence.)

Vladimir: They all speak together.

Estragon: Each one to itself.

(Silence.)

Vladimir: Rather they whisper.

Estragon: They rustle.

Vladimir: They murmur.

Estragon: They rustle.

(Silence.) (58)

The use of stichomythia shows the conversation without any real meaning. It seems that it is used only to create rhythm by words. It shows that real communication is not actually necessary. They talk just to pass time. When they do not talk for a while, Estragon says: "Let's make a little conversation".

When Beckett uses stichomythia, the conversations often end in silence, which represents failure of the language. Silences in *Waiting for Godot* do not bring any peace. They bring focus on the hopeless situation of the characters. Silence speaks louder than words and is a language in itself.

(Long silence.)

Vladimir: Say something!

Estragon: I'm trying.

(Long silence)

Vladimir: (in anguish) Say something at all! (59)

Beckett also uses monologues in a specific ways. The characters in *Waiting for Godot* use monologues to break the silence. Beckett also uses monologues to express some of his attitudes, for example on religion when Vladimir tells the story of two thieves that were crucified together with Jesus or in the Lucky's monologue, which is full of disconnected parts of the speech. Beckett created rhythm in this monologue and expressed his opinions on philosophy.

Monologues in *Waiting for Godot* sometimes lead to a kind of a questioning game:

Vladimir: One out of four. Of the other three two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: What?

Estragon: What's all this about? Abused who?

Vladimir: The Saviour.

Estragon: From hell? (14)

In *Waiting for Godot* characters often speak just to pass the time, which is also a way of using the time for exploring and confirming their empty lives. Martin Esslin says: "For to be alive is to be aware of oneself, to be aware of oneself is to hear one's thoughts, that endless, relentless stream of words. As a human being suffering from this compulsion, Beckett rejects language; as a poet, endlessly compelled to work with language, he loves it. This is the source of the ambivalence of his attitude to language sometimes appears to him as a divine instrument, sometimes as mere senseless buzzing." (84)

If Beckett's plays are concerned with expressing the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to incessant change, his use of language examines the limitations of language both as a means of communication and as a vehicle for the expression of valid statements, an instrument of thought.

The way Beckett uses language in *Waiting for Godot* shows that language is not adequate any more, that it cannot express our thoughts and does not facilitate communication, which we need to resolve the human problems, but at the same time, in spite of everything, his characters try to communicate and offer this as an escape, however ironic and nonsensical it might be.

5.3. Use of Language in *Footfalls*

Language in *Footfalls* shows a struggle with words to express what cannot be expressed, but this can also represent a special exploration of identity and presence. We are not sure whether mother exists and we are not quite sure whether May that we see on the stage is real or a ghost.

We often hear a lot of unconnected thoughts. Beckett also uses stichomythia, for example in this conversation:

May: Would you like me to inject you again?

Voice: Yes, but it is too soon.

(Pause)

May: Would you like me to change your position again?

(Pause)

Voice: Yes, but it is too soon. (400)

Beckett used contradictions here, as well. May asks if she could do something for her mother and the mother says “Yes”. And then contradicts herself by saying: “But it is too soon.” The contradictions show that the language is not useful any more, it lost its function. The contradictions are also a part of the everyday language and prove that it lost its meaning:

“Will you never have done?”

Conversations mostly contain questions and answers. The characters ask a lot of questions, but they are not interested in the answers. The conversation between May and her mother becomes two monologues and this makes us feel that there is no real connection between them. They talk just to hear their own thoughts and use the other one just to confirm their own existence. Ben-Zvi Linda says that through these monologues Beckett tells us that language can be a tool that enables us to understand the external world, but when it comes to understanding our inner world, it fails us just like it failed May. (193)

It seems that May is suffering from some traumatic event that led her to this situation. She cannot deal with it and she is trapped in repeating her statements and walking up and down.

The dialogues and the monologues convey deep despair and pain and dialogues become more and more monologues without reply. The monologues lose their meaning and the audience hears only fragments of the characters’ thoughts and fragments of the important traumatic experience. The characters are separated from each other, they just present their thoughts and they are not interested in the others. The other character has to repeat a question or an answer:

May: What age am I now?

Voice: And I? (Pause. No louder.) And I? (400)

There are also many examples of repetitions which express May’s and mother’s empty and repetitive lives. For example, May repeats statements that correspond to the rhythm of her steps, which also creates special, automatic language rhythm for the audience. It sounds as if the characters describe some memories they do not remember very well.

May: ... (Pause) Mrs W: You yourself observed nothing... strange?

Amy: No, Mother I myself did not, to put it mildly.

Mrs W: What do you mean Amy, to put it mildly, what can you possibly mean, Amy, to put it mildly?

Amy: I mean, Mother, that to say I observed nothing... strange is indeed to put it mildly. (403)

Beckett uses a lot of silences in *Footfalls*, as well. His characters cannot stand the silence and the uncertainty that it brings. This forces them to talk about anything, even if it is nonsense. For example, May says: “the motion along is not enough, I must hear the feet, however faint they fall” (401). Speaking to another person proves they exist and that they are not alone in the world.

The absence of language plays an important role in *Footfalls*. There are a lot of pauses after sentences: “... when she fancies none can hear. (Pause.) Tells how it was. (Pause.) Tries to tell how it was. (Pause.) It all. (Pause) It all. (Pause.)” (401)

May needs to avoid silences by walking or talking because every pause reminds her how empty her life is. We also feel that pauses separate the statements from the characters who are saying them and the characters from each other. The characters speak, but the silences follow and the language does not seem to have any point or meaning. Beckett shows us that the language is not effective.

6. PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS

6.1. A Short Introduction to Performance Elements in Dramatic Texts

When examining performance elements in dramatic texts, special attention should be paid to differences and connections between the dramatic text and its performance on the stage. It might be said that exploring this difference is not very important, since it is expected that authors create dramatic texts for the performance on stage and rarely think of them as pure literature. There are examples of different approaches throughout the history of dramatic texts, both from the point of theoreticians and the playwrights. In his introduction to his play *The Robbers*, written in 1781, the German playwright Friedrich Schiller suggests that he created this play more for reading than for being performed on stage, probably because he wanted to raise his reputation as a writer at the time. On the other hand, Shakespeare’s plays were created primarily for the performance on the Elizabethan stage, but they are also perceived and studied as brilliant pieces of literature. I think that a dramatic text and its performance should not be viewed as separate aspects, but I also think that the analysis of

their connection is best if the performance elements are studied through the stage directions that the playwright wrote, since I think they express the author's intentions in the most authentic way.

I believe that it should also be taken into account that the 20th century saw performance becoming an independent form of art in which an artist can use their body or voice to convey artistic expression, while theatre is considered to be a branch of performing arts that is concerned with acting out texts in front of an audience, using a combination of speech, gesture, music, dance, sound and spectacle.

The histories of theatre and performance are very much intertwined with each other. Even their basic descriptions confirm this connection. The theatre started as a performance of ritual activities that did not need initiation from the audience. It resembled the sacred mysteries and the primary aim was to bring purification and healing to the spectator by means of a vision, the *theama*. The physical location of such performances was accordingly named *theatron*.

This ritual typically included elements that entertained or gave positive experience, and the performers had costumes and masks. Later on, as society developed spectacular elements, they began to be performed in non-ritualistic conditions. From these non-ritualistic performances came the theatre as an autonomous activity that was later held in specialized spaces.

Throughout history, theatre and performance have developed certain traditions and during the 20th century, realism and naturalism in theatre became more and more popular. They also had an additional current in the shape of experimental theatre that rejected the conventions and traditions of the theatre. These experiments come from modernist and postmodernist movements that can include forms of political theatre, as well as more aesthetically orientated work. Some of the best-known experimental theatres are: Epic theatre, the Theatre of Cruelty, and the Theatre of the Absurd. The Theatre of the Absurd was breaking away from the traditional theatre in a way that it sometimes contained abstract performances and stage settings of plays that also eliminated traditional structures. The Theatre of the Absurd was concerned with existential and psychological themes and was very much influenced by the horrors of World War I and World War II.

During 1960s, performance became more abstract and incorporated elements of surrealism and futurism, as well as technology. The artists started to experiment with body motion, recorded sounds, written and spoken texts and even smells. I believe that these

experimentations also influenced Beckett's plays and their performance in a way that they became more minimalistic, abstract and surreal.

6.2. Performance Elements in *Waiting for Godot*

As far as the connections between dramatic text and its performance on the stage are concerned, I believe that Beckett was a playwright who was very much aware that his plays are going to be performed on stage and he paid special attention to stage directions. His stage directions are not just illustrations of the dramatic text, but add very special aspects and effects to the performance. However, he used some stage directions to simply enrich the written text and make readers laugh or think, since some of the stage directions cannot be transferred to the stage:

Estragon: Use your intelligence, can't you?

Vladimir uses his intelligence.

Vladimir: (Finally). I remain in the dark.

Some of the important aspects of Beckett's plays are the themes related to discourse, identity and action. All of them are present and intertwined in *Waiting for Godot* and Beckett explores them through his characters on stage.

The actions of the characters in *Waiting for Godot* are particularly interesting. The main action, around which everything revolves, is waiting. Estragon and Vladimir just wait. This action inspires their conversations and their games to go on. The whole point of waiting is finally to come to the end of it and transition to something new, but it never ends. Estragon and Vladimir are not bound physically to the waiting, but they choose it. They are free to leave and at the same time they are not free. They convinced themselves that they are obliged to wait for Godot. The audience is constantly seeing the expression of the ideas of physical impediment and psychological restraint. It can also be seen in the literal version of Pozzo's rope. He becomes blind and Lucky deaf. existentialist themes are expressed in these two plays.

The trapped mind is felt through characters' bodies. Lucky is hunched over and tied to a rope, Pozzo is lost without his watch, Vladimir has problems with urination and Estragon with his boots. Beckett emphasises their bodies and movement. For example, the characters often repeat certain actions: Pozzo gives orders to which Lucky obliges, Vladimir and Estragon play games or walk across the landscape even though there is nothing to be seen:

(He spits. Estragon moves to centre, halts with his back to auditorium.)

Estragon: Charming spot. (He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.)

Inspiring prospects. (He turns to Vladimir.) Let's go." (15)

The stage setting is also important in *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett graphically describes the places in which his characters appear. All of the Beckett's instructions about the scene or light are relevant and they often show the absence of nature and culture to which the characters belong. The empty landscape reflects Vladimir's and Estragon's empty lives. Charles B. Lyons says: "In this play the characters do not use images of the past to create a sense of their identity within time. They either cannot or will not sustain a concept of the continuity of their experience by assimilating images of the past. Consequently, they must invent and improvise with the material they find in their present situation: the barren landscape, their own physical processes and the painful failure of these processes, the presence of Pozzo and Lucky, and the potential help to be offered by Godot." (27)

Beckett uses certain strategies in order to make the audience laugh. For example, in *Waiting for Godot* he uses a pair of characters to play as clowns. There are certain reasons he might have chosen Vladimir and Estragon to act as clowns. A clown is usually someone with whom the audience sympathise and who makes them laugh. Clowns are usually clumsy figures who trip and experience some kind of comic misfortune. In some way, clowns represent ordinary human beings with their ups and downs. The clowns' failures to achieve something are a kind of parody of small tragedies, but their absurd turns them into comic element, as well.

Beckett also uses elements of farce, for example in the scene where Estragon's trousers fall down. We laughed because Estragon was in a socially funny situation at that moment. That scene was necessary because it made Estragon's empty existence less heavy and it was a way Beckett decided to diminish hopelessness. However, there was one more aspect to this situation. We started to laugh and then realised that the characters in the play did not laugh and that they were not a part of the society in which this situation is funny, so this scene stopped being funny for us, as well. Beckett's farce is not the ordinary farce. There is no regular society in *Waiting for Godot* and the reactions are not regular either.

Esslin recognized that Beckett relied on the tradition of music halls, as well: "Vladimir and Estragon - who call each other Didi and Gogo, although Vladimir is addressed by the boy messenger as Mr Albert, and Estragon, when asked his name, replies without hesitation,

Catullus - are derived from the pairs of cross-talk comedians of music halls. Their dialogue has the peculiar repetitive quality of the cross-talk comedians' pattern.

Estragon: So long as one knows.

Vladimir: One can bide one's time.

Estragon: One knows what to expect.

Vladimir: No further need to worry.

And the parallel to the music hall and the circus is even explicitly stated:

Vladimir: Charming evening we're having.

Estragon: Unforgettable.

Vladimir: And it's not over.

Estragon: Apparently not.

Vladimir: It's only the beginning.

Estragon: It's awful.

Vladimir: It's worse than being at the theatre.

Estragon: The circus.

Vladimir: The music hall.

Estragon: The circus.”

The contradictory and repetitive physical actions also reflect the contradictory and repetitive world around them.

“In accordance with the traditions of the music hall or the circus, there is an element of crudely physical humour: Estragon loses his trousers, there is a protracted gag involving three hats that are put on and off and handed on in a sequence of seemingly unending confusion, and there is an abundance of pratfalls. On the stage, language can be put into a contrapuntal relationship with action, the facts behind the language can be revealed. Hence the importance of mime, knockabout comedy, and silence in Beckett's plays. Beckett's use of the stage is an attempt to reduce the gap between the limitations of language and the intuition of being, the sense of the human situation he seeks to express in spite of his strong feeling that words are inadequate to formulate it. The concreteness and three-dimensional nature of the stage can be used to add new resources to language as an instrument of thought and exploration of being.”
(Esslin)

6.3. Performance Elements in *Footfalls*

Footfalls is a play that constantly makes us wonder what is actually happening on the stage. We are not even sure whether characters really exist. There are supposedly two characters - May and her mother, Voice. As we go along the performance or the text, we become unsure whether the Voice is in fact May's mother. Anna McMullan thinks that in actuality May is imagining the Voice or she is remembering the conversation with it: "The fact that Voice is aroused by May from a 'deep sleep' could suggest that the scene is a past memory being replayed in the present, in May's 'poor mind', the deep sleep suggesting not only, literally, the sleep of the body, but, metaphorically, the depths of memory or death." (91) We are also not sure whether the other characters mentioned in the play, like Amy and Mrs Winter, actually exist separately from May.

The dim light and the confined space give special aspects to the performance, as well. Since May's trauma may involve some kind of separation from her mother that caused her anxiety, we feel that the light and the space might represent a womb. The fact that May is trapped is also visible through her hunched defensive posture and the repeating actions and words, but it is also represented through the confined space she is in. It resembles a womb that can also be seen as a tomb.

May seems to be trying to create her own existence that does not depend on her mother. We can feel this when the play peaks with May's monologue and her walking. But the separation does not happen and May's performance continues on with walking. McMullan says: "The form of the play therefore becomes that of a series of circular revolutions, moving from one phase of absence to another, gradually fading away into less and less sharp definition and moving towards silence, stillness, and deepening darkness". (98)

The sounds of rhythmic footsteps and repetitions in speech also seem to be closely connected with the performance and represent the repetitions in the lives of the characters and the world that surrounds them. May is walking around and needs her footfalls to be loud. They prove that she exists, her words are not enough. The character is hardly present and dimmed and all attention is focused on the sounds of footsteps and dialogue. Beckett uses a lot of repetitive actions to mirror the characters' repetitive lives. The characters want freedom, but their attempts are unsuccessful and end in mechanical repetitions and habits that lead to the uncertainty in space, time and memory.

Beckett was quite specific in which way he wanted the actress in this play to move and speak. He has pointed out in his essay on Joyce's *Work in Progress* that the form, structure,

and mood of an artistic statement cannot be separated from its meaning, its conceptual content, simply because the work of art as a whole is its meaning, what is said in it is indissolubly linked with the manner in which it is said, and cannot be said in any other way.

McMullan says that *Footfalls* represents: "...a development in Beckett's exploration of those areas which elude the dominant structures of symbolic representation, and of how to present such liminal spaces and provisional identities on stage." (89)

7. THE COMIC

7.1. A Short Introduction to the Comic in Dramatic Texts

In this chapter I will give a brief overview of the role of comic elements in dramatic texts that preceded the creation of Beckett's plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Footfalls*. In this context, the expression "dramatic texts" refers to the literary texts written to be performed on stage and including dramatic, tragic, as well as comic elements.

Tragedy has often been considered a more impressive genre of drama, but comic drama has always been present, as well. Comic drama has evolved over time and included a wide range of dramas: satires from classical times, Shakespearean romantic comedies, comedies of manners created by Oscar Wilde and Molière, as well as Beckett's absurdist plays. All these forms share some common traits. For example, comic elements in dramas are often there to make fun of the social rules.

The writers like Plautus and Aristophanes created classical Greek and Roman comic drama. These classical playwrights created comic dramas called satires, in which exaggerations and absurd were used to accentuate some errors in society. Some of the satires and parodies contained even sexual humour, but they also contained serious comments, even anti-war messages.

The Renaissance in the English literature was the period of great comic writers like William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Some of their comic dramas satirized the life around them and in this aspect they were similar to classical dramatic texts. Shakespeare was also putting his stories in exotic parts of the world and exploring norms about genders and classes. For example, in his play *Twelfth Night* he created a comic confusion full of mistaken identities and cross-dressing, but also full of social comments.

The 18th century brought the comedy of manners that usually contained characters from upper classes and laughed at their social norms and limitations. Comedy of manners kept

appearing in the following centuries, as well, and gave us comic plays written by Molière, William Congreve and Oscar Wilde, who also wrote plays full of mistaken identities, but with less direct moral lessons.

The comic elements associated with the Theatre of the Absurd are rather specific and they will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

7.2. The Comic in *Waiting for Godot*

Waiting for Godot presents a wide range of comic elements – from the elements relating to language and ironic meanings to parody and performance aspects. The jokes and humour often appear in conversations between Vladimir and Estragon in order to pass the time. They have known each other for fifty years and they know each other very well. There are no more serious subjects they can discuss and all that is left for them is to use jokes in their conversations. Their conversations are like everyday conversations between old friends that have said all that there is to be said.

The main situation in *Waiting for Godot* is a desperate situation of hopeless waiting, but the anxiety is lighter because of the jokes, games and improvisations.

Some humour in *Waiting for Godot* comes from Beckett's use of language - repetitions and puns. For example, every time Estragon wants to leave, Vladimir answers that they can't because of Godot and every time Estragon yells and repeats something surprising and confusing, which causes laughter. Although the humour coming from repetitions in *Waiting for Godot* is sometimes dark, it can still make the audience laugh.

Instead of raging over absurd human actions, Beckett decided to laugh at them. His ironical humour creates a balance between laughter and tears, until they merge. As Topsfield put it: "He observes his fellow creatures and finds comic material in their confusion. Most of all they share the joy of comic language. He notes the ridiculous, and lampoons false illusions and complacency with a personal humour that throws new light on old themes." (16)

Beckett also uses dark comedy to make the audience laugh at despair. One such example is the scene where Vladimir and Estragon are discussing whether they should hang themselves and how. Beckett was able to make the audience laugh at the ridiculous discussion on how to perform a suicide, making us laugh at despair and absurdity.

Estragon: Let's hang ourselves immediately!

Vladimir: From a bough? (*They go towards the tree.*) I wouldn't trust it.

Estragon: We can always try.

Vladimir: Go ahead.

Estragon: After you.

Vladimir: No no, you first.

Estragon: Why me?

Vladimir: You're lighter than I am.

Estragon: Just so!

Vladimir: I don't understand.

Estragon: Use your intelligence, can't you?

Vladimir uses his intelligence.

Vladimir: (*Finally*). I remain in the dark.

Estragon: This is how it is. (*He reflects.*) The bough... the bough... (*Angrily.*) Use your head, can't you?

Vladimir: You're my only hope.

Estragon: (with effort). Gogo light—bough not break—Gogo dead. Didi heavy—bough break—Didi alone. Whereas—

Vladimir: I hadn't thought of that.

Estragon: If it hangs you it'll hang anything. (Beckett 18 19)

This situation also contains ironic elements, which is commonplace throughout the play. In fact, the use of irony in *Waiting for Godot* is so accentuated that it clearly supports the opinion how Beckett saw humour as a source of hope in the bleak universe that surrounds his characters. The characters are talking about suicide and we are laughing at it. This situation accentuates this paradox between the absurd, the misery produced by their own imprisonment and humour as a way of coping with it.

Beckett is not the only author that offers some kind of solution in the absurd universe. In his novel *The Plague*, Camus offered another kind of a response to the absurd - the citizens had to become strong and decisive to be able to fight death. Characters in *Waiting for Godot* do not revolt with a clear intent through their humour, they did not choose to confront the absurd and revolt against it as Camus's characters do, but they use humour as a way of escaping misery. Their humour is not the Revolt or hope in their classical sense, but it is not complete submission to meaninglessness either. Furthermore, they escape misery by entertaining themselves with hardships of others, which can be seen in the scene where Pozzo constantly cries for help but Vladimir and Estragon ignore his cries and instead discuss whether they should help him. There are also other ways they try to escape from thinking about their situation through silly distractions like this one:

Vladimir: There's nothing we can do.

Estragon: But I can't go on like this!

Vladimir: Would you like a radish?

Estragon: Is that all there is?

Vladimir: There are radishes and turnips.

Estragon: Are there no carrots? (Beckett, "*Waiting for Godot*" 44)

As it was shown, Beckett has a very special approach to the absurd in this play and that is comic, and actually tragicomic approach. Beckett's dark humour is tragic, but it is also realistic and optimistic. Many dialogues and situations in this play are the result of the meaningless world in which the characters are thrown in, but they are also comic.

However, Beckett does not only use humour in order to laugh at human condition. He also uses it simply to parody high society or pompous actors. This can be seen in the character of Pozzo who has a need to keep up the appearances and to be seen: "Pozzo: Good. Is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me? Will you look at me pig! ... I am ready. Is everybody listening? Is everybody ready?" (Beckett, 30 31) The exaggerations Beckett makes are comic in themselves, but he also makes fun of everybody who thinks too highly of themselves. This can be seen in the scene where the tramps meet Pozzo. They are not sure who Pozzo is so he says: "(Terrifying voice) I am Pozzo! (Silence) Pozzo! (Silence) Does that name mean nothing to you?" Estragon answers: "Pozzo....no... I'm afraid I... no... I don't seem to." (Beckett 22) By employing this kind of parody Beckett tries to tell us that popularity and appearances in reality do not mean anything. What value does fame and reputation have in a forgotten and absurd world? They mean nothing, just like Pozzo. "His melodramatic style falls flat in this world of empty waiting. His acting style, like his attitudes, is out of date and irrelevant, and his importance for Vladimir and Estragon, as well as for the audience, extends little beyond helping time to pass more quickly." (Mackean)

Fast, simple and witty conversations are also used in *Waiting for Godot* to get a comic effect. The viewers do not have time to think about what the characters are talking about and basically laugh at the confusion and absurdity of such conversations. Beckett uses this fast comic element to hide and, at the same time, stress his characters' insecurity and his philosophical views. However, some authors think that "Conversational exchanges, often non sequiturs, are meant only to keep the ball rolling; it is all a game, Vladimir tells Estragon: Come on, Gogo, return the ball can't you, once in a way." (Topsfield 100)

Beckett also uses comic effects of repetitions, puns, digressions and mixtures of "intellectual" clichés and slang, as well as empty social habits. Bergson agrees that repetition

produces laughter and explains why: "Wherever there is repetition or complete similarity, we always suspect some mechanism at work behind the living. Analyse the impression you get from two faces that are too much alike, and you will find that you are thinking of two copies cast in the same mould, or two impressions of the same seal, or two reproductions of the same negative,—in a word, of some manufacturing process or other. This deflection of life towards the mechanical is here the real cause of laughter." (Bergson) For example, this is evident in Pozzo's and Lucky's monologues which contain a lot of repetitions and they do not lead anywhere, the same way the characters do not go anywhere. But the comic elements make their situation seem less tragic. The characters are all stuck and pass the time by talking and making jokes to escape the tragic situation even for a moment. We laugh at their talk of suicide, at their frustration with waiting, at little games they play to escape their reality. Topsfield and Bergson comment on the audience, as well: "Laughter, says Bergson, need not be just or kind-hearted, and Beckett's often cruel. In other words, such comedy has a cathartic effect, and it is significant that *Waiting for Godot* has been particularly appreciated by audiences 'outside society': prison inmates, and minorities in totalitarian states, or where freedom is threatened." (Topsfield 22)

7.3. The Comic in *Footfalls*

Beckett is well known for his use of many different comic elements in his plays, but I think that they cannot be detected in *Footfalls*.

In this play Beckett uses some techniques that are similar to the techniques that produced laughter in his earlier plays, but in *Footfalls* they produce a significantly different, dark effect. In *Footfalls* the elements usually connected to Beckett's comedy are used for more serious purposes. They are there to make us feel trapped together with May, so it can be said that the elements like repetitions, clichés and puns are there to cause anxiety, frustration and confusion rather than laughter. For example, May says the word "sequel" twice, but Beckett asked for this word to be pronounced similarly as "seek well" because May is supposed to seek herself. This pun is not used for the comic effect, but for symbolizing May's trauma.

The same goes for the use of repetitions in *Footfalls*. Beckett uses them to symbolise the repetitive life May and her mother have or to show the deterioration of memory in May's and mother's mind. May and her mother, Voice, produce the sentences as they come to their heads, and as persons trapped in her past, they often repeat themselves. They cannot avoid

experiencing the traumatic event again and repeating the thoughts and sentences connected with it.

May: Would you like me to inject you again?

Voice: Yes, but it is too soon.

(Pause)

May: Would you like me to change your position again?

Voice: Yes, but it is too soon. (400)

The repetitions are also noticeable in the Voice's answers: "Yes but it's too soon". This repetition becomes boring and worn out, reflecting the repetitive and boring state of May's mother's health and life. These answers become frustrating and not at all amusing.

May and Voice have meaningless conversations that might just be invented by May. She has something to say, but there is no one who wants to hear her. She tries to get rid of her trauma by talking, but she doesn't succeed. Her meaningless sentences are deeply serious and desperate. May is probably alone and the conversation with her mother might be just her ghostly invention or memory.

There are some opinions that the dialogue between May and her mother might be somewhat comical, depending on how the actresses stress and react to the words, but that does not seem to stem from the text of the play. The main theme of the play seems to be a hopeless psychological trauma and comic elements would diminish the anxiety coming from the trauma. I think that there are no comic aspects in *Footfalls*.

8. CONCLUSION

By exploring the comic in *Waiting for Godot* and *Footfalls* we have seen that Beckett's treatment of the comic elements has significantly changed over time, although some techniques that relied on the use of language, performance and certain existentialist ideas remained similar. I think that the analysis has contributed to the confirmation that the traditional opinions about what is specific for Beckett's comic and his vision of the world are based only on the comic and the vision of the world he presented in his plays belonging to the Theatre of the Absurd and the middle phase of his career (1945-early 1960s). The works from the last phase of his career seem to be very different and call for re-examining the concepts that are traditionally connected with Beckett's name.

The language structures and techniques that are traditionally considered to be characteristic for Beckett's humour (repetitions, puns, stichomythia, irony, contradictions, nonsensical utterances, clichés, indelicacies, digressions and mixtures of "intellectual" clichés and slang, monologues, phatic communication, fast speech, substituting speech by pure sounds, musicality, silence...) produce laughter only in *Waiting for Godot*. In *Footfalls* they do not serve as means to achieve laughter, but to immerse the audience into the characters' dark mental state. In *Waiting for Godot* we can laugh at the characters that are planning suicide and in *Footfalls* we just feel cold death.

The use of performance elements changed, as well, especially the focus on characters' bodies, their posture, movement and rhythm. Their actions lead nowhere. They either wait or walk and speak to kill the time. In *Waiting for Godot* we have six characters that move around freely across a well-lit space that might be endless. In *Footfalls* we have only one protagonist walking up and down the darkened, confined space in a repetitive manner. The visual image of May's hunched body that does not go anywhere conveys her dark mental state to the audience. In *Waiting for Godot* there is also emphasis on the physical discomfort of the characters who do not go anywhere either, but it is quickly substituted by some nonsensical and fun action that makes the waiting bearable.

In both plays Beckett deals with similar existentialist ideas. The characters are frozen in time. They are somewhat aware of their situation, but are unable to break free and achieve a kind of self-fulfilment, or as the existentialist thinkers would say "lead an authentic life". The reasons for their situations are different, but the main point is that they cannot move on, either they are blocking themselves or the circumstances prevent them from doing this. The question that is traditionally considered to be specific for Beckett's plays - "How can human existence

face absurd and death?" - brings different answers in *Waiting for Godot* and *Footfalls*. In *Waiting for Godot* Beckett offers escape through humour, but in *Footfalls* the characters simply face death without any hope or are already dead. The concept of Revolt, the choice to live despite the depressing realization that everything is meaningless is completely absent from *Footfalls*.

I found it very interesting that Beckett is traditionally identified only with the comic and his vision of the world that he expressed in his plays between 1945 and early 1960s and I believe that his late phase deserves more research, as well as the reasons for the significant change in Beckett's vision, especially as far as the comic is concerned. I believe that the atmosphere of dark, cold absurd and death that we can feel in *Footfalls* corresponds to many aspects of the world Beckett saw around him in 1975. It is possible that he was frustrated with the world he was witnessing and he made his play short and pessimistic for a reason. He did not have anything more to add, he could not change anything. The world was doomed to suffering and repeating its mistakes so there was no point in writing lengthy plays about the absurd. It was already done, and sadly, nothing changed. It seems like he felt that he had nothing more to say, except to announce death.

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10. THE COMIC IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S PLAYS *WAITING FOR GODOT* AND *FOOTFALLS*: SUMMARY AND KEY WORDS

This thesis deals with the comic in Samuel Beckett's plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Footfalls*, more precisely with analysing the ways in which Beckett was developing certain structures and techniques at the peak and at the end of his career, especially when it comes to the comic elements that are traditionally considered to be characteristic of Beckett. Following the brief overview of the socio-historical context of the 20th century, existentialist philosophy, as well as use of language and performance elements in dramatic texts, the emphasis is primarily on the plays and the interpretation of the ways the ideas of existentialist philosophy, language and performance interconnect with the comic in the two plays. The aim of the thesis is to show a significant difference between Beckett's approach to the comic during the middle and the late period of his career, as well as to open the possibility of re-examining traditional opinions on what is specific and characteristic of Beckett's approach to the comic, and what meaning the comic has in the Beckett's vision of the absurd world.

Key words: Godot, Footfalls, comic, existentialism, language, performance, absurd

11. KOMIČNO U DRAMAMA SAMUELA BECKETTA “U OČEKIVANJU GODOTA” I “FOOTFALLS”: SAŽETAK I KLJUČNE RIJEČI

Ovaj diplomski rad bavi se komičnim aspektima u dramama Samuela Becketta “*U očekivanju Godota*” i “*Footfalls*”, točnije, bavi se analizom načina na koje je Beckett razvijao određene strukture i tehnike na vrhuncu i na kraju svoje karijere, osobito kada je riječ o komičnim elementima koji se tradicionalno smatraju karakterističnim za Becketta. Uz pregled socio-povijesnoga konteksta 20. st., kratke preglede egzistencijalističke filozofije, te uporabe jezika i elemenata performansa u dramskim tekstovima, naglasak je primarno stavljen na sama djela i interpretaciju kako se ideje egzistencijalističke filozofije, jezik i performans prožimaju u odnosu na komične aspekte u spomenutim dramama. Cilj rada je pokušaj prikaza značajne razlike između Beckettova pristupa komičnome u srednjem i završnom razdoblju njegove karijere, te otvaranje mogućnosti preispitivanja tradicionalnih mišljenja o tome što je specifičan i karakterističan Beckettov pristup komičnome te koje značenje komično ima u Beckettovoj viziji apsurdnoga svijeta.

Ključne riječi: Godot, Footfalls, komično, egzistencijalizam, jezik, performans, absurd