

OBJECTS IN THE THEATRE OF SAMUEL BECKETT

OBJECTS IN THE THEATRE OF SAMUEL BECKETT:
THEIR FUNCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE AS
COMPONENTS OF HIS THEATRICAL
LANGUAGE

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of all the plays of Samuel Beckett written for the live theatre, with a view to elucidating their meaning through a study of the objects present on the stage. The frame of reference is consistently that of the play in actual production. The Beckett stage is never cluttered: there are always very few people, words, or things in the Beckett dramatic world. Similarly there is little movement. (The same people, words, things, and movement, however, repeat themselves obsessively.) It is proposed that every object specified as being on stage by the stage directions of the author or by the dialogue, and whether functioning as part of set, costume, or properties, makes a dramatic statement in interaction with word and gesture. What man does and says in relationship to things largely defines his existence. As the dramatic oeuvre of Beckett progresses from Waiting for Godot (1953) to Not I (1972) the function and significance of objects becomes increasingly marked as people, words, and movement convert to things, silence (or incoherent outpourings), and stillness. As the Beckett world becomes increasingly "réifié" the bleakness of his vision is intensified.

Beckett's use of objects as part of his theatrical language becomes increasingly sophisticated and complex. It is discovered that two peculiarly Beckettian contributions are made to what Artaud called "le langage concret" of the stage: character-objects, and light functioning as object. The use of both emphasizes the dehumanization of Beckett's characters: as they become progressively static and fragmented they become increasingly less the manipulators of objects and are increasingly themselves manipulated by objects. The light as object elicits the voice in Play and Not I. In Play the human being is part of the object (urn) that contains him and in Not I has herself become an object, Mouth, suspended in the light above the stage. In the last plays, then, the Beckett stage is totally dominated by objects. They make the only statement: the urns and Mouth speak. Since speech is the definitive human attribute of the Beckett hero throughout Beckett's work, objects have thus superseded human beings at the centre of the Beckett dramatic world.

PREFACE

This thesis, which deals with the significance of and function of objects in the theatre of Samuel Beckett, requires frequent references to French criticism as well as to English. In addition reference is occasionally made to Beckett works written in French. Samuel Beckett writes with equal facility in both languages, although his stage drama since Endgame has been written first in English and then translated. With one exception I have not translated citations from French texts. The first quotation in Chapter I, however, the longest in the thesis, is translated for the reader. It is hoped that the other briefer passages given in French will offer no serious difficulty to the English reader.

References are made in each chapter to the "text" of the plays. Some explanation of which "text" is referred to is necessary, since in the theatre the director works with the printed text which becomes increasingly the director's working script as rehearsal advances toward production. This working script for each production being generally unavailable, I have considered the English text to be the text published in America by Grove Press. The

one exception is Come and Go. The text I have used for Come and Go is that of Calder and Boyars (1967), which includes photographs from the original production in Germany. When details from the working script are known and appropriate, allusions are made to this second "text". When the French version of a play is referred to I have used the Editions de Minuit text of the play.

Research for this thesis was completed in Paris in June, 1975. I am particularly grateful to the interest and assistance of Mme. Anne Ubersfeld, Professor of Contemporary Drama at the Institut d'Etudes Théâtrales, Université de Paris III. Mme. Ubersfeld offered the resources of the theatre library at the Institut, including the thesis of Andrée Waintrop, entitled Etude des Mises en Scène des Pièces de Samuel Beckett par Roger Blin ("préparé sous la direction de Bernard Dort"). This work dealt specifically with the original Roger Blin productions of four Beckett plays and included many production photographs as well as taped interviews with Roger Blin. It is largely on these interviews that I base my discussion of Blin's early Beckett productions.

The Arsenal Library in Paris offered large bound volumes of French press clippings related to Beckett and his work for each year subsequent to the initial 1953

production of En Attendant Godot (Waiting for Godot).

These volumes proved very useful in supplying French reaction to Beckett productions as well as reviews of each new volume in French of Beckett's work or of Beckett criticism.

I am grateful to Mme. Marie-Hélène Dasté of the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault who was pleased to be interviewed and who introduced me to Mme. Madeleine Renaud. Mme. Renaud had been Beckett's famous Winnie of Oh Les Beaux Jours and was currently playing in the Compagnie's production of Pas Moi (Not I) directed by Beckett himself. I have made reference to my conversation with Mme. Renaud and to this production which was part of a double-bill with La Dernière Bande (Krapp's Last Tape).

This thesis will discuss the significance of objects in all of Beckett's plays written for the live theatre. I have not considered in the discussion either the Buster Keaton silent film, Film, or the television production, Eh Joe. The chapters deal with individual plays; entire chapters are devoted to the three full-length plays -- Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and Happy Days. The other shorter plays are grouped according to technical or thematic similarities. The chapters are generally divided according to the various functions of objects in the stage

production of each play: set objects, costume objects,
and property objects. Two further divisions are made when
appropriate to the play being considered: character-
objects and light as object.

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CHAPTER I
OBJECTS IN THE THEATRE OF SAMUEL BECKETT:
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Précédant la parole il y a la chose. C'est au théâtre que les objets se détachent sous le double éclairage des lumières et du regard rivé des spectateurs. Sur scène les choses acquièrent une extraordinaire éloquence et nous font parfois oublier les personnages qui viennent comme des intrus envahir un espace parfait et éternel. Le No japonais, théâtre abstrait et poétique, utilise à la perfection ce langage symbolique, comme une conversation sous-jacente, ou parallèle à celle des répliques.

Notre théâtre a négligé pendant des siècles ce langage des choses, et c'est l'énorme trouvaille des contemporains que d'avoir ressuscité cette langue morte. Longtemps une chaise ne se trouvait sur scène que pour fournir un siège à un acteur, pour les "commodités de la conversation", comme disaient les précieux. Le théâtre d'avant-garde a su redonner à l'objet sa valeur. Une chaise de par le fait qu'elle se trouve placée sur une scène, devient parole. . . . Chez Beckett, dans les romans comme au théâtre, il y a une réhabilitation de l'objet, phénomène courant dans la nouvelle littérature. . . . Les personnages de Beckett sont démunis de presque tout (leur plus grand luxe serait une bicyclette), mais c'est la paucité de leurs possessions qui donnent de la valeur aux quelques objets qui les entourent, devenus trésors et signes.¹

It will be the purpose of this thesis to examine
the role of objects in the theatre of Beckett. Beckett's

"langage des choses" provides not so much "une conversation sous-jacente, ou parallèle à celle des répliques", but in combination with verbal and gestural language makes up what might be called "le langage théâtral". The playwright's theatre language is part of his dramatic technique. "Au théâtre plus qu'ailleurs les techniques ne sont pas le moyen ou le vêtement, elles sont le sens même."² In Beckett's theatre, it seems to me, objects progressively become the dominant component of the playwright's theatrical language; thus by a careful examination of Beckett's use of them we discover "le sens même" of his plays.

Before examining the function and significance of objects in the theatre of Samuel Beckett, I shall try to define what, for the purposes of this thesis, I take to be "objects" in the theatre. By stretching definitions and widening one's focus, one could consider as objects such diverse things as Lucky's tirade in Waiting for Godot and Hamm's sightless eyes in Endgame. But the definition from which I shall work is a narrower, more precise one. The playwright's own starkness might act as a check on our most fanciful wanderings. What Robbe-Grillet calls the quality of "présence", "être-là", defines a basic element of Beckett's theatre. Estragon and Vladimir are there, before us on the stage. That is what is primarily required of them.

As for Gogo and Didi, they resist even more obstinately any interpretation but the most commonplace one, the most immediate: they are men. And their situation can be summed up in one simple statement, beyond which it is impossible to go: they are there, they are on the stage.³

A tree is on the stage as well. It may be a tree fashioned of coat-hangers or of papier-mâché according to what Anne Ubersfeld calls "le texte du metteur-en-scène",⁴ but it must be there because its presence is stipulated in the author's stage directions. As Alan Schneider warns us, we are not to take Beckett's stage directions lightly; few contemporary playwrights are so precise as to what must be there.

No other author I know of writes stage directions which are so essentially and specifically valid -- as we discovered to our gain on each occasion when we ventured to disregard or to oppose them. . . . And I soon found myself not only getting more and more faithful to his printed demands but expecting an equal allegiance from the actors when they tended to go off on their own tangents -- as actors are wont to do. . . . As well as designers. . . .⁵

First, then, objects are things required by the definitive text of the play, either by explicit stage directions or by dialogue. They occupy space on the stage as integral part of the set, as costume, as property, even as Beckett's strangely fixed characters. This last category of objects we shall consider as "character-objects".

In some of Beckett's plays theatrical lighting

becomes an object on stage -- of fixed dimension, not merely allowing us to see the action clearly, by flooding the acting area with light, but having definite physical dimensions and itself making an important and individual contribution to the theatrical language of performance. The spotlight functions generally as a symbol of the theatre itself. In Beckett's theatre it becomes a symbol of the exigencies of consciousness, of self-awareness. In the light over his table and recorder Krapp feels alone, faced with the piled-up former "selves", Krapps-gone-by objectified in the tapes. Mouth of Not I is fixed by the circle of the spotlight and must go on talking while that light is on her. The "inquisitor" light of Play forces the three mask-like faces to talk, to tell and retell their story and inquire about their tortured present state. The ladies of Come and Go become self-aware only when together in the light, when they are still between coming and going.

Some objects in Beckett's theatre do not fit easily into one convenient category. The tape-recorder in Krapp's Last Tape, for example, is a crucially important object on the stage. The entire play is based on one man, Krapp, in relation to this object. One of the very few technical objects that appear in all of Beckett's theatre, it occupies a fixed space on the stage as part of the set, displays its

function as Krapp's essential prop, and even acts as an extension of the character, since it "speaks" with his voice.

The tape-recorder could be considered as part of the set, since little in a Beckett set functions merely as background. He strips away almost everything so that in the denuded environment everything that is there makes a dramatic statement. There is no naturalistic window-dressing or local colour: the single picture turned to the wall in Endgame makes an emphatic statement; the urns that contain the three characters of Play express starkly the truth of their lives. But I shall consider Krapp's recorder under the heading of properties, since he is able to manipulate and control it. Nagg and Nell in Endgame cannot manipulate their ash-cans; they are fixed in them as the three characters in Play are fixed in their urns. Nor can Hamm manoeuvre his wheel-chair. Ash-cans, urns, chairs, will all be considered as parts of a "set". While Clov can move Hamm's chair and lift the lids of the ash-cans they cannot be displaced without their human contents, any more than the entire cell-like room of Endgame can be "displaced", although Clov can go in and out of its door.

Estragon's boots in Waiting for Godot are clearly part of his costume. But so much stage business has to do with these famous boots, as well as with the various hats of

Godot, and with the contents of Winnie's bag in Happy Days, that we cannot consider them as merely costume -- that is, what the actor wears. They become props. On the other hand, Krapp's clown-like too-large shoes (one unlaced and only half-on in the Paris, summer 1975 production of La Dernière Bande) are objects of costume, as are the hats and coats of the three interchangeable ladies of Come and Go. Since they are not concerned in any stage business or gesture we shall consider their importance as costume only.

Characters themselves may become objects, immobile, fixed in space. They are distinguishable from other objects by their consciousness and by their suffering in time, ultimately by their mortality. Nell dies in her ash-can. But she is the only character who actually dies on stage. We do not, however, see her "die". One is reminded of Guildenstern's words in Tom Stoppard's play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead:

. . . you can't act death. . . . It's just a man failing to reappear, that's all -- now you see him, now you don't, that's the only thing that's real: here one minute and gone the next and never coming back -- an exit, unobtrusive and unannounced, a disappearance gathering weight as it goes on, until, finally, it is heavy with death.⁶

Nell simply fails to reappear and Nagg does not answer Hamm's call at the play's end.

For Beckett's human beings-as-objects the suffering

imposed by time is not its "running out", as non-character objects are always "running out" in Beckett's theatre. Time does not run out, but runs on, seems virtually to slow down as one waits for it to end, for grains to add up to a life (Endgame), for night to fall (Happy Days), for the present to become the past (Play), for the "I" to be obliterated finally in silence and darkness -- "They being one."⁷ Beckett presents time's seeming endlessness for his character-objects by repetition, by ritualized movement, by verbal echoes and inverted situations, much as in music a fugue repeats in different voices modulations on its theme.

Character-objects may play at ending, but are powerless either to initiate or to end any process. Hamm "warms up" for his "last soliloquy"⁸ but the endgame is never over. One never knows, except if one has played it before, which is the "last" soliloquy. He can discard objects -- his whistle, his dog -- playing at being Prospero, ending the "revels" (Endgame, p. 56), but sightless and immobile he has never had any real power. He has never been master of the revels and can now only yearn to "have done with losing" (Endgame, p. 82). Winnie in Happy Days sinks deeper into the mound, her bag of possessions becoming increasingly depleted as tooth-paste and tonic run out. Like Hamm she can toss away the tonic

bottle but, unlike him, she is only too aware of her powerlessness to end anything. The burned umbrella will reappear intact, as will her shattered mirror. The bell will ring and she will get through another "happy day". During the entire second act the revolver beside her on the mound expresses her powerlessness, as her hands are now buried and she can do nothing but move her eyes. She repeats her trivial rituals despite the progressive depletion of her store of things, of her "classics", and of her above-ground body. She can only wait for the mound to engulf her completely:

I can do no more. (Pause.) Say no more. (Pause.)
 But I must say more. (Pause.) Problem here.
 (Pause.) No, something must move, in the world,
 I can't any more.⁹

The character-object is acted upon; he is subordinate to a power which in Endgame is represented by the script itself, and which in Play is distilled in the glare of the light. Hamm, despite his bravado, cannot determine when he will "speak no more" (Endgame, p. 84). He must wait and play until, as Clov puts it, at the play's opening, "Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap" (Endgame, p. 1). The play ends as it began -- Hamm, motionless, his face covered by the bloody handkerchief, Clov fixed in the doorway, staring at Hamm. They play out an ending but

essentially nothing has changed: "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on" (Endgame, p. 69). Hamm has not died; he is still dying. Clov has not left; he is still leaving. We are reminded of his opening line in the play, with its increasing uncertainty and desperation: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." (Endgame, p. 1). The characters of Play long to be released from their interrogation and try to create an ending. W1 thinks "it must be something I have to say".¹⁰ W2, approaching madness, orders the light, "Get off me! (Vehement.) Get off me!" (Play, p. 53).

The repetitiveness of human behaviour in time is constantly reinforced by the nature of theatre itself: on the next night the performance will be played again, the same lines will be spoken, and Hamm will again "warm up" for his "last soliloquy". As Peter Prook points out in The Empty Space, the French word for rehearsal is "répétition". He explores the connotations of the word, approaching, it seems to me, an articulation of the Beckett-drama view of life, or of dying, or waiting, which are all the same thing:

It is a drudge, a grind, a discipline; it is a dull action . . . repetition is a word with no glamour; it is a concept without warmth; the immediate association is a deadly one . . . repetition is the touring musical comedy repeating automatically with its fifteenth cast, actions that have lost their meaning and lost their savour. Repetition

is what leads to all that is meaningless in tradition. . . . These carbon-copy imitations are lifeless. Repetition denies the living.¹¹

The "drudge", the "grind", "all that is meaningless in tradition", are concepts that are made concrete by the choice of objects and their function in the theatre of Beckett. Certain objects are focussed on repeatedly: hats, shoes, coats, bags, and capacious pockets, and people that are incomplete, legless or bodiless, reduced to objects that can speak and die. The shoes and coats are used in tired-out repetitive vaudevillian "routines". The bags and pockets supply an assortment of accessories for commonplace rituals. The people reduced to objects are limited to simple, repetitious responses: Nagg and Nell pop in and out of their ash-cans; Winnie is finally limited for an entire act to mere eye-rolling.

The character-objects of Play are visually repetitions of each other: "Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns." (Play, p. 45) and at the play's "end" they are directed to repeat the entire text. After the second playing, there is a five-second blackout, spots then up on the three faces, a three-second pause and the play's second opening chorus is replayed -- for the third time, since it has already been played twice in the double run-through. The play's last line is but a repetition of the man's line in the second chorus: "We

were not long together --" (Play, p. 61).¹²

"Etre, c'est être perçu."¹³ The dictum is a favourite one of Beckett's. (He uses it at the opening of his script for Film: "Esse est percipi".¹⁴) All of his character-objects are acutely aware of the need to be perceived. When one is no longer perceived, one no longer exists. The man of Play wonders if he still exists: "Am I as much as . . . being seen?" (Play, p. 61). The spot is turned off; Beckett's "inquisitor" loses interest in the three characters and the blackout signals the end of Play. Up to her neck in earth Winnie must keep assuring herself that someone is watching her still. Again the theatre provides its own metaphorical statement of the "esse est percipi" concept. When the lights go off or the curtain goes down, the audience no longer sees; the characters, therefore, no longer exist. They enter "cet enfer de la non-perception à la fois souhaité . . . et reconnu comme le non-lieu total . . .".¹⁵

In Beckett's recent Not I, character-as-object is reduced still further from maimed, immobile humanity -- sightless, legless, trunkless -- to a mouth suspended in darkness. He thus reduces the human being to its irreducible essence: a mouth and a voice speaking in the darkness and inventing. We must infer the presence of the entire person from what the voice does: she listens,

responds: ". . . in a godfor -- . . . What? . . . girl? . . . yes . . .".¹⁶ She laughs, screams, and tells her story, which, despite her "vehement refusal to relinquish third person" (Not I, p. 87) is her life. The point Janvier makes in Beckett Par Lui-Même in relation to Malone applies equally to the narrator of Not I, to Winnie, to Hamm, and to the three characters of Play:

Car parler, et inventer surtout, c'est faire durer: c'est ainsi que le sent Malone, qu'il le vit, que le vivent tous les inventeurs becketttiens . . . soi, sans doute, est une histoire.¹⁷

Winnie says as much: "What now, Willie? (Long pause.) There is my story of course, when all else fails. (Pause.) A life. (Smile.) A long life." (Happy Days, p. 54).

One observes in Not I, in which the character-object is most obvious, the same entrapment of the self in space and time as that of Hamm, Winnie, and the trio of Play. The mouth cannot move out of the light; it must go on until the curtain comes down. Indeed Beckett directs that it continue speaking "behind curtain, unintelligible, ten seconds" (Not I, p. 87) until the house lights go up. The repetitiveness of her agonized outpouring suggests again that suffering will not end because time will not run out: parts of her narrative are repeated several times: her birth, the "buzzing . . . in the ears" (Not I, p. 77), the laughable notion of a "merciful . . .

God" (Not I, p. 77), punishment "for her sins" (Not I, p. 77), a "voice she did not recognize" (Not I, p. 80), and "can't stop" (Not I, p. 82). Like Hamm, Winnie, and the three characters of Play, she cannot change anything or manage to contrive an ending for "she": " . . . no matter . . . keep on . . . (curtain starts down) . . . hit on it in the end . . . then back . . ." (Not I, p. 87).

In one sense the Beckett character-as-object becomes increasingly free as his body becomes more and more constrained. The mind is freed to invent, to speak without relation to doing. One need no longer struggle to co-ordinate his interior life with exterior action. Existence is simplified. Murphy's mind is freed when he is bound to his rocking-chair. Citing Malloy and Moran, Janvier states "le paradoxe de la parole beckettienne et du corps englouti" as follows: "Dès que le corps ne parle plus, la voix fonctionnera mieux. . . . La perte du corps, c'est le triomphe de la parole."¹⁸ The self in immobility has opportunity to explore itself: "fuir, c'est se perdre. Se retirer, c'est peut-être avoir une chance de re-trouvailles."¹⁹ Beckett's characters at times express the liberating effect of physical constraint: Moran thinks, "To be literally incapable of motion at last, that must be something!"²⁰ Maddy Rooney, in All That Fall, one of Beckett's plays for radio, wishes to be free of the necessity of moving: "How can I go on, I cannot. Oh let

me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again!"²¹ Walking home with her from the station her husband tells her not to expect conversation. "Once and for all, do not ask me to speak and move at the same time."²² Winnie sees her position as preferable to (still crawling) Willie's: "What a curse, mobility!" (Happy Days, p. 46).

The inverse point is made dramatically by Beckett in Act Without Words I. The man, once "flung" onto the stage, is free to pursue the gratification offered by a series of objects. But just when gratification seems at hand the unseen Power that tantalizes but withholds satisfaction frustrates his efforts. Despite his mobility he is not free; his mind is constrained to devise strategems whereby he might act in relation to the objects offered. Only when he refuses to be provoked, remaining still at the play's end, choosing immobility, is his mind free to explore the self: "He looks at his hands."²³ To reinforce his stillness, Beckett repeats the instruction, "He does not move", four times.

It seems to me, however, that one can over-emphasize "le triomphe de la parole". Triumph for the word does not necessarily mean freedom for the self. The voice goes on: Nagg retells his joke "worse and worse" (Endgame, p. 22); Hamm repeats his story, "the one you've been telling yourself

all your days" (Endgame, p. 58); waiting for "the bell for sleep" (Happy Days, p. 59) Winnie narrates the story of Mildred, her Dolly, and the mouse: "There is my story of course, when all else fails" (p. 54). Mouth cannot stop "her" voice which seems to come from the outside -- "mouth on fire . . . stream of words . . . in her ear . . . practically in her ear . . . not catching the half . . . no idea what she's saying . . . imagine! . . . no idea what she's saying! . . . and can't stop . . . no stopping it . . . can't stop the stream . . ." (Not I, p. 82). The three characters of Play, as we have seen, are held by the light and their voices must go on, until blackout, replaying their trivial little domestic drama over and over. The word itself exercises a tyranny over the self -- "the obligation to express", as Beckett says, together with the knowledge that "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express".²⁴ Thus, as we shall see, characters-as-objects are not, I think, to be viewed as freed; their physical immobility only reinforces their virtual entrapment by time and sounds in time. The theatre itself provides us with a metaphor for this entrapment. The characters must play out the text of the play, however long. Clov asks, "What is there to keep me here?" (Endgame, p. 58). The answer

is only too obvious: "The dialogue." And the same lines are to be repeated every night until the "run" is over.

Objects, then, are things physically present on the stage and are either stipulated in stage directions or referred to specifically in the text. Light may be considered an object in specific plays. Characters fixed on the stage, immobile and physically incomplete, may be considered as character-objects. One is left with the task of determining their function and significance as components of Beckett's theatrical language. Let us leave aside for separate discussion the character-objects. Non-character objects have specific functions and characters are related to them in various ways. Jean Baudrillard makes this point about objects in his "Introduction" to Le Système des Objets: "tout objet transforme quelque chose",²⁵ while putting the emphasis not on the literal functions of objects, but on the complex social and psychological meaning they have for us:

Il ne s'agit donc pas des objets définis selon leur fonction, ou selon les classes dans lesquelles on pourrait les subdiviser pour les commodités de l'analyse, mais des processus par lesquels les gens entrent en relation avec eux et de la systématique des conduites et des relations humaines qui en résulte.²⁶

With some of these processes I shall be concerned in dealing with objects as components of sets, costume, and as properties. Objects have a practical function in the

theatre, obviously, as the instruments of action, and they "transform" something, cause some change of image or sound. Light as object obviously changes Krapp from a shadowy stumbling figure in semi-darkness to a clearly-defined old man who sits and listens and records. A character, Lucky, removes an object, his hat, from his head, and, surprisingly, his long white hair falls to his shoulders. His appearance is changed. Krapp puts a tape on the tape-recorder and listens to it play. The silence of the present is changed into sound from the past.

The object or its function may reveal something about the character or about the nature of his relationships with his world. Why are the hats in Godot specifically "bowlers"? Why is Winnie so intent on keeping her teeth white, her hair combed, her lips painted, when no one, not even Willie, ever looks at her? Why does Krapp choose to play this particular tape? The significance of the object in relation to its particular "user" I shall call its "metonymical" function. Beyond this function, it seems to me, the object has what we might call a "metaphorical" significance in the theatre of Beckett. Krapp's playing of the tape not only makes a statement about Krapp and his world, but about man and our world and about the nature of what emerges as the only real conflict in Beckett's oddly static plays. In Anne Ubersfeld's study

of the theatre of Victor Hugo, Le Roi et le Bouffon, we find a clear statement of the metaphorical function of the object:

l'objet . . . est la figure des vrais rapports entre le héros et le monde. . . . Il souligne le fait que le véritable adversaire du héros n'est pas un autre être ou ses propres passions, mais un univers solide à quoi il se heurte rudement . . . le conflit du héros s'établit moins avec un système de valeurs intérieures ou avec d'autres hommes porteurs d'autres passions, qu'avec l'ensemble des grandes forces sociales présentes sur le théâtre sous leur forme -- réifiée -- d'objets signifiants.²⁷

But in Beckett's theatre "le véritable adversaire" is not "l'ensemble des grandes forces sociales" but factors more formidable, more universal, beyond the social matrix, which define our human condition more fundamentally and more hopelessly: time, consciousness, death. Objects individually in Beckett's theatre may indeed make a statement about social forces but his concern is ultimately both narrower and wider: the self and the nature of life stripped, for the most part, of its social milieu. Beckett's characters-as-objects seem to me to provide us with his most dramatically effective metaphors for our alienated existence. He gives us not the social world "réifié" but the person "réifié", become his own object in a world of objects. The stories they tell are in the third person; the "I" has been objectified from a helpless cripple (the Hamm of Endgame) to a powerful, rich, but heartless lord of

the manor (the Hamm of Hamm's "chronicle"). Winnie becomes Mildred with her Dolly; Mouth protests vehemently throughout that her story is about "Not I". One recalls Janvier: "Car la parole de soi est forcément fiction: à se dérober toujours le sujet parlant finit par se reconnaître comme cet autre aliéné, dévoilé-dévoilant, dont Rimbaud disait Je est un autre."²⁸

The self disclaims its own story, which is its life. The object-perceived tries to dislocate from itself as perceiver. To detach oneself from one's life, to deny it, is in a sense to die. For Beckett's characters-as-objects, as we shall see, life is a constant dying. Ironically, as Winnie points out, "things" do seem to "have life", sometimes in inverse proportion to that of their object-like possessors.

Il est remarquable que les objets occupent de mieux en mieux un esprit que le corps ne retient pas. Déclarée notamment avec Molloy . . . cette attitude accompagne la première inquiétude fondamentale sur l'identité. . . . Au fur et à mesure que la personne se dilue . . . les objets tiennent lieu d'existence, et de cela le vocable obsessionnel de possessions. . . .²⁹

Objects in Beckett's theatre make increasingly important contributions to his theatrical language. Their function and significance will be explored in terms of their use in stage production of each play. To their usual theatrical categories of set, costume, props, will

be added two others, both peculiarly Beckettian. Focused bright light as used in certain of the plays functions as an object, as it has fixed shape and dimensions and operates as a separate thing in Beckett's theatre, rather than as mere complement to other objects. Similarly, Beckett's character-objects, the things that speak and die, are part of his unique contribution to "le langage des choses".

NOTES

¹Rose Lamont, "La Farce Métaphysique", in M. J. Friedman, ed., Configuration Critique de Samuel Beckett (Paris: M. J. Minard, 1964), 111.

I offer my own translation of this passage into English for the convenience of the reader:

Preceding the word there is the thing. It is in the theatre that objects become detached under the double illumination of lights and the fixed attention of the audience. On stage things acquire an extraordinary eloquence and sometimes make us forget the characters who come like intruders and invade a space [at once] perfect and eternal. The Japanese No, an abstract and poetic [kind of] theatre, uses to perfection this symbolic language, like an underlying conversation or a parallel one to that of dialogue.

Our theatre has neglected for centuries this language of things, and it is the enormous achievement of the contemporaries that they have re-instated this dead language. For a long time a chair was only on stage to provide a set for an actor, for the "conveniences of conversation", as the "précieux" would say. The avant-garde theatre has known how to restore the object to its proper place. A chair by the fact of being on stage becomes a word. . . . In the work of Beckett, in the novels as in the drama, there is a restoration of the object, a current phenomenon in the new literature. . . . The characters of Beckett are deprived of almost everything (their greatest luxury would be a bicycle), but it is the scarcity of their possessions which gives value to those objects which surround them, having become treasures and signs.

²Anne Ubersfeld, Armand Salacrou (Paris: Seghers, 1970), p. 75.

³Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Samuel Beckett, or 'Présence' in the Theatre", in Martin Esslin, ed., Samuel Beckett (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 111.

⁴Anne Ubersfeld used this term in conversation with me. As she pointed out, as soon as a play goes into rehearsal, the text that the director works with becomes his text, distinct from that of the author ("le texte de l'écrivain") as he adds stage blocking, gesture, the timing of sequences, etc.

⁵Alan Schneider, "Waiting for Beckett: A Personal Chronicle", in Bell Gale Chevigny, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Endgame" (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969), p. 19.

⁶Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 62.

⁷Samuel Beckett, "Play", in his "Cascando" and Other Short Dramatic Pieces (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 59.

⁸Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 78. [All subsequent references to Endgame are to this edition.]

⁹Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 60. [All subsequent references to Happy Days are to this edition.]

¹⁰Samuel Beckett, "Play", in his "Cascando" and Other Short Dramatic Pieces (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 54. [All subsequent references to Play are to this edition.]

¹¹Peter Brook, The Empty Space (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 154. [All subsequent references to The Empty Space are to this edition.]

¹²This cyclical effect, achieved by having the ending repeat the beginning, is referred to by Emmanuel Jacquot as a standard technique of Ionesco and others in what Jacquot terms "le théâtre de dérision": "le dénouement n'est que la reprise du commencement." (Emmanuel Jacquot, Le Théâtre de Dérision [Paris: Gallimard, 1974], p. 178.) The technique is seen in

Ionesco's La Cantatrice Chauve, La Leçon, and Délire à Deux. Genet uses it in Le Balcon.

¹³Ludovic Janvier, Beckett Par Lui-Même (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), p. 171. [All subsequent references to this work are to this edition.]

¹⁴Samuel Beckett, "Film", in his "Casando" and Other Short Dramatic Pieces, p. 75.

¹⁵Janvier, Beckett Par Lui-Même, p. 170.

¹⁶Samuel Beckett, "Not I", in his "First Love" and Other Shorts (New York: Grove Press, 1974), p. 76.

¹⁷Janvier, Beckett Par Lui-Même, pp. 97-98.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 104.

²⁰Samuel Beckett, "Molloy", in his Three Novels by Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 140. [All subsequent references to the trilogy are to this edition.]

²¹Samuel Beckett, "All That Fall", in his "Krapp's Last Tape" and Other Dramatic Pieces (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 37.

²²Ibid., p. 69. [All subsequent references to All That Fall are to this edition.]

²³Samuel Beckett, "Act Without Words I", in Endgame, p. 91.

²⁴Samuel Beckett, "Three Dialogues", in Martin Esslin, ed., Samuel Beckett (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), p. 17.

²⁵Jean Baudrillard, Le Système des Objets (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1968), p. 8. [All subsequent references to Le Système des Objets are to this edition.]

²⁶Baudrillard, Le Système, pp. 8-9.

²⁷Anne Ubersfeld, Le Roi et le Bouffon (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1974), pp. 588-589.

²⁸Janvier, Beckett Par Lui-Même, p. 178.

²⁹Ibid., p. 143.

CHAPTER II
WAITING FOR GODOT

A true symbol is specific, it is the only form a certain truth can take. The two men waiting by a stunted tree, the man recording himself on tape . . . the woman buried to her waist in sand, the parents in the dustbins, the three heads in the urns: . . . fresh images sharply defined -- and they stand on the stage as objects.¹

Beckett's momentous first produced and published play, Waiting for Godot, was written originally in French, and entitled En Attendant Godot. Beckett wrote it in the winter of 1948-49, between two novels of his trilogy, Malone Meurt and L'Innommable. Directed by Roger Blin, it opened at Jean-Marie Serreau's now-defunct Théâtre Babylone in Paris on 5 January, 1953. Roger Blin also had in his hands at that time Beckett's Eleutheria (still unpublished) but chose to produce Godot instead. He had no privileged foresight with which to see that it would usher in what various critics would call the "Theatre of the Absurd" (Martin Esslin), "le théâtre de Dérision" (Emmanuel Jacquart), "Metaphysical Farce" (Rosette Lamont), "the Theatre of Protest and Paradox" (George Wellwarth), "the Holy Theatre" (Peter Brook). Godot required only five characters, one-third the number required by Eleutheria and money was scarce. The scarcity of objects as well as

characters in Godot helped make it a relatively inexpensive play to produce. The set requires only one object -- a tree. Costumes consist of bits and pieces of mismatched and well-used clothing that one could (and did, in Blin's case) gather together from attic trunks and second-hand clothing stores. Properties (always called "props" by theatre people) are no less unelaborate. Pozzo's whip, stool, bag, vaporizer and pipe are almost as accessible as the food items required by the text -- radishes, turnips, carrots, some cold chicken and wine. The banality and paucity of the objects required by Godot reflect the simplicity and starkness of the situation, dialogue, and action of the play. Indeed we shall see that no Beckett play requires elaborate objects.

A pattern is set in Godot that is repeated through every Beckett play to Not I. There are no elaborate things in Beckett's theatre. The most complicated of his objects and his only theatrical acknowledgements of the fact of our technologically-advanced society are the tape-recorder in Krapp's Last Tape and the mobile spotlight of Play. The simplicity and scarcity of objects only serve to emphasize their importance. A Beckett stage is never cluttered with objects or people; it is denuded of almost everything. Thus whatever remains demands to be noticed and makes its statement all the more emphatically.

It is not easy to summarize the situation and action of a play in which one of its leading characters, Estragon, says, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!"² and of which one of its leading critics, Martin Esslin, says, "Nothing happens -- twice".³ Two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, familiarly known to each other as "Gogo" and "Didi", wait by a tree on a road somewhere for someone named Godot to keep his appointment with them. He has promised to come at nightfall; in the mean-time they pass the time as best they can in conversation with each other. They contemplate suicide briefly but the suggested plan proves impractical and their resolve is weak. Two strangers appear, Pozzo and Lucky; Pozzo leads Lucky on a leash and treats him tyrannically. Lucky diverts them briefly by performing a tortured dance and then by "thinking" aloud, delivering a kind of derailed lecture. After these two go on, a boy messenger arrives from Godot with the disappointing but apparently familiar "news" that Godot can not come this evening but will surely come the next evening. Act II is a run-down version of Act I. Again Pozzo and Lucky come by, still on their way somewhere, but Pozzo is now blind and Lucky is deaf and dumb. The deaf mute is leading the blind. Both fall down and after futile attempts to help them get up, Vladimir and Estragon sprawl helplessly on the ground too. Again the diversion

of company comes to an end. Pozzo and Lucky go on their way, Vladimir and Estragon continue their waiting, the boy comes again and brings the same message, that Godot again cannot keep the appointment but will come tomorrow "without fail" (p. 59). The tramps again consider briefly and reject the idea of suicide. They again run over the usual alternatives: tomorrow they will hang themselves or Godot will come and they will be "saved". They decide "Let's go." (p. 61). They do not move and we assume that Godot will not come and they will not hang themselves. They will simply go on waiting.

Set Objects

The play's meaning can be explored by looking at its objects, the things that Beckett's text requires to be on stage. We shall begin by examining the set, then progress through costume to properties. Beckett describes the setting in place and time: "A country road. A tree. Evening." Thus the only object we see as part of the set on the stage throughout the play is the tree. As the only constant object in the environment of the two clochards it should provide them with confirmation of their existence and help define their setting in time and space. But it only confuses them, confirming nothing but their suspicion that nothing is confirmable. Thus at the beginning of the

play, noting the bare tree, Estragon asks, "Where are the leaves?" (p. 10). Vladimir concludes, "It must be dead." To Estragon being dead means "No more weeping" (p. 10) since to be alive is to cry, to suffer, and to protest. The two consider other possible explanations for the bare tree: "perhaps it's not the season" (p. 10) or the tree may not be a tree but a "bush" or "shrub" and thus they may not be in the right place. Vladimir snaps at Estragon: "What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?" If the time or place is wrong, then their waiting here is futile. And even if the time and place are right they are uncertain about the object of their waiting: "He didn't say for sure he'd come." (p. 10). They cannot even agree whether or not they came here yesterday or whether he said Saturday or not. Vladimir is angry that "Nothing is certain when you're about." (p. 10). Towards the end of the play he will progress towards being able to admit uncertainty; he will give up trying to ascertain anything beyond what they are doing at present: "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 --" (p. 52). Thus at the beginning of the play the tree is the one thing outside themselves that they know exists, but it only stimulates uncertainty about their

situation and reveals their basic isolation from each other; they can agree about nothing.

Beyond raising doubts about their appointment the tree provides them with the possibility for an alternative to waiting. They could commit suicide by hanging themselves from it. Perhaps, then, they can use it. But no Beckett character is efficient at using objects for his own purposes. (Even Krapp has trouble locating the desired passages on his tape recorder.) Beckett makes their lack of serious intent and their general ineptitude comic. Vladimir asks Estragon what they might do now "while waiting". Estragon suggests casually, as though it would be but a diversion from the boredom of waiting, not an end to it, "What about hanging ourselves?" (p. 12). Vladimir's comment that "It'd give us an erection" excites him: "Let's hang ourselves immediately!" and "They go towards the tree". The flimsiness of the tree provokes a disagreement over who will go first. Estragon figures out that since he's the lighter he would hang successfully. But "Didi heavy -- bough break -- Didi alone." (p. 13). He is concerned that Vladimir might be left alone. Vladimir admits "I hadn't thought of that." But the argument falls apart if Estragon's assumption that he is the lighter proves false. Vladimir questions: "But am I heavier than you?" Estragon's certainty dissolves in the face of

probing and questioning as did Vladimir's earlier: "So you tell me. I don't know. There's an even chance. Or nearly." (p. 13). Again the tree, the one concrete object in relation to which we see both characters, serves only to illuminate their essential solitude and the impossibility of any concerted, effective action. "Nothing to be done" (p. 7). Beckett here makes a more general point as well: no one can ever die with someone. Everyone must die alone.

If this object can serve no practical function it can stimulate a literary awareness in Vladimir and Estragon and become transformed by the imagination into the cross, and the two clochards themselves into the two thieves whose death was infused with meaning by the Christ who died between them. The meaninglessness of their situation is thus ironically contrasted with the significance of the Crucifixion. Estragon's "there's an even chance", stimulated by speculation over hanging themselves from this tree, recalls to us the other "even chance" that Vladimir had mused about earlier. If one of them should die by chance on the tree, and one of them be "saved" by chance on the tree, the two tramps would mirror ironically the situation of the two thieves on their tree-crosses with the Saviour between them. Vladimir had puzzled over the matter of percentages: "But one of the four says that one

of the two was saved" (p. 10) and yet "everybody" believes the one hopeful version. (The story fascinates Beckett and is reiterated time and again in his oeuvre with varying emphases. Sometimes it is recognized as "a fair percentage"; sometimes the cruel arbitrariness of fate is remarked on bitterly.) But for these two "thieves" to hang themselves would be an admission that Godot will never come and their existence is based on his. "Let's wait and see what he says," (p. 13) suggests Vladimir, and to this suggestion Estragon agrees: "Good idea." Of course, should Godot come, there would no longer be a reason for hanging themselves out of despair. Vladimir rationalizes his rejection of suicide: "I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it." (p. 13). What Godot "offers", obviously, is what would be negated by his arrival -- the reason not to commit suicide, the possibility always that he might arrive. His arrival would erase that reason. When waiting is over, life is over.

Thus a single object -- the tree of Act I -- functions in several ways. It signifies the enigma of life and death: it has no leaves, and thus may be dead, or the season may not be right. It marks the place of the essential appointment -- the place where the tramps must live, that is, wait for Godot. "He said by the tree" (p. 10). And yet it may not be the right tree; they may

be in the wrong place or at the wrong time. It offers a practical means for dying, and yet if one should survive? In its starkness it recalls the cross, the tree of death and yet of life renewed, symbol of light after darkness. It serves as a reminder for Vladimir's uncertainty about the thieves; why did only one out of four Gospels (Luke) report that one of the two was saved? Why only one? Why that one? Of what did he "repent"? What if they "repented"? "Repented what? . . . Our being born?" (p. 9). What if they should die and thus not be here when Godot comes? And so back to the present situation: they are here, waiting, and Godot does not come. Night falls.

When the curtain goes up on Act II we see that the one given, as yet unchanging object of the set -- the tree -- has changed. "The tree has four or five leaves." (p. 37). Significantly, no one is on stage at the beginning of the act; the audience has the opportunity to contemplate the things on stage -- the tree, Lucky's hat, Estragon's boots. The leaves indicate that time has passed, that life is renewed in nature; it is a new season. The tree is apparently living; it affirms life. Paradoxically the object in asserting its own integrity negates all the philosophical speculation engaged in by Vladimir and Estragon the previous day. The tree is not dead; the season is not winter; the tree is not a shrub, a gallows

or a cross. It is a tree and all of that was just talk.

The boots become temporarily a set object and remind us of the barefoot Estragon who all his life "compared" himself to the Saviour, and of Lucky, who, without his hat, had long white hair and was brutally made to suffer. One critic has pounced on the Christian allusiveness of this opening and has gone so far as to suggest that in the interval Godot has come, and since the tramps are nowhere in sight, it is they who have missed the appointment.⁴ Such an interpretation, however, in view of the undercutting of this affirmation which follows, seems to me to be wildly optimistic.

The playwright tells us specifically (in the text and in the programme) that it is "Next day. Same time. Same place." Thus the tree has sprouted overnight. The audience is reminded that but a day has passed by Vladimir's remarks to Estragon. He observes that "Things have changed here since yesterday." (p. 39). But except for the boots and hat, which, as far as we can ascertain, have not changed, there is only one "thing" on stage -- the tree. Estragon does not remember the tree, their contemplation of suicide, or the encounter with Pozzo and Lucky. The world to him is an unvarying "muckheap" (p. 40), a "void" (p. 43), and they have always been doing the same thing:

Vladimir: . . . Now what did we do yesterday evening?

Estragon: Oh, this and that I suppose, nothing in particular. (With assurance.)
Yes, now I remember, yesterday evening we spent blathering about nothing in particular. That has been going on now for half a century. (p. 43)

We tend to share Vladimir's exasperation with him; we agree that the tree has changed; "yesterday evening it was all black and bare." (p. 42). Yet he goes on to say that "now it's covered with leaves" (p. 42). Clearly it is not. It has "four or five leaves."⁵ Vladimir exaggerates the hopeful evidence. Then can we believe him that "yesterday" it was black and bare? Did it happen "in a single night" as he insists? Vladimir tries constantly to discern an order, an intellectually-manageable progression in time or pattern in space. Should we perhaps, like Estragon, trust only our senses? He surmises that the leaves mean "It must be spring" and dismisses the notion that they were here yesterday. Similarly he can't say "when" he threw his boots away but only why -- "Because they were hurting me!" (p. 43).

The mysterious change in the tree and the conversation it provokes has produced in the audience the same state of uncertainty that the tramps and indeed all men must feel in the face of the external world. "To know that one cannot know" and to face that uncertainty with courage

would seem to be an intellectual stance that Beckett reiterates throughout his work. "The same questions" (Endgame, p. 5), "Where now? Who now? When now?"⁶ have no clear answers. "La vérité de la vie . . . est en effet ignorance, angoisse, et finitude."⁷ Onimus makes this statement about Beckett's attitude towards those who put their faith in systems:

Beckett déteste les éducateurs, les législateurs, et les moralistes . . . tous ceux qui dérangent, en somme, le désordre et font croire aux hommes qu'ils sont capables d'instaurer un ordre quelconque dans l'univers.⁸

If we sympathize with intellectual man trying to explain to himself the unexplainable in nature, we laugh at physical man trying to use nature to solve his problems or, alternately, to emulate it in order to feel part of it. Two funny bits of stage business occur in relation to the tree in this act. Estragon becomes suddenly frightened: "They're coming." (p. 48). He cannot say who "they" are, but he feels "accursed" (p. 47); "I'm in hell." Vladimir, the optimist, is pleased that someone seems to be approaching: "It's Godot! At last! . . . We're saved!" (p. 48). But he suggests that Estragon "disappear", by hiding behind the tree. Vladimir's solutions are never solutions. The tree obviously can "hide" no one (p. 48). Vladimir finally realizes the obvious; the tree can provide them with no solutions -- neither suicide nor solace.

"Decidedly this tree will not have been the slightest use to us." (p. 48). Later, as they again seek diversion, games to play to pass the time, Vladimir suggests they "do the tree, for the balance" (p. 49). This bit of business resembles a drama-school exercise as they both stagger about the stage trying to "do" the tree. The incident is comic but a serious point is made; they can neither "use" the tree nor "do" it. They are separate from the external, natural world, which will neither comply with their needs nor allow them to blend with it. The tree has its traditional associations: it may suggest the tree of life (Proverbs), the Tree of Knowledge and thus of original sin and death, the Saviour's cross which promises life. To Estragon, who remembers the Bible only for its coloured maps, it suggests a gallows. Yet finally it promises nothing and negates nothing. It is but a stage-tree, first without leaves, then with leaves.

The tramps contemplate the tree again at the play's end which recalls its beginning. Vladimir comments, "Everything's dead but the tree." (p. 59). If to live is to change for the better, to progress, then he is right, because nothing in their situation has progressed. They are literally where they started, alone by the tree, waiting for Godot, who has again promised to come tomorrow. Their life, like Hamm's in Endgame, is still "the life to come" (Endgame, p. 51). And yet for Beckettian man, to live is to

wait and to run down, to deteriorate, not to change for the better: "l'existence: le fait d'être là pour mourir."⁹ Everything but the tree is not "dead"; everything (including the tramps) is simply dying, or living, "taking its course" (Endgame, p. 32) in time. We have seen Pozzo become blind, Lucky deaf and dumb. Estragon asks Vladimir a question he had asked at the play's beginning: "What is it?" meaning what kind of tree is it, since Vladimir has always been the one to impose order, explanations, categories, systems on things. In the beginning he had answered, "I don't know. A willow." (p. 10). This time he says "It's the tree" (p. 59), as though he has learned to live, like Estragon, with only the evidence of his senses. Estragon must probe before Vladimir will again name it specifically: "A willow." Estragon again makes the suggestion that they hang themselves from it. In the early part of the play Vladimir had responded with the knowledgeable opinion that hanging would cause an erection. This time he asks, "With what?" (p. 60). It would seem he has become more practical than reflective. But the play's last bit of dialogue reinforces the circular pattern¹⁰ recognized by Watt: "If I could begin it all over again a hundred times, . . . the result would always be the same."¹¹ Vladimir posits the same alternatives -- "We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. (Pause.) Unless

Godot comes." (p. 60). Act II ends exactly as did Act I:

Well shall we go?
 Yes, let's go.
They do not move. (p. 60)

At the end of Act I, the first line is Estragon's; the second is Vladimir's. At the end of Act II they each speak the other's line. But they both remain still, both times. There is no movement, no essential change.

Costume Objects

"Fundamental to the work of designing is the problem -- what should an actor wear?"¹²

In the published text of Godot Beckett gives no indication of costume except for the bowler hats which the four principal characters must all wear: a foot-note on page 23 of the Grove Press edition states simply, "All four wear bowlers." Roger Blin has made the following comment on the significance of the oddly formal but battered hats:

C'était la tradition chaplinesque irlandaise,
 mais c'est aussi le dernier reste de dignité
 des petits bourgeois par rapport à la casquette.
 . . . J'ai donc affublé tous les personnages
 de chapeaux melon. Pozzo -- un chapeau gris
 melon. . . .¹³

The hats become props, of course, as so much stage business involves them. Lucky cannot think without his hat on; conversely Vladimir and Estragon remove their hats when trying

to concentrate. In Act II Vladimir and Estragon do a vaudeville routine involving their hats and Lucky's. But the hats as simply costume also make a statement, as Blin suggests. They evoke the dispossessed tramp left with but a few reminders of a past place in society. The formality of the bowler is comically incongruous with the undignified behaviour of Estragon and Vladimir. As they struggle with the everyday harassments of their life and play their trivial games their actions are unfailingly those of the clown whose body is never completely under control. Estragon struggles just to get his boots off; he hobbles about after Lucky kicks him; he crouches ridiculously behind the scrawny tree in an attempt to escape unseen pursuers; at the play's end he removes his belt to try it out as a hanging-rope only to be left with his pants down. Vladimir, whom Blin considers the "intellectual" of the two tramps, is just as grotesque and awkward physically: like so many of Beckett's heroes he walks stiff-legged, hurrying on and off "pour aller tenter de se soulager",¹⁴ the victim of a painful kidney condition. Like Estragon at one point in the play he is caught with his pants "undone". In tandem the two perform various pratfalls: they "do" the tree and stagger about the stage; in trying to help Pozzo and Lucky get up they both fall down and all four lie sprawled helplessly on the ground. At the play's end they do a tug-of-

war with Estragon's belt to try it out as a hanging device. When it breaks they both fall again, thus undercutting any serious significance the act might have. The actions of Pozzo and Lucky are no more dignified. Pozzo plays at being lord-of-the-manor as he tyrannizes over his manservant, Lucky, in Act I, but his specific actions are but a pastiche of the elegance of true command: when he jerks violently on Lucky's rope Lucky falls and the master who cannot control him looks as ridiculous as his slave.

He eats "voraciously" (p. 17) and sucks the bones greedily. He cannot even sit down "without affectation" (p. 19) unless specifically invited to do so. He proudly displays his status-posessions -- his watch, pipe, and vaporizer -- but misplaces them all before leaving in Act I. In Act II he falls and cannot get up, crawls about the stage, and must have his servant place the whip and rope in his hand. Lucky's actions throughout his two scenes are those of a sub-human creature. Overburdened as Pozzo's "pig" (p. 32) he falls down repeatedly, carries the whip in his mouth, bows his head abjectly, kicks Estragon viciously, and dances on demand.

The hats thus have metonymical value. They are comically incongruous with the clown-like actions of each of the men, anachronistic, and mismatched with the rest of their costume. The bowler is a concrete sign of social

status and of attitude. It is the once-proper accessory for the formally-dressed business man. It appears ridiculous atop rags and tatters. It is but a vestige of lost status -- when "we were respectable" (p. 7) as Vladimir says -- or a pathetic attempt to dignify present existence; in either case it represents an attempt to deny the reality of their present trivial pastimes.

It is significant that they all wear bowler hats. The hats are a link between those who play various "roles" -- Vladimir, the "intellectual", Estragon the "sensualist", Pozzo the master, and Lucky the slave. Their equality as men is thus emphasized. As Pozzo realizes, one's role is only arbitrarily assigned: "Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed otherwise." (p.22). The bowler then begins to take on more general, metaphorical significance, as Beckett places all four in various undignified, ridiculous situations. It is "Charlot's" symbol, that of the little man who pathetically yet comically keeps trying to assert his dignity but who can't really control his own body or understand why his attempts to perform significant actions always end in failure. As one critic puts it, Beckett's tramp is always, like Emmet Kelly, trying to sweep a circle of light on the floor into his dust-pan.¹⁵ He goes about his task seriously, but we perceive the futility

of his hope. The hat catches in a concrete image the disparity between aspiration and achievement, between desire and fulfilment, and thus the absurdity of Beckettian existence; we wait for Godot to come to give meaning to our existence. In the meantime, which is a life-time, we try to maintain some kind of dignity in our own behaviour, all the while playing ridiculous games and performing trivial actions.

Let us now consider the significance of various other costume objects. Here we have no directives from the text. We have, however, Roger Blin's recollections of the first production, overseen in every detail by Beckett himself. Of Vladimir Blin comments:

. . . l'intellectuel du couple, je l'ai fait habiller en professeur, miteux avec un col cassé, une jaquette ouverte derrière à long-spans, ce qui lui permettait un jeu quand il allait chercher au fond de ses poches. J'ai retrouvé chez mes parents la jacquette de mon père qui avait servi pour son mariage. . . . Il avait un plastron de chemise, mobile séparable, retenu par des ficelles sur une espèce de tricot crasseux rose.¹⁶

One notes the care with which this most famous of all Beckett directors (the two, Beckett and Blin, have been likened to the inseparable Vladimir and Estragon) allies function and appearance. The tails look properly formal but incongruous with present reality; they also allow "un jeu" -- comic stage business whenever Vladimir gropes in his pockets for vegetables to feed Estragon. The costume

has other movable parts: one can imagine the comic shifting of the "mobile séparable" during various bits of clownery.

It is interesting to read that Blin costumed Vladimir as a kind of professor "manqué", again the costume object suggesting status once-attained and now lost or Vladimir's faded aspirations of which only a few tattered signs are all that remain. The costume thus makes a metonymical statement, about Vladimir, his sadness and foolishness. He is the intellectual who is reduced to contemplating whether death by hanging might, paradoxically, produce a sign of life -- an erection, and to devising word games ("let's ask each other questions" [p. 41]), to protecting, feeding, and diverting his sole companion, and finally to making cynical comments on the futility of all intellectual endeavour: "What is terrible is to have thought." (p. 41). "When you seek you hear. . . . That prevents you from finding." (p. 41).

On the metaphorical level Vladimir's costume speaks the futility of all rational thought: the existence of intellectual man is as meaningless as that of all other men. In a sense he has the greater responsibility; he must protect and feed Estragon. He chides him in Act II for allowing himself to be beaten again: ". . . you don't know how to defend yourself. I wouldn't have let them beat

you." (p. 38). He sings him a lullabye, takes off his coat and lays it across Estragon's shoulders, and comforts him when he awakens frightened. It is to him both times, and we are to assume every time, that the boy messenger from Godot brings his message. And yet, essentially, his situation is exactly that of Estragon: he waits and suffers, the victim of a body deteriorating in time, more wakeful and thus more pitiable than Estragon, the less thoughtful man.

Let us now consider the costume of Estragon. Beckett gives us no description of what he wears. Yet, following the example of Roger Blin, we find in the text some clues as to his clothing. Vladimir tells him sarcastically, "You should have been a poet." (p. 9). Estragon replies, "I was. (Gesture towards his rags.) Isn't that obvious?" (p. 9). Thus he must be wearing the tramp's tatters. His pants are held up by a flimsy cord and must be too big for him, a point made clear by the last bit of business in the play. ("Estragon loosens the cord that holds up his trousers which, much too big for him, fall about his ankles. . . .") [p. 60]) They play tug-of-war with the cord and "It breaks." (p. 60). Estragon suggests that tomorrow they bring "a good bit of rope". Working from these bits of textual information and in conjunction with the author in preparing the first

production of Godot, what sort of costume did Roger Blin devise for him? First, he tells us, he had an image of the character in his mind, as large, immovable, a contrast with the peripatetic Vladimir:

Estragon a toujours mal aux pieds et . . .
s'asseyait dans un coin, refuse de bouger. Je
le voyais plutôt massif, comme un bloc de refus,
de silence, Vladimir, plus petit, protégeant le
plus grand. . . .¹⁷

His costume he describes as "un costume noir ou bleu marine, très fermé, avec de grosses godasses très usagées, trop grandes . . .".¹⁸

Pour Beckett, Ionesco, et Adamov le metteur-en-scène fait surtout figure d'exécutant fidèle.
. . . Les exigences d'un Beckett sont à cet égard significatives. Qu'on se souvienne qu'au lendemain de la guerre, alors qu'il était presque inconnu, il n'hésita pas à refuser sa première pièce [Eleuthéria, 1947] à Jean Vilar qui réclamait des coupures. (Beckett a d'ailleurs continué d'exiger de ses interprètes une fidélité et une précision telles qu'il est allé jusqu'à chronométrer les silences.)¹⁹

It is again obvious how Blin is faithful to Beckett, "exécutant fidèle", working always from the facts of the text. Estragon's feet are always hurting: he can't get his boots off at the play's opening, and when he does he complains of their being swollen and painful (p. 8). Later Lucky kicks him in the shins and he limps about on one leg. Starting with his pain in walking Blin generalizes to physical awkwardness. He sees Estragon as a large reluctant-to-move body, covered by an uncomfortable-looking

buttoned-up coat and mismatched too-large trousers. "Godasses" translates into English as something like "clodhoppers" -- too large, well-worn and decidedly inelegant. They must be large and prominent because we must be aware immediately when the curtain goes up on Act II that the boots on stage are Estragon's. On the other hand, Blin may be reinforcing visually, in concrete terms, the point that Vladimir makes about Estragon's complaints concerning his boots: "There's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet." (p. 8). If the boots are obviously too large, Estragon's difficulties in pulling them off and his complaints that they hurt his feet are incongruous with the concrete reality of the object as perceived by the audience and reveal something about Estragon, and perhaps, as Vladimir suggests, about man in general. We shall return to the matter of stage business involving the boots when we discuss their value as properties.

One notices at this point the lack of definite colour in either costume. The dark colours of the clowns' suits against the illuminated sky-cloth backdrop of the set produce a kind of black-and-white film effect, in keeping with the Chaplinesque connotations of the tramps-in-bowler-hats and with the tendency toward abstraction of the entire play -- any road, any tree anywhere, any two mismatched

couples, as all couples are mismatched. Colour is particularizing and indelible in the audience's memory. As Ruby Cohn informs us, in the final draft of Endgame Beckett removes all distinctive colours in his general process of stripping-down, reducing the play and thus making it poetic and evocative rather than particular and descriptive. Jacquart quotes Beckett on the suggestiveness, rather than explicitness of art, and although the point has relevance that goes far beyond colour in the theatre of Beckett it is perhaps useful to recall at this point: "l'art n'a rien à voir avec la clarté, qu'il ne se soucie pas d'être clair, et qu'il ne clarifie pas".²⁰

The vagueness of colour has another significance in relation to Estragon's boots in Godot. The boots are a non-descript dark colour. A comic exchange reveals Estragon's inability to identify them positively by colour or even to name the present colour with any certainty.

Estragon: They're not mine.
 Vladimir: (stupefied.) Not yours!
 Estragon: Mine were black. These are brown.
 Vladimir: You're sure yours were black?
 Estragon: Well they were a kind of gray.
 Vladimir: And these are brown. Show.
 Estragon: (picking up a boot.) Well they're
 a kind of green. (p. 44)

The audience begins to share his uncertainty. Are these Estragon's boots, the ones from Act I? Beckett specifies that "Estragon's boots" are on stage at the beginning of

Act II. Thus we identify them as such and are reminded of the character now barefoot. But if the colour is suitably indefinite we cannot be sure. Beckett produces in his audience the same doubts about anything that happened "yesterday" (or in Act I) as his characters feel. Everything in Act II is the same as in Act I with slight variations. The slight variations in Beckett, like the slightly-changed tree, the almost-identical boots, tantalize with the possibility of a fundamental change for the better in human existence. Godot might come. But the only substantial changes, the blindness of Pozzo and the deaf-mute condition of Lucky, are distinct deteriorations. Thus the boots, like the tree, by their familiarity, seem at first to provide a kind of stability and a definite link between "yesterday" and this new day. But any such comforting illusion is quickly undercut by the dialogue and business involving them.

The costumes of Pozzo and Lucky, like those of the two clochards, are not described by Beckett in any stage directions. We know only that like the other two, they wear bowler hats. We must look at the text to devise a costume. Pozzo is the one character who demonstrates his possessions ostentatiously. Like Hamm of Endgame he is an actor, who delivers a set speech on the coming of evening, and who plays to the hilt his role of lord and master over

Lucky. At first sight he assumes an air of superiority in dealing with Vladimir and Estragon. He assumes he is of sufficient prominence to be recognized and booms: "I am Pozzo! . . . Pozzo! (Silence.) Does that name mean nothing to you?" (p. 16). Condescendingly he concedes he might gain from talking to them: "From the meanest creature one departs wiser, richer, more conscious of one's blessings. Even you . . . even you, who knows, will have added to my store." (p. 20). Estragon, always the practical man, "scents charity". Pozzo must look, then, comparatively speaking, well off. As Blin points out, "ils le prennent pour Godot, le hobereau, le seigneur du lieu, ce qui a déterminé son costume".²¹ On this metonymical level Blin's costume would work admirably: "un chapeau gris melon, une culotte de cheval, un manteau de voyage à carreaux et un fouet".²² Pozzo's costume is more appropriate to his bowler than are those of the other characters, yet, significantly, it is a mismatched outfit nonetheless. A checkered greatcoat over riding-breeches and topped by a bowler is not a well co-ordinated outfit and like the others it is anachronistic.

The costume he decided on for Lucky is even more wildly out of step with time. Blin characterizes it as

un peu du baroque ou surréaliste . . . je ne peux pas expliquer . . . mais c'est le physique de Martin [qui a joué Lucky] qui me l'a suggéré qu'il ait une livrée de domestiques du dix-huitième siècle, ou des domestiques qui servent à l'Elysée ou à la cour de Londres, rouge, avec des bordures en or, des boutons et un tas de trucs; il avait un pantalon noir trop court, un maillot de corps raillé et des espèces de vieilles godasses. . . .23

It is a convention of the theatre for the audience to assume that the character has "chosen" to wear what he wears. In fact a director and designer have collaborated in choosing how the actor should appear on stage. In considering the metonymical value of the costumes of Pozzo and Lucky we can deal with both as though they had been "chosen" by Pozzo, since the relationship as presented on stage is such that Lucky is totally subservient to Pozzo and is even ordered when to "think". Pozzo's costume reveals his love of show and finery, his pride of position and possessions, since only the gentry wear riding breeches and only the pampered carry about a vaporizer to keep them in fine voice. Only intermittently does he wear his glasses, perhaps another indication of his vanity, since he seems to need them, even to determine if Vladimir and Estragon are "human beings" (p. 16). Lucky is ostentatiously a servant; he is anachronistically and ironically in livery from the Age of Reason and of aristocratic privilege. But Pozzo is obviously a fake seigneur; he is straining for effect in both their outfits. His doesn't match and Lucky's doesn't

fit. And neither is "à la mode" for 1953. Both give Pozzo away as no genuine aristocrat.

Such incongruities in costume are reflected in the situation and dialogue of both. Pozzo acts the proud lord, demanding to know why Vladimir and Estragon are on "his" land. Yet a few lines later he admits, if stiltedly, his need for human companionship: "With your permission, I propose to dally with you a moment, before I venture any further." (p. 17). He is proud of having things the others have not, enjoying his pipe, checking his watch, spraying his mouth, offering his handkerchief. But he promptly misplaces everything²⁴ before leaving, and sobs at the loss of his watch. He jerks violently on Lucky's rope, offers him only bones to eat and calls him "pig", but he admits "But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings, would have been of common things." (p. 22). He orders Lucky to think, but during his tirade Beckett directs that he suffer, "more and more agitated and groaning" (p. 28) and he tramples on Lucky's hat at the end to prevent any repeat performance. In Act I there are signs of helplessness beneath his commanding exterior; by Act II his helplessness will have surfaced in total blindness.

Lucky's costume as devised by Blin is bizarre, "surréaliste". It is the least realistic of any, as is Lucky's role as menial-carrier, yet alleged mentor of Pozzo.

Strangely, his costume is also the most startling and beautiful. It corresponds with his non-naturalistic speech and his erratic behavior. In Act I he does his mad dance and delivers his wild tirade; for the rest of the play he is silent. It is his incoherent (at times) torrent of words that is the most unforgettable speech in the play. At times it is garbled, what Estragon would call "blathering": ". . . quaquaququa . . . labors left unfinished crowned by the Acacacademy of Anthropopometry" (p. 28) and yet it repeatedly flashes fragments of meaning -- "a personal god . . . who . . . loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown . . ." before running off the rails into incoherence again. He carries his enormous burden without complaint and continues to serve even a blind, helpless master, the Pozzo of Act II, yet he is capable of viciousness in the face of piety: he kicks Estragon when he tries to wipe away his tears.

On the metaphorical level the costumes of Pozzo and Lucky have a significance beyond that relating to the specific characters: they make a statement about masters and slaves. Pozzo, flamboyantly ridiculous in his mismatched costume, is the master who cannot co-ordinate even his own outfit; ironically the master depends as much on his slave as the slave on him. The master-slave relationship is a mutual dependence. Lucky, the slave in wildly

beautiful attire, with his luxuriant long white hair (Pozzo is bald) surpasses his master in sheer visual impact, with the master's concurrence, since he has "chosen" the outfit. Similarly he drives him to a frenzy with the brio of a speech commanded by the master. The slave wears and does what he is told, but undercuts the dominance of the master by the style of his performance. Such a relationship is based on paradox. Lucky remains with Pozzo even when Pozzo is literally helpless (Act II). Such a "deadener" is habit that it binds even the "dog to his vomit" as Beckett says in Proust.²⁵ What is familiar, even if it is unpleasant, is always preferable to the "suffering of being",²⁶ which one feels only when one habitual mode of behaviour has been broken and new habits have not yet formed to deaden the pain.

Pozzo and Lucky appear only together, bound by a rope. Without one the other has no role to play, no habitual mode of behaviour. As Genet shows us in Les Bonnes it is the slaves who define their masters and allow them their role as masters. Conversely, as Beckett shows us in Godot, the masters also define existence for their slaves. Jacquart puts it succinctly: "Pozzo n'est maître que si Lucky le reconnaît comme tel."²⁷ In a sense Pozzo and Lucky, master and slave, cannot "live" without each other. Again it is the costumes that make the

primary statement. There can be no entrance in the modern theatre more startling than that of Pozzo and Lucky in their strange attire, the beautiful one burdened by and bound to the brutal one without complaint.

Of the costume of the fifth character, the boy, Roger Blin says nothing.²⁸ The text gives us no indication of costume, not a single particularizing detail of appearance. "Enter Boy, timidly." (p. 33). Similarly, in Act II, "Enter Boy right." (p. 58). "Boy" is assigned no distinguishing name and no distinguishing costume, only a function. He is simply generic Messenger, who in this case is a boy. The one visible requirement would seem to be that he be unmistakably attired as a child, perhaps in short pants to distinguish him from the other four, all in varieties of long trousers, and perhaps in white to suggest his youth and innocence, since his only "characteristics" are lack of knowledge and fear of adults. He recoils from the angry Estragon in Act I, admits he "was afraid" (p. 33) to approach, doesn't know the "two big men" (p. 33), doesn't recognize Vladimir (p. 33), doesn't know why Godot doesn't beat him, doesn't even know if he is unhappy:

Vladimir: You're not unhappy? (The Boy hesitates.)
Do you hear me?
Boy: Yes Sir.
Vladimir: Well?

Boy: I don't know, Sir.
 Vladimir: You don't know if you're unhappy or
 not?
 Boy: No Sir. (p. 34)

Similarly, in Act II, he knows nothing: he does not recognize Vladimir, denies he came yesterday or met anyone along the way. He "thinks" Godot's beard is white. He recoils from Vladimir and runs away in fear. Beckett's child is a blank on which Godot writes his message. He shows no curiosity about the affairs of adults, questions nothing they do, speaks only when spoken to, and is concerned only to avoid their wrath. Yet the child, merely by appearing, prolongs the agony of waiting. The child in Beckett's oeuvre is never to be viewed sentimentally; he is always, as Rooney says, in All That Fall, a "young doom in the bud",²⁹ who views his parent as "accursed progenitor" (Hamm, in Endgame, p. 9).

Property Objects

There are few properties in Waiting for Godot and all property objects in the play "belong" to someone. The props are all possessions. Pozzo is the play's only object-possessed man. He is defined by his objects; they are extensions of him and without them he will become literally powerless. He needs Lucky essentially as a "carrier" of his things. Lucky carries "a heavy bag, a

folding stool, a picnic basket and a greatcoat, Pozzo a whip" (p. 15). As yet we do not know what is in the bag, merely that it is "heavy" and weighs Lucky down. In Act II, Vladimir asks "What is there in the bag?" (p. 57). Pozzo replies: "Sand." (p. 57). It is the one possession he does not use. It is simply there for Lucky to carry, as a tangible sign of Pozzo's control over him and as a symbol of the material world: lifeless and useless, only a burden to bear. All of Pozzo's other possessions provide him with physical comforts or, like the whip and watch, reinforce his delusion that he is in control of his own existence. The folding stool is a sort of portable fauteuil; it is beneath his dignity to sit on the ground to have his picnic. Ironically he will sprawl on it helplessly in Act II. The picnic basket, accoutrement of the bourgeois "déjeuner sur l'herbe", contains meat and drink; the chicken and wine he attacks greedily in view of the others. Throwing the bones to his carrier, like feeding a dog from the table, allows him to indulge his sense of wealth and importance and even feel smug about his own generosity: he is a "good master". Of course he is not, since his carrier is neither dog nor "pig", but a man, for whom bones provide no nourishment. He is starving Lucky.

Pozzo's life is defined by how he uses and directs the use of his objects. Lucky is his prize object. Beckett's

focus on his pleasure in playing with his objects emphasizes for the audience the contrast between Pozzo's collection of things and the tramps' lack of them. He performs a whole series of actions with the objects that Lucky carries for him. He has each of them brought to him in turn, issuing cryptic commands like an operating surgeon, and expecting instant obedience: "Coat! . . . Hold that! Whip! . . . Coat! . . . Whip! . . . Stool! . . . Closer! . . . Back! . . . Further! . . . Stop! . . . Basket! . . . Basket! . . . Further! . . . He stinks." (pp. 16-17). The series of commands and Lucky's silent compliance with them reveal Pozzo's egotism and his pleasure in playing the role of tyrant, but he is made to look ridiculous because so lacking in vision. Intent only on satisfying his own appetite, he misses the hungry look of the tramps. He comments on the "Touch of autumn in the air" (p. 16) as he buttons up his coat, failing to notice that only he has a coat to wear or a stool to sit on, or food to eat, or a servant to "carry" for him. About to leave, after enjoying his pipe, he complains about the effects of nicotine -- "It makes my heart go pit-a-pat. . . . You know how it is." (p. 19). But of course they don't; they have nothing to smoke. Ridiculously he vaporizes his throat in order to perform effectively. His self-enclosure as revealed in this stage business is a metaphor for the short-sightedness of

all masters, a failing that will be literalized by his blindness in Act II.

The whip is traditionally a symbol of power wielded by force, the horseman's control of his horse, but in the stage business of Act I it belies the mastery of Pozzo. He must have Lucky hold it in his mouth (Lucky's hands are full with bag, basket, and stool) while Pozzo puts on his coat. He hands his instrument of authority to his servant. He knows there will be no rebellion on the part of Lucky. Thus his whip is but an affectation, part of his "show", not a genuine sign of power. (He cannot even "crack" it effectively and blames it on the whip. "Pozzo cracks his whip feebly. 'What's the matter with this whip?'" [p. 24].) Similarly, Pozzo shows off his watch, commenting on the number of hours he has been without companionship (discounting Lucky, of course). He maintains he must observe his "schedule", but it is clear by Act II that his "schedule" like everyone else's, is simply a matter of going "On":

Vladimir: Where do you go from here?

Pozzo: On.

.
Vladimir: Don't go yet.

Pozzo: I'm going.

Vladimir: What do you do when you fall far from help?

Pozzo: We wait till we can get up. Then we go on. On! (p. 57)

Significantly, he has lost all objects that belong to him by his first exit, except those things taken care of by his menial. He has misplaced watch, pipe, and vaporizer. He cannot even remember the word "vaporizer" and says, "I can't find my pulverizer!" (p. 27). All Pozzo's possessions provide supports for his delusions. Beckett here is making a statement about masters, and about object-obsessed twentieth-century man in general. As Warren Lee points out in his discussion of Godot³⁰ the bums have nothing with which to deceive themselves about the nature of what they are doing. The master, the property-owner, has his diversions -- his pipe, his watch, his whip, and his alleged responsibilities. Therefore he has no sense of waiting. For Pozzo, losing his objects is a prelude to the blindness and physical helplessness of Act II. With blindness, however, he gains some spiritual insight: he no longer belongs to the world of watches and schedules ("the blind have no notion of time" [p. 55]), can't remember meeting them yesterday, and sees life as but a flash in darkness -- "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." (p. 56). He recognizes his own powerlessness and calls for "help" fourteen times. The remainder of his lines in Act II are mainly questions: "Where am I?" (p. 52), "Who are you?" (pp. 53, 55), "What happened?" (pp. 52, 56), "You are not

highwaymen?" (p. 55). Without his things he is unaccommodated man, weak and pitiable, only going "on" because there is nothing else he can do. Objects define what is "Pozzo". By Act II, without them, he is no longer asserting his name and demanding recognition. He is seeking definition, asking questions, stumbling about with no sense of direction.

In contrast with the Pozzo of Act I, the two clochards and Lucky have little in the way of possessions: Vladimir has his hat and some vegetables; Estragon has his hat and his ill-fitting boots. Lucky has only his hat and even that is controlled by other people. Vladimir is constantly "fiddling" with his hat, as Estragon "fiddles" with his boots. Neither finds the fit comfortable. Their nervousness, their discomfiture with their object-posessions, contrasts with the pleasure Pozzo displays in using his. It is a critical commonplace now to surmise that Estragon's ill-fitting boots are a symbol of bodily pain as he is the more sensual of the two and that Vladimir's discomfort with his hat indicates that it is his spiritual and intellectual malaise that disturbs him most and causes his restlessness. Beckett specifically connects the hat with Lucky's thinking: "He can't think without his hat", says Pozzo (p. 28). It is important, however, to keep in mind the comic, vaudevillian overtones of the hat and shoe routines. Estragon struggles to get off his boot, finally

giving up. Vladimir takes off his hat twice; each time he "(. . . peers inside it, . . . He knocks on the crown as though to dislodge a foreign body, peers into it again, puts it on again.)" (p. 3). He comes to the same conclusion: "Nothing to be done." (p. 8). The clown-mime trying to remove the source of discomfort invisible to the audience, giving up and trying again, only to resign himself to living with misery, is a funny routine. When Estragon gets his boot off he goes through the same set of actions as Vladimir with his hat: "(He peers inside it, . . . shakes it, looks on the ground to see if anything has fallen out, finds nothing, feels inside it again, . . .)" (p. 8). The automatic, obsessive quality of their actions provides some of the humour. Later when Pozzo demands their attention for his speech about the twilight, they are characteristically "fiddling" with the only objects they own -- Estragon "with his boot again, Vladimir with his hat" (p. 24). Vladimir does his routine again, when Pozzo has finished (p. 25). Estragon begins to take off his boots after the messenger arrives, leaving them for someone with "smaller feet" (p. 34).

The boots that do not fit and the hat that is vaguely uncomfortable perhaps represent the irritations of a material existence which only grates on man. Vladimir

and Estragon's comic routines are but ineffectual patterns for trying to cope with some of the minor discomforts of living, which are only signs of a nameless anguish in the face of an indifferent Godless universe.

Society touches only in an external way all the A's and B's that wait upon the plateau. In this play, as in all the novels of Beckett, this touch seems to be symbolically represented by hats that scratch and shoes that pinch.³¹

But Lucky's hat is not one which "scratches", or perhaps it is only that he does not complain. He is beyond both suffering and waiting; he merely obeys. Pozzo for him is a kind of Godot -- a reason for existing, for going "on", and the hat has become merely another signal for stereotyped action. When it is placed on his head he "thinks"; he delivers his tirade, which the others find so unbearable that finally suppressing it becomes a victory, and they the "victors" (p. 29). Pozzo tramples on it and it is left on stage. Lucky will not speak again in the play; he appears wearing a different hat in Act II and he is deaf and dumb. For him to "think" is to speak, to express, as it is for the heroes of all Beckett's novels. As long as one "thinks" one must speak.

Lucky, as revealed by his relation to this one object, his hat, is clearly Pozzo's man. Without his hat he cannot "think". Without his array of objects Pozzo can only stumble about in darkness, led by his man-object,

Lucky. Lucky is controlled by Pozzo whose power resides in objects. Lucky's limited power, his power to "think", resides in one object, his thinking hat. When he removes it, his hair cascades to his shoulders, contrasting with Pozzo's baldness and suggesting the innate power of man -- of Samson, of Claudel's *Tête d'Or*, a power hidden and constrained under a "thinking cap" that elicits a stream of semi-coherent "thought" and incites violence in his listeners. Beckett would seem to be making a point familiar in the theatre of Ionesco: that objects, rather than increasing and focussing man's power, may only diminish his humanity, obstruct his ability to communicate with his fellow creatures, and fill his life with emptiness, as the stage in Les Chaises is filled with empty chairs at the play's end.

Lucky's dependence on his hat for thinking contrasts with the function of the hats in relation to the other three characters. Vladimir and Estragon are dependent on no objects; they are ill-at-ease with their possessions, misfits in a world dominated by objects. They take off their hats to think. Pozzo is a man of the world, defined by his objects. But Pozzo's hat is not a significant possession; it is his other things that are embodiments of his power. To the man who owns another man as an object, a hat is just a hat and thus he mimics the actions of the tramps, adjusting

himself to their hat routine. Thinking is signalled by ceremoniously removing their hats. Most of the time they are wearing their hats; most of the time they are not thinking. "All three take off their hats simultaneously, press their hands to their foreheads, concentrate." (p. 27). When Vladimir comes up with the answer for why Lucky has put down his bags -- "In order to dance" (p. 28) -- they relax and "put on their hats". Estragon and Vladimir do the same "number" in Act II. They try to think of something to do to pass the time.

Estragon: Let me see. (He takes off his hat, concentrates.)

Vladimir: Let me see. (He takes off his hat, concentrates. Long silence.) Ah!
They put on their hats, relax. (p. 42)

Lucky's hat is appropriated by Vladimir in Act II. He welcomes it as a sure sign that they are at the right place. He and Estragon do an elaborate and funny exchange number with it, at the end of which Vladimir tosses away his own hat. He will wear Lucky's to the end of the play. While Beckett's meticulously worked-out hat routine is amusing (a less spun-out version of the famous sucking-stones routine in Molloy), again obsessive and automatic, as though it were a routine familiar to both the tramps, it makes a serious point. Changing hats, appropriating another man's things, makes no essential change in one's existence.

Vladimir: No, but how do I look in it? He turns his head. . . .
 Estragon: Hideous.
 Vladimir: Yes, but not more so than usual?
 Estragon: Neither more nor less.
 Vladimir: Then I can keep it. Mine irked me.
 (Pause.) How shall I say? (Pause.)
 It itched me. (p. 46)

But Lucky's hat will be no less irksome. The point is made immediately, as no sooner does Vladimir decide to keep it than he does his usual hat routine again.

Vladimir and Estragon are dependent on no objects. They are dependent on each other. There is as little lasting solace in such a dependence as in a dependence on things. Beckett makes the point by more business with objects -- the food objects. The carrots, turnips, and radishes that Vladimir carries about in his pockets are simply garden-variety vegetables, suitable fare for tramps on the road. But the business that involves them is revealing of their relationship and of the relationship that binds a couple together. It is Estragon, the sensual man, who says he is hungry and Vladimir, the intellectual one, who supplies the food:

Estragon: (Violently.) I'm hungry!
 Vladimir: Do you want a carrot?
 Estragon: Is that all there is?
 Vladimir: I might have some turnips.
 Estragon: Give me a carrot. (Vladimir rummages in his pockets, takes out a turnip and gives it to Estragon who takes a bite out of it. Angrily.) It's a turnip!
 Vladimir: Oh pardon! I could have sworn it was a carrot. (He rummages again. . . .)
 There, dear fellow. (Estragon wipes the carrot on his sleeve and begins to eat it.) (p. 14)

In Act II, Vladimir offers him a radish (p. 44). Estragon is disgruntled that there are no more carrots, settles on a radish, then complains "It's black! . . . I only like the pink ones." (p. 44). Vladimir carries and provides the food while Estragon eats it and complains if it is not to his liking.

The contrast with the Pozzo-Lucky relationship is made clear by the stage business involving food. Lucky the servant carries food for Pozzo the master. Vladimir is protective of Estragon; he is the dominant one of the relationship but feeds and shelters Estragon rather than tyrannizing over him. "Master" in this relationship is in this sense "menial". The tie between them is no rope but habit and thus need. Estragon needs Vladimir to protect him and to supply him with food, but the food "bit" has become just another automatic routine. They are perfectly synchronized with each other in all of their routines -- whether with objects or with words. Like the Interlocutor and the Straight Man one is not complete without the other. One gives a "cue" and the routine is launched. The tyranny of the partner "routine", which is a theatrical term for a set, habitual pattern of words and action, is as binding as that between master and slave. The "routine" supplies both with a role to play, an evasion of the suffering of being. The two are not bound together

so much by love and tenderness as critics have sentimentalized, but by habit. It is not that tenderness is altogether lacking -- they embrace (momentarily), Vladimir covers the sleeping Estragon with his coat, has some time in the past "fished" him out of the Rhone, and promises to carry him if he becomes unable to walk. Estragon professes to be concerned lest Didi be left alone. But one cannot miss the very human selfishness in both:

Estragon: . . . God have pity on me!

Vladimir: (vexed.) And me?

Estragon: On me! On me! Pity! On me! (p. 50)

Vladimir refuses to listen to Estragon's dreams and admits he was "happy" without him (p. 38). The point is that the binding element in the relationship is that of habit, the exigencies of the tandem routine which helps pass the time until Godot comes "or night falls".

Thus the objects of décor, costume and properties function together to articulate the "meaning" of Godot. In the theatre of this bleakest of all modern playwrights nothing is extraneous, mere decoration; meaning is distilled into details of dialogue and action in relation to objects. The natural world exterior to man is signified by a single object -- a tree. The relationships between human beings are defined by action in relation to their possessions. Pozzo owns many objects; he even "owns" another human being and plans to "get a fair price" for him at market.

But he returns with him in Act II. Human beings are bound together by habits which are revealed by their actions in relation to objects. Lucky is accustomed to carrying Pozzo's things. He will go on doing so when his master is powerless even to lead him. Pozzo will go on shouting orders and cracking his whip even when his servant cannot hear him and he cannot see the servant to strike him. Estragon and Vladimir are bound together by the "routines" they do involving hats, boots, vegetables.

In this first and most famous of Beckett plays we see that visually perceived objects as integral part of set, costume, or props, make statements that together with dialogue and gesture comprise Beckett's theatrical language. Both dialogue and gesture are frequently concerned with the physical things that we see. The tramps talk about the tree and do routines with hats. But dialogue and gesture develop and change in time as the play progresses. Their impact is relatively fleeting. Objects, it seems to me, by their very concreteness and their persistence in time, make a contribution to Beckett's statement that becomes increasingly central as we move from Waiting for Godot through the rest of the plays. Beckett insists on the importance of physical objects by their very scarcity and simplicity, and frequently, by their startling incongruity

with their context. Vladimir carries only the most ordinary of vegetables and only a few. But all four major characters wear bowler hats; Pozzo ostentatiously uses a vaporizer, and Lucky is dressed in eighteenth-century livery. Lucky's tirade the audience may recall only as a wild outpouring of disconnected, garbled words, but the visual impact of Lucky is unforgettable and his relationship with Pozzo is defined from the moment of their entrance, before either speaks.

But Waiting for Godot remains a "talky" play. As we progress through Beckett's theatrical oeuvre to Not I, Beckett becomes less and less dependent upon words to make his statement in the theatre. (Concurrently, from the trilogy on, his novels get progressively more condensed.) One can quote hardly a line from Not I; in fact "lines" have all but disappeared. Words tumble out in breath groups as they do in Comment C'est. (In his Pièces Sans Paroles, I and II, not a word is spoken.) But one remembers the frenetically active mouth, the light, the chilling scream and the relentless voice. The centrality of the object begins in Godot. Considering the function of objects expressed in theatrical terms as set, costumes, and props, illuminates the meaning of the play. As one considers each Beckett play in turn, objects progressively

take over the theatrical language and subordinate words to things.

NOTES

¹Peter Brook, The Empty Space (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 65.

²Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 27. [All subsequent references to Waiting for Godot are to this edition.]

³Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (2nd ed.; New York: Anchor Books), p. 24.

⁴Ronald Gray, "Waiting for Godot: A Christian Interpretation", The Listener, LVII (January 24, 1957), 160-161.

⁵It is interesting that in the French text the stage directions at the opening of Act II regarding the tree are as follows: "L'arbre porte quelques feuilles." (79). Vladimir's line, "il est couvert de feuilles" (92) is thus not so incongruous with what the audience would see as it is in the English version. It would seem that the Blin realization of Beckett's tree -- stark and surrealistic -- worked its way into the English stage directions. Beckett described the tree in the English version as having only "four or five" leaves, but Vladimir's line was translated from "quelques feuilles" nonetheless.

⁶Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable", in Three Novels by Samuel Beckett, 291.

⁷Jean Onimus, Beckett (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1968), p. 14. [All subsequent references to this study are to this edition.]

⁸Ibid., p. 131.

⁹Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰I disagree with the argument of the article, "The Chain and the Circle: The Structure of Waiting for Godot and Endgame" by Konrad Schoell, which sees the pattern of Godot as linear. It seems to me that all of Beckett's structures are circular. Although the setting of Godot appears to be an open road, Vladimir and Estragon never travel the road. They remain by the side of the road. Those who do, Pozzo and Lucky, pass by twice, thus not progressing but doubling back on their route. And the second time we see them they are much the worse for their travelling. To go "on" is not necessarily to get anywhere or to progress. It is the same hopeless closed situation.

¹¹Samuel Beckett, Watt (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 47.

¹²Peter Brook, The Empty Space, p. 115.

¹³Andrée Waintrop, "Etude des Mises-en-Scène des Pièces de Samuel Beckett par Roger Blin". Unpublished "thèse de maîtrise", Institut d'Etudes Théâtrales, Université de Paris III, 1969, 16.

¹⁴Waintrop, p. 14.

¹⁵Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 13.

¹⁶Waintrop, p. 17.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁹Emmanuel Jacquart, Le Théâtre de Dérision (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 19-20. [All subsequent references to this study are to this edition.]

²⁰Ibid., p. 27.

²¹Waintrop, p. 16.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Pozzo's handkerchief simply disappears from the text. It is not mentioned or used after Estragon tries to wipe away Lucky's tears with it. After kicking Estragon Lucky gives the handkerchief back to Pozzo.

²⁵Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, 1931), p. 8. [All subsequent references to Proust are to this edition.]

²⁶Ibid., p. 9.

²⁷Jacquart, Le Théâtre de Dérision, p. 141.

²⁸That is to say, Blin does not mention the boy's costume in the taped interviews with Waintrop.

²⁹Samuel Beckett, All That Fall, p. 74.

³⁰Warren Lee, "The Bitter Pill of Samuel Beckett", Chicago Review, X (Winter, 1957), 81.

³¹Edith Kern, "Drama Stripped for Inaction", Yale French Studies, XIV (1954-55), 44.

CHAPTER III

ENDGAME

In December 1955 Beckett began work on another play in French. Fin de Partie, translated by the author as Endgame,¹ was originally devised as a full-length two-act play. It is first mentioned in a note by Beckett to Alan Schneider, written 27 December, 1955.² (Schneider had been the American director for Waiting for Godot in both its disastrous Miami try-out and its successful New York run.) Beckett wrote that he was "struggling with a play". Ruby Cohn, in her article, "The Beginnings of Endgame", details for us the processes of revision from Beckett's first draft to its final one-act form.³

Roger Blin began rehearsals in October 1956, once again not knowing what theatre might house it. As Fletcher and Spurling recount in Beckett: A Study of his Plays, "no Paris house could be persuaded to risk it"⁴ and the play had its first performance in French at the Royal Court Theatre in London on 3 April, 1957. Roger Blin played Hamm, as he had played Pozzo in Paris in En Attendant Godot; his original Lucky, Jean Martin, played Clov. Fletcher and Spurling report its première production a "semi-fiasco, being rather monotonous, shrill and disjointed".⁵ The play

moved to Paris and the Studio des Champs-Élysées on 26 April. In its English translation the play opened in New York at the Cherry Lane Theatre on 28 January, 1958, directed by Alan Schneider. The English version returned to the Royal Court in London on 28 October, 1958, in a double bill with Krapp's Last Tape.

A verbal summary of the situation and action of Endgame gives little insight into what the play is "about". A photograph from the Blin production would be more revealing, as plot and dialogue in this play give way to the objects perceived. Three of its four characters are character-objects. In a dimly-lit enclosure four characters play out the end of some terrible game which we suspect is life, as they are all in various stages of physical deterioration. One of them, Hamm, sits blind and immobile in a wheelchair; two of them, Nagg and Nell, are legless and stuffed into ash-cans, and the fourth is lame but manages to limp about the stage and carry out Hamm's orders. It seems they are what remains of humanity after some catastrophe. They are the last grotesque mutant of the family unit: Hamm seems to look on Clov as his adopted son yet treats him as a menial; he has relegated his hated parents to ash-cans.

Like Vladimir and Estragon they are all putting in time, waiting for the end of waiting. But in a "corpsed"

universe they have abandoned hope in Godot; they are waiting for "night to fall", for the game to end, for death. In the mean-time they run through the dialogue and gestures. Clov and Hamm play out a nasty master-slave relationship, hating yet depending on each other:

Hamm: Where are you?
Clov: Here.
Hamm: Come back!
(Clov returns to his place beside the chair.)
Where are you?
Clov: Here.
Hamm: Why don't you kill me?
Clov: I don't know the combination of the cupboard.
(p. 8)

Clov's main function is to give progress reports on the processes of depletion: supplies are running out inside, and outside there is "no more nature" (p. 11). From time to time Hamm orders Clov to bring him his things and to wheel him about and to "bottle" (p. 10) or feed the parents. Hamm tells an ongoing "chronicle" (p. 58), which seems a fictionalized autobiography. Nagg and Nell, when not out of sight in their bins, recall "yesterday" (p. 15), scratch each other, and whine for their treats. Nagg tells a stale joke about a tailor who fashions pants more painstakingly than God created the world. Hamm and Clov show flashes of anguished awareness of their lack of control over their own lives. They are all pawns in this game:

Hamm: (anguished.) What's happening, what's happening?
Clov: Something is taking its course.
(Pause.) (p. 32)

Throughout the play they express no hope for any alleviation of suffering, only for an end to it. There is a flurry of excitement when Clov spots a boy outside but Hamm decides no action, not even of extermination, is worthwhile. "If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here." (p. 78) Either way he cannot live long. Hamm announces the end, Clov delivers an exit speech, goes out and returns in a travelling costume. Hamm speaks his "last soliloquy" (p. 78), covers his face, and the curtain comes down.

Beckett's second play is set in the interior of a "shelter" (p. 3). We shall see that Beckett's interior sets are no more cluttered with scenery and props than are his open exteriors of Godot and Happy Days. Whatever objects are on stage make statements, and contribute significantly to the total impact of the play. In Endgame nothing is extraneous; the set and properties are stripped-down. The language employs repeatedly the same sparse vocabulary. There is almost no stage action, since only one of the four characters is still mobile. The stillness of Endgame, the fixity of its objects, increases its impact. One feels from the beginning that a reductive process has taken place before the time of the play's beginning. Almost everything has "run out"; what is left is the irreducible minimum for the "game" to go on -- a room, four players, all partially decomposed and only one able to move about, and a few props.

In the stripping-down process, man and objects have become almost indistinguishable. Man has been stripped of some specifically human attributes: Hamm cannot stand or see; Clov cannot sit; Nagg and Nell are legless, senile, relegated to ash-cans. If the two "poles" of human existence are, as Malone states, to "eat and excrete"⁶ neither is functioning efficiently. Hamm needs a catheter and Hamm, Nagg and Nell cannot eat unless Clov brings them food from the cupboard. Yet Clov's food supply is in turn controlled by Hamm who knows "the combination" (p. 37) and at one point threatens to starve him. The food mentioned is only marginally human fare; biscuits ("Spratt's Medium" [p. 10] are dog biscuits) "pap" (p. 9) and sugar-plums, the menu of infancy and senility.

Hamm, confined to darkness and his chair, and Nagg and Nell "bottled" in their ash-cans, are what I have designated "character-objects". Their suffering consciousness and their subjection to time mark them as human. (Nell "dies" on stage.) They occupy a fixed space on stage as things that think, laugh, remember, speak, and die. They are "there", covered by their antimacassars like pieces of furniture when the curtain rises on the set. When Clov uncovers them, the play begins. Kenner comments on this opening: "It is . . . a removal from symbolic storage of the objects that will be needed during the course of the

performance. When the theatre is empty it is sensible to keep them covered against dust. . . . The necessary objects include three additional players (two of them in ash-cans)".⁷

The set, the physical space of Endgame, has stimulated much critical speculation. Beckett's "shelter" is variously interpreted as the skull of human consciousness or as a kind of "womb". Kenner's view is that it is a skull whose two windows are "eyes".⁸ Ross Chambers suggests that the two "spaces" -- can be seen as an image of "the dualistic conception of subject and object of consciousness, of self and nonself".⁹ The "womb" interpretation seems to me implausible. Beckett's characters look back on the prenatal state as the only time of peace and innocence; it is anterior to the original "sin" of being born. If we adhere closely to the text of the play we see immediately that the enclosure is a place of suffering and of deterioration, and thus some compartment of the post-natal "muckheap" (Estragon's word), either outside man or within him. The third line in the play is the closest Clov will come to an expression of hope: "I can't be punished any more." (p. 1). Hamm self-dramatizes in his second line: "Can there be misery -- . . . loftier than mine?" (p. 2).

Set Objects

In the printed text Beckett gives us at the play's opening a terse description of the set. We notice that the characters are all fixed on stage as the curtain goes up. They are all motionless, including Clov, although he is able to stand and is stationed beside the door. Motion for him is possible.

Bare interior. Grey light. Left and right back, high up, two small windows, curtains drawn. Front right, a door. Hanging near door, its face to wall, a picture. Front left, touching each other, covered with an old sheet, two ashbins. Centre in an armchair on castors, covered with an old sheet, Hamm. . . . (p. 1)

The bare interior has been realized variously, from a gloomy subterranean cave to a sterile and modernistic fall-out shelter. The schemes of Blin and Schneider met with the approval of the author. Blin devised for the London production "a rather obvious gray-green cave-like interior which added to the oppressive effect".¹⁰ Schneider "did not set the play in a cavernous cell but used the dirty, bare back wall of the theatre as décor".¹¹ The essential quality would seem to be claustrophobic dreariness. "There's nowhere else." (p. 6). It is the last place on earth. Little light enters and it is difficult to see out: Clov must climb up on the step-ladder and then use his telescope to perform his ritualized inspections. But what he reports seeing is

"Zero . . . zero", which Hamm interprets as death -- "Outside of here it's death" (p. 9) and hell -- "Beyond is the . . . other hell." (p. 26). Thus it is a world turned in on itself; the inside is only a reflection of the outside. If it is a mind it is a mind well-suited to the world.

And yet Beckett suggests remoteness, distance, even between one "hell" and the other, by the use of an object in an attempt to reduce that distance. Clov must use his telescope to get a proper view of both sea and land. It is strangely situated, this "earth", which is a hell, between sea and land, in sight of both yet part of neither. This distancing suggesting man "*à l'écart du monde*" reminds one of Camus' definition of "*l'absurdité*" in Le Mythe de Sisyphe cited and translated by Martin Esslin in his The Theatre of the Absurd:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.¹²

There is a door on the set but it connects not with the outside "hell" but specifically with Clov's cubical kitchen where the extinguishing process goes on as well; on its walls "I see my light dying." (p. 12). There is no door to the outside, an important point to remember, since so much

critical debate has been stimulated by Clov's being ready to "leave" at the play's end. Beckett himself is rumoured to have stated that this is the crucial question of Endgame -- "Will Clov leave Hamm?" -- just as "Will Godot ever come?" is the question in Godot. Like all questions raised in Beckett's theatre it has no satisfactory answer. Clov does "leave" Hamm many times in the play, but always to retreat to his kitchen, and he always returns. At the end of the play he stands by the door, as he does at the beginning; the only change is a change of costume. There is still no way "out" and "nowhere else" to go.

The key-note of the set, and indeed of the entire play, it seems to me, is its sombre strangeness, what Ionesco might call the "insolite" quality of the enclosure and its ritual. The situation, action, and setting ("anywhere") of Godot seem familiar; Beckett is fashioning art out of banality. The objects of Godot are commonplace; the dialogue and action are for the most part abstracted from recognizable patterns. (Lucky is frankly bizarre in appearance and action; the tramps' reaction to him is to a show, a diversion, and their reaction mirrors that of the audience.) But everything in Endgame -- set, costumes, props, action -- is frankly theatrical, out of this world. A ritualized performance is being played out for us by actors who keep reminding us that they are performing from

a set text. Blin says he tried to achieve "une espèce de noblesse formelle qui était incluse dans le texte finalement".¹³ Blin reports that Beckett intended a strict stylization of performance:

[Il] ne songeait pas à une progression dramatique, il désirait que sa pièce soit comme une espèce de géométrie musicale, où chaque son, chaque mot qui revenait devait revenir de la même façon à peu près, quel que soit le contexte et quelle que soit la place de ce mot dans la durée de la pièce.¹⁴

The room can be mistaken for no ordinary naturalistic room; in Endgame we have the drawing-room domestic drama gone mad, the drawing-room a cell with "hollow" walls, high inaccessible windows, and a single picture turned to the wall. Its "family" is three generations of crippled and blind creatures of whom only one can still walk about and yet who are all tyrannized by a blind and crippled son. The windows, high up on the wall and curtained, provide neither light nor view. They are non-windows.

Nothing in Endgame functions "naturally" (thus Hamm's catheter). All objects are either faulty in themselves, like the three-legged and sexless stuffed dog, or are used to a peculiar end, contrary to the expected or usual one, like the ash-can that serve to "bottle" Nagg and Nell. The object of the game itself is not to win but to "end" and to "have done with losing". "Rien de semblable. Ici . . . la mort devient l'objet et le sujet même du

spectacle."¹⁵ An end to losing, like an end in waiting in Godot, is an end to life. Thus the object of life is to die; we play but to die. That is the terrible truth that Beckett shows us in Endgame and indeed, in all of his theatre.

This perversity of functions in the set objects of Endgame is well illustrated by the use of the windows, the picture, the door, Hamm's chair, and the sheets. A special and painful effort must be made by Clov to use the windows at all. He must carry in the step-ladder, manoeuvre it into position, get up on it, draw back the curtain, and then use his telescope to get a clear view. And such an endeavour, as all endeavour in Beckett, is futile and repetitive. It is expected that Clov will see nothing out the window. When the object does fulfil its normal function -- that is, to allow a view of something, it is a sign that the game is nearing its end. The windows look out onto "Zero" (p. 29); the land is "corpsed" (p. 30); on the ocean "the light is sunk" (p. 30); land and sea are a uniform grey -- "Light black. From pole to pole." (p. 32). Hamm recognizes the uselessness of the window routine and yet insists that the ineffective action be played out:

Hamm: I want to hear the sea.
 Clov: You wouldn't hear it.
 Hamm: Even if you opened the window?
 Clov: No.
 Hamm: Then it's not worth while opening it?
 Clov: No.
 Hamm: (violently): Then open it! (p. 65)

Only once does Clov peer through the window and report that he sees something unusual, something alive outside: "Looks like a small boy!" (p. 78). For the first time Hamm questions the truth of what is reported: "If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here. And if he doesn't . . . Clov: You don't believe me? You think I'm inventing?" (p. 79). The windows do not function to permit a view of life, but of death, of a universe "corpsed". Strangely, the first sign of life outside signals for Hamm "the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you any more." (p. 79). Again the child figure marks the end of a period of waiting, as in Godot, but is clearly associated not with a possible amelioration of the condition of life presented on stage, but with the further prolongation of boredom and anxiety in Godot and with the imminence of death itself in Endgame.

The picture turned to the wall also demonstrates this perversion of function in the objects of Endgame. A picture is supposed to provide aesthetic pleasure for the inhabitants of the home. As Baudrillard points out, in the modern home it is part of the "décor": ". . . l'oeuvre d'art, originale ou reproduite, n'y entre plus comme valeur absolue, mais sur un mode combinatoire".¹⁶ In the bourgeois home a family portrait is a familiar symbolic object; it represents tradition, the stability and continuity of the

home and family unit. ". . . le portrait de famille, la photo de mariage. . . . Tout ceci, constituant en quelque sorte le miroir diachronique de la famille."¹⁷ The picture of Endgame is in a concrete sense art turned inside out, expressing nothing. But it is peculiarly appropriate to the world of Endgame. It is a non-picture decorating a non-living room. It is a non-portrait of a non-family. Only one of the "family" has sight sufficient to see it and in this family there is no sense of particular continuity, only the general continuity of suffering which is the common lot and which is aggravated by particular cruelties inflicted by one member on another. All tradition ends here in the Endgame; this family is the last on earth.

The door connecting shelter and Clov's kitchen is another illustration of the non-functioning of the objects in Endgame. As we have noted, it is not a door that leads to the outside, but one that leads inside, to a cubical space "ten feet by ten feet by ten feet" (p. 2) where food and pain-killer are kept in a locked cupboard, a still smaller closed-in space. Thus all Clov's moves toward leaving are the comings and goings of theatrical gesture; no willed exit is possible. Clov's entrapment in the closed space of the shelter and "kitchen" is as constraining as Nell's in her ash-cans. They can both only go "in", not out.

Nell tells Nagg, "I am going to leave you", but the only movement possible (and she knows it) is deeper into her bin. Clov makes the same statement "Then I'll leave you" (pp. 37-38) and Hamm points out the obvious. "You can't leave us." (p. 37). Yet Clov repeats several times, "I'll leave you." (pp. 38, 39, 41, 48). Hamm ignores the remark each time, following it with an unconnected question:

Clov: I'll leave you.
 Hamm: Is my dog ready? (p. 39)

Clov: I'll leave you.
 Hamm: Did you ever think of one thing? (pp. 38-39)

Clov: I'll leave you.
 Hamm: Have you had your visions? (p. 41)

Hamm finally protests when Clov makes another announcement of his departure.

Clov: I'll leave you.
 Hamm: No.!

Clov: What is there to keep me here?
 Hamm: The dialogue. (p. 58)

The dialogue keeps Clov here until it is over. He is restricted in time by the length of the script and in space by the dimensions of the stage. The last time Clov states his intention to leave Hamm asks for an exit speech:

Clov: I'll leave you.
 Hamm: Before you go . . . say something. (p. 79)

At the end of his speech Clov "goes towards door" (p. 81) commenting, "This is what we call making an exit." Clov again "goes towards door" and then exits. Six lines are spoken by Hamm alone on stage and Clov re-enters. He is

dressed for travelling, "for the road" (p. 82), but the only place he can "travel" to is the shelter. There is no way out and no road to travel. The door in Endgame does not offer a way out; it is not a connective with the outside, just as the picture does not offer an alternative vision to the present reality of Endgame. The door leads into the enclosure and the picture is turned into the wall.

Two other set objects contribute to the general atmosphere of bizarre entropy and rusty mechanism in Endgame. Hamm's grotesque throne is a wheelchair that is not "a proper wheelchair" (p. 25); Nagg and Nell have landed "in the bin", ash-cans with sand in the bottom that "was sawdust once" (p. 17). The "furniture", chair and bins, are covered with sheets at the play's opening. Clov removes the sheet, "raises the curtain" to signal the beginning of Endgame. Since the sheets are only used in connection with the set in this way, one might note again the perversion of normal function. It is people who are covered by the antimacassars; their status as objects is thus suggested at the opening. But there is another suggestion in the gesture, it seems to me. The sheet traditionally is drawn up over the face of the dead to signal death and the return to dust. Here Clov removes the sheet for a re-awakening of some kind of life, however halting, and as Kenner points out in the passage previously quoted,

it is as though the sheets have been used to protect the furniture from dust -- to preserve what is human from death? The ritual is reversed, turned inside out, the characteristic perversion of Endgame.

By putting familiar objects to strange uses or by having them malfunction in some way, Beckett in Endgame shocks us into a heightened awareness of them and of the human beings who relate through them to their world and to each other. By presenting us with malfunctioning or misplaced objects in relationship with crippled or specialized human beings in an unearthly setting, Beckett engages us in the vision of Endgame. Everything is safely unrealistic and yet the objects are not unrecognizable and the characters are clearly human. We cannot dismiss the vision of Endgame as mere fantasy because the individual components of strangeness are all familiar enough. It is their use or context that jolts us into a heightened awareness of them. The set objects one might consider "containers", Hamm's chair and Nagg's and Nell's ash-cans, are familiar objects dislocated from their familiar functions, thus jarring us into a consideration of their peculiar function and significance in the world of Endgame.

Like Vladimir and Clov we are comforted by "putting things in order" (p. 57) and are disoriented and disturbed by things out of order, not in their usual context or not

functioning in a familiar way. We are thus forced to pay particular attention to what is being said by objects thus used on the stage. Hamm's chair is not "a proper wheelchair" (p. 25.). He demands "bicycle wheels" (p. 8) but "there are no more bicycle wheels" (p. 8). He tries to move himself about with the gaff "wielding it like a punt-pole" (p. 43) but with no success. Thus he tries to make a kind of boat out of a kind of wheelchair, a chair on castors (which though oiled "yesterday" do not move easily). Hamm's wheelchair, instead of allowing increased independence and mobility to a crippled man (its familiar function) emphasizes his dependence and immobility: he must be moved about by Clov. Like the blind Pozzo he is utterly dependent on his servant. The malfunctioning object thus makes concrete for the audience the mutual dependence of the master-slave relationship: Hamm, the blind and crippled tyrant, sits physically impotent but paradoxically all-powerful in a faulty wheelchair. Hamm in his chair-throne evokes not only a "toppled Prospero", a burnt-out ruler, but demonstrates the terrible power of the helpless. To move he must be pushed and yet through Clov he controls almost all movement in the play. He orders his own movement which can only be accomplished by the action of Clov. "Take me for a little turn." (p. 25). Clov pushes him about the

stage. Thus Hamm is in control of his own movement and of Clov's. Clov "can't sit" (p. 10); he needs Hamm's directives which require him to move about the shelter and go in and out to his kitchen and back, because without them he has only one thing to do: "I look at the wall." (p. 12). He is dependent on Hamm for something to do and somewhere to go.

The ash-cans of Nagg and Nell are other familiar objects we are forced to see anew by the shock of their specific function in Endgame. They make statements about their human contents, about their relationship with Hamm, about existence from generation to generation in the world as seen by Beckett and about the isolation of the self, what Joyce called "the essential loneliness of the human spirit". The ash-cans are the last domicile of Hamm's parents; "the old folks at home" (p. 19) are at home in ash-cans. They are, therefore, refuse, the human waste that remains when legs, teeth and hearing are gone and love, boat-rowing, and bicycle-riding are but vague memories in whitened heads. Since Hamm is in command of his parents' feeding and of their "bottling", the cans bespeak his attitude toward his parents, the new generation's casting-off of the old. But they make an ironic comment on both generations. The younger generation is never any better off than their elders in Beckett's world. They are all "losing" or dying in this game; the younger simply have

longer to wait for the game to end for them. Hamm, the "new" generation is as crippled as Nagg and Nell and he is totally blind whereas their sight "has failed" (p. 15). They are capable of more movement than he. They can lift their lids and appear at will; they can "leave" each other by retreating inside. Hamm must remain on stage, always engaged in the game without respite. Nell will die and Nagg will not answer and Hamm will "end up" (p. 84) alone on stage, but for the motionless Clov.

The ash-cans, self-contained cylindrical "dwellings", are metaphors for the self's imprisonment. Like Clov's kitchen each is an enclosure within the enclosure. Nagg and Nell, like all Beckett's loving couples, are forever separate, each inhabiting his own inviolable space, unable to kiss, finding it difficult even to scratch each other. Their memories of shared experiences are different. They do not listen to each other. At the end of Nagg's tailor joke, Nell's mind is still on Lake Como: "You could see down to the bottom." (p. 23).

Costume Objects

Décors, costumes, accessoires, éclairages, bruitages et dialogues n'ont plus d'existence propre; c'est par leur convergence, leur complémentarité ou leur contradiction qu'ils donnent le jour au sens. Ils constituent donc une seule forme d'expression artistique, le "langage scénique". L'auteur dramatique rejoint finalement la vision synthétique du metteur en scène.¹⁸

The costumes of Endgame, like those of Godot, have both metonymical and metaphorical value and orchestrate with the other components of production to make with their "langage scénique" the statement of Endgame. One notices in the costuming the same odd juxtaposition of object and its setting that we observed in the set. Beckett again makes the familiar new and shocking by displacing it in space or time or by changing ever so slightly its usual appearance or function. A handkerchief tucked into one's breast pocket is a cliché; a blood-stained handkerchief tucked into the breast pocket of a decayed dressing-gown is the startling and macabre language of Endgame. Beckett gives us few directions as to the costumes of Endgame, but about certain articles of clothing he is specific. As in Godot, he specifies the type of hat to be worn by three of the four characters. Significantly he comments on all but the costume of Clov until the play's end when Clov is "leaving"

and dressed "for the road". How Clov is dressed for the shelter is left to the director.

An antiquated quality runs through the costumes of both Godot and Endgame. The characters are thus always distanced from us in time, distinctly not people from everyday contemporary life, and yet they belong to no identifiable period from the past; we cannot place them in time. There is a deliberate incongruity between one costume and another (Lucky is the only character dressed for the eighteenth century, for example) and between one single costume item and another. This "out of synch" effect is, I think, another variation of the distortion of function we have noticed in the set objects of Endgame. The actors are blatantly "dressed up", decked out in odd combinations of clothing mismatched in style and era, each piece of which worn in its own time and with its matched complements would be ordinary. Beckett makes the ordinary "insolite" by putting it in an incongruous setting, by juxtaposing it with discordant elements. The current fad for attic clothes sold at high prices in trendy "rag markets" perhaps manifests a similar design: in an effort to look different and be noticeable one mixes démodé lace with the latest in vinyl. The mixture of style is sometimes flamboyant as it is in Endgame: Nagg and Nell pop out of their ash-cans in night-caps, Hamm wears a toque with his dressing-gown, and Clov

is seen sporting a Panama hat and tweed coat at the play's end.

At the opening of the play Beckett describes what Hamm is wearing: "a dressing gown, a stiff toque on his head, a large blood-stained handkerchief over his face, . . . a rug over his knees, thick socks on his feet . . ." (p. 1). The costume is a strange mixture; the total effect is bizarre and startling. Can it be that Beckett intends a pastiche of "le malade imaginaire"? It is interesting that Beckett has Clov unveil Hamm at the play's opening, thus carefully maximizing the sudden visual impact. The dressing-gown is the garb of the invalid or the leisured, but it is also the closest that male modern dress can come to a monarch's robe. The temptation for the director is to overplay the dying king image of Hamm. Blin reports that in the London production costume and chair were overly luxurious and regal: the bathrobe was in velvet with fur trim and Hamm in an elaborate wig was seated on a Gothic throne. The correction was made for the Paris production. Here the robe was one that had once been beautiful but was now faded and definitely "démodé".

The metonymical value of Hamm's gown is complex. It is the robe of indolence, of non-activity. It also expresses Hamm's physical suffering and mutilation, and paradoxically, his power and authority. Hamm is a man who

does not act. The predominant feature of his existence is non-activity as he sits and waits for the game to end. He passes the time by conversing with Clov, and ordering him about, and by telling his "chronicle". His reminiscences of his past life reveal that he has never been active; there has never been any real change in his life: "It's the end of the day like any other day, isn't it, Clov?" (p. 13). "Then it's a day like any other day." (p. 45). His life is almost over without his ever having participated actively in it: "Clov: Do you believe in the life to come? Hamm: Mine was always that." (p. 49). He speaks of being "finished", using the impersonal "it's" and then the passive construction as though he has only been acted upon, but never acted. He is like the king in a chessgame nearly over. "It's finished, we're finished." (p. 50).

Hamm's "chronicle", which seems to be the story of his life, is a story of what he didn't do when called upon to act in response to another's need. The story is of a man who petitioned him on his knees for food for his starving child. Hamm's response demonstrates his egotism and his habitual stance of resignation to the fact that "something is taking its course" (p. 13). He was angered by the man's hope for an alleviation of suffering: ". . . you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (p. 53).

His suggested solution was that the man become his servant.

Briefly Hamm reflects on other non-actions, on "All those I might have helped" (p. 68) and repeats the line that sums up his hopelessness and justifies his passivity: "Use your head, can't you . . . you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (p. 68). Like Estragon he has concluded there is "nothing to be done". To Clov, as the end of the play draws near, he admits that he was never actively engaged in anything:

Hamm: I was never there.
 Clov: Lucky for you. . . .
 Hamm: Absent, always. It all happened without me. I don't know what's happened.
 (Pause.)
 Do you know what's happened? (p. 74)

Hamm's inactivity extends beyond indolence and indifference to deliberate cruelty. Clov hints that he ought to remember how the doctor died and confronts him directly with his responsibility for the death of "Mother Pegg":

Clov: When old Mother Pegg asked you for oil for her lamp and you told her to get out to hell. You knew what was happening then, no?
 (Pause.)
 You know what she died of, Mother Pegg?
 Of darkness.
 Hamm: (feebly): I hadn't any.
 Clov: (as before): Yes, you had. (p. 75)

Similarly, when Clov wept to have a bicycle, "You told me to go to hell." (p. 8). Hamm now threatens to withhold food from Clov entirely, then refines his cruel suggestion. He will give him enough food to keep him alive, but he will

be hungry all the time. When Clov wants the gaff to kill the small boy whom he sights outside, Hamm commands him not to act. The child will "die there" or come to the shelter. He then prefers the child to die the torturous death of Endgame instead of the quick and violent death Clov proposes.

Hamm acts suffering. The deliberate theatricality of his costume mitigates our response to his suffering condition. Beckett never allows our emotional involvement with the single human being. We perceive suffering and it is pitiable but the objects we see distance us from the individual sufferer. Hamm's gown is not only the robe of the leisured but of the sick. It is old and well-worn, suggesting that Hamm's life has been a long suffering. But this gown must be distinctly a costume; Hamm is an actor. It cannot suggest hospital corridors. If it retains a faded elegance, as in the Blin production, it suggests a certain revelling in pain, suffering with élan. The bloody handkerchief and stiff toque are outrageously theatrical details which destroy any "realism" in the costume. The bloody handkerchief, evocative of the veronica veil which covered Christ's face, is Hamm's self-consciously "showy" sign of supreme suffering. It is the Beckettian note of deliberate falsity that distances us from Hamm's personal suffering and makes us aware of it as sheer performance.

Hamm stages his suffering grandiosely, announcing the beginning of his performance with a flourish of the handkerchief:

Hamm: Me -- (He yawns)
 -- to play.
 (He holds the handkerchief spread out
before him.) (p. 2)

The bits of stage business involving the handkerchief and toque are commonplace actions. It is the incongruity of the object and the gesture that reminds us of the falsity of Hamm's suffering. We are aware always that Hamm is an actor using the available props to act misery. The lifting of the bloody handkerchief from his face at the play's opening is Hamm's signal that he is about to perform publicly his suffering. He "folds the handkerchief and puts it back neatly in the breast-pocket of his dressing-gown" (p. 2). The action is oddly formal, a cliché of the properly dressed gentleman. But the handkerchief is bloody, Hamm has just removed it from his face, and he is wearing not a suit but a dressing-gown. ("... He clears his throat, joins the tips of his fingers.") And Hamm begins to declaim his suffering: "Can there be misery -- . . . loftier than mine?" (p. 2). Hamm is totally self-concerned throughout the play, straining to project his own pain but blandly disregarding the pain of his "son". When Clov tells him the pain in his legs is "unbelievable" (p. 46) Hamm's only comment is "You won't be able to leave me." (p. 46).

Hamm does not bring out the handkerchief until his "last soliloquy". Like the stage curtain it is raised at the beginning and is lowered at the play's end. He performs one other gesture with it: he takes off his glasses and wipes them as the performance draws to an end. The gesture is common but in this context pure "show". The dark glasses neither keep out light nor improve vision. Hamm is blind; they are shades that hide his eyes. They are part of the paraphernalia of Hamm's fakery; wiping them with a bloody handkerchief for clearer "vision" is an action that dissolves into empty gesture. He puts the handkerchief carefully back into his pocket and goes on with his monologue. After calling his father he takes it out, unfolds it, and speaks his last line with the handkerchief held before him, apostrophizing it as he did at the beginning: "Old stancher! . . . He covers his face with handkerchief" (p. 84). Signalled by the lowering of his curtain, Hamm's suffering has come to an end until the next performance.

Hamm's toque gives him a roguish air. It undercuts his kingliness and reminds us that he is always playing a role. Depending on its shape it may even suggest a fool in a king's robe. When he removes it in formal, ritualized gesture, the tribute he intends becomes a travesty of itself. Recalling his dead artist-madman friend, he raises it in salute.

Clov: When was that?
 Hamm: Oh way back, way back, you weren't in the
 land of the living.
 Clov: God be with the days!
 (Pause. Hamm raises his toque.)
 Hamm: I had a great fondness for him.
 (Pause. He puts on his toque again.) (p. 44)

Clov's ironic outburst is prompted by a reference to his pre-shelter existence (or perhaps the time before he lived). Hamm characteristically misses Clov's meaning. The gesture is timed so that he seems to be saluting Clov's pre-Hamm days. As a prelude to his own acted demise he raises the toque again. In context the gesture is anything but dignified:

(He raises his toque.)
 Peace to our . . . arses.
 (Pause.)
 And put on again.
 (He puts on his toque.)
 Deuce. (p. 82)

Paradoxically Hamm's dressing gown signifies not only his passivity and suffering but his power. In his robe of the leisured or sick man he is the controlling force in the play. He is a blind and terrible tyrant, a son who has consigned his parents to ash-cans and a father who orders his son about relentlessly, threatening to starve him and glad he has made him suffer:

Hamm: I've made you suffer too much.
 (Pause.)
 Haven't I?
 Clov: It's not that.
 Hamm: (shocked):
 I haven't made you suffer too much?

Clov: Yes!
 Hamm: (relieved):
 Ah you gave me a fright! (p. 7)

Without Clov he would be helpless. He uses him as an extension of himself. Clov becomes his eyes and inspects the outside for him; Clov is his legs, moving him about, bringing him the things he commands: his pain-killer, his dog, his gaff, his catheter.

As in Godot master and slave are interdependent and bound together by habit. Like Lucky Clov remains servant to a now helpless master.

Hamm: Why do you stay with me?
 Clov: Why do you keep me?
 Hamm: There's no one else.
 Clov: There's nowhere else. (p. 6)

Inactive Hamm needs someone to act for him and Clov needs a space in which to be active. (In his kitchen he stares at the wall.) They both need someone to play to:

Clov: What is there to keep me here?
 Hamm: The dialogue. (p. 58)

Both have learned only one role: Clov knows the servant's part and Hamm the master's. They cannot live without each other:

Hamm: Gone from me you'd be dead.
 Clov: And vice versa. (p. 70)

Helplessness may exert a more insidious authority than naked force which is always a challenge to rebellion. Clov cannot rebel although he'd like to: "If I could kill him I'd die happy." (p. 27). He cannot even leave him, although he

is planning his departure from the beginning of the play. At the end he is still on the set, motionless, his eyes fixed on Hamm.

The metaphorical value of the gown thus derives from the co-existing connotations of power and impotence. The image is a kind of double-exposure; the mantle of power is a dressing-gown, the crown a toque. The two are the same: there is in weakness the power to dominate. The blind Pozzo of Act II of Waiting for Godot is not less master of Lucky than the Pozzo of Act I. Adorno makes this point about the power of weakness: "To reject the domination of the powerless is perhaps the most difficult task of all."¹⁹ The ruler needs his servants in order to rule; he must be allowed to be king, be designated king in this game by those who serve him and move him about the board. Beckett reinforces the suggestion of kingliness with specific allusions: Hamm is the king in a chess "endgame"; it appears Hamm's eyes have been gouged out like those of Oedipus. (Clov asks if he has "bled" and we have seen the bloody handkerchief on his face.) Absurdly he parodies Richard III, "My kingdom for a nightman!" (p. 23), and refers to the days of his feudal glory when Clov inspected his "paupers".

Clov's costume is never described until he changes into his travelling outfit at the play's end. But his role as servant, the exploited one, must be clear from the

beginning; he must be dressed shabbily, in mismatched cast-offs even more decayed than Hamm's robe. Metaphorically he is the image of Suffering Man, clownish and awkward, since Beckett directs that his walk be "stiff, staggering" (p. 1), but the physical grotesquerie is caused by pain. His first speech expresses the lingering agony that is his life: "I can't be punished any more." (p. 1). As Jan Kott points out in Shakespeare Our Contemporary, Clov is more unhappy than Hamm since "his gabble is still eschatological as is Lucky's in Godot. Hamm alone has realized the folly of all suffering."²⁰ Clov is still trying to work out the rationale of the game: "I say to myself -- sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you -- one day. I say to myself -- sometimes, Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go -- one day . . ." (pp. 80-81). The general effect of Clov as envisioned by Blin was of a skeletal creature, his eyes blackened and his cheeks gaunt -- "l'homme d'Auschwitz".²¹

From the text we can discern only that Clov wears no hat and wears trousers. There is a bit of business requiring him to kill the flea inside his trousers with insecticide. "Clov loosens the top of his trousers, pulls it forward and shakes powder into the aperture." (p. 34). Blin chose to dress him in dirty, old too-short pants and

a tight long-sleeved sweater. Only about his shoes does Blin give us any detail: "une paire de vieilles godasses, des brodequins -- . . . sans lacets, que Clov fait grincer sur le plancher".²² The sound of the shoes is important because it gives blind Hamm the signal that Clov is approaching.

When Clov re-enters dressed for the road, his new costume must be radically different from his dreary rags for the shelter.²³ The audience must grasp immediately that he is "leaving". The characteristic incongruity of the objects in Endgame is again in evidence. The clothes are for "the road" but Clov does not travel. Ruby Cohn comments, noting the Panama hat, umbrella and raincoat, that he is "ridiculously armed against sunstroke or tempest".²⁴ Her remark implies that Clov, while now nattily dressed, is dressed for more catastrophes. It has been suggested that he is on his way to another Endgame. The change must be as dramatic as Willie's at the end of Happy Days. Clov is dressed "for the road" and Willy is dressed "to kill" but neither of them moves: both plays end in an ambiguous tableau.

The change, it seems to me, is a stroke of pure theatre, startling but not convincing: Clov is dressed for the finale of Endgame and is going nowhere. His clothes ostentatiously announce his plan to travel but he has worn

them only to re-enter the shelter from his kitchen. Even Hamm thinks he has gone; he would not speak his "last soliloquy" if he knew another character were on stage with him. He "discards" (p. 82) his whistle and will not call Clov again. But Clov remains with him. The costume, like his exit speech, his repeated threats to leave, and his elaborate plan with the alarm clock, is only a theatrical gesture. The servant cannot leave the master even when the "dialogue" and the habitual roles that they have learned are over.

Nagg and Nell are wearing "nightcaps". A single iconographic detail distinguishes Nell from Nagg; her nightcap is trimmed with a bit of lace. Otherwise the two are identical, with white faces and blackened teeth, human ruins, death's heads which paradoxically keep popping out of their ash-cans for one more look at the world and each other. The nightcaps indicate the nature of Nagg and Nell's lingering existence. They also demonstrate once again Beckett's poetic method in Endgame. According to Peter Brook "poetry is a rough magic that fuses opposites."²⁵ The poetry of Endgame, as evidenced again in the visual impact of Nagg and Nell, derives from the repeated fusing of opposites. Trashcans belong in a back alley; nightcaps belong in a boudoir.

Beckett juxtaposes incongruous elements in a complex

and powerful dramatic image. The caps are anachronistic relics of a bygone age, like Nagg and Nell themselves. Nightcaps are worn for bedtime and for sleeping or for what Nell calls "time for love" (p. 14). Most of the time Nagg's and Nell's heads are down; they are "sleeping". Yet Beckett makes much of their limited dialogue and action specifically sexual, deriving maximum effect from the clash of opposites -- death and desire. Nagg knocks on Nell's lid and she emerges: "What is it my pet? (Pause.) Time for love?" (p. 14). They strain to kiss but fail to meet. They reminisce about their engagement and a Krapp-like romantic rowing episode. Nagg's joke is mainly concerned with the snug crotch on a pair of trousers.

The grotesque image of the night-capped parents in ash-cans is a powerful metaphor for the processes of aging and death. Nagg and Nell are near death. But when Nell dies, her head simply does not reappear. She sleeps the everlasting sleep in her bin. The bin becomes her coffin and her body slumps to the sand at the bottom. Nagg and Nell thus live in shrouds in their coffins. (Blin had them dressed in nightgowns.) Living is dying; being dead is not lifting your head out of your ash-can. There is only a gesture between life and death.

Property Objects

Clov: There are so many terrible things.
 Hamm: No, no, there are not so many now. (p. 44)

A nearly-ended world disintegrates still further in Endgame. As objects disappear or malfunction we perceive the world running down, the game nearing its end. Beckett shows us life defined by the relationship of human beings with their world through objects. Loy's comments on the use Sartre and Camus make of objects is relevant to Beckett's:

Things can be notoriously unsympathetic to anthropomorphic design. The physical universe is adamant, and nothing is to be gained by human reasoning, cajolery, and menace. . . . For Sartre, Camus . . . these crucial encounters with objects spell out the basic absurdity of human existence . . . in a universe of inanimate objects.²⁶

When the objects are all played out or "discarded" the life-game cannot continue. The property objects of Endgame are the "cards" of the game.

Property objects have a practical theatrical function in Endgame. They provide the only movement in the play, its only "business". As Clov says, he has "things to do" (p. 12). He goes in and out, fetching and bringing things in response to the commands of Hamm. He manoeuvres the ladder, fetches the glass, the food, the dog, the alarm clock, the gaff. As the objects run out, there is less and less for him to

do. Without objects no action is necessary. Hamm orders his pain-killer, his gaff, his dog, a sugar-plum for Nagg. Clov brings him things, keeping up a running inventory that is always diminishing: there are "no more bicycle wheels", "no more pap" (p. 9), "no more coffins" (p. 42), "no more sugar-plums" (p. 55), "no more rugs", "no more painkiller" (p. 71). When there is nothing more to fetch from the kitchen Clov will be still and all the characters will be character-objects, fixed in space. Already his repeated inspections of the outside seem but empty gesture since the object is to see something, and he always sees nothing: he reports "the same as usual" (p. 4), "Zero" (p. 4), "no more nature" (p. 11), "Zero . . . zero . . . and zero." (p. 29).

Objects provide stimulus for movement in an otherwise static existence. They give the players of Endgame something to do, and thus pass the time until the game is over. To kill time is to kill pain in Beckett's world. As long as Hamm keeps Clov scurrying back and forth, busy with objects, time passes. We are reminded of the exchange between Estragon and Vladimir when the man of possessions, Pozzo, has departed:

Vladimir: That passed the time.
 Estragon: It would have passed in any case.
 Vladimir: Yes, but not so rapidly.²⁷

Hamm responds only to the announcement that there is no more pain-killer. It is the coup de grâce; a world without pain-killer is unthinkable: "What'll I do? (Pause. In a scream.) What'll I do?" (pp. 71-72).

Like Pozzo, Hamm is the only character in the play who is not utterly dispossessed. The few things that remain are all his. But there are only two objects in the play that he controls directly, without the intervention of Clov: his whistle and his gaff. They are signs of his false power and have metaphorical connotations beyond the limited world of the shelter. When Hamm has dismissed Clov and has discarded these last two objects the play will end. The whistle signifies his power over Clov and thus his control over the world of objects. When he whistles Clov enters and does his bidding: "(He whistles. Enter Clov immediately.)" (p. 13). The whistle is congruent with the game metaphor that runs through Endgame. The referee controls the action of the game (although he is not responsible for its being played), stops action, and assigns penalties at the blow of a whistle. But a whistle is also a child's toy and contributes to the impression of falsity in Hamm's display of power.

Hamm's gaff is an instrument of violence. Clov suggests killing the child with it and Hamm himself suggests Clov "finish" him with it. It is also his staff (recalling

Prospero's) and a grotesque sceptre, a symbol of power. But its traditional association is undercut by Hamm's inability to use it effectively. He tries to use it as a "punt-pole" to move himself about but cannot budge his chair without Clov. He cannot change anything with the gaff. He has no real power. It becomes the "stick" of Beckett's decomposed old men groping their way through the "muckheap", poking at things, trying to connect themselves with the world outside themselves. At the play's end Hamm "discards" his whistle and his gaff. It is a ridiculous gesture, again a mixture of opposites: the grandiose and the trivial. Playing at Prospero, he announces that the "revels" (p. 56) are ended. But there have been no revels and he has never had any magical power.

Three of the four characters of Endgame are character-objects: Hamm, Nagg, and Nell. They are immobile, fixed in space. Yet they suffer and change in time. Nell dies during the course of the play. Although the other objects in Endgame, as we have seen, "run out" in a general process of entropy, the character-objects deteriorate, malfunction, but are caught in an agonizingly slow process of running-down or dying. It is not a "quick death", as Beckett tells us explicitly in "Dante and the Lobster".²⁸

Hamm projects his suffering -- his bleeding, his "bad" eyes, the "sore" in his "breast", the "dripping"

(p. 18) in his head, -- throughout the play. Time has brought him to this impasse, near the end, hoping for the end, yet forever on the threshold of "the silence and . . . the stillness" (p. 69). Characteristically he delivers a stagey little lament about the ravages of time: ". . . we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" (p. 11). Nagg and Nell lament their losses in a more personal and immediate way; Nagg misses "me tooth" (p. 14); Nell comments that "our sight has failed" (p. 15); together they recall losing "our shanks" (p. 16). Nothing seems to change. Dukore explains admirably this sense of sameness which makes time drag: "Since deterioration, a process, is habitual, it is in that paradoxical sense unchanging."²⁹

As time runs on, towards the end of the game, the character-objects experience it in slow-motion. Time seems to expand as it nears the end. "Yesterday" is "that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day." (pp. 43-44). Nell wonders, "Why this farce day after day?" (p. 14). Hamm comments after Nell's death, "The dead go fast." (p. 66). Perhaps he means that because Nagg is no longer crying the dead pass quickly from the memories of the living. In Beckett's work dying is an endless suffering, beginning with birth. Hamm feels the weight of time and looks forward to the end. He keeps asking the time: "Is it not time for

my pain-killer?" (p. 7). "This is deadly." (p. 28).

"Do you not think this has gone on long enough?" (p. 45).

"It will be the end and there I'll be, wondering what can have brought it on and wondering what can have. . . . Why it was so long coming." (p. 67).

But they can not end it. None of them can control the game. They are the pawns of some cruel mechanism and they must wait for it to run down. "Something is taking its course." (p. 32). Hamm sees himself as a small wheel within the larger mechanism: "I'm taking my course." (p. 42). He discards objects at the play's end in an attempt to make an "ending", but he remains an object on stage; he must himself be "discarded" by the script for the Endgame to end.

There is only one essential difference between Clov and the object-characters: he can still move. He thinks he can change the "course" of things but he is like a moving part of Hamm. He is as unable to move from Hamm as Hamm is to move. He devises an elaborate "leaving" plan involving the alarm clock and a new suit of clothes. Like the Pozzo of Godot's Act I he still lives in a world of schedules, clock-time, and dressing for the occasion. He is able to move and manipulate objects. At the play's opening he unveils objects Hamm, Nagg, and Nell, and moves Hamm about the stage -- "around the world". But Clov can

only stage a departure the way Hamm stages an ending. He "winds up" and "dresses up" to leave but remains frozen in place as the curtain falls, staring fixedly at Hamm.

Beckett emphasizes the inescapability and perpetuation of the threshold situation by repetition. The repeated announcements to Hamm that there is "no more --" marks the depletion of each object in turn. Hamm repeatedly calls for his "pain-killer" and brings up the matter of "bicycle wheels" three times. The words "finished" and "end" are woven in and out of the text. Within consecutive lines of dialogue we notice two Beckettian techniques that emphasize the endless repetition of "the same old inanities" that make up a life: Beckett repeats entire sentences not quite consecutively or picks up a word from one sentence and repeats it in the next in a slightly different context so that the new sentence sounds vaguely familiar.

Nagg: It's lower down. In the hollow.
 Nell: What hollow?
 Nagg: The hollow! (Pause.)

 Yesterday you scratched me there.
 Nell: (elegiac):
 Ah yesterday!
 Nagg: Could you not?
 (Pause.)
 Would you like me to scratch you?

 Hamm: Perhaps it's a little vein.
 (Pause.)
 Nagg: What was that he said?
 Nell: Perhaps it's a little vein.
 Nagg: What does that mean?
 (Pause.)
 That means nothing. (pp. 19-20)

The theatre provides the perfect form for the expression of the tedious repetitive quality of life being played out and for the inability of the characters to "end". The play is played the same way every night. Roles are not interchangeable; an actor is assigned a role and he must repeat it every night, speak only his lines. The characters are not free to change the dialogue or gestures. They are bound by the mechanism of the text; it must "take its course". The text of Endgame is full of theatrical terms to emphasize its self-conscious performance quality.

Beckett's object characters always have a story they must tell. Fixed in space their mind is released to wander in dream, reminiscences, and fictions. Clov has "things to do"; his mind is concerned with objects. Hamm dreams of the "forests" (p. 3) and of making love, and he tells his ongoing chronicle. Nagg and Nell share memories of their accident and of rowing on Lake Como. Nagg tells the story of the tailor while Nell is lost in dreams of Lake Como. Hamm's story is an objectification of his life; he becomes his own object. Over his object he has the control of creator: he can effect change in it, reshape it, precisely what he cannot do with his own subjective experience. The weather is variously "extraordinarily bitter" (p. 51), "exceedingly dry" (p. 53), as he tries different conditions. He can "get on with it"

(p. 59) even when he can not "get on with" his own existence. He reflects on his narration as on an object apart from himself: "Nicely put, that" (p. 83); "Technique, you know" (p. 59). He interrupts it, stops time, when he wants to -- "Well there we are, there I am, that's enough." (p. 83).

In Endgame, more than in Waiting for Godot, Beckett's theatre is a theatre of objects -- of what is left when "it" -- life, the chessgame, the play, language, is almost over or depleted. The objects in the context of the play are part of its strange language. The truncated situation and plot are bizarre, horrifying. The objects of set, costume, props, are concrete images of a world incomplete, burned-out and dehumanized. (Beckett himself wrote to Alan Schneider that the play was "more inhuman than Godot".)³⁰ Everything is malfunctioning or has "run out"; ordinary objects are seen in strange contexts or used in odd ways, like familiar melodies played off-key. The degenerative process of Godot's Act II is carried still further in Endgame. Pozzo and Lucky had lost sight and speech respectively but are able to "go on", if haltingly. Three of the four characters in Endgame have themselves become fixed in space as character-objects: Hamm can neither see nor move; Nagg and Nell have no legs and Nell dies on stage. Her dustbin remains before us: the object prevails. In the three "pièces sans paroles" of the next chapter

Beckett abandons utterly the word and the drama is played out with the human figure in silent interaction with objects.

NOTES

¹Fin de Partie was not translated into English until a year later. Bell Gale Chevigny in the "Introduction" to Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Endgame" (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969) quotes a letter written by Beckett to Alan Schneider on 30 April, 1957, in which he expressed misgivings about the translation. It would "inevitably be a poor substitute for the original (the loss will be much greater than from the French to the English 'Godot')." (p. 11). [All subsequent references to this collection are to this edition.]

²This letter was published in The Village Voice on 19 March, 1958.

³Ruby Cohn, "The Beginnings of Endgame", Modern Drama, IX (December, 1966), 319-323.

⁴John Fletcher and John Spurling, Beckett: A Study of his Plays (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), pp. 132-133. [All subsequent references to this study are to this edition.]

⁵Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 132.

⁶Samuel Beckett, Malone Dies (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 12.

⁷Hugh Kenner, "Life in the Box", in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Endgame", p. 53.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ross Chambers, "An Approach to Endgame", in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Endgame", p. 72.

¹⁰Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 132.

¹¹Ibid., p. 134.

¹²Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 5.

¹³Waintrop, p. 51.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁵Maurice Nadeau, "Fin de Partie", France Observateur (le 2 février, 1957), cited by Waintrop, p. 64.

¹⁶Baudrillard, Le Système des Objets, p. 29.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁸Jacquart, Le Théâtre de Dérision, p. 150.

¹⁹Theodor W. Adorno, "Towards an Understanding of Endgame", in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Endgame", p. 110.

²⁰Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 128. [All subsequent references to this work are to this edition.]

²¹Waintrop, p. 56.

²²Ibid., p. 54.

²³The problem for the director and actor, of course, is to effect this change within a very short space of time. After Clov leaves the stage Hamm speaks only six short lines interspersed with five pauses before Clov reappears "dressed for the road". Beckett shows the "sens théâtral" that Mme. Renaud commends him for by making the new costume mainly a matter of added items: a tweed coat, necessitating no change of trousers, a raincoat over the arm, an umbrella, bag, and Panama hat. For once Hamm does not hear him enter. Presumably in the Blin production he changed his shoes, the "brodequins . . . que Clov fait gincer".

²⁴Ruby Cohn, "Tempest in an Endgame", Symposium, XIX (Winter, 1965), 334.

²⁵Peter Brook, "Preface", in Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, x.

²⁶J. Robert Loy, "Things in Recent French Literature", PMLA, LXXI (March, 1956), 30.

²⁷Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 32.

²⁸Samuel Beckett, "Dante and the Lobster", in his More Pricks than Kicks (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1974), p. 19.

²⁹Bernard F. Dukore, "The Other Pair in Waiting for Godot", Drama Survey, VII (Winter, 1968-69), 136.

³⁰Samuel Beckett, letter to Alan Schneider, cited by Bell Gale Chevigny, "Introduction", in Twentieth Century Interpretation of "Endgame", p. 11.

CHAPTER IV

"PIECES SANS PAROLES":

ACT WITHOUT WORDS I

ACT WITHOUT WORDS II

BREATH

Mime is the performance of symbols.¹

Tout le théâtre de Beckett tient finalement dans cette honte faite à Dieu de nous avoir si mal traités et de ne s'en être même pas aperçu.²

Beckett, like all the writers of the new "alittérature" (Claude Mauriac's term) is profoundly mistrustful of words. "Beckett is sceptical of the possibility of any system of meaning being able to introduce any ultimately valid and satisfactory order into the universe."³ Beckett has been quoted as saying that we must work with words -- "there's nothing else"; his character, the Unnamable, says precisely this. At the beginning of the novel he tells us "I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never"⁴ and one hundred and twenty-three pages later he is still speaking; silence is still impossible:

I'll wake in the silence, and never sleep again, it will be I, or dream, dream again, dream of a silence, a dream silence . . . all words there's nothing else, you must go on, that's all I know, they're going to stop, I know that well I can feel it, they're going to abandon me, it will be the silence . . . I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any. . . .⁵

Beckett's dramatic characters frequently show dissatisfaction with the limitations of language and yet, like the Unnamable, they go on speaking except for Lucky, who after his remarkable outburst can not speak, is literally "struck dumb". Maddy Rooney feels she is speaking "a dead language".⁶ Clov finds that language, like the objects of Endgame, is becoming depleted: "I ask the words that remain -- sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say." (Endgame, p. 81). He blames Hamm for giving him a vocabulary which seems to be "running out" of meaning as the cupboard is running out of food. "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent." (Endgame, p. 44). Beckett's prose works are getting shorter and shorter as he works towards silence. Raymond Federman calls this latest stage of Beckett's work the "impossible fiction" and points out that from 1961 to 1971 Beckett published only sixty-five to seventy pages of new prose fiction comprising several works.⁷ Olga Bernal has given this reason for Beckett's "passion du silence": "La passion du silence qui traverse toute l'oeuvre de Beckett est une passion de la vérité. . . . Car le langage et ce qui est 'nommable' empêche et trahit toute vérité."⁸

In the new theatre words are of secondary importance. "Le Théâtre de Dérision se méfie du langage, le

met en doute, le tourne en dérision, ne l'utilise qu'avec une certaine gêne."⁹ The new dramatists were influenced by Antonin Artaud. (One hesitates now to call them the "Absurdists" since Martin Esslin's label has been worked to death, but I am referring to those contemporary dramatists beginning in the 1950's who write outside the conventions of naturalistic theatre.) Artaud had written in Le Théâtre et Son Double about a language in the theatre that had little to do with the splendours of the spoken word:

Je dis que la scène est un lieu physique et concret qui demande qu'on le remplisse, et qu'on lui passe parler son langage concret.

Je dis que ce langage concret, destiné aux sens et indépendant de la parole, doit satisfaire d'abord les sens, qu'il y a une poésie pour les sens comme il y en a une pour le langage, et que ce langage physique et concret auquel je fais allusion n'est vraiment théâtral que dans la mesure où les pensées qu'il exprime échappent du langage articulé.¹⁰

"Awkward silences" traditionally cause embarrassment and uneasiness in the theatre. Cues are generally picked up quickly or the performance is said to "drag"; gaps are filled with fussy stage business -- lighting a cigarette, pouring a drink from the bar. But silence is always important in the theatre of Beckett. His pauses, we are told by his directors, must be as carefully timed and as scrupulously adhered to as any gesture, business, or dialogue. They are part of the text. A performance of Godot that does not "drag", but is speeded up, its pauses

ignored, would seriously distort its vision of the world. Kenneth Tynan has defined a play as "a way of spending two hours in the dark without being bored".¹¹ But watching Godot we do become bored, infected with the ennui of the characters, and that is precisely its intended effect. Madeleine Renaud claims that learning the lines for Winnie of Oh Les Beaux Jours was the most difficult task of her career because of the pauses.¹² The monologue resumes after the pauses without any verbal cue; the train of association has been broken by the pause. Beckett, who supervised the performance himself, allowed Mme. Renaud to change any lines which she found particularly difficult, but he insisted upon the observance of his pauses.

Notwithstanding Beckett's "passion du silence", his plays are notable for their linguistic vigour and beauty. As one critic has pointed out, no one in Beckett's plays utters an inarticulate cry of despair.¹³ Vivian Mercier, one of the most distinguished of Beckett's critics, points out that "Be they tramps or aristocrats, Beckett's characters are nearly all capable of sounding as if they had doctorates -- or at least had been accepted as doctoral candidates."¹⁴ Apparently he mentioned this to Beckett who only shrugged and said something to the effect of "How do you know they don't?" The plays of Beckett abound in puns, word-games, carefully stychomythic rhythms. His characters

frequently share his delight in language, the well-turned phrase, the speech carefully delivered, its tones savoured. "Words have been my only loves, not many."¹⁵ Hamm admires his own lines: "You cried for night; it falls: now cry in darkness. (Pause.) Nicely put, that." (Endgame, p. 83). One of the last delights remaining for writer Krapp, as we shall see, is his delight in words: he fondles them and turns them over on his tongue. Winnie recites bits of her "classics" in Happy Days, finding comfort in near-quotations from poems half-remembered. Vladimir and Estragon take verbal "canters" to help pass the time.

With Act Without Words I Beckett became "le seul auteur dramatique qui ait réussi à écrire une pièce sans paroles".¹⁶ Beckett has now written three plays "sans paroles": Act Without Words I, Act Without Words II, and Breath. It is with these three silent theatre pieces that I shall deal in this chapter. The first two plays use man and objects to make their statement; Breath is a play without actors.

Act Without Words I: "The Calculus of Human Frustration"

Acte Sans Paroles I was originally written in French in 1956 for the dancer, Deryk Mendel, with music by John Beckett, the author's cousin. It was translated into

English by the author in 1958. It was first played as part of a double bill with Fin de Partie (Endgame) when it opened in London at the Royal Court in 1957. Since the production of Fin de Partie was played before an English audience it is interesting that this endpiece was written to be performed in a universal language, the language of mime.

There are some clear similarities with Endgame. Indeed, we might think of it as a compressed, miniature Endgame stripped down still further, so that there is no set or dialogue remaining; there is just one character and several objects with which he is involved during the course of the performance. It is a "dumbshow" after the performance of the play. The only character resembles Clov. He responds to an unseen Hamm who "whistles" him to perform certain actions with objects. This transcendental Hamm is in control of everything: he/it knows the "combination of the cupboard" and can withhold or bestow nourishment (the water) from the Clov figure on mere caprice, recalling Hamm's threats to give Clov nothing more to eat. The man at first obeys without question, as Clov does, performing all the actions that "hypothetical imperatives"¹⁸ command him to perform.

At the opening the man is thrown backwards onto a brightly lit stage from the right wing. He responds to a

whistle from the left wing and he is thrown back from the left. A series of objects appears from the flies. A tree lands; he sits under it. A pair of scissors descends; he trims his nails. A tiny carafe labelled "WATER" descends and the teasing begins in earnest. The carafe is too high for him to reach. A large cube and then two other smaller cubes and a rope descend one after the other, suggesting various possibilities for reaching the carafe. At one point he is about to reach it and it is pulled up just out of his reach. He almost attains it twice again -- once by climbing a rope, and then by making a lasso to catch it. Both times his efforts are frustrated. The rope is let out, depositing him on the ground; the carafe is pulled up again as he is about to lasso it. He reflects, sets cubes under the tree and picks up the lasso again, presumably to hang himself. The bough folds. Twice more he is "whistled" from the wings. The first time he is flung back onto the stage as at the beginning. The second time he does not move. He opens his collar, preparing to cut his throat with the scissors. The rope and scissors are pulled up. The big cube on which he has been sitting is pulled out from under him. He does not move again, despite repeated whistles and the descent of the carafe to the level of his face. He remains still, lying on his side

facing the audience, looking at his hands as the curtain comes down.

There are two obvious differences between the behaviour of this man and that of Clov: the man in Act Without Words I contemplates suicide twice whereas Clov still fantasizes about killing Hamm; the man of Act Without Words I drops out of the game, whereas Clov is still on the board at the play's end. The man is prevented from killing himself by the perverse power that wants him to survive so that there will be someone there to be tormented. Clov never mentions killing himself; he still dreams the impossible dream of killing Hamm and then dying happy himself for having done so. While Clov keeps threatening to leave, or drop out of the game, he is still leaving at the play's end. The man of Act simply refuses to play, to respond to the stimuli offered him. "He does not move" is repeated five times at the play's end. He contemplates himself, which is what all Beckett's characters do when they are immobile, no longer manipulating objects: "He looks at his hands."¹⁹ Jan Kott's commentary on Act Without Words I states succinctly the significance of giving up:

The forces external to man . . . are not indifferent but sneering and malicious. . . . They tempt him all the time. These forces are stronger than he, Man must be defeated and cannot escape from the situation that has been imposed on him. All he can do is to give up; refuse to play blindman's buff. Only by the possibility of refusal can he surmount the external forces.²⁰

The Set

L'espoir chimérique d'un ailleurs qui obsède
tous les personnages ne rend que plus pénible
l'aridité de ce qui est.²¹

Beckett's stage directions indicate no constructed set for Act Without Words I. It is the lack of objects that is the remarkable fact of its set. "Desert. Dazzling light." (p. 87). A cyclorama is stretched across the back of the stage so that the actor, in black, appears against a white, brilliantly-lit backdrop. The play acts as a sort of afterword without words to Endgame; the dazzling light provides a sharp contrast with the grey interior of Endgame. The brilliance of the lighting emphasizes the nakedness of man, his vulnerability to the capricious power that toys with him. He can hide nowhere. Estragon had tried to hide behind a tree when he heard "them" coming; there is not even a tree on stage at the beginning of Act Without Words I. Man is utterly alone; there is "no more nature". The world is a desert, Beckett's set a wasteland where nothing grows. Anticipating the scorched earth of Winnie's Happy Days it represents the "aridité de ce qui est" and there is no "ailleurs", since each time the man tries to go offstage at the wings to someplace else he is thrust back violently onto the stage.

The associations of the desert are sterility and

death. Since Hamm had said that outside the enclosure was "death" and "the other hell" we can perhaps see the "desert" of Act Without Words I as what exists outside the shelter of Endgame on the land Clov had described as "zero". (Interestingly, Nell's last word before dying is "desert".) It is the other side of the shelter, its reverse: it is brightly instead of dimly lit; it is hot and dry whereas the interior of Endgame was cold and dank. Hamm had needed a rug over his knees, Nell had felt "perished" (Endgame, p. 16) and Nagg "freezing" (Endgame, p. 16).

In Beckett's theatre, the more things change, the more everything remains the same. As Winnie remarks as she sinks deeper and deeper into the sand in Oh, Les Beaux Jours!: "Jamais rien qui change".²² External conditions may be radically different, even opposite, as in Endgame and Act Without Words I, but man's existence remains essentially the same. He is "whelped" (Clov's words for being born), cast out onto the stage of life as the man is at the beginning of Act; he hopes and strives; he sees that all effort is futile, that "something is taking its course". Then he may contemplate or even attempt suicide, in an effort to negate the absurdity of his existence. But this effort, like all the rest, may be frustrated: the bough may break, the scissors unaccountably disappear. He may then either continue playing the game,

aspiring and hoping and having his hopes dashed repeatedly by a sneering unseen authority, or he may simply stay still and refuse to play. It is this last that is so hard to do as Hamm tells us: "If I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over with sound, and motion, all over and done with." (Endgame, p. 69).

Human existence is always the same, inside the shelter of Endgame, or in the desert of Act Without Words I. But the stripped-down set of Act Without Words I suggests that a further depletion has taken place. When the curtain went up on Endgame some objects were on stage with the one mobile character, Clov. The objects were what Madeleine Renaud terms "objets parlant", speaking objects, Hamm, Nagg and Nell. When the curtain goes up on Act there are no objects on stage and no speakers. Language has run out. As long as there are words, as the Unnamable says, we must use them. But when there are no more words, as in Act Without Words I, absolute stillness, non-activity and a refusal to play becomes possible.

Costume

The actor's costume is that of a mime artist -- black leotard, white face. Jan Kott says that Act Without Words I is performed by a clown. He refers to it as a new Book of Job "shown in buffo, as a circus pantomime".²³

Beckett's tramps and cripples are all, in a sense, clowns, victims of their own physical limitations, slipping on banana peels (Krapp's Last Tape), performing pratfalls or doing vaudeville routines in mismatched clothing (Godot), popping in and out of ash-cans in jester-like caps (Endgame). Clov's costume had been clown-like, his shoes too big and his gait grotesque. But here we have man more completely stylized, stripped of any pretense of naturalistic detail. He is man the performer, responding to stimuli presented him, running through his comic tricks and routines until he tires of performing them. The clown costume may, however, also signify a Fool, whose wisdom is greater than Kings'. The Fool knows that the world is not governed by reason but by unreason, and the clown in Act Without Words comes to just this knowledge. When he does so he will refuse complicity in what Nell calls "this farce" (Endgame, p. 14).

The part was "danced" by Derek Mendel. The dancer's leotard makes his every bodily movement clear and pronounced. The leotard requires on the part of the dancer precise, absolutely disciplined movement; he chisels out patterns in space. The outline of his body is never blurred; the leotard is the theatrical convention for nudity, for the body as body.

Beckett's stripping-away process is thus carried even further in Act Without Words I than in Endgame. A

non-character (he is generic man, unparticularized, unnamed) wearing a non-costume, is seen in stark silhouette on a non-set. The concrete reality of the property objects and the man's body is thus thrust into stark relief.

Property Objects

Le personnage beckettien danse la même
danse que vous et moi.²⁴

"La danse" is composed almost entirely of movements and reflective pauses elicited in response to the sound of a whistle and the appearance of objects to which it draws the man's attention. There are two exceptions: the man is thrown back on to the stage when he responds to whistle sounds from the wings, and he is finally still, despite the whistle and objects. He comes to this self-directed repose only after repeated rebuffs (from the wings) and frustrations (from the flies). The only self-motivated act, then, is inaction. The dancer finally chooses not to dance.

The unseen Tease presents to the man a series of objects -- a tree, a pair of scissors, a carafe, cubes and a rope -- thus setting up various situations in which he tries to use the objects to ameliorate his own situation. The key object is the water -- the object of his desire. Whenever he is about to be successful in making the object

serve his own ends, the Tease denies him gratification by manipulating the object in such a way that he can no longer attain it or use it effectively. Thus the business with objects in Act Without Words I becomes a metaphor for human life and a playing-out of the myth of Tantalus: we are always on the brink of attainment, but at the last moment it is denied us. Godot is always about to come, but at the last moment a messenger brings word that he will not come -- yet. There is never any explanation; no rule of causality governs the behaviour of the unseen power. Godot beats one of his boys and treats the other well. One of the thieves was saved.

The first object which descends from the flies is "a little tree" (p. 87). It is a meagre tree, recalling the tree of Godot which had only three or four leaves. "It has a single bough some three yards from the ground and at its summit a meager tuft of palms. . . ." (p. 87). And yet it provides some relief from the dazzling light, "casting at its foot a circle of shadow". The man sees the tree, reflects, and sits in its shadow. Miraculously a tree appears in the desert. It surely symbolizes the tree of life. Didi had quoted Proverbs in Godot: "Hope deferred maketh the something sick." The part of the sentence he omits is "but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life."²⁵ Desire seems to have come in the presence

of the tree: it signals the beginnings of possible action and fulfilment. But throughout Act Without Words I hope will be deferred repeatedly until the heart (the word Didi could not remember) sickens and the desire disappears. The man will not move and the tree will be pulled out of sight at the play's end.

The whistle next signals a pair of "tailor's scissors" which descend from the flies. They are a symbol of creativity, of man's ability to fashion artefacts, but the man of Act Without Words I is allowed neither mundane purposeful activity nor creative endeavour. He takes the scissors and begins to trim his nails. He is thus engaged in a seemingly successful and purposeful action. The only possible way he can make use of scissors -- that is, to apply the object to its proper function -- is to trim his nails since there is nothing outside himself to cut. No sooner is the action in progress than "the palms close like a parasol, the shadow disappears. He drops scissors, reflects" (p. 87). The "tailor's scissors" recall the tailor of Nagg's joke, who cut the cloth so carefully to make a snug pair of trousers. But no creation is allowed the man of Act. He is exposed once more to the dazzling light.

Each time the dancer "reflects" the audience supplies for itself his internal monologue. The mime thus

engages an active participation of the audience. In the non-verbal language of mime movement equals speech and stillness equals silence. There are frequent reflective pauses in Act Without Words; Beckett is still playing with silence within a totally silent medium. The pauses must still be strictly observed.

The next object to descend from the flies is a carafe marked "WATER" and it is the key symbol of the piece. It is the object that stimulates desire. Its traditional associations are obvious: it is the source of all life, the water of purification, of baptism and thus of new life for the Christian. It is in a "carafe", which in North America normally contains wine, thus proliferating its religious connotations. (But this point, I think, should not be over-emphasized. Drinking water in France is normally served from a carafe.) Water to the thirsty man in a desert is life-promising. It is dangled from above by an unseen power just as the promise that Godot will come is dangled before the tramps. It suggests an "ailleurs" where water is available; the desert is not all there is.

The game the unseen puppeteer plays with water and the secondary objects attached to his strings and the man below is a cruel metaphor for the conditions of our existence. Gratification is impossible. The man will never attain the water and will even give up trying to do so; the play will end in the passivity of despair. At

first it seems that all that is required is some ingenuity and resourcefulness on the part of man; the Power in the universe seems to be benevolent. But what looks like benevolence is only more subtle cruelty. When man meets the challenge with thoughtful effort the timing is always off. Just when he has solved the problem presented, it is transformed into a different problem and he must begin again. If fate is unkind, its victim at times seems stupid. Even wisdom gained through experience seems an ephemeral thing for the man quickly reverts to previously-rejected futile patterns of behaviour. The universe is relentlessly mocking. Even when man despairs and longs to die it shows no mercy: his despair is made to look ridiculous and his efforts at suicide are foiled. The only possible dignified action left him is not to act, to refuse to "play blindman's buff".

The carafe of water descends and "comes to rest some three yards from ground" (p. 88). The whistle draws the man's attention to it; he "tries in vain to reach it" and when he cannot, "reflects" (p. 88). While he is thinking, a "big cube descends". It is as though the manipulator has made concrete his desire: something to stand on is now available. It seems that the power outside himself is benevolent. He tries to reach the carafe by standing on the large cube. He cannot and reflects again. "A second

smaller cube descends from flies, lands." Again the whistle signals its arrival, and again the power outside seems to be on his side, providing him with the means to attain his goal.

The next two actions illustrate his own stupidity and incompetence; even if the power outside him is benevolent the intelligence and ingenuity of man are needed for the gratification of his desires. Persistence wedded to stupidity simply will not do. He tries out the smaller cube although it is obvious that he will not be able to reach the carafe in this way. He then puts the larger cube on the smaller, stands on them, and predictably the improvised structure collapses and he falls.

After reflecting he comes up with the solution that will allow him to attain the carafe. He puts the larger cube on the bottom. But no sooner is he about to reach it than the power ceases to appear benevolent and shows its maliciousness. It does not allow him to succeed: the carafe "is pulled up a little way and comes to rest beyond his reach" (p. 88). A third cube is lowered. But this time the man does not bother to respond. This sort of endeavour is obviously futile and he refuses to engage in it again. He seems to have learned by experience a valuable lesson. It is precisely this lesson, of course, that Vladimir and Estragon never learn or there would be

no second act in Godot. They continue to wait for Godot after repeated disappointments. Night falls and they are about to see him; the messenger announces he will not come -- again. At the first act's end and at the play's end they are still waiting.

But if the man of Act has learned not to try where failure is sure to be the only reward for effort, he has not given up effort in general. When the rope descends, "with knots to facilitate ascent" (p. 89), an alternate route to gratification is obvious: he "climbs up it and is about to reach carafe when rope is let out and deposits him back on ground" (p. 89). Again, when his own efforts seem sure to reward him with the attainment of his goal, fate plays another cruel trick. He has come to expect that ropes will be raised out of reach. But this rope is "let out" (p. 89). What he is not prepared for happens. Having learned how to handle one problem, he is presented with a different one. He is outmanoeuvred again.

He reflects, sees scissors, begins to use them to cut the too-long rope. He is made to look increasingly ridiculous as the rope is pulled up, lifting him from the ground: he cuts it, thus bringing about his own fall to the ground. He is made to assist in his own "put down". But now he has something in his hands with which to fashion something new; for the first time he has an opportunity to

be truly creative in an effort to defeat the conditions imposed on him. He makes a lasso, but when he tries to lasso the carafe it is pulled out of reach.

All his efforts have failed. A cruel power beyond him has seemed to delight in forcing him to acknowledge his own impotence. But if he cannot overcome the conditions imposed on him he can use his own invention to cancel his life. In so doing, he would be depriving his tormentor of a victim, or of a pawn in his game. But even this last minor triumph is denied him. He is not even free to decide his own end. After making preparations to hang himself from the tree with the lasso "The bough folds down against trunk." (p. 90). "Nature" is decidedly antagonistic to all his designs. He thirsts for life and the gratification of desire; it is denied him. He longs for death and the end of all desire; it is denied him. All that he is allowed is mere existence in a desert.

Our sympathy for man the victim is mitigated by our contempt for his stupidity. He does not learn any permanent lessons from his suffering. The whistle blows from the right wing. He "goes out right" and is "flung back on stage" (p. 90). This is a replay of the play's opening, when he had learned not to respond to whistles from the wings. Older, he is no wiser; he has regressed to behaviour formerly rejected as futile. He picks up the

scissors, about to trim his nails as before. But he has another thought. He "runs his finger along blade of scissors, goes and lays them on small cube, turns aside, opens his collar, frees his neck and fingers it" (p. 90). But when he turns to take the scissors he realizes what we have seen happen: the small cube carrying rope and scissors has disappeared. He has not learned even by now not to turn his back on such an opponent; whenever he has turned his back the power outside has made its move.

In despair, he sits on the big cube; it is pulled out from under him. "He falls." (p. 90). The indignity of failure is compounded by its aftermath. Now he is not even allowed to sit and meditate with dignity on his failure. His "chair" is pulled out from under him, thus making even his despair ridiculous as he falls to the floor. He lies on his side, staring out at the audience. He has given up all action. The carafe is dangled by his face and he does not respond. The tree provides him with shadow once again. But desire has left him. The once-desired object, the carafe of water, and the "tree of life" disappear.

Thus in Act Without Words I one actor and several objects provide us with a metaphor for our existence. It is Endgame stripped down still further: four actors are replaced by one; words are reduced to silence; the walls

of the shelter have disappeared. But the conditions of existence in Beckett's world remain unchanged. Life is shown as a game played against impossible odds with a wily opponent who shows no mercy even in our defeat. As the Player says in Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, "Life is a gamble, at terrible odds -- if it was a bet you wouldn't take it."²⁶ Desire is aroused but gratification is always just beyond reach. Beckett in Proust defines love as the pursuit of what can never be possessed.²⁷ Perhaps we might view Act Without Words as a theatrical statement about the futility of love in this world. The mime is intricately worked out so that that futility is underlined: the audience always perceives what is happening before the man on stage. We are always a step ahead of him; the whistle calls his attention to what we have already perceived. We anticipate his actions and their outcome before he performs them. Thus from our point of view he does what we expect will fail. He never surprises us. His failures reinforce in concrete form a pattern we have already worked out in our heads; thus failure seems doubly emphasized and unavoidable.

Act Without Words II

Act Without Words II, like Act Without Words I, was originally written in French, in early 1958 and then was translated by the author into English. It was to have been one of the "mimes of my devising" offered by Beckett to the 1958 Dublin Theatre Festival but he withdrew it in February of that year because the Festival Committee had decided to drop Sean O'Casey's The Drums of Father Ned.²⁸ Its first production in England was at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London on 25 January, 1960, directed by Michael Horovitz. This play, like the other mime, is usually played as an afterpiece, or in anthology programmes compiled of Beckett excerpts, but it is not specifically associated with one play as Act I is associated with Endgame.

Interestingly this mime "II" divides both the stage and the single character into two: the result is that it is a mime on half a stage designed to be played by two characters, A and B. With Beckett's characteristic love of symmetry, he stipulates at the beginning that although B has more to do than A he is "brisk, rapid, precise" whereas A is "slow, awkward, absent", and thus the two actions of the play "should have approximately the same duration."²⁹

To summarize Act Without Words II is to summarize what is already a summary of human existence as experienced by two different characters representing two different types of people or two different aspects of a single personality. Beckett himself provides a graphic summary at the end of the play's text: he gives us three illustrations showing the three "positions" of the play. At the beginning A and B are in two sacks on the stage. Beside sack B there is "a little pile of clothes (C)" (p. 137). A "goat" enters, pokes A twice and exits. A crawls out of his sack, slowly performs a series of actions with objects, carries the two sacks half-way to the left wing, sets them down, takes off his clothes carelessly, crawls back into his sack and lies still.

The goat re-enters, this time "on wheeled support (one wheel)" (pp. 138-139). It pokes B once and exits. B crawls out of his sack, quickly performs a longer series of vigorous actions with objects, pick up the sacks and carries them still further towards the left wing, sets them down, takes off his clothes carefully, crawls back into his sack and lies still.

The goat enters for a third time, this time on two wheels. It pokes A twice. "A crawls out of sack, halts, broods, prays." (p. 141). The curtain falls.

Clearly the play is "a day in the life of A and

B", who, it seems to me, can be seen as not two people at all, but perhaps two different facets of a single personality. Act Without Words II is another Beckettian parable of human existence. The "goad" is the extension of another unseen power figure, another manifestation of the inhuman force that prods us into life and activity, that will not let us simply stay immobile in our "sack", but keeps toying with us until for some unfathomable reason, or for no reason at all, just lets us "end" and retreat forever into silence and darkness.

Daily human life is depicted simply as what one does with objects between getting out of the sack and getting back into the sack. A and B perform various actions with a series of objects; the tempo of their activity and some of the objects they perform actions with are different. B "has more to do than A" (p. 137). But it all takes the same time, as Beckett points out. They both fill the day in their own style, but the conditions under which they act -- that is, exist or pass time, are exactly the same. The goad prods each into activity (A needs to be prodded twice as he is the more lethargic); they have the same clothes and a variety of objects to manipulate during the same length of time; they both must carry "bowed and staggering" the two sacks on their backs for a certain distance towards the left wing; they both must undress and

get back into the sack.

At the end we come back to the beginning as though to repeat the entire performance. The goad pokes A again. There are only two differences: the sacks are now on the left side of the stage rather than the right and the goad has become mechanized. It is supported by two wheels. But there has been no essential change. The effect, as at the end of all Beckett plays, is that nothing has happened. At the end of Godot, Vladimir and Estragon are still waiting for Godot, as they were at the play's opening; at the end of Endgame, Clov is still "leaving", but has not left, and Hamm's face is covered as it was at the play's beginning; at the end of Act Without Words I the man is lying on his side staring at his hands, alone in the "desert" in the blazing light as he was at the beginning of the mime. At the end of Act Without Words II A begins another day: he "crawls out of sack, halts, broods, prays."

The Set

The set is another non-set, like the set of Act Without Words I: it is a "low and narrow platform at back of stage, violently lit in its entire length . . ." (p. 137). The glaring light, like the desert blaze of Act I, is a set object; it seems as palpable as the walls

of the shelter of Endgame since it is an immovable, unchanging context in which the actors must perform. One notes that all Beckett's lighting is either the grey of dying day -- "hellish half-light" as W2 calls it in Play -- or the dazzling and merciless glare of full sunlight. Godot, Endgame, and Krapp's Last Tape are grey (although there is a "spot" over Krapp's table). Happy Days, Act Without Words I and II are set in dazzling light. In Play and Not I the characters are subjected to bright light refined to the particularized interrogation of a focused spot. As in Act I the effect of the lighting in Act Without Words II is that of a desert, where no shade, no refuge from the merciless glare is possible -- except in the sack.

The sack is a set within the set. It is an enclosure within the larger space of the stage like Hamm's chair or the ash-cans of Endgame. It serves as a refuge from the light and, of course, the pun is on the North American slang for bed. In the mime it is the dark place to which man retreats at the end of the "day" and from which he must be prodded to emerge at the beginning of the next "day". It is also a metaphor for the enclosure of the self, the irony being that from the outside, from the audience's point of view and from that of the goad, there is no difference whatever between one sack and the other.

Individual differences only become obvious when the character moves out of his sack and performs everyday activities with objects. In his choice of objects and in the tempo of his interaction with them, "personality" or "attitude" or whatever psychological label one applies to ways of behaving, is revealed. But if the sack represents the self, whatever the character is outside it is not his true self. The true self is not knowable by anyone else. Beckett makes this point explicitly in Proust: "Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself, who knows others only in himself and who, if he asserts the contrary, lies".³⁰

It seems to me more reasonable to see the two figures, A and B, as different facets of a single personality than as two different people, and thus the sacks as representative of two different "selves". The two figures are never together on stage; the two sacks are seen side by side, but only one is available to the goad at a time. They are like two layers of the personality. The goad can only work on the outer layer, the inner one being inaccessible to its prodding. The two figures share the same clothing and one sleeps while the other performs actions. The concept of the multiplicity of the self is a familiar one in Beckett's work. Krapp is many "selves" as we hear him at different points of time, and even the Krapp we see before us is several Krapps. Willie is an ambiguous

lover-killer, as Happy Days ends with his reaching either for Winnie's hand or for the revolver. In the novels Moran is an alter ego to Molloy; Malone's creation, Sapo, is a version of Malone. In Proust Beckett states the concept explicitly:

Life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals. . . . Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects.³¹

Strangely the "set" object sacks become properties because the two figures both in turn pick them up and carry them on their backs towards the left wing. The connotations of man in interaction with this object are interesting. Each of them picks up both sacks -- his own and the other containing the other character. If the two figures are seen as two separate human beings the action makes little sense. Neither is aware that the burden he carries is another human being. Neither questions what he must do. He accepts as part of his human condition that he carry both sacks and he lacks the curiosity even to look inside. He becomes a menial, a Lucky-like "carrier" for a Pozzo he can never see, but which prods him into action at the beginning of each day. If one accepts A and B as two selves in a single human being, then the burden that each carries is the burden of another "self". We see clearly that it is an oppressive burden; the man is weighed down by

object. His mental baggage is made concrete in the form of the sack. The single individual interpretation would seem the more valid. Each figure unquestioningly accepts that the other sack is his, indeed is him and must be carried wherever he goes.

It seems to me that the sacks are another Christian allusion, with which, as he readily admits, Beckett's works are filled. But the effect of it is also typically Beckettian. If one of the associations of the sack is a bed, it is interesting that both take up their bed and walk, but the allusion is an ironic one. No miracle has taken place. The directive that the characters obey comes from no God-healer but an inhuman, mechanical tormentor who cannot distinguish A from B. Beckett again makes the Christian allusion only to undercut it, to expose the cruelty of the reality in contrast with the comforting illusion. Kenneth Tynan in his review of Fin de Partie and Acte Sans Paroles I, printed in Curtains, quotes H. G. Wells writing to James Joyce in 1928; the quotation applies to Beckett, despite his Protestantism. "You began Catholic, that is to say, you began with a system of values in stark opposition to reality. . . ." Tynan goes on to say this of Joyce and Beckett:

They share . . . a grudge against God that the godless never feel. But above all, in Beckett's private world, one hears the cry that George Orwell attributes to Joyce: "Here is life without God. Just look at it!"³²

An "Object-Character"

I have designated some of the characters in Beckett's theatre as "character-objects". The reverse seems to me in evidence in Act Without Words II. The goad in this mime is an object-character. A mechanical object, the goad fits into no conventional theatrical category. It cannot be considered a property object since the two characters have no control over it, cannot manipulate it in any way, and indeed, do not even see it. They simply feel it. Classifying it as part of the set presents difficulties as well: it moves, it "enters" and "exits". It even changes. It appears three times: the first time it is without wheels: the second time it has one wheel; the third time it has two wheels. It acts to manipulate objects -- the two sacks. It is a performer, a sort of inhuman stage character. It does not speak but neither does A or B.

A goad is a cruel metaphor for the vitalizing power in the universe. It inflicts pain on man, forcing on him "the suffering of being";³³ he cannot outmanoeuvre it and must simply submit to its conditions until it stops

the game. One recalls Hamm and Clov's conversation about this "thing", life:

Hamm: Have you not had enough?
 Clov: Yes!
 (Pause.)
 Of what?
 Hamm: Of this . . . this . . . thing.
 Clov: I always had.
 (Pause.)
 Not you?
 Hamm: (gloomily):
 Then there's no reason for it to
 change.
 Clov: It may end. (Endgame, p. 5)

A and B "wake up" in response to pain as Winnie in Happy Days is wakened by the shrill insistant ringing of a bell. They dress and perform their activities and move on, seemingly out of the range of the goad. Perhaps pain can be evaded and one can retreat forever into the peace of silence and darkness. But, as in Act Without Words I, man is outmanoeuvred, regardless of his efforts. In Act Without Words I the rope got longer and longer; in Act Without Words II the goad "gets longer" and develops wheels in order to pursue man effectively. Man is entrapped in both space and time: no matter how far he moves he cannot get far enough away; when A's turn is over it is B's turn to perform, in a relentless alternating pattern which neither can break.

Property Objects

Existence, as depicted in the activities of A and B, is a series of actions performed with objects. A and B represent two different modes of putting in the time allotted and their choice of objects is different. A is religious and contemplative; B is obsessively active and organized. But we are made to see both patterns of activity as equally pointless and even ridiculous. There is no point in praying when it is made clear to us that the activating force in their lives is a mechanical contraption on wheels. There is no point in planning carefully a journey when the only journey possible is a few feet to the left with a sack on one's back. The man who prays or plans in such a world is a fool. Again Beckett makes man appear no mighty opposite to the power outside him, but a trouserless clown who crawls out of a sack and performs meaningless actions.

A and B share one set of objects -- the pile of clothing, but even in their dressing and undressing we see the differences between them. A's activities are all just breaks in his "brooding": "broods, goes to clothes, broods, puts on clothes, broods . . ." (p. 138). When it is time to undress, he "broods, takes off clothes (except shirt), lets them fall in an untidy heap, broods . . ."

(p. 138). He does not care about his appearance and his mental life is far more active than his physical life. He uses only two other objects during the course of his day: a bottle of pills and a carrot. His contemplative life is sustained by drugs and food. He swallows a pill as soon as he emerges from the sack, swallows another before crawling back into the sack. One is reminded of Hamm, dependent on pain-killer and tonic: "In the morning they brace you up and in the evening they calm you down. Unless it's the other way round." (Endgame, p. 24). The man who "broods" and "prays" depends on chemicals to "brace him up" when he emerges and to "calm him down" when he retreats to the sack. Praying and brooding lead to no solutions; he can change nothing in the pattern of his existence. There is a single bottle of pills; thus they are undifferentiated pain-killers, whatever is required to dull the "suffering of being", to help one get through the day and then get through the night. The man who ruminates finds no pleasure in anything: he "takes a large partly eaten carrot from coat pocket, bites off a piece, chews an instant, spits it out with disgust, puts carrot back."(p. 138). He has no appetite for even sensual pleasure. His response to having to exist is disgust: each time he crawls out of his sack he does so slowly and reluctantly. The goad has to poke at him twice.

B is the active man, the well-groomed athlete and traveller. He performs all actions with gusto, but his exuberant activity is as pointless as A's praying and brooding. Unlike A, he emerges briskly from his sack and performs a series of actions quickly: he consults his watch three times while he "does exercises", "brushes teeth vigorously", and combs his hair. Only then does he put on the clothes. His day is more complicated than A's; he is the "busy" man and manipulates several objects: a watch to keep him on schedule; four grooming aids to keep him attractive; a carrot to keep him alive; a map and compass to keep him on course. The absurdity of his activity is clear: all that he does is predicated on the assumption that his life has some purpose and that he has somewhere to go. But we can see that this assumption is false: the only purpose of all his "maintenance" activities and his organization is to maintain him for yet another round of the same activities.

B consults his watch ten times during the course of his performance and winds it before crawling into his sack. Pozzo was also a man concerned with measuring time, knowing the time, keeping on schedule. Both are deluded. Pozzo had nothing to do but to go "on"; B has nothing to do but crawl back into his sack and go on the next day doing precisely the same actions all over again. There is

always the same amount of time to fill; it cannot be lengthened or shortened by a single second. To feel that because one has a watch that "keeps time" one can somehow "have the time" is one of modern man's comforting illusions. The object, the watch, is a concrete image of that illusion. Baudrillard's analysis of "la montre" is worth quoting, since so many of Beckett's characters (Pozzo, Clov, Krapp, Winnie) share B's concern with a time-piece of some kind.

Mais en même temps qu'elle nous soumet à une temporalité irréductible, la montre en tant qu'objet nous aide à nous approprier le temps. Comme la voiture "dévore" les kilomètres, l'objet-montre dévore le temps. En le substantifiant et en le découpant, elle en fait un objet consommé. Il n'est plus cette dimension périlleuse de la praxis: c'est une quantité domestiquée. Non seulement le fait de savoir l'heure, mais le fait, à travers un objet qui est sien, de "posséder" l'heure, de l'avoir continuellement enregistrée par-devers soi, est devenu une nourriture fondamentale du civilisé: une sécurité.
(p. 114)

Similarly, William Barrett in his study of existentialism, Irrational Man, speaks of "the central and overwhelming reality of time for man who has lost his anchorage in the eternal".³⁴ It is B, in Act II, the man who does not pray, who keeps consulting his watch.

B's grooming activities -- a series of manipulations of objects with the end of beautifying himself -- are another Beckettian metaphor for the futility of all endeavour. One is always preparing for and looking forward

to something that never happens, a Godot that never comes, a carafe of water that one can never have. B fusses about his appearance although there is no one in his world to see him. Later we shall see that Winnie, too, is "well-preserved". For what is not clear. She carries an array of grooming objects and is concerned with white teeth and well-combed hair, like B, although it is always doubtful whether Willie ever looks at her. B brushes his teeth, combs and brushes his hair, brushes his clothes and then inspects himself. The futility of his good grooming is emphasized by the sequence of his activities: after making himself attractive he eats a carrot. He has prepared himself for some encounter with another person, but it never happens. Man is finally alone with his objects.

Beckett again underlines the essential sameness of human existence; he does so by showing man interacting with objects. Unlike A, B enjoys the sensual pleasure of eating. But the food is precisely the same -- a carrot. B "chews and swallows with appetite" (p. 139) because that is his characteristic response to life generally. But his life is no better than A's; the conditions of existence remain unchanged. He does not take painkilling pills like A, but presumably that is because he does not think about his existence. He does not feel

"the suffering of being" because he has formed an array of habits which keep him busy and preclude meditation. One notes that he does exercises, one of the things that Vladimir and Estragon do to pass the time. They are a habit, and as Vladimir says, "Habit is a great deadener." (Waiting for Godot, p. 58).

B consults his map and compass as a preparation for travelling. Again the sequence of activities cancels any possible significance in the action itself. After such preparation he "travels" across the stage a few feet towards the left wing. We are reminded of Clov dressed "for the road" and simply re-entering the shelter from his kitchen. However one fills the day, distracts oneself with objects, plans, exercises, and schedules, existence is rigidly confined to a certain space for a certain length of time. Whatever one does is trivial and meaningless, just a version of what to do while waiting for Godot, for the game to end, or for the allotted time to be used up, for one's "turn" to be over. In the mimes Beckett is showing us once again "how it is on this bitch of an earth" (Waiting for Godot, p. 25).

Breath

Breath was originally written in English in response to a request by Kenneth Tynan for a Beckett

contribution to his Broadway review, Oh! Calcutta!.

It was presented as the prologue to Oh! Calcutta! at the Eden Theatre, New York City on 17 June, 1969, under the direction of Jacques Levy. It was withdrawn from the London transfer, apparently for two reasons: the producer added to the stage directions "including naked people" and did not attribute Breath to its author.

It seems to me characteristic of Beckett's irony that he would offer such a stark and sad piece as contribution to a noisy comic review whose performers were all to be nude and whose sketches all focused on various sexual situations in lavish settings. Breath is not comic. There is no body either clothed or unclothed on stage; only three sounds are heard: the cry of birth, a single breath, the cry of death. Its set is a stage littered with rubbish. Played as a prologue to Oh! Calcutta! the minuscule play is an ironic Beckettian sigh of ennui at all that follows. Despite the daring of its nudity, Oh! Calcutta! was in the familiar tradition of musical comedy review. Breath was the really revolutionary event of the evening. Beckett had managed to write a play this time not only without words, but without characters.

Little need be said about a play that takes approximately thirty-five seconds to "perform". There is

only a "set", "miscellaneous rubbish", which Beckett stipulates is "No verticals, all scattered and lying."³⁵ The world has been levelled and objects have survived man. A cry is heard and a breath -- inspiration and increase of light -- then silence, expiration and decrease of light, and a final cry. There is silence; the curtain falls. Breath is shorthand for life. The only enduring things are the objects lying on the stage and they have lost their value; they are reduced to "rubbish". Human existence, the time between birth and death, is condensed into about fifteen seconds before the exhalation and the cry of death are heard. "Birth. Copulation. Death." Oh! Calcutta! is about copulation and its variants. Beckett's Breath is about Birth and Death and fifteen seconds of bright light -- all that remains in a bombed-out world of the glory that was man.

Thus in these three short theatre pieces, Beckett renounces words utterly. Man is alone on stage with objects, as in the two mimes, or objects are alone on stage, as in Breath. In Act Without Words I and II man himself becomes predictable and robot-like when his existence is limited to a series of speechless actions with objects. He becomes puppet-like in Act Without Words I, stylized to a dance-figure silhouetted in leotard, responding to a series of presented objects in predictable and

repetitive patterns. He can break the machine-like automatism of his responses only when he refuses to respond at all, and remains still, contemplating his hands which have the innate ability to create and shape, not just to reach for whatever is dangled by some sadistic puppeteer.

In Act Without Words II man again, in two different versions, is an automaton-like figure, running through a series of activities he is goaded into performing by an impersonal mechanism that prods him into alertness. Man himself has become a kind of mechanized object, rather like the old man and old lady at the conclusion of Ionesco's Les Chaises. Obsessed with their interaction with objects -- the empty chairs -- they themselves become dehumanized, like wind-up toys.³⁶ Beckett makes the same point but more startlingly in Act Without Words II when he makes A's "brooding" and "praying" as mechanical and mindless as teeth-brushing and watch-winding. In Breath human life has become so insignificant in comparison with the debris that remains as its monument that only the objects remain on stage; human existence is marked only by a momentary sequence of sound and light. Objects are no longer part of set, costume or properties -- that is, accessories to the representation of the human predicament, but they have superseded it, and have become both background and fore-

ground. In Krapp's Last Tape, which is the play to be discussed in the next chapter, man in interaction with a single object is the substance of the play. Oddly the two will not always be easily separable. It will not always be clear which is in control. Significantly, the object will have taken over a specifically human capability in the Beckettian world -- the ability to speak.

NOTES

- ¹Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, p. 117.
- ²Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, "Plainte Contre Inconnu Beckett Dramaturge", Les Nouvelles Littéraires (1e 24 février, 1966), in Extraits de Presse, Samuel Beckett: Biographie, Critique, Oeuvre, vol. I, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris, Cote: 4^o SW619, p. 97.
- ³Nathan Scott, Samuel Beckett (New York: Hillary House Publications, 1965), p. 82.
- ⁴Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable", in his Three Novels, p. 291.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 414.
- ⁶Samuel Beckett, All That Fall, p. 80.
- ⁷Raymond Federman, "The Impossibility of Saying the Same Old Thing the Same Old Way: Samuel Beckett's Fiction Since Comment C'est", L'Esprit Créateur, XI (Fall, 1971), 24.
- Following is a list of Beckett's fiction since 1965:
- 1965 Imagination Morte Imaginez (translated as Imagination Dead Imagine same year), 10 pages.
 - 1966 Assez (translated as Enough same year), 21 pages.
 - 1966 Bing (translated as Ping in 1967), 9 pages.
 - 1967 "Dans le Cylindre", printed in Livres de France, not translated, 2 pages.
 - 1968 L'Issue, printed text accompanying drawings by Asigdor Arilcha.

1969 Sans (translated as Lessness in 1970),
14 pages.

⁸Olga Bernal, Journal de Genève (le 11 juillet, 1970), in Extraits de Presse, Samuel Beckett: Biographie, Carrière, Oeuvre, vol. III, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris, Cote: 4^o SW2517, p. 43.

⁹Jacquart, Le Théâtre de Dérision, p. 199.

¹⁰Antonin Artaud, Le Théâtre et Son Double (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), pp. 53-54.

¹¹Kenneth Tynan, Curtains (New York: Atheneum, 1961), p. 101. [All subsequent references to Curtains are to this edition.]

¹²Madeleine Renaud, "Beckett le Magnifique", Les Nouvelles Littéraires (le 24 février, 1966), in Extraits de Presse, vol. I, p. 94.

¹³"They may discuss consternation, they may even feel consternated, but Beckett's heroes never stoop to the creation of a poorly formed cry of despair." J. D. O'Hara, "Introduction", in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Malloy", "Malone Dies", "The Unnamable" (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 24.

¹⁴Vivian Mercier, "Beckett's Anglo-Irish Stage Dialects", James Joyce Quarterly (Summer, 1971), 316.

¹⁵Samuel Beckett, From an Abandoned Work (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), p. 48.

¹⁶L'Aurore (le 24 octobre, 1969), in Extraits de Presse, vol. II, p. 26.

¹⁷Ihab H. Hassan, The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett (New York: Knopf, 1968), p. 193.

¹⁸Samuel Beckett, "Molloy", in his Three Novels, p. 87.

¹⁹Samuel Beckett, "Act Without Words I", in Endgame, p. 91. [All subsequent references to Act Without Words I are to this edition.]

²⁰Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, p. 119.

²¹Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, "Plainte Contre Inconnu Beckett Dramaturge", in Extraits de Presse, vol. I, p. 97.

²²Samuel Beckett, Oh Les Beaux Jours (Paris: Editions de Minuit), p. 61. [All subsequent references to Oh Les Beaux Jours are to this edition.]

²³Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, p. 119.

²⁴Robert Abirached, "La Voix Tragique de Samuel Beckett", Les Etudes (janvier, 1964), in Extraits de Presse, vol. I, p. 31.

²⁵Rosette Lamont elucidates this allusion in her article, "Beckett's Metaphysics of Choiceless Awareness", in Melvin J. Friedman, ed., Samuel Beckett Now (2nd ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 206.

²⁶Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 83.

²⁷"Love . . . represents our demand for a whole. Its inception and its continuance imply the consciousness that something is lacking. 'One only loves that which one does not possess entirely.'" (Samuel Beckett, Proust, p. 39.)

²⁸This information is given us in Alec Reid's All I Can Manage, More Than I Could (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 79. [All subsequent references to this study are to this edition.]

²⁹Samuel Beckett, "Act Without Words II", in his "Krapp's Last Tape" and Other Dramatic Pieces, p. 137.

- ³⁰Samuel Beckett, Proust, p. 49.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 8.
- ³²Kenneth Tynan, Curtains, p. 401.
- ³³Samuel Beckett, Proust, p. 8.
- ³⁴William Barrett, Irrational Man (New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 61.
- ³⁵Samuel Beckett, "Breath", in Alec Reid, All I Can Manage, More than I Could, p. 96.
- ³⁶Ionesco makes this point explicitly: "ils ont l'air de glisser sur des roulettes." (Eugène Ionesco, "Les Chaises", in Théâtre d'Eugène Ionesco, I [Paris: Gallimard, 1954], p. 155.)

CHAPTER V

KRAPP'S LAST TAPE AND NOT I

The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for to-day's. We are disappointed at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment. But what is attainment? The identification of the subject with the object of his desire. The subject has died -- and perhaps many times -- on the way. For subject B to be disappointed by the banality of an object chosen by subject A is . . . illogical. . . . The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, . . . to the vessel containing the fluid of past time. . . . Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals.¹

Krapp's Last Tape was Beckett's first play written originally in English. It was completed by May, 1958, and was specifically designed for the Irish actor Patrick Magee. Apparently Beckett had been impressed by Magee's reading from his fiction (Molloy, Malone Dies, From an Abandoned Work) broadcast in 1957 on the BBC Third Programme.² Krapp's Last Tape was translated into French in 1959 by Pierre Leyris with the collaboration of the author; its French title was La Dernière Bande. The play was first produced in England at the Royal Court Theatre London on 28 October, 1958; it was part of a double bill with Endgame and was directed by Donald McWhinnie. Krapp

was played by Patrick Magee. The New York première was at the Provincetown Playhouse on a double bill with Albee's The Zoo Story on 14 January, 1960. Alan Schneider again was the American director and Krapp, the play's single character, was played by the Canadian actor, Donald Davis.

In recent years Krapp's Last Tape has usually been played as part of a double bill with Beckett's Not I.³ The two plays have several similarities: they have approximately the same playing time -- fifteen minutes; they are both one-character plays, Not I requiring an actress and thus balancing the one-man show of Krapp; they both are retrospective exercises on the part of the only character as he/she now old, looks back on a life no longer the life "to come" (Endgame, p. 49). Both of them "have to talk about it", as Estragon says in Godot (Waiting for Godot, p. 41).

Like every Beckett play Krapp's Last Tape is difficult to summarize. As usual not much happens and the fascination of the play is not what happens but how it happens. At the opening of Krapp's Last Tape we are presented with one of the modern theatre's most unforgettable and evocative images of solitude: an old man in decayed clothing sits at a table under a light in silence, with a tape recorder in front of him. The opening business is a characteristically Beckettian non-exposition. All of

Beckett's "talking" plays begin at a point near the end. The character or characters onstage are always engrossed in a pattern of action that appears to have begun long before: Estragon is busy with his boot; Clov limps about with his ladder checking the view from the windows; Winnie's burial is well under way; the mouth of Not I has begun speaking (unintelligibly) before the curtain goes up. In Krapp's Last Tape Krapp fumbles about with keys, tapes, and bananas, shuffles backstage for a drink, re-enters with an old ledger, mumbles to himself, and puts a tape on the machine. Then he listens to his own voice from the past.

Krapp does little more than this throughout the entire play; he adds only one other action to this repertoire of actions: he begins to record on a fresh tape. The other routines are repeated. He disappears several times to pop corks and drink offstage and get progressively more unsteady as the performance goes on; in the course of the play he listens twice to the tape made when he was thirty-nine. This thirty-nine-year-old Krapp feels "at the . . . crest of the wave -- or thereabouts" (p. 14). He in turn had been listening to "an old year" (p. 15) from about ten years ago, when he was twenty-nine. The twenty-nine-year-old Krapp lived with Bianca and had "aspirations" and "resolutions" that the two "other" Krapps share a laugh about. The middle-aged Krapp's tape includes

an account of his mother's death, mentioning a "dark beauty" pushing a perambulator, and a dog to which he had given a ball. More important, it provides insight into Krapp as artist and lover: he reports a moment of "vision" which he considers "what I have chiefly to record this evening" (p. 21) and a moment of love with a woman in a punt. We hear only fragments of the "vision"; it is the episode in the punt that the old Krapp listens to twice. The audience is subjected to constant interruptions as Krapp breaks off the tape, rewinds, moves forward, restarts. At one point he hears a word whose meaning he cannot remember and busies himself with the dictionary. Finally he begins to record on the fresh tape. He responds to "that stupid bastard" he was thirty years ago and reflects on a wasted life and present misery. He then wrenches off the tape to listen again to the episode in the punt with the woman. At the play's end Krapp is staring before him, the tape running on in silence.

All of Beckett's one-character plays show the person in relation to objects; the only conflict possible is between man and object and the object becomes a metaphor for everything that is other than the self. In Krapp's Last Tape the central object is an electronic machine which can eerily reproduce the human voice; its reels of magnetic tape "contain" the voice of Krapp's past "selves". We have

dealt with character-objects, immobile characters speaking with the voice of human consciousness. In Krapp's Last Tape the immobile object "speaks" and the distinction between man and object becomes blurred. The object is a concrete representation of various Krapps from the past; in this play the "other" is Krapp's collection of selves, his collection of tapes. One is again reminded of Rimbaud: "Je est un autre". The reels of tape are mechanized memories and Krapp's conflict is with himself. In Not I, Beckett's most recent one-character play, we shall see that the object is once more the self, not only objectified in a concrete stage object (the mouth), but objectified grammatically -- the "not I" of the story.

In Krapp's Last Tape we see one of the few evidences in Beckett's theatre that his "gallery of moribunds" belongs, if only peripherally, to a technological society. The central object, the reel-to-reel tape recorder, is the only electronic gadget in all of Beckett's theatre and the entire production depends on the efficient functioning of this gadget. With his usual precision Beckett instructs that the play takes place "in the future" (p. 9), since an old man at the time of the play's writing, 1958, would not have been able to tape-record his own voice thirty years earlier.

Set Objects

The play is set in "Krapp's den" (p. 9). Only three objects are mentioned in Beckett's opening stage directions -- "a small table, the two drawers of which open towards audience" (p. 9), "a tape-recorder with microphone and a number of cardboard boxes containing reels of recorded tapes" and "strong white light" (p. 10) over the table. (The rest of the stage is in darkness.) A sort of cardtable shaded light hanging over Krapp's table throughout the play assures the continuing beam of light. Krapp at thirty-nine mentions "the new light above my table" (p. 14). There must be nothing else on stage. Blin, recalling his production of La Dernière Bande⁴ recalls the austerity and precision demanded by the play: "Pour cette pièce il y avait les indications extrêmement précises de Beckett que j'ai suivies à la lettre"⁵ and later emphasizes again "les indications presque maniaques de Beckett".⁶

The set is a dark interior, perhaps representative of the interior of Krapp's lonely self. The light over the table illuminates part of that self -- the tape-recorder and thus the speaking voice. We are reminded that for Beckett the self is finally defined by the voice. The Unnamable, jarred, maimed, helpless, still cannot be silent and therefore remains something human; at the end

of Endgame Hamm considers his parents and Clov dead or gone because they do not answer; Winnie in sand up to her neck goes on for another act-long monologue because her mouth is still free; the character of Not I is reduced to mouth only, the voice the last vestige of the living self. Beckett himself considers his entire dramatic oeuvre "a matter of fundamental sounds, made as fully as possible".⁷

When Krapp moves out of the light and thus away from the tape-recorder, he moves away from his conscious self. The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp records that the new light is "a great improvement. With all this darkness round me I feel less alone. (Pause.) . . . I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to . . . me. (Pause.) Krapp." (p. 15). When Krapp moves about in the darkness, outside the circle of light, away from the tape-recorder, he merges with the space outside himself and thus he feels "less alone". When he returns to the light, and thus the tape-recorder, he is moving back into the conscious self -- "me . . . Krapp". It is only the conscious self that can be preserved on tape and "played back" by an objectification of voluntary memory. This concept of voluntary memory is explained in Beckett's Proust:

The memory that is not memory, but the application of a concordance to the Old Testament of the individual, he calls "voluntary memory". This is the uniform memory of intelligence; and it can be relied on to reproduce for our gratified inspection those impressions of the past that were consciously

and intelligently formed. . . . Its action has been compared by Froust to that of turning the leaves of an album of photographs. The material that it furnishes contains nothing of the past, merely a blurred and uniform projection once removed of our anxiety and opportunism -- that is to say, nothing. 8

Whatever Krapp does involving words and the voice -- all business with the tapes, the ledger, the dictionary, the scribbling on his envelope -- is expressive of Krapp's tormented and dying conscious self, trying to recapture the past. The things he does in relative darkness -- the business with the bananas, the shuffling off to drink, the singing offstage -- provides him with relief from the glare of self-scrutiny and self-revelation. It is interesting that whenever Krapp leaves the stage the tape-recorder remains lighted, centre stage. This stage representation of Krapp's conscious self never leaves the stage and thus Beckett only seems to break with the standard theatrical practice of never leaving the stage bare. He thus makes his own clear statement: Krapp remains in the spotlight centre-stage.

Krapp's table is the other set object, as we shall consider his tape-recorder a property object. The table with its contents is an objectification of Krapp: on top of it are the Krapps gone by and in its drawers are the hoarded treasures of the present lonely and dying man. On the table are "a number of cardboard boxes containing reels of recorded tapes" (p. 10). Beckett directs that

the drawers of the table open toward the audience. Presumably this is simply a matter of sight lines, of making the business of Krapp's fumbling in the drawers clearly visible to the audience. But it is surely significant that Krapp's discarded "selves", his collection of recorded memories, are piled up on top of the table. What he jealously guards in carefully locked drawers are his bananas and his "virgin reel". His bananas, obviously a phallic symbol, he strokes lovingly and eats voraciously; they are a continuing motif in his life and perhaps represent a physical appetite locked up but still indulged guiltily and furtively. The "virgin reel" is surely representative of Krapp's life "to come"; it is the blank tape of the future. Visually the object is indistinguishable from all the other tapes. It thus makes the statement that no essential change is possible in Krapp's existence just as no amelioration of existence is possible for any of Beckett's characters. The only possibility is further loss: the tape may remain blank and thus silent, marking but a further step toward final obliteration. The table and its contents are concrete representations of the Krapp of the past and the Krapp of the present, his appetite still unquenched and his spirit still pathetically hopeful for a future in which he may have something worthwhile to record.

Costume Objects

Krapp is another of Beckett's sad old clowns. Surely there is no more grotesquely pathetic yet comic figure in the theatre than an old clown. A sad young clown maintains the shred of dignity that accrues to all whose aspirations still seem possible of realization. His youth, despite his sadness, is an affirmation that anything, even joy, is still possible. There is time yet; his rags are only dressing-up, a temporary costume. But the poignancy of Beckett's tramp-clowns rests finally in the fact that they are old: hope for a life "to come" that may be better than present misery is clearly foolish in a man soon to die. Clov is less foolish than the tramps of Godot: he who has never seen the earth "lit" hopes for nothing better than the end of suffering. The "peut-être" which Beckett says is the key word of his entire oeuvre,⁹ sounds less and less convincing as his moribunds limp closer towards death. Thus the rags worn by Krapp are a true expression of an impoverished spirit worn thin with suffering. Janvier expresses admirably how the bizarre clothing in Beckett's work is a true expression of the incomplete self and of the suffering body:

si se vêtier c'est non seulement adhérer au langage mais parler, on voit ce que ces lambeaux et cet accoutrement signifient: l'existant se montre tel parce qu'il n'est pas fait et qu'il refuse de masquer par l'apparat ce qui l'habite. Le vêtement doit exprimer ce que le corps, jugé et maltraité comme on le sait, vit dans l'insatisfaction et la gêne. L'existant alourdi par son corps est en quête d'identité: il ne trouvera pas deux souliers de la même pointure. Il aura mal aux pieds comme il a mal au soi.¹⁰

Krapp's appearance is deliberately clownish:

Rusty black narrow trousers too short for him.
Rusty black sleeveless waistcoat, four capacious
pockets. Heavy silver watch and chain. Grimy
white shirt open at neck, no collar. Surprising
pair of dirty white boots, size 10 at least, very
narrow and pointed. White face. Purple nose.
Disordered grey hair, unshaven. (p. 9)

Krapp is dressed in black and white, the tramp of the silent black and white cinema. His face is white with a purple nose, his grey hair is frazzled and he wears large and prominent shoes, like a geriatric Bozo. Beckett's image is a double-focus metaphor of tragic-comic man, the old clown. The too-small trousers appear comically grotesque but they are also a sign of Krapp's poverty and of a "vie râée", a failed life wherein there is nowhere to go, no need to keep up appearances. The middle-aged Krapp says it is "Good to be back in my den, in my old rags." (p. 14). Krapp has always felt most at home in outmoded mismatched clownish clothing which signifies not only his incomplete self but his continuing alienation from the ordinary social world of men.

The "four capacious pockets" (p. 9) are an essential feature of Krapp's costume. No doubt the bottomless pocket routine of vaudeville and the music-hall provided Beckett with a theatrical model for the pocket business that he uses so often. His characters frequently have pockets, secret compartments in their clothing where they hide their possessions -- little pieces of the world that belong to them and connect them to what is outside, the other. The device is useful in the theatre because it allows variety of stage business and "routines", but it appears elsewhere in Beckett as well. Molloy performs a complicated routine involving his sucking-stones which he moves from pocket to pocket in various calculated patterns; Malone thinks of making a final inventory of what he carries in his pockets. In the theatre we have noticed that Vladimir carries Estragon's supply of food in his pocket. It is said that Beckett chose to make the leading character of Happy Days a woman simply because a woman's purse was large enough to contain a large array of objects;¹¹ the contents of a man's pockets would have considerably limited the stage business of the play which is its total stage action. Krapp keeps two items in his pockets: his keys and his envelope. The keys unlock the drawer of his table, giving him access to his bananas and his fresh tape. The envelope is what he writes on, all that is needed to

contain what is left of Krapp the writer. Krapp uses his waistcoat pocket for his banana, then forgets it is there, making for a funny bit of business and illustrating the absent-mindedness of the old man and his total lack of social decorum.

There is another familiar Beckettian touch in an object accessory to the costume of Krapp -- his heavy silver watch and chain. Krapp consults the watch only twice. We are reminded of B in Act Without Words II, of Clov with his alarm-clock in Endgame, and of Pozzo, who loses his watch in Act I of Godot. Krapp's watch functions both metonymically and metaphorically in the play. Its metonymical function is as an indicator of Krapp's past life. Since Krapp belongs to "the future" such a watch is decidedly an anachronism. It is old-fashioned, and expensive-looking. Perhaps we are to infer that at one time Krapp had sufficient property and prospects to make a silver watch and chain an appropriate accessory to his waistcoat. It is sadly out of place on a waistcoat now used to wipe Krapp's greasy fingers. It is an indicator that at one period in his life time was important to Krapp. Like Pozzo, Clov, and B, he believed he had important "things to do"; he belonged to the world of schedules, alarm-clocks, dead-lines, and appointments. Now there is no need for him to keep track of present time. Most of the business of the play concerns Krapp's past as he re-runs

it for himself on his mechanized version of voluntary memory. He looks at his watch, recorder of presently-passing time, twice, and each time the gesture is followed immediately by the same action: Krapp "gets up, goes backstage into darkness." An awareness of present time dissolving relentlessly into the past sends Krapp into the darkness, where, he had told us, he feels "less alone". And in the darkness there are bottles, whose corks we hear popping. Krapp drinks to stop time or to dull the awareness of its passing, which is almost the same thing.

The watch, this anachronistic object accessory, is a representation of old Krapp's inability to compute time. One notices in the two earlier Krapps a diminishing of time-sense. The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp on the tape shows us an awareness of time-measurement in the still younger Krapp. He laughs at young Krapp's resolution to drink less and quotes his calculations: "statistics. Seventeen hundred hours, out of the preceding eight thousand odd, consumed on licensed premises alone. More than twenty percent, say forty per cent of his waking life." (p. 16). The middle-aged Krapp is already far less precise about time. The older tape, he says, is from "at least ten or twelve years ago" (p. 16). He no longer speaks of time in terms of abstract calculation but already shows a feeling for the evanescence of life: after his mother's death "I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my

hand. . . . Her moments, my moments. (Pause.) The dog's moments." (p. 20).

The watch operates on the metaphorical level as well. Paradoxically it contributes to the total out-of-time effect of Krapp's costume. The watch does not connect Krapp with any other specific time-period; like the rest of Krapp's costume, and, indeed, like Krapp himself, it is vaguely evocative of some other time and some other place but one cannot say just what time or what place. Beckett's man is always "out of joint" with the time, always alienated from the community of men. Janvier's commentary on the clothes in Beckett's work is worth recalling: "le personnage est inscrit hors de la mode et de l'histoire, loin du présent des hommes et de leur communauté de communication".¹²

Property Objects

Krapp's tape-recorder and its tapes and microphones are the central objects of the play. Beckett presents us with a haunting future image of old age: an old man ill-kempt and grotesque sits hunched over a tape-recorder listening to his own voice from the past, remembering and musing as he plays back a voice itself remembering. Thus Krapp is twice removed from the life experiences recorded. From this interaction of character and object an important

scene is recreated: even through two layers of memory -- that of the old Krapp and that of the young Krapp -- one incident shines through in all its unforgettable beauty and promise. Ironically the one memory worth summoning again and again, the "stuck record" in old Krapp's mind, is not the episode at the end of the jetty when he saw with excitement "the vision, at last" and in the howling wind "great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-guage spinning like a propeller" (p. 21). The episode he keeps returning to is far more tranquil; it is not "on the end of the jetty" but in the water itself, in the punt where "under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side." (p. 21). It was Krapp's one unforgettable "gentle rhythmic dance of erotic peace".¹³

Krapp alone in his den sitting silent in front of his tape-recorder, fiddling with his tapes, trying to record something new, is a crueler vision of an old age stripped of its graces because of a path wilfully chosen than is Macbeth's verbalized realization of a similar emptiness:

My way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead,
Curses. . . .¹⁴

Krapp's solitude is more terrible: the only "curses"

directed against him are his own as he dismisses that "young whelp" (p. 16) and that "stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago" (p. 24). His bitterness is turned towards himself, objectified in the reel unwinding in front of him. He does not even have an ideal of old age which the reality contradicts; he can only articulate in the ugliest images of physical deterioration the significance of time in a life devoid of meaning: "What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool." (p. 25).

The tape-recorder itself is a brilliant metaphor for the predicament of Beckettian man. It is a technological society's device for "freezing" in time and space the speaking voice, which in Beckett's world is the irreducible essence of what it is to be human and alive. In the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter Beckett expresses in Proust the concept of multiple selves, the impossibility of ever achieving the object of pursuit, since even if it is achieved the subject has changed sufficiently in the interval of striving so that the object is no longer desired: "The subject has died . . . on the way." The tape-recorder allows one to capture and keep the discarded selves; it mechanizes the memory of what one was.

But the tape-recorder is cruel, intractable, whereas one's memories, like one's selves, are dynamic, always changing in time. Time changes one's memories of what one was and did and wanted and said. The tape-recorder pre-

vents any distortion. One is made to face precisely what one was, or at least what one said. One's articulations become fixed points in the continuous "decantation" process. Beckett in the same Proust passage speaks of "the fluid of future time . . . the fluid of past time . . .". The effect of the tape-recorder is to fix time, to solidify it unnaturally. That man should try to evoke the past by mechanically reproducing for his own ears mechanically-produced sounds made by earlier selves is a singularly perverse and soulless exercise wherein man and object become nearly indistinguishable.

To listen to one's past selves recording events summoned by voluntary memory is a bleakly masochistic and life-defeating exercise, and that is precisely Krapp's exercise throughout the play. As the middle-aged Krapp says, "These old P. M's are gruesome, but I often find them . . . a help before embarking on a new . . . retrospect." (p. 16). Krapp's preoccupation with the consciously-remembered past, as represented on the stage by the tape-recorder, prevents him from living in the present and even from recapturing, through involuntary memory, what Beckett in Proust calls "the real". "But involuntary memory is an unruly magician and will not be importuned. It chooses its own time and place for the performance of its miracle."¹⁵

Claude Sarraute, writing in France Observateur, perceived just this horror in Beckett's terrible vision of life nearly over but never fully lived:

une cruauté que Beckett a poussée jusqu'à son terme: celle qui consiste à mettre immédiatement en présence l'auteur de cette pensée et ce qu'il est devenu, trente ans plus tard . . . le progéniteur d'une oeuvre qu'on sait à présent perdue dans les sables et pour laquelle il a sacrifié les plaisirs de sa jeunesse. 16

A tape-recorder's function is not just to freeze the voice, thus crystallizing the self for subsequent self-examination. It is not just a mechanical memory. Its usual function is a social one: the voice is recorded for communication to another person. It is a way of knowing the other, not just the self, and of communicating ideas and information, to be digested at the listener's chosen rate of consumption. But Krapp records on each birthday salient events of the previous year solely for his own replay. He communicates only with a future self. The repeated playing with and playing of the tapes in Krapp's Last Tape is a solipsistic exercise and a faintly masturbatory one. As we shall see, old Krapp let slip by the opportunity for reaching beyond the self in communion with another person and with nature. In saying a "Farewell to Love" he thought he was on his way to the "magnum Opus". But communicating the great work is impossible for the little man who deliberately shuts himself in from another

human being. (It is significant that Krapp locks up his tapes and his bananas and always stuffs the keys back into his pocket.) Krapp is left with little to say and only another self to say it to. Once loving, he is now lecherous, entertaining "Fanny . . . Bony old ghost of a whore" (p. 25), fit companion for Krapp, bony old ghost of a man.

There are two tapes which Krapp manipulates in the play: the fresh or "virgin reel" on which he begins to record himself at sixty-nine and "Box . . . three . . . spool . . . five" (p. 12), the tape made thirty years earlier. At the beginning of the play he unlocks the drawer containing the unused tape. But he "puts it back" (p. 10) and chooses to eat bananas instead. After eating a banana and going offstage for a drink he returns with the ledger. Beckett suggests the various levels of the self by means of the tapes and the ledger. Krapp records himself on tape and then records the tapes by writing in a ledger. The process of transposition is complex: the voice is recorded on tape -- a visual and auditory embodiment of the voice; the tape is translated into the written word and recorded in the ledger. Thus Krapp keeps written records of taped records. The process is further complicated by the voice of the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp reporting on the voice of the twenty-nine-year-old (which

he had just listened to) who in turn had looked back on a year past.

The order of the tape business is significant: Krapp puts the unused reel back in the drawer, just as he takes the envelope out of his pocket and puts it back. No longer capable of easy expression he chooses to indulge his sensual self first and thus takes the bananas and wine. The business with the bananas leads to "an idea" (p. 11) and he "goes with all the speed he can muster backstage into darkness" (pp. 11-12). The "idea" is to come back with the ledger, and look up his favourite reel, box three spool five, the "Farewell to Love" (p. 13). This listening to the past is Krapp's customary pattern before "embarking on a new . . . retrospect". But this is a tape from thirty years earlier and Krapp got the "idea" while savouring his banana. He chooses a tape which captures an erotic episode which he will savour; he has taken out a second banana and he will listen to the favourite section of the tape twice. It is this tape that is Krapp's "last" tape, the last he will listen to and let run on in silence at the play's end, and it is the last that has real meaning for him, "When there was a chance of happiness." (p. 28).

The spool of used tape, a physical object before us, takes on particular meaning, even before we hear it played. Held in Krapp's hand it serves to illustrate his love for words, which is our first indication in the play

that Krapp is a failed writer who still delights in language. "Box . . . thrree . . . spool . . . five" (p. 12). Krapp looks up in his ledger the entry he wants and pauses over the word "Spoooool!" (p. 12). He smiles happily. The name of the object becomes detached from the object itself and he enjoys the sound and feel of the word in his mouth. He then refers to the tape affectionately as "the little rascal!" (p. 12) and "the little scoundrel!" He talks to it almost as though it were a child. Ironically it would seem that this tape in which he has recorded the death of love in his life is a "creation" for which he has special fondness.

This first and last tape is a concrete representation of Krapp at age thirty-nine. While it plays the spectator undergoes a complex theatrical experience. It is Beckett's finest double exposure: we see the old Krapp before us alone, deaf, unkempt and slightly drunk; at the same time we hear a much younger, more vital and hopeful Krapp, who looks forward to "the day when my work will be done" (pp. 20-21). The contrast between an imagined life to come and the reality of that future life made present in front of us is a striking and poignant one. Beckett emphasizes it by the old Krapp's state of physical decomposition. He must cup his ear to hear his young, "strong voice, rather pompous" (p. 14). In the midst of the

younger Krapp's boast that he is "sound as a --" (p. 14) the old Krapp awkwardly "knocks one of the boxes off the table, curses, switches off, sweeps boxes and ledger violently to the ground" (p. 14) and winds back to the beginning. The confidence and ease of the younger man is juxtaposed to the fumbling incompetence and angry frustration of the older in dealing with the objects, the tapes. The fluency of his opening is broken by the start-stop action of old Krapp. They seem clearly two different men and one feels the poignancy of the enfeeblement brought on by the years.

Yet as the tape plays on, the younger Krapp "unwinding" before us, we discover that this earlier self has similarities with the present self. Beckett's consecutive selves are not clearly separate, self-contained, and discontinuous. The tapes all look the same; they have to be placed in numbered boxes and their "contents" recorded in a ledger for Krapp to distinguish between them. The physical similarity seemed at first directly opposite to the obvious dissimilarity revealed by the voice. But as the tape plays on, what seemed to have been easily distinguishable -- the younger Krapp clearly different from the old man in front of us -- begins to reveal itself as similar in many respects. There are disturbing parallels between younger Krapp and old Krapp;

the audience experiences a kind of "déjà vu" as the continuing motifs in Krapp's personality become clear. Beckett's double-exposure, then, is further complicated. These are not two clearly different selves, one superimposed on the other, but two selves both similar and dissimilar.

Like the physical objects, the tapes themselves, the "Krapps" seem basically made of the same material, to have the same general characteristics; only the specific "contents" have changed. Several critics emphasize the dissimilarities: Durozoi speaks of the tapes which "témoignent de l'écart entre ses différents passés". According to this critic "c'est à un 'lui-même' différent de ce qu'il est devenu qu'il se trouve ainsi confronté".¹⁷ Doherty refers to the tapes as "a series of discarded false selves".¹⁸ But the vision of Beckett seems to me more cruel and more complex: the selves as made concrete in the objects on stage, the tapes, are similar in many ways and are never discarded. Krapp keeps all his tapes; they are his only treasure. He "collects" himself and the only tape or self that he actually will discard is the one he is trying to record on this evening.

The similarities are clear. The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp mentions his "old weakness" (p. 14) and records that he "celebrated the awful occasion" (his birthday) by

drinking alone. The old Krapp before us is also celebrating the awful occasion by drinking alone. The minor variation is that the younger Krapp, while alone, was still attached to society, and drank "at the Winehouse" (p. 14) instead of offstage in darkness. He has "jotted down a few notes, on the back of an envelope" (p. 14); we have seen the older Krapp take an envelope out of his pocket and not write anything. Writing is not so easy now. The younger Krapp speaks of being in his "den, in my old rags" and he has eaten "three bananas". The old man is in the same setting and his appetite for bananas is still in evidence. The younger's resolution to "Cut'em out!" (p. 14) is confronted with old Krapp's comic appearance: his second banana is still tucked into his waistcoat pocket.

Interrelationships between the selves get more complex as the third Krapp, the twenty-nine-year old, is added by means of the taped voice. The thirty-nine-year-old, whom I have designated the "middle-aged" Krapp, has been listening to the twenty-nine-year-old, the "young" Krapp, and now there is a kind of triple exposure. The tape gives us two Krapps from the past superimposed on this present Krapp. There are correspondences among the three. The sensual Krapp, the lover of women with beautiful eyes, we see in all three. The middle-aged Krapp speaks of the young Krapp's living with Bianca: "Not much about her,

apart from a tribute to her eyes." (p. 16). Young Krapp's "tribute" evokes an image in the middle-aged Krapp: "I suddenly saw them again. (Pause.) Incomparable!" (p. 16). Old Krapp will similarly dwell on the punt episode, the middle-aged Krapp's "tribute to her eyes", although in the context of a "Farewell to Love": ". . . the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow. . . . Let me in." (p. 22).

Krapp's drinking habit is another continuing motif in his collection of selves. The young Krapp had resolved "To drink less." The two older Krapps share a laugh at him and the Krapp before us will go on popping corks in the darkness offstage. Despite his resolutions Krapp has never been able to curb effectively his appetites. He still indulges his weakness for bananas, wine, and women.

The aspiring artist in Krapp also has a certain continuity through the tapes to the present self. Middle-aged Krapp reports that young Krapp perceived "shadows of the opus . . . magnum" (p. 17). The middle-aged Krapp considers himself "intellectually . . . at the . . . crest of the wave -- or thereabouts" (p. 14). He excitedly reports "that memorable night in March . . . when I suddenly saw the whole thing" (p. 20). We never get a full account of "the vision" (p. 20), because just as the middle-aged Krapp is about to describe it, "Krapp switches off im-

patiently, winds tape forward" (p. 21), trying to find again the punt episode. His action is a rejection of the account of a vision which has turned out false; he cannot bear to hear of what has had no lasting value. Beckett cleverly has Krapp switch off and wind forward three times. This detail of gesture has an interesting and complex effect: it serves the remarkable "realism" of the play, since it is almost impossible to wind a reel immediately forward to the desired portion. It also breaks the ordered, discursive prose of the middle-aged Krapp's account. What we hear is fragmented and intriguingly incomplete, like the "vision" itself, which has had no lasting effect on a Krapp who has never written the "magnum . . . opus".

Ironically these taped selves which Krapp records each birthday are all concerned with death: the death of parents and the death of Krapp himself. The middle-aged Krapp reports that the young Krapp had recounted "Last illness of his father." (p. 16). The middle-aged Krapp recalls "the house on the canal where mother lay a-dying" (p. 18) and goes on to describe his vigil on the bench. Each Krapp rejects the Krapp that he used to be and congratulates himself on having been able to reject love, the opportunity for sharing the self with another. In a sense he celebrates having cut off part of his life; the Krapp before us is a "bony old ghost" of a man, more dead than

alive.

The middle-aged Krapp rejects "that young whelp" (p. 16), the twenty-nine-year-old. "The voice! Jesus!" He recalls Bianca but reflects, "Well out of that, Jesus yes! Hopeless business." (p. 16). He reflects that although his "best years" are perhaps gone, "I wouldn't want them back." (p. 28). This middle-aged Krapp records that the young Krapp, in turn, "Sneers at what he calls his youth and thanks to God that it's over." (p. 17). Old Krapp shows even greater scorn for the man he used to be, the middle-aged Krapp, "that stupid bastard. . . . Thank God that's all done with anyway." (p. 24). Krapp emphasizes his detachment from his former selves by referring to them in the third person; he objectifies himself as the mouth does in Not I. The middle-aged Krapp refers to "his waking life" (p. 16), "his youth" (p. 17), and "Last illness of his father." (p. 16). Old Krapp reflects that "Maybe he (middle-aged Krapp) was right." (p. 24). Only when it is too late will Krapp mourn the death of Krapp the lover, which has turned out to be the death of Krapp the artist as well.

Krapp's interplay with the unused tape is worth careful attention. Krapp's actions with this object reveal with little need of words his sadness and longing for a life now gone by, unwound before him. In a moment of

true "vision" he will see that the one tape worth listening to, the "Farewell to Love", was, in fact, his "last tape" and when it runs on in silence it expresses perfectly the empty tape that his self now is. Before attempting to record a "new retrospect" old Krapp listens to his middle-aged self on tape. He also indulges both his weaknesses -- for bananas and wine. (He walks "a little unsteadily into light . . ." [p. 23].) All that we have perceived of old Krapp to this point in the play by means of his costume, gestures, movements and mumblings is now articulated clearly in what and how he records on this "virgin reel". It is his "exit speech", a statement bereft of hope, revealing a life come to nothing but a waiting for death. His career has failed; he longs for love lost, and rejects his present self.

Krapp's present stage of disintegration is indicated by his difficulties in managing the technical problems of taping. He cannot cope efficiently with the object. His difficulties also allow Beckett by pauses and repetition to give special emphasis to Krapp's initial response to the middle-aged Krapp. He begins characteristically by rejecting his previous self -- "hard to believe I was ever as bad as that." (p. 24). But then he broods on "The eyes she had!" Realizing he is recording silence he switches off and laments "Everything there,

everything . . ." (p. 24), only to become aware that this is not being recorded. This spontaneous and deeply-felt response to the experience of the middle-aged Krapp is thus not on the tape. It is not performed, but comes from the depths of Krapp's sadness. He repeats it but already the tone has changed. The point is made that so much of what he thought and felt is not recorded. All of the tapes are incomplete; they are only the "leaves of an album of photographs",¹⁹ posed for or performed and then frozen out of time. On this tape Krapp's characteristic detachment from his old self is replaced by anger: the middle-aged Krapp had "everything" and "Let that go! Jesus! Take his mind off his homework! Jesus!" (p. 24). He broods, switches off, then on again.

The stops and starts, his mechanical difficulties in using the tape-recorder, are a prelude to a statement admitting what we have surmised: that he has nothing to record: "Nothing to say, not a squeak." (p. 25). Significantly, the action with the object precedes the articulation, making the primary statement as so often in this play. His life is bereft of joy, his "happiest moment of the past half million" (p. 25) was his revelling in the word "spool". He informs us of his failed career as Krapp the writer: "seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond

the seas" (p. 25). He reflects on love lost -- "Effie. . . . Could have been happy with her up there on the Baltic . . ." (p. 25) and on present lust for Fanny, of whom he can only concede, "I suppose better than a kick in the crutch. The last time wasn't so bad." (p. 25). The fatigue of old age precludes even an active participation in the forms of religion: at Vespers he "went to sleep and fell off the pew." (p. 26).

Finally we hear Krapp order himself to finish his "booze" and get to bed. He will turn off the mechanical memory and let his mind "wander" in the dark, and "be again": "Be again in the dingle on a Christmas Eve, . . . Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning . . ." (p. 26), when hope and faith were still alive. He repeats the line of Godot: "Once wasn't enough for you." (p. 27). But he rejects talking about it into a machine: he "wrenches off tape, throws it away . . ." (p. 27). He puts on the punt episode again and listens to it through to the end.

Ironically, this taped episode, the crucial one in the play, the key passage on Krapp's last tape, is, by its nature, a rejection of everything that the tape-recorder and tapes stand for in Krapp. He speaks into the microphone to himself; the tapes are a way of preserving Krapp for Krapp. The punt episode recounts a sharing of the self in the experience of love. It was the one time

he let another person "in" to his life and asked in turn to be let into hers. "I asked her to look at me . . . the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. . . . Let me in." (p. 27). In this moment of harmony he knew peace and "such silence. The earth might be uninhabited." (p. 28). Old Krapp listens to the episode to the end. After middle-aged Krapp's self-confident declaration that he wouldn't want those "best years" back, "The tape runs on in silence." Old Krapp stares before him. The silence of man before object makes the statement: he would want them back but the tape is over, the chance is gone, and the rest is silence -- not the silence of peace, but of emptiness.

Two other objects which require comment are two further objectifications of aspects of Krapp: his bananas and his envelope. The bananas help create Beckett's image of the monkey-clown at the play's opening. Some funny business is mimed with them. A phallic symbol, they are more widely a manifestation of Krapp's intense sensual appetites, still functioning despite his old age. The envelope is a prop of Krapp the writer. His crumpling it at the play's end directly precedes his wrenching the tape off the recorder. It reinforces the same wordless statement: Krapp has nothing to say and henceforth will speak no more. It is the moment of insight into his own failed life.

Krapp keeps his bananas locked in a table drawer, the keys in his pocket. He is a self-enclosed man, afraid of letting another person "in", of a violation of the self. The absurdity of locking up bananas reveals the absurdity of locking up the self. What is so carefully hoarded and locked up because considered valuable is not even particularly interesting or desirable to others. The business with the bananas is both comic and erotic. Krapp "strokes banana, peels it . . . puts end of banana in his mouth and remains motionless, staring vacuously before him" (pp. 10-11). Krapp becomes a monkey-like parody of intellectual man "meditatively eating banana" (p. 11). Beckett has him nearly perform the oldest of vaudeville clown tricks; he "slips, nearly falls" (p. 11) on the banana peel. After finishing it he "takes out a second large banana" (p. 11), goes through the same obsessive fondling and stroking, and staring before him. The banana routine robs Krapp of any dignity at the outset, makes him clown-like and ridiculous. When it incongruously stimulates him to "an idea" he puts the banana in his waistcoat pocket, a touch of the grotesque which he wears throughout the performance.

Krapp keeps his envelope in his pocket. It may be considered analogous to the empty tape which he keeps in his drawer. Both are a medium of expression for Krapp the artist. At the play's opening he "fumbles in his pockets, takes out envelope" (p. 10), but he puts it back, searches

in another drawer for a banana. These opening actions show Krapp as a man who indulges his appetites before attempting verbal self-expression. He is primarily sensual, not intellectual, and in rejecting love, the one experience that might have provided satisfaction for both parts of his nature, he has doomed himself to professional failure and personal unhappiness at once. He fumbles once more in his pockets after listening to the tape, brings out the envelope and puts it back. After drinking once more he "loads virgin reel on machine, takes envelope from his pocket, consults back of it, lays it on table . . ." (p. 24). At one point after beginning to record he consults it but then in disgust crumples it up, just as he will wrench the tape off the machine. He is admitting that he cannot say or write anything of significance.

Every object in this play, as we have seen, functions as a concrete image of some aspect of Krapp. Every part of himself, made concrete by his tapes, his recorder, his bananas, his envelope, his wine whose corks we hear popping, is kept enclosed, for Krapp alone. Krapp is an intensely egocentric man and it is an intensely one-subject play: an old man, dying by himself because he has insisted on living by himself, replays his voice from the past and muses on what might have been. The final image, of a tape unwinding in silence, is a starkly powerful metaphor for

a self with nothing more to say, just running on in time until its fixed span has run out. Krapp sits on in silence, just waiting for time to run out.

Interplay between man and object has become highly sophisticated in Krapp's Last Tape and provides the total action of the play. The tape-recorder, this one Beckettian theatrical acknowledgement of an electronic age, is as essential to the play as its only character. It in a sense is the character, since the two earlier Krapps, who figure largely in the play, only exist through the tape-recorder. Yet they are earlier, other versions of Krapp and thus separate from him, although not utterly dissimilar as we have noted. Krapp has difficulty in mechanically controlling the recorder, in making the object serve his intentions; at the same time the recorded voice controls him, in that it awakens longings for a love rejected. Krapp in the end discards the new tape, refusing to make yet another recording. As so often in this play, the action with the object makes its own statement; language but reinforces the point. He rejects mechanical memory in favour of silence; in the end his humanity resists domination by the object: the tape runs on in silence and whatever Krapp is thinking and feeling remains within him, not ever to be recorded on magnetic tape. As at the end of Act Without Words I there is dignity in stillness, in the recognition of failure

and the refusal to engage any longer in an interplay with objects.

Not I

The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. 20

Not I was first produced in New York on 7 December, 1972 at the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Centre. It was directed by Beckett's American director, Alan Schneider. Although only one character speaks, there are two characters on stage: Mouth and Auditor. Mouth was played by Jessica Tandy; Auditor was played by Hume Cronyn. The new play was presented on a double bill with Krapp's Last Tape, Hume Cronyn playing Krapp.

Before the house lights go down and before the curtain goes up, the audience hears a voice speaking unintelligibly. (Beckett uses this same incomprehensible verbal barrage at the opening of Play.) As attention becomes focused on the stage, the curtain goes up, the house lights dim, and the words become intelligible. "On stage", audience right, is a mouth lit up and suspended above the stage. The rest of the face is "in shadow" (p. 75). On stage audience left is a cloaked and hooded figure, dimly lit and immobile throughout the play except for four arm movements.

Mouth, like all Beckett's protagonists, tells a story, another "fiction" which is really her story, although she insists that it is not. The audience has difficulty picking up the words; they come out in spurts, are punctuated by screams, laughter, and vehement denials that the story is about Mouth herself. The monologue produces somewhat the effect of a deranged telephone call (the one-sided telephone conversation is a stage cliché) of which we hear only her responses and must infer the questions, objections, and assertions of the other party.

The story Mouth tells is the story of her life, projected onto a nameless other, "Not I". Thus she makes of herself an object and that view of the self as object is made concrete on stage as a mouth. The story is given a ritual and obsessive quality by Mouth's repetitions of words, phrases, and key episodes of awakening in her life. She reiterates several times, for example, her loveless and untimely birth: "into this world . . . this world . . . tiny little thing . . . before its time . . ." (p. 76). She keeps returning to her sudden awakening to speech after a near-silent seventy years on that "April morning" (p. 79) and laughs repeatedly at her once-held naïve belief "in a merciful . . . (brief laugh) . . . God . . . (good laugh)" (p. 77). It seems that after a silent and uneventful sixty or seventy years of "nothing of note" beyond

birth, while wandering in a field in April she found herself speaking and in the dark. Pursued by "a ray of light", amazed that she was "not suffering . . . imagine . . . not suffering!" and always subject to "the buzzing" in her head, "words were coming . . . a voice she did not recognize" (p. 80). She could not stop the stream of words. Somehow mouth and brain seemed disconnected: ". . . the brain . . . raving away on its own . . . trying to make sense of it . . . or make it stop . . ." (p. 83). She goes on to remember "flashes" from her past, "walks mostly" (p. 83) and "that time she cried" (p. 83).

Once the story is out the voice goes on, telling and retelling the same bits of narrative over and over in varying patterns, always insisting on the "she" protagonist, "not I". Mouth goes on spilling the words in fitful outbursts even after the curtain starts to come down. The house goes dark and the voice still goes on, until the house lights come up.

Character Objects

There are two principal objects in this play and they are both character-objects, fixed in space like set objects, the mouth itself and the auditor. Significantly, they have no names; they are stripped of personality. In the Paris, summer 1975 production of Pas Moi, translated and directed by the author, there was no Auditor. The

production was staged in the "petite salle" of the Gare d'Orsay theatre by the Renaud-Barrault company and Madeleine Renaud (Beckett's famous Winnie of Happy Days) played Mouth.²¹ The mouth, magnified and made up with garish bright red lipstick, was the only object on stage in this production. Since the play is normally played as written, however, it is necessary to consider the Auditor as well as Mouth in our discussion of its objects.

Mouth, like Hamm, Nagg, and Nell, is fixed in space, with only its parts able to move -- the lips, the tongue, the teeth. Mouth itself is fixed in a circle of light eight feet above the stage and cannot move out of that space. In order to play the role, the actress must be strapped into place so that the mouth occupies a fixed circle of light. Such unnatural immobility places extraordinary demands on the actress. In Toronto, September 1973, Jessica Tandy found the strain of performance too great and a full week of production had to be cancelled. Mme. Renaud played Mouth only two or three times a week, alternating her performance in the Beckett play with two other more conventional roles in larger-cast plays, Christophe Colomb and Harold et Maude.

Like all character-objects in Beckett's theatre, Mouth is being manipulated by a power outside the self, objectified theatrically by the light. Clearly the woman

in her fiction is herself, is "I" objectified to "she". Thus "her" predicament is that of Mouth. "She" felt she had no control over her sudden torrent of speech. "Suddenly she realized . . . words were -- . . . what? Who? . . . no! . . . she! . . . realized . . . words were coming . . . imagine! . . . words were coming . . . a voice she did not recognize . . ." (p. 80). She recognizes her own voice by the way it sounds, that is, as listener, as her own Auditor, not speaker -- "certain vowel sounds . . . she had never heard . . . elsewhere" (p. 80). "Her" difficulty in recognizing her own voice is duplicated in Mouth's difficulty in recognizing, or her refusal to recognize, her own story. She repeatedly and vigorously denies the unspoken implication by Auditor that the story's protagonist is Mouth itself.

The audience perceives that the woman who cannot control the stream of words that comes from her mouth is Mouth herself, since she begins her outpouring of words before the curtain rises to signal the beginning of the play and keeps talking after the curtain falls. The fictionalized self -- "not I" -- began speaking when the April morning light went out and she saw a ray of light, "the beam . . . flickering on and off . . . starting to move around" (p. 83) "ferreting around" (p. 84) as though eliciting her voice: "perhaps something she had to . . . had to . . . tell . . . could that be it?" (p. 84). This

is precisely the situation of Mouth. The house lights go out, like the morning light in April; she is in the dark speaking and the spotlight picks her up. Caught in it she keeps talking, babbling, trying different combinations and repetitions of her story in an effort to put out the light and stop the voice from speaking. (The situation is similar to that in Play where the light becomes an "inquisitor", demanding instant response as it moves from one character to the next.) Like Hamm, Nagg and Nell, and Winnie in Happy Days, she must keep telling her story until time runs out and the house lights go up, taking the spotlight off Mouth.

Like all Beckett's character-objects Mouth cannot begin or end anything or perform any significant action. Mouth has made an object, a thing outside the self -- "Not I" -- out of her own life, somewhat the way Krapp makes things, tapes, out of his life. For both characters the performance -- the story of "Not I" and the recording of Krapps gone by -- supplants reality. Mouth is totally taken up with her story as Krapp is totally given over to the manipulation of his tapes. The identification between "she" and Mouth is made explicit when Mouth reports the old woman's loss of feeling in the rest of her body and her reduction to a speaking, feeling mouth: "whole body like gone . . . just the mouth . . . lips . . . cheeks . . .

jaws . . . never -- . . . never still a second . . . mouth on fire . . ." (p. 82). Mouth is a physical representation of that bodiless woman "she" had become. "She" had become an object, Mouth.

Like Beckett's other character-objects Mouth is distinguishable from other stage objects by her speaking and by her suffering in time which, now drawing near the end like time in Endgame, seems to dilate and expand, to be endless. All of the woman's life from birth to seventy she dismisses as "nothing of any note" (p. 76) until that awakening on an April morning when she "found herself in the dark". Mouth dwells on the details of the morning, repeating words and phrases so that its account is woven through the word-flow to the end of the play. She recalls repeatedly the "buzzing . . . in the ears" (pp. 77, 78, 79, 80, 82, 83, 84, 86), her disillusionment about a "merciful" God (pp. 77, 78, 84, 85), the voice that was "not her voice at all" (pp. 80, 81, 82), the "beam" of light (pp. 77, 78, 83, 84, 86). The effect of the repetition is to suggest a constant replaying, an endless succession in time. Twice she repeats phrases from the account of her birth with which the play opens: "tiny little thing . . . before its time . . . godforsaken hole . . ." (p. 84) as though by starting again she can bring about an ending. But by the

time the curtain starts down she is back to the April morning. Like Hamm and Clov she is unable to make an end, and like Krapp she keeps turning back to dwell on a moment of awakening.

Auditor

Auditor, like Mouth, is fixed in space; he moves only his arms and moves them only four times, each time showing compassion for Mouth's "vehement refusal to relinquish third person" (p. 87). Unlike Beckett's other character-objects he does not speak; he has only a single function, which is to listen and "audit" the account. He communicates with Mouth, as we have noted, but silently. His voice is heard within her head; thus he may be seen as an objectification of the part of her that listens to her own account, reminding her of omissions, correcting her descriptions, questioning the whole basis of her story -- its third person protagonist. The Auditor, dressed in a "loose black djellaba, with hood" (p. 75) is a vague, ghostly figure on stage, in clear contrast with the brightly lit mouth. His appearance suggests a priest-confessor, a sympathetic listener, a figure quite atypical in the theatre of Beckett, and which we must, I think, see as part of the self.

Light as Object

The light which elicits the voice of the self is a frequent device in Beckett's theatre. We have seen how Krapp's table is lit from a light directly above it. When he moves into the light he moves back into self-awareness; the darkness "outside" is emphasized by this light on the self. Similarly, in Play, when the spotlight is focused on a character he speaks and reveals himself. Light in Not I, as in Krapp's Last Tape, may be considered as an object on stage: it has fixed dimensions in space -- a shape and size which do not change. It is the light of self-awareness, or self-consciousness, the prompter that demands one speak and give an account of one's existence. Thus Mouth has no respite while the light is on her, and when Krapp moves into its brilliance in Krapp's Last Tape he moves to the tape-recorder, the objectification of his conscious self in time which is placed directly underneath it.

It is worth noting that the brilliant, focused spotlight is symbolic of the theatre itself. When the light is on the actor performance is demanded. In all of Beckett's plays in which the use of the spotlight is required there is a conscious theatricality, a quality of "playing" in the theatre sense. (Thus the title of Play.)

Under the light Krapp must play back his own taped performance or give a "new" performance; caught in the light Mouth must go on with her story. The characters of Play will perform on demand whenever the light is trained on them. When it is trained on all three at once they will all speak in an incoherent chorus of performances.

Alvarez, in his book on Beckett, sees Not I as "Beckett's own bleak formulation to Duthuit of his vocation as a writer".²² (The "formulation" is that quoted at the opening of this discussion of Not I.) It seems to me presumptuous at this point to label the play Beckett's "final dramatic expression"²³ of the impossibility and obligation of expression, or, indeed, his "final" expression of anything. Although the play can plausibly be seen as a statement about the artist's predicament in general which is what Beckett is discussing in the dialogue with Duthuit, it seems to me to make a statement more fundamentally human. Mouth reports her life as "Nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when -- . . . seventy? . . . good God!" (p. 76). Mouth, fixed in a circle of light, babbling fragments of the "nothing" that is an old woman's (her) life, denying that it has anything to do with her even if one could make sense of it, yet coming back repeatedly, like Krapp, to a moment of awakening, is Beckett's new metaphor for the dying self. It is his bleakest presentation of what Robert

Abirached calls, quoting the Unnamable, "le thème unique de Samuel Beckett . . . je n'ai pas de voix et je dois parler, c'est tout ce que je sais".²⁴ Mouth speaking in light is Beckett's barest theatrical metaphor for human existence: "Vivre . . . c'est bouger la bouche . . . le verbe reste la seule fièrté, la seule consolation de l'Homme-Pot ."²⁵

Mouth is a stage objectification of the last remnant of the self: the speaking voice that cannot be silent until there is darkness and the spotlight is taken off.

Car, finalement, le récit se trouvera réduit à un simple filet de langage, mince et désincarné. Acceptant la seule preuve possible de son existence, ce qu'un personnage de Murphy (imitant Platon) appelle déjà "le flot vocal, jaillissant de l'âme par les lèvres".²⁶

In the story of "Not I" we hear the story of Mouth. The awakening Mouth refers to in her story over and over again is the awakening of self-awareness in "Not I". "All went out . . . all that early April morning light . . . and she found herself in the . . . dark" (p. 77). Disoriented, she suddenly was aware of a ray of light on her alone and she began to speak after a life-time of near-silence. She became aware of her lips moving and "feeling coming back" (p. 81). The voice unleashed, she tried to co-ordinate brain and voice, to understand the words, to think what she might do to end the light and be able to retreat into silence and darkness.

"Her" predicament is objectified by that of Mouth on stage. She is held by a light; a voice tumbles out of her which seems not controlled by her; it tells an incoherent story which is her life but which she refuses to recognize as such. She is listened to by an Auditor who although silent and fixed, communicates with her, checking on her account, which is the function of an Auditor. He corrects her on details: her age is seventy, not sixty; he suggests she might have been "kneeling" or "lying" in the dark that April morning, not just "standing . . . or sitting" (p. 77). But his persistent interest is in the basis of her story, the buzzing in her ears -- "What? . . . the buzzing? Yes . . . all the time the buzzing." (p. 78) -- and the identity of the protagonist -- "no! . . . She!" (p. 80). After each denial he raises his arms in "a gesture of helpless compassion" (p. 87).

We begin to see why Krapp's Last Tape and Not I are an effective double-bill. Each is too short to present on its own; together they make an "evening of Beckett". There is a neat economy in having only two actors, one of whom can play Auditor as well as Krapp, since Auditor is not required to speak. But it seems to me there is a more significant, thematic reason for playing them together. All of us, while speaking, are split into two: one who speaks and one who listens and responds. Auditor, like

Old Krapp, represents the part of the self that listens to the speaking self. He also talks to Mouth but in this play we are allowed to hear only one "self", Mouth. In a complex theatrical performance Beckett presents us with three "selves" as in Krapp's Last Tape: the self whose experience is recounted -- the "not I" of Not I, the thirty-eight year-old lover Krapp of Krapp's Last Tape; the self who tells the experience -- Mouth of Not I, the thirty-nine-year-old writer Krapp of Krapp's Last Tape; the self who listens to the story -- Auditor of Not I, old Krapp of Krapp's Last Tape.

Significantly, Beckett has directed that in the usual double-bill of these two plays Krapp is to be played first. The role of objects in Not I progresses beyond that of Krapp's Last Tape. The role of light as object is more clear-cut and uncompromising. Mouth cannot move out of the circle of light, while Krapp is still free to move periodically into darkness where he feels "less alone". In Krapp an old man is seen in interaction with an object, listening to it and speaking to it; in Not I an object, Mouth, speaks to an object, Auditor (Ear), and there is no distinctly human figure on stage.

NOTES

¹Samuel Beckett, Proust, pp. 3-8.

²This information comes from Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 139.

³Not I was first played (New York, December, 1972) with Krapp's Last Tape. This same double-bill was played in Toronto in September, 1973 at the St. Lawrence Centre. Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy played Krapp and Mouth respectively as they had done in New York. The same programme was produced in French as La Dernière Bande and Pàs Moi in Paris, June 1975, by the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault at the Théâtre Gare d'Orsay. This production was directed by Samuel Beckett and Mouth was played by his Winnie of Oh Les Beaux Jours, Madeleine Renaud.

⁴Roger Blin's production of La Dernière Bande opened on 22 March, 1960 at the Théâtre Recamier in Paris.

⁵Waintrop, p. 32.

⁶Ibid., p. 35.

⁷Martin Esslin, "Introduction", in Martin Esslin, ed., Samuel Beckett (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 1. [All subsequent references to this collection are to this edition.]

⁸Samuel Beckett, Proust, pp. 19-20.

⁹Prières peut-être pas vaines. . . (Happy Days, p. 16).

Jean Onimus comments on Beckett's "peut-être" after discussing Estragon's prayer ("Dieu aie pitié de moi").

En fait Dieu n'est peut-être ni aveugle ni sourd. Il est même peut-être là tout proche, attentif à me sauver: le tragique est moins dans le sentiment d'absence que dans une expérience d'incommunicabilité. Il est probable que la

communication avec l'Etre, si elle est vraiment possible à l'homme, ne l'est que par un élan d'amour. Or, . . . il n'y a pas une once d'amour dans la lucidité beckettienne. . . . Qui sait si les supplices de la dépossession, de l'impuissance, de la claustration ne sont pas des tentatives de l'au-delà pour entrer en communication avec ses créatures? . . . Peut-être l'engloutissement de Winnie . . . est-il un bien -- comme la marche errante de Molloy et la longue agonie de Malone? . . . Peut-être le malheur même est-il orienté vers une plénitude -- . . . Oui, peut-être la souffrance elle-même est-elle un bien Le Tout n'est séparé du Rien que par un presque, un peut-être, l'espace d'une hésitation. Mais toute l'oeuvre de Beckett n'est-elle pas faite de cette hésitation? (Onimus, Beckett, pp. 94-98.)

¹⁰Janvier, Beckett Par Lui-Même, p. 180.

¹¹Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 142.

¹²Janvier, Beckett Par Lui-Même, p. 180.

¹³Francis Doherty, Samuel Beckett (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971), p. 101. [All subsequent references to this study are to this edition.]

¹⁴William Shakespeare, Macbeth, V, iii, 22-27.

¹⁵Samuel Beckett, Proust, pp. 20-21.

¹⁶Claude Serrault, "Lettre Morte et La Dernière Bande", France Observateur (le 28 mars, 1960), cited by Waintrop, p. 36.

¹⁷Gérard Durozoi, Beckett (Paris: Bordas, 1972), p. 101.

¹⁸Doherty, Beckett, p. 101.

¹⁹Samuel Beckett, Proust, p. 19.

²⁰Samuel Beckett, "Three Dialogues", in Martin Esslin, ed., Samuel Beckett, p. 17.

²¹In a conversation with Mme Renaud I asked her about the absence of Auditor, since one could be sure that this omission was the decision of the author-director, Samuel Beckett. Mme. Renaud explained that because the theatre was so small (the "petite salle" of the Gare d'Orsay) M. Beckett had decided to concentrate the audience's full attention on the mouth.

²²A. Alvarez, Beckett (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 136. [All subsequent references to this study are to this edition.]

²³Alvarez, Beckett, p. 136.

²⁴Robert Abirached, "La Voix Tragique de Samuel Beckett", Les Etudes (janvier, 1964), 85, in Extraits de Presse, vol. I, p. 48.

²⁵Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, "Plainte Contre Inconnu Beckett Dramaturge", Les Nouvelles Littéraires (le 24 février, 1966), in Extraits de Presse, vol. I, p. 97.

²⁶Ross Chambers, "Beckett: Homme des Situations Limites", Cahiers Renaud Barrault, XLIV (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 37.

CHAPTER VI

HAPPY DAYS

Beckett at his finest seems to have the power of casting a stage picture, a stage relationship, a stage machine from his most intense experiences that in a flash, inspired, exists, stands there complete in itself, not telling, not dictating, symbolic without symbolism.¹

Happy Days was written in English in 1961 and translated into French as Oh Les Beaux Jours by its author. The world première of Happy Days was in New York at the Cherry Lane Theatre on 17 September, 1961. Ruth White played Winnie and John C. Becher played Willie. Once again Alan Schneider was Beckett's choice as director. Happy Days was produced subsequently in London at the Royal Court Theatre in November, 1962, directed by the late George Devine and played by Brenda Bruce and Peter Duguid.

Although the play was not particularly well received by the critics (Harold Hobson reported that the play was about "how one is happy because half-buried")² it has become Beckett's most written-about play next to Waiting for Godot. John Simon, writing in The Hudson Review, was one of the few American critics who wrote of the play sympathetically and intelligently: "the play is full of that Beckettian strategy which presents the most innocuous trifles of human existence dripping with blood and bile,

and the most unspeakable horrors rakishly attired and merrily winking".³ Winnie's situation he sees as an "egregiously valid theatrical metaphor" as she goes on "blithering about the great mercies of existence as she is pressed deeper and deeper into the sod".⁴

Oh Les Beaux Jours⁵ had its première in France at the Odéon-Théâtre de France in Paris on 21 October, 1963. The director was again Beckett's first French director, Roger Blin. Winnie was played by Madeleine Renaud and Willie by her husband, Jean-Louis Barrault. The French critics were ecstatic about the performance of Mme. Renaud. Robert Abriaché's homage is representative of the general reaction: "Winnie, c'est Madeleine Renaud. Toute entière, toute neuve. Inoubliable."⁶ Only Americans would dare the comment of Fletcher and Spurling who say she was "magnificently miscast. Beckett's derision of all theatre hardly had a chance in the hands of such a great professional."⁷ But Beckett himself had chosen Mme. Renaud to be his Winnie. The play is not "a derision of all theatre"; it is Beckett's own peculiar brand of theatre. Surely by choosing France's consummate Marivaux-style theatrical coquette to be his Winnie, stuck in the ground, subjected to the merciless glare of the sun, he is not deriding "all theatre" but pushing it beyond its familiar conventions to make his own unique dramatic statement. In Happy Days

the coquette is indeed a dying object on stage, but there is courage as well as foolishness in her refusal to relinquish words, the last remnants of her life.

Madeleine Renaud to this day considers Winnie her greatest role and Beckett a great playwright: "il possède à un point étonnant le sens théâtral." Of Oh Les Beaux Jours she says "Je lisais tout ce que je n'osais pas penser depuis . . . ma première ride supplémentaire. C'est un merveilleux poème d'amour, le chant d'une femme qui veut encore entendre et voir l'homme qu'elle aime . . .". She tells with pride the story that Jean Luc Godard asked Beckett for authorization to film Oh Les Beaux Jours with amateur actors. "Beckett a refusé, il a répondu qu'il n'envisageait pas Oh Les Beaux Jours sans Madeleine Renaud."⁸

Happy Days is a two-act play about a middle-aged woman named Winnie who is stuck in a mound of earth up to her waist at the play's opening. Despite her predicament, which she alludes to only in passing, she manages to carry on the trivial rituals of her "day": she says her morning prayer, rummages about in her bag, brushes her teeth, polishes her glasses, takes her tonic, puts on her hat and her lipstick, unfurls her parasol, prattles on about the heat, her youth, a wandering couple who commented on her situation, quotes half-remembered lines from her

favourite poems, and plays "I love you so" from The Merry Widow with her music box. Finally she tidies up for the night.

Winnie is unfailingly optimistic and pleasant in the most incongruous and horrible situation. There are only occasional hints of some awareness beneath her cheeriness that something horrible is taking its course or, as Winnie herself says, "something seems to have occurred" (p. 39). She shows no alarm when her parasol unaccountably goes up in flames, and breaks her mirror on a stone, sure that "it will be in the bag again tomorrow" (p. 39). Unexpectedly she hits Willie on the head quite viciously with her parasol and kisses the revolver she carries in her bag with her toothbrush.

Willie, the play's second character, is almost never seen and never heard. In a Beckettian parody of the suburban-weekend husband, he sleeps, reads his newspaper, grunts occasionally, and looks at pornographic postcards. Winnie shows constant concern that he hear her, respond to her, look at her. Occasionally he responds monosyllabically and reads aloud excerpts from the want ads and obituaries. He makes no sound when Winnie hits him on the head but emerges with his bald head trickling blood.

Act II is another of Winnie's "happy days". It is filled with much the same chatter, but her activities

are curtailed now because of Winnie's worsened condition: she is now stuck up to her neck in the mound and can move only her eyes. Nevertheless, she carries on, her monologue increasingly fragmented: "One loses one's classics." (p. 57). Like the rest of Beckett's characters she begins to tell a story, as the end draws nearer. Winnie's story is about a little girl, Mildred, who has "a big waxen dolly" (p. 55). One morning Mildred slips in to see Dolly; a mouse runs up her thigh and Mildred screams. Winnie screams. The story ends with the family arriving to see what is the matter -- "Too late." (p. 59).

At the end of Happy Days Willie suddenly appears on all fours, dressed up in formal attire. He approaches Winnie, much to her delight, but has difficulty ascending the mound. Winnie cheers him on. Happy to have his full attention at last she sings the music box tune about love. The bell rings to end the day and Winnie and Willie are frozen in position, staring at each other, never having made contact.

The Set

"Mais ne sommes-nous pas tous des enterrés vifs qui admirent le paysage?"⁹ Beckett's stage directions concerning the set of Happy Days are less terse than those for Godot, his other play whose set is a vast

exterior.

Expanse of scorched grass rising centre to low mound. Gentle slopes down to front and either side of stage. Back an abrupt fall to stage level. Maximum of simplicity and symmetry. Blazing light. Very pompier trompe l'oeil backcloth to represent unbroken plain and sky receding to meet in far distance.

We notice at once the precision of the scenic directions. A woman is to be literally entrapped in a mound of earth out in the blazing sun. There will be no sign of any relief anywhere; plain stretches to sky without even a tree to break a seemingly limitless space. Winnie's unflagging optimism and her cheerful continuation of her daily routines is grotesquely incongruous with the spectacular theatricality of her setting.

Beckett's specific instructions here for a "trompe l'oeil" effect indicate a sharp contrast with the unpretentiousness of the original set for Godot. Alan Simpson describes Roger Blin's décor for the Paris production of Godot. The Godot backdrop was "some pieces of light green cloth (suspiciously like old double sheets)" and argued with "Sam" about its "amateurish" effect.¹⁰ Apparently "Sam" thought the obvious and crude fakery just the thing for Godot. Blin, in his taped interviews with Wainthrop, describes his Paris décor for Oh Les Beaux Jours. The production was approved in every detail, of course, by the author:

Matias avait fait un décor pompier. Beckett avait souligné ce mot, c'est-à-dire un ciel, ce tertre, et derrière ce petit tertre, une excavation où se trouvait le mari, Willie, dont on n'apercevait que le dos de la tête et le journal. . . . L'important dans ce décor est qu'il soit justement pompier qu'il y ait comme matière une certaine rugosité, pas d'herbe . . . et c'est là que la couleur devenait importante. . . . Nous avons pensé . . . que nous rendrions cela davantage par un orange.¹¹

Matias (one of France's most gifted stage designers) painted the sky orange, the top in a violently shrieking orange: "si on levait les yeux de plus en plus haut vers le ciel, il devenait de plus en plus insupportable comme stridence d'orange." People were thus obliged to focus on the centre of the scene -- the person, "cette petite tête dans l'immensité".¹²

Winnie must be, like Hamm, precisely in the centre of the set. She is man-woman at the centre of the universe. It is a cruel universe with which she is ill-equipped to cope and she is dying in it. "Samuel Beckett . . . a simplement pris à la lettre l'expression 'avoir un pied dans la tombe' . . . il y a mis les deux pieds et le reste."¹³ Nothing grows; even the grass around her is scorched. The horror of the setting sets off the inanity of Winnie's monologue and the triviality of her stage business. Beckett would seem to be showing us that our optimism, our pastimes, our ways of getting through the day until nightfall are all self-delusions, ways of

avoiding looking around at the burnt nothingness and at our own approaching death. One might as well be a Willie, sleeping as much as he can, caring for no one but himself, making no effort to communicate with Winnie, indulging his taste for pornography, picking his nose, reading the want ads and the obituaries instead of trying to remember his "classics". He, at least, is still able to move: he can crawl. He has "vaseline" to protect him against the sun and can sleep protected by Winnie's mound. To survive in such a place Winnie's social niceties and remnants of boarding-school education and Sunday-school religion are simply of no use. One critic has said of the play that it is Beckett's own caustic brand of beatitude: "Blessed are the optimists, for they shall be buried alive."

Much of what Winnie says and does, padding her consciousness with illusions, is undercut ironically by the overpowering presence of the set and her own status as an object in its midst. When she first awakens she comments, "Another heavenly day." (p. 8). The effect of the "day" as presented by the violent orange of the setting under blazing light is anything but "heavenly"; it is hellish. She immediately begins to pray, ending "World without end Amen." (p. 8). It is a common liturgical coda, but in this context it is ironic: Winnie lives in the middle of a world seemingly "without end", an endless

expanse of space in which she fills an endless series of "happy days" as the grains of Zeno's millet add up to a life. Similarly she greets the day at the beginning of Act II in a way that is undercut by the reality of her situation. Now "imbedded up to neck" (p. 49) she wakes up in the orange glare quoting Milton: "Hail, holy light." (p. 49). The apostrophe is from the beginning of Book III, Paradise Lost. The light that blazes on Winnie is not "Holy" and life-creating but destructive and scorching. She goes on to say with a smile that "Someone is looking at me still . . . caring for me still." (p. 49). All expressions of faith in a benevolent deity in such a setting are ludicrous.

Winnie focuses on minor problems, like her decaying teeth and her disappearing supplies, symptoms of her general condition -- dying, returning to dust. Her concern seems wildly misplaced in view of the enormity of her misfortune. But it is surely psychologically valid -- that one focuses on the near-at-hand, missing or deliberately avoiding the wider situation which is not manageable. Her automatic comment as she inspects her gums, "good God!" (p. 9) is amusing because so obviously literally untrue. There is no evidence in Winnie's existence of a "good" God. She notes that her toothpaste is "running out" (p. 9) but accepts that it "can't be helped" (p. 9),

that her red medicine is "Running out" (p. 14), but "Mustn't complain." (p. 14).

The perfect equanimity with which Winnie accepts these minor inconveniences is mirrored in her general composure in the face of her major predicament. According to Vivian Mercier, uncomplaining Winnie is "the stoical epitome of an Irish-Protestant gentlewoman, a loyal member of the Church of Ireland (Anglican) like Maddy Rooney [of All That Fall]"¹⁴ Winnie is willing to contemplate even the melting of her own flesh with equanimity: "And if for some strange reason no further pains are possible, why then just close the eyes -- . . . and wait for . . . the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many degrees . . ." (p. 18). Janvier comments of Winnie's cheeriness that "un jour sans mourir est un beau jour".¹⁵ But Winnie's optimism is greater than that: she speaks calmly of being "charred to a black cinder" (p. 38). Even the day of death will be for Winnie another "happy day".

The objects Winnie manipulates during Act I of Happy Days show her concern for her appearance; most of her hand props are grooming aids. (She reminds us of B in Act Without Words II.) When the earth seems "very tight" (p. 28) she worries about putting on weight. And yet her general appearance -- a woman stuck in the earth up to her waist under the blazing sun -- and its significance, she

does not concern herself with. When she recalls "Shower -- or Cooker" (p. 42), the man who stopped to stare at her, she quotes his amazement at her situation: "What's she doing? he says -- What's the idea? he says -- stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground -- . . . What's it meant to mean?" (pp. 42-43). But she dismisses his astonishment and curiosity, which mirror precisely the reaction of the audience, as "usual drivel" (p. 43). She passes no further comment and ventures no answers of her own to his questions. She simply muses that the man and woman were "last human kind -- to stray this way" (p. 44), thus revealing momentarily her loneliness.

Winnie herself having become an object, planted and immovable in the ground, takes stock of her "blessings", which, in such a setting, Beckett shows us, is pitiable, as are all hymns of praise. "That is what I find so wonderful, that not a day goes by -- without some blessing." (p. 24). She feels fortunate that there is "so much to be thankful for" (p. 11), that she feels "no pain" (p. 11) (except for occasional migraines), that each day (which, of course, buries her deeper in the ground, makes her more an object indistinguishable from the set object, the mound of earth) brings with it "some addition to one's knowledge, however trifling". Winnie even manages to convert misfortune into blessing. Unable to move, she concludes that "mobility

is a curse." Looking at the scorched grass, she observes, "What a blessing nothing grows." (p. 34).

Winnie's delight in accumulating new "knowledge" is particularly pathetic in view of her constantly dwindling stock of "old" knowledge. As Winnie herself says, "One loses one's classics." Beckett shows us not only Winnie's failing memory but also her failure to relate any of what she does remember to her horrifying situation -- her existence in the earth. Literature in such a setting provides neither insight nor solace. The process of uncovering the allusions in Happy Days would seem to illustrate what Enoch Brater says of the process generally as applied to Beckett's work: it is "the ultimate endgame itself -- for the allusion has been poised only to point out its disfunction".¹⁶ The horror of the set and Winnie's position on it obliterates the beauty of poetry.

Winnie quotes bits of Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet; Hamlet; and Cymbeline. As she puts on her lipstick she quotes Romeo: "Ensign crimson. . . . Pale flag." The lines are from his scene in the tomb, Act V, scene iii, with the sleeping body of Juliet. As he looks at her rosy beauty he pays tribute to her loveliness as though it could conquer death itself:

Thou are not conquered.
Beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there.¹⁷

The irony is, of course, that Romeo mistakenly thinks that Juliet is dead. She is in fact alive, reviving from her death-like sleep. Winnie, on the other hand, is pathetically adding colour to her dying skin as death slowly overtakes her; the earth will be her tomb and, like Juliet, she is being buried alive in it. But there is no vigorous young lover to take his own life to be with her. There is only Willie who seems half-dead himself, does not look at her, and seems utterly unconcerned about her situation. He even refuses to respond when she longs to know if she was ever "lovable" (p. 31).

While polishing her glasses she echoes Ophelia: "woe woe is me -- . . . -- to see what I see . . . " (p. 10). The allusion is from the end of the famous "nunnery scene", Act II, scene i. Ophelia's lines, after encountering a Hamlet she takes to be deranged, are "O, Woe is me, / To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!" (ll. 168-169). Winnie's partner is no Hamlet; far from delivering an impassioned denunciation of her he sleeps peacefully on through Winnie's chatter. There is a further irony, it seems to me. Winnie's situation is indeed full of "woe", although she ignores it through most of the play. She in fact "sees" very little.

"Fear no more the heat o' the sun" (p. 26) is from Cymbeline (Act IV, scene ii, l. 258). It is a song whose

refrain is that all "must . . . come to dust". It is consolation to those who will soon no longer be subject to the hardships of physical life -- those about to die, all of us. But in Winnie's immediate situation, stuck in her mound in the unrelenting glare of the sun, it is ironic. Winnie shows no "fear", or even concern for the horror of her situation. Her baseless optimism and cheerfulness are more horrifying than alarm. And the song in Cymbeline, of course, is consoling only in a Christian context, where there is presumed to be a life after this. In Beckett's universe, where this intolerable situation is all there is or will ever be, the line sounds cruelly mocking.

Similarly Winnie almost remembers a line from Thomas Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College": "What is that wonderful line . . . something something laughing wild amid severest woe." (p. 31). The part she omits is "moody madness laughing wild". At this point in the poem Gray is foretelling that the children will be victims of passions he calls "The Vulturs of the Mind". Winnie's laughter, her cheerful complacency in the midst of such woe is anything but appropriate and laudable. It seems "moody madness". Winnie only half-remembers her "classics" and only out of context. She misses even the obvious connections between poetry and life.

Willie provides Winnie with her most comforting illusion, the one which prevents her being fully aware of the bleakness of her existence. Fixed in the middle of Godot's "anywhere", an object entrapped by the earth, unable to escape for even a moment the heat and brilliance of the sun, Winnie can only talk. Talking itself is a denial of the hopelessness of her situation. "Speech . . . -- when there is another person to talk to -- is a way of creating a kind of campfire about which one can huddle by way of staving off the surrounding wilderness."¹⁸ Winnie is pathetically sure that "Something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do --" (p. 21).

But Willie is anything but an active listener; Winnie's monologue never really becomes a dialogue. Winnie's concern for Willie's comfort, her constant self-effacement, her patience and understanding, are all as misplaced as her optimism about her own predicament. Her relationship with Willie offers her the same amount of joy as her relationship with the earth; he is as unyielding and as cruel. Her response to Willie is as inappropriate as her placidity in the midst of a hell. Strangely, Beckett elicits from the audience only a half-hearted sympathy for Winnie. Once again, subject to indignity,

Beckett's man (woman in this instance) does not rise above circumstance to win dignity for himself: Winnie's overriding silliness mitigates our response. At times we can even side with Willie and the earth: she will be silenced at last.

Winnie refers to Willie as "Poor Willie" (p. 9) and "poor dear Willie" (p. 11) although it is clear to the audience that his position is preferable to hers. She shows concern that he might "get singed" without his "drawers" and feels apologetic for waking him, although she herself is unprotected from the sun and is harshly awakened each "day" by a shrill alarm-clock. She feels inordinately gratified if he gives any sign whatever of being "on the qui vive". She finds his dirty post-card disgusting, missing the point that her own flesh is being subjected to the worst indignities. When he replies with one word to her question about hair, "What would you say speaking of the hair on your head, then or it?" (p. 23) she is "joyful". She is very sympathetic to his point of view, trying to imagine what he is thinking, supplying him with "lines" since he offers none himself. "Oh I can well imagine what is passing through your mind, it is not enough to have to listen to the woman, now I must look at her as well." (p. 29). She enjoys sharing a laugh with him over the "formication" (p. 30) of the "emmet": "What a joy in any case to hear

you laugh again Willie." (p. 31). She goes on to say one can best "magnify the Almighty" by laughing at his jokes "particularly the poorer ones". But surely one of his poorest "jokes" is his "joke" played on Winnie, made concrete by the horror of Beckett's set and Winnie's inability to escape from it. Grotesque and ridiculous, as insignificant as the emmet, Winnie has not even the possibility of "formication".

The image before us is of a woman being roasted and buried alive: she is one with the object, the mound of earth, subjected to blazing sun. Yet Beckett shows us that not even extreme physical punishment can efface certain psychological patterns. Winnie is not loved. But with the self-abasement of a good Protestant Irish housewife she blames herself. It must be her "due", like roasting in the earth. She "keeps herself nice" for Willie who never looks at her, although she gets a "crick" in her neck admiring him. She asks not if he ever loved her but if she were ever "lovable". Willie, who is surely one of the most unlovable husbands in the entire history of the theatre, says nothing, and Winnie excuses even this silence: "Well I admit it is a teaser and you have done more than your bit already . . . just lie back now and relax . . ." (p. 31). When she does give in momentarily to her nostalgia for a youth lost wherein she was "lovely . . . in a way"

and so perhaps loved, she asks forgiveness: "Forgive me, Willie, sorrow keeps breaking in." (p. 34). When Willie sings she claps her hands in glee; when he refuses to sing she is sympathetic to his customary intransigence: "Well it is very understandable, very understandable. One cannot sing just to please someone, however much one loves them . . ." (p. 40). It is clear that Willie does not "love" her at all.

In Act II Willie says nothing at all. Indeed, he may be considered more of an object than Winnie, since he does not speak, and speech in Beckett's world is the specifically human attribute. Winnie calls repeatedly for him but he does not answer. She tells her story not knowing if he is listening. Like Hamm and, indeed, all of Beckett's storytellers, she needs a listener, and for the first time reproaches him: "I sometimes find your attitude a little strange, Willie, all this time, it is not like you to be wantonly cruel." (p. 56). Again she deceives herself, pads her consciousness with comforting illusion. It is just like Willie to be "wantonly cruel". She quickly switches to concern that something might be "amiss". "God grant he did not go in head foremost! . . . You're stuck, Willie? . . . You're not jammed, Willie?" (p. 56). The irony is that Winnie herself is "stuck", "jammed" in the earth up to her eyes and cannot move.

Willie makes his final appearance "dressed to kill" (p. 61). He advances toward Winnie on all fours. When he starts to crawl up the mound to her she is "(. . . Glee-ful.) Oh I say, this is terrific!" (p. 63) and she cheers him on, wondering aloud what he wants: a kiss?

His murmur of half her name, "Win", causes a happy expression and she sings the Merry Widow love song. But we are left with the two staring at each other, motionless, Winnie no longer with a happy expression. Beckett, directing the German production, stipulated that the ending be deliberately ambiguous. Is Willie reaching for Winnie or the revolver? It is like Winnie to sing a love song while her "lover" moves for the gun to kill her: it expresses exactly her misapprehension of reality. Has Winnie's chatter driven Willie to a parody of the lover's murder-suicide? (Winnie had referred to his thoughts of suicide. [p. 33]) Is "poor Willie" an incipient killer? Or is he "dressed to kill" for a happy reunion? The gesture is "stuck", frozen, never-to-be-completed, like Winnie's burial.

Costume Objects

Beckett directs that Winnie appear with "arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom, pearl necklet" (p. 7). Later she rummages in her bag and brings out "small ornate brimless hat with crumpled feather" (p. 15)

which she puts on as part of her "dressing up" for the day. The impression we first get of Winnie is of a middle-aged woman, plump and "blond for preference" who is "well preserved". Winnie takes great care of her appearance and it is Beckett's irony that she is all "dressed up" like Clov at the end of Endgame, and can go nowhere but further into the earth, so that at the opening of Act II no costume at all is visible, just Winnie from the neck up, totally dressed in earth.

Beckett has Winnie carefully and attractively dressed for her burial. The double-horror of her "well-preserved" appearance is that not only is she in her "Sunday best", which is our usual way of dressing the dead for the feast at which they will be eaten, but she herself is concerned so obviously throughout the play more with how she looks than with what is happening to her. Her careful toilette is based on the assumption that someone is looking at her. Otherwise, all her efforts to "preserve" herself are stupid and meaningless.

Beckett takes care to show us that her efforts are indeed futile. Her one-time lover and now reluctant husband, Willie, does not look at her. At the play's opening Willie is "To her right and rear, lying asleep on the ground, hidden by mound." (p. 8). When he sits up (p. 14) she cranes to look at him but we only see the back

of Willie's bald head: he does not turn around. He hides behind a newspaper, the comic-strip version of bored husband-at-breakfast. He then folds it to use it as a fan to fan himself. When he hands her the pornographic postcard to examine, we see only "the hairy forearm" (p. 18) deliver it and take it back. Similarly we see only his hand when he takes his hat off, only hear him when he blows his nose. He crawls out only for his vaseline to protect his skin. The audience and Winnie are aware always of his presence but he does not ever turn toward her and look at her. Winnie does not insist that he look at her, just that she might be able to look at him without getting a "crick" in her neck:

Do you know what I dream sometimes? (Pause.) . . .
That you'll come round and live this side
where I could see you. . . . Or just now and
then, come round this side just every now and
then and let me feast on you. (p. 46)

At the play's end Willie finally does look up at Winnie (p. 61). He is dressed up for a wedding or a funeral and his stare could be that of lover or killer. But in any case Winnie's toilet rituals have come to nothing. Her "costume" has sunk into the earth. Winnie is now truly dressed for her funeral. Hamlet is one of the "classics" she quotes from and one notes that Winnie herself is fast becoming a concrete realization of a line from one of its most famous scenes: "Now get you to my lady's

chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that." (V, i, 211-213). Winnie "keeps herself nice" for Desire, but it is Death that creeps up on her.

Winnie's costume and her concern for her appearance point to what is a central issue concerning this play. It has been suggested that Beckett chose a woman for the first time to be protagonist because a woman's shopping-bag type of purse offered more scope for comic business with its contents than a man's pockets would have offered. Such a rationale for his choice seems to me to be quite unlikely. Beckett is making for the first time a point specifically about the feminine condition. Winnie is clearly a woman, not just the possessor of a bag instead of pockets. Only a woman could find so much to do while stuck in the earth "up to her diddies". Most of what she does has to do with grooming and "preserving" herself. A woman "preserves" herself for a man and Winnie's preoccupation with her own waning attractiveness is obvious throughout the play. Waning attractiveness preoccupies her rather than waning life. "Life" for Winnie equates with being lovable or looked at by a man. Her memories are of Mr. Johnson and her "first kiss" (p. 16) and of Mr. Shower who stopped to look at her in her present situation. Beckett's frequently quoted dictum "Esse est percipi" (which he uses at the

opening of Film) has special application to woman: to be perceived by a man is the real issue for Winnie, Beckett's Woman. He makes a harsh evaluation of the lives of ordinary women like Winnie. Even if they are not literally stuck in the earth like Winnie, how different from hers are their lives? Do they not spend the best part of a day in as trivial pastimes, waiting for a man to look at them, to speak to them, put down his pornographic postcards and newspaper and pay them some attention?

In this portrait of Winnie in Happy Days Beckett reveals a view of woman similar to that of his contemporary, Eugène Ionesco. Richard Coe, in his book on Ionesco's plays, articulates very clearly this view and it coincides nicely with that of Beckett in Happy Days. Coe quotes Béranger speaking of his Josephine in Ionesco's Le Piéton de l'Air and goes on to elaborate the Ionesco view of woman.

Poor dearest little scrap of something. . . . Could one bring her to see that a human being needs independence, or that, as Rilke used to say, the most precious gift that anyone can offer to the creature whom he loves is the gift of freedom -- for her, such things are inconceivable: the very words independence, autonomy, are incomprehensible to her . . . I need freedom; but for her the phrase is meaningless since, for her, where I am not, there is no freedom.

It is this last sentence which contains the key: for

"him", liberty is freedom to pursue the ideal; for "her" it is freedom to be with him . . . although she can never understand how he should leave her,

her intuition tells her that he will. The result is fear: an overwhelming terror of loneliness, a terror which she cannot analyse, yet which dominates her every action . . . compelling her to concentrate on all that is dreariest and least poetic in existence -- on filling up the cracks in the damp walls and on re-covering the settee -- since this alone is safe and comforting. . . .19

Although Beckett's man in this play, Willie, can hardly be said to "pursue the ideal", he does have mobility and his own "pursuits": reading the newspaper, enjoying his post-cards, doing whatever he does independently of Winnie. We have noted Winnie's "terror of loneliness", that is, of not being looked at by her man: "if you were to die -- . . . or go away and leave me, then what would I do . . .?" (p. 21). Neither Winnie's spotty education nor her mindless faith has prepared her to live and die autonomously. Beckett makes explicit her fear of Willie's leaving her: "You are going, Willie, aren't you? . . . You will be going soon . . .?" (p. 28).

At the opening of Act II Winnie imagines that "Someone is looking at me still. . . . Caring for me still." (p. 49). It is only too clear by this point in the play that besides herself, only the audience looks at Winnie and "cares" for her. There is no lover-witness and no deity-witness to her dying. She watches herself by consulting her hand-mirror and we watch her. But in the world defined by the stage she is not being perceived; to feel that "someone" is "looking" at her is a life-

sustaining illusion, just another of the self-deceptions that permit Beckett's optimist to get through another "happy day". Beckett reinforces this point by having her make the assertion immediately after the interval, when even the audience has not been looking at Winnie. When the lights go up we perceive a change. Something has happened during the interval, like the "sprouting" of the tree in Godot: Winnie's engulfment has been intensified. Without our knowledge, complicity or interference, her situation has changed. Our helplessness is clear: no one is "caring for" Winnie.

Winnie's resources other than Willie are few: her bag of "things", her story to tell of a little girl frightened by a mouse. Even the story presents a female-stereotype of a crisis. A little girl is devoted to her "Dolly". She daringly sneaks out before dawn on a wild adventure: to play with her Dolly. A mouse runs up her thigh; it is the climax of the story. The rescuers, mommy and daddy, arrive "too late". The childish story, like Hamm's a fictionalized autobiography, is so uninteresting and unimaginative that we do not wonder at Willie's ignoring it.

The specific objects of Winnie's costume reveal much about her and function metaphorically as well. Her pearl necklet and hat are the genteel touches of the middle-aged

matron of her class and upbringing. Winnie chooses pearls because they are soft and pretty, not flashy and vulgar. The hat is anachronistic and ridiculous, the accessory of the lady who thinks it is still proper when "dressed up" to wear a hat. Yet curiously she mismatches it with a low-necked gown. If she were sensible and pragmatic, more genuinely self-preserving, she would wear a hat throughout: not a "small ornate brimless" one but a sunhat to protect her from its blaze. Similarly she would sacrifice the allure of a "bare bodice" for more suitable desert-attire. Winnie's attire is chosen purely for its attractiveness. She remembers "Shower" or "Cooker"'s remarks, the man's not his wife's: "Can't have been a bad bosom, he says, in its day. . . . Seen worse shoulders. . . . Has she anything on underneath?" (p. 58).

The metaphorical value of Winnie's clothing seems to me due to this ~~eminent~~ unsuitableness for the reality of her existence. Woman dresses for a party, for a rendezvous with a lover. The reality is that she is alone, dying in the earth under a blazing merciless sun and only the upper part of her body remains above ground. Her clothing is a manifestation of pitiable self-delusion and alienation. She is alienated from the universe -- ridiculously over-dressed in a feathered hat and low-necked gown for a slow burning and burying in the desert. She is a

cruel parody of the earth mother, sexless, dying, telling a story of a "waxen" lifeless Dolly to an indifferent husband.

Beckett's searing vision goes beyond even this negation. Like all Beckett's characters Winnie is a misfit even in the social world of her fantasies. Her dress and hat are unfashionable, out-of-step with each other and with any fashion season that ever was. Her feather on her ornate little hat is "crumpled". Winnie is grotesquely dressed even for the role she wants to play. She is another of Beckett's sad clowns out-of-time; for the first time the clown is also a woman.

Willie's "costume", until his final dramatic re-emergence in the play, must be surmised from occasional descriptions of what we see. We never see all of Willie in Act I. The only things that we know he wears are a "boater" and "drawers". Beckett does not explicitly describe Willie at the outset as he does Winnie. At first he is completely hidden by Winnie's mound. When he sits up (p. 14) we see his "bald head, trickling blood" (p. 14) as Winnie had hit him with the beak-like end of her parasol. Then his hand appears with a handkerchief: he "spreads it on skull" (p. 14). The hand again appears "with boater, club ribbon" (p. 14) which he settles on his head before disappearing again. Winnie tells him to slip on his

"drawers" (p. 14) to protect himself from the sun.

We notice again Beckett's insistence on particular kinds of hats: the tramps wore bowlers, Hamm a toque, Nagg and Nell nightcaps, Clov a panama, and Winnie her small ornate brimless hat. Molloy is Willie's predecessor who wears a boater. Willie's boater is a holiday hat, rakish and theatrical and suggestive of the twenties. The club ribbon suggests some sort of festivity, a convention or a parade or a civic luncheon. It is totally incongruous with his general nudity and with the desperation of his wife's situation, but it is expressive of Willie. He is unconcerned, totally apart from Winnie who is dying alone. His hat, unlike Winnie's, does have brim. Thus it offers protection from the sun. Willie takes care of himself.

Willie is the only character in Beckett's theatre who seems more object than human being but who maintains mobility. Willie has no clear identity as either human being or object. We see nothing of him but the back or top of his head, a hairy arm, a folded newspaper. Our partial glimpses make Beckett's point: he is never really "there" for Winnie. What we see of him, an incomplete partner, is precisely what he is. He is disconnected objects -- a head, a newspaper, an arm with a dirty postcard at the end. Winnie sees only parts of him; he hides

behind a newspaper, grunts, and hands her things. They are another of Beckett's mismatched couples; Winnie's careful dressing up contrasts with Willie's hairy nudity and makes concrete the lack of harmony and love in their relationship. Willie's nudity is an exact expression of his self-concern. He is taking advantage of the glaring sun to get a sun-tan; Winnie reminds him to keep his skin protected with his vaseline although she shows no similar concern for herself. While Winnie, his wife, is dying Willie sleeps protected by her mound of earth, ultimately her grave, and basks in the sunlight while she burns in the "blaze of hellish light".

Willie makes his final appearance formally dressed. It is a "coup de théâtre" -- a sudden reappearance of a character, in a costume drastically different, which takes the audience by surprise. One feels with a jolt the sudden shaking-up of all elements in the situation, much like the ending of Pinter's The Dumb-Waiter when both Ben and Gus are frozen in a moment just prior to the explosion of violence. Willie is a new man, "dressed to kill" (p. 61), grotesquely crawling on all fours up the mound to Winnie, got up in attire suitable for a formal wedding or a funeral, "top hat, morning coat, striped trousers, etc., white gloves in hand" (p. 61). One has no ready explanation. Winnie sees him at first as a suitor, but she sees so much

through the prism of her inveterate sentimentality that we cannot accept her reading of the situation. "Reminds me of the day you came whining for my hand." (p. 61). Then she laughs at him: "What a get up, you do look a sight. (Giggles.)" (p. 61). She launches into a series of questions, as even Winnie begins to perceive by his expression (which we cannot see) that something is amiss. "Don't look at me like that! . . . Don't look at me like that!" (p. 63). They look at each other for the first time in the play and Beckett directs that there be a "Long Pause." The play ends with this ambiguous tableau. It is reminiscent of the end of Endgame, with Clov dressed "for the road" and frozen, looking at Hamm. The gesture is left incomplete: Clov does not leave; Willie does not either kiss or kill Winnie. As usual Beckett "ends" nothing; he simply stops the play. We cannot be sure if Willie is dressed for a wedding, a reunion with Winnie, or for a funeral, for Winnie's burial. Beckett seems deliberately to be playing with the slang expression "dressed to kill" in the written text of the play. The expression means, of course, to be dressed to make a big impression at a social gathering. But if we read it literally, we catch Beckett's deliberate ambiguity. The playwright is perhaps suggesting that the lack of clear distinction in the appropriate dress for a wedding or a funeral makes a point about the Winnie-Willie

marriage; it is a lifeless, mechanical repetition of familiar routines, a slow dying.

Property Objects

A bag, "shopping variety" (p. 7), provides Winnie, like Clov, with "things to do" through most of the play. It is a practical necessity that she have concrete objects to perform actions with and talk about. A woman like Winnie busies herself with everyday trivialities, with what Richard Coe calls "filling up the cracks in the damp walls and . . . recovering the settee -- since this alone is safe and comforting". There is no doubt that Winnie is aware of her reliance on the bag -- that the business she performs with objects distracts her from facing the "wilderness". Contemplating what she would do without Willie she muses: "gaze before me with compressed lips. (She does so.) All day long. (Gaze and lips again.) No. (Smile.) . . . There is of course the bag. . . . There will always be the bag. . . Even when you are gone, Willie." (p. 27).

Even if there is no present satisfactory relationship with Willie, Winnie can at least reminisce about the happier days in the past when he paid tribute to her "golden" hair. When "words fail", that is, when she can no longer talk about and thus recreate her past relationship

with Willie, she can do things with her objects until they (words) "come again". (Winnie never abandons hope of a happy ending.) "Brush and comb the hair. . . . Trim the nails if they are in need of trimming, these things tide one over." (p. 24). Like Pozzo, Clov, B, and Krapp, she staves off the silence and stillness by manipulating objects, her possessions. They are concrete representations of the past made present, like Krapp's tapes; thus they add dimension and resonance to her present existence as do her nostalgic recollections and fading "classics". When her possessions have all "run out", or when she can no longer do things with them (as in Act II), she will have increasing difficulty in denying present reality. Possessions are a familiar last resort for Beckettian heroes: Molloy foresees that when there is nothing left to do he will "draw up the list of my possessions"²⁰ and again speaks of "when the time comes for the inventory of my goods and chattels".²¹ Winnie, deprived of both the reality of Willie and her reminiscences of Willie, turns to things. Baudrillard, in Le Système des Objets, makes the point that a reliance on objects is always revelatory of a failure in personal relationships.

Et je peux le regarder [l'objet] sans qu'il me regarde. Voilà pourquoi s'investit dans les objets tout ce qui n'a pu l'être dans la relation humaine. Voilà pourquoi l'homme y

régresse si volontiers pour s'y "recueillir". Mais ne nous laissons pas tromper par ce recueillement et par toute une littérature attendrie sur les objets inanimés. Ce recueillement est une régression, cette passion est une fuite passionnée. Sans doute les objets jouent un rôle régulateur de la vie quotidienne, en eux s'abolissent bien des névroses, se recueillent bien des tensions et des énergies en deuil, c'est ce qui leur donne une "âme", c'est aussi ce qui en fait le décor d'une mythologie tenace, le décor idéal d'un équilibre névrotique.²²

Ironically, even Winnie's relationship with Willie, such as it is, is concerned with objects. Objects have three specific functions in defining the relationship: she communicates with him by the mediation of objects; like Estragon and Vladimir they do well-rehearsed "routines" together with objects; Winnie's grooming objects reveal her desire to be attractive to Willie. She makes "contact" with Willie by the use of objects. They provide verbal and physical cues for him to respond to her. Surprisingly she hits at him with her parasol. She tells him to put on his "drawers" (p. 14), and to "work in" his suntan "stuff" well. He finds in his newspaper obituaries and want-ads, tid-bits of information that are "cues" for Winnie to reminisce. Her reminiscences are always variations on one theme -- her lost youth and her relationships with men.

While Winnie's object-like condition is a constant visual reminder of the impossibility of actual sexual contact, most of their verbal exchanges (cued by objects)

have sexual connotations. Here we might note that in this play Beckett plays his usual tricks with lovers. He never allows them to love: they are shankless octogenarians in ash-cans, or clownish old men reliving the old days, or stuck forever in urns, playing and replaying their sordid little affairs (in Play). Here one is stuck in the earth and the other is indifferent. Yet, like the exchanges of Nagg and Nell, those of Winnie and Willie are full of sexual allusions. Winnie considers Willie's postcard "filth" but examines it carefully through her glass before handing it back. She asks him repeatedly for a definition of a "hog" since "hog's setae" appears on the handle of her toothbrush. His "castrated male swine" (p. 47) delights her. (It is of course not just what he says but that he speaks at all that delights her.) She examines an "emmet" with her glass and Willie supplies two words of explanation for the "little white ball" it has in its "arms" (p. 29): "Eggs. . . . Formication" (p. 30). When she takes up her musical box and it plays "I love you so" Willie joins in.

Winnie and Willie do "routines" with objects. Their perfect synchronization of action, like that of vaudeville comedians, is achieved by constant practise, mechanical repetition. Beckett works out very carefully the business of Winnie with her hat and glass and Willie with the newspaper:

Pause. WINNIE puts on hat hurriedly, looks for mirror. WILLIE turns page. WINNIE takes up mirror, inspects hat, lays down mirror, turns towards bag. Paper disappears. WINNIE rummages in bag, brings out magnifying-glass, turns back front, looks for toothbrush. Paper reappears, folded, and begins to fan WILLIE's face, hand invisible. WINNIE takes up tooth-brush and examines handle through glass.

WINNIE: Fully guaranteed. . . . (WILLIE stops fanning) . . . genuine pure . . . (Pause. WILLIE resumes fanning. WINNIE looks closer, reads.) Fully guaranteed . . . (WILLIE stops fanning). . . . (p. 17)

They function almost as a unit. Beckett emphasizes this point by giving stage directions for both beside the character-designation, WINNIE.

In a series of brief question-response lines we get a staccato ping-pong bounce of sound from one to the other. The effect depends on cues picked up quickly, perfect co-ordination between partners. Winnie and Willie perform this sort of verbal game skilfully:

Winnie: (turning front, same voice). And now?
 Willie: (Irritated). Yes.
 Winnie: (less loud). And now?
 Willie: (more irritated). Yes.
 Winnie: (still less loud). And now? (A little louder). And now?
 Willie: (violently). Yes!

They do a "number" on the emmet:

Willie: Eggs.
 Winnie: (arresting gesture). What? (Pause.)
 Willie: Eggs. (Pause. Gesture to lay down glasses.) Formication.
 Winnie: (arresting gesture). What? Pause.

Willie: Formication.
Pause. She lays down spectacles, gazes
before her. Finally.
Winnie: (murmur). God. (Pause. WILLIE laughs.
Quietly. After a moment she joins in.

(p. 30)

Beckett in the above passage again emphasizes the precise synchronization of the routine by timing the pauses very carefully and by making no division between what Willie says and what Winnie does. Their mechanical synchronization underlines their spiritual dislocation from one another. It is the smooth-running machinery of habit that glosses over the suffering of being. The couple perform their routines in tune with one another. But this apparent rapport is only another deception. Most of the time there is literally a mound between them and one of the partners (Willie) refuses to engage in any discourse whatever with the other (Winnie) who goes on chattering anyway.

Winnie's bag is a Pandora's box that includes, along with lipstick and toothbrush, a revolver. Since I have tried to make the point that in this play Beckett concerns himself specifically with the feminine condition, it is worth noting that most of the contents of Winnie's bag are female grooming aids -- that is, they are objects designed to make Winnie attractive to her man -- lipstick, hairbrush and comb, toothbrush and paste, hand-mirror, nailfile. Winnie performs her toilette rituals as though

she were at home in the suburbs. She does her teeth, makes up her face, worries about whether she has combed her hair yet, looks at herself with concern in the mirror. Her concern with being "lovely . . . to look at", her careful preparation for the day, contrasts with Willie's lack of concern. The extent of his preparation is to put on his drawers, smear himself with vaseline, and put on his boater -- all steps designed to protect himself from the sun.

Four of Winnie's objects, those that are not simply to "keep her nice", deserve special attention: her parasol, her magnifying glass, her "musical box", and the revolver. Two of these are at least potential weapons -- the parasol and the revolver. The magnifying glass she uses to examine Willie's "filth" postcard and the emmet. The musical box is the aural-visual concretion of her foolish sentimentality.

The parasol is first a weapon. Winnie strikes Willie with it twice (p. 12) and viciously and he soon appears with a bleeding head. Her action belies her words. She calls him, commenting that to sleep so soundly is a "wonderful gift" (p. 12). And then she strikes. This unexpected rage flashing forth from Winnie is one of the few disruptions of her apparent equanimity. There are others which will be noted further on. Willie's reaction is similarly odd. He immediately gives back her parasol when it slips from her grasp. She thanks him politely.

Although she shows concern for his sunburn she never mentions his obvious injury. The action and response are interesting and Beckett here makes a rather complex point, I think, about the couple's relationship. It is painful for both: Winnie is ignored and Willie is hit over the head. Yet both keep repeating the familiar pattern. The parasol is "immediately restored" by Willie. Winnie asks him not to "go off again. . . . I may need you." (p. 13). She does need him to listen to her, but he will become absorbed in his newspaper and ignore her.

Winnie "hoists" the parasol when she thinks it is the right time. "One keeps putting off -- putting up -- for fear of putting up -- too soon . . ." (P. 35). Winnie hoards the things there are to do so that she will not run out of things to do before the day runs out. The parasol has a seemingly practical purpose: it is to protect Winnie from the sun. It is the only one of her possessions that seems to relate specifically to the reality of her situation. But in fact it does not. It is a "collapsible" fold-up parasol (p. 7), the kind ladies carry in their bag in case of sudden rain. It is not the proper thing for protection from unrelenting sunlight. It does not help Winnie cope with the reality of her situation. There is a bit of business which reveals Winnie's comprehension of its uselessness. She complains of being tired holding

it: "I am weary, holding it up, and I cannot put it down. . . . Reason says, Put it down, Winnie, it is not helping you, put the thing down and get on with something else. . . . I cannot. . . . I cannot move." (p. 36). She asks Willie to order her to put it down. He as usual does not respond. "The parasol goes on fire." (p. 37). With perfect aplomb Winnie tosses the parasol behind her and watches it burn: "I presume this has occurred before." (p. 37).

In the parasol sequence several points are made about Winnie and, more generally, about human existence. She "cannot put it down". That parasol held aloft becomes a habit, although here the habit-forming process is speeded up. One recalls Beckett's Proust. A habit may be painful, even destructive, but we cannot with ease "put it down" and face the glare of reality. This is true even if the habit does not help us cope with that reality. Hamm found himself hesitant to end although it was time to do so: "it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to -- " (p. 3). What is familiar is not easily discarded. If Willie tells her to put it down she will obey; the habit of "honouring and obeying" Willie could cancel out the other, less-binding habit. When the parasol bursts into flame Winnie is not alarmed or even surprised.

She has lost all capacity to react with surprise to the "jokes of the Almighty". She is sure that there is "never any change" (p. 45), yet "something seems to have occurred" (p. 39). These convictions, contradictory to be sure, are basic to her optimism. If something has occurred (the parasol in flames) and nothing changes, then this "something" has happened before. Her response to life is totally passive: things happen, the earth even swallows one up, and one goes on performing one's customary rituals: "Nothing to be done."

Hugh Kenner points out the repetitive echoing quality of the lines in Happy Days. Verbally "Nothing changes" and everything has been said before. Kenner calls the play "Beckett's most thorough going exercise in Closed Field logistics". The play works, he says, "wholly with quotations and self-quotations".

Everything Winnie says she says again, every topic on which she touches she reverts to, at closely calculated intervals. Her first line is a cliché: "Another heavenly day." Her second is a quotation: "For Jesus Christ sake Amen." Her third is another quotation: "World Without end Amen." Her fourth is "Begin your day, Winnie." Beckett is as deliberate as Bach. Quotation -- "What are those wonderful lines?" -- is an explicit motif of the play.²³

Winnie uses her magnifying glass three times in the play. (Her regular spectacles she puts on and takes off repeatedly; she is too concerned about her appearance to wear them consistently.) She uses the glass to examine

the writing on the handle of her tooth-brush, to scrutinize Willie's "genuine pure filth" (p. 19) postcard, and to inspect the "emmet" (p. 29). Thus Winnie examines very carefully the things at hand. She has a curiosity about detail; she wants to know what kind of bristles are in the brush, what the "creature" in the background of Willie's postcard is doing, what the emmet is carrying "in its arms" (p. 29). Winnie's myopia signifies her blindness to whatever is not directly "under her nose". She does not examine the significance of her general situation or of her relationship with Willie. She deals with what is near-at-hand, trivial and psychologically manageable.

Winnie's "musical box", which plays "I love you so" from The Merry Widow, is a concrete representation of Winnie. Ironically it catches the essence of her life more subtly and more truly than do Krapp's mechanized and literal recordings of himself at various stages of his life. A romantic waltz duet, played in the thin lifeless tones of a music box, emphasizes her solitude, her lack of romantic partner, the cruelty of her situation, the harsh contrast between the dance of the "merry widow" and the enforced immobility of the dying wife. Perhaps we should see Willie as the soon-to-be merry widower: he bursts out in song after the music stops. The musical box with its sentimental and romantic song provides

mechanically just the sort of music that expresses Winnie and that she would choose to bring with her; it is another evidence of her sentimentality, her unfounded optimism, her inability to see herself independently, as anything other than part of a "duet". She sings its song at the play's end as Willie enigmatically crawls toward her; the audience hears it at this point as an echo, a reproduction of a mechanical reproduction. The tune seems to me to undercut the possibility of any "happy ending": to see Winnie as determinedly refusing to acknowledge the reality of her existence is the more valid interpretation of the play's ending. Her last words reveal her inveterate optimism in the face of impending disaster.

One of Winnie's bag objects, the revolver, strikes a wildly theatrical, operetta-like note, totally incongruous with the rest of her commonplace and innocuous possessions. It signifies the desperation just beneath Winnie's placidity, the threat of violence which manifests itself directly only once in the play -- when she hits Willie with her parasol. Through Act II the revolver remains an ironic, mocking reminder that now, imbedded up to her neck, even the freedom to choose to die is no longer hers. Winnie brings out the revolver inadvertently. Like a child she turns her back and "plunges hand in bag and brings out revolver." (p. 32). Her way of dealing with it is characteristic of Winnie

as she deliberately refuses to acknowledge it as a powerful lethal weapon. She has a familiar name for it -- "Brownie" -- (p. 33) and wonders why it didn't fall to the bottom of her bag, again showing her curiosity about details. It recalls an incident in the past involving Willie who threatened to put himself out of his "misery". She finds it "a comfort" like all her things (p. 33) and puts it on the ground beside her with the rest of her things.

When she begins "tidying" (p. 45), preparing for night, she takes up the revolver again and is about to put it in her bag but "arrests gesture . . . lays down revolver to her right." (p. 45). Thus the revolver remains the only one of Winnie's things that stays "outside" her bag to the end of the play. Beckett directs at the opening of Act II that it is "conspicuous to her right on mound." (p. 49). As Willie ascends the mound at the play's end his motivation, as we have noted, is not clear. Either he is approaching for Winnie's "kiss" or for her revolver, perhaps to put her out of her "misery".

Objects associated with both characters function dramatically together to elucidate the nature of their relationship. There are only three property objects associated with Willie: his handkerchief (bloodstained like Hamm's), his newspaper, and his pornographic postcard. Ironically all three are expressive of his relationship

with Winnie but quite differently from the way objects of Winnie's are expressive of that relationship. Winnie's things "keep her nice" for Willie. They express her optimism, her silly reliance on, somehow, a "happy ending" to their relationship. Willie's things are clearly expressive of the discord between them. Willie places the handkerchief over the "trickling blood" (p. 14) on the cut on his head, caused by Winnie's parasol. His bloody head is our first partial view of Willie. He places his boater over the handkerchief, undaunted by Winnie's attack, and hands her back her parasol. Apparently Winnie's outbursts are an accepted and expected part of the relationship; thus he deals with his wound matter-of-factly. Willie's personal habits are disgusting to fastidious Winnie. He takes the handkerchief off his head and we hear him blow his nose "loud and long" (p. 20). "Hand reappears with handkerchief, spreads it on skull, disappears." Later she reprimands him for not using it: "Oh really! . . . Have you no handkerchief darling? . . . Have you no delicacy?" (p. 42). The questions are indications of the mechanical nature of their exchanges. Willie has a handkerchief and Winnie knows it. Her first question is that of a mother scolding a naughty child. The second question is purely rhetorical: Willie of course has "no delicacy".

Willie's newspaper, from which he reads bits from the want-ads and obituaries, and his postcard, are his version of literature -- more genuinely diverting, perhaps, than Winnie's stack of half-remembered "classics". From his bare factual announcements Winnie spins nostalgic fantasy: the obituary notice elicits from her "Charlie Hunter! . . . Oh the happy memories!" (pp. 15-16); the want-ad for "smart youth" (p. 16) causes her to close her eyes in remembrance: "My first ball! . . . My first kiss!" (p. 16). Willie and Winnie represent two opposing attitudes towards existence, one stereotyped as male and the other as female: Willie deals with facts, the world of men as it is; Winnie deals in fantasy -- young love and lovers, a world gone by when she was for men "lovely . . . to look at". Willie's absorption in the newspaper, of course, gives him a tangible excuse for ignoring Winnie and a physical barrier behind which to hide from her babbling.

Willie's postcard, which he savours, turning every which way, provides him with vicarious sexual titillation. He is obviously no longer interested in his wife, who is half-buried and inaccessible sexually. "Shower"'s question, "Why doesn't he dig her out?" is easily answered. He doesn't want to; there's no advantage for him in having a complete Winnie. His postcard is a portable surrogate for stag movies and other male entertainments. He lets

Winnie look at it, which she does, showing a predictable reaction: "Make any nice-minded person want to vomit!" (p. 19). The objects they value make a dramatic statement about the couple and their relationship. The contrast between Winnie's musical-box and Willie's postcard seems to me a significant one. Both carry with them objectifications not only of themselves, but of their view of the man-woman relationship. Winnie's is romantic, imaginative, the stuff whereof light operas are made; Willie's is realistic, biological, the stuff of which pornographic pictures are made.

Character-Object

"When I try and think riding I lose my balance and fall."²⁴ Winnie is clearly an example of what I have designated "character-objects" in the theatre of Beckett. She is incomplete as a human being -- we see only half a woman and then only the head of a woman -- and occupies a fixed space on the stage. She is immobile, and, unlike Hamm, cannot even be moved around. (It is perhaps worth noting, however, that the familiar Beckettian master-slave relationship is here ironically reversed. Willie, still mobile although reduced to crawling, is in control of Winnie. Hamm would have ordered Clov to dig him out as he orders him to move him about the stage.)

Winnie's mind is set free to think. But Winnie's mind, freed of the "curse" of mobility, focuses on her obsessions -- Willie and the bag -- and on her memories -- her sketchy "classics", and her youth as a "lovable", that is, "lovely . . . to look at" woman. Winnie's mind, although freed to create or to explore the realm of the self, does both only sporadically. Winnie shows momentary fear that the mind turned in on itself might degenerate into madness; she reassures herself with diminishing conviction: "If the mind were to go. (Pause.) It won't of course. (Pause.) Not quite. (Pause.) Not mine. (Smile.) Not now." (p. 52). She wonders about the "sounds" in her head: "I used to think they were in my head. (Smile.) But no. (Smile broader.) No no. . . . I have not lost my reason. (Pause.) Not yet. (Pause.) Not all. (Pause.) Some remains." (pp. 53-54). Winnie's defense against madness is to focus her mind on the familiar -- the immediate world outside the self.

Winnie's mind is as earthbound in a metaphorical sense as her body is so in a literal sense. Woman focuses on man and possessions and a little cultural veneer, a sort of make-up for the mind and woman confined-to-the-earth changes her concerns very little. In Act II when Winnie is further confined, with only her head protruding from the earth, she remains concerned with Willie, the bag,

and her attractiveness. She still tries to look at herself. "The face. (Pause.) The nose. (She squints down.) I can see it . . . (squinting down) . . . the tip, . . . the nostrils . . . that curve you so admired . . ." (p. 52). She sticks out the tongue "you so admired" and puffs out her cheeks in an effort to check their "damask".

Finally Winnie resorts to her "story" which she knows she can tell "when all else fails." (p. 54). All of Beckett's character-objects are story-tellers; their story is always an objectification of their own life. Hamm dramatized himself in his story; Mouth told the story of "Not I"; Winnie tells the story of Mildred and her "dolly" and retells her reminiscence about Mr. Shower and his interest in Winnie. Significantly her story is about an object, a "waxen dolly" (p. 55) which is almost a person. The "dolly" is not a baby-doll but a completely dressed woman: she wears "a frilly frock", "gloves", and "a little white straw hat" (p. 55). Like Winnie she wears a "pearly necklet" (p. 55) and has "China blue eyes that open and shut." Winnie takes care to stipulate that she wears "undies, complete set" (p. 55), which is one of the matters that so intrigues Mr. Shower about Winnie: "Has she anything on underneath?" (p. 58). (Mr. Shower is a version of lover before he reaches the indifference of a Willie. He walks "hand in hand" [p. 58] with the woman,

finds Winnie still mildly attractive, and has a curiosity about her situation that Willie never shows.)

Mildred and Dolly are both aspects of Winnie. Mildred undresses Dolly, "Scolding her . . . the while." (p. 55). Winnie talks to herself, "scolds" herself throughout Happy Days: "How often I have said, Ignore it, Winnie, ignore the bell. . . . Open and close the eyes, Winnie. . . ." (p. 54). Mildred screams when a mouse runs up her thigh. Shower is curious about the "life" in Winnie's legs. Mildred screams; Winnie's scream is Mildred's and not-Mildred's, Winnie's, just as "Not-I"'s scream was Mouth's scream. Words objectify; as Molloy says, "Saying is inventing."²⁵ The scream is a direct expression of suffering without the mediation of words. Winnie's fear breaks through the artefact of the story. The rescue team of papa, mama, and Bibby arrives too late for Mildred; of course it is too late for Winnie and no rescue team will ever arrive.

Winnie, like Beckett's other character-objects, is entrapped not only in a fixed space but within a fixed time. The time is allotted by a power outside man. For Hamm it was the time for the running of the play, the time between the opening and his "last soliloquy"; for Mouth it was as long as the voice kept on; for Winnie it is the time it takes the earth to swallow her. As time runs out

on Winnie and the earth creeps up to suffocate her, time seems to expand, to spin out endlessly. Kenner has said that the effect of the play is like the endless prolongation of a catastrophic moment: "the play is not really the lunatic fantasy it seems, but perhaps an H-bomb explosion rendered in extreme slow motion, the blazing instant stretched into an evening's theatre time."²⁶

Winnie's major concern is having enough to do or say; she is terrified of not having enough to do to fill the time between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep. Each routine has its scheduled time and if it is played ahead of schedule some unfilled time will be left at the end of the day: "so little to do, and the fear so great, certain days, of finding oneself . . . left, with hours still to run, . . . and nothing more to say, nothing more to do." (p. 35).

As in Endgame, we perceive through the character-object both the subjective perception of the endlessness of time and the obvious objective fact that "something has occurred": Winnie's toothpaste and medicine have run out; she is buried more deeply in her mound. The expansion of time is an effect achieved by verbal repetition and by Beckett's peculiar dramatic technique. As Kenner has pointed out, the play is built verbally on quotation and self-quotation. What does not happen in Beckett's theatre,

like his silences, is an important element: there is, for an entire act, no change in Winnie's situation or in the relationship between her and Willie. There is very little stage movement, no variation in the set or lighting, and Winnie is never displaced from the exact centre of the set. There is no dialogue. Winnie's monologue goes on relentlessly; we wait for a response from Willie that never comes. The unfulfilled expectation that something will happen, suspended through an entire two-act play slows time down for the audience as for Winnie. Although its running-time is less than two hours in the theatre, it seems a much longer play.

Despite her remarkable capacity for distracting herself from reality, Winnie has flashes of suffering awareness when the truth will no longer be denied. Her equanimity cracks. It is this faltering that completes Winnie as another of Beckett's sad clowns. Her foolishness is always in evidence; we get only glimpses of her sadness and of her courage in enduring. She shows momentary insight into both her own dying condition and into her relationship with Willie. She recognizes that she is helplessly caught, can do nothing: "I cannot. (Pause.) I cannot move. (Pause.) No, something must happen in the world . . . if I am to move again." (p. 36) "one can do nothing. . . . That is what I find so wonderful . . . (voice breaks,

head down)" (p. 39). She sees the earth as it is, the extinguisher of her life. She bursts out "With sudden violence" an admission of her pain: "My neck is hurting me!" (p. 60). Her faith falters: "great mercies -- . . . brokenly) -- prayers perhaps not for naught -- " (p. 12) and by Act II she prays no more.

But it is her relationship with Willie, the centre of her life, that causes her the most pain when she must see it as it is. Early in the play she strikes out at Willie with her parasol. She reminds us of Clov hitting Hamm with the toy dog. The action itself is childish, ineffectual; it is a laughably small act of rage against the tyrant who controls one's life. But it is all she can do. She cannot kill him with "Brownie" because she needs him for someone to talk to even if he does not listen. Speaking of her once-lovely hair she says: "Golden you called it, that day . . . -- to your golden . . . (voice breaks)." (p. 24). She understands that Willie now does not even want to look at her; he wants to "be left in peace" (p. 29). "One does not appear to be asking a great deal . . . (voice breaks, falls to a murmur) --" (p. 29). She recalls being once "lovely"; her voice falters and she asks "Forgive me, Willie, sorrow keeps breaking in." (p. 34). At the end of the play she summarizes neatly, and for the first time accurately, her relation-

ship with Willie: "Oh I know you were never one to talk, I worship you Winnie be mine and then nothing from that day forth only titbits from Reynolds' News." (p. 62).

In Happy Days Beckett's character-object, Winnie, is seen in a setting of unmitigated horror: she is half-buried in earth and subjected to the relentless glare of the sun. She is the Beckettian object that is aware of her suffering, speaks and is dying.

Un homme? Ce déchet dans une poubelle, cette
chenille dans la boue, ce tas de hardes dans
un fossé! Non, plus un homme: une chose.
Mais cette chose parle!
Ce qu'elle dit n'a pas de sens: un mélange
délirant de rires et de rages.
Mais elle parle.²⁷

Her husband, Willie, we perceive as a series of objects, of disconnected movements, and of fragmented monosyllabic bits of speech. There is a sustained contradiction between what we perceive -- Winnie's situation -- and what she sees -- another "happy day". If it is the object concrete before us which makes the primary statement, and it seems to me that this is so, then all that Winnie says and does in the play is but futile whistling in the dark, self-deluding and thus comforting, but essentially silly. Seen the other way, what is human prevails to the last, asserting with courage the value of love, hope, and faith despite all practical contingencies.

The object makes once again the unforgettable statement. It is the image of the head chirping in the earth that one remembers, not what Winnie says. Her lines are eminently forgettable; we "lose" them as Winnie "loses" her "classics". What progresses, as usual in Beckett's theatre, is disintegration. Winnie is progressively more deeply imbedded in the earth. Her grave is swallowing her before our eyes; she is returning to dust no matter what she says or does, and she progressively says and does less and less. It is a bleak play whose concrete images will not allow us to fasten sentimentally on Winnie's stiff-upper-lip kind of optimism. It is a baseless optimism and Beckett uncompromisingly makes us face that fact by the sheer force of the visual impact of his stage objects, most notably Winnie herself.

NOTES

¹Peter Brook after the first performance of Happy Days, quoted by Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 141.

²Harold Hobson, quoted by Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 142.

³John Simon, Hudson Review (Winter, 1961-62), quoted by Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 141.

⁴Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 141.

⁵The title in both English and French is a richly ironic one. The English suggests the song title, "Happy Days are Here Again", when, in fact, Winnie's Happy Days are gone forever. The French title may be an allusion to Verlaine's "Colloque sentimental": "Ah! les beaux jours de bonheur indicible / Où nous joignons nos bouches! . . ." The poem is a dialogue between "deux spectres" (l. 6) in which one enthusiastically recalls "notre extase ancienne" (l. 7) and the other makes terse, non-committal replies. The situation is a ghostly counterpart of that of Winnie and Willie.

⁶Robert Abriaché, Les Etudes (janvier, 1964), in Extraits de Presse, vol. I, p. 88.

⁷Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 142.

⁸Madeleine Renaud, "Beckett le Magnifique", Les Nouvelles Littéraires (le 24 février, 1966), in Extraits de Presse, vol. I, p. 94.

⁹Olivier de Magny, "Samuel Beckett et la Farce Métaphysique", in Cahiers Renaud Barrault: Samuel Beckett, XLIV (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 67.

¹⁰Alan Simpson, Beckett and Behan and a Theatre in Dublin (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 131.

¹¹Waintrop, p. 41.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Robert Kanfers, "La Reine Grise", L'Express (le 7 novembre, 1963), cited by Waintrop, p. 47.

¹⁴Vivian Mercier, "Beckett's Anglo-Irish Stage Dialects", James Joyce Quarterly (Summer, 1971), p. 313.

¹⁵Janvier, Beckett Par Lui-Même, p. 29.

¹⁶Enoch Brater, "Noah, Not I, and Beckett's 'Incomprehensibly Sublime'", Comparative Drama, VIII (Fall, 1974), p. 261.

¹⁷William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, V, iii, 94-96.

¹⁸Nathan Scott, Beckett, p. 122.

¹⁹Richard Coe, Ionesco: A Study of His Plays (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 131.

²⁰Samuel Beckett, "Molloy", in his Three Novels, p. 45.

²¹Ibid., p. 81.

²²Baudrillard, Le Système, p. 108.

²³Hugh Kenner, Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 98. [All subsequent references to this work are to this edition.]

²⁴Samuel Beckett, "Molloy", in his Three Novels, p. 26.

²⁵Ibid., p. 32.

²⁶Hugh Kenner, The Stoic Comedians, p. 100.

²⁷Jean Onimus, Beckett, p. 13.

CHAPTER VII

PLAY AND COME AND GO

Play

The most trivial experience . . . is encrusted with elements that logically are not related to it and have consequently been rejected by intelligence: it is imprisoned in a vase filled with a certain perfume . . . and raised to a certain temperature. These vases are suspended along the height of our years, and, not being accessible to our intelligent memory, are in a sense immune, the purity of their climatic content is guaranteed by forgetfulness, each one is kept at its distance, at its date. So that when the imprisoned microcosm is besieged . . . by accident, we are flooded by a new air and a new perfume (new precisely because already experienced), and we breathe the true air of Paradise, of the only Paradise that is not the dream of a madman, the Paradise that has been lost. (Proust, p. 73)

Play was written in English in 1963 and translated into French as Comédie by the author and into German by Elmar Tophoven. Its first production was in Germany at the Ulmer Theatre, Ulm-Donau, Germany, on 14 June, 1963, under the direction of Deryk Mendel, who performed the two mimes Act Without Words (I and II) on the same occasion.

Alan Schneider was director of the first English production at the Cherry Lane Theatre, New York, on 4 January, 1964. London's National Theatre produced the play directed by George Devine on 7 April, 1964. Jean-Marie Serreau directed the French version at the Pavillon de

Marsan, Paris, on 11 June, 1964. A filmed version of Comédie was made in 1965 with the assistance of Beckett himself.

The English version of Play was generally unsympathetically reviewed. The film version apparently was hooted at with derision at the Venice Festival in 1966. Literary critics have been more perceptive of the play's odd beauty:

. . . the most perfect example of Beckett's dramatic art, the most self-contained, the most exacting and self-exacting. What he said of Joyce's Work in Progress in 1929 he has at last fully brought about in the theatre (hence, of course, Play's title): it "is not about something; it is that something itself".¹

Harold Hobson, who had been among the first to see the genius of Godot, commented on the da capo repetition: "all in the story that had seemed vague becomes sharp and clear. The incidents stand out: only the emotions -- the sadness, the compassion, and the pain -- are still beyond computation".²

The French press seems to have been favourably impressed with Comédie: Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, writing in Le Monde, distinguished it from mere shock theatre: "une curiosité de laboratoire, mais comme on en voit peu, et dont la rigueur fait pâlir les petits amateurs de provocations gratuites".³ Jean-Louis Bory saw it as "une bouffonnerie saisie par un gel tragique".⁴ R. Kanter

did not see the play's characters as "posthumans" and observed that the hope for improvement, or an end to suffering, which is expressed by so many of Beckett's characters, was now a hope for change toward "le néant": "Le Beckettland de nos trois jarres est une région crépusculaire de la vie et de la conscience, un purgatoire où est laissée l'espérance d'un changement, mais d'un changement vers le néant."⁵

When the curtain goes up we see three large funeral urns on stage. Each has a head protruding from it. The heads seem fixed in the urns, like stoppers. They are undifferentiated, mask-like, but it soon becomes apparent that the head in the middle is that of a man; the other two are women. All three are dimly lit and stare straight ahead intoning their lines in expressionless voices that rarely show any variation of pitch or tone.

They begin to speak, all together, a cacophonous chorus of sound, of which we hear only disconnected words. There is a blackout, then bright spot-lights up on all three. They begin to speak again; quickly there is another blackout. After these two abortive beginnings, a single spot moves from one character to the next, eliciting their voices in turn. It soon becomes obvious that what we are hearing is an old and tired story: they give us three different versions of the triangular love-story. The man is caught between wife and mistress; he is pursued by a

detective in the employ of the wife; the wife has an angry scene of confrontation with the mistress; the man goes back to his wife, promising fidelity. The story begins again: the man goes back to the mistress, deserts the wife. He then reverts to habit and deserts the mistress, who, no doubt, has become as boring as the wife.

When the story of the eternal triangle is pieced together, unconventionally and elliptically to be sure, the three begin to respond to the light in a reflective rather than a narrative way. They attempt to understand the nature of their present existence in this strange, limbo-like state. The man had looked forward to "this change"; there would be an end at last. He remains optimistic that peace will come. The mistress had hoped for something "more restful" and feels herself tipping over into madness. The wife finds her existence intolerable, wonders whether telling the truth would put out the light at last: "it must be something I have to say."

All three make references to their intertwined relationship but are oblivious to the fact that they are still together; they each think of the other two as living on, maintaining a dialogue with each other. The man, whose imaginings are wildly improbable, envisages the two ladies sharing tea and memories. The wife reflects that "she [the mistress] lived like a pig" and wonders where "they"

(her husband and the other woman) have gone to live. The mistress imagines husband and wife talking of "That poor creature who tried to seduce you." (p. 56). The three think their own position unique although we see them locked in parallel jars.

When the play ends it begins again and is played over again exactly as before. By this time the audience has acquired a context and everything comes into clearer focus. Even the opening babble becomes faintly intelligible. The second ending is followed by a partial replay of the opening. Blackout finally intervenes to cut off the man's last line.

In this play there is a fusing of object categories: set and costume are indistinguishable. The urns function as set and as costume. They are also undifferentiated from their human contents: the heads seem "stoppers" in the urns, part of them; thus heads and urns together form character-objects. There is, therefore, a remarkable cohesion and economy in this production. There is no distance between character and object: they have become one. Similarly there is no distance between narrator and protagonist. The three are story-tellers, like all Beckett's character-objects, but do not tell stories about other people, or allegedly other people, like Mouth. They do not dramatize or reminisce about a situation from a past

life much different from their present existence, like Hamm, Nagg, or Winnie. The Unnamable, compelled to speak, spoke of others, invented Mahood and Worm. "I invented him, him and so many others, and the places where they passed, the places where they stayed, in order to speak, since I had to speak, without speaking of me, I couldn't speak of me. . . ." ⁶ These characters "speak of me".

Their past life and their present existence are essentially the same. The self changes in time and yet endlessly repeats itself with slight variations. "To have been always what I am -- and so changed from what I was." (Happy Days, p. 51). They lived together, yet separately, each enclosed within the self, as they do now. They could not break their ties and move apart and yet they could never be together, a harmonious threesome as imagined by the man. They felt and expressed mutual suspicion, hatred, and lust, as they do now. They told separate stories and distrusted everyone else's; now they can no longer even hear any but their own.

The cohesion between character and object, the lack of change in their existence "before" and "after" becoming part of a funeral urn, and their uniformity of aspect, emphasize the point that the "story" they tell is an old familiar one. Its versions are endless; in the French novel it extends from La Princesse de Clèves through to

Le Diable au Corps, and it is the stock material of Boulevard theatre. Nothing essential changes: "this fragmentary recital of middle-class adultery, told in the past tense in passionless voices . . . is a tissue of the second-hand, the pre-digested and the pre-packaged. In a word it is theatrical. An audience of regular theatre-goers . . . cannot help but respond automatically to this talk of butlers, lawn-mowers, 'bloodhounds', Rivas, morning rooms, vanity bags, as to comfortable and homely furniture".⁷ The characters have no individualized names: they are Man, Wife and the Other Woman, designated in the printed text and in the programme as M, W1, and W2. Beckett uses the technique of da capa repetition to underline the unchanging and cyclical quality of their existence. Robinson, in The Long Sonata of the Dead, discusses this aspect of time in Play:

. . . the eternal now at which they have arrived
is the lonely anguish of memory without end:
. . . The structure of the play demonstrates
the movement of finite time within infinity as
it was explained in the first pages of The Un-
namable: vast tracts of time eternally repeated,
each cycle beginning and ending at the same words
which mark the furthest progress possible along
the never-to-be-ended series.⁸

Light functions importantly as an object in this play. Indeed it becomes almost an object-character: Beckett stipulates that it be "expressive of a unique inquisitor" (p. 62) and provides explicit and detailed directions for

its use. It has a definite size and shape -- a circle of light fixed at a certain magnitude -- and thus can be considered an object, but it exercises some attributes of personality. Like the prod in Act Without Words II and the bell in Happy Days it elicits a response from the characters, plays on them, forcing them to act or to speak. It is moved about the stage by a power we cannot see, a technician, and in this way is analogous to the objects dangled before the dancer of Act Without Words I by an unseen power backstage, eliciting responses from the characters entrapped on the stage. Rosette Lamont makes the point that objects take on life in the theatre of Beckett just as characters become objects. (This is the point Winnie makes: "things have life.") "Le langage des choses durera plus longtemps que celui de l'homme. Dans l'univers de Beckett les objets prennent vie et les êtres s'immobilisent, et se changent parfois en objets."⁹

The Urns as Set Objects

The three characters are placed in urns which remind us of the Unnamable's Mahood, stuck in his jar outside a restaurant, his head lit up with lanterns. Beckett directs that they are almost indistinguishable from their urns, part of the object which is their set and costume. Oddly, then, character, set, and costume are

one: there is a fusion of character and object without parallel in the theatre. Similarly the Unnamable-Mahood feels he is a part of his jar: "And sometimes I don't confuse myself with my jar and sometimes do."¹⁰

Play exploits theatrical conventions in such a highly individual way that one must analyse carefully to uncover the convention. As George Devine, Play's London director, noted, "The story and dialogue are of a deliberately banal order."¹¹ Beckett uses a multiple set, a conventional technique, in an unconventional way, just as he uses the most hackneyed material of Boulevard drama, the adulterous intrigue, in an unconventional way. Since there are three urns on stage, containing three characters who are totally unaware of the presence of the others, we can say that in effect there are three sets, three acting areas on stage. It is not particularly innovative now to use three different sets: Death of a Salesman (1949), for example, required two levels of the house and the apron served variously as restaurant, garden, office. Light goes up on one area when the scene is to be acted there. Beckett's Play has three separate acting areas which are lit up at times simultaneously, thus requiring simultaneous speech from the three characters. For the most part, however, light focuses on one area at a time, in accordance with the convention, and speech comes from

that one urn.

The technique of lighting up one part of a multiple set at a time is, then, a conventional theatrical technique. In the hands of Beckett it seems strange and idiosyncratic only because of the speed of change. He switches with increasing speed from one set to another as the play progresses; we hear only a line or a word from one and then a line from another, the lines frequently interacting as ironic counterpoint to one another:

W2: They might even feel sorry for me, if they could see me. But never so sorry as I for them.

Spot from W2 to W1.

W1: I can't.

Spot from W1 to W2.

W2: Kissing their sour kisses.

Spot from W2 to M.

M: I pity them in any case, yes, compare my lot with theirs, however blessed, and --

Spot from M to W1.

W1: I can't. The mind won't have it. It would have to go. Yes.

Spot from W1 to M.

M: Pity them.

Spot from M to W2.

W2: What do you do when you go out? Sift?

Spot from W2 to M.

M: Am I hiding something? Have I lost --

Spot from M to Wl.

Wl: She had means, I fancy, though she lived like a pig. (pp. 56-57)

The technique of multiple set is normally used to permit flexibility in time as well as space. Light goes up on the stage apron in Salesman and we are in a Boston hotel-room years prior to the main action of the play. Or light goes up on the boys' bedroom to indicate what is going on at the same time as Willy mumbles to himself in another area of the house. Strindberg in A Dream Play and those influenced by Expressionist techniques, like Tennessee Williams in Camino Real, uses multiple sets to give a kaleidoscopic vision of the mind's complexities. Beckett's multiple set in Play functions in quite an opposite way; it emphasizes the stasis, lack of flexibility in space, time, and consciousness. All three characters are locked in identical urns; even their voices and faces are nearly identical. There is no variety in space, no possibility of movement or change. They all speak in exactly the same sequence: first they narrate their story from the past and then all reflect on the present. Past, like present, involves the three locked in mutual deception, selfishness, and repetitive and unimaginative patterns of speech and behaviour.

The set always operates metaphorically in Beckett's theatre. The urn functions as a symbol of death, since these are distinctly funereal urns. It seems to me that they are also the vases of Beckett's Proust; involuntary memory is locked within them; the "Paradise Lost" is stoppered up by the heads, by "our intelligent memory". What we get from the voices in the opening segment of Play is voluntary, mechanical and rationally structured memory, not the essence of the experience, its "perfume", but the trivial experience recalled rationally, consciously, in all its trivial detail.

Funeral urns function to enclose the ashes of the dead. (Murphy had stipulated specific steps to be taken with his ashes.) The faces of Beckett's Play, are "to seem almost part of urns" (p. 45), which are "grey" (p. 45). The horrible implication is that the characters exist in a living death -- beyond living, yet not absorbed in the silence and darkness of "le néant". The ashes have consciousness. Their state has been variously called "limbo" and "hell" but no such definite assignation seems to me valid. They are caught in an unnamable region beyond life. "Entre le mourir et la mort, où est la limite? Toute l'oeuvre de Samuel Beckett est dans cette interrogation."¹² Gérard Durozoi explains this Beckettian concept of "La mort inimaginable":

La mort, l'effacement de soi, serait une délivrance: elle réaliserait le retour à la non-conscience qui caractérisait l'avant-naître. Elle n'est jamais atteinte, et les mots eux-mêmes ne parviennent jamais à la dire. Si elle intervient, il n'y aura plus de mots possibles. . . .13

If we see their existence as in a hell, it is a highly particularized hell of their own making. It is an ironic inversion of Sartre's famous "Hell is other people" in Huis Clos. In Play, Hell is one's self. Within the prison of the self the three are forced to remember and to reflect by the light which insists on an account of themselves and allows no respite. They must repeat forever the trivial formulae of their past and question without ever being answered the present horror of their situation.

If we see the urns as objectifications of Beckett's "vases" filled with the "imprisoned microcosm" of past experience and the perfume of a Paradise Lost, then these three have blocked forever their own access to that Proustian Paradise. It is attainable, Beckett tells us, only by "accident"; it cannot be "besieged" by the will or the rational intellect. It cannot be preserved on tape, by mechanical memory, or in the conscious mind. It can be found only when one is not looking. The whole structure of Play precludes the possibility of the three recovering any of that "temps perdu". Beckett encloses their bodies in funeral urns. Only their rational mind is

still alive, still functioning.

The three reconstruct obsessively their "trivial incident", telling it from their own selfish points of view. Even the objective "true story" of the incident is never told; all that we hear is partial, the speaker concerned about saying the right words, the words that will make an ending, that will put out the light. Again, their position is that of the Unnamable who agonizes: "Then I resurrect and begin again. That's what I'll have got for all my pains. Unless this time it's the real silence at last. Perhaps I've said the things that had to be said, that gives me the right to be done with speech, done with listening, done with hearing . . .".¹⁴

Play has often been likened to a musical composition, particularly a fugue. Its structure is polyphonic; three voices play variations on a common theme. Each tells his/her version in a carefully-structured way so as to present only their side of the triangle. According to W1 she "had him dogged for months by a first-rate man" (p. 47). M. recalls that "She put a bloodhound on me." (p. 48). W2 comments on the appearance of W1: "Her photographs were kind to her." (p. 46). W1 contemptuously dismisses W2 as "Just a common tart. What he could have found in her when he had me --" (p. 50). The man reveals a contempt for them both: "God what vermin women" (p. 51), yet a capacity for

telling the same lies to both of them. "I took her [W1] in my arms and swore I could not live without her. I meant it, what is more." (p. 48). Returning to W2 to convince her falsely of no "revival of intimacy" with W1 he "took her [W2] in my arms and said I could not go on living without her" (p. 51).

M lies; W2 lies -- "What are you talking about? I said, stitching away." (p. 47). W1, although she told W2 "I bear you no ill-feeling" (p. 49) admits she "went to have a gloat" (p. 50). None of them in life told the truth, and now beyond life the voices admit their lies, W1 wondering if the truth will set her free: "Is it that I do not tell the truth, is that it, that some day somehow I may tell the truth at last and then no more light at last, for the truth?" (p. 54). But since nothing has changed, the present being a perpetuation of the past, the triangle indeed proving eternal, then can we assume that what we are told bears any resemblance to the truth?

Are liars converted to truth-tellers by immobilisation in an urn, by being "bottled" as Hamm would say? There is no such change in all of Beckett's work; there is evidence everywhere of "cette inertie immortelle".¹⁵ His prototype hero, Belacqua, the hero of More Pricks than Kicks, "the seed of the melancholy brood that fill his pages,"¹⁶ gets his name from Canto IV of Dante's Purgatorio. He was

a lute-maker in Florence, notorious for being bone-lazy and apathetic. The poet discovers him lounging in the shade and he explains that having failed to repent in time before his death, the heavens must wheel around him for the whole length of his life before Peter will admit him. After living one is condemned to repeat the patterns of one's life endlessly. According to Nathan Scott, Belacqua became for Beckett a very type and example of what Proust alerted him to recognize as the general situation of humankind -- of waiting, for the time "when the Gates shall be opened and the Secret unveiled".¹⁷

The Urns as Costume Objects

The three characters in their urns are the modern theatre's most unforgettable visual metaphor for man dressed in his mortality. Their "costumes" are deliberately undifferentiated. Immediately after birth babies in their plastic hospital containers in our society all look nearly identical; they are quickly assigned identification bracelets, blue or pink blankets, ludicrous hair ribbons, and name tags stuck onto their containers to give them an individual identity. Containers for dead bodies are normally similarly individualized -- a bronze name-plate, a particular kind of wood, and a metal decoration. Beckett allows us no such comforting illusions of self-importance.

Life and death are both levellers. The three of Play are dressed identically and have no names. He presents them with an impartial eye: there is little to choose between them. Only minor deviations give them any individuality, as together they are the embodiment of "grey mediocrity". M seems to share Krapp's dyspepsia: he hiccoughs. W1 is more coarse-tongued, less hypocritical than the other two. (Righteousness is on her side.) W2 becomes "unhinged" and we hear from her "Peal of wild laughter." (p. 60).

Through identical death-garb Beckett thus presents his familiar vision of our common lot in a godless world: we live, telling our story, recalling life past and imagining the life to come. In the life to come we recall life past and go on imagining the life to come. The object is pursued, but by the time it is attained the subject has changed and no longer finds it desirable. (Proust) There is little else for the characters of Play except for futile questions and futile commands, both directed at the power from the outside represented by the light, and some silly imaginings about the other two.

The man reveals he looked forward to "this change" and "thanked God" (p. 52). Now, disillusioned with his present condition, the "life to come" having come, he imagines a more peaceful life to come: "It will come.

Must come. There is no future in this." (p. 53). He questions the light, "When will all this have been . . . just play?" (p. 54). He imagines the ladies "over a cup of that green tea they both so loved . . ." (p. 55) and pities them.

W1 reveals that "silence and darkness were all I craved" (p. 59). But the reality was "worse". She was "dying for dark -- and the darker the worse. Strange." (p. 60). Now she orders the light "Get off me" (p. 60) and wonders what she must say or do to stop it. "Is it something I should do with my face . . ." (p. 55). She imagines "she" (W2) has taken "him" (M) "away to live . . . somewhere in the sun" (p. 58). Ironically, the "sun" they all share is the pitiless interrogator-light.

W2 finds she is "disappointed" (p. 52) with the reality of the life to come: "I had anticipated something better." She looks forward hopefully to a better "life to come". "Some day you will tire of me and go out . . . for good." (p. 53). She, too, orders the light to leave her in peace: "Go away and start poking and pecking at someone else." (p. 52). She imagines W1 discussing "that poor creature" (W2) with M (p. 56). Yet, significantly, she is the only one of the three to imagine that the life to come might be worse: "Things may disimprove, there is that danger" (p. 54) and who feels fully the solitude that they

are all in: "Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?" (p. 55). Lacking Winnie's relentless optimism, her mind begins to "unhinge".

The Light as Object

"A play is an inquisition at which we connive."¹⁸ The single spotlight as used in Play may be considered an object. It has a definite size and shape, a fixed circle of light which is moved about the stage by some unseen human hand. It is not, I think, as some have argued, a "character" in the play. It is a representation on stage of what Molloy calls a "hypothetical imperative", a force from some unseen authority which demands response from the characters, like the goad in Act Without Words II and the objects dropped from the flies in Act Without Words I.

Beckett gives very explicit directions concerning the spotlight in a note following the text of the play:

The source of light is single and must not be situated outside ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims.

The optimum position for the spot is at the centre of the footlights, the faces being thus lit at close quarters and from below.

When exceptionally three spots are required to light the three faces simultaneously, they would be as a single spot branching into three.

Apart from these moments a single mobile spot should be used, swivelling at maximum speed from one face to another as required.

The inquisitorial light focused on an urn elicits the voice. Without this object light, the urn and its human content remain in "silence and darkness" -- that is, do not exist. It is not the light of "life"; it is the light of some force that pushes the characters in an odd backward parody of birth through the neck of an urn into a "hellish half-light" of half-existence. The light forces consciousness, self-awareness; it is the tormentor of Not I that would not release Mouth from "the obligation to express".¹⁹ It will not release the three heads of Play from the necessity, like that of the Unnamable, of telling their "story", of "inventing", and of asking his questions: "Where now? Who now? When now?"²⁰

Stage light in Beckett's theatre is always representative of life's basic exigency -- to be, which in Beckettland is not so much to think, but to speak. We have remarked the light above the table in Krapp's Last Tape; under it are placed Krapp's table, recorder, and tapes, the composite object that represents Krapp. In its circle Krapp records and explores his various selves; he likes to wander out of its glare into the darkness where he feels "less alone" and then back to "me . . . Krapp". Mouth is caught in a circle of light much like the spotlight of Play, except that there is no respite. The light never leaves her even for a moment in the darkness where she could feel

"less alone"; immobilized, compelled to tell her story, Mouth creates her own distance between her life and her speaking self. The Unnamable had created Mahood and Worm; Mouth creates "Not I", but her screams and "Not I"'s screams become indistinguishable. Winnie cannot escape the "hellish" light in which she spends her days stuck in the mound, but she is never alone: Willie is always behind her somewhere. She talks to someone she can sometimes see and even hear, unlike the others caught in the light in utter solitude. In the play's first act she has the freedom to manipulate objects; she generates "conversation" by interacting with things and even with a person. In Act II, Winnie, like the others entrapped in the light, now unable to see or touch either objects or Willie, tells a story and even wonders, like W2, if her mind might "unhinge".

Light then, is the one object in Beckett's theatre which requires one to do something but which gives one nothing to do. Unlike all other stage objects it cannot be manipulated in any way by the characters. They are under its control, its "victims", to use Beckett's word. Combined with the immobility of the characters as it is in Not I, Happy Days, and Play, the only possible response is speech. The torture it inflicts on the three heads of Play is more refined than that in any other play, because it is intermittent. Beckett specifies: "The response to

light is not quite immediate. At every solicitation a pause of about one second before utterance is achieved, except where a longer delay is indicated." (p. 45). Beckett thus makes explicit the role of the light: it extorts voices from the characters. Each of the three is allowed brief moments when the light does leave him/her in the "peace" and "restful" state all long for. In effect time stops and starts endlessly. When a line is cut off, the next time the light switches to the character, he/she picks up the line at the cut-off point and continues on from there. Both women seem momentarily to have their order -- "Get off me" -- obeyed. But the spot returns. Sometimes their words are cut off in mid-sentence, heightening the possibility that there is finally an end to the torture since the light seems not to be interested in having them say more. "And all this? When will all this --" (p. 54). "But I have said all I can. All you let me. All I --" (p. 55).

The light is a sort of orchestra conductor, indicating to each player when it is his turn to play and indicating when all three must play as full orchestra -- together. Beckett himself makes the musical analogy by providing at the end of the text a chart for the "chorus", scoring it, so that word phrases from one character play as a melody, counterpointed against corresponding word

phrases from the two other characters. Breaks or pauses are simultaneous so that the effect is of bars of music. The play's da capa repetition reinforces the musical score analogy. The arrangement is precisely the same, the timing exactly as before; the light moves precisely in its pattern eliciting voices in the same order, cutting lines off at exactly the same places.

Character-Objects: M; W1; W2

The three characters of Play are all character-objects. "Buried" up to their necks like the Winnie of Act II of Happy Days they suffer endlessly in time, in some region after life, in the world of the Unnamable or of How It Is. "How people enter this world they never know. They need not know. They are in it."²¹ They are the residue of human life, as though all were burned away and only the heads remain. There is never the possibility of regeneration in time for any of Beckett's moribund character-objects. There remains at the "end" of each piece only the suspended possibility of total obliteration, the complete submerging of the human into the object. Winnie can only be totally swallowed up by the earth; the mound would remain. The heads can only sink into the urns, leaving only the urns. People are overcome by things. In Breath only the things remain in physical form on stage;

what is human is further reduced from object to mere sound, not even structured into the symbolic patterns of speech.

Strangely, then, the audience for a Beckett play waits, as do the characters, for time to run out. The audience is never allowed any hope beyond Waiting for Godot; it is clear always that we are present at a terminal situation that seems never to end. The endlessness of the suffering of the characters in Play is presented dramatically by the Beckettian techniques of verbal repetition and various omissions: there is no movement, no variation in voice tone or facial expression. The entire play is repeated once, as we have noted, and begins a second repetition before the merciful intervention of the curtain and darkness. Winnie had quoted Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, and Gray. These three quote the clichés of a nameless pot-boiler from everyone's half-remembered collection of trash, in which they played the leads. The setting is a world of high-class adultery. We hear of mansions with "morning-room", a butler named Erskine (a reappearance of the butler from Watt), a hired detective, jaunts to the Riviera and "our darling Grand Canary".

The man and wife are verbally well-matched; the speech of both is coarsely colloquial. "We were not long together when she smelled the rat. Give up that whore, she said, or I'll cut my throat --" (p. 47). "I smell

you off him, she screamed, he stinks of bitch." (p. 47). When W1 pulls herself together to assume the airs of a fine lady she is capable of affecting "fine" speech, but it sound grotesquely stilted and unnatural: "Judge then of my astoundment when one fine morning, as I was sitting stricken in the morning room . . ." (p. 48). W2, having heard of M's decision to return to his wife, remains calm, a foil to the frenzy of W1, yet has a flare for the overly dramatic line or gesture: "I felt like death." (p. 50). With a fine sense of dramatic crescendo she burnt his clothes and "All night I smelt them smouldering." The burning of M's clothes ends the first part of Play (the part M looks back on as just "play"), and provides an oddly frivolous verbal accompaniment to the ghastly sight of all three now in ash containers.

During the normal playing of Play we hear the story of the affair twice. The story itself everyone has already heard; it is a stereotype. The lines are clichés; the characters then, quote twice from memory clichés that are part of everyone's memory. The fact that they repeat exactly the same lines the second time suggests that they are working from a set script, which, of course, they are. The total impact is of a tired-out re-run that runs on and on.

If the second run-through of Play is not an exact replica of the first playing, the effect of a machine universe in which everything repeats itself exactly as before in endlessly repeating cycles, is modified. Apparently Beckett himself varied from this exact reproduction in the second playing when he took a hand in directing both the London and Paris 1964 productions. In the published text of Comédie (1966) Beckett explains the revisions in a note, offering them as a possible alternative to the usual scrupulously exact replay. Kenner explains the revision in a final chapter to his study of Beckett. (This last chapter was based on an essay for Beckett at Sixty and provides a kind of postscript to Kenner's full-length study.)

Beckett virtually improvised a new work (Play No. 2?) by modifying the rigor of the light. It grew tired; it faded (and the voices with it); it relaxed its rigorous sequence for soliciting speeches, so that the second cycle was not identical with the first. Perhaps it would eventually get out and release the players into non-being; or perhaps it was teasing them with this hope.²²

If Play is produced with this alternate method of playing, it seems to me that the effect of endless suffering is only heightened. It is much the same pattern as Godot and Happy Days: Act II is a near replay of Act I. There are slight variations which perhaps suggest a definite change in the future, but not for the better. The

variations are in the direction of entropy: Lucky and Pozzo have degenerated; the vegetables are running out; Winnie is more deeply buried, her "classics" more fragmentary, her husband utterly silent. If the three of Play have not said what is necessary to give them peace from the "inquisitor" in the first playing, then repeating exactly the same lines in whatever order (Beckett does not suggest changing the lines) is a hopeless enterprise. If the light and voices both "fade" then it is a long and lingering, endless dying. Again the variations are in the direction of entropy.

Come and Go

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.²³

Nobody Comes. Nobody goes. It's awful.
(Estragon, Waiting for Godot)

Come and Go was originally written in 1965 and dedicated to John Calder. It was translated into French by the author as Va et Viens and into German by Elmar Tophoven. Its first production, like that of Play, was in Germany, this time at the Schiller Theatre in Berlin, in September 1965. It was directed by Deryk Mendel, who had directed the first production of Play. On 28 February, 1966 the play opened in France, supervised by the author himself, directed by Jean-Marie Serreau. The play was produced at the Odéon-Théâtre de France and Beckett's

famous French Winnie, Madeleine Renaud, played Vi.

The world première of the English Come and Go was presented in Ireland by The Abbey Theatre Company at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, on 28 February, 1968. The director was Edward Golden. The play was not produced in England until 9 December, 1968 at the Royal Festival Hall in London; the director was the play's original director in Germany, Deryk Mendel.

Come and Go, like Play, has three characters, and a structure which seems analogous to that of musical composition. It is comprised of only one hundred and twenty-one spoken words, and twelve silences; the running time is three minutes. Although the play has been greeted with derision ("there was a time when Beckett wrote plays, not dramaticules"),²⁴ the view being that Beckett is playing a joke on us and that the response ought to be a reciprocating scorn, literary critics generally treat the work seriously. Its sparseness provides a theatrical parallel to Beckett's recent spare novels: Bing and Assez (1966); Sans (1969); Le Dépeupleur (1971). The ambiguity of Beckett's word, "dramaticule", has perhaps contributed somewhat to the variety of response. Is he playing with the word "ridicule", or with "minuscule"? Is Come and Go a derision of drama (after all, one could say that the key words are the ones never heard) or is it a miniature drama

compressing everything essential into three minutes playing time?

Alvarez comments on the play as Beckett's attempt to "reduce his plays to the condition of silence"²⁵ as he has "done his best to kill off the novel as a viable form, reducing it to a few pages of spare prose in which the same phrases are repeated and repeated and the whole world is stripped away until only a single image is left, immobile in a neutral light".²⁶ Webb sees Come and Go as a "formal work; in fact it is almost as close as the theatre can get to pure form, since it is about almost -- though not quite -- nothing".²⁷ Kenner makes more extravagant claims:

three lives are telescoped into three minutes, in a vignette so spare that each of just 121 spoken words is shaped by dozens of words not spoken. Suffused in their disappointment, sustained by their wistful reenactment, braced by their inter-linked connivance to withhold from one another intelligence of rumored agonies, each guilty of having broached the subject on which she must next enjoin reticence, they make of their reticence their lifetime's finest achievement; and Beckett has very nearly made a play out of silence.²⁸

Whether the play is about "nothing" or about everything is thus a matter of critical contention.

Three women, identically dressed except for the different colours of the coats they wear, sit in the light centre stage side by side. They sit rigid, their

hands in their laps, like little girls ordered to "face front" in school. One walks out of the light; one of the two remaining reveals in a whisper something about her to the third. The listener is appalled, voices hope that the secret is not true, and the subject of the gossip returns. Silence. Two lines of shared reminiscence. Another leaves. The whispering and appalled reaction routine is repeated; only the names and figures are changed.

The subject returns. Silence. Two more lines of reminiscence. The routine is played a third time. The three sit in silence. They hold hands, interlocked "in the old way" (p. 13), each holding in her two hands the hands of the other two. The last line is "I can feel the rings." (p. 14). None of the three is wearing a ring.

The names of the three characters resemble three notes in the musical scale: Flo, Vi, Ru. Together they are a three note chord like Do, Mi, So; but unlike the voices of Play, a much more complex composition, we never hear them together. We hear them only separately as a simple melody is played three times; each time the melody is complete, self-contained. This is no fugue, but simply three variations in three different keys, of a single melodic line. Beckett provides a brief commentary at the end of the text on the "Ohs" and on "Voices". The "Ohs"

are to be "three very different sounds" and the voices are to be "as low as compatible with audibility. Colourless except for three 'ohs' and two lines following." (p. 16).

Beckett's last line, that calls our attention to "rings" that are not there, is a final distillation of what has been going on in the play from its opening. We are required to be aware of what is not there. If Play brings together set, costume, and character in a single complex image, Come and Go presents us with a much simpler visual metaphor. It is Beckett's version of a costume play: there are no set objects, no property objects, no character-objects, just costume objects in the light. And it is a play about three women who have literally nothing to do, but to "come and go". There are no objects to manipulate, no men to "keep nice" for, and there is almost nothing to say. They talk about the one woman who is not there; they refer to their shared childhood which no longer exists except in memory; one suggests talking about "what came after" (p. 13) but there is silence. They are sitting on a bench but seem suspended in air: "It should not be clear what they are sitting on." (p. 16). Thus the seemingly opposite views of what the play is "about" are not, finally, contradictory: the play is about "nothing", but that "nothing" happens to sum up the

lives of three women.

Costume Objects

At the end of the text Beckett stipulates exactly what he wishes as costume:

Full-length coats, buttoned high, dull violet (Ru), dull red (Vi), dull yellow (Flo). Drab nondescript hats with enough brim to shade faces. Apart from colour differentiation three figures as alike as possible. Light shoes with rubber soles. Hands made up to be as visible as possible. No rings apparent. (p. 16)

Here we have a female version of the familiar Beckettian greatcoat of the trilogy. In the Berlin production, from which there are photographs by Ilse Buhs printed in the Calder and Boyars edition of the text, the coats were slightly different in style: one had a high ruff of feathers around the neck and no visible buttons; one had a plain, unadorned mandarin collar and covered buttons down the front; the third had a tailored shirt-style collar and no visible buttons. The hats were neither "drab" nor "nondescript". Instead they were quite Easter-bonnet-like, deep-brimmed as specified to throw the face in shadow, but trimmed frivolously with fluffs of net and clusters of artificial flowers. The hands show up even in the photographs as unnaturally white and prominent. Perhaps the effect is that of a mime's whitened hands. In accordance with Beckett's instructions the bench is not clearly

visible. When all three sit together, it appears that they are perched on a thin bar, like three birds on a wire. Presumably Beckett approved the costume design for this initial production.

The essential point about the costumes is their muted, "drab" femininity and the general impression of uniformity. The colours are potentially beautiful ones -- tulip colours, violet, red, yellow -- but Beckett stipulates they are "dull". The coats, even if ruffed around the neck, or showing some sign of interest in style, are uniformly long; they cover the entire body. The hats have seen no parade or celebration; they shadow the eyes, thus emphasizing the mouths which are lighted and which say almost nothing in voices that are almost inaudible. It is particularly interesting that Beckett for the first time specifies that the hats are "drab and nondescript". He usually specifies particular, idiosyncratic hats. Their shoes, as they come and go, are rubber-soled, thus making no noise, as though they were for tiptoeing in and out of sick-rooms. The three are grown-up ladies of "undeterminable age" who have never lived and the play shows them conspiring not to speak.

The coats are uniformly long, concealing their bodies, thus making them all look alike in grown-up versions of the old school's uniform. They agree to be silent when

Vi asks when they last met. It seems that they have lived apart, but similarly; thus the similarity in appearance. They are like paper-dolls, three cut-outs from the same pattern, and their similarity is reinforced in speech and movement. They do and say almost precisely the same things. They are silent and rigid together. They used to sit together with hands interlocked on a log at "Miss Wade's school" and dream of "love". Now they sit together, still prim and upright like good little girls on what could be a log. They interlock hands at the play's end and there is mention of "rings" which we can see do not exist. They dreamed of love; they talk of rings. They still huddle together preserving their common illusions, hiding their common "secrets", each looking like a variation of the other two.

Beckett specifies that the coats are to be both long and "buttoned high". It seems that he is emphasizing the sexlessness of the three, since in describing Winnie at the opening of Happy Days he had stipulated a "low bodice" and Winnie's primary concern was her now-waning attractiveness to men. She had based a life on a man who had stopped listening to or looking at her. These three have had no men in their lives, no rings. The play opens with Vi's parodic inversion of the first line of Macbeth: "When did we three last meet?" (p. 7). The reply from

Ru is "Let us not speak" and there is silence. In the extremely vital opening of Macbeth the three witches agree to meet with Macbeth after the battle. They anticipate with evil relish their involvement in the career of a great man. The three lifeless ladies of Come and Go have influenced no man, great or otherwise, and agree not to speak of when they last met. The play develops from this one line; they agree not to speak of the unspeakable. Whenever a question is asked, there is silence or a toneless non-committal reply. The only lines that provoke an animated response we are not allowed to hear. Nothing is "given away".

As in Happy Days, Beckett is here making a statement about the specifically feminine condition. These three play a weird Beckettian pastiche of the old girls' reunion. If men get together and get drunk, women get together and gossip. The three in their long coats and big hats are near carbon-copies of each other, women in "dull" colours of tulips that never fully bloomed; they never found the love they dreamed of as little girls at Miss Wade's. They are dressed in continuations of the school uniform -- sexless and prim; they whisper gossip secrets whenever one is out of the way and mouth exaggerated cliché responses to news of disaster about the others. Each, of course, is spared the truth about herself, but the similarity of

appearance, movement, and speech gives it away to the audience. They are all surely going to die and Miss Wade's school has prepared them for a life that never happened. I cannot share the view of Kenner that their reticence is "their lifetime's finest achievement" (p. 225) or that of Alvarez that "all are doomed, but each is determined to protect the others from the destructive knowledge" (p. 29). I see their whispers as only the nasty gossip sort of tidbits presaging disaster that women pass on to each other about absent "friends". They are unable to contain personal secrets in a life that holds for them no genuine mystery or excitement.

Beckett uses the medium to make his point; he breaks theatrical conventions to illuminate the emptiness of these three lives. In the theatre entrances and exits are motivated; actors have "reasons" for coming and going; the ladies have none. If life itself is a series of comings and goings they have no motivation for living it -- no men to "keep nice" for or to perform for. They "come and go" in unexplained mechanical movement like the trivial women of "Prufrock", not talking of Michelangelo, for they spent their time at Miss Wade's "dreaming of . . . love" and thus their education is even spottier than Winnie's. They whisper about each other. Dialogue in the theatre is to be heard -- "projected" clearly to the last row of

the balcony. These three whisper unheard secrets to each other; the rest of the time their voices are to be "toneless" and nearly inaudible. The primary use of lighting in the theatre is to light the actor's face, particularly the eyes, which are his most expressive feature. Here the eyes are shaded; only the mouths are lighted. Thus theatrical convention which works to present with clarity and emphasis the "meaning" of the drama is here turned on its head to emphasize the lack of meaning in these three lives. Beckett makes a clear statement of meaninglessness.

The hats worn by the trio in Come and Go, unlike the bowlers, night caps and other idiosyncratic hats worn by Beckett's characters, reveal no individual character traits, make no statements about the lives of the characters or about their relationship with the world. The objects are "drab" and "nondescript", reflecting the bland quality of their lives. They hide their hair and shade their eyes, thus reducing still further the possibility of any individuality being revealed. Their function is to cover rather than to reveal. They throw the mouths into relief as the only part of the face in the light, but the mouths stay closed or whisper, or speak tonelessly or speak outworn clichés in response to information we cannot hear.

If the hats are trimmed with net or false flowers, Easter-bonnet or mother-of-the-bride style, as in *Berlin*,

they make a more complex statement. They contrast with the severity of the coats, frivolously out-of-step with the long, drab, sexless uniforms. They become odd symbols of celebration, incongruous with the almost militarily-severe coats and with the joyless voices and rigid demeanour of the ladies from Miss Wade's school. They seem an outrageous contradiction, like the gaily-coloured polka-dot suit of the sad clown. They are spring bonnets for ladies whose springtime is over, make-believe flowers and imaginary rings for women who never carried bridal bouquets or wore real wedding bands. Miss Wade's school, where they sat together and dreamed of love, aroused in them no other dreams or aspirations. The repetitive pattern of the play is a microcosm of the pattern of their lives at Miss Wade's and beyond: to sit in silence, to come and go, to whisper and wait and dream of love.

Beckett specifies that the shoes are "light" and "rubber-soled". Again it is what the shoes withhold rather than what they reveal that is important. They make no noise; the women can "come and go" without being heard, unobtrusively gliding in and out of the light. Beckett has often made a point about shoes and manners of walking. Krapp's shoes were long and pointed, clown-like; Clov had difficulty walking and Roger Blin had chosen shoes that made a grating noise as he walked; Estragon had trouble

getting off his boot in Godot's opening scene and complained repeatedly of sore feet. The three women in Come and Go have no such complaints or peculiarities, nothing that distinguishes one from another, not even the sound of their footsteps.

Hands

The hands of Vi, Flo, and Ru can be distinguished as objects -- made-up to have special independent prominence, rather than simply being part of their bodies. The hands in their unnaturally white make-up become separate from the body, a less extreme version of the similar process in Not I, where the mouth alone was lighted and made up, the rest of the figure obliterated in darkness. In Not I the mouth is an object, the irreducibly minimum symbol of the human being. In Come and Go the symbol of the loveless lives of the women is their ringless hands.

Beckett takes care to specify the positioning of the hands. There are no gestures in the play except these carefully-patterned hand movements. At the play's opening they sit "facing front, hands clasped in laps" (p. 7). The attitude is one of humble school-girl obedience and docility. They sit absolutely still except when movement or gesture is specifically indicated by Beckett's stage directions. After whispering in Ru's ear,

"Flo puts her finger to her lips." (p. 9). The gesture is a cliché, the little girl's "sh", admonishing silence. They "resume pose" with hands clasped in laps. The gesture is repeated each time the secret is told. "Ru puts her finger to her lips." (p. 11). "Vi puts her finger to her lips." (p. 13). The gestures are stereotyped; each does precisely the same as the others and each time the "pose" is resumed afterwards. The final hand movement is the interlocking, for which Beckett provides a diagram at the end of the text. The joining is another stereotyped gesture, the interlocking of people singing Auld Lang Syne, a sentimental gesture of love and solidarity. In this context the gesture of the hands is ironic. Ladies of identical costume, demeanour, and background, interlock identical ringless hands, joining their emptiness, their lovelessness, their solitude, and their mutual treachery in a gesture of abiding love and friendship.

The Light

Soft, from above only and concentrated on playing area. Rest of stage as dark as possible. (p. 15)

Table and immediately adjacent area in strong white light. Rest of stage in darkness.
(Krapp's Last Tape, p. 10)

The light in Come and Go makes a circle of fixed size on centre stage, much like the light above the table in Krapp's den, except that it is to be "soft" rather than

"strong". When the ladies "exit", they move out of the light: "The figures are not seen to go off stage. They should disappear a few steps from lit area." (p. 16). They are defined by the light over the bench, as Krapp was defined by the light over his table. When Krapp moved out of the light he felt "less alone" than with his many taped "selves" in the light. When the ladies move out of the light they are literally alone, yet when all three are together in the lit area their loneliness and solitude is unmitigated by the presence of the other two. Beckett's characters are normally seen by themselves or in pseudo-couples who do little or nothing to alleviate the essential loneliness of the individual spirit. Here, like Ionesco, he presents the loneliness of the individual in a social setting. Three pairs of ringless hands make a triplicate statement about lovelessness; three toneless voices express a life lived without enthusiasm; three women sitting in silence state the emptiness of three mouths with nothing to say; three lifetimes add up to nothing but a mechanical repetition of "come and go".

The light is to be "soft". If the light is that of self-awareness, the light, like the colours of their coats, the sounds of their shoes, the tones of their voices, is muted. It is in keeping with the dull tranquillity of lives not fully-lived. None of the three ever appears in

the light alone. Alone they have no clear sense of self. For them as for Winnie "esse est percipi"; without another to whisper to, to reminisce with, to share dreams and illusions with, they do not exist. When they move out of the light they have nowhere to go and nothing to do, and are perceived by no one. Thus they give no "reason" for their exits and have nothing to say when they return.

In Come and Go, Beckett uses the objects -- costumes, hands, and light, to express what is missing in three empty lives. Rather than the characters becoming part of the object, one with it as in Play, or part of the character becoming an object, as Mouth in Not I, or the character becoming fixed in space, an immobile object like Hamm or Winnie, in Come and Go the characters are replaced by objects. They have no life of their own. They sit as rigid and impassive as three coated mannequins; they walk and gesture as mechanically as wind-up dolls. Even the specified animated expressions of horror -- the "ohs" and the two following lines, are mechanically played three times, like the tinned cries from mechanical dolls.

NOTES

¹Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 111.

²Harold Hobson, "The Second Time Round", Sunday Times (April 12, 1964), cited by Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 143.

³Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, "Expérience d'Eté", Le Monde (le 13 janvier, 1964), p. 14.

⁴Jean-Louis Bory, Nouvel Observateur (le 22 février, 1967), cited by Gerard Durozoi, Beckett (Paris: Bordas, 1972), p. 215. [All subsequent references to this study are to this edition.]

⁵R. Kanters, L'Express (le 18 juin, 1964), cited by Durozoi, Beckett, p. 215.

⁶Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable", in his Three Novels, pp. 395-396.

⁷Fletcher and Spurling, Beckett, p. 109.

⁸Michael Robinson, The Long Sonata of the Dead (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 295.

⁹Rosette Lamont, "La Farce Métaphysique de Samuel Beckett", in M. J. Friedman, ed., Configuration Critique de Samuel Beckett (Paris: Minard, 1964), p. 114.

¹⁰Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable", in his Three Novels, p. 340.

¹¹George Devine, cited by Alec Reid, All I Can Manage More Than I Could, p. 45.

¹²A. Bosquet, Combat (le 24 mai, 1966), cited by Durozoi, Beckett, p. 158.

- ¹³Durozoi, Beckett, p. 156.
- ¹⁴Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable", in his Three Novels, pp. 393-394.
- ¹⁵A. J. Leventhal, "The Beckett Hero", in Martin Esslin, ed., Samuel Beckett, p. 43.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 46.
- ¹⁷Nathan Scott, Beckett, p. 39.
- ¹⁸Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett, p. 211.
- ¹⁹Samuel Beckett, "Three Dialogues", in Martin Esslin, ed., Samuel Beckett, p. 17.
- ²⁰Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable", in his Three Novels, p. 291.
- ²¹Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett, p. 222.
- ²²Ibid., p. 220.
- ²³T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", in Seven Centuries of Verse (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 656, ll. 13-14.
- ²⁴C. Ricks, The Listener, LXXVIII (August 3, 1967), 148.
- ²⁵A. Alvarez, Beckett, p. 129.
- ²⁶Ibid.
- ²⁷Eugene Webb, The Plays of Samuel Beckett (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), p. 118.
- ²⁸Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett, p. 225.

CONCLUSION

The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being -- that is, in terms of concrete stage images. . . . The Theatre of the Absurd . . . tends towards a radical devaluation of language, towards a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself . . . what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken by the characters.¹

I have explored in each Beckett play written for the live theatre the role of objects in the articulation of Beckett's theatrical language. Like Esslin's other "Absurdist" Beckett presents the human condition "in terms of concrete stage images". His stage images are composed largely of characters in relation to objects or characters become objects. As one explores his work from Waiting for Godot to Not I one discovers that language is increasingly devalued, as is any stage activity. But it is not "what happens" that transcends words but what is on stage. Objects increasingly become the most important component of Beckett's theatrical language, making their own statement as its other components -- verbal language, gesture, movement, move progressively towards silence and stillness.

Beckett in his stage directions and in his own direction of productions puts particular emphasis on certain

objects of property and costume. Idiosyncratic hats reappear obsessively in Godot, Endgame, Happy Days, and Come and Go. Shoes that do not fit, either too small (Estragon's in Godot), or clownishly too large (Krapp's in Krapp's Last Tape), make the same sort of statement: Beckett's characters are misfits, alienated from their setting in time and from their own bodies. They suffer from physical, social and spiritual malaise. Clocks are on stage in Godot (Pozzo's watch), Endgame (Clov's alarm-clock), Act Without Words II (B's watch), Krapp's Last Tape (Krapp's old-fashioned pocket-watch), and the shrill sound of an alarm clock startles Winnie into wakefulness in Happy Days. Beckett's characters are all out-of-time, belong to no identifiable time-period, and yet are acutely aware of time's passing and running out. Objects of food and medicine (Hamm's pain-killer, Winnie's tonic) are progressively running out, as all change in Beckett's theatre works toward depletion and disintegration.

Beckett makes two unique contributions to "le langage des choses" in his theatre: characters and light both become stage objects. Character-objects are immobilized, incomplete human beings fixed on the stage, yet still speaking, compelled to stay and speak until released by the dialogue (Endgame), the light (Mouth, the three

characters of Play), or the earth (Winnie). Light as object elicits the voice in Krapp's Last Tape, in Not I, and Play. In it is distilled the basic exigency of the theatre, that the actor spotlighted on stage must perform, must speak. Without this object the "play" would not exist. In these plays object is thus clearly the dominant component of Beckett's theatrical language.

Distinctions between object and character are not always clear. Beckett's theatre is perhaps most disturbing when boundaries blur between what is object and what is human. The goad in Act Without Words II is an object, but shows characteristics we identify as human: it is malicious, insistent as is the light in Play (Beckett's "inquisitor"), and controls the human beings it plays on. The tape-recorder in Krapp's Last Tape preserves on tape an episode that confronts old Krapp with his life's failure. He has trouble manipulating the recorder. In a sense it "plays" him. He is saddened, angered, then transfixed and silenced by his "last tape". The marionette-like dancer of Act Without Words I is more puppet-object than human being. Like A and B, the three characters of Play, and Krapp, he is manipulated by objects until the last of the play when he remains still and contemplates his hands. Willie is a series of disconnected objects and the three ladies of Come and Go are paper-doll-like replicas of each

other, silent and lifeless.

Objects, then, become progressively more important in Beckett's theatre as one moves from what now seems a relatively conventional and "talky" four-character play with "scenery", Waiting for Godot, to the uniquely Beckettian theatrical experience of Not I, wherein a single object, a mouth spotlighted eight feet above the stage, has all the play's lines and the only human figure on stage is reduced to infrequent arm movements indicating helpless compassion. Objects now not only predominate in Beckett's theatrical language as its most important component, making its clearest statement, but objects supersede characters as the Beckett world becomes increasingly "réifié".

In Play and Not I we see Beckett's most sophisticated and unequivocal use of objects to make his dramatic statement. In both plays people are reduced to objects. In Play only heads remain, having become seemingly part of the urns from which they protrude. They are identical, almost indistinguishable visually and verbally from each other. In Not I Mouth is woman reduced to an object recognizably part of a human being. But by itself in the light above the stage it is grotesque and inhuman. In both plays light as object elicits voices from these character-objects. People have become things and objects manipu-

lated by objects have taken over the Beckett stage.

NOTES

¹Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, pp. 6-7.

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