

WAITING FOR GODOT AND SUFISM: THE SEARCH, THE WAIT ... AND THE FAILURE

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Original Article

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Abstract

*Samuel Beckett's use of religion can be conceived as the dominant trend in Beckett Scholarship as the upshot of this tendency is witnessing an ever-increasing scholarship evolving around Beckett and religion. However, it has been noted that very little has been discussed about Beckett's experience or familiarity with Islam and the Islamic world. But what is even more important, we find no word or a clue that may direct us to create any link between Beckett and Sufism. Thus, this gap allows us to introduce Sufism as a new lens for reading Beckett. This article, therefore, selects *Waiting for Godot* as a matrix of examination to be analyzed through the prism of Sufism. The rationale behind the selection of *Waiting for Godot* is simple, this is the only text of Beckett, which is taught at various universities in Pakistan. Secondly, Baldwin's close reading of Beckett's works focusing mainly on the pervasiveness of Christian allegorical instances offers another attraction to contribute to Beckett scholarship through an innovative lens that is Sufism. This paper explores how *Vladimir* and *Estragon* can be framed as Sufis; nonetheless, it is observed that they follow only those rules of Sufism that they feel comfortable with or that agree with their own desires. Thus, they exhibit certain qualities that can be examined through the conventions of Sufism and many of them hardly fall into the sphere of mysticism. As a result, it is very challenging to domesticate them in Sufi terminology. However, their selection of activities lead us to claim they are but 'failed' Sufis and it is challenging to domesticate Beckett as a Sufi writer. Just as nothing is ever certain in Beckett's world, however, the mixture of match and mismatch between Beckett and the Sufi tradition allows for interpretive pathways as well as dead ends, or occasionally both at the same time.*

Keywords: *Beckett and religion, Sufism, sphere of mysticism, Christian allegorical instances, interpretive pathways*

INTRODUCTION

The works of Samuel Beckett have long been a subject of critical analysis, with scholars examining various themes and aspects of his writing. One such area of exploration is the use of religion, particularly Christian mysticism, in his works. However, there is a noticeable research gap when it comes to exploring Sufism (Islamic mysticism) in relation to Beckett's writing. While scholars have also acknowledged the impact of Buddhism and Taoism on Beckett's works, there is a lack of research that explores the possible influence of Beckett's travels to Tunisia and Morocco or the Islamic religion on his works. To fill this gap, this essay examines Beckett's seminal work, *Waiting for Godot*, through the lens of Sufism, and explores the potential connections between Sufism and his other works.

The extensive scholarship on Beckett's use of religion, or the lack thereof, has resulted in a significant body of Beckett scholarship. For instance, Baldwin's *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence* (1981), Wolosky's *Language Mysticism: The Negative Way of Language in Eliot, Beckett, and Celan* (1995), Bryden's *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God* (1998), Ackerley's 'Samuel Beckett and the Bible: A Guide' (1999), *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui's* special issue on Beckett and Religion (2000), Athanasopoulou-Kypriou's 'Samuel Beckett Beyond the Problem of God' (2000) and 'Samuel Beckett's Use of the Bible and the Responsibility of the Reader' (2006), Gami's 'Beckett's Conception of God and Religion' (2009) and Bailey's *Samuel Beckett and The Bible* (2015) exemplify this trend. However, the tendency of reading Beckett's religious plethora has also led to controversial debates among Beckett scholars about his dealings with religious beliefs and the meaning behind his works. While some scholars, such as David Hesla's *The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of Art of Samuel Beckett* and Colin Duckworth's *Angels of Darkness: Dramatic Effect in Beckett and Ionesco*, argue that Beckettian oeuvre evades religious meaning, others, such as Pilling's *Samuel Beckett* and Webb's *The Dark Dove: The Sacred and Secular in Modern Literature* reject these claims. As a result, the ever-increasing scholarship on Beckett and religion continues to evolve.

The mystical element, particularly the aspect of *via negativa*, offers itself an important lens through which to read Beckettian oeuvre. *Via negativa*, also known as apophatic theology, is a way of knowing God through His utter negation. The theological term, apophatic, means something that is negative, while its positive parallel positive term is cataphatic. Gallop (2003) proposes that the word apophatic 'is an adjective applied to knowledge of God obtained by way of negation, according to which God is known by negating concepts that might be applied to him' (Gallop, 2003, 137). This path, in other words, suggests that God is beyond human imagination and language, and He can hardly be captured by either. Corrigan and Harrington, with reference to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, argue that it is a process of 'affirming our affirmations, then negating them, and then negating the negations to ensure that we do not make an idol out of God about whom we know nothing' (Kevin and Harrington, 2019; Forbess, 2015, 119). In this regard, Thomas Aquinas aptly explains the philosophy of *via negativa*, he says 'we must negate all limitations from our concepts before we apply them to God. We must apply to God only the perfection signified (goodness, truth, etc.), but not the finite mode of signification' (Geisler, 2003, 40). The essence of the *Via negativa* is negation or silence is the only way of understanding God as definition comes by memory or imagination, both of which are incapable of demonstrating the Deity. Baldwin's *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence* (1981) has shaped and sharpened the evolution of Christian mysticism within Beckett scholarship by identifying the instances of mystical rudiments in the Beckettian oeuvre. Baldwin reinforces the notion of E. M. Cioran, who suggests that 'the less you connect your thoughts, abandoning them to contradictions, the more you risk coming near the truth' as 'God benefits from the peripheries of logic' (Cioran, 1995, 38) and demonstrates how Beckett can be seen as the one who mocks the 'metaphysics', 'not in a rational chop-logic way, but in a way intuitive, metaphorical, and mythic' (Baldwin, 1981, p. 6). However, Baldwin contends that Beckett's search is not 'a search for self' but is a 'negative way' of mysticism, 'whose object is to break the bonds of time and place and find what Eliot calls the still center of the turning world' (Baldwin, 1981, p. 6). In her detailed discussions, she hypothesizes that Beckett's textual implications transport the mystic aspect of the *via negativa*. Thus, Baldwin's thorough study of Beckett succeeded in introducing the *via negativa* as an innovative mystical lens of reading Beckett while other scholars were debating about Beckett and his controversial way of dealing with religious ideas.

Bryden's *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God* also offers an insightful overview and extends the horizons of the mystical aspect of Beckett by linking Beckett's writing with the writers like Pseudo-Dionysius and Meister Eckhart. Focusing on the keywords including solitude, stillness, and silence, Bryden postulates that Beckett can hardly be excluded from spiritual theology. Advancing Bryden's discussion on perceiving a valuable potential in approaching the religious bent of Beckett, Bunning's 'The "Via Negativa" and its First Stirrings in *Eleutheria*' contributes to literary studies through a close reading of *Eleutheria*, and claims that the monologues of Victor Krap frame 'an "emphasis on freedom", on "being the least possible" and on "doing nothing" in order "to be nothing" that convey the first stirrings in Beckett's drama (Buning, 2000, 51).

Likewise, Bryden (2010) identified that mystical *via negativa* ostensibly exists in Beckett's *Not I* as well. She perceives that the ellipses in the phrase, 'God is love' undermine the hope in God, and the phrase 'can't go on' suggests that still going on is a possibility, but the panting after uttering the phrase 'God is love ... she'll be purged'(Beckett, 1984, 221) deems the hope in God is futile. In *Company*, we observe how futile hope in God is. Here, Beckett advances the conventional positive formula, 'God is equal to Love'. As the question is asked, 'Beyond experience. God is love. Yes or no?'. This question, however, fails to have any positivity instead we find an eventually conclusive answer, 'No' (Beckett, 1989, 42).

The discussion among several Beckett scholars reveals that Beckett failed in understanding the supernatural or the subject of mysticism (Harries, 2018 and Jebb, 2011), categorizing him similar to the mysterious figure, Mr Beckett, who is described as 'a dud mystic' and 'John of the Crossroads' (Beckett, 1993, 186) in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. For instance, Jebb identifies that Beckett was familiar with spiritual writers or mystics such as Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich' (Jebb, 2011, 34), but 'Beckett felt that he had failed at mysticism'; however she conceives that 'Beckett's own failure was one of personal failure; rather than a John of the Cross, he is a John of the crossroads, an ascetic about town, an anchorite on leave' (Jebb, 2011, 96). According to her, this failure might have contributed to leading 'Beckett's apophatic mood' toward 'disunity, diminishment and nihilism' (Jebb, 2011, 119). In the same way, Harries compares Beckett with St. John of the Cross and sees his work at the point where, 'contemplative has to go into unknowing, ignorance, failure and darkness, and simply wait in silence' and this observation leads Harries to suggest that Beckett either failed to understand mysticism or considered mysticism was possible without God and 'this was the state', he announces 'that Beckett was in all his life (Harries, 2018, 96). Although the scholars like Jebb and Harries have attempted to portray Beckett as a 'failed mystic', Beckett scholars still read his work through the mystic lens, and Beckett scholarship has proliferated through the aspect of *via negativa*. The above discussion reveals that scholars of Beckett tend to interpret his works through the prism of Christian mysticism, as evidenced by the vitality of this line of inquiry. The vitality of this scholarship indicates that there is little literature on reading Beckett through Islamic Sufism (Sufism) or other source material that might connect them. We can only trace a few instances with the potential to link Beckett with the Islamic world or the Islamic tradition of knowledge as the phrase 'the darkest passages of [...] Hatiz, Saadi' in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (Beckett, 1993, 61). Hatiz, the name, probably refers to Hafiz, a famous Sufi poet and Saadi, a Persian poet. In his *A Companion to Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, John Pilling corrected the name with a note that Beckett put Muslim poets into the thematic list (Pilling, 2003, 116). Also, the translated poetic version of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* is traceable in *Happy Days* when Winnie considers Willie's company as bliss in the wilderness; she says, 'just to know you are there

within hearing and conceivably on the semi-alert is ... er ... paradise enow' (Beckett, 2006, 160). Winnie's passionate phrase 'paradise enow' (Khayyam, 2009, 21) is an allusion to Edward Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam, a famous Muslim Sufi poet. Omer Khayyam (1048-1131) was a mathematician, poet, astronomer, and physician from Nishapur (Iran).¹⁰

Although these references reveal an indirect involvement of Beckett with Muslim writers or the Islamic world, his holidaying in Tunisia and Morocco from the 1960s marked a significant turning point in his engagement with local cultures. Despite the casual nature of his interactions, the impact of his stay in those countries could be traced in various ways, such as his use of the conventions of the Islamic calendar (the Hijri calendar), 4 Moharram 1392, in a letter written to Barbara Bray (Beckett, 2016, 283). And his impressions of local life find their way into a French poem '*noire soeur*', part of the *mirlitonnades*. In 1972, he did some birdwatching in Morocco where he mistook storks for vultures and the storks would later find their way into the 1974 poem 'dread nay.' His fascination with a Djellaba-clad figure, 'an Arab woman waiting there for her child who attended a nearby school, in Tunisia, also inspired his a patient listener in *Not I* (Knowlson, 1996, 589).

There is little indication of Beckett's experience or familiarity with the Islamic world beyond the aforementioned references, and there is no clue that may suggest any link between Beckett and Sufism. This gap presents an opportunity to introduce Sufism as a new lens for reading Beckett. Despite his focus on Western literary traditions, there is a growing body of scholarship that suggests that his work may have resonances with non-Western spiritual traditions, such as Sufism. Sufism, an Islamic mystic tradition, shares similarities, such as a focus on spiritual enlightenment, an emphasis on inner experience, and a rejection of materialism, with other Christian mysticism. Baldwin's projection of Christian allegorical instances in Beckett's works provides an opportunity to contribute to Beckett scholarship through an innovative lens, as she contends that Beckett's "*Watt*, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* are parables of individual soul's mystic' whereas '*Waiting for Godot* is the public or cultic equivalent of the same quest' (Baldwin, 1981, 107). Moreover, given the growing interest in cross-cultural dialogue and the role of non-Western traditions in shaping global literature, it appears essential to explore the ways in which Beckett's work may have been influenced by non-Western spiritual traditions. By examining Beckett's work through the lens of Sufism, this article seeks to contribute to this emerging field of scholarship and offers a new perspective on Beckett's writing. Specifically, this analysis will focus on *Waiting for Godot*, which is widely taught in Pakistani universities and has been subject to extensive critical analysis. By framing the characters of Vladimir and Estragon as Sufis, this analysis will offer a new interpretation of the play and deepen our understanding of the ways in which Beckett's work may engage with spiritual themes in global contexts.

1. Die Before You Die: Sufism

Chittick posits that our thoughts about religious and non-religious concepts can differ, but 'we should agree that religion in any meaningful sense of the word has, by definition, something 'mystical' about it' (Chittick, 2019, 30). This mystical aspect centres around the quest for perceiving God and achieving a profound connection with the Divine or communion with the Ultimate Truth. It plays an important role in shaping religious practices and rituals of a mystic. Moreover, cultural values, geographic settings and socio-political situations can also affect or alter

¹⁰ His life is an enigma. His biographers have taken contradictory routes that is why he, at the same time, considered to be a Sufi mystic, orthodox Muslim, and wine-drinker.

mystical practices. Accordingly, the differences in the expression of mystical traditions within the same religion may be evident in different areas. For example, the mystic traditions inhabit differences in practices in the Middle East and other Islamic world. However, the essentials remain the same. Likewise, cultural and geographical, and occasionally political differences also influence mystic traditions and religious outlooks. Observing all this phenomenon, Reynold A. Nicholson argues that though each form of mysticism 'is marked by peculiar characteristics resulting from the circumstances in which it rose and flourished', yet 'all the great types of mysticism have something in common' (Nicholson, 1914, 2-3). Essentially, it may be contended that mysticism, as a spiritual tradition, regardless of its location, habitually shares similarities in its customs and conventions.

Gerson identifies that mysticism or mystical theology is an 'experiential knowledge of God attained through the union of spiritual affection with Him' (Fesko, 2012, 113). This understanding of mysticism suggests that prayer and contemplation can lead to knowledge of God and union with Him. Paige (2010) conceives that mysticism is 'an experience of mystical unions or direct communion with ultimate reality reported by mystics, and the belief that 'direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experiences' (P, 15). The argument emphasizes that knowledge of God can also be attained through subjective experiences such as intuition, insight, or illumination. This indicates a departure from the conventional understanding of rationality and perception, highlighting the distinctiveness of mystical experiences.

Chittick (2019) takes a different approach and considers mysticism as a fact that 'many religious people have been seriously and intimately engaged with ultimate reality, or, at the very least, that they have been engaged with a quest for communion with that reality' (p, 30). In other words, mysticism is a religious practice for attaining an insight into God, knowing hidden truths about the Deity and having communion with God. This doctrine is certainly a characteristic of Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, which is a form of Islamic spirituality, that originated in the very early days of Islam. However, the Sufis and Sufi orders (سلسلے صوفی) differ in their approach to understanding God and the world.

Sufism, known as *tasawwuf* (التَّصَوُّف) in the Muslim world, is a mystical form of Islam that finds its source of inspiration from the Holy Quran and the example of the Prophet of Islam. Despite its mystical nature, Sufism 'in no way rejects either the law or the rites of Islam' (Geoffroy, 2010, xvii). Instead, it focuses on contemplation and divine intimacy with God as a way of transcending sectarian differences and worshipping God. Critics like Geoffery highlight that 'Sufism is at the heart of Islamic culture' (xvii), while Lings (2006) identifies 'Sufism is nothing other than Islamic mysticism' (p, 15). Moreover, Sufism is not limited to male Muslim followers as female Sufis like Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya earned fame in this tradition (Margaret Smith, 1984, 20-38). It is pertinent to mention that Sufism is neither a sect within Islam, such as Sunni and Shia nor a heretical tradition like Ahmadiyya. Chittick maintains that Sufis were also 'ordinary Muslims,' but they happened 'to be more serious about the practice of their religion than others' (Chittick, 2019, 32).

As a term, *Sufism* is very complex to define as this term was unknown in the early years of Islam. By the end of the 8th century, this term had come into use, but no one can define precisely why Sufis are called Sufis. There is no consolidated definition of Sufism; rather, we find a blend of various descriptions that help us in forming a general understanding of Sufism. The word *Sufi*, originally from Arabic, means 'the one who wears wool', this meaning gives an impression that Sufism is associated with early Muslim followers who used to wear cheaper clothes. A few critics also ascribe this term to the companions of the prophet of Islam (Peace Be Upon Him), who devoted their lives to religious practices and spent all their lives in a place attached to Al-Masjid Nabwi named Al-Suffah.

Despite the lack of a precise definition, scholars have provided various descriptions to form a general understanding of Sufism. Chittick, for example, notes that other words like 'poverty' (*faqr*) and 'gnosis' (*ma'rifa*) have also been used to describe the same teachings and practices as Sufism, but they failed to achieve the same popularity (Chittick, 2019, 32). Green (2012) sees Sufism as a 'tradition of powerful knowledge, practices and persons' while he thinks that Sufis are the 'marginal party of God seekers' (p, 3). On the other hand, Chittick (2019) defines Sufism as 'the interiorization and intensification of Islamic faith and practice' (p, 22), and that its spirit lies in 'the deepest awareness of self and of direct communion with ultimate reality, which is God' (Chittick, 2019, 32). Thus, it can be argued that Sufism has not only been seen as a phenomenon related to a search for God, but it also deals with people and works for their improvement.

For many years, critics felt at ease considering *tassawuf* or Sufism as an equivalent or similar term to that of Mysticism (Chittick, 2019, 32), and some scholars even believed that it had been influenced by other religious traditions, such as Christianity (Nicholson, 1914, 7). However, more recent research has shown that Sufism is much more than a mystic construct. It encompasses not only spiritual and ascetic religious practices but also the political and social aspects of life, with a worldview based on personal, ethical and moral values that can affect the wider community. According to Nasr (2000), being a Sufi involves adopting a satisfactory, humble, truthful, and charitable nature, which has helped to spread these virtues and work towards the betterment of society (p, 133-37). Therefore, Sufis have a systematic approach to improving the lives of ordinary people, both in religious and worldly matters.

During the early days of Islam, Sufism was primarily an individual practice focused on piety and devotion. By the 11th century, however, this individual practice began to evolve into social practices (Danner, 2000, 263), encompassing devotional, doctrinal and institutional systems (Knysh, 2017, 1), which helped in popularising spiritual traditions among the followers. Moreover, in later phases, Sufis started building. As a result, Sufi institutions and dwellings such as *Zawiyas* and *Khanaqahs* (Trimingham, 1998, 9) began to emerge, institutionalizing the practice of Sufism. The institutionalization of Sufism provided a space for people to express their views about the state (Levtzion, 2002, 110-12) and contributed to the formation of systematic orders, known as *Tariqas* and *Silsials* (Sufi orders) that include *Suhrawardiyya*, *Rifa'iyya*, and *Qadiriyya* (Trimingham, 1998, p. 31-66).

As Sufi *Silsials* developed into powerful systems, they started participating in the public sphere to improve the status of common people by launching programs of prosperity either on their own or

with the help of the governments (Nasr, 2000, 140)¹¹. Thus, what started as a practice for finding ways of communion with God evolved into a tradition with social, political, and economic implications.

The preceding sections have established that Sufism is commonly perceived as a mystical offshoot of Islam. However, Sufism has evolved over time and has taken on characteristics that set it apart as a distinct discipline. While the previous section examined how Beckett's works can be interpreted using a Christian mystical lens, this section argues that a Sufi perspective is equally crucial and that the use of Sufism as a critical framework has potential.

2. *Waiting for Godot* and the Sufi Way

Before delving into the analysis of *Waiting for Godot* through the lens of Sufism, it is vital to acknowledge the limitations of this study. It does not encompass all aspects of Sufism; rather, it takes up one aspect, namely the Sufis' journey to God and through this lens we examine the protagonists of *Waiting for Godot*. To facilitate this study, three fundamental stages of the Sufi journey are identified to scrutinize the behaviours and traits of Vladimir and Estragon to determine whether they can be considered Sufis or not. This approach will enable a more comprehensive understanding of the characters and their actions in the play.

The Sufi's journey to God is primarily an internal one that progresses from the normative principle of external practices to inward practices. The love and union with God is the ultimate goal of the Sufi's journey, stated by Nicholson (19140), who notes that the Sufi traditions involve different organs of the body for 'spiritual communication: the heart (*qalb*), which knows god; the spirit (*rūh*), which loves Him; and the inmost ground of the soul (*sirr*), which contemplates Him' (p, 68). Once all these organs get on the right track, Sufis start their journey while following certain rules. These include *repentance*, the state of the soul when it awakens and becomes aware of committed or uncommitted sins, and it seeks unbounded compassion for God. This entails not only forgetting oneself but also considering oneself the meanest creature in need of purgation. The second, rule is *abstinence* from worldly luxuries and pleasure, particularly acts of lust and greed. In other words, and submitting one's will to the will of God. The third rule is *renunciation*, which involves freeing one's heart and soul from physical lust. *Poverty* is the fourth rule, which entails a state of being without desire for anything but God. The fifth rule is *patience*, it means to keep a mental equilibrium in adversity in distress and in trials from God. It may be of three types: 1. Patience in God; 2. Patience for God; 3. Patience in, for, with God. Sixth is *trust* in God; some practised it to the extreme to the extent of neither working nor begging and still expecting their daily necessities to be fulfilled by God. Seventh is *satisfaction*: in this stage, the Sufi does everything to please God (Jones, 2009, 151-52). Poverty is the fourth rule, which entails. The fifth rule is patience, which involves maintaining mental equilibrium in adversity, distress, and trials from God. It can be of three types: patience in God, patience for God, and patience in, for, and with God. The sixth rule is trust in God, which is taken to the extreme by some Sufis who neither work nor beg but still expect their daily necessities to be fulfilled by God. The seventh rule is satisfaction, in which the Sufi does everything to please God (Jones, 2009, 151-52).

¹¹ In the postcolonial world, the tradition of Sufism has seen a gradual decline; however, it has not ceased to exist and continues to play its vital part in two ways. In the Muslim world, it is still a practical spiritual matter, while in the West, scholars are delineating and expanding Sufism in the fields of knowledge. The latter can be useful in reading western texts from the perspective of Sufism.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir announces that 'We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment' (Beckett, 2012, 74). Through this line, Vladimir concedes that they would have been saints but they have some limitations. However, he reassures himself that everything has not been lost as they were able to keep the promise. This line could be taken as the leading point for seeing them through the lens of Sufis by the choice they made for them. However, not only this part of the dialogue, but the whole play has instigated the literary critics to connect the play and its text with theology and mysticism. As early as 1958, G.S. Frazer postulated the idea that '[t]he fundamental imagery of *Waiting for Godot* is Christian' (Frazer, 1958, 326). His opinion paved the way for other critics to import their religious views into their reading of *Waiting for Godot* to strengthen the idea that Beckett is a religious writer by overlooking the literary ethos of the play. Accordingly, Francis W. Nichols explored the parallel themes existing in *Ecclesiastes* and *Waiting for Godot* (Nichols, 1984, 14-16). Samuel Terrien claimed that *Waiting for Godot* 'made a subtle plea for a faith that fully respects the transcendence of God' (Terrien, 1989, 140). Among all of them, nonetheless, Baldwin appears to be the major critic who focuses mainly on proving that '*Waiting for Godot* is the public or cultic equivalent of the same quest' (Baldwin, 1981, 107) while Vladimir as a spiritual leader, the soul of mysticism (p. 111) and Estragon a follower, the body. She believes that Pozzo and Lucky represent the secular world and they 'are already 'damned,' in that their lives are a sadomasochistic hell' while Vladimir and Estragon are the faithful representing 'the 'good' thief and are 'saved,' for they are waiting for Godot' as she believes this act of theirs demonstrate that 'they acknowledge his ethical claim' by admitting Godot's 'power to punish and save' (Baldwin, 1981, 122). Her dependence on religious imagery, however, fails to recognise sarcasm or an ironic tone and she even states that 'Godot appears to be God' (Baldwin, 1981, 107). Whether we support Baldwin's suppositions or not, it is significant to note that she has extensively contributed to renewing the reading of Beckett. This exploration can now be prolonged through the lens of Sufism.

From the very start, *Waiting for Godot* shows extensive potential in various ways to be sifted through Sufi traditions. For instance, Vladimir and Estragon's physical appearance and the way they are shown on stage depict nothing but a visible trait of Sufis that is 'poverty'. Estragon, dressed in rags, is always hungry and never hesitates in begging from even a stranger (Pozzo) and eats an unwanted chicken bone. Vladimir, presented as a tramp, shows decency but he always possesses trivial food items like turnips, carrots and reddish along with various rubbish items in his pockets. However, the trait of their poverty is not due to their *abstinence* i.e. they are not leaving worldly luxuries and pleasures; rather, they hope for a better future attached to the arrival of Godot. Although they do not express their wishes explicitly, they wait for the reversal of their fortune. Vladimir depicts this point while he gives a clue about the possibility of accepting or rejecting what Godot offers them.

VLADIMIR: I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it. (Beckett, 2006, 19)

Vladimir's idea projects that they are not sure what they would get but it shows their desire to change what they have and do not want to surrender their wishes. For Sufis, however, *poverty* is to desire nothing. The textual references in *Waiting for Godot* repeatedly allude to the poor condition of the characters and the trait of *poverty* does exist in the play if the word is taken in its literal sense, yet this feature does not fall in the region of *faqr* as it appears that the characters are

always in search of those objects that may give them pleasure. Thus, it can be argued that they do not consciously abstain from worldly pleasures; rather they are devoid of them, whereas they do not wish to stay in such a situation of scarcity as the Sufis do; however, it is imposed upon them.

Estragon and Vladimir's consistent wait, with a solid determination, for Godot displays their inclination of having the qualities of *patience*, *trust* and *satisfaction*. Interestingly, they struggle to keep their patience while waiting, and they are not willing to leave the place.

ESTRAGON: Inspiring prospects. [...] [He turns to VLADIMIR.] Let's go.

VLADIMIR: We can't.

ESTRAGON: Why not?

VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot. (Beckett, 2012, 15)

It suggests their willingness to keep the promise, in whichever way is possible, by staying at the so-called appointed place. Vladimir brags about this by saying that 'we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?' Although Estragon debunks the idea by answering 'Billions', their wait clearly defines their blind trust in whatever has been communicated to them and the awaited figure. This trust keeps them waiting as they are curious to know the outcome of their wait.

As far as the trait of *satisfaction* is concerned, it characterises a complex relationship with the protagonists. Aligned with the loathsome situation, the characters face consistent internal and external sufferings which render unceasing painful situations. While Vladimir suffers from a prostate issue as Beckett has been quoted saying this (Knowlson, 1996, 694: Ben-Zvi, 1992, x) that causes him to urinate quite frequently and pain in his genitals when he laughs, Estragon continues to face sore feet, consistent beating, and bad dreams. Vladimir faces natural pain, Estragon has to undergo external. In Sufism, the role of suffering is considered to be a redemptive element that works as a barometer of transformation to the spiritual world. According to this standard, all these symbolic features of the protagonist, in *Waiting for Godot*, fundamentally spin a web to link them with the Sufi path. Nonetheless, a few points lead us to think otherwise. The character neither has the qualities of a composed personality that can show the interweaving of the heart (*qalb*), the spirit (*rūh*), and the soul (*sirr*). Instead, they work on individual problems. While Estragon is busy with his physical pain and keeps raising questions related to it, Vladimir indulges in the rational exploration of his problems. As a result, the former's physical pain never ceases and the latter's mental pain keeps increasing. When Estragon is unable to take off his shoes and complains about it, Vladimir tries to prove that Estragon's pain is less than that of Vladimir.

VLADIMIR: It hurts?

ESTRAGON: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

VLADIMIR: [Angrily.] No one ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have.

ESTRAGON: It hurts?

VLADIMIR: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts! (Beckett, 2012, 12)

Sufis do find solace in each sort of situation. In particular, they never complain about their agony or painful circumstances. However, the protagonists in *Waiting for Godot* i.e. Vladimir and Estragon keep complaining about their pain and this point can be taken as a point of departure from Sufis. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Vladimir and Estragon never fail in caring for others. They raise questions about the way Pozzo treats Lucky, they feel sorry for him and also help Lucky to stand on his feet. Vladimir is so sensitive that (I think this is complicated in Act II when they hesitate to help the blind Pozzo...have a look at Elin Diamond's article on the play for commentary on the ethics of their helping/not helping

)he cannot even bear hearing the grief of others that is why he directs Estragon not to tell him his dreams, 'Let them remain private. You know I can't bear that'. Also, the idea of *repentance* appears to be a major theme in the play, but it has been manoeuvred within the Christian tradition. Rolling the ball of discussion, Vladimir attempts to keep Estragon engaged by speaking about various subjects. He offers him an aspect of solace by suggesting to follow the practice of the good thief who did repent and was saved.

VLADIMIR: Suppose we repented?

ESTRAGON: Repented what?

VLADIMIR: Oh . . . [*He reflects.*] We wouldn't have to go into the details. (Beckett, 2012, 13)

Estragon, forgetting his present condition, takes an interest in the discussion initiated by Vladimir. However, he is unable to link it with Vladimir's intended religious theme of repentance and salvation and wonders why they should repent? Now, Vladimir avoids going into the details. The avoidance from details provide Estragon with a space to associate repentance with 'original sin'. As a result, he asks the question, should we repent on 'our being born'? The moment when Vladimir is occupied with the idea of a good thief's repentance, Estragon reminds him of another occasion of repentance. For Vladimir, both the ideas are interlinked and are unjustified. This makes him laugh at the construction of religious belief. Nevertheless, his body does not allow him to laugh freely, 'One daren't even laugh anymore'. To this, Estragon responds, 'Dreadful privation' (Beckett, 2012, 13). This privation further helps them in establishing the opinion that man is physically and mentally bound to an invisible force; one needs to repent for what one has never done. As they raise the questions about the matter of repentance, it seems that they would never be involved in repenting for what they are and what they have done. Thus, their evasion from repentance may lead them to be seen not as the follower of the Sufi path, but as the ones who feel comfortable in the rules they have developed for themselves.

If we judge them by the seven characteristics of a Sufi, we can see Vladimir and Estragon have very few of these attributes. In particular, they show a lack of capability for possessing the four qualities of *repentance*, *abstinence*, *renunciation* and *satisfaction*. However, we find traits of *poverty* and *trust* to some extent. They are not aware of their circumstances, and that is why it is not acceptable for them to adopt the quality of *repentance*. As far as *renunciation* is concerned, they do not possess anything that they want to give up; however they have plenty of time and they are investing this in their wait for Godot.

Although Vladimir and Estragon do not completely qualify the early internal stages of the Sufis, they show the signs of treading on the Sufi path. Accordingly, we analyse them as per the given

stages of a Sufi's practical path. For walking on the practical path, three stages are very important. They include acknowledgement of insignificance, the search for a guide and a quest for communion with God. The first and foremost thing is to know one's insignificance. The idea of insignificance and life after death is very important in Islam. The Holy Quran announces, 'Naught is the life of the world save a pastime and a sport. Better far is the abode of the Hereafter for those who keep their duty (to Allah). Have ye then no sense?' (The Holy Quran, 6: 32). A Sufi believes in this idea and strives to achieve a permanent abode in the world to come. For believers, this word is insignificant. Vladimir and Estragon are tramps, bearing no traces of caste and race. They possess nothing in which to take pride. However, they do not think about the life hereafter.

The second important ritual in Sufism is to find a guide. In addition to observation of religious duties, the concept of seeking guidance for a spiritual journey contains much value. The spiritual guide is known as Pir, Shaykh, or Murshid (*director*), the person who examines and scrutinizes a *Salik's* (traveller's) willingness by making him pass through various trials and tribulations. If a spiritual guide is happy, then he allows the *Salik* to navigate the main stages of the sacred journey. Vladimir and Estragon can be examined in two ways. Firstly, they explore themselves to guide each other. This is the reason why they ask repeated questions; it shows that they are directionless. Secondly, they try to find some external force that can help them in finding a direction or may guide them on the right path. Thus, their wait can be interpreted as something relevant to the wait for a person who will come and suggest something that will bring change to their present condition.

The last stage is the communion with reality. E. M. Cioran says 'My lord, without you I'm mad, and with you, I shall go mad!' (Cioran, 1995, 8). This madness of being a part with the Ultimate, depicts a Sufi stage of ecstasy of communion with God. Spiritual realization paves the way for the communion with God, soul works as an agency, but it is the combination of all the organs of body, heart (*qalb*), the spirit (*rūh*), and the soul (*sirr*), that must enmesh in love. A *Salik* needs to pass various 'stages' (*maqamat*) along a 'path' (*tariqat*) to the goal of union with 'reality' (*fana fi l-Haqq*) (Nicholson, 1914, 21). That is the process by which the soul is gradually isolated from all that is foreign to itself, from all which is not internal, in other words, from all that does not belong to God. This stage marks the attainment of the goal, reaching its climax in *Fana*, which is 'the passing-away of the Sufi from his phenomenal existence and involves *baqa*, the continuance of his real existence. He who dies to self, lives in God, and *Fana*, the consummation of his death, marks the attainment of *Baqa*, or union with the divine life. In *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon keeps asking, 'We're not tied?', 'I'm asking you if we're tied' and confirming himself that 'We're not tied!' to Godot. But Vladimir enjoys the question and answers 'NO'.

Vladimir: To Godot? Tied to Godot? What an idea! No question of it.

Ironically, the situation of the characters demonstrates that they are invisibly tied to the 'action' of waiting for Godot. Their impatient wait for Godot and the strong wish to see him make them desperate mystics who are on the way to face reality in whichever way is probable. They assume it is the only way they can be saved and this is why they keep hoping to be saved if they meet Godot. It is the final stage Vladimir and Estragon are trying to attain. When Pozzo comes, Vladimir gets excited and says, 'It's Godot! At last! Gogo! It's Godot! We're saved! Let's go and meet him!' (Beckett, 2006, 68). However, the arrival of Pozzo throws them into despair; but their hope never ends. Rather they find solace in the company as Vladimir says, 'we are no longer alone, waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting for ... waiting. All evening we have struggled, unassisted.'

They do not know what the eventual outcome of their wait would be but they keep waiting for Godot, which works as a metaphor of bliss and peace in the situation of having no other option.

ESTRAGON: And if he comes?

VLADIMIR: We'll be saved (Beckett, 2006, 87).

Thus, the hope of being saved never allows them to leave the place. This situation is aptly described at the end of each act of the play when both of them are ready to go but they do not move.

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go. [They do not move.]

CURTAIN

3. Conclusion

The upshot of all the above-mentioned exploration of *Waiting for Godot* from the prism of Sufism suggests that the protagonists exhibit certain qualities that enable us to examine them through the conventions of Sufism. Yet, it is hard to domesticate them in Sufi terminology. For example, the protagonists show a sense of knowing that they are in search of something, but they barely know what it is. This situation does not occur with the Sufis as they are aware of their aims and objectives from the very first day. Moreover, these characters rarely listen to their hearts; instead, they are more interested either in the physical pleasures, as is the case with Estragon, or in the rational exploration of reality as is depicted by Vladimir. Thus, it may be argued that the protagonists of *Waiting for Godot* do not qualify for acceptance in the overall criteria of Sufi traditions as they lack the characteristics, especially 'spiritual bliss' originated through the interrelationship of heart, soul and spirit, needed for mystical experience and understanding God in a meaningful way. Having no 'straightforward' goal in mind, they themselves become goals as they are undirected and aimless. Mostly, they appear to be self-centred and are highly absorbed in their own atmosphere. Thus, they cannot develop an embodied self and a cherished relation with 'the Other', and, consequently, fail to offer any transcendent meanings. However, the way they offer themselves and behave leads us to say they are nothing but 'failed Sufis'.

In the same way, it is hard to force Beckett's works to accommodate Sufi ideology; rather, he is the dud-mystic of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Just as nothing is ever certain in Beckett's world, however, the mixture of match and mismatch between Beckett and the Sufi tradition allows for interpretive pathways as well as dead ends, or occasionally both at the same time. It is, therefore, to be expected that a thorough study under the umbrella of Sufism can bring new perspectives to supplement existing Beckett scholarship. In response to Baldwin's projection, this paper sees how the characters of Vladimir and Estragon can be framed as Sufis; nonetheless, it is observed that they follow only those rules of Sufism that they feel comfortable with or that agree with their own desires and such set of activities lead us to claim they are but 'failed' Sufis.

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