

explorations



Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature

Facing God experience – Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett

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Abstract. *Regardless of the times in which people live, they feel a need to seek answers to some fundamental questions which apply to each and every human being, such as: how to deal with situations that cause suffering to us? What are the causes of it? Is it possible for a man to find happiness and the ultimate truth through following one's own philosophy? In this paper the authors discuss the way in which Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett, the two well-known 20th century writers and thinkers, deal with these dilemmas in their novels and dramas. In the works of both authors, like "The Myth of Sisyphus", "Caligula", "Act without words" or "Catastrophe", the protagonists are pictured as individuals helpless towards influences of the external supernatural forces. Despite the fact that all of the protagonists face similar experiences, the way they react to them is diverse.*

Key words: *Beckett, Camus, spirituality, Sisyphus, Catastrophe*

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite many dissimilarities between Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett who were widely considered exceedingly famous and influential writers of the second half of the 20th century, it needs to be mentioned that they also had some important things in common. Both of them were concerned with the hardship of the internal fight and dilemmas related to the Christian faith. Paradoxically, despite the fact that both of them doubted the existence of God, in their works they were focused on describing man's either submissive or rebellious attitude towards the higher, supernatural forces which can be interpreted as the divine power that influences him. In this respect special attention will be paid to one of Beckett's late short dramas, *Catastrophe*, as – in comparison to his earlier dramatic works – the way the main character reacts to what happens to him apparently marks a significant change in the author's thinking.

In the first section of this study the authors will examine Camus' and Beckett's attitude towards spiritual matters. In the next four sections Camus' texts, namely *The Stranger* (1942), *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), *The Plague* (1947) and *Caligula* (1944) will be juxtaposed with Beckett's dramas *Waiting for Godot* (1952), *Act Without Words I* (1956), *Endgame* (1957) and *Catastrophe* (1982), respectively. The aim is to investigate

in what way the texts of both authors relate to one another by showing what their artistic and spiritual ideas are and how they evolved over time.

2. CAMUS' AND BECKETT'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE MATTER OF FAITH

Camus' religiosity can be summarized with one word: 'anxiety'. According to Waleria Szydłowska (2001, 13), although he did not believe in God and claimed that he was not able to imagine life of the spirit being separated from the body, and he *did not want* to believe that death is only a gate to the afterlife, in his diaries he admitted that throughout his life he constantly felt "religious anxiety" [*translation mine* – E. B.]. We know for instance about his long discussions with Monsignor Altermann, a Parisian archbishop, in which they were talking about topics concerning the Christian faith and the presence of God, as well as comparing the arguments of believers with those put forward by nonbelievers. Moreover, Olivier Todd (1996, 662) quotes Camus' utterance from an interview for *The World* from 1956: "Je ne crois pas en Dieu, c'est vrai. Mais je ne suis pas athée pour autant. Je serais même d'accord avec Benjamin Constant pour trouver à l'irréligion quelque chose de vulgaire et de... oui, d'usé" [I do not believe in God, it's true. But I'm not an atheist either. I would even agree with Benjamin Constant to find irreligion as something vulgar and... yes, outworn – E. B.]. From Jerzy Klechta (2010) we find out that during a speech for the Dominicans in 1946, one of the participants claimed that, unlike himself, Camus had never experienced God's grace, so he had no idea about it. The writer replied modestly that he was like Saint Augustine before his conversion – he wrestled with the problem of evil but he was unable to solve it yet. In general, rather than following Descartes, Kant or Hegel, Camus was more fascinated by the ideas of such thinkers as Plotinus and Augustine who were focused on writing about the mystical idea of heading to the Absolute viewed by the Christians as the supernatural world, the Kingdom of God.¹ Trying to reconcile what is real with what is not, namely the world of reason with the world of spiritual and emotional sensations, he wanted to experience the presence of the divine force already on the Earth, and not only after death.

Samuel Beckett's way of reasoning varied from that of Camus. Gilles Ernst (qtd. in Hubert 2011, 338) quite ambiguously describes Beckett as "the atheist who cares about God", because even if he seemed to neglect the issues concerning faith, he did not stop talking about it and kept God "alive", as He still *existed* in his works (there are many philosophical questions he posed in his texts that can be a source of inspiration or serve as a source for further research). The rebellious attitude towards God is manifested in his works by profanity, disrespect, jokes and parodies of the Bible. The author attacks the Christian faith, although it needs to be mentioned that each time he does it less and less virulently which only proves he took care of this issue and that his mind was fixed on it. "Beckett's God" is not present in the way that the Christian God is. As Yannick Hoffert (911) points out Jean Onimbus and George Steiner stated that, the presence of God was manifested in Beckett's output through an idea of underlining His absence. However, at the same time, he never openly proclaimed the nonexistence of God and researchers cannot deduce what exactly was the case here.

¹ The topic of Camus' short PhD thesis was "Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism, Plotinus and Augustine".

Consequently, on the one hand both writers declared that they were not Christians, but on the other hand they were concerned with the issues connected to the Christian faith and the dilemma concerning the existence of God, the traces of which can be found in their works of art.

2.1. *The Stranger vs. Waiting for Godot*

There are surprisingly many parallels between Camus' *The Stranger* (1942) and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Firstly, in both works the protagonists are presented as the individuals who do not have any specific goal in life; hence, they do not manage to achieve or realize anything significant. Meursault, the main character of Camus' novel, does not take care neither of his professional advancement nor even of his mother's death, instead he aims at enjoying life – wandering, smoking, drinking with Raymond, listening to Salamando and making love. In turn, Beckett's protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, the vagabonds approaching fifty, meet every day in more or less the same place to chat, constantly rehash the same thing and to hopefully wait for a man called Godot who never comes.

Furthermore, all of the characters act as if the surrounding reality and their own lives were of little significance. Meursault for instance does not manage to enter a close relationship with neither his mother nor his lover and does not permit anybody to influence him and his life in anyway. He regards faith in God as a waste of time, and he believes that when any pangs of conscience occur, the best remedy is to ignore it. Because of this he also does not receive help from anyone during his trial. Nobody is compassionate towards him. In prison Meursault speaks with a priest, but he does not pretend that he believes in God even when he becomes aware that his life will depend on it (he shows an indifference towards the cross during the trial). The matter of faith in God is diminished and undervalued by him. He also does not want to defend himself in front of the court, as for him it does not matter if he will be allowed to live or if he will be sentenced to death.

As for Vladimir and Estragon, they await the arrival of someone who is supposed to influence their lives, but at the same time they are uneager to undertake any action on their own, they have no power over themselves, not to mention the world around them. Their impotence is manifested best in these words: "VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go? / ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go" (2, 94) - and then nobody moves. Martin Esslin (1971, 77) remarks that characters make attempts to perform some action, but it occurs only on a declarative level. This concerns even Estragon's suicidal attempt - first he says he wants to hang himself, but later he decides that it does not matter anymore (it is noticeable that the idea that comes to his mind when he wants to do something with his life is to commit suicide). Godot may be also identified with God. If we assume such interpretation, then we may conclude that Beckett adopts the deistic point of view of God who created the world and decided not to intervene with the functioning of it. And since the characters *want* to depend on Godot, waiting for him serves as an excuse for their passive attitude.

As the two characters always agree with one another (to an extent then it seems they constitute a single entity) and their reasoning is totally uncritical there is no space for any fruitful reflection on their own or each other's behavior, the change of which could lead to some modifications of their lives. It is visible in the way they lead their conversations:

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

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

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

VLADIMIR: We have that excuse.

ESTRAGON: It so we won't hear.

VLADIMIR: We have our reasons.

ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.

VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

VLADIMIR: Like sand.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

(2, 62)

ESTRAGON: What do we do now?

VLADIMIR: While waiting.

ESTRAGON: While waiting.

Silence

VLADIMIR: We could do our exercises.

ESTRAGON: Our movements.

VLADIMIR: Our elevations.

ESTRAGON: Our relaxations.

VLADIMIR: Our elongations.

ESTRAGON: Our relaxations.

VLADIMIR: To warm us up.

ESTRAGON: To calm us down.

VLADIMIR: Off we go.

Vladimir hops from one foot to the other.

Estragon imitates him.

(2, 76)

As can be seen, these two characters represent men who willingly and voluntarily deprive themselves of the impact of things happening around them. Why do they do it? Is it just laziness? Maybe it is caused by the awareness that people have the inner capacity to be aggressive and cruel to one another (which manifests itself most evidently in life-threatening situations characterized by a collective aggression, like wars, strikes etc.) and that the same negative potential is hidden in them (cf. Hannah Arendt's concept of the potential of evil in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*)? If we assume the latter is true then it explains why the protagonists choose to stay passive – they do it in order to suppress the negative traits of their characters. Nevertheless, there is one point in the drama when Vladimir and Estragon become disillusioned and so tired of waiting that it makes them wish to liberate themselves from their miserable, barren existence: "ESTRAGON: I can't go on like this" (2, 94).

With Meursault the case is different, as his situation becomes for him the source of happiness and satisfaction (Szydłowska 2001, 25). It is only in prison where he begins to truly reflect on his life and enjoy it. According to him, the perspective of approaching

death makes him a happy man, because he is finally freed from thinking about it. He does not have to care about his future in the way that normal people must which is very often a source of anxiety and restlessness that constitute forms of mental suffering. Camus himself, who suffered from tuberculosis, claimed that a disease is a remedy, as it prepares us to face death (Todd 1996, 47). Therefore, in the case of Meursault the passive attitude is not a sign of weakness of character, but as a way of accepting the hopelessness of a change in one's fate.

2.2. *The Myth of Sisyphus vs. Act Without Words I*

The next two texts that will be compared are *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus' philosophical essay published in 1942, and Beckett's playlet *Act Without Words I* from 1958.² What we find out from Camus' (2006, 304) essay differs from what we know about Sisyphus from Greek mythology. He is described by the author as superior to the gods, since, despite being aware of his fate, he finds a purpose in performing the task which was supposed to be a punishment and, therefore, a source of eternal torment:

(...) persuadé de l'origine tout humaine de tout ce qui est humain, aveugle qui désire voir et qui sait que la nuit n'a pas de fin, il est toujours en marche. Le rocher roule encore. (...) Sisyphe enseigne la fidélité supérieure qui nie les dieux et soulève les rochers. Lui aussi juge que tout est bien. Cet univers désormais sans maître ne lui paraît ni stérile, ni futile. Chacun des grains de cette pierre, chaque éclat minéral de cette montagne pleine de nuit, à lui seul, forme un monde. La lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à remplir un cœur d'homme. Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.

[(...) Convinced of the origin of the human kind, of all that is human, a blind man, who is eager to see and knows that the night has no end, is always in movement. The rock is continuously rolling. (. . .) Sisyphus teaches us that thanks to the superior fidelity towards himself he can oppose the gods and raise rocks. He also thinks that all is well. The universe without a master seems to him neither barren nor senseless. Each grain of that stone, each mineral of that mountain immersed in the night constitutes for him the world itself. The struggle against the mountain top is in itself enough to fill one's heart with faith. One needs to imagine Sisyphus happy – A. W.]

The work performed by Sisyphus is certainly not only a duty, but also a conscious attempt to rebel against gods that try to enslave him and break his spirit. Fidelity to one's own ideals is highly valued here and presented as heroic. Sobolewska (2010, n. p.) states that Camus himself used to write that it is better to die standing than live on your knees. Sisyphus, who is aware that he is doomed to failure, does not break mentally, but instead accepts his faith which ultimately allows him to triumph over gods.

² 'Playlet' (or 'dramaticule') is a term found by Beckett himself, it appears for the first time in the subtitle to one of his short plays, *Come and Go* (1966).

Although the plot of Beckett's next drama, *Act Without Words I* brings to one's mind the story of Sisyphus, its main character reacts differently to what happens to him. In this short drama, the action takes place in the desert. The protagonist is being kept there involuntarily, as the mysterious forces prevent him from leaving the place. At the beginning, he tries to perform some actions, such as reaching for a bottle of water, hiding in the shade of a palm tree or even hanging himself, but those forces prevent him from accomplishing any task successfully. After a few attempts, disillusioned and morose, he chooses to stay passive and not to react to further temptations. If we associate those forces with a divine power, God, then the whole scenario makes us think of Him as a cruel oppressor who makes fun of human life. Man can make an effort to satisfy himself by trying to gain what he wants, but he is doomed to failure and it seems that the best thing that he can do is to stay inactive and indifferent.

One should pay attention to the character's last gesture which is vital here – he raises his hands to his eyes and looks at them carefully, realizing that despite the fact that they were given to him to perform certain tasks, they have been proven to be useless to him. He wonders what the reason he was created for and if he has no influence over his life whatsoever. The gesture also brings to mind Beckett's other character, Winnie who in the first act of *Happy Days* prays to God. Unlike Winnie, the protagonist of *Act Without Words I* just looks at his hands, but does not fold them in prayer. He prefers not to ask God for anything, since everything that he wishes to have, to get from God, slips away from his hands at the very last moment which is more painful than just sitting idly by.

As we can see, once more, in each work an attitude of the protagonist who faces the inability to perform certain tasks successfully varies. For Camus' Sisyphus, the fact that he is punished becomes an even stronger motivation to act against the will of gods who play with human life. He manages to do it by simply accepting his fate (cf. *The Plague* or *The Stranger*), whereas Beckett's character chooses to be passive, he does not want to make further effort, as lack of success demotivates him.

2.3. *The Plague vs. Endgame*

The Plague and *Endgame* are among the first works for which Camus and Beckett gained a wide recognition. The former (published in 1947, ten years before the publication of Beckett's *Endgame*) discusses the presence of God and His place in the life of an individual, as well as the problems of predestination and the absurdity of suffering. In this respect, each of the characters, namely Father Paneloux, Doctor Rieux, Jean Tarrou and Raymond Rambert present their own point of view. However, it is noticeable that the author most probably sympathizes with Rieux, Rambert and Tarrou, as their attitudes represent a way of thinking characteristic of Camus, his humanistic ideas, namely eagerness to rebel, even if one is doomed to failure.

All of the characters fight with the plague and its occurrence of which is inexplicable; nevertheless, their reactions to the situation they encounter are multifarious. For instance, at the beginning Father Paneloux assumes that the epidemic is a consequence of sins of the city's inhabitants. He views its occurrence as God's punishment, a test of one's faith, an exhortation to change people's behavior that is supposed to help them find the true meaning of life. However, when an innocent child gets infected, the Jesuit experiences a shock, his point of view changes which is visible for example during sermons (he starts to

use the first-person plural instead of the second). He undergoes a spiritual crisis, which apparently is the cause of a strange psychosomatic disease – not plague – which later results in his death.

The character of Father Paneloux is juxtaposed with Jean Tarrou, an atheist, Epicurean who seeks sainthood by following his own code of conduct and not someone else's philosophy. He is the first to organize a group of volunteers, so that no one has to be forced to do it. When it comes to facing the plague, a journalist Reymond Rambert acts in an altruistic way too. Despite the opportunity to secretly leave the infected town and go to Paris, where his wife waits for him, he decides to stay and fight with the consequences of the epidemic.

Dr. Rieux also tackles a problem of the suffering of the innocent. His argumentation is more philosophical than theological in nature – he ignores for instance the idea of original sin or the will of God on which people do not have any influence. He believes the ultimate truth can be discovered with the help of logic. As for Joseph Grand, he comes out strengthened from the duel with the disease and motivated to take life in his hands. He decides to write a letter to his wife who had left him and whom he still loves.

Another interesting example constitutes Doctor Richard's behavior who does not want to admit that the disease is pestilent, but who states that it is only a specific kind of a fever. He does not take any steps to fight with it, since he does not want to spread panic. Because of the fact that he rather prefers to fool himself than to take responsibility for what is happening around him, he is finally condemned by people. Rieux is in turn convinced that the fight with the pestilence is necessary, regardless of one's motivation (in his case it is a call of duty). Such attitude, which from Rieux's perspective is devoid of a "recompense" which for the Christians would be the perspective of entering heaven's gates and for altruists a feeling of deep satisfaction, is raised by the author to the rank of heroism, because it seems that it demands more devotion and strong will than in other cases. Probably, it will also remind the readers of the situation described in Franz Kafka's *The Trial* in which the protagonist becomes lost in an incomprehensible, absurd reality. This reference comes to one's mind not without reason, since one of the characters in *The Plague* reads this particular book.

From the way that Camus' characters react to the pestilence, it may seem that the belief that the adversity is an effect of *force majeure* becomes the cause of problems, such as inner doubts or spiritual crisis rather than a source of relief. Moreover, those characters who do not believe in God, namely Rieux, Tarrou, Rambert become stronger and more self-confident while confronting the pestilence.

The situation is different in Beckett's *Endgame*, as in this drama the characters do not deal with any misfortune that could be considered by them as an effect of God's will. Similarly as in *Waiting for Godot*, God can be viewed as "the great absentee" who does not interfere in the once established order of things. Throughout the play God is mentioned by the characters only twice and the light in which he is presented is not very favourable. Telling the story about the man who went to a tailor for a new pair of trousers, Nagg concludes that the world created by God looks poor in comparison to the trousers, and it is apparently because it took much more time and effort for the tailor to finish them:

NAGG: . . . [*Customer's voice*] 'God damn you to hell, Sir, no, it's indecent, there are limits! In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world. . . . And you are

not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months!’ [*Tailor’s voice, scandalized.*] ‘But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look – [*disdainful gesture, disgustedly*] – at the world – [*pause*] – and look – [*loving gesture, proudly*] – at my TROUSERS!’ (1, 149)

On the other occasion, when Hamm looks for an inspiration to continue with his story, he forces Nagg and Clov to pray to God, but after a moment they come to the conclusion that God does not exist:

HAMM: . . . Let us pray to God.

CLOV: Again!

NAGG: My sugar-plum!

HAMM: God first! [*Pause.*] Are you right?

CLOV: [*Resigned.*] OFF we go.

HAMM: [*To Nagg.*] And you?

NAGG: [*Clasping his hands, closing his eyes, in a gabble.*] Our Father which art –

HAMM: Silence! In silence! Where are your manners? [*Pause.*] Off we go. [*Attitudes of prayer. Silence. Abandoning his attitude, discouraged.*] Well?

CLOV: [*Abandoning his attitude.*] What a hope! And you?

HAMM: Sweet damn all! [*To Nagg.*] And you?

NAGG: Wait! [*Pause. Abandoning his attitude.*] Nothing doing!

HAMM: The bastard! He doesn’t exist! (1, 119)

The three characters apparently hold a grudge against God that the world he created leaves much to be desired. Moreover, when they turn to him, because they want him to change the surrounding reality and the order of things for the better, God refuses to do so and nothing changes. The characters therefore feel abandoned and disillusioned and decide to turn away from God. This kind of reaction proves their spiritual immaturity, as it shows the readers the characters’ faith in God is truly perfunctory. They personalize God, regarding him as somebody who should come, when they call him and fulfil their wishes.

Quite early in the course of the drama Clov notices that “There is no more nature” (1, 97) too. From time to time, standing on a ladder, he describes to Hamm the outside world:

CLOV: Let’s see. [*He looks, moving the telescope.*] Zero . . . [*he looks*] . . . zero . . . [*he looks*] . . . and zero. (. . .)

HAMM: . . . All is what?

CLOV . . . Corpsed. [*Pause.*] Well? Content? (1, 106)

The presentation of the outside world as a barren empty space, nothingness, tells us that nature is not re-creating itself anymore. The normal order of things is disrupted, causing an interruption in the wheel of cyclic existence. This empty space also represents the nihilistic attitude of the characters for whom their lives are bereft of sense and who, in the end, do not believe in the afterlife.

Lack of perspective makes the characters feel dejected and constantly annoyed. Hamm and Clov are hostile to each other and everything that moves. The only exception

is the relation between Nagg and Nell who are still compassionate to each other, despite the fact that they experience a lack of respect from their son and are being kept in the garbage cans. In general, the lives that the characters lead are monotonous, filled with pessimism and anguish. Although they despise each other, they stay in one room (Clov does not leave the place, as he thinks outside there is nothing to look for – literally and metaphorically speaking). The characters also manipulate one another which is the source of mutual attachment which in turn makes leaving practically impossible. Clov constantly threatens Hamm that he will abandon him, but he is too mentally weak and undecided to do so. It is only at the very end of the play that he finally decides to take action. Ready to leave, he stands in front of Hamm who either talks to himself or tries to call him or his father, who is probably already dead. However, we do not know if Clov finally leaves the place or if it is only a part of a regular scenario which is repeated by them every single day:

HAMM: . . . [*Enter CLOV, dressed for the road. Panama hat, tweed coat, raincoat over his arm, umbrella, bag. He halts by the door and stands there, impassive and motionless, his eyes fixed on HAMM, till the end. HAMM gives up.*] . . . Clov! [*Long pause.*] No? Good. [*He takes out the handkerchief.*] Since that's the way we're playing it . . . let's play it that way. (1, 133)

In summary, the perspectives presented by Camus and Beckett are again distinct. In Camus' novel the readers come across the whole spectrum of characters who react in various ways to the outbreak of an epidemic. The disease constitutes a metaphor of an evil which imperceptibly falls on men. In the face of an adversity some characters experience inner turmoil and a crisis of faith. However, Tarrou, who can be viewed as the author's *alter ego*, does not experience any doubts and therefore reacts in a more constructive way to what happens. Instead of wasting time deliberating on the cause of the misfortune, the plague, he focuses on helping the victims of the epidemic. His system of values turns out to be most coherent, as it rests on an ability to follow one's heart, rather than a predetermined code of conduct.

As for Beckett's characters, all of them present the same attitude towards the surrounding reality. They are guided by the same philosophy or, to be more precise, the lack of it. Unable to undertake the effort to change anything in their lives, Nell, Nagg and Clov are submissive to Hamm who is like a hammer which, over and over, hits the heads of the three nails (in his article entitled "Exorcising Beckett", Lawrence Shainberg (1987) points out that Beckett stated that the names of "Nagg and Clov come from 'noggle' and 'clou', the German and French for nail, Nell['s] from the English 'nail' and Hamm['s] from the English 'hammer'"). The latter plays his absurd game and is interested only in finding the material to his story. Clov is the only character who still has a potential to undertake some change, as his body and mind are still working properly. Nevertheless, we do not find out if he uses his potential or wastes it.

2.4. *Catastrophe vs. Caligula*

The last pair of works that will be compared is Camus' *Caligula* (1944) and Beckett's *Catastrophe* (1982). The former is a part of what Camus called the "Cycle of the Absurd", together with the novel *The Stranger* (1942) and the essay *The Myth of*

Sisyphus (1942) (McCarthy n. d., 79). The plot of the drama revolves around the historical figure of Caligula, a Roman Emperor who is famous for his cruelty. He wishes to become equal to the gods and does not want to submit to them. In the meantime though he becomes a victim of an uprising, as his subjects also want to oppose the uncompromising power. Conscious of the conspiracy, Caligula does not hope to be saved by the divine aid: “CÆSONIA : Non, ils ne te tueront pas. Ou alors quelque chose, venu du ciel, les consumerait avant qu’ils t’aient touché. / CALIGULA : Du ciel ! Il n’y a pas de ciel, pauvre femme” (4.13, 385) [CÆSONIA: No, they will not kill you. Or something from the heaven will consume them before they touch you. / CALIGULA: From the heaven! There is no heaven, poor woman! – E. B.]. Similarly to those who rebel against him, Caligula expresses his hatred towards the gods, saying that the only way to be equal to them is to be as cruel as they are (Camus 2006, 362). In fact he wants to be even worse: “CALIGULA : Je vis, je tue, j’exerce le pouvoir délirant du destructeur, auprès de quoi celui du créateur paraît une singerie” (4.13, 387) [“I live, I kill, I exercise power of destroyer in comparison to which that of a Creator seems to be a mimicry” – E. B.]. As we notice, Caligula contradicts himself: on the one hand he confirms the existence of the gods, but later he denies it. This indicates that he is confused and that he is only seemingly in control of what happens around him. Unlike other Camus’ characters, Caligula is not internally strengthened by the misfortune he must face. However, it does not make him disillusioned and resigned either, instead, he becomes blinded by hatred which shades his eyes and obscures his other feelings.

The idea of the manipulation of an individual, which is the main concern of this paper, is also evident in Beckett’s late dramacule, *Catastrophe*. The protagonist of this play is subject to experiments by the director and his assistant, the task of the latter is to change the positions of the protagonist’s body according to the desires of the former. One of the director’s ideas is to lose the character’s fists and bend his head, since otherwise his posture expresses the rebellious attitude. In the course of the play one realizes that the protagonist is being dominated, subjected, manipulated and stripped of his dignity. He is a puppet in the hands of the director who can be viewed here also as the Divine Creator. His assistant, dressed in white, is like an angel who is fully submissive to his master. Finally, the lighting designer, Luc who does not appear on stage can be easily compared to Lucifer, the fallen angel of light. He also represents the higher, supernatural force that have an impact on each human being. What is surprising is that he cooperates with God against man.

Despite being influenced and controlled by these forces the protagonist makes a decision to perform one movement once the other two characters leave the place of action, namely he raises his head. In the course of the drama this one, small movement is immensely important as it shows how Beckett’s way of presenting his characters finally changed (with time, Beckett in his works tended towards minimalism, so it is not surprising that the transition in his thinking is expressed in this play in one tiny movement of a single character). Unlike in *Waiting for Godot*, *Act without words I* and *Endgame*, in *Catastrophe* the protagonist is no longer overwhelmed by the resignation and despair caused by the awareness that he is controlled by the external, superior forces. For the first time he starts to rely on his inner strength which allows him to some extent to remain untouched by those external influences. By raising his head it is as if he says: “I

can be devoid of everything, but not my dignity”.³ Moreover, apart from the visible change in behavior of the protagonist, the readers notice that Beckett placed his drama in a specific time and space, the thing he clearly avoided doing in his earlier works. The fact that the place of action is the theatre hall also proves that the dramatist, among other things, was trying to gain distance to his profession. Furthermore, after experimenting with the fragmentation of his characters (as in *Not I*) or removing actors from the stage (as in *Breath*), Beckett decided to put them back on the stage and give them back their identities. All of these testify that Beckett most probably underwent a significant change in the way he perceived the surrounding world and the place of a man in this world who is no longer helpless to what happens to him.

4. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, on the basis of the analysis of Camus’ and Beckett’s literary works the readers were able to see in what way both authors approached the topic of the presence of the higher, superior forces in the life of a man and their effect on his behavior and attitude towards himself as well as the surrounding world. The reader could also find out how spiritual and artistic thought of both authors were reflected in those texts, how they developed over time and in what way they were aligned with each other or differed from one another.

As for Camus, the manner in which he depicted his characters, which is most evident in *The Plague* where each of the numerous characters represents different worldview, shows that he approached the problem of the presence of God/gods and of predestination from different angles. In his novels, employing those characters, he also showed what may be the consequences of keeping certain worldviews and following certain principles that are based on the pre-established system of values or following the system of values that is developed by an individual on his/her own in the course of life. From such novels as *Caligula* the readers also find out that Camus was constantly broadening his (and simultaneously also the readers’) perspective by dealing with various topics, as that of possession of power over others and its destructive influence on an individual.

On the other hand, the attitude of Beckett’s characters towards the superior forces, the working of which can be also interpreted as a sign of the presence of God (*Act Without Words*) or the absence of whom is interpreted by the characters as an ignorance of God towards their requests (*Endgame*, *Waiting for Godot*), is negative, they perceive those forces as evil and vicious. Beckett’s characters are (or with time they become) passive and disillusioned, unable to take their fate into their own hands, they wait for somebody else to take action for them and the responsibility for performing this action. As this is true for all of the protagonists enumerated in this paper, it may be assumed that Beckett’s attitude towards the matter of Christian faith and of faith in the working of the superior forces in general was well established and changed little over time. However, the

³ It is worth mentioning that the play was originally dedicated to Vaclav Havel, a Czech writer, philosopher, anti-communist activist and the last democratically elected president of Czechoslovakia (1989-1992) and the first president of Czech Republic (1993-2003). In his works he made use of an absurdist style to rebel against communism and to criticize it.

case is different when the readers come across *Catastrophe*. Behavior of the protagonist of this drama stands out from that of Beckett's other characters. For the first time the character stoically accepts changes that are imposed on him from the outside, neither staying passive, nor being overwhelmed by the resignation caused by the sense of the impossibility of having full control over his life. Instead, he let himself be guided by his inner voice, thanks to which he starts to rely on his inner strength and manages to oppose those external influences.

Though discussing everything that lead to the creation of works of the two authors which has an immense importance (the worldviews which they held, the way they approach the topic of faith in the superior forces in general and in omnipotent God in particular), one should also pay attention to the message included in those works that Beckett and Camus wanted to pass to the readers. Through creating certain characters, like the protagonist from Beckett's *Catastrophe* or Jean Tarrou from Camus' *The Plague* who owing to the process of introspection become mentally stronger and more self-confident in relying on themselves and their judgement dictated by the internally established system of values Beckett and Camus show in what way such attitude may lead to diminution of mental suffering felt by anyone who experiences it as an effect of external forces working of which he/she has no influence (even regardless from the way we define those forces – as the act of God, gods or simply bad fortune).

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