

وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou

جامعة مولود معمري تيزي وزو

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Department of English

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

Specialty : Literature and Interdisciplinary Approaches



**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master in English Entitled:**

*Suppositions of Nietzsche's Übermensch in  
Albert Camus' Caligula (1944) and Samuel Beckett's  
Waiting for Godot (1953)*

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Class of 2023

Laboratoire de domiciliation du Master : Etude des Langues et Cultures Etrangères

*To my friends and family who have always shown me love and support;*

*& to the memory of Mr. Amis, my late high school Philosophy teacher.*

## **Acknowledgements**

I hereby express my gratitude for my supervisor, Mr. Rafik Laced, whose insightful observations have allowed the pages of this dissertation to come together beautifully. I also recognize the panel of examiners, Ms. Hassiba Bensafi and Mr. Mouloud Siber, for assessing my work with discernment, for their pertinent remarks, as well as their kind words about this modest work.

I would also like to thank the rest of the teachers at the Department of English, whose relentless help and selfless advice offer the students a well-rounded learning experience at our University. We owe you a great deal.

Thank you all very much.

## Abstract

This study was conducted by analyzing the implicit Nietzschean elements in the famous twentieth century plays *Caligula* (1944) written by Albert Camus and *Waiting for Godot* (1953) by Samuel Beckett. The purpose of this dissertation was to expound the main echoes of Nietzsche's morality, *Übermensch*, Last Man and Higher Man within the scope of the playwrights' implementation of these notions for the construction of their main characters. In addition this, I have attempted abstracting them in order to get a map of Nietzsche's kinds of men that rely on his controversial ideas about superior and inferior moralities. The results showcase the intertextual dialogism of the two plays. The first chapter dissected Nietzsche's representations, mainly that of the Overman, in the play *Caligula*. Findings after analysis showed that Albert Camus was not only exploring the concept through his main character, but he also caricatured the emperor of Rome by applying the attributes of Nietzsche's Overman in a literal and rigid manner. Chapter II was dedicated to an analysis of *Waiting for Godot*'s Vladimir and Estragon as well as a study of Pozzo and Lucky whom were presented as a literal Master/slave dichotomy. This second chapter revealed the failure of Vladimir and Estragon to go beyond themselves as well as Pozzo and Lucky's oversimplified representation that served as a critique to the duality of dominance and subservience. Therefore, the conclusion that imposed itself was that the playwrights payed double-edged tributes to Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy.

**Key words:** Absurdism, Higher Man, Last Man, Master morality, Nietzsche, Nihilism, Overman, slave morality, *Übermensch*.

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## I. Introduction

World events and philosophy are inseparable. If one were to trace any important point in human history, it would crystallize in their mind that philosophical currents often lead the world in new directions, and vice versa. A potent example that illustrates this intertwining is the separation of religion from state. This was caused by the need to move beyond the shackles of the church, as well as the humanist movement that swept through Europe as early as the fifteenth century. As such, religion has progressively come to be seen as antiprogressive. All the dense church teachings could no longer assuage the masses' need for progress and have become no more than tombs, especially during the Enlightenment, where reforms were henceforth made from a secular perspective, not a religious one. Subsequently, in the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed in *The Gay science* that "God [was] dead ... And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers?" (1882, p. 120)?

As the world moved along after the idea of the God's death was put forward, it seemed that art and literature in all their glory did so in a counterintuitive way: less has come to mean more. As the abstract and unusual styles rose, so did interpretations of works become open to multidisciplinary approaches. Needless to say that secularism, humanism as well as the previous centuries' unfortunate blood baths have inspired it, this unprecedented philosophical ideology that romped through the artistic world: Nihilism, which is the belief that the world bears no meaning nor purpose and that all religions and morality are of no value. Nietzsche rejected nihilism, however, for he knew it constituted a danger for man because it imperils wellbeing. He instead sought to install new foundations for a post-Christendom existence in order to escape the state of meaninglessness that people would otherwise be plunged in. Variations on the terminology of this state due to differing perceptions towards it changed with his contemporaries and successors in the likes of Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger.

A notable philosophy that has emerged from the remains of Nietzsche's words, along with other philosophers, is Existentialism, a philosophy that differs slightly in that it does not resign to the cold indifference of the world. Philosophers such as Albert Camus are known to refuse surrender to the Absurd, and instead postulate that one must face it readily in order to create one's own meaning; a worldview he shares with Jean-Paul Sartre, the man who posits that existence precedes essence (1956). From their philosophies, flourished the existential theater, which focuses on man's freedom in deciding his own fate whilst highlighting his subjective experience and responsibility for his actions, unlike the theater of the Absurd, a genre in which plays bear neither parable nor any satisfying explanation for life's cruelty and irony.

One of the most important playwrights of the Absurdist theater is Samuel Beckett, who personally suffered from the implications of the World War II, as well as insomnia throughout his life. Beckett subsequently developed a fascination with the idea of death, the haphazardness of life, and man's failure to successfully react against the Universe which offered no solace for its cruelty. This is what led to disillusionment and Beckett's flair for creating irrational characters that often seem to have lost all sense of direction in their lives. Hence, Absurdist theater describes the modern world's existential status quo.

## **1. Review of literature**

The primary sources I am dealing with are two of the most important theatrical works of the twentieth century. *Caligula* by Albert Camus (1944) and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett (1953) are famous philosophical plays, and although the latter is purely Absurdist and diverges from the former's structurally organized setting, the truth remains that these two plays overlap and intersect in their themes, presentation as well as the Nietzschean elements implicit to both. Studies conducted by scholars as well as critics follow the fashion of analyzing the authors in relation to Nietzsche, as he was an important influence on the works

of both playwrights.

*Waiting for Godot* has been dissected from various perspectives owing to its stripped setting and characters that seem to do nothing except wait, hence its adaptability. It is composed of two acts, of which Vivian Mercier say “nothing happens, twice” (Mercier, 1956, as cited in Casey, 2017). On the other spectrum, Camus’s *Caligula* is one where its title character is very much present throughout the play’s four acts, interacting with the patricians of his court and the other characters in any way he pleases. Making no concessions whatsoever, he has decided to exercise his freedom and power to the fullest extent, against all social and moral norms.

Albert Camus has a tendency to expose the inherent absurdity in his writings, mainly in what is referred to as ‘the cycle of the absurd’, composed of his earlier works: *L’Étranger*, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, and *Caligula*. This latter is one of the first plays of the existential theater; and as Camus was not interested in merely recounting historical events, he ventured freely in detaching *Caligula* from accurate historical accounts about him. The playwright began the writing process for *Caligula* in 1938. When it was first published in 1944 however, it had already undergone multiple changes from the first version he had constructed. As a matter of fact, the play underwent more changes following the evolution of the playwright’s philosophical thought, until it reached full fruition in 1958, some twenty-five years after it was first conceived.

A unique viewpoint is provided by James Arnold in his article entitled: “*Camus’ Dionysian hero: ‘Caligula’ in 1938*” which specifically analyzes Camus’ first version of *Caligula* as a Dionysian tragedy following Nietzsche’s conceptions of the Greek myth of Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this book, Nietzsche’s conception of the myth is that of a god whose torment was brought about when the Titans dismembered his body. As a symbol, his torture ensued out of knowing the “torment of individuation” (Arnold, 1973, p. 47) and

separateness from other parts. The purgatory of Dionysus can be paralleled with the emperor's pain and his subsequent sexual perversions, about which Arnold cites Herbert Marcuse' saying that they are the alienated man's rebellion against the *principium individuationis* (Marcuse, as cited in Arnold, 1973). Arnold parallels "the incestuous union between Zeus and his sister Demeter" that rebirthed Dionysus with Caligula's amorous relations with Drusilla in the play (1973, p. 47). This latter's death is for the former the loss of a primordial union with the universe, causing his fateful entering the world of individuation. The critic summarizes his analysis of the play and its intersecting elements with Nietzsche's interpretation of the Dionysian myth and his model of the modern tragedy, by remarking that the later versions of *Caligula*, albeit representing progress from an ethical viewpoint, have taken steps back from following the aesthetic model of modern tragedy.

Lorene M. Birden, on her behalf, wrote an essay which she entitled "*Caligula-Christ: Preliminary Study of a Parallel*". She mentions that, as with all great writers, juxtapositions of their characters and others from mythology and history occur, and as such, she relates Caligula to the 'character' of the Bible, Jesus. Birden sees Caligula as a "dark Christ", one which – much like his religious "mirror"– is striving for more justice and liberty for all, but not happiness. The play opens with the emergence of its principal character after three days of disappearance with plans to become god. Such a scheme parallels Jesus' forty days in the desert. She writes:

However, the devil that tempts Caligula is human verity, misery, and death, and he spends only three days in his desert because he gives in to this temptation instead of resisting it. By succumbing, he shortens his stay in the desert and brings his followers the black sermons of his devils. In addition, instead of a message of calm and heavenly love at the end of his ordeal, he offers them the cruel totem of a destroyer-god (Birden, 2010, p. 6).

Additionally, *Caligula's* inverted gospel events as well as the striking similarities between the emperor of Rome and Jesus in the Bible are rampant in the play. The most important parallel that Lorene M. Birden draws is with the last sentence where Caligula cries out: "I am

still alive” (IV, 14, p. 136)! Even as he was bleeding to death. This, according to Birden (2010), epitomizes his duality with Christ; for whilst Christ is the symbol of eternal life, Caligula lives on as the symbol of eternal evil and more importantly, eternal absurdity.

Similarly to Camus’ interest in revealing the world’s absurdity in his works, so does Samuel Beckett break down his plays to expose the failure of man. Recurrent themes in his writings include characters suffering from alienation, inaction, existential dread, and a distorted sense of time and space, all of which bring out his views on life that he considers to be “just a mess” (Beckett, as cited in Menouer, 2022). His masterpiece, *Waiting for Godot*, encapsulates most of the struggles of modern man to locate himself within this meaningless setting.

Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy has frequently been referenced in analyses of *Waiting for Godot*. Badra Menouer, in her Doctorate’s thesis, studies “*the Quest for the self in Beckett’s plays: the Beckettian views of time and space*”. In her analysis, she refers to the German philosopher’s influence on Beckett by considering him one of most influential figures in forming the playwright’s philosophy, particularly his Will to Power and the *Übermensch*, in addition to more influences on Beckett that include Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Camus.

Beckett repeatedly stated his refusal to be called a writer whose works follow a particular doctrine; however, Menouer looks at *Endgame* in addition to *Waiting for Godot* through an Absurdist lens, in order to illustrate this philosophy’s prevalence in the plays’ settings, as well as the manifestations of the mad nature that man is born with (Beckett, 1953). Furthermore, she discusses the origins of absurdism and Beckett’s distortion of the notions of time and space in his plays by breaking down these two fundamental units of existence. She writes in this regard:

Rather than simply lamenting loss (which is evident in Beckett’s work), I believe Beckett confronts us with what is left and challenges us to work with it, to accept the whims, inconsistencies, and contradictions that at times

become the focal points of our existence and move on, to continue with what we do have, our basic need to be individuals (Menouer, 2022, p. 19).

Additionally, Menouer looks at the self as is presented in Beckett's work and considers it, in relation to time and space, as being illusive and never fully grasped, where man is left "in a kind of no-man's land between an unknowable outside world and an unlocatable self" (2022, p. 231).

On *Waiting for Godot*, another essay entitled "*Godot is dead: Nietzsche and Beckett on salvation and suffering in a godless Universe*" was written by author Jökull Valsson. As is evident in the title, the author therein relates the play to Nietzsche's infamous proclamation that God was dead. Although the author is aware that the playwright himself refuted the speculation that Godot referred to God, it still made sense to dive into the play from this approach, for all the signs of alienation and loss that the characters, mainly Vladimir and Estragon, exhibit. Valsson conferred the title character to the concept of salvation of the Messiah, and his absence throughout to the Second Coming of Jesus. Additionally, he posits that the characters' inability to muster the will to do anything but wait is an implicit "challenge to Nietzsche's emphasis on strength and dismissal of weakness" (Valsson, 2011, p. 14). Furthermore, he relates the play's themes to a transition from the modern to the postmodern world in which all the latter's negative connotations are still prevalent, relying on the German philosopher's depiction of society's nihilistic destiny after 'god's death'. To conclude, an assertion of similarities between Beckett and Nietzsche was made despite admitting to the former's hopeless resignation and the latter's positive disposition for joyful possibilities despite his criticism of romanticism.

Another study of Beckett's play entitled simply "*Waiting for Godot: a Marxist study*" was conducted by Javed Akhter, Khair Muhammad and Naila Naz. Their findings are shared in an article where it is suggested that Pozzo and Lucky's interactions refer to the slave-Master duality and is "a bleak reference to one of the most important socio-political themes" (Javed

& al., 2015, p. 46) which persist in the capitalist system. As such, the ambiguity of the identity of Godot “suggests a reflexive practice of distrust that any action to change the modern capitalist social formation is futile and absurd” (Javed & al., 2015, p. 47). The article expands further on the issue by relating it to an expression of capitalism’s systematic victimization of humans by exploiting them until they are devoid of meaning in their lives. In conclusion, the writers interpret Godot’s perpetual absence as a critique to the capitalist modern world in which people wait for something to materialize that never does.

Relating Samuel Beckett’s work to that of Albert Camus, an interesting article was written by Richard Durán, entitled “*En attendant Godot*’ or *le suicide philosophique*’: *Beckett's play from the perspective of Camus's 'Le Mythe de Sisyphe*”. I have included it for it joins Beckett’s play to thought patterns presented by Camus in his famous essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, which the author famously opened with the affirmation that there was but one truly serious philosophical question, and that was suicide (1942). *Waiting for Godot*’s Vladimir and Estragon talk about the option of taking their own lives frequently, and although Estragon attempted suicide before, which Camus considers one means of escaping the Absurd, Vladimir admits to how afraid he will be when he faces his last moments of absurdity in the world. In this manner, Durán analyzes the play according to more Camusian ideas such as persistence out of habit, philosophical suicide and the effects of alienation on the human psyche. Additionally, he asserts the difference between Sisyphus, the personification of metaphysical revolt, and the characters of *Waiting for Godot*: “Given Camus's perspective, however, Vladimir and Estragon must be viewed as anything but heroic. They incarnate, in fact, the exact opposite of Sisyphus. Rather than embrace their reality, the two tramps use every means available to evade it” (Durán, 2009, pp. 989-990). Durán concludes that one cannot deny the striking congruence between these authors’ works, given their interest in tackling the same existential issues of the world, particularly, the Absurd.

## 2. Issue and working hypotheses

From the above selected compilation of previous works that analyzed the two plays from different perspectives, mutual factors imposed themselves given the similarity of Albert Camus' and Samuel Beckett's works in terms of themes, despite their different approaches to tackling them. Some academics have compared the two playwrights to each other; others related their works to Friedrich Nietzsche, but despite all these intricacies and the German philosopher's ideas' applicability on my selected works, I am yet to see a dissertation about *Waiting for Godot* and *Caligula* together, where it is attempted to apply the specific Nietzschean notions he gradually developed in the books *Beyond good and evil* (1886), *On the Genealogy of morality* (1887), and *Thus spake Zarathustra* (1883-1892), notions which I am introducing below. My work is therefore conducted to analyze the plays *Caligula* and *Waiting for Godot* by applying the models of the Nietzschean concepts of Life Affirmation – Will to Power – Last Man – Higher Man – *Übermensch*, as well as some of his most controversial conceptions about morality, on said plays. The process is to study their characters and settings not only as tangible people, places or times, but also as abstract constructions or personifications of the aforementioned concepts. The purpose of this is to illustrate their manifestations, philosophical implications as well as their relevance in the plays' constructions to study the formula that Nietzsche devised to face the modern world in its collective existential crisis, for he set the tone for a godless society all the whilst warning from its consequences.

A notable feature in his work, however, is his belief in man's ability to prevail over nihilism through Life Affirmation acts and the acceptance of Eternal Recurrence with joy for, he believed, it is what renders life –not only bearable– but meaningful. According to him, a man who lives fully procures hope for a future worthier creature. Through this, one can understand that Nietzsche is not merely interested in the persistence of man as he is, but in his succession, and the overcoming of nihilism, notably by what he calls the *Übermensch*. My

working issue is therefore set out to delve into the kinds of men that Caligula, Vladimir and Estragon are, as well as the ways in which these kinds have been presented in the works. In addition to this, I will explore the tributes and critiques that the playwrights make to Nietzsche's aforementioned concepts, and finally, I will expound on the most prominent resemblances between the plays of *Caligula* and *Waiting for Godot*.

### **3. Methodological outline**

As I am undertaking this task, I have followed the IMRaD system. Beginning with an introduction, I have given a general overview of my dissertation. Working from the general to the specific, many concepts are established amongst which the most pertinent will be revisited in depth in the other sections. The two plays, *Caligula* and *Waiting for Godot* are presented along with previous literature on their regard. After stating my main thesis comes the second section of the methodology where I expand on Nietzsche's work in the scope of my working issue, as well as offer synopses of the two plays. The third part is for the results, whereas in the fourth I discuss them thoroughly and divide them into two chapters. The first chapter is devoted to *Caligula's* *Übermensch* ambition, whilst the second analyzes *Waiting for Godot* and its characters according to the selected concepts.

## II. Methods and materials

### 1. Methods and theoretical framework

#### a. Nietzsche's critique of morality

Friedrich Nietzsche was born in 1844 to a home of Lutheran piety. His father was a pastor before passing away in 1849, and his grandfather likewise had been an ecclesiastical superintendent of the protestant branch of Christianity. This is why it is particularly interesting, that as Nietzsche grew up, he developed views that went against those of his society. In *On the Genealogy of morality*, the thinker exposes the dominant morality of the Western civilization as anti-natural and going against the instinct of life. According to him:

For too long, man has viewed his natural inclinations with an 'evil eye', so that they finally came to be intertwined with 'bad conscience' in him. A reverse experiment should be possible *in principle* – but who has sufficient strength? – by this, I mean an intertwining of bad conscience with *perverse* inclinations, all those other-worldly aspirations, alien to the senses, the instincts, to nature, to animals, in short all the ideals which up to now have been hostile to life and have defamed the world (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 66).

In addition to this, he thinks most people do not critically evaluate their society's judgments of good and evil, a frightening fact which makes morality "the danger of dangers" (1887, p. 8), given that it hinders man from acquiring better values which would lead the way for a superior way of being in the future.

Nietzsche notes that life neither possesses nor lacks intrinsic value, that all the evaluations society makes of it are merely symptoms of the evaluators themselves. Following this line of thought, he characterizes the West's fundamental cultural values as expressions of the 'ascetic' ideal. Such an ideal, for Christians, puts suffering on a pedestal, endowing it with divine will, and man is presented with the chance to atone and repent, consequently denigrating the experience of material existence in favor of some other *true* world (Nietzsche, 1887). He further diagnoses this belief system as a symptom of life in distress, one in which anti-natural values have taken over the much-needed morality of the Higher Men, or in other words, the

Master morality. By contrast, slave morality refers to the moral systems of the Judeo-Christian civilization that encourages passivity, laziness and promotes fear in the hearts of its herd (Nietzsche, 1887).

### **b. The Higher Man**

*Thus spake Zarathustra's* titular character is based on the Persian prophet Zoroaster, from whose philosophy sprung the Abrahamic religions. However, Nietzsche's Zarathustra, offers teachings that are antithetical to the former's. After he departs from his ten-year seclusion on a mountain to rejoin mankind, Zarathustra soon grows disappointed with the masses, and instead takes to teaching only a select few whom he deems worthy of his wisdom. He calls this selection of men Higher Men, to whom he speaks about many a subject that he thinks they would use to elevate themselves.

His antiegalitarian philosophy allows him to categorize these Higher Men opposite the rest of mankind. He contrasts them against each other by saying: "... God hath died. Before the populace, however, we will not be equal" (Nietzsche, 1882, p. 320). He then proceeds to advise them against mingling with the populace, for they do not understand the higher spirits. Nietzsche believes that the purpose of philosophy is the facilitation of the emergence of great individuals who have the ability to overcome themselves, even in the face of great suffering and tragedy. He says: "... now do *we* desire—the Superman to live" (1882, p. 320).

He posited that amongst Higher Men are two types: 'creative geniuses' whose mix of nature and nurture grants them the ability to develop their crafts, and the numerous other Higher Men. What is common amongst the two is that they all have a unifying life project and strive to reach their lofty goals. The Higher Man is therefore, by constitution, distinguished, albeit his chaos puts him in a perpetual battle against himself. His most prominent danger lies in his ability to self-destroy, or most dangerously, to be pulled into the masses and join the herd. Nietzsche describes this in *The Will to Power* by saying: "In so far as the mass is

dominant it bullies the exceptions, so they lose their faith in themselves and become nihilists” (1887, p. 19).

Separating oneself from the noise of the masses and descending to the pouts of existence to ponder on the meaning of life is thereafter, according to the German philosopher, the way to avoid distracting oneself from thinking or from leading an inconsequential life, to lead the way for a superior being.

### **c. Life affirmation**

Nietzsche’s philosophy believes in the power of affirming one’s life and habits in a pursuit of self-overcoming. He says in this regard:

If we affirm one single moment, we thus affirm not only ourselves but all existence. For nothing is self-sufficient, neither in us our-selves nor in things; and if our soul has trembled with happiness and sounded like a harp string just once, all eternity was needed to produce this one event—and in this single moment of affirmation all eternity was called good, redeemed, justified, and affirmed (Nietzsche, 1883-1885, pp. 532-533).

He additionally describes the state of life affirmation as a state of *yes-saying* and complete surrender to life’s currents and tragedies no matter how painful they are, because suffering makes man more profound. To convey the level of life affirming qualities that the Higher Man must possess, Nietzsche, through his character Zarathustra, speaks of a person’s final moments alive.

In order to deny any condemnation of life and show total satisfaction with one’s happenings, they must be willing to say at the end of their life: “Was that life? . . . Well then, once more” (1882, p. 357)! In this declaration, there was an indirect reference to the notion of Eternal Recurrence whereby “every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in [one’s] life will have to return to [them], all in the same succession and sequence” (1887, p. 194). The courage it takes to accept this, as well as

the self-becoming that leads to it, are qualities that Nietzsche considers to be those of the Master morality.

#### **d. Will to Power**

Perhaps one of the most known Nietzschean concepts, and certainly one of the most misunderstood, *der Wille zur Macht*, also known as the Will to Power, was coined by the German philosopher for the first time in *Thus spake Zarathustra*. He had previously commented on the immense pleasure that the feeling of being powerful brings, so it was indeed a subject of the greatest interest to him, despite having never systematically defined it in any of his books, hence the extreme adaptations of it, notably by the Nazis.

Nietzsche's Will to Power means the urge that creatures have not only to live but to *overcome*. He, thereby, refutes his contemporaries' Will to Existence by arguing that people put their lives at risk for the chance to gain more power. He explains in *Thus spake Zarathustra*: "much is reckoned higher than life itself by the living one; but out of the very reckoning speaketh—the Will to Power" (1882, p. 25)! He expands on this in *The Gay science* by adding: "to wish to preserve oneself is a sign of distress, of a limitation of the truly basic life-instinct, which aims at *the expansion of power* and in so doing often enough risks and sacrifices self-preservation" (Nietzsche, 1882, pp. 207-208).

However, Nietzsche's Will to Power has been contested over and over for meaning different things. On the one hand, Zarathustra says he does not wish to preside over lions, meaning that his strength is only exercised over himself; on the other hand, in his other writing, Nietzsche often revels in explaining the ways in which the higher types' Will to Power leads them to danger, confrontation, love of war and violence, all against one's opponents. He writes: "thus we immoralists require the power of morality: our drive of self-preservation wants our *opponents* to retain their strength—it only wants to become *master over them*" (1887, p. 197).

### **e. *Übermensch* or the Overman**

Post-god world certainly reeks of nihilism, and to Nietzsche, this necessitates the establishment of a new system of values upon which man is to rely to find meaning in his life. Unlike the Judeo-Christian tradition, this new system has to put this material world into focus, instead of belief in otherworldliness, Zarathustra preaches: “I conjure you, my brethren, remain true to the earth, and believe not those who speak unto you of superearthy hopes! Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not” (1882, pp. 6-7). This is in order to center one’s priorities on this realm and thus live fully, courageously, artistically and without fear.

This line of thought led to Nietzsche’s conceptualizing of the Overman, a creature further from current man than current man is to ape (1882). The Overman *transfigured* traditional values, he is imbued with passion to exercise his Will to Power and does not refer to social conventions for life advice. It is, according to Nietzsche, an ideal worth striving for and trying to become, but as the contemporary man is still rustling the anti-life belief system of the archaic religions, one may merely hope to serve as a bridge to this future *Übermensch*. He says: “Not ‘mankind’ but *Overman* is the goal” (Nietzsche, 1884, p. 546)!

### **f. The Last Man**

On the opposing spectrum of the Overman lies the Last Man. They are complete oppositions to each other. Whilst the *Übermensch* is the ideal, the Last Man is the terror, one that would mean mediocrity had prevailed in the world. Whilst Zarathustra was preaching to the masses, they seemed more than willing to become it, thus the prophet-like character lost hope in them.

Unless man strives to become the *Übermensch*, the Last Man will become of him. Ironically, however, Western people set this man as a goal for themselves, hence the terror. The Last Man is characterized by complete alienation from life, living safely at the expense of living freely, however, Nietzsche says: “the earth hath then become small, and on it there

hoppeth the last man who maketh everything small. His species is ineradicable like that of the ground-flea; the last man liveth longest” (1882, p. 11). He has the herd mentality which makes him unable to think for himself. He also avoids solitude lest meaning creeps to him. Distraction and diversion through consumerism and other such vices are drugs that the Last Man takes to think himself happy (Nietzsche, 1882). He is constantly drowned in stimulus from the outside world and refuses his inner calling. The Last Man, therefore, is antithetical to the Overman and poses a real threat to the evolution of mankind.

#### **g. Bakhtinian concepts**

Mikhail Bakhtin is a Russian philosopher and scholar who introduced many concepts that are now commonly used in literary criticism. In the books *The Dialogic imagination* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, he discusses dialogism, intertextuality, satire, as well as parody and their roles in a literary work, mainly the novel.

First, dialogism arises out of interactions between different characters whose views can be contradictory or controversial. It can also be expanded to include various viewpoints that are found in different novels. This interaction is often referred to as intertextuality, which can be defined as the interconnectedness of various literary works through implicit means, such as satire, which is a humorous critique usually involving an implicit moral standard (Frye, 1957) and parody, which is humorously exaggerated mimicry. Both these genres implement irony and sarcasm as their main tools to make critiques to their tackled topics.

Another one of Bakhtin's concepts that is particularly useful to my study is “hidden polemics” in intertextually-related texts or novels. He defines it as:

In a hidden polemic the author's discourse is directed toward its own referential object, as is any other discourse, but at the same time every statement about the object is constructed in such a way that, apart from its referential meaning, a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object. A word, directed toward its referential object, clashes with another's word within the very object itself (Bakhtin, 1963, p. 195).

In this passage, the critic aims at explaining the hidden meanings that are constructed inside of words which do not explicitly refer to their referential object, but can nevertheless be discerned through analyzing their shared themes.

## **2. Materials**

### **a. Synopsis of *Caligula***

*Caligula* is an intriguing portrait of a king whose methodical madness invites reconsideration of man's intrinsic values and drives. *Caligula* is presented as a four-act play, each divided into multiple scenes. The play opens with the absence of Caligula, the Caesar of Rome, and his reemergence three days later as a new man, prepared to make drastic changes for Rome and all of its people. His peculiar but logical realization that "men are dying and they are not happy" (I, 4, p. 60) is attributed by the Patricians of his court to Drusilla's death, his sister and lover. Albert Camus diverges from the historical accounts of Caligula, which interpret his tyranny as psychosis. Instead, he interprets his madness as having emerged from an epiphany about the interaction of man with the world.

The death of Drusilla merely makes him realize that nothing really matters, not even our deepest tragedies. Caligula then rustles with his solitude and fills it with corpses, taxes, famine and women, all which he neglects to consider outside of his perception of the world as absurd. He is convinced that the absence of deities, and man's belief in them irregardless, enables him to play god, as he has enough power to influence people's fates, whilst he always retains arbitrariness in bestowing his cruel punishments and murders.

In the second act of the play, we learn of a plot against his life, led by his patricians and a man of letters called Cherea. The formers discuss their reasons for wanting the king gone: He has taken his authority too far, murdering, executing, humiliating and starving the people of Rome for sheer pleasure. His reign had surpassed their ability to keep quiet.

In the fourth and last act, which Albert Camus calls: *La Mort de Caligula*, Caligula delivers a soliloquy on what he has come to realize about the implications of his life's choices and desires shortly before the conspirators rush into the room and deliver daggers to his chest and face. Caligula then utters his shocking last words: "Into history, Caligula! ... I am still alive" (IV, 14, p. 135)!

### **b. Synopsis of *Waiting for Godot***

*Waiting for Godot* is perhaps the most known Absurdistplay. Written by the dramatist Samuel Beckett, the play not only pioneers the genre, but supersedes the formerly written material of many other Absurdistplaywrights given the intricacies of its barrenness and consequently, the overflowing number of possible interpretations of this two-act tragicomedy.

The main *dramatis personae*, Vladimir and Estragon, exude nothing. Sat on a mound, one of them is struggling with his shoe. The other tries to help him. The dialogue that ensues and persists throughout the play is something of a linguistic limp. They struggle with words, they repeat the same things over and over, and they use their speech as crutches lest they fall silent and face their truths, with the exception of some rare lucid moments. They repeatedly lament that how there is "nothing to be done" (I, p. 11), and they repeatedly try to divert themselves with chatter and small talk which they exchange indifferently; however, they often seem shaken up and uneasy when they mention the titular character and how they must wait for Godot.

The two acts of this play begin and end in the same way and in the same place. The critic Vivian Mercier says that the play "has achieved a theoretical impossibility—a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats ... a play in which nothing happens, twice" (Mercier, 1956, as cited in Casey, 2017).

Two other characters are introduced in the first act and later come back in the second. They go by the names of Pozzo and Lucky and are a Master and a slave respectively. In the first act of the play, The Master rejoices in making his slave perform and ridicule himself for the other two characters to witness. They help Vladimir and Estragon pass the time although “it would have passed in any case” (I, p. 41) remarks Estragon. Pozzo and Lucky eventually depart to a supposed fair where Pozzo is to sell his slave, Lucky. In act II, the duo returns, although now, Pozzo seems to have lost his sight. In spite of this, Lucky does not leave him, and together with Vladimir and Estragon, make for another round of comedic interaction.

A final character appears in *Waiting for Godot*'s two acts, a nameless boy who comes to inform Vladimir and Estragon that Godot was not coming that day, but reassures them that he was surely coming the next. The play grapples with concepts of void and makes a good run of exploring the stagnation of time and mind, in a place which only had a tree and a road, one evening. It also features the same characters. Samuel Beckett draws the curtains after the following words:

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

[They do not move] (II, p. 87).

### III. Results

In this section, I present the main findings of my analyses of Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett's plays *Caligula* (1944) and *Waiting for Godot* (1953), respectively. As they are two of the most famous Absurdist plays of the twentieth century, it is enough to draw parallels between them right off the bat. This dissertation, however, attempts to study the plays on a deeper level, ambitiously sketching the characters as representations of Friedrich Nietzsche's conceptualization of types of men, which he divides into those with a Master morality, and on the opposing spectrum those with slave morality, intersected in the middle by men who strive to achieve the superior ideal of the *Übermensch*.

Belonging to the theater of the Absurd, the playwrights chart their presentations with a nihilistic streak, vacating the characters from anything that provides meaning to their lives. Despite *Caligula* being set in ancient Rome, Camus purposefully removes the historical character from the confinements of his times' philosophical status quos, and embeds him instead with a modern existential crisis whose ramifications set forth the play. Similarly, *Waiting for Godot* is also imbued with a sense of alienation typical of the modern world, which makes its characters feel despair and anguish.

Upon relating the two plays to each other, as well as to Nietzsche's prose, multiple dialogical relations emerged between each other, and with German philosopher's writings, whose influence shows that Camus and Beckett, consciously or otherwise, have characterized their characters in accordance with the types of men that the German philosopher had established in a number of his books, mainly in *Thus spake Zarathustra*. A hidden polemic also arises when one notices the opposed points of view by which the same issues are tackled.

*Caligula's* titular character seems to be the complete antithesis to *Waiting for Godot's* Vladimir and Estragon. He possesses unbreakable courage, along with authority which he exercises with his Will to Power limitlessly. Caligula has given reign to his passions and

deadly obsessions. Depopulating Rome, he maintains that he is simply doing that which is necessary. He also considers himself a worthy teacher of the truth. Interestingly, Zarathustra from Nietzsche's *magnum opus* is also one who seeks to teach, albeit going about it in a different way from Caligula's tyranny. Additionally, in my analysis of the play, I have come to realize that the aforementioned qualities of the emperor, are literal and rigid attributes that Albert Camus gave his character to present a caricature of the Overman, wherefrom he makes an implicit critique to this Nietzschean type that the German thinker repeatedly urged striving for. In Bakhtinian words, Albert Camus can be said to have satirized this concept through the exaggeration of Caligula's attributes and his eventual shortcoming.

On the other hand, Vladimir and Estragon, in all their defeatism, were once Higher Men. The important part about this sentence is the past tense, for they have allowed something to bring back to the nihilism of the Last Men despite having once been aware of the realm of Superior men that lay ahead of them. Waiting for Godot has become then, their only goal in life. Why 'waiting' instead of 'walking' to Godot? One might ask. The answer is because they have failed their moral project, which Camus repeatedly insisted on in his writings. This is the dialogical link that exists between Samuel Beckett's play to Camus' philosophy that he developed in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Durán, 2009). Vladimir and Estragon have become reactive creatures whose Will to Power is ostensibly nonexistent. They try their best not to think too lucidly about their current lives lest it creeps to them the fact that they are responsible for their failure. The trivialization of all the characters of *Waiting for Godot*, by imbuing the play with comedic effects and giving its characters chaplinesque mannerisms, serves to parody the discussed elements of Nietzsche's philosophy in the tragicomedy.

On one end, the tyrannical emperor of Rome inflicts pain at random because he is playing God for sport; on the other, the peculiar Last Men of *Waiting for Godot* sit and await their eventual annihilation because that is all they can do. Intersected with the various other

characters that sustain, oppose or divert the main ones, all the plays' characters could exist in the same philosophical and abstracted realm. It is becoming for the Nietzschean formula to be mapped out in the middle of nowhere, with Caligula posing as the Overman, Cherea and Scipio acting as Higher Men, and Vladimir and Estragon belonging to the commoners, waiting for whatever cruelty the emperor chooses to befall on them, whilst Pozzo and Lucky, the supposed Master and slave represent a brute depiction of the duality one-on-one.

The plays in this abstract manner draw, not only a sketch of the Nietzschean notions, but also form a continuum between them, going from failed Higher Men to Last Men, to Higher Men, and into a rudimental form of an *Übermensch*. However, even as these images conceptually make sense, in application, they are more nuanced than this, especially with the Overman Caligula who has, by subverting all common values of man, committed superior suicide, backing his playwright's beliefs regarding communal values. Albert Camus says that Caligula, by being "unfaithful to mankind through fidelity to himself, accepts death because he has understood that no one can save himself all alone and that one cannot be free at the expense of others" (Camus, 1957, p. vi).

Guilt emerges as a common theme as well, invertedly in the selected plays, for whilst Caligula takes every man to be guilty and starts from that point, Vladimir and Estragon arrive at the realization of their guilt. This feeling is what drives both the plots forward. In later scenes however, the emperor of Rome also comes to admit his own guilt and commits annihilates his own self by allowing it his conspirators, whilst the characters of *Waiting for Godot* contemplate taking their own lives regularly but mostly fail to take action. Whether or not life is worth living is therefore one more motif that exists ever so tacitly in the two plays.

What remains to be included in the results, is one more unlikely similarity between the Caesar of Rome, Vladimir and Estragon. Upon advancing the study of these *dramatis personae*, one can tell that they also share defeat. Caligula fails by going too far, Vladimir and

Estragon fail backwards. Caligula does too much for his own good, the others do literally nothing of consequence; and eventually, both excess and idleness lead to failure to embody the Overman, and to successfully failing as Higher Men, thus plunging back to the Last in Vladimir and Estragon's case.

Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett have therefore portrayed two extremes that breed failure to consummate Nietzsche's conceptualization of the Last Man to Overman *transvaluation*, despite Camus' retainment of healthy depictions of Higher Men through the characters Cherea and Scipio, as well as the intentional absenteeism of Godot on Beckett's behalf. One might, through these abstract representations even say that Vladimir and Estragon, with all their relief and terror, are waiting for Caligula.

These results have shown the hidden polemics with which Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett engage Friedrich Nietzsche's writings through satire and parody, intended to critique this latter's concepts of the *Übermensch* and Master morality. They have present their characters still at nihilistic loss despite the presence or anticipation of the superior being or the superior state of being.

## **IV. Discussion**

*Caligula* and *Waiting for Godot* are two plays whose characters are immersed in a nihilistic view of life in which meaninglessness is omnipresent. However, in Albert Camus' construction of *Caligula*, unlike Samuel Beckett's of *Waiting for Godot*, meaning becomes a quest instead of a lost cause. Therefore, I have divided the Discussion part into two distinct chapters, each delving into the plays separately. My analysis is then attempted in accordance with Friedrich Nietzsche's aforementioned concepts, in order to study the main characters as conceptualizations of Last Men, Higher Men and *Übermenschen*. The first chapter is devoted to Camus' *Caligula*, whereas the second chapter aims to analyze *Waiting for Godot*.

### **Chapter I: Overcoming nihilism in *Caligula***

This first chapter deals with *Caligula*, written by Albert Camus in the late thirties, and first published in 1944. It follows the madness of a young king, whose attributes of courage and intense drive to fulfill his desires no matter how society perceives them, nominate him for a Nietzschean study under the umbrella of his idealistic conceptualizations for mankind. Caligula displays an array of qualities that qualify as Master mentality traits, and his views of the world, in all their methodical madness, put this play *Caligula*, and its titular character in alignment, albeit miscalibrated, with Nietzsche's Overman, contrasting him against his Patricians and servants.

#### **1. Caligula and the characters**

The dialogue in this play is constructed eloquently, with each word piercing through the ears to convey the characters' intentions and express their philosophies. As members of the Roman court, each one has formed resounding opinions about the state affairs as well as about Caligula. The emperor, in addition to expressing his worldviews, goes one step further by trying to materialize his proper visions regardless of their implications. The dialogue that

ensues is, therefore, set to highlight the contrast between Caligula's nihilistic perfectionism and the rest of the characters' attempts to dissuade him of his tyranny.

At the outset of the play, the court's Patricians speak of their king: "He was as one ought to be: scrupulous and inexperienced" (I, 1, p. 54). They add on to that that it was them who held the empire together, suggesting that the king was replaceable and his role secondary because "among [them], emperors aren't lacking" (I, 2, p. 56). This goes to show the extent of the patricians' influence in the Roman Empire, as well as their haughtiness when dealing with Caesar, who was first perceived as a young, suggestible and malleable ruler. They had let him have his affair with his sister but would draw the line at that, not allowing him to let it interfere with state affairs. During these first scenes, more characters appear, a young poet Scipio, and Cherea, a man of letters, who will prove, by their immovable courage, to be worthy of Caligula's respect, unlike the Patricians who have no real character, and exalt hypocrisy, according to the king, whom likewise subjects them to humiliation and cruelty for the sheer sight of it.

When they devise a plot to assassinate the emperor, they ascribe their reasons to virtue: "For us the question is above all moral ... The family totters, respect for work evaporates, and the entire country is given up to blasphemy. Virtue calls to us for help" (II, 2, p. 76). Eventually, however, the old Patrician professes to their profound feelings of shame and their unwillingness to accept Caligula's tyranny on them: "conspirators, in the end, will you accept that patricians are forced each evening to run around the bed of Caesar?" (II, 2, p. 76).

As the play progresses, so does the impression that the Patricians have of Caligula grow more spiteful. Their helplessness being now undeniable, they resort to plotting his assassination, both to restore the order of Rome, and to realize their personal vendettas against him. Cherea, whilst agreeing that the assassination must take place, refuses to take up the cause of their "petty humiliations" (II, 2, p. 75), and presents his own views to the

conspirators by informing them of his reasons for participating in the plot. He knows that Caligula above all must go because he has given up to his wild and deadly passions, which then endanger the life of man. Cherea believes in a meaningful life, which is threatened, not by Caesar's unlimited power, but his willingness to use it to the fullest extent. Cherea proclaims that "man cannot live without reason," and expresses his philosophy of life to the Patricians, saying he would accept death, but not life in perpetual fear (II, 2, p. 75).

In addition to the aforementioned *dramatis personae*, Caesonia emerges as an old lover of Caligula, whom he has initially forsaken for his love of Drusilla. Caesonia, by fault of her love for him, follows him as he marches into what Albert Camus called "superior suicide ... the most human and the most tragic of errors" (1957, p. vi). Helicon, a former slave, does the same, attributing his reasons to the great gratitude he feels towards Caligula for having freed him from slavery. They would both be willing to defend him should any threat arise. And as conspirators begin to plot the murder of the emperor, they hurriedly inform him and plead with him to take action against it, to no avail.

In Caligula's mind, all men are guilty, and he decides to play fate because of the absence of actual gods. He makes arbitrary execution lists and attends them for the sheer pleasure of watching the people die ever so slowly, to feel its pain all the more. He states in this regard:

Execution relieves and releases. It is universal, strengthening and as just in its applications as in its intentions. People die because they are guilty. They are guilty because they are subject to Caligula. Now, everyone is subject to Caligula. Consequently, everyone is guilty, from which it follows that everyone dies. It is a question of time and of patience (I, 9, p. 86).

The concept of guilt is a prevalent theme in the play. Not only that, Albert Camus often incorporates it in his other books, most notably in the novel *The Fall*, where guilt set off the narrative for the protagonist Jean-Clamence, who has come to the realization that he had been a hypocrite, after an unknown woman falls into a river one night and he does not try to help her. The incident brings too much guilt to Jean-Clamence, rendering him unable to sustain his

lifestyle as a lawyer and consequently moves to Amsterdam. In the novel, the protagonist says “[not to] wait for the Last Judgment. It takes place every day” (1956, p. 34). Similarly in *L’Étranger* (1942), the French-Algerian writer treats the theme of guilt, which the protagonist Meursault fails to exhibit over the spontaneous murder of an unnamed Arab at the beach, and he is subsequently punished for his indifference more so than the murder. Clearly, guilt and death are prevalent in Camus’ works, along with a sense of judgment, whether it comes from one’s own conscience, law institutions, or people.

What makes *Caligula* stand out is that it follows the story, not of a regular man facing judgment, but one who casts it on others. With unlimited access to power, Caligula is furthermore willing to test the extent at which he could go without shattering his logic and consequently, feeling the guilt himself. He is aware that it would mean the end of his sense of superiority, which ends up happening after he murders Caesonia and his fragile world collapses in the mirror. Nietzsche considers guilt as directly stemming from the language we use to express our deeds. He considers our moral retributions to be a consequence of terminology we use to refer to it. Therefore, in *Beyond good and evil*, he advocates for a substitution of the terms we use to describe evil, with expressions such as “bad” instead, with “bad” being more diluted and useful in deciding the wisdom of our actions instead of judging them as purely good or evil. Additionally, Nietzsche finds this polarizing classification to be characteristic to young souls who lack the art of nuance, and who grow up to renounce good conscience because of fear that it might be deluded (Nietzsche, 1886, pp. 37-38). Caligula, in the play, voices the despicable feelings he harbors by the end (his shameful tenderness towards Caesonia and his cowardice at the approaching of weapons) and finally moves from judging his actions by their consequence (considering his tyranny justified for aiming at making men happy) into admitting his guilt when he realizes his failure, hence the guilt of the tyrant.

## 2. Cherea and Scipio as Higher Men

*Caligula* presents many characters that act as instigators of change –be it positive or negative– by using their Will to Power in order to achieve their individual goals. Amongst the most balanced characters in the play, we find Cherea, a man of letters, and Scipio, a young poet whose father, we learn, Caligula murdered for no good reason. Cherea takes part in exacting justice and restoring security for Rome by partaking in a plot to murder their emperor. Scipio opposes this plan, for he feels that he has understood Caligula. He tells Cherea: “The same flame burns in our hearts” (IV, 1, p. 113).

These two characters prove to be courageous, both defending their opposing stances with logic. While Cherea deduces the necessity of Caesar’s assassination, Scipio’s poeticism refuses to condemn the king’s atrocities, going as far as forgiving the murder of his own father. Caligula, likewise, reciprocates their candor with them, by indulging the young poet’s lyricism (II, 14, pp. 94-96) and not condemning Cherea’s murder plans against him (III, 6, p. 111). Caligula recognizes their bravery, which they both exhibit without fear. Nietzsche’s Higher Men have fearlessness as an attribute, living according to their own truths regardless of others’ opinions. Truthfully to his belief therefore, Scipio criticizes Caligula in act III, not minding Caesonia’s protest. The brave young man disagrees with the emperor’s blaspheming the gods and desecrating the heavens after having filled the earth with blood (III, 2, p. 101). Such sharp descriptions are indicative of Scipio’s unrelenting personal values. Eventually, after the poetry contest of act IV, Scipio, recognizing his inability to live in the presence of Caius any longer, decides to leave, and does. Cherea, on his part, stays until the very end, true to his own beliefs. When the Patricians show up with arms to kill Caligula, Cherea was amongst them, stabbing him in the middle of the face.

Higher Men are those who follow through with their decisions, and oftentimes exhibit talents or genius. They show determination and the Will to exact their goals with courage. In

addition to this, Scipio is a poet and Cherea is a man of letters with sound reason. They both stand out against some of the Patricians who recoil and submit in the presence of fear, which qualifies these two characters as Higher Men.

### **3. Caligula and the moon**

Caligula wanders off for three days. When he comes back, he says he has been searching for the moon. But it is difficult to find. He complains about this to Helicon by saying: “This world, as it is constituted, is not bearable. Therefore I have need of the moon, or of happiness, or immortality, of something which is demented perhaps but which is not of this world” (I, 4, p. 59). This captures the essence of his existential struggle, which seems insatiable unless he is brought the moon down from the heights of the sky. The moon, henceforth, becomes a symbol of the necessary but unattainable tenet of fulfillment. He decides to follow logic to its end, by all means, to which he stays true throughout the play, all the whilst repeatedly restating his desire to have the moon. Everything else is secondary, even the death of his mistress. He says: “Some days ago a woman that I loved died. But what is love? A slight thing. This death is nothing, I swear it to you. It is only the omen of a truth which makes the moon necessary to me” (I, 4, p. 60).

Caligula speaks of an absolute truth that he wants to promote in Rome:

In that case, everything around me is fiction and me; I want only that men live in the truth. And justly, I have the means to make them live in truth. For I know what their need is ... They are deprived of knowledge and they need a teacher who knows what he is talking about (I, 4, p. 60).

This truth is not confined to any moral or social constrictions. However, he makes laws and signs decrees that besiege the freedom of people by forcing it. One example of such a law is opening a brothel and creating decorations for the citizens who most attend it. The citizens who fail to visit the brothels are either executed or exiled, depending on Caligula’s mood, who is, by this systemic arbitrariness, acting as fate in the lives of his citizens. Another way in which he manipulates the state of Rome in a chaotic manner is by deciding to shut down the

public granaries at random even though it would cause instant famine in Rome, which he will then end when it pleases him (II, 9. p. 86).

Caligula has a goal in mind. He simply wants to have the moon, and when he gets it, all will be well. His propensity for desiring the impossible was both a result of his internal turmoil as well as a reason for his perpetual non-satiation with the possible. His power as Caesar, however, grants him a chance at delirium by having those around him attend to his every wish and command. Helicon faithfully obeys him when he asks for the moon, which is also a feminine symbol of renewal. Caligula's moon waxed with Drusilla's death, and waned with Caesonia's. In act III, scene 3, he evokes the moon's association with woman. He describes her as being:

.... All bloodstained above the horizon. Then she started to rise more and more, buoyant with a growing velocity. The more she rose, the brighter she became. She became like a milky lake in the middle of this night full of clashing stars. She approached then in the heat, sweet, light and naked. She leapt over the threshold of my bedroom. With steady slowness, she came up to my bed, glided herself into it and drenched me with her smiles and her radiance (III, 3, p. 104).

The moon, true to Caligula's tastes, is bloodstained and fleshly, making her the perfect embodiment of his desires. Death however, also manifests as a bloodstained, bodily experience that he relishes in inflicting. This suggests that Caligula's constant violence as well as his sponsoring a public brothel are but the tangible facets of his aim for the moon. Therefore, his lust for blood and women are moves he makes towards it, ergo towards the impossible too.

When act III opens, a ceremony is already taking place. Helicon spruiks about the grandeur of the event, and deifies Caligula, saying that "the gods are landed upon earth. Caius, Caesar and god, surnamed Caligula, imparts to them his entirely human shape" (III, 1, p. 98). Caesonia welcomes everyone to the spectacle, and urges them to present offerings to Caligula who is dressed like a grotesque Venus. She makes the patricians repeat a prayer with her, in which they implore the goddess to "instruct [them] in the truth of this world, which is

that it is pointless” (III, 1, p. 98). Venus is the goddess of sorrows and of the dance, an allusion to two oppositions which should remain irreconcilable, nonetheless, the tyrant Caligula has a habit of making his subjects laugh about the atrocities he commits against their families. Dressed as Venus, on that night, he sits on a pedestal collecting obolus (coins) from the audience composed of some Patricians and Scipio. When one of them forgets to deposit the offering, Caligula calls back upon him, insisting that the mortal’s offering must be paid lest the gods grow poor. Scipio later informs him that it was an act of “blasphemy” that he has committed, stating that despite not believing in the gods, he still retains respect for them, out of courtesy to those who did believe. Caligula vehemently opposes this opinion, saying that it has not been blasphemy, but “clairvoyance” instead (III, 2, p. 101).

Caligula was staring into a mirror when he was delivering his soliloquy about his final realizations of life and its meaning (IV, 14, p. 135). He then proceeded to shatter it upon his realization that he, too, had been guilty all along. His initial *coming into* adopting an Absurdistphilosophy about life was propelled by the death of his lover Drusilla. Interestingly enough, his eventual *coming out* of this understanding followed the death of another lover of his: Caesonia, whom he strangled to death. He failed to recognize the link between the two happenings although he admitted that the sole feeling life has ever given him was that of shameful tenderness towards her which he admits: “I just have conscience, and it’s terrible that this shameful tenderness is the only genuine feeling that my life has given me so far” (IV, 13, p. 132). Caligula thus admits the effect that his women have had on him. Drusilla’s death at the outset of the play was an omen that made him want to possess the moon. It also led him to the pouts of tyranny, imbuing him with a god-complex, a dissociation from communal life as well as the need for absolute freedom which he tried to find in the impossible.

Eventually, Caligula comes to learn of his limits after he exhausts the realm of the possible. In the final scene of the play, he wonders, despite him being guilty too: “But who

would dare to condemn me in this world without justice, where no-one is innocent” (IV, 14, p. 135)! He reckons with distress, that with the arms approaching to kill him, so does innocence pave its way back, referring to the end of his tyrannical rule. The word innocence figures in *The Rebel*, when Camus discusses Nietzsche’s ideas about the meaninglessness of the world, and says that Nietzsche proposes to “concede its innocence” (Illing, 2014, p. 6). Caligula eventually destroys the mirror from which his judgment of himself spurred, whilst awaiting his superior suicide. Caligula is a story of a man who robustly fulfilled his will and followed his logic to the very end of his life, subverting everything in his way; however, at the very end, he cried out:

Everything seems to be so complicated, yet everything is so simple. If I’d have had the moon, if love had sufficed, all would have been transformed. But where to slake this thirst? What heart, what god would have for me the depth of a lake? (Kneeling and weeping) Nothing in this world, or in the next, that exists to my standard. I know, however, and you know it too (He holds out his hands towards the mirror while weeping) — that the impossible existing would have been enough. The impossible! I have searched for it in the extremities of the world, in the confines of myself. I’ve stretched out my hands (IV, 14, p. 135).

From this passage, it can be readily discerned that, after all, Caligula has not achieved final peace with his life’s decisions, although in the previous scene, he boasted about being happy to Caesonia shortly before strangling her, saying:

In that case, the truth is there are two sorts of happiness and I’ve chosen that of murderers. For I am happy. There was a time when I believed I had reached the extremity of pain. Well! No, a man can still go beyond. It’s a sterile and magnificent happiness at the end of that region (IV, 13, p. 133).

Through his sudden change of heart about how he truly feels and his restlessness about his truest desires, Albert Camus makes a tactful critique to Nietzsche’s Will to Power as discussed in Sean Derek Illing’s article “*Camus and Nietzsche on politics in an age of absurdity*”. He illustrates his view with quotes from Camus where he describes Nietzsche’s concept of Will to Power as anti-communal (2014). Therefore, as *Caligula* comes to an end, it is only befitting to the playwright’s philosophical stances that he destroys the idea that absolute freedom at the expense of others could lead to happiness.

#### 4. Caligula as Overman

According to James Arnold, Albert Camus extensively read multiple books by Nietzsche and studied them, first for his Diplôme d'Études Supérieures, then later developed ideas akin to his about drama which he implemented in the play *Caligula* (Arnold, 1973). However, Nietzsche's influence on the playwright exceeds the realm of aesthetics. In this play, Albert Camus presents his main character, which he loosely based on the historical figure by the same name and reign, as a man who has not only awakened to the absurdity of existence, but he, as a rational man, has tried to confront it the best way he could. Caligula's strategy for dealing with an irrational world is to exercise his Will to Power to the fullest extent, whilst, as a man of nobility, disregards the commoners' needs. Nietzsche, in *On the Genealogy of morality* explains his views on superior morality, one which does not adhere to societal conventions, but takes to create itself completely by wielding one's Will to Power over outside circumstances. As Caligula developed a strong urge to exercise his freedom to the fullest extent, one may argue that this character is presenting a model for the Nietzschean superior men, or the *Übermensch* as is formulated in *Thus spake Zarathustra*.

Caligula is shown to slowly descend into madness, assisted by his loyal entourage, consisting of Caesonia and Helicon, whom, unbeknownst to them, precipitate his descent by their unequivocal obedience. Helicon declares this to Cherea, informing her that by freeing him from slavery, Caligula has become his Master (IV, 6, p. 120). Caesonia also repeatedly confesses her love to Caius, who always seems unfazed and even slightly condescending. He believes that he is the rightful Master to teach his people about absolute truth. Caligula follows his logic sternly, so when he hears of the plot to murder him, he makes the Patricians *admit* that there is no such plan. Likewise, when he speaks with Cherea, he burns the only piece of existing evidence that makes the plot real, and does not take any action to deter his assassination.

Nietzsche spoke about truth a lot in his works, particularly emphasizing that it is unattainable and fleeting. In the preface to *Beyond good and evil*, he says:

Supposing that Truth is a woman—what then? Is there not ground for suspecting that all philosophers, in so far as they have been dogmatists, have failed to understand women—that the terrible seriousness and clumsy importunity with which they have usually paid their addresses to Truth, have been unskilled and unseemly methods for winning a woman? (1886, p. xv)

Thus, Nietzsche likened Truth to a woman, one who does not allow herself to be won, and confronted dogmatists that their efforts to understand her have failed. He mentions “the *perspective* –the fundamental condition– of life” (1886, p. xvi) and the manner in which it shapes our understanding of the world, particularly in what relates to the European man’s freedom from Plato’s invention of Pure Spirit and Christianity which is “Platonism for the people” (p. xvi). Caligula realizes this Will to truth that people have hitherto, therefore, in his attempt at reaching it, he, like Nietzsche believes, has no source in an absolute God; the ideal had to be found elsewhere. Albert Camus’ implementation of Nietzschean Will to Power in this play makes Caligula venture on a journey of pure self-referencing and venerating, in order to find truth himself. In dressing as different gods and challenging them, Caesar tries to become this ultimate Truth, thus to overcome his human essence in favor of a grander ideal, and in true Camusian fashion –that all quests be for happiness– Caligula pursues his going beyond in search for true happiness.

Nietzsche asserts in *The Gay science* that “only as creators can we destroy” (1882, p. 69) ! A notion that Caligula touches upon in his speech with Caesonia. He, as an all-capable man, has realized that he is free and can afford to destroy all that is around him, by executions, cruelty, mass murders at random and famine in order to achieve a greater purpose.

I will create for this century the gift of equality. And when everything will be level, the impossible finally on earth, the moon in my hands, then perhaps I will also be transformed and the world with me. Then, at last, men won’t die and they will be happy (I, 11, p. 70).

Additionally, he confesses to desiring that men like him should arise. When Scipio warned him of tormenting the weak lest “one day, legions of human gods will rise up” (III, 2, p. 103) and stand up to him, he replies that he dreams of such a day. In destroying the weakness around him, Caesar has the ambition or fantasy of giving rise to a stronger kind of man, who will not be afraid of confrontation and blood. In act II, he makes fun of his Patricians by taking advantage of their fear of Caesar and tells Caesonia that “the fear... this beautiful sensation, without alliance, pure and indifferent” (II, 5 p. 81), against which nothing works any longer. In his own perverse manner, Caligula despises its existence just as much as he revels in causing it for the common people of Rome and its nobility.

By adopting a Master morality, he no longer recognizes weakness to be worthy of respect, therefore, he tyrannically extracts it by killing those who exhibit fear. He does not make objections against Cherea and the Patricians’ plot to murder him precisely because he has respect for their courage. Despite his arbitrary cruelty, Caligula does not touch Cherea nor Scipio who exhibit bravery and true commitment to what they believe in, albeit radically different from the former’s life views. This proves that his madness was not so arbitrary after all, but methodical. Albert Camus described it as a “systematic perversion of all values” (1957, p. v). Unlike the slave morality people who “preach submission and humility and policy and diligence and consideration and the long *et cetera* of petty virtues” (Nietzsche, 1882, p. 321), Scipio, the young poet, shows courage in defending his love for nature and life (II, 14, pp. 94-96), and his respect for faith even when lacking it. Cherea, likewise, lists his opinions to Caligula under the very real threat of having himself killed.

From the play’s citations and their relation to Nietzsche’s views of the *Übermensch* as the ultimate ideal for man, one can discern the affinity that exists between Caligula and the Overman. His subversion of all values, his fearlessness as well as his Will to Power and ambition of creating a new world devoid of weakness and consideration for others, makes this

rendition of the Roman emperor both an attempt at, and an implicit critique of, Nietzsche's Overman. The points of resemblance between the two are apparent in Caligula's obsession with the moon, which embodies his compulsions. Amongst these is his tireless aim for going beyond the realm of the possible, his hedonistic attitude, as well as the attempt he makes at separating himself from his surroundings. The purpose that the emperor finds in such behaviors is practicing his personal philosophy, regardless of dogmatic beliefs about morality. His bid at the *transvaluation* of all values, however, intersected with blood and necessary cruelty, corrupted the Camusian ethical backbone for his quest for happiness. Camus' implicit critique for the Overman therefore lies principally in his actions being antithetical to communal life, which requires dialogue and mutual understanding between people (Illing, 2014).

Thus, one would argue that *Caligula* is a caricature of the Overman more so than a serious attempt to present Caligula as the ideal *Übermensch*. Camus has taken Nietzsche's outlines for this kind of man and implemented them rigidly on an emperor, one with enough power to afford to take his Will to Power to the extremities. Similarly, Caius' power to will his subjects into his individual conception of truth makes him their teacher about freedom whilst taking it away. This draws a parallel between him and what Zarathustra did in *Thus spake Zarathustra* in terms of their drive to teach. Whilst some argue that Zarathustra is the closest manifestation of the Overman that exists, Caligula, by contrast, appears as a cynical sketch of the type, for in both stories, the Will to Power and a continual quest to take others higher on their postmetaphysical quest for a better life are present, but Zarathustra taught with words, and Caligula took action to implement his *transvalued values*. *Der Wille zur Kraft* (force) is therefore more prevalent in the construction of Caligula, not *Macht* (power), a distinction that makes all the difference from a creature that inhabits life peacefully to one that almost took everything down with it.

## **Chapter II: Annihilating nihilism in *Waiting for Godot***

Various interpretations of *Waiting for Godot* consider it as an Absurdistplay. Other critics speculate that Godot was in fact a symbol of God, courtesy of the similarity between their names. This has linked Samuel Beckett's play to Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy indefinitely. In the present work, I will attempt a new analysis of the play, continuing with the tradition of the Nietzschean analysis of it, but straying away from the belief that Godot refers to God, and deviating from studies of the play as simply an Absurdistdepiction of the postwar era of the modern man as well.

### **1. *Waiting for Godot*'s characters as duos**

In order to get a thorough understanding of my analysis of *Waiting for Godot*, one must first be acquainted with previous interpretations of the play. As one of the most important of the twentieth century, it is certainly not short for perspective. However, the most common approach that asserts itself amongst its critics is one where the characters are studied as duos, in pairs or even couples. This choice is justified due to their interactions and presentations.

Vladimir and Estragon are grown men who make contortions and vaudeville-like movements. They fall and struggle to get up, and they hold their heads between their legs quite often. Estragon sleeps, Vladimir cannot stand to hear of his nightmares; Vladimir has carrots and turnips, Estragon eats; Estragon wants to leave, Vladimir reminds him they must wait. "Wait for whom? –Wait for Godot"(I, p 41); Estragon emphasizes that there is "nothing to be done" on multiple occasions in act I, and Vladimir always concurs. They are as dependent on each other as they are complementary. The duo is thus representative of the animus/anima duality developed in Carl Jung's psychology of the human psyche. Vladimir is rational and contemplative (animus); Estragon dreams and is irrational, symbolizing the anima (Sion, 2006). As such, other readings have noted homoerotic undertones in the

behaviors of Estragon and Vladimir suggesting that they are an aging couple (Boxall, 2004). The other characters likewise are seen through a dual lens; Pozzo is the overflowing ego exacting his sadism over Lucky, the unconscious shadow. They are a blatant Master/slave duality that can, furthermore, be regarded as a mirror to the vassalage that links Vladimir and Estragon with the ever-absent character Godot (Al-Assady, 2000).

The play's characters are, therefore, presented in pairs and are often studied as such; each individual is related to an archetype or a class. The eventlessness of that evening on the side of the road with a single tree makes it easier to disregard the setting altogether, although there have been studies about the significance of the leaves that appear on the tree in act II in regards to essence and existence as pertains Sartre's philosophy.

## **2. *Waiting for Godot's* characters as Nietzschean concepts**

This present analysis attempts to deviate from the literary habit of viewing the characters of the play in pairs. Instead of separating Estragon from Vladimir, and likewise Lucky from Pozzo, I suggest that they be looked at as different characters forming single entities, especially for the main characters who are too similar to be taken apart individually. The quirky variations between Vladimir and Estragon serve to deepen their description as Last Men. Similarly, Pozzo and Lucky on account of their polarity as Master/slave, serve to encapsulate the concept of hierarchy which Nietzsche vehemently defended.

### **a. Vladimir and Estragon as peculiar Last Men**

Vladimir and Estragon are guilty. They wait for –not hope nor god– but their demise. They know they will meet it eventually, personified by Godot. They have pleaded mercy by making “a kind of prayer” and “a vague supplication” (I, p. 10). Godot can henceforth be seen as a superior to them, a judge or a higher being, perhaps even a higher state of being. He delays his arrival at will, and in so doing, he defers Vladimir and Estragon's eventual punishment. These two often contemplate ending their misery themselves but willfully wait

anyway out of cowardice, and although the waiting exasperates their torture, they accept it as a form of self-flagellation. Vladimir and Estragon do not blame Godot for postponing his coming despite sending a boy twice to inform them that he is not going “this evening but surely tomorrow” (I, p. 44). In the time they spend by the tree, they are caught somewhere between hiatus and hell. It can be seen as a purgatory of a sort, and they have come to resign to the transience of their existence.

According to the above narrative, I intend to apply Nietzsche’s aforementioned concepts to my analysis and argue that this play can be read from a standpoint of the thinker’s views on men and morality. Vladimir and Estragon’s crime against the order of man is their conformity to societal pressure, be it in the name of morality or out of fear. What is considered moral by societal standards is merely a projection of said society’s expression of their fears. Nietzsche observes that “after all, ‘love to our neighbour’ is always a secondary matter, partly conventional and arbitrarily manifested in relation to our fear of our neighbour” (1886, p. 112). Fear as a driving force was epitomized in *Waiting for Godot*’s Vladimir and Estragon, who have given into its reign, hence the guilt of the mediocre. In *Thus spake Zarathustra*, the prophet-like character distinguished another type of man that laid between the Last Man and Overman. After Zarathustra got disheartened by the masses, he took to teaching his wisdom to a select few whom he called Higher Men, for they would voluntarily serve as a bridge to the ideal Overman and work on elevating their states of being. The goal of Higher Men is not instant gratification; they are, therefore, more prone to solitude and isolation from the herd. They exercise the Will to Power in order to drive forth their lives without subjugating themselves to outside forces, which is absent from Last Men. Vladimir and Estragon, the embodiments of what Nietzsche found to be wrong with Western culture cannot afford to Will anything anymore, and says that “the majority of men are as it were suspended in the air like toy balloons; every breath of wind moves them” (1874, aphorism 21).

The main *dramatis personae* in *Waiting for Godot* are regular men of modern society who once showed signs of being Higher Men, but have now been dragged back down to the herd. This explains their defeatist attitude towards life, as well as an implicit consciousness of their mediocrity. Now, they mostly exhibit symptoms of nihilism and a general haphazardness in life's direction, and they have even forsaken any useful character attributes, such as Estragon's love of poetry. Vladimir and Estragon have proven that they embody the traits of individuals whom modern society has driven to the pits of existential dread. Their only redeeming factor is their lack of the general ignorant bliss of the typical Last Men, who seem to think they hacked happiness. In *On the Genealogy of morality*, Nietzsche further elaborates on the state of modern man:

For this is how things are: the diminution and leveling of European man constitutes our greatest danger, for the sight of him makes us weary.—We can see nothing today that wants to grow greater, we suspect that things will continue to go down, down, to become thinner, more good-natured, more prudent, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian—there is no doubt that man is getting 'better' all the time (1887, p. 25).

The cynicism of these aphorisms appropriately expresses much of Nietzsche's thoughts on the matter. Rendered more docile by the advancements of technology and the security of their foyer, one seems to have retracted into a lazy mode of existence whence taking risks and living free of other people's influence have become foreign concepts, and consequently, men have come to be indistinguishable from one another, not only in their habitus but also in their collective rejection of any different form of thinking. This is what Nietzsche termed herd mentality. The herd follows a herd morality, and the herd morality is for the weak. He differentiates another type of morality upon which religion does not reign, but a value system that is far removed from the former's anti-natural laws. The play's characters do not display this superior morality. Instead, they are both caught on the verge of realization of their failure to resist the herd; they are in a peculiar coming-of-age phase, to a general sense of inadequacy. From this perspective, Samuel Beckett's play can be analyzed as a rendition of

the lives of modern men stuck in a loop where spatiotemporal factors have come to be so devoid of meaning to the point where days are not only fragmented and disconnected from one another but are also interchangeable. The playwright's choice of baring the setting is representational of the empty atmosphere that modern times often cast on places no matter how busy. This general aura of being a hamster on an endless wheel, as well as being helpless in it, and hopeless about it, pertinently encompasses the nihilism of this era, which Nietzsche says is to be the fate of Western civilization after God was killed. Additionally, as everything in the play gets repeated over and over again, it can be understood as a representation of the concept of Eternal Recurrence where everything is recurring repeatedly in the same way.

*Waiting for Godot's* Vladimir and Estragon seem to have forsaken their rights in life. In Act I, after Estragon asks: "We've lost our rights?" Vladimir distinctly answers: "We got rid of them" (I, p. 11), implying that it was them who brought about their state of nihilism. In society, it is this kind of man which survives, says Nietzsche whilst always employing a cynical way to speak of the Last Man, or the mediocre; for although he admits that it is them who shall survive, they will bring about society's demise, by prosecuting all that does not adhere to its laws whether out of shame or jealousy. This is what allows slave morality, upon which religion has thrived for millennia, to persist.

The first task of any religious institution is to root out its followers' natural values and replace them with predetermined definitions of what is good and what is evil. It proceeds to cast judgment and instill fear in the hearts of the believers. Fear then creates anxiety which transmutes into hostility against the other, or non-believer. Nietzsche vehemently opposes the xenophobia that arises from this anti-life atmosphere, and as he proclaimed god dead, he urged the creation of a new system whereby *transvaluation of values* is achieved, to attain what he called a Master morality, by abiding life-affirming habits. He further advises: "'Your own salvation above everything' – that is what you should say; and there are no institutions

which you should prize more highly than your own soul” (1874, aphorism 21). This is only achievable when one uses his Will to Power, for albeit Nietzsche said it was intrinsic to every man, still not everyone made full use of this power to benefit oneself. Vladimir and Estragon fail to use theirs to make any lucid decisions or to strive to achieve anything. Although Estragon gets beat up every night, he has accepted his weakness and does not try to defend himself or go somewhere he will not be found by his enemies. Thus, he is complacent in perpetuating his own misery. Vladimir, likewise, seems to blame him, telling him that his way of “doing nothing” to ensnare his abusers must have been wrong! But that he would have stood up for him anyway (II, p. 50). However, in act I, we already learned that violence against Estragon is habitual, and neither of them does anything about it. Neither of them can muster enough energy to act, therefore they merely react. They do not have courage either.

Nietzsche believed that courage allows man to break from the comforts of life and seek out new experiences that, although they may be dangerous, they nonetheless provide meaning for one’s life, as he proclaims: “for - believe me - the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is - *to live dangerously*” (1882, p. 161)! Vladimir and Estragon are too afraid of additional failure, so they accept the status quo though it does not serve them. They are, therefore, servants of different tides that pass, and different whims of people, which categorize their type of morality as slave morality, meaning that they are not in charge of their destinies. In act I, when Pozzo hurts Lucky, they remain helpless against his suffering and even participate in humiliating him despite dimly protesting against it. Pozzo has an air of being “positively bad” as he describes himself and he let them have his leftover bones then later boasts about it, to their gratitude. This shows how impressionable Vladimir and Estragon are. Pozzo can be seen as their test in this regard, or their scale for self-agency. He treats them like they are beneath him, and they both allow it because he is materially richer and he has asserted himself onto them, which shows they are

people-pleasers which is another inherent characteristic of people rattled with fear, and who would willingly submit to anyone who shows an indication of leadership. This readiness to serve is yet another characteristic of the Last Man.

They do not speak of having awareness of a means to transcend their situation; however, waiting ceaselessly for Godot is the way out of their absurd rattle. They do not affirm their lives for they look back in regret and reminiscence to whence they were in Paris and could have ended their lives on the Eiffel tower, but did not. In addition to this, their recollection of events is always cut short with one of them abruptly changing the subject, and the other one going along with it. In act I, for instance, Estragon says he used to be a poet, and Vladimir followed up by asking how his leg is doing, changing the subject seamlessly as if having a vocation in life did not matter (I, p. 4). In the past, they used to have meaningful lives before they faded into nothing. Perhaps precipitated by hegemonic pressure to conform, they got burnout from their professional and/or social responsibilities; either way, Vladimir and Estragon are ceaselessly awaiting Godot now. That is the only step they take towards life affirmation. Having an instinctual idea that their kind of men must be abolished and a better kind instated on Earth, they are sitting on a mound in the midst of nothing, incapacitated by their seemingly perpetual longing and equal terror of his arrival. This implies that they are not consciously making the choice to become more than they are, although they know it in their heart that Godot must come. Vladimir sums this up when he says:

But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! ... It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflection, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come— (II, p. 72).

Godot's coming is an allusion to the inevitability of overcoming the Last Man by the 'arrival' of the *Übermensch*. Taking their characters not as merely personal, but abstracting them and laying them on the Nietzschean land of Last, higher and Over men, a map may be sketched aligning the order of Vladimir and Estragon's place on this representational plan, thus first putting them with the Higher Men, to quickly drop back down to take their spot amongst the Last. But having once stood higher than their current state of affairs, these abstracted personae have understood what exists further on the realm of Overmen. Therefore, Vladimir and Estragon are peculiar Last Men, men who are acutely aware of their flaws, albeit, stagnant in them.

#### **b. Godot as Overman**

Godot will save the Last Men by annihilating them for their destiny is to be overcome. As such, the *Übermensch* ideal can be seen as both their greatest threat and promise for becoming more than they are. Only in a world of abstracted personifications, they shall be undone and rendered historical precursors for the Overman. This can be explained in the way Nietzsche describes man as "a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman \_ a rope over an abyss" (1882, p. 8). He also explains that man is further from the Overman than he is of primates, which goes to show just how distant this energetic ideal is to the modern human being. His sister and editor, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, in the preface to *Thus spake Zarathustra*, however, gave a less gloomy interpretation of what she believed her brother meant by it: "It is not a far remote creature, but is meant as a possibility which men of the present could realize with their spiritual/physical energies" (Förster-Nietzsche, 1905, pp. xi-xii). Still, the men of the play are such examples of those who do not possess enough Will to Power to self-actualize, unlike other Higher Men who would be willing to plant trees that will take centuries to provide shade for long successions of generations (Nietzsche, 1878).

When Godot is first mentioned in the play, Estragon despairs. He pauses and asks questions about the whereabouts of their meeting, and then the date of it. Both characters share a sense of uncertainty and are haunted by his eventual arrival. The next time Godot is mentioned, Estragon inquires about what they had even wanted from him. They mention “a kind of prayer ... a vague supplication” (I, p. 10). It is not something they can readily discuss. Godot told them he would think about it, unhurried in fulfilling their solicitation. When Estragon asks Vladimir about their roles in the matter, Vladimir answers that they “come in ... on [their] hands and knees” ( I, p. 11), a metaphor for helplessness. Shortly before they discuss this, they briefly mention repentance, and although they tacitly desire it, Vladimir suddenly breaks into laughter and just as suddenly stops and says: “one daren’t even laugh anymore” (I, p. 3). Their sense of despair is then renewed because there is “nothing to be done” (I, p.4), for they may not escape the eventuality of their undoing and overcoming. Estragon professes that “people are bloody ignorant apes” (I, p. 5) whilst Vladimir recounts inconsistencies in Evangelists’ stories about Christ and the thieves; they particularly wonder why one of the infidels was spared from eternal damnation. This underscores their interest in the topic of repentance and the chances one has of being saved despite their transgressions, or in their case, despite their weaknesses and failures.

The last time Godot is mentioned in the play, a slight change of attitude is remarked, and they are now waiting for him with less despair for they “will be saved” (II, p. 87) if he comes the next day before they end themselves. Their suicide in this case can be philosophically interpreted as eternal damnation: if Last Men kill themselves, their abstract death means sterilizing their development indefinitely, which is why they hold on for the ideal to arrive like consecutive loops form a comprehensive chain. If it is broken at any point, the ideal is not attained, and Nietzsche’s formula fails. Samuel Beckett intelligently ends the play without connecting its pieces together, and in so doing, he sustains the link to the Overman.

Samuel Beckett in his writings is known to employ a technique so loud that it fulfills its purpose in complete silence: extended moments of quiet invaded *Waiting for Godot* about Vladimir and Estragon, and in the midst of silence, fear of the abyss emerged, making the characters overly sensitive to its sound. During both acts of the play, [silence] is often omnipresent along with the characters' continual self-distraction from it as if it were a beast; Vladimir wakes Estragon up from his slumber and they plead with each other to keep talking in order to pass the time. Together they successfully evade stillness with chaplinesque silliness and talk. They even make use of their hats, exchanging theirs and Lucky's repeatedly to decide which one each of them likes best (II, pp. 63-64).

Quietism is a term that came to describe a religious method of contemplative prayer which was popular in seventeenth-century Europe. A prominent figure of quietism was a Spanish priest named Miguel de Molinos (1628-1696) who became infamous for a manual of prayer entitled *The Spiritual Guide*. In its pages, the author discussed a way in which man was to attain the highest stages of equanimity with God, by way of doing as little as possible, not paying mind to any distractions. He devised his method in several steps, each one bringing the believer to complete surrender, until the complete *annihilation* of self is achieved. Molinos explains this in chapter XIX by proclaiming that "this powerful and practical conformity to the Divine will in all things leads the soul to annihilation and transformation with God, without the mixture of raptures, or external ecstasies, or vehement affections" (1675, p. 131).

Vladimir and Estragon, however, living in a postmetaphysical world, must be willing to submit to the fact that the quietist ideal is not achievable, so they consume their distractions in the form of radishes, turnips, and senseless chatter. The abstraction of these characters following Nietzsche's formula for the order of men from slave morality bearer, to the Higher Men and ultimately to the quintessential *Übermensch*, only have this latter as an ideal to hold on to. He is not God –as God is an archaic myth to the Western man– but the next best thing.

Interestingly enough, the terminology of Godot, the much-anticipated titular character of the play, bears a resemblance to the name of God, followed by [ot], the French suffix used to express a diminutive form for words to express terms of endearment, thus it being viable to interpretation to describe Godot an alternate god, one who is less omnipresent and intimidating, or perhaps even one that is *reachable*. From the perspective of Godot's attainability or arrival, the multiple silences that interrupt the play are not necessarily used to evoke transcendence of mind and soul, like de Molinos' prayers. On the contrary, Vladimir and Estragon's silences are sharp reminders of their transience, which their Last Men' consciousnesses cannot readily accept despite knowing that a transvaluation must occur. Their being stuck on a hamster wheel that yields entertaining diversions successfully keeps them from stillness which would make them look around and face their realities as failed Higher Men who are now in the sphere of slaves. That is why they so vehemently refuse silence as they are awaiting annihilation by Godot's inevitable (over)coming.

### **c. Antiegalitarianism of Pozzo and Lucky**

*"Nietzsche and equality"* is an article written by James Wilson in which he critiques the views that Nietzsche formed about the concept of equality. He distinguishes three main stands that critics usually take on the philosopher's work, from condemning his stance on equality, to defending it, or deferring judgment completely which Wilson says, imports a failure of moral nerve (Wilson, 2007). In the modern era, man has come to believe in the ubiquity of egalitarianism, taking the equality of every man as the basis for morality. In *Waiting for Godot* however, it is an antiegalitarian morality that pervades in the interactions of the two characters Pozzo and Lucky, with each expressing their own polar opposite of domination and servitude. In so doing, they represent Nietzsche's flair for an aristocratic social hierarchy. His antiegalitarian ideas make more sense than to discard them on ideological grounds, for he presented his philosophy of morality in a way that begs the question of whether it is even a

positive thing for equality to play an important role in our thinking, both politically and morally speaking, despite the pervasiveness of our commitment to making every man equal to the other. Having put every man on the same footing makes one automatically reject any other argument that challenges the righteousness of egalitarianism. However, Nietzsche posits it a stepping-stone for any great civilization to have both its upper men and those of the lower rank who serve at the bottom of the hierarchy in an aristocratic model of society. In *Beyond good and evil*, he most clearly outlines these views:

Every elevation of the type "man," has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society and so it will always be —a society believing in a long scale of gradations of rank and differences of worth among human beings, and requiring slavery in some form or other. Without the pathos of distance, such as grows out of the incarnated difference of classes, out of the constant outlooking and downlooking of the ruling cast on subordinates and instruments, and out of their equally constant practice of obeying and commanding, of keeping down and keeping at a distance— that other more mysterious pathos could never have arisen, the longing for an ever new widening of distance within the soul itself, the formation of ever higher, rarer, further, more extended, more comprehensive states, in short, just the elevation of the type "man," the continued "self-surmounting of man,".... (1886, p. 197)

This passage aims against the non-aristocratic reflective equilibrium of morality upon which modern day equality is considered to be the end-point of a deliberative process of our moral system wherefrom we judge our beliefs about human rights. Clearly, Nietzsche argues in favor of a state of being in society in which the powerful are recognized and are obeyed by the subjects, thus, he sees, is the only way for development, despite the prevailing notions of equality that the modern man preaches. In addition to this, in *On the Genealogy of morality*, Nietzsche further elaborates on opinions he formed in *Beyond good and evil* and traces the history of the development of morality back to ancient times, where we find that Masters' subjugation of slaves instilled in them a sense of bitterness that they cannot afford to act out on, which he termed as *ressentiment*. This latter breeds bad conscience in slaves who attempt to assuage it by taking a form of revenge on the Masters, as Nietzsche points out:

The beginning of the slaves' revolt in morality occurs when *ressentiment* itself turns creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of those beings who,

denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 20).

In this way, the slaves achieve a semblance of content which consequently keeps them in their low places where they become at least partially satisfied with their lives. Moreover, “in a ‘slave’ morality this negative term ‘evil’ is central, and slaves can come to a pale semblance of self-affirmation only by observing that they are *not* like the ‘evil’ masters” (Nietzsche, 1887, p. xxi). Nietzsche further relates this mode of thinking to Christianity's *modus operandi* of: “I am morality itself, and nothing else is morality” (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 151).

Pozzo has the figurative and literal grip on Lucky, his slave. From the first time he is introduced on stage, he exercises complete control of the latter who seems to have succumbed to his domination. Not only that, Lucky is unwilling to free himself and even weeps when his Master talks about taking him to the fair and selling him in order to get a price for him. Master says that he is not willing to simply kick Lucky out nor to get rid of him any other way out of the goodness of his heart. He proceeds to humiliate his servant whilst he holds his possessions, guessing that the reason he is so devoted to being a good slave is to spare himself from being let go (I, pp. 24-25). Lucky is, therefore, completely dependent upon Pozzo and does not know what he would do with his freedom if he got it. That is what makes him do his best to maintain servitude. It is how he finds meaning to his life like his Master, whose entire life revolves around showing dominion over his humble Lucky. Unsurprisingly, they are oftentimes related to the Hegelian dichotomy given how exteriorized their dynamics are. Hegel in *Phenomenology of spirit*, upon telling the story of human spirit through history of consciousness, recognizes that the dissolution of this unity results in two types of consciousnesses:

...Self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness. In immediate self-consciousness the simple ‘I’ is absolute mediation, and has as its essential moment lasting independence. The dissolution of that simple unity is the result of the first experience; through this there is posited a pure self-consciousness, and a consciousness which is

not purely for itself but for another, i.e. is a merely immediate consciousness, or consciousness in the form of thinkhood. Both moments are essential. Since to begin with they are unequal and opposed, and their reflection into a unity has not yet been achieved, they exist as two opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman (1807, p. 115).

These types that ensue are the Master and the slave. The Master, otherwise known as the Lord, values freedom above all, whilst the slave, or the bondsman, decides freedom is useless if life is lost. Although the superior Master ideal is praised above the other, Hegel makes the contradictory distinction between what is initially conceived as domination and submission. The slave soon grows to assert his indispensability in the life of the Master whose life becomes an unfettered feast of consumption and enjoyment that the slave tends to and anticipates and takes care of. In this way, the dialectic of the spirit is flipped, and the slave and Master become codependent on each other for their survival. Hegel explains this dialectic by saying: “The lord therefore paradoxically depends for his lordship on the bondsman’s self-consciousness, and entirely fails of the fully realized independence of status which his self-consciousness demands” (1807, p. 522).

In the play, Lucky finds meaning in carrying out the menial tasks that Pozzo orders him to do, who likewise finds entertainment in continuing to tyrannize his pitiful servant. For instance, he orders him to dance for Vladimir and Estragon (I, p. 33). He showcases his dominion by ordering him to perform humiliating acts. In the first act, Lucky is given a hat which he cannot think without, but with which he then lets out a long ramble that does not make sense. Alas, professes Pozzo, there was a time when Lucky’s thoughts were lucid and pretty (I, p. 32). Lucky’s long years of servitude have proved detrimental to both his physical and mental wellbeing, becoming inapt to even form coherent ideas and express them. “Old dogs have more dignity” cruelly says Pozzo about him, “... you can’t drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill them” (I, p. 25). His subservience has become so

selfless that it tipped the glass and it lost the pleasure it once brought Pozzo, hence his willingness to sell him now. The Master/slave dynamics have failed to bring neither of them fulfillment.

This state of incompleteness is highlighted insofar as Pozzo and Lucky's behaviors are concerned. Having initially resigned to his Master, Lucky is loyal to him. Moreover, he finds a sort of masochistic contentment in bowing to him as well as comfort and relief from independence. Pozzo, however, grows to feel weighed by this. He says: "He used to be so kind... and so helpful ... now... he is killing me" (I, p. 27). Although it can be argued that Lucky holds feelings of "ressentiment" against his Master, to follow Nietzsche's reasoning about the Master-slave dynamics (1882, p. xxi), he only feels a strong enough urge to take out his hostility on Estragon in act I of the play. Another viable reason for Lucky's abrupt violence can be attributed to his lack of mental clarity, hence believing that by striking the man, he is defending his position as a slave in order to impress his Master and make him keep him.

Pozzo speaks lucidly about his views on suffering: "The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else, another stops" (I, p. 25). He quantifies laughter in the same fashion, then proceeds to defend beliefs about "[their] generation, it is not any unhappier than its predecessors... Let us not speak at all" (I, pp 25-26). Pozzo believes in the stasis of the world despite the opposing currents that flow within it, reinforcing his ideas on the balance that is inherent to the order of things, as well as its arbitrariness by asserting that it was chance that determined his relationship to Lucky: "Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed otherwise. To each his due" (I, p. 24). His views, devoid of any real belief in the righteousness of his superiority over Lucky, posits an antiegalitarianism based, not on mental dominance, like Nietzsche thought, but on chance that wills order. The Master, here, by virtue

of awareness of the arbitrariness of his superiority, does not relate his superiority to an inherent quality within himself, but merely to random chance, and in so thinking, he opposes Nietzsche's and Hegel's beliefs in the difference between men that breeds hierarchical social ranks. Therefore, Pozzo ultimately subscribes to a nihilistic, or at the very least, Absurdist philosophy of life, projected into the play by the playwright, Samuel Beckett's personal views. Pozzo and Lucky's relationship has failed to fulfill its purpose. Jerking a rope and holding bags and answering each command has lost its vigor, which contradicts the characteristic sentiment of the noble, or the strong, of being light-hearted and unbothered by their subordinates. The dichotomy, therefore, shows a rift in the mental balance that can be caused by complete idle obedience of the weak and the mechanical control of the Masters.

Unlike Nietzsche's conceptualizing of the Master morality as that of higher rank of people who go about their lives irrespectively of others' considerations, Samuel Beckett in this play subverts these considerations. He traces them back to Hegel's interdependence of the slave and Master, which we see in act II as well, when Pozzo loses his sight. However, despite remaining Master, Pozzo is now even more dependent on Lucky than Lucky is on him. The Master's tie to the slave is material; the slave's is psychological, and they are both miserable in their hierarchical construction.

*Waiting for Godot*, therefore, draws many parallels to Nietzsche's philosophy. The analysis conducted in chapter II showed an implicit critique of the German philosopher on two levels, one on his antiegalitarian views, arguing that the rigid rules of a slave and a Master come to lose their initial appeal after the dynamic settles into mechanical domination; another critique is on the level of the main characters Vladimir and Estragon when they are sketched out as abstract representations a peculiar kind of Last Men that even though had already seen beyond the confinements of nihilism and established itself, it was still plunged

back into it. Godot, in this same presentation, is the ever-absent Overman, to whom Samuel Beckett retains a lifeline.

The quest for meaning in modern art may have been forsaken for Absurdist creations; however, if one were to trace the plays I have conducted this study on, they would clearly see the quench of human reason for a solution on how to deal with the irrationality of the world. Albert Camus famously made this the project of his philosophy, as exposed in *Caligula*, then elaborated on in his consecutive works. The author has, to a great degree, elucidated his argument that being happy matters above all in this world that does not reciprocate, albeit with careful consideration for reasonable morality. *Caligula*'s downfall was brought about by his non-commitment to community life alongside his personal freedom.

Therefore, I have contrasted *Waiting for Godot*'s seemingly everlasting wait, in that barren setting, to *Caligula*'s overindulgence in the Empire of Rome, to showcase two of man's extreme reactions against the indifference of the world, Samuel Beckett's inert characters become, then, important manifestations of the stillness of the world, whereas Camus's character Caligula embodies the gods to also manifest the world's idle response to man's plea. Combined with Nietzsche's beliefs in morality and men, as well as his philosophy in what concerns and related to his infamous *Übermensch*, these plays go one step further into a new territory, one which does not supplicate an outer force, but refrains from spirituality in favor of living as their own types of men. In the process, these plays describe the nihilism of the modern era, in addition to expressing the possibility to overcome their current stature.

## V. Conclusion

In this present dissertation, I have attempted a philosophical study of *Caligula* (1944) and *Waiting for Godot* (1953) by Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett, respectively. The plays share many themes, *inter alia* existential crises and Absurdist views of the world. However, each one of them, by virtue of the playwrights' personal philosophies in life, implemented these themes differently.

The study has been conducted on the plays from a Nietzschean perspective, which has come to be a tradition in literary analysis, given the intricacy of his views and the moral ambiguities and outright antiegalitarianism which he endorsed. As one of the most controversial philosophers of the modern world, and because of his skillfulness with prose, Nietzsche has become one of the most influential thinkers, influencing playwright and philosopher Albert Camus, as well as Samuel Beckett's personal views, with which they then imbue their stories. My take on the plays borrows from Nietzsche's most known concepts, that he developed and revisited in his various books, as he had a sporadic style and often wrote in aphorisms. The methods I implemented are mainly those of his moral views, antiegalitarian opinions, his much beloved *Übermensch*, the Last Man and the Higher Man.

Putting these concepts into a methodical analysis of *Caligula* and *Waiting for Godot* has revealed the extent of Nietzsche's influence on the playwrights, the difference between the main characters of these plays, the implicit critiques that the playwrights make of Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as the unlikely similarities to be found between Caligula, Vladimir and Estragon. These similarities of theirs consist of feelings of guilt, pondering the question of suicide, and their failure to embody a higher state of being despite having the prerequisites to overcome themselves. Vladimir and Estragon give in to nihilism to the point where they have become stuck in an eternally recurrent loop of eventlessness, whereas Caligula by an excess of drive, drives himself to "superior suicide" (Camus, 1957, p. vi), aided by his grateful and

loving subservients. On the whole, my dissertation had to do with dissecting the traits of Last Men in Vladimir and Estragon, to strengthen my argument that they are a peculiar case of Higher Men who have somehow descended to mediocrity, in the same way that Caligula descends into madness after having shown traits of Overcoming. The plays are, therefore, found to be dialogically interrelated by studying their hidden polemics.

Lastly, I owe my study of *Caligula* and *Waiting for Godot* to their pliability and openness to interpretation. They have provided canvases upon which a sketch of Nietzschean notions could be made –whilst retaining their essences as stories that emphasize man’s need for purpose in life– as well as map out two extremes of going about this hunt for meaning, in all its imperfection. This is what brings me to ask these questions: Do *Caligula* and *Waiting for Godot* prove the impracticality of Nietzsche’s individual idealism, or do they merely explore this question in a too-literal sense? If so, what other plays/novels can apply these ideas on their narratives successfully, to perhaps illustrate the practical side of Nietzsche’s Overman and serve, not as satire against the Nietzschean idealism, but as parable, to showcase the dangers of nihilism for those individuals with a greater project for themselves but who are infested with guilt and threatened by society?

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