MODES OF BEING AND TIME IN THE THEATRE OF SAMUEL BECKETT

MODES OF BEING AND TIME
IN THE THEATRE OF
SAMUEL BECKETT

By

ANNA E.V. PRETO, B.A., LICENCE ES LETTRES

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

October 1974

MASTER OF ARTS (1974) McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(Romance Languages) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Modes of Being and Time in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett

AUTHOR: Anna E.V. Preto, B.A. (University of British Columbia)
Licence ès Lettres (Université de Grenoble)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Brian S. Pocknell

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 163

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Brian S. Pocknell for his interest, his encouragement and counsel in the patient supervision of this dissertation.

I also wish to thank McMaster University for its generous financial assistance.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Beckett as an author has inspired an impressive range of critical studies to date. The imposing amounts of critical material bear witness to the richness of his writings, which present a wealth of themes and techniques. His plays concentrate for us the problem-themes that already concerned him in his earlier prose works, and bring them to the stage in a more streamlined form. The essential problem which evolves from Beckett's own earlier writings comes to the fore, downstage, in the plays: it is that of being in time, a purgatorial state, the lot of mankind and of Beckett's characters, who are representative of mankind.

Beckett's characters live in a strange world, that of their externalized minds, wherein time is not real time as we know it, nor the time of revolutionary twentieth century physics, but the time of the representational intellect, which conceives the world in the shape of its own ideas. The purgatorial world which Beckett's characters inhabit is the anguished world of their minds, and we do not have to read very far into Beckett's works to recognize therein some aspect of our own condition, for the plays are dramatic illustrations of the plight of modern man, of his being in time, of his confusion and his anguish.

Two plays offer between them an encompassing view of this predicament which concerns Beckett. They are his most popular plays, Waiting for Godot and Endgame. Waiting for Godot illustrates the problem of having to wait endlessly for the end of existence to begin, and Endgame illustrates the problem of having to wait endlessly for the end of existence to end. Much has been written on these two plays, which are often considered as the only important elements of Beckett's theatre.

It is important to note, however, that there are many other plays in Beckett's theatre, offering multiple reflections of the major themes in works that are generally less popular. These have been given considerably less critical attention, so we have tried to compensate for this shortcoming in our third section.

Another important area which has enjoyed but little critical attention is that of the problem of language as a dramatic mechanism. Our fourth section looks at how the nature of language changes in Beckett's theatre, where words are not just words any more, but serve to illustrate a conflict of language which, for Beckett, embodies the drama of mankind.

Our bibliography is a selection of the works we found most useful; for a complete one, reference is necessary to the list of bibliographies at the beginning of that section.

I. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BECKETT SITUATION

Before launching into an analysis of the nature of being and time as depicted by Samuel Beckett in his plays, we ought to consider three major areas: firstly, the author's esthetic attitudes towards his work; secondly, the range of philosophers with which he has been associated by various literary critics (at times justifiably, at others gratuitously); thirdly, the few direct statements that Beckett himself has made in his critical essays on the nature of being and time.

Beckett's general attitude towards his work is one of consistent interpretative silence: perhaps more than any other writer of our time, he has categorically refused to explain or develop his writings in general, and his plays in particular, which, as a result, have often been termed esoteric and hermetic. The following quotation illustrates very neatly not only Beckett's attitude towards the play in question, Endgame, but also that towards his work as a whole. Between the lines, moreover, we detect the contempt that he bears for the sort of critic who is incessantly attempting to attribute a definitive meaning or message to his plays:

> "We have no elucidations to offer of mysteries that are all of their making. My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility

> for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirins. Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated, nec tecum nec sine te, in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could."1

The reserve and contempt on Beckett's part have not, however, prevented nor inhibited the extensive critical activities which surround his work. In just a few years, for example, the best-known of his plays, Waiting for Godot, has sparked an imposing variety of commentaries: the play hit Paris in 1953 (Théâtre de Babylone), London in 1955 (Arts Theatre), and Miami in 1956 (Miami Playhouse). This last date in particular is significant if we consider that at present the greater part of literary criticism on Beckett comes to us from the United States. In just over two decades, the play provoked several querelles, and became known throughout the world as a classic part of the contemporary repertory.[2] To crown the play's success, its author was recognized among the great literary figures of our time when he was awarded the 1969 Nobel Prize in literature.

It is because of his success, coupled with his reserve, that Beckett has often been accused of intellectual snobbery; yet his interpretative silence is not gratuitous, for it is in keeping with his definition of the role of the artist and of the writer.

There are as yet few statements on Beckett's part concerning the role of the artist, in fact they seem

to be as rare as his commentaries. We may nevertheless resort to a few scattered statements which, because of their rarity, take on the value of veritable documents.

Such a document is the series of Three Dialogues between Beckett and Georges Duthuit on the subject of three modern painters, Tal Coat, Masson, and Bram Van Velde. It is quite unlikely for the text of the dialogues, concise as it is, to be the faithful version of an actual dialogue between Beckett and Duthuit, but it is nevertheless certain that it owes its printed form, and therefore its content, to Beckett himself. The definition that Beckett makes of the role of the true artist, in speaking of Bram Van Velde, applies as well to the role of the true writer, to the role that he tries to fulfill as a writer. Of the three painters whom he discusses with Duthuit, Beckett considers Bram Van Velde as the only true artist. He describes the artist as one who refuses to limit his efforts to the field of the possible, and who aims for the impossible. The true artists refuse to look at the world "...with the eyes of building contractors...". They turn from the field of the possible "...in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road." Instead of expanding the field of the possible and, as a result, of limiting themselves to what is at its best mediocre, they prefer to break away from the

feasible, and to choose "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." Like Masson, they attempt to paint the void, "...in fear and trembling...".[3] The problem is one of isolation, according to Lawrence E. Harvey, isolation of the artist not only from things, but from other men as well.[4] In our world, communication is difficult and perhaps impossible, short of constant distortion. Cut off from what is around him, man finds himself in a state of ignorance, and "...the new void spawns a new need - to know..."; the artist, according to Beckett, suffers from "...the malady of wanting to know what to do and the malady of wanting to be able to do it...".[5] He finds himself in a world which lacks an acceptable metaphysical solution, an acceptable goal for his efforts, which could give them purpose as well as supply him with incorruptible ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty. His problem is that he lacks a goal: he is no longer to paint the glory of his god, pagan or Christian. The world is empty, scarred by the absence of god, which leaves a void, "...the obliteration of an unbearable presence...".[6] Since Nietzsche ("This old saint in the forest has not yet heard anything of this, that <u>God is dead</u>!"[7]) the artist can no longer direct his efforts towards the old goal, that of exalting the glory of his creator, of attempting to capture the reflection of ideals existing in a sphere beyond the

physical and corruptible universe. Lacking the support of a creed, pagan or Christian, the artist finds himself isolated and helpless in a universe which has lost all purpose and order. For him, all is out of focus, save the obligation to express, which remains as urgent as ever. If there is on the one hand the obligation to express, there is, on the other hand, nothing to express, and it is in many ways impossible to express nothing. Undergoing the obligation to express, with nothing to express, and with the impossibility of expressing nothing, the Beckett artist is indeed in a predicament:

> "The situation is that of him who is helpless, cannot act, in the event cannot paint, since he is obliged to paint. The act is of him who, helpless, unable to act, acts, in the event paints, since he is obliged to paint."8

Having to face these obstacles, the artist is doomed to fail: Beckett admires Bram Van Velde among painters as "...the first...to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living...". Failure is inescapable, yet Beckett sees a certain value, a certain valour in the attitude of the true artist who dares to confront the void, the failure, and makes "...of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation, and the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation."[9]

This attitude of the true artist, according to Beckett, applies also in full to the true writer, yet another who concerns himself with failure, and who dares to confront the void. Beckett is concerned in all of his work with confronting the void, the failure, the mess.

If we wish to pursue Beckett's esthetic attitude further, and explore the philosophical base on which his work can to a certain extent be said to rest, we ought foremost to consider his own statement:

> "When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right. I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess."10

This, however, does not mean that Beckett has not read extensively in philosophy or that he has not borrowed heavily, as points out John Fletcher, from the writings of many philosophers.[11] Like Beckett, the characters he has created also deny that they are philosophers and insist upon their ignorance, yet manifest knowledge of the philosophers and reveal compulsively examining minds. They never cease to examine their lives, their situations, to deal with old philosophical problems that have been with mankind since the pre-Socratics. They ponder over the nature of the Self, the World, and God.

At this point it may prove of interest to note, briefly

and chronologically, the philosophers with whom Beckett has been linked by various literary critics.

According to John Fletcher, Beckett tends to use, especially in his early works, pre-Socratic doctrines in order to give cohesion and a certain weight to what would otherwise be light fiction. Beckett apparently borrows quite eclectically, parodying the thoughts of Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Democritus, and Empedocles, at times going as far as twisting them to suit his own purposes as a writer. In More Pricks than Kicks, for example, he contrasts Empedocles' "serious" death with Christ's "slick" demise.[12]

A.J. Leventhal,[13] links Beckett rather gratuitously (since there are no direct references to the philosopher in question in Beckett's works), to a Sicilian rhetorician and sophist, Gorgias of Leontini.[14] This critic is however quite right in pointing out a certain affinity between the teachings that Gorgias concentrated in his Nonent (that there is nothing which has any real existence; that even if anything did exist, it could not be known; that, supposing real existence to be knowable, the knowledge would be incommunicable) and Beckett's concern with the inadequacy of language as an instrument to convey ideas, and the impossibility of an idea to be the same in separate minds. From these concerns springs the uncertainty of identification which plagues most of Beckett's characters, who are all very much aware of the

unreality of the apparently real.

Another thinker to whom Beckett refers often and directly in his work is Plato's Christian disciple, Saint Augustine. John Fletcher points out that the words of the saint, "Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved; Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned.", not only dominate Godot, but also help to explain the boot-and-foot symbolism in the play. One of Estragon's feet is blessed, the other damned: the boot won't go on the foot that is damned, yet its mate fits perfectly on the other foot, which is not damned.[15]

There are other numerous references to medieval thinkers, some to Guillaume de Champeaux, Bishop of Châlons (in Murphy), but again they are a twisted parody of their originals. Beckett has stated quite directly that he has no religious feeling.[16]

It is Dante who occupies, along with Descartes (as we shall see later), a dominant position in Beckett's works. A.J. Leventhal and John Fletcher point out the affinity between certain characters of the Divina Commedia, Belacqua, Sordello, and Malacoda, and characters in Beckett's novels and plays. The protagonist of More Pricks than Kicks, for example, is called Belacqua; he turns up as a term of reference in Murphy, and his embryonal attitude of repose[17] appears in Watt and in Godot. Dante's Purgatorio and Inferno, moreover,

seem to set the atmosphere for Godot and Endgame, as we shall see.

Bruno, Campanella, and Vico are also referred to, the latter especially in Beckett's essay Our Exagmination, in which Vico's views on history, language, poetry, and myth are compared with Joyce's.

Of all the philosophers, however, it is Descartes who seems to have been present in Beckett's work from the beginning: the early poem Whoroscope (1930), is based on a seventeenth century work by Baillet on the life of Descartes. Whoroscope follows the biography very closely. Descartes never appears again as a character, but his philosophy of dualism, the radical distinction he made between mind and body (thought and extension), underlies the rest of Beckett's writings. Descartes was troubled by the question of how the human mind and body can act in such intimate harmony if they belong to fundamentally different categories of substance. In Beckettian as in Cartesian man, the body is distinct from the mind, and the mind is free, tirelessly, to ignore the body's misfortunes:

> "In Beckett's trilogy of French novels...a mind is precariously fastened to bodies in successive stages of decay, and that very decay may originate in Descartes' statement 'that body is always divisible, and that mind is entirely indivisible' (Meditation VI). Thus, although Beckett's Moran begins as a champion walker, runner, and autocycle-rider, creeping paralysis reduces him to crutches. Molloy starts with crutches and a bicycle, but he ends up crawling and rolling. Malone, immobile in his bed, has only dim memories of a life spent walking. The Unnamable begins by claiming to be

> seated, but ends in headless thought, mouthless speech, and earless listening to words that may or may not be his. All these heroes work themselves into frenzies of meditation."18

Watt feels his body decaying about him, and his fellow Beckett heroes are in various states and stages of physical decomposition as well: pustules on the skull, complaining feet, stiff legs, rebellious bladders; varying degrees of paralysis, if not complete leglessness plague them, yet they remain Cartesian men who strive to compensate for their breaking or broken bodies by mechanical aids, to replace them with crutches, poles, or bicycles, which nevertheless usually prove useless. These misfortunes, in true Cartesian fashion, never prevent their minds from operating as nimbly as ever, since mind and body are independent of each other. Ruby Cohn points out quite accurately that the Cartesian dualism in Beckett's plays never results in a clear-cut dramatization, that is to say, in a debate between mind and body. In Godot, for example, the polarity that exists between the physical Estragon and the relatively intellectual Vladimir of the first act, becomes less evident, blurred, by the end of the second act.

A disciple of Descartes, Arnold Geulincx also holds a place in Beckett's works. He compares man's free will in a deterministic universe to a traveller borne eastward in a vessel, but at least feeling free to walk westward along the deck. Beckett differs with Geulincx on two points, however, birth and suicide: Geulincx holds that we must never

regret having been born, since our birth is a necessary part of things. Beckett does not share this conviction with him in the least:

> "Tragedy is the statement of an expiation... The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin...the sin of having been born..."19

and again,

> "No, I regret nothing, all I regret is having been born, dying is such a long tiresome business, I always found."20

Suicide, which Beckett's characters are usually prevented from committing only by their weakness, is never admitted by Geulincx. Beckett nevertheless concurs with him on many points, that world order is beyond our control, for example; that in the physical realm we are quite impotent, even over events in our own bodies, which are liable to let us down at any moment; that we are ignorant about the essence of things or the origin of the universe and of our minds; that our ignorance shows our impotence over all things, except for what goes on inside our minds. It is on this assertion of the power of the mind within its mind-limited realm that rests the quest of many Beckett characters for bliss in the microcosm: they try to live immured within their minds in order to insulate themselves from a humiliating world.

In Murphy, Beckett mentions briefly other philosophers, namely Spinoza, Malebranche and Leibniz, but only to parody their philosophies in order to obtain his own special brand

of humour.

Ruby Cohn points out that two of the dominant contemporary philosophies, Logical Positivism and Existentialism, have also been linked with the works of Beckett, as have the thinkers that gave rise to them indirectly, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Soren Kierkegaard. Because of his austerity and his dedication as a writer, Beckett has often been compared to the latter. Although there is no evidence of a direct influence, Martin Esslin points out various parallels between Kierkegaard and Beckett. The literary creations of Kierkegaard express a variety of existential attitudes, which are articulated by a range of autonomous voices, the author being absent, or a mere prompter in the third person. Such a variety of voices can also be found in Beckett's works. Both authors, moreover, insist on the fact that their personalities have nothing to do with their literary characters, and picture the individual as constantly changing, the only basis to truth being experience. However, and this point is sufficient to separate Beckett from Kierkegaard, the latter has repeatedly explained his work at great lengths. We have already commented upon Beckett's consistent interpretative silence.

Both Logical Positivism and Existentialism attempt to solve Cartesian dualism by rejecting classical metaphysics. The Existentialists, led by Heidegger, declare that Aristotle's

rational animal is also by necessity a metaphysical animal, because reason and metaphysics both lead man away from being, which should be the central concern of philosophy. The Existentialists by-pass logic to focus upon the immediate impact of experience and existence, the Dasein of Heidegger. The Positivists, on the other hand, insist upon reason and empiricism as effective tools, and rule out metaphysical considerations as nonsense. Watt, a Beckett hero of the Positivist kind, uses his senses, logic, and language with great meticulousness. He tries to name the objects he sees, to find similarities between events by situating them in a series, to discover relationships by questions, conditional hypotheses, permutations and combinations. His rationalism and empiricism lead eventually to a breakdown of his senses, his mind, and his speech, an insane form of solipsism.

As Beckett turns from novel to drama in literary form, his protagonists turn from Logical Positivism to Existentialism in order to convey human dread and despair in a world of doom, disorder and absurdity. This change of attitude is of course partly dictated by the more rigorous discipline of the dramatic form, which does not allow for lengthy cerebration.

We see then how Beckett has ranged freely among the writings of philosophers to find confirmation for the metaphysical obsessions that haunt him. He has managed to transmute

such speculative problems as Cartesian dualism, incertitude, epistemological waverings, into the literary form. There is however no handy philosophical key to his work, even though the references he makes, ranging from the pre-Socratics to the Existentialists, would tend to disprove his statement that he does not write in a philosophical vein.

A philosopher who is on the one hand left unmentioned by A.J. Leventhal and Ruby Cohn, but mentioned (and briefly at that) by John Fletcher is, on the other hand, discussed at length in relation to Beckett by Martin Esslin. The philosopher is George Berkeley, and Martin Esslin refers to his dictum, which is a basic premise to Beckett's only attempt at film-making.[21] In dealing with Berkeley and Beckett, Martin Esslin presents us with a possible explanation of the paradoxical situation of the Beckett artist. How is it that if there is nothing to express, if the artist no longer has the ability to express, he nevertheless undergoes the obligation to express?

Film is based on the Berkeley dictum "Esse est percipi.", ("To be is to be perceived."):

> "All extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self-perception maintains in being.
> Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception."22

Self-perception is then a fundamental condition of our existence: we exist because and as long as we perceive. For the artist,

perception results in the obligation to express what he perceives, and this obligation is fundamental to his very existence as an artist. Because he exists, he perceives, and as an artist he must express what he perceives, and suffer if he cannot express it satisfactorily. This is a possible way to interpret the role of the Voice in Cascando: the Voice is the voice of the artist, of the writer:

> "Voice (low, panting) - story...if you could finish it...you could rest...you could sleep...not before...oh I know...the ones I've finished... thousands and one...all I ever did...in my life... saying to myself...finish this one...it's the right one...then rest...then sleep...no more stories...no more words...and finished it...and not the right one... couldn't rest...straight away another...to begin..."23

The story can never be told and finished because man, and the artist, are subject to a constant modification. Man's personality is constantly changing, if imperceptibly, and all the artist can do is tell the story of each instant of his existence, as he registers it in his self-perception. His work is endless, since each instant gives birth to a new story:

> "The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicolored by the phenomena of its hours."24

In order to be faithful to their duty as writers, Beckett and those amongst his characters who are writers must tell the story of the stages and the modifications, the story of their

changing self; they must make their "...non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception, before they have been distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into a chain of cause and effect...".[25]

Beckett's works are based on a dichotomy that results from Cartesian dualism and from Berkeley's "Esse est percipi." What is expressed has two angles of expression, two aspects, that of the voice that speaks and that of the ear that listens. At times these two aspects are personified and take the form of two separate characters; this is a possible way to interpret the constant presence of the couple in Beckett's works, the couple of him who perceives and of him who is perceived. Didi/Gogo, Pozzo/Lucky, Hamm/Clov, Krapp present/Krapp past, Opener/Voice, Winnie/Willie, can be seen as the two complementary aspects of a same person. Martin Esslin interprets Cascando as follows: the Opener is the perceiving part of the self (the subject), whereas the Voice as well as the Music are that part of the self which the perceiving part perceives (the object). Since the object is constantly changing, the subject can never end telling a story that is constantly renewing itself.

This point allows us to appreciate also another characteristic of Beckett's work, that of the compulsiveness of the writer's voice. The writer is unable to escape self-perception and the obligation to express self-perception, which are the fundamental conditions of his existence as an

artist.

The duty of the writer is therefore not to give solutions to the problems of existence, but to recognize and to articulate them. The world is too complex to be explained; that is why Beckett refuses to deal in abstract truths, in generalizations, in philosophical systems:

> "He says nothing that compresses experience within a closed pattern. 'Perhaps' stands in place of commitment."[26]

This clarifies the silent attitude he maintains toward his work: it is the attitude duly dictated to him by his definition of the role of the writer, and not a sign of intellectual snobbery. As an artist, Beckett is obliged to express, but not obliged to explain. He is interested in the individual and, since the individual is constantly changing, only the experiencing of this changing can serve for him as a basis to truth. All generalization that is made to apply outside the flow of time and the ever-changing individual's self-perception, is for him inexact or untrue. On the one hand the Positivists, who deal in unchanging and abstract truths, are inaccurate, for the universe is in a constant process of modification, where each instant contains the development or negation of the preceding instant. In the Beckett universe, on the other hand, nothing is certain, and that is the only certitude. Accuracy lies in inaccuracy, and it is because of this conviction that Beckett, as well as his characters,

always withdraw any affirmation that they make and change their views concerning the identity of things from one line to the next.[27]

Essentially, then, the Beckett vision is characterized by doubt and the lack of assurance concerning the external world.[28] Colored by the individual's existential experience, the world loses its familiar and reassuring outlines. That is the reason why in the end there is nothing to express: nothing is certain.

Beckett's refusal to deal in abstract truths and generalizations, his preference for concrete expression are therefore not gratuitous. We can now begin to understand why he denies all religious significance in the words he quotes from Saint Augustine, and all philosophical significance in the words of Berkeley.[29] His work is a document, an exploration of the nature of man and his existence, yet the expression of his human existence is independent of the Existential philosophical system. Beckett wants to avoid its ingrained contradiction, that of using generalizations in order to illustrate a phenomenon as individualistic as existence. The Existentialist system lacks the validity and immediacy of impact that characterizes Beckett's writings.

The refusal on Beckett's part to be more than a reporter of modes of existence prevents his critics from applying any given philosophical system to his work. This places Beckett's work in a realm of significance which goes beyond that

belonging to other writers. Beckett's writings are very successful not only as literary structures, verbal forms and images, but also as documents of humanity, and that because they focus on human existence and on the experience of human existence. For the reader they are richer and more direct than the writings of philosophers who only strive to illustrate their philosophies via a literary medium. Unlike Sartre, for example, Beckett does not force a philosophical system in order to adapt it to a literary form, or force a literary form to make it illustrate a philosophical system. His work is situated on a level of artistic intensity which shows no trace of invasion by a philosophical system.

It is important not to underestimate Beckett's refusal to deal in abstract generalizations. His vehicle of expression is by preference the concrete, and we shall see later how he shows the passing of time (which most people regard as abstract) in concrete terms. For Beckett there is no one philosophy, no single well-packaged message, only a series of attempts to give shape to the void. The external world has lost its positive and uniform outlines, and as a consequence can only be shown in a fragmentary way, through the extremely varied existential experience of the individual.

Since Beckett does not lay claim to a definitive reality, he can form arbitrary action to create an illusion

of reality. In his plays, as we shall see, there is an infinite possiblity of variations, of experiences, of games, "...patterns of experience. While none of them can lay claim to meaning anything beyond itself, they are nevertheless worth our attention; they may not express reality in terms of something outside of itself, but they <u>are</u> reality, they <u>are</u> the world to the consciousness which has produced them and which in turn <u>is</u> what it experiences."[30]

If we wish to extract a message from the works of Beckett, we must learn to live the experiences that he portrays. Our experience of them will be that message. Once the reader has analyzed the allusions and references present in the text, he must accept the flow of its images, the rythm of its silences, and allow himself to be transported by them into the crepuscular brink-zone of the Beckett world.

Instead of searching for a specific message and attempting to explain it, there is, for the critic, another task, much more useful to the reader: it is the task of isolating the structural elements of each work and of Beckett's work as a whole. The theme of time is one such structural element, as is the portrayal of being. This task is very useful to the reader because he can subsequently establish a better communication with the author, and a better identification with the experience the author is trying to convey. The very existence of a writer depends on how his works are read and lived by his readers: for a writer, and especially

for Beckett, Esse est percipi.

There is very little in the way of direct pronouncements on the part of Beckett concerning time, in fact they seem to be as rare as are the commentaries and interpretations he offers with respect to his own work. There is no denying, however, that the subject is for him of great interest, since he makes of time a major theme and structural element of his work in general and of his plays in particular. On two occasions only has Beckett come close to working with time as a literary element, and then only indirectly, in dealing with two of his masters on the subject, Proust and Joyce.[31]

The essay on Proust is the first book that Beckett wrote while working at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris in 1930. The book reveals that he is particularly sensitive to two major Proustian themes, that of time and that of disillusionment in love. We will disregard the latter, and pay particular attention to the statements that Beckett makes on the former, statements which foreshadow his future work, and the importance that the theme is to have in it. Although the problem of time seems to grip Beckett even at this early stage of his literary career, we must bear in mind that the book, as he conceived it then, was not meant to be a study of time as such, but simply an introduction to the work of Proust.[32]

Beckett begins his essay by describing time as

monstrous and ambivalent, "...that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation...", a superior and hostile force in relation to man. As a fourth dimension, time is more important to man than space since man, according to Proust, occupies in time a much greater place than that conceded to him in space, a place extended beyond measure, for he can touch at once periods of his life greatly separated in time but not in space. The effects of time, Beckett goes on to say, are essentially destructive: Proust's creatures (like Beckett's own later on) are victims of this predominating condition and circumstance:

> "There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday. There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us. ...Deformation has taken place. Yesterday is not a milestone that has passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday."

Time, therefore, deforms us daily. The self which made a choice yesterday will no longer exist tomorrow to follow through with that choice: man is destined to pursue phantoms not only because of the variability of the object, but also because of that of the subject, one and the other undergoing time's perpetual modifications; Beckett sums up the situation with a reference to mythology:

> "...we are...in the position of Tantalus, with this difference, that we allow ourselves to be tantalized..."33

Attainment is rare, since in the course of attainment the subject has been modified (has died) perhaps many times.

Man's optimism and humour serve as defence mechanisms against time, but they may be shaken when, for example, the future that man thought he could dominate shows its independence or its indifference concerning the plans that man was certain to see through, in accordance with his fancies. The future is generally innocuous and amorphous:

> "...hazily considered in anticipation and in the haze of our smug will to live, of our pernicious and incurable optimism, it seems exempt from the bitterness of fatality: in store for us, not in store for us."

The future is out of focus, then, unless definitely situated and a date specifically assigned to it. Man has learned to live in the absence of a tacit understanding that the future can be controlled. This results of course in great uncertainty and insecurity which could make life quite unbearable, were it not for the great deadeners.[34] The anguish which is generated by this situation is sedated by a drug that is supplied by time itself, the drug of habit. It is the product of "...the poisonous ingenuity of Time in the science of affliction...", engendered by time in the depths of man's pain and suffering,

> "...a compromise between the individual and his environment...the guarantee of a dull inviolability... Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals..."

Habit is a series of treaties:

> "The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day. Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects."

Although habit cannot watch over us constantly, although the "...boredom of living..." may periodically be replaced by the "...suffering of being...", the sedative is prompt in attaining dominance once more:

> "The pendulum oscillates between these two terms: Suffering - that opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience, and Boredom - ...that must be considered as the most tolerable because the most durable of human evils."

These statements of Beckett on Proust shed a lot of light on Beckett's plays, in which almost always the characters find themselves the victims of a tragic destiny, menaced by a cosmic void or catastrophe, prey to anguish and imperfectly defended by habit. It is the imperfection of this defence which lets them alternate between a state of boredom and one of anguish.

Another attribute of what Beckett calls the "Time cancer", besides habit, is memory. In his analysis of the Proustian vision, Beckett distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary memory. Voluntary memory is an instrument of habit which may be of use to the bureaucrat or the examinee, but which is for the artist only a representation of the slavery of his creativeness and sensitivity, a trap which he

must be careful to avoid. If on the one hand voluntary memory can be mastered and should be avoided, on the other hand involuntary memory is autonomous and cannot be mastered, not even by the artist. It only can recreate in its totality the living sensation that was lost in time past, which remains in most cases time lost. Involuntary memory is "...explosive, an immediate, total, and delirious deflagration...". Man is as helpless caught in the flight of involuntary memory as he is in the clutches of time, for both are beyond his control. And time, of course, is an instrument of death, is death, which dominates man's abyss, where

> "Tragedy is not concerned with human justice. Tragedy is the statement of an expiation... . The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin...the sin of having been born..."

The Beckett abyss is similar to the Proust abyss, yet for the latter there is a way out, a way to salvation, an esthetic and semi-religious one. For the artist, it consists

> "...in the negation of Time and Death, the negation of Death because the negation of Time. Death is dead because Time is dead."

This esthetic and semi-religious solution operates of course through involuntary memory, which sporadically eliminates for man both time and death. Through involuntary memory past and present fuse in a moment of ecstatic restoration. This phenomenon provides man with his most vivid experience of discontinuity and mutability, it stirs the bog of habit. It is in fact this incommunicable and impenetrable experience

of our unconscious state of sensation that Proust strives to penetrate and communicate in his work. Hostile time, a falsifier and transformer of all reality that is valuable and dear to us, is the archenemy that is to be defeated by involuntary memory. Yet, if Proust searches for time lost, and upon finding it through involuntary memory redeems it through writing, for Beckett the search is without hope of any redemption. No such revelation brightens the Beckett abyss to cheer the Beckett hero in the depths of his personal calvary: for Beckett, the crucifixion is slow. Time is destructive, the promise it holds of salvation illusory, the creative potential which it holds for Proust, nonexistent. Following Proust's line of thought, Beckett may have come close to equating the artist's role with a struggle to achieve immunity from the liquidating action of time, yet for him time is essentially destructive, and the victory of the artist impossible, if we recall his references to failure in Three Dialogues.

Proust made time the essential dimension of his work, temps perdu et temps retrouvé. It is in time that his characters, and similarly those of Beckett, become conscious of themselves, for they seek themselves in it and are reflected in it. They undergo their metamorphoses in it, and yet time remains exterior to them. They are no more incorporated in it than they integrate it into themselves. They submit to it as to an overwhelming

exterior and impersonal force, as they do to gravity, for example. Time is their element, yet they are not suited to the long perspective that confronts them at each instant of their being.

With Joyce, as with Proust, time is a dominant factor, and Beckett does not fail to point this out,[35] but with one definite difference: time, which is for Proust external, is for Joyce, on the other hand, an inseparable factor, a primary element at the base of his work. Joyce, in fact, creates his own time, much as he creates his own language. He does not fight time but integrates it in his work, so that Joycean time is not chronological time, but the flexible, ever-twisting time of association. Joyce puts much emphasis on the relativity of time and its mystery. His idea of time is that of the dissociation of moments. For an insect that lives only a few days, a fraction of a minute is filled with as much experience as a year for a long-living animal. Similarly, to reduce the decades of the Odyssey to eighteen hours in the ordinary life of an ordinary man is an Einsteinian miracle of the relativity of time. Beckett also plays, as we shall see, on the relativity of time: there are many levels to this structural element of his theatre. One very typical one, very briefly, is that of the nightmare of time, that of a treadmill-present, empty of recall of the past or of anticipation of the future, of any sense of preparation behind or of consummation ahead. Endgame,

for example, may be interpreted as the final yet never-ending moment of consciousness before death.[36]

According to William T. Noon,[37] the most extraordinary and concentrated symbolic effort of our century to discover some principle of unity (at least imaginatively) in the fluctuating flow of time, and to express this flow in words, is Joyce's Finnegan's Wake. A cyclical concept of time pervades this work, written, as Beckett points out, in the perspectives of Vico's corso-ricorso theory of history, but with an added twist of Joycean irony (philosophical perspectives with a twist of humour are also common to Beckett, as we have already mentioned). Non-Christian attitudes cluster around the Christian core of the work in such a way as to distort Vico's creative Christian structure of time. The redemptive role of Christ which Vico places at the center of his history is by-passed almost altogether and, where it is incidentally enacted, it is by way of ironic allegory or parody.

Joyce's time is what Hans Meyerhoff[38] would call psychological time, personal and subjective, as opposed to physical time, which is impersonal and objective, that which we study in science when we measure the rate of change, the number of motion of one finite object in terms of that of another, in virtue of which we set our watches. Beckett's time has both qualities, as we shall see. In Finnegan's Wake the concepts of past, present, and future are better laid aside if one is to grasp the composition: no such process is possible

in the reading of Beckett's writings. Although generally nothing happens in the theatre of Beckett, the fact that time passes while nothing happens is very important: psychological time may be at a standstill, the characters may seem to be outside time, yet physical time is passing, inexorably, relentlessly. Earth is Purgatory, according to Beckett, who compares Joyce's world to Dante's Purgatorio. Joyce's Purgatory is like Beckett's, a godless one:

> "Dante's is conical and consequently implies culmination. Mr. Joyce's is spherical and excludes culmination... . In the one, absolute progression and a guaranteed consummation: in the other flux-progression or retrogression, and an apparent consummation. In the one movement is unidirectional, and a step forward represents a net advance: in the other movement is non-directional - or multi-directional, and a step forward is, by definition, a step back. ...Hell is the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness. ...There is a continuous purgatorial process at work, in the sense that the vicious circle of humanity is being achieved, and this achievement depends on the recurrent predomination of one of two broad qualities. ...On this earth that is Purgatory... neither prize nor penalty; simply a series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its tail."39

The chaos and frustration of the world of Joyce, like that of Beckett, is a necessary condition of creation. Both writers have experienced a refutation of man and his milieu, a rejection of combinations already used. They look for new forms, new instruments, individual conceptions of time. Under apparent chaos, their creative purpose is constructive and architectural. These authors have razed every conventional concept of dimension and vocabulary, and have selected the elements of a

new structure, a new language, Beckett to a lesser extent than Joyce, of course. In Beckett's theatre, many standard conventions are broken or ignored. Beginning, middle, and end of an organized plot line, clear character progression, dramatic mobility and colour are dismissed, and new concepts are established, such as tone, rhythm, cross-currents of relationships which he weaves into every fibre of his material. The stage directions, for example, are essential and valid: the pauses are as much a part of the text as are the words themselves, and any production which overlooks this fact is destined to be mediocre. What Beckett strives for is a new expression, a veritable expression not of abstract concepts, but of a very concrete one, time.[40] Time is perhaps the only reality in the world, the thing which is the most concrete, for it is equivalent to death. Beckett strives to achieve the quality he admired so in Joyce, that of incorporating form and content into one intense statement:

> "Here form <u>is</u> content, content is form. ...It is not to be read - or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not <u>about</u> something; <u>it is that something itself</u>."[41]

Once again, this statement of Beckett on Joyce reaffirms Beckett's stand against interpreting a literary work: the work is not to be deciphered, but to be experienced. With Beckett, as with Joyce, "The danger is in the neatness of identifications."[42]

PART I: FOOTNOTES

[1] Taken from Beckett's correspondence with Alan Schneider, Village Voice, March 1958, p. 185. The letter is dated December 29, 1957.

[2] For an account see Melvin J. Friedman, samuel beckett now, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 15-16.

[3] Martin Esslin, Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), p. 17.

[4] Lawrence E. Harvey, "Samuel Beckett on Life, Art, and Criticism", Modern Language Notes (Vol. LXXX, 1965), 547.

[5] Esslin, Beckett, p. 17.

[6] Esslin, Beckett, p. 18.

[7] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 12.

[8] Esslin, Beckett, p. 19.

[9] Esslin, Beckett, p. 21.

[10] Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", Columbia Forum (Summer 1961), p. 23.

[11] John Fletcher, "Samuel Beckett and the Philosophers", Comparative Literature (Vol. XVII, Winter 1965), 43-56.

[12] Legend tells of Empedocles' suicide on Mt. Etna, into the crater of which he cast himself in order to establish his claim to divinity.

[13] A.J. Leventhal, "The Beckett Hero", lecture delivered at Trinity College, Dublin, June 1963. Esslin, Beckett, pp. 37-51.

[14] Esslin, Beckett, p. 46: "For the metaphysical background we must turn to a Sicilian rhetorician and sophist who flourished from 483-375 B.C.: Gorgias of Lentini (sic.) ..."

[15] John Fletcher attributes this explanation to a letter of Beckett to Hobson in 1956: we have been unable to check on this source, as the correspondence does not seem to be published. This parody of Saint Augustine's words is in keeping with Beckett's brand of humour, yet the restrictive explanation of the boot-and-foot symbolism is not likely to have come from Beckett: firstly, Beckett meticulously avoids such explanations of his plays; secondly, making a spoof of Saint Augustine's words disturbs the atmosphere of austerity and tragedy that the statement as discussed by Vladimir and Estragon lends to the play.

[16] Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 23.

[17] Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia (Firenze: Sansoni, 1892), Purgatorio, IV, vv. 106-108:

> "...ed un di lor, che mi sembrava lasso,
> sedeva ed abbracciava le ginocchia,
> tenendo il viso giù tra esse basso."

[18] Ruby Cohn, "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett", Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts (Vol. VI, No. 1, Winter 1964). Esslin, Beckett, p. 171.

[19] Samuel Beckett, Proust (London: John Calder, 1965), p. 67.

20 Samuel Beckett, From an Abandoned Work (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1958), p. 14.

[21] Film, for Project I, written in 1963, produced in New York by Alan Schneider (Summer 1964), starring Buster Keaton.

[22] Samuel Beckett, Film, introduction.

[23] Samuel Beckett, Cascando and Other Short Dramatic Pieces (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1970), p. 75.

[24] Beckett, Proust, p. 15.

[25] Beckett, Proust, pp. 86-87. Beckett goes on to add that "...we are reminded of Schopenhauer's definition of the artistic procedure as '...the contemplation of the world independently of the principle of reason...' ..."

[26] Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 24.

[27] Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1954), pp. 10a-10b. Notice how rapidly Vladimir changes his mind about the type of tree he is observing, how his determination to return the next day to the place of meeting is replaced by a "...possibly..."; notice how Estragon, who is at first certain of having already been during the preceding day where he is presently waiting, suddenly becomes uncertain.

[28] Murphy, 1938, illustrates an extreme attitude to this dilemma: for Murphy, uncertainty is so extreme that for him the unseen is the real and the seen is a necessary obstacle to reality. To get beyond that obstacle is his aim in life, and he neglects or despises the criteria of the substantial world. He moves in the lowest strata of society, and the efforts of the other characters fail to nail him securely to life.

[29] Alan Schneider, "Waiting for Beckett", Chelsea Review (September 1958), p. 3:

"I take no sides. I am interested in the shape of ideas. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine: 'Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.' That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters."

Beckett, Cascando, p. 75:

"No truth value attached to above, regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience."

[30] Esslin, Beckett, p. 9.

[31] Beckett, Proust, and "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce", Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1961).

[32] Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations which follow are taken from Beckett, Proust. See also John Fletcher, "Beckett et Proust", Caliban (Vol. I, 1964), 89-100.

[33] As we shall see later, this myth is a favourite for Beckett: it is very clearly dramatized in Act Without Words I, 1956.

[34] Beckett, Godot, p. 58b: "But habit is a great deadener."

[35] See footnote 31 above for reference to James Joyce.

[36] Esslin, Beckett, p. 7.

[37] W.T. Noon, "Modern Literature and the Sense of Time", Thought (Vol. XXXIII, Winter 1958-1959), 571-604.

[38] Hans Meyerhoff, Time in Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), pp. 4-5, 12-13.

[39] Beckett, Our Exagmination, pp. 21-22.

[40] Marcel Brion, "The Idea of Time in the Work of James Joyce", Our Exagmination, p. 26.

[41] Beckett, Our Exagmination, p. 14.

[42] Brion, "The Idea of Time", pp. 26-27.

II. BEING ON THE THRESHOLD TO ETERNITY: WAITING FOR GODOT AND ENDGAME

Time is a characteristic literary theme of this century. It is generally presented as a problem with which man must cope, a problem which is usually given no solution. For Proust, the redemption of time past was made possible through involuntary memory, yet its functioning was totally abandoned to chance. For Joyce, time was of a different nature, that of the endlessly fluctuating world of association. For both, the world of art was timeless and secure: life was the exclusion from a timeless inner essence, and art was to be used as a means of escaping from time and rejoining that essence. Not so for Beckett: art to him means a world of failure, and being an artist to him means having the courage to face constant failure. The escape through art, which for Proust was a stated and joyous certainty, and for Joyce an unstated but reassuring one, is, for Beckett, an impossible dream.

One of man's main preoccupations in literature is the conflict which exists between the temporal and the non-temporal. From Beckett's plays we will strive to grasp the author's vision of man's temporality and place. In our century, man has been growing more and more conscious of his isolation.

As the individual discovers his isolation, human thought no longer feels itself a part of life. By the very act of thinking, it feels itself to be disengaged, it sets itself apart from things in order to reflect upon them, and in this way is no longer upheld by their own power of enduring. It places itself outside the motion which is its object. Isolated from exterior time, it also feels equally detached from the time of its mental life, interior time. Separated from the duration of things, and even from that of the modes of its existence, the human consciousness finds itself reduced to existence without duration and, as a consequence, it is always of the present moment. Such is the essential experience of modern man, a "Time cancer", the symptoms of which are the intimate awareness of an ever-present existence, an acute sense of the discontinuity of duration, and total dependence upon a creation continually repeated. These result in a state very close to nonexistence, typified by torpor, indolence, and an undefinable anguish, the former two contributing to the void of the present, the latter springing from the dread of an obscure future.

For Bergson, as for the Romantics, the human being discovered himself in the depths of memory, and all genuine thought was thought of the continuous becoming of things: duration was the only reality, and Bergson equated it with the free creation of the mind. This is not the case with Beckett: for him, in place of the possibility of a mutual

communication (the relationship between the moment and time), there is a hiatus between the actual feeling of existence and the depth of existence. He calls that hiatus the void.

Probably the main difference between man and God, according to Marcel Brion,[1] is that of time. Man measures time, but does not know what it is, and is controlled by what he cannot understand. Relationships between human beings are predominantly those of time: all human beings are made similar by the nearly identical cadence of their heart-beats, yet they are separated by the rhythms of their sensations and thoughts. Be it biological or intellectual time, it is this fourth dimension which really matters. Space is no longer relevant as a fourth dimension because in our century time has taken its place. Space is reduced every day by increasingly sophisticated means of communication, yet it is often the tragedy of life to feel ourselves only a small distance away from those among whom we live, but separated from them by all the imperviousness of time.

Time is then an essential factor in a literary work, and becomes quite evident if we consider it in one of its major aspects, rhythm. The plays of Beckett have their own particular rhythm, as we shall see, the rhythm of the consciousness of time, the rhythm of life. An author's story may embrace several centuries without revealing the experience of time to the reader, another's imposes it in a few moments. Such are Beckett's plays.

A theme which is complementary to the dominant theme of time in Beckett's plays is that of entropy. Entropy is, to say the least, a difficult concept for the layman to grasp, and even more so for the layman to explain. What relevance does a scientific term have when considered in the light of Beckett's plays?

Even though Beckett does not use the actual scientific term in his writings, it is certain that he is familiar with it and that its concept is quite basic to his theatre. An inscribed copy of Erwin Schrodinger's The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell[2] was presented by Samuel Beckett to Dr. Gerald Beckett[3] in June 1946. The book is apparently not without interest with respect to Samuel Beckett's own work, Chapter VI in particular, which is entitled Order, Disorder and Entropy, and headed by a quotation from Spinoza's Ethics:

> "Neither can the body determine the mind to think, nor the mind the body to move or to rest nor to anything else, if such there be..."4

In this chapter, Professor Schrodinger speaks about entropy and gives a very elementary definition of it, a definition which can easily be grasped by the layman:

> "...in a word, everything that is going on in Nature means an increase of the entropy of that part of the world where it is going on. Thus a living organism continually increases its entropy... and thus tends to approach the dangerous state of maximum entropy, which is death."5

Schrodinger equates maximum entropy with death, yet most definitions of the term are far more complex.[6] For our

purposes, however, the equation maximum entropy = death is sufficient, since it makes the situation of Beckett's characters even more desperate: while nothing happens in their empty lives, not only is time passing, but entropy is increasing towards its maximum value as well. Both movements lead to death. This brief consideration of the concept of entropy, of its irreversibility in a closed system, of its tendency towards a maximum value in the universe, a maximum which is equivalent with death, should allow us to sense, if not to grasp in its entirety, the extent to which Beckett's plays are intimately connected with the great currents of time and life. In a closed system, that is, in man. In the universe, time and life are seemingly endless and reconciled, in comparison to what they are in man, unreconciled. One limitless, the other very much limited. Entropy is the measure of this discontinuity which becomes increasingly evolved and evident as it nears its maximum value, death. Plays like Godot, Endgame, Breath[7] (the play lasts thirty seconds, a breath and a cry emerge from a pile of rubbish on the stage), have as their central structural elements time, entropy, and suffering. Man is seen and/or heard suffering, as time passes, as nothing happens, and as he nears death. Whether it be thirty seconds, or grey and recurring days of waiting, or the stretched-out final moments of man's consciousness in life, what we experience from Beckett's plays is a feeling of tension, the tension between the desperately temporal and the seemingly

infinite, between one man's life and time, between the constantly decaying nature of the material universe and the immaterial aspect of consciousness which renews itself without end in self-perception:

> "The more in Beckett's works the material envelope decays and is stripped away, the more painful becomes the tension between the temporal and the infinite. Beckett's characters may lose the capacity for locomotion; their senses may decay; yet the awareness of their own self continues relentlessly; and time can never have a stop: the final situations in Waiting for Godot, in Endgame... imply eternal recurrence...as the individual can never become aware of his own cessation, his final moments of consciousness must remain, as it were, eternally suspended in limbo and can be conceived as recurring through all eternity."8

We may now begin to understand how Beckett uses the elements of time, suffering, and death as a dramatic structure on which to build his plays.

Much ink has been spilled in vainly trying to find the key to Godot. It has been called by Alan Schneider "...some of the most terrifying and beautiful prose of the twentieth century...". His question, "Who or What does Godot mean?", was met by Beckett's answer, "If I knew, I would have said so in the play."[9] Clearly, Beckett would not go into matters of vaster symbolic meaning, letting his work speak for itself, preferring to let the meanings fall where they might. We are already familiar with his motives for an interpretative silence.

In the title, the important word is of course the first: we are not so much concerned with Godot as with Waiting.

Waiting is a passive attitude with regards to time, a way of dealing with time, of disposing of it, of killing it.

Gunther Anders[10] describes the play as a negative parable. By negative he means to say that, like most parables, the play conveys its message in mirror-image, inverted form, even though it does not correspond any longer to the formal ideal of the classical fable:

> "In order to present a fable about a kind of existence, which has lost both form and principle and in which life no longer goes forward, he destroys both the form and the principle so far characteristic of fables: now the destroyed fable, the fable which does not go forward, becomes the adequate representation of stagnant life; his meaningless parable about man stands for the parable of meaningless man."[11]

If the play does not present us with a definite plot, it is because it describes man excluded from and deprived of the historical flow of time. If there is no action, it is because the action related is that of passive, inactive life. If the dialogue is repetitious or lacks motivation it is because the subject matter is life deprived of a motive principle and without motivation. But let us look at the play more closely:

At the beginning of the first act we see Estragon (also called Gogo) sitting on the ground beside a country road. He tries in vain to remove one of his boots, which seems to give him much pain. At first contact, we are tempted to think of him as a hobo[12] who is exhausted from too much walking and who has insufficient strength left to remove his boot. Estragon has problems breathing, and he has to stop struggling to regain his breath. His "Nothing to be done."[13]

manifests his intense frustration. This remark, which Estragon makes with reference to his immediate struggles, is given greater scope by his friend Vladimir (also called Didi) who is more philosophical and likes to speculate on life. Vladimir too is plagued by a physical affliction, for he walks stiffly, taking short steps. Both suffer from physical and moral infirmities, then, and their condition seems desperate. They meet after a night of separation. As usual, Estragon has been beaten by hostile and mysterious men, perhaps in reality, perhaps in his dreams. Vladimir is very happy to see his friend, but Estragon, irritated, pushes him away. It is frequently thus for the hoboes: the need for affection of one never coincides with that of the other.

Vladimir ponders, while searching for something which irritates him inside his hat, and Estragon continues to struggle with his boot. He muses over the past possibility of suicide in style, which is for him and his friend no longer feasible, because they have lost all will power and dignity:

> "Vladimir: Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up."14

Vladimir then turns his thoughts to his hopes of salvation. Estragon hardly listens to him, too aggravated by his physical complaints to care about philosophizing. The lack of communication in their dialogue is typical throughout the play, for the characters speak about all sorts of things without

understanding each other clearly.

After discussing their chances of salvation, Estragon proposes leaving, but Vladimir reminds him that they are waiting for Godot. The waiting begins, or rather, continues. They speak of the tree nearby, they quibble over the exact place of waiting. Estragon becomes bored and goes to sleep. Vladimir feels alone and wakes his friend: they quarrel, and then they make up. As a pastime they consider the possibility and the effects of hanging themselves, but they soon abandon the idea. After having eaten a carrot, Estragon arrives at the same conclusion as before: "Nothing to be done." At this point the play seems to double back, and we realize that we have come the full circle.

Following the first circular phase, a frightening couple enters, that of Pozzo and Lucky, as if summoned by Estragon's question, "We're not tied?" (tied to Godot).[15] Pozzo holds Lucky by a long rope which is tied around his neck: they are clearly the master and the slave. We find ourselves wondering, along with Vladimir and Estragon, whether the newcomers are by any chance Godot, even though they hardly resemble a reassuring and accomodating divinity. But the identity problem is soon solved, Pozzo and Lucky are <u>not</u> Godot.

During the sequence that follows, Pozzo tortures his exhausted slave by repeated and unnecessary orders. Pozzo

rests, eats, smokes, and chats with the hoboes while Lucky awaits his orders. Estragon can only think greedily about the scraps from Pozzo's snack, but Vladimir, the more sensitive of the two, begins to show signs of indignation. His rest finished, Pozzo is on the verge of leaving, but he decides to stay. He tells the hoboes that he wishes to sell Lucky at the market,[16] and at this Lucky begins to sob. Estragon offers him a handkerchief and tries to console him, and receives in return a violent kick in the shins. Evidently, the slave rejects compassion and is jealous even of his miserable condition. The dialogue continues, and Pozzo tells of his miseries as a rich slave owner. He continues by giving a lyrical description of the twilight and, to entertain the hoboes, he commands Lucky first to dance and then to think. Once he is given permission to think, Lucky rapidly becomes a verbal monster whom the others are forced to stifle.

After much hesitation, Pozzo finally decides to depart. During the conversation, he has lost his pipe, his vaporizer, and his watch. This marks the beginning of the rapid degeneration that the couple will undergo before the end of the second act.

Alone once again, Vladimir and Estragon return to their stagnant condition. Their boredom is broken when a Boy arrives to tell them that Godot will not be coming, while renewing the promise of his coming. The moon rises, Estragon speaks of Christ's quick crucifixion as opposed to their own

interminable experience of suffering. Resigned, Vladimir proposes looking for a shelter from the night. Having reached the conclusion that nothing is certain, they decide to leave, but remain as if rooted to the ground.

The second act is very similar to the first. At the same place, the hoboes continue to wait for Godot. When they find each other after the night of separation, their dialogues are centered around the same themes: fear of others, friendship, physical and moral suffering, suicide, and waiting. Pozzo and Lucky reappear, one blind and the other dumb. The Boy also returns to deliver the same message. The act ends just like the first, with the hoboes deciding to move on, but unable to do so.

Both acts, then, begin with Vladimir and Estragon concerned about the latter's boots, continue with a series of activities which the two hoboes improvise to pass the time. They are interrupted by the entrance of Pozzo and Lucky, who stay for a while and then move on, leaving them behind to resume their waiting. At this point the Boy comes from Godot to say that his master is unable to come but that he will come the next day; once he leaves, Vladimir and Estragon are once again left suspended in time, wanting to leave, but lacking the will power to do so.

The two central characters are clearly set apart, abstracted, and assume representative proportions. In fact they themselves say that they are men in general:

> "...at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not..."

and again,

> "Vladimir: ...we have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?
> Estragon: Billions."17

Gunther Anders points out that they are abstractions also in the literal sense of the word, because they are pulled away and set apart from the rest of the world.[18] Not only have they been abstracted from the world, but the world too has become for them an abstraction, empty and barren. Like most of Beckett's characters, the hoboes are philosophers, because the primary mode of their being is speculation. They live as a consequence in the abstract world of their thoughts, a symbolic, empty landscape of the mind. A country road and a mound constitute an empty stage, except for the tree in its centre, which is a reminder of the possibility of escaping the situation, the possibility of suicide. The fact that on two occasions the hoboes toy with the idea of suicide only to abandon it, seems to define their lives as the non-committing of suicide while waiting. They are alive, but no longer living in the world; they are in a sense suspended in time, waiting in Purgatory for the moment they will be able to enter Paradise.[19]

All they do and say is to prove to themselves that they actually exist while they wait:

> "Estragon: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?"20

Within the play the hoboes engage in lucid play acting, in games, diversions, farce. Their existence is poignant because in spite of their suffering it does not even have a chance at tragedy, it must always be farce. They are men, representative of mankind, yet first and foremost they are indolent hoboes, rejects, creatures excluded from the world, who no longer have anything left to do but to wait. The object of their waiting is undetermined: Godot may be their future employer, or he may be God, or he may represent death and the end of their suffering. They wait because they no longer have anything to do with the world. The metaphysical basis for the comicality of clowns, according to Gunther Anders, seems to rest in their inability to distinguish <u>being</u> from <u>non-being</u>, with the result that they are always falling over non-existing obstacles or treating real obstacles as if they were non-existing. Vladimir and Estragon, however, no longer attempt to concern themselves not just with this or that object, but simply with the world as a whole. They have nothing to do because they will have nothing to do with the world (or rather, they <u>have nothing</u> to do with it, since <u>will have nothing</u> implies that there is a will at play, a will that they have long lost). They simply have nothing left to do. How this came about, and it must have come about in their past, we are not told. What they are before our eyes is the result of their past, and yet their past is not explained to us. They are what they are because of their past but also in spite of it.

This lack of specific causality is characteristic of the Beckett situation, and serves to intensify the anguish of the present by making it inexplicable. This is a logical notion in view of the general lack of specificity in the temporal structure: since the chronological sequence of the days is uncertain, only the immediate present actually matters.

Even though Vladimir and Estragon are confronted with the inaction and the emptiness of their present existence, they still go on, just as the average man would. If men do not give up living when their life becomes pointless, it is because they have lost the will power to end it. Vladimir and Estragon are no exception: it is not in spite of the emptiness of their present lives that they go on living, but because of it. They continue to live simply because they already exist. The theatrical hero, once everything has failed, will make his exit with much sound and fury, usually by committing the act of suicide. Vladimir and Estragon are so untheatrical that they cannot even make their exit, let alone take their lives into their hands. With nothing left, the theatrical hero will leave; knowing there is nothing left, the hoboes are incapable of leaving, and seem to say, "We are waiting for nothing. Yet, since we are unable to leave, and since we are waiting, there must be <u>someone</u> or <u>something</u> that makes us wait."

Nevertheless, the fact that they are not waiting for anyone or anything in particular seems to be quite clear.

On several occasions Vladimir, the more intellectual of the two hoboes, and the one with the better memory, has to remind Estragon, who is more instinctive, having no memory at all except for suffering, that they are in fact waiting for Godot.[21] Even when he actually remembers him, Estragon is very uncertain about Godot's identity, and Vladimir cannot really help him on that account either.[22] And yet, they have fewer doubts about the fact that they are waiting.[23] The attitude is certain, but its object is not: the waiting is quite certain, whereas Godot as the object of waiting is quite uncertain. Again we are faced with the lack of a specific cause for a certain attitude, in this case, waiting: the hoboes' waiting is without a clearly defined reason and purpose. However, suspended as they are in time, with nothing happening, and exposed to the daily and irreversible continuation of their existence, their endless waiting, the hoboes reach the conclusion that they must be waiting for someone or something. To speculate on Godot's identity is consequently futile. Here is Gunther Anders' answer to the question:

> "Godot is nothing but the name for the fact that life which goes on pointlessly misinterprets itself as waiting, as waiting for something. The negative attitude of the two tramps thus amounts to a double negation: their inability to recognize the senselessness of their position."24

Vladimir and Estragon are champions of the doctrine that life must have significance even in a clearly insignificant situation.

They are incurable optimists and it is difficult to understand how some commentators have managed to call them nihilists.[25] If anything, Beckett shows us two men unable to be nihilists, even though circumstances practically dictate that they be so. They are prisoners of time, victims, and not manipulators of time, nihilists. Day after day their hopes are crushed, and yet they remain incapable of abandoning hope. The fact that they are not nihilists, the fact that they cannot cope with the situation by terminating it with their own hands, shows us that they are incurably naive optimists, and makes them pathetically comical.

Gunther Anders calls the hoboes' mode of life "being without time"[26] meaning outside of time, and he would be quite right if he did not go on to describe the whole play as being without time, for, with respect to Pozzo and Lucky, his definition is less accurate. In fact, Beckett presents us in this play with a treatment of time which is not homogeneous but changing relatively to the characters, as we shall see.

Vladimir and Estragon wait aimlessly for Godot, in spite of repeated signs that Godot will not come, and in fact never will come. Not having the will power to commit suicide (one possible way of terminating the situation) or simply to leave, they remain by the tree. Even thus their life continues, but it fails to progress, and becomes suspended outside of time, as it were, life without time, as Gunther Anders puts

it. They no longer have objectives or ambitions, for them life is a treadmill of time, a series of repetitive circular agitations which they act out in order to pass the time, to kill time. This they do to give themselves the illusion that they are actually existing in time. They are outcasts, yet time hangs on them still and heavily enough to make them suffer from their inactivity:

> "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful."27

moans Estragon.

For the hoboes, before and after have lost their time character; usually, life is a temporal experience because objectives have not yet been reached, or because ambitions have been satisfied, but for Vladimir and Estragon all this lies in the dim past, from which come imperfect memories of a period of their lives when action and suicide had been possible. Estragon had then attempted to drown himself, but, having failed, evolved somehow into the more indolent and static of the two hoboes:

> "Estragon: Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhone?
> Vladimir: We were grape harvesting.
> Estragon: You fished me out.
> Vladimir: That's all dead and buried."28

For Estragon the past is a series of failures and frustrations which he successfully blots out from his memory, but which emerge in his sleep as plaguing nightmares. Suffering and failure have been with him for so long that they have coloured

his past uniformly grey:

> "Estragon: ...Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery!"29

The situation is similar for Vladimir, except that for him memories are more distinct. He is also more lucid in his grasp of their situation, but he is still plagued by doubts and uncertainty. He struggles to keep a hold on time and reality, a hold which Estragon has long lost, and he suffers from the static condition of his present life more than does his friend:

> "Vladimir: ...Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today?...(Estragon, having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again. Vladimir looks at him.) He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot."30

For both, then, the past is relatively unimportant, even though it holds the key to what they have become, even though it is a source of suffering, since it furnishes memories of happier times. The past is choked out by the present, as it were, by the leaden grey duration of their suffering which they can somehow tolerate and endure because of the games they play, because of the fast-fading glimmers of hope that Godot will come and, most of all, because of the great defence mechanism of habit. They have become accustomed to failure, to frustration, to suffering: life may be heavy and painful, but habit is a great reliever, a great deadener. They are accustomed to waiting:

> "Estragon: So long as one knows.

Vladimir: One can bide one's time.
Estragon: One knows what to expect.
Vladimir: No further need to worry.
Estragon: Simply wait.
Vladimir: We're used to it."31

Because of the force of habit which protects them to a great extent from despair, the hoboes cling quite irrationally to their hope that sometime in the future Godot will come to make all things well. When, in the second act, they at first mistake Pozzo and Lucky for Godot, we are able to see the changes that his coming would have initiated for them:

> "Vladimir: We are no longer alone, waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting for... waiting. ...Now it's over, it's already tomorrow.
>
> ...
>
> Vladimir: Time flows again already. The sun will set, the moon rise, and we away...from here."32

The stagnant, static present would once again become active, and the current of time would start to flow once more. Even at the end of the play, the future holds for them still the answer to all their problems, an answer which becomes increasingly less accessible, but which constitutes for them their only hope.

Vladimir and Estragon then, are trapped in an eternity of waiting which is inexplicable, and in which time appears to be at a standstill, even though it is moving along relentlessly. To show this treadmill aspect of time, Beckett presents us, as we have seen, with a second act which is but a slight variation of the first. A third and a fourth act, of

course, would be but a further slight variation of the first and second, and so on. Each little sequence of the hoboes (Estragon calls their efforts "little canters") takes us back to the starting point. Action always falls back into silence and inaction, that is the rhythm of the play. The various incidents do not change the condition of the hoboes in the least: the more things change, the more they remain unchanged. The circular structure of the play matches the content: here form is content, content is form.

To say, like Gunther Anders,[33] that the hoboes suffer from amnesia and do not recognize that their conversations are mere recapitulations of previous ones, is not quite accurate. Several times Vladimir and Estragon show that they are aware of the repetitiousness of events:

> "Boy: (off). Mister!...
> Estragon: Off we go again."

> "Vladimir: ...There you are again...There we are again...There I am again."[34]

Vladimir's song, at the beginning of the second act, also illustrates very well the circular form of the play, for it always ends with the beginning, ad nauseam. What makes the hoboes very pitiable is that they are both aware that in spite of the repetitiveness of the present, the flight of time is irrevocable. Their waiting in boredom also constitutes an increase in entropy and an insidious progression towards death:

> "Estragon: Everything oozes. ...It's never the same pus from one second to the next."[35]

For Estragon, Heraclitus' river has become a river of pus. His condition, as well as that of the other characters in the play, is one of unhealthy decay.

The circular structure of the play is not meant to evoke the wholesomeness of the cycle of the days or of the seasons. The rhythm it sets is not that of an eternal renewal, it is rather that of the repeated but irreversible build-up of entropy, a trap without an exit, where morbid motion gives the impression of being stationary because it does not lead anywhere. It is the rhythm created by the exasperated motion of the caged animal. It is a sterile parody of the fertile cycle of the seasons, a parody which leads to death. The events of the preceding day recur, but the time is now, the events of today will recur unchanged, but the time will be tomorrow, and so on, until death.

For Vladimir and Estragon nothing changes, even though time passes, and because of this they <u>seem</u> to exist without time. Nevertheless, the few changes which occur in the second act make the passing of time very clear. The tree, barren in the first act, has burst into leaf: for it, time is that of the cycle of the seasons, fertile time. For Pozzo and Lucky, on the other hand, time is infertile and causes degeneration. Unlike Vladimir and Estragon, they have a well-defined social classification, they are the master and his slave. In contrast with the inactivity of the hoboes, this couple is constantly on the move. Yet, in spite of their activity, they are to reach

the same fate as the hoboes, death. Both inactivity and activity are ways of battling with time, and both lead to defeat and death. Pozzo is the great hypocrite, brutal with those whom he exploits, affable with those whom he meets for the first time, yet always calculating if somehow he can exploit them to his own advantage. He knows how to philosophize and how to poetize. Brutal and determined when dealing with his slave, he can be timid and hesitating, though insincere, when dealing with the hoboes. He is tied to his slave both literally and figuratively, for he shares with him a common destiny. Lucky is the slave, the intellect which has degenerated because of the exploitation of an oppressive force. Under the domain of Pozzo, Lucky has lost all his talents and has been reduced to a sub-human state. Beckett has named him Lucky perhaps because he is the only character in the play who does not think independently. Lucky is lucky because his suffering is limited, for he only thinks when told to do so by his master. When ordered to think, Lucky delivers a long tirade which manifests the disintegration of his intellect and at the same time gives us a parody of human knowledge.

If Vladimir and Estragon are stagnating in time, if their only concern is to pass the time, to kill time,[36] Pozzo and Lucky, on the other hand, are active in time and constantly on the move. During the first act, Pozzo often consults his watch,[37] and is very sensitive to the insidious passing of time:

"Pozzo: ...the sky...it begins to lose its

> effulgence, to grow pale...pale, ever a little paler, a little paler until...pppfff! finished! it comes to rest. But...but behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is charging...and will burst upon us... pop! like that!...just when we least expect it... That's how it is on this bitch of an earth."38

The essential difference between the two couples is seen in this quick exchange of the first act:

> "Vladimir: Time has stopped.
> Pozzo: (cuddling his watch to his ear). Don't you believe it, Sir, don't you believe it. ...Whatever you like, but not that."39

Vladimir and Estragon have lost touch with the world, Pozzo (and inevitably Lucky) are very much concerned with it: for the hoboes time seems to be at a standstill, but for the master and slave it flows much more rapidly, as we shall see. Pozzo and Lucky undergo a degeneration which begins in the first act when the former misplaces his watch. As Vladimir, Estragon, and Pozzo search for his watch by listening for its ticking, at one point they think they have found it, but they discover that it is merely the beating of their hearts. Here Beckett reminds us very subtly that for all of us time is passing and death is drawing closer with every heart beat. When we see Pozzo again in the second act, he is totally blind, and his slave totally dumb. Also, the rope which connects them is much shorter. They have degenerated rapidly, and their time is running out. When Lucky stumbles or falls, he pulls his master down with him, both sharing their common fate. When the hoboes finally move to assist them, one of the first

questions that Pozzo asks concerns the time:

"Pozzo: What time is it?...Is it evening?"40

and, when Vladimir tells him that it is indeed evening, Pozzo is filled with anguish, the anguish of death. Later on, he tells the hoboes that he has lost all notion of time; he has also lost all memory. Since time no longer matters for him, neither does memory. Thus, only by the end of the second act, and not from the start, as Gunther Anders would have it, do Pozzo and Lucky reach the same condition with regards to time as Vladimir and Estragon. Only then time no longer matters and is without proportion. Each of their little diversions could well represent a day, a week, a month, or a year in their empty lives suspended in the void, and yet they are nearing death with every heart beat.

This point is reiterated in Lucky's tirade, where another time dimension, that of Godot and the Boy, is touched upon. For Vladimir and Estragon time is stagnating; for Pozzo and Lucky time is at first the cause of disintegration, then also stagnating; for the tree, time is fertile and a source of life; but for Godot and the Boy there is no time. Godot is in infinity, outside of time, always in the wings, and the Boy is also in the wings, except for brief incursions onto the stage. The former is truly outside of time, completely abstracted in infinity, like God, and the latter is his extension, leaving infinity twice to appear concretely on stage. It is tempting to identify Godot with God, but the play

does not deal with God; it deals rather with the concept of God. God is personal, that is, he corresponds to the illusions that each individual may harbour. The play does not deal with a definite God: the image is left vague. What God does and why is unknown, that is at least what transpires from the theological passages of the play. Vladimir and Estragon base their hope and faith on what remains of the Christian tradition, the memory of a passage from Saint Augustine concerning the two thieves and the salvation of one of them by Christ. The fact that salvation was granted him arbitrarily and that only one out of four evangelists spoke of the incident, does however leave the hoboes rather conscious of the shakiness of their hopes. It is mostly the non-arriving of God that gives them faith and keeps them waiting. God is personal and is in apathia (indifference), athambia (insensitiveness), and aphasia (silence); he suffers with man, but is inconstant when granting the gift of salvation. Man, in spite of his progress, wastes and pines, and will perish. From this situation there is no escape.

There remains the crucial question of how to fight the anguish produced by such a situation:

Like Vladimir and Estragon, on the one hand, we can resort to inactivity and rudimentary activity to set stagnant time in motion. Theirs is not real action, because its purpose is to make time move. In normal, positive life, this is not the purpose of action, but its result.[41] Vladimir and

Estragon play at fighting, at leaving, at helping, at being Pozzo and Lucky, they even go as far as to act out feelings and emotions. All this they do to pass the time, to reduce somehow the distance that separates them from Godot, God, or death. Even in real life, passing the time occurs very frequently and, although people like to make the distinction between real life and play, our condition is not that far removed from that of the hoboes. There is no really recognizable demarcation between our real life and play. The two have become fairly intermingled, even at the linguistic level: an office worker will, for example, work in his office all day, and then work-out during his leisure time. Activity and indolence, time spent working and time spent playing are becoming one. Those people reading or watching the play will probably not be so conscious of the fact that the real hoboes are not Vladimir and Estragon (they at least know that they are playing games) but themselves. The implication is that we are all actors in the farce that Vladimir and Estragon exemplify: they are not alone.

Like Pozzo and Lucky, on the other hand, we can resort to activity as a matter of fact, but the end result will be the same; they too are playing, in their case at master and slave, and they differ from the hoboes only in that, like most of us, they are not conscious of the fact that they are passing the time. At first actively engaged in time, champions of time, Pozzo and Lucky had no need to wait: the master was

pulled by his slave, the slave was goaded by his master. Vladimir and Estragon clearly envied them, and that is why, at first, they suspected master and slave to be Godot. Yet, once time begins to degenerate for them, Pozzo and Lucky come to be in a situation similar to that of the hoboes, for their motion becomes as futile and as devoid of meaning as the hoboes' waiting.

However pitiable may have seemed the plight of the characters in Godot, we find, as we read on in the plays of Beckett, that the situation becomes increasingly dark. In the Beckett universe man is portrayed as becoming gradually helpless physically until he finds himself the captive of a useless body, only his mind free as ever to speculate and torture itself in trying to understand the mysteries of time and life. To illustrate the tension between the temporal and the infinite, Beckett sets the progressive concentration of action to a static pattern. The characters lose their motor and sensual attributes until they are left with their self-awareness, with which they never cease to attempt to analyse, rationalise, and control their situation.

Martin Esslin[42] sees the plays of Beckett as illustrations of man in limit situations, man reduced to point zero, thrown far into the limbo of infinitely continuing consciousness. Such is the position of a consciousness before the moment of birth, a consciousness that cannot yet conceive the

fact of its own existence; or the position of a consciousness at the hour of death, and even beyond it, a consciousness that cannot become aware of its own non-being. This interpretation is of course as valid as any other, especially that of the limit situation of a consciousness at the hour of death, since in the plays it is clearly a mature consciousness which speaks, and not a foetal one.

We have already noted what Beckett has said concerning Endgame: he is writing about what he terms a local situation, in which two individuals, Hamm and Clov, operate under a given set of circumstances. They are not to be considered as abstractions or symbols, he forewarns, or as representing anything other than themselves. Once this is understood, if the audience or the critics wish to look for some kind of significance, they are to do so, at their own risk and peril. So much for that.

In his book Le retour du tragique,[43] J.M. Domenach qoutes a passage from Buchner's La mort de Danton (1835) which matches in mood and tone those set by Beckett's plays, Endgame in particular:

> "La création s'est faite trop large; en elle, ...c'est un foisonnement sans fin. ...la création est sa plaie, nous sommes les gouttes de son sang, le monde est le tombeau où il pourrit. Tout cela peut paraître fou, mais renferme pourtant une part de verité."

As Beckett's vision darkens, it comes to resemble quite closely Buchner's own death-vision: the tragic is no longer explained by God or the gods, there is but the void left to accuse,

and man's world is left in decomposition. In this terminal situation, man sends out his last hopeless prayer to a God or gods who may or may not exist.

Godot dealt with the promise of an unfulfilled arrival; Endgame (the title itself makes it clear) is a play of termination, dealing with the promise of an unfulfilled departure. Dim though the situation may have seemed in Godot, that of Endgame is a lot more desperate. In Godot, temporary escape was still possible through motion, manipulation of objects, and an attempted dialogue with other people. Motion was, granted, a little limited for Vladimir (who suffered from bladder problems) and for Estragon (who was plagued by complaining feet), yet it was at least possible for them, and even more so for Pozzo and Lucky, veritable athletes in comparison. Hats, boots, pants, food, bags, and various other articles were also present and available for manipulation, which always offered some means of temporary relief. Most of all, however, it was the human element, the warmth factor, which considerably lightened the burden of anguish: not one couple, but two, inseparable and, in the case of Vladimir and Estragon, still capable of cooperating somehow to create an impression of existence. There was, in addition, the outdoor setting: the sky, with its sun and moon, may have frightened the characters at times, yet its changes, and most of all its spaciousness over the barren plain gave at least a feeling

of vastness. Not so in Endgame, which is a claustrophobic play. Motion is very restricted, objects are becoming increasingly scarce, there is but one principal couple, and it shares only hate, bitterness, and spite. There was something almost festive about Pozzo, Vladimir and Estragon chatting by a country road under the open sky, with Lucky resting beside them. That is, if we compare them to Hamm and Clov, intent on torturing each other sadistically behind the walls of a dungeon-like basement, outside of which the world lies empty and dying. Endgame is very much an indoor play, and a stifling one at that, more so perhaps also because it is a one-act play, giving no restful interval to the reader or to the audience. But let us look at the play more closely:

Outside, life is at an end: there are no more men, there is no more animal or plant life, no more sun, no more stars, no more tides, as if after a great nuclear holocaust. Inside, in the refuge, life is also nearing its end, ever so slowly. As time approaches its termination, it moves more and more slowly, so that it seems to become endless. Hamm, the master, is dying, paralyzed. Clov, the servant, is also dying, but more slowly, for he can still drag his legs to move around. The servant watches the master, and at times the two seem to be complementary aspects of the same consciousness, the perceiving and the perceived self. All is empty and dying, the world is barren, all values are abolished (generosity,

compassion, honour, faith). If spiritual resources are running out, so are material ones, bicycle wheels, pap, sugar-plums, rugs, pain-killer, coffins. All these elements create the impression of imminent finality. The dissociation from life is evolving slowly yet relentlessly: entropy is accumulating, and there is no reversing the process. During their evolution towards death, the characters express hate and bitterness while producing fragments of tales and memories of their past lives. They are partly out of their lives, but unable to escape from them completely, closer to attaining the end than they have ever been before, on the threshold to eternity, yet still infinitely distant from it, and so condemned to playing the endgame endlessly. Their world is the colour of Purgatory, a world of waiting, crepuscular. The grey half-light is that of the time of day when day is over, but has not yet turned into night, and so drags on, holding out a constant promise of the still remote nightfall. Often, in Beckett's plays, it is evening, interminably: always Purgatory, day on the threshold of undecided night, undecided day on the brink of night. In it, man is caught between time and timelessness, the temporal and the infinite.

In his excellent thesis, Ross Chambers defines evening as follows:

> "Evening then, is the time of day when time itself is exhausted; at evening, time that ever devours but does not devour the self is running down. Evening thus gives promise of a night to come, when time will

> stop, and the self, undevoured, will be free to enjoy the darkness of timelessness. ...But although at evening time is no longer the ordinary time of daylight and is on its way towards stopping, the dark of stopped time is itself always in the future... it is always evening..."44

On two occasions, in Endgame, Hamm and Clov clearly articulate this dilemma, with reference probably to Zeno.[45] Theirs is an interminable twilight of existence, their situation is that of approaching eternity in time. Everything is played out from the start, yet nothing ever manages to cease:

> "Clov: ...Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished...Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap..."
>
> "Hamm: Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of...that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life..."46

Their goal is almost attained, but can never be attained fully. Half dead, surrounded by a moribund world, they are on their final stages of escaping from existence, but they are not quite there yet. Their end will be a beginning, but the endgame is endless:

> "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on."47

Nagg and Nell (Hamm's parents) are supposedly a generation closer to reaching the end, as Hamm is in turn a generation closer than Clov, but they all seem to be in an identical, endless stage. Whatever is "...taking its course..." is doing so, and interminably.

When Hamm asks, "What time is it?" and Clov answers,

"The same as usual. ...Zero.",[48] we may well ask ourselves whether time is actually passing for them. It may seem to have stopped for them, but in fact it has not quite stopped: things are running out, food, clothing, medicine. Time is still moving and, even though it is decelerating progressively towards a stop, its motion is still perceptible. Similar to Zeno's progressively smaller portions of millet, time is becoming progressively slower, and seems to be expanding towards the infinity of stopped time. The millet heap will never be complete, and time is expanding towards an infinity it will never reach. In the process, decelerating time will have to be lived through, agonizing second by agonizing second. As the curtain falls, we have drawn imperceptibly closer to the end of the endgame: Hamm has thrown away his whistle and his dog, Clov has struck the pose of someone departing, Nagg seems to be alive, and Nell seems to be dead. Although the circumstances have changed, the characters themselves (with the exception of Nell, though her condition is not certain) have not: they are ready for the end, but they were so at the beginning of the play. Time has passed, yet the end has not been noticeably approached. The characters are still <u>about</u> to die, as they were at the beginning, but only a little more so than before. Beckett makes the end expressly ambiguous, and it is misleading to comment that the end of the play is truly an end, because nothing has been fully

consummated: only a few more things have been partly consummated, that is all. Ross Chambers calls this ambiguity brilliant because it "...exactly mirrors the situation of people whose lives are over but still going on, who are part-way out of time but cannot attain timelessness."[49]

In these two plays, the characters are on the brink of entering the Paradise of eternal self-possession. Their existence is like a Purgatory on earth, characterized by exclusion and waiting. They are suspended between their existence in time and their life in eternity, they are neither in one nor the other, but they have the characteristics of both. Their lives are over, but not yet altogether ended, and so continue interminably on. They resemble Dante's Belacqua (a character type which appears frequently in Beckett's works), a man who has been condemned, even though his life is over, to live it through again, in expectation of being admitted first into Purgatory proper (Belacqua is only in ante-Purgatory) and then into Paradise.[50] What would constitute Paradise for the characters of Godot and Endgame? Paradise for them would be an atemporal world, wherein the waiting and the anguish of the endgame would be replaced by order and silence.[51]

PART II: FOOTNOTES

[1] Brion, "The Idea of Time", pp. 25-33.

[2] Erwin Schrodinger, The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell (Cambridge: University Press, 1945).

[3] Dr. Gerald Beckett is Samuel Beckett's uncle, and father of pianist and composer John Beckett. These details are taken from Samuel Beckett: an exhibition (Kensington Church Walk: Turret Books, 1971), pp. 52-53. The exhibition was held at Reading University Library, May-July 1971. The catalogue is by J. Knowlson, with a foreword by A.J. Leventhal.

[4] This particular quotation from Spinoza's Ethics brings to mind the concept of Cartesian dualism, which is of special interest to Beckett, as we mentioned earlier.

[5] Schrodinger, The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell, p. 72.

[6] The term was actually coined by a German physicist, Rudolf Clausius, in 1865, to denote a thermodynamic function (originally introduced by him in 1854) that tends to increase with time in all spontaneous natural processes. Entropy can also be defined as the measure of the probability of the states of a system: the more probable the state of a system, the higher its entropy. Any isolated system tends towards its most probable state, and its entropy tends to increase to the maximum value obtainable. In defining entropy, Clausius paraphrased the first and second laws of thermodynamics to say that "The energy of the universe is constant. The entropy of the universe tends towards a maximum." In a closed or isolated system, every reversible transformation leaves the entropy unchanged, whereas every irreversible transformation is accompanied by an increase in entropy. An understanding of the physical meaning of entropy was reached over a period of years. In 1872 an Austrian physicist, Ludwig Boltzmann, proposed the existence of a function that continually decreases during molecular collisions, and he identified the negative value of the function with entropy. The negative value of an increasingly negative function implies irreversible increase, and the existence of a final dead end towards which the molecular collisions tended.

[7] The dramaticule was written originally for the review O! Calcutta! that was being produced by Kenneth Tynan in New York (Grove Press, 1969).

[8] Esslin, Beckett, p. 7.

[9] Schneider, "Waiting for Beckett", pp. 3,7.

[10] Gunther Anders, "Being without Time: On Beckett's Play Waiting for Godot", Neue Schweizer Rundschau (January 1954), pp. 140-151. Also in Esslin, Beckett.

[11] Anders, "Being without Time", p. 140.

[12] We chose hobo over vagabond, tramp, beggar, clown, because of its brevity. All the above are partly incorrect, since they imply that the person so described is a vagrant. Beckett's characters are ex-vagrants. The French clochard would have been preferable, but the repeated usage of one French word in an English text would have proven awkward.

[13] Beckett, Godot, p. 7a.

[14] Beckett, Godot, p. 7b.

[15] Beckett, Godot, p. 14a.

[16] In the French version, the market is that of the Saint Sauveur, possibly an allusion to Godot.

[17] Beckett, Godot, pp. 51a-51b.

[18] Anders, "Being without Time", p. 141.

[19] The foetal posture that Estragon assumes in the second act is reminiscent of that of Belacqua in Dante's Purgatorio. See footnote 17, Part I.

[20] Beckett, Godot, p. 44b.

[21] Beckett, Godot, pp. 10a, 12b, 31b; 39a, 41a, 44a, 45b, 50a, 54a, 59b.

[22] Beckett, Godot, pp. 14b, 16a.

[23] Beckett, Godot, 12a, 40a.

[24] Anders, "Being without Time", pp. 143-144.

[25] Harold Clurman of The Nation said that Godot is "...the concentrate...of the contemporary European...mood of despair...", Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 21.

[26] Anders, "Being without Time", p. 146.

[27] Beckett, Godot, p. 27b.

[28] Beckett, Godot, p. 35a.

[29] Beckett, Godot, pp. 39b, 40a.

[30] Beckett, Godot, pp. 58a-58b.

[31] Beckett, Godot, p. 25b.

[32] Beckett, Godot, p. 50a.

[33] Anders, "Being without Time", p. 146.

[34] Beckett, Godot, pp. 32a, 38a.

[35] Beckett, Godot, p. 39a.

[36] Beckett, Godot, pp. 9a, 31b, 44b, 54b.

[37] Beckett, Godot, pp. 16b, 24b (bis), 25a.

[38] Beckett, Godot, pp. 25a-25b.

[39] Beckett, Godot, p. 24b.

[40] Beckett, Godot, p. 55a.

[41] Anders, "Being without Time", pp. 146-147.

[42] Esslin, Beckett, p. 9.

[43] J.M. Domenach, Le retour du tragique (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), pp. 67, 267-268, 277.

[44] Ross Chambers, "Beckett's Brinkmanship", Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association (No. 19, May 1963); also in Esslin, Beckett, pp. 152-168. This excellent thesis has helped us immensely in our work, and we have followed it closely in this section, p. 158.

[45] The legend has it that in a dialogue with Protagoras, Zeno imagined the endless process of the dropping of progressively smaller quantities of millet in a mound: a ton, a bushel, a grain, and progressively smaller fractions of a grain, and so on endlessly. The mound, as we shall see in the next part, dominates Happy Days.

[46] Samuel Beckett, Endgame (London: Grove Press Inc., 1958), pp. 12, 45.

[47] Beckett, Endgame, p. 44.

[48] Beckett, Endgame, p. 13.

[49] Chambers, "Beckett's Brinkmanship", p. 160.

[50] Dante, Purgatorio, IV, vv. 130-132:

"...Prima convien che tanto il ciel m'aggiri
di fuor di essa, quanto fece in vita,
perch'io indugiai al fine i buon sospiri..."

[51] The numerous references which Beckett makes to life as Purgatory probably spring partly from the Irish-Catholic influence that Beckett, though born into a Protestant family, doubtless experienced in his early years, and partly from the later influence of Dante on Beckett as a writer.

III. THE FACETS OF THE PRISM: BECKETT'S REMAINING PLAYS

Beckett's plays can be considered as intricate and at times exaggerated images of the absurdity of existence. They drive home to us the meaninglessness, the futility and squalor of human existence, factors which nevertheless for Beckett constitute its reality. They reveal his concern with the difficulty of becoming aware of one's own self in the midst of the merciless process of renovation and destruction which occurs in time, with the difficulty of communication between human beings as a result of a faltering language, with the fruitless quest for reality in a world where dream and reality are ever mingled, with the tragic nature of all love relationships and the self-deception of friendship. Beckett seems to work with impotence as his main topic, a topic little used by his predecessors and, if used by some of his contemporaries, not treated in the same form by them. For Beckett, a new form is necessary to express a new content, a form stripped of many conventional paraphernalia, simplified and, as a result of this simplification, at times appearing fantastically exaggerated.

In the second part of our dissertation, we attempted to give some insight into the modes of being and time which Beckett portrayed in his early and best-known plays, Godot

(1948) and Endgame (1954-1956). This third part will be concerned with the remainder of Beckett's plays which are shorter and tend to repeat a certain theme or a certain aspect of the complete vision as depicted by Beckett in Godot and in Endgame. They are individual facets in the prism which is the general human condition as portrayed by Beckett.

Act Without Words I[1] is a mime for one player, brief and silent, and gives us the key to, and the essence of, inaction. In it, the player ends by waiting, just like Vladimir and Estragon.

The stage is deserted and bathed in a blinding light. Onto it, a man is flung from the wings with great violence. Twice he attempts to return to the wings but is again pushed back to face the play. It is important to note how in this mime Beckett seems to equate representative man with player, and life with play. Player-man is flung back to face play-life, seemingly held there as if under observation by a malevolent and concealed power. Punctuated by shrill prompting whistles, various desirable objects are lowered from the flies, presumably by the concealed power. As man reaches for them, they are pulled up and evade his grasp, a maddening form of punishment. A little tree is lowered first, its meagre tuft of leaves offering a minimum of refreshing shade, yet its only branch folds down and the shade

disappears as soon as man sits under it to trim his nails (with a pair of tailor's scissors, also lowered from the flies). Similarly, a small carafe of water, a potential source of refreshment, remains just above his reach. At this point the concealed power seemingly becomes an accomplice to the man and lowers in turn three cubes of different sizes necessary to reach the water. Yet the water is pulled up and remains out of reach even after the man puts the cubes to use. The concealed power raises it out of reach. After this a knotted rope is lowered but, as man climbs it, it too is drawn up, so that man has to cut it in order to fall back onto the stage. With the rope he now has in his possession, the man attempts to lasso the carafe. Failing in this he approaches the little tree (whose branch is again functional). His intention is clearly to hang himself, but the branch immediately folds down once again along the trunk. The man then turns to the scissors with the intention of cutting his throat, but they disappear, along with the cubes, up into the flies. Deprived even of the cube on which he was sitting, the man falls and remains lying on the ground, motionless. The whistle fails to goad him into any further action, for he can no longer be tempted even when the carafe is lowered close to his face. Finally, both carafe and tree are pulled back into the flies and man remains alone, staring at his hands, the only remaining possible

instruments of death.

In spite of his own rational efforts, man is shown at the mercy of unrelenting, impersonal, and unseen forces. The mime is a variant of the Tantalus myth, and demonstrates concretely the frustrations which Beckett's characters endure. Man as victim, goaded into action by a whistle, is an image which recurs in Beckett's theatre, as we shall see. For example Winnie, awakened by the bell, is a first cousin to the man in Act Without Words I.

Beckett of course leaves the ending ambiguous: is man's failure to respond to the final whistles the result of a conditioning, is he like Pavlov's dog or Kohler's ape, or does he fail to respond because he chooses to do so as a protective measure? Is he broken man or semi-victorious man? Clearly, Beckett protrays him as rational man, reflecting before acting. Unable to achieve what he aspires to do, unable even to escape via suicide, rational man seems to choose inaction. Protective apathy is the only way out, since he is powerless and all real and veritable action is forbidden. Deceived by the world at each attempt to make contact, man can only withdraw himself, passively, and wait, immobile.

The mime is a work of abstraction, a parable of man's desperate condition, which can be bearable only if endured in apathy. Immobility is a form of victory when facing the deceiving temptations of the world. Progressively losing

individuality while obeying the stimuli goading him, man ends by manifesting some individuality when he wilfully abandons futile action. Faced with the absurdity of the world, he turns inward, ceasing to act like a puppet and becoming an individual who, refusing to obey, refusing to search for a meaning, chooses to withdraw himself from the play, from life. Gérard Durozoi[2] interprets the mime further as an affirmation of man's dignity in a hostile world. To speak of dignity is perhaps too complimentary for, above all, man is shown in his utter impotence, and impotence is far from dignified.

All That Fall[3] is Beckett's first radio play. In direct contrast with the mime, the radio play substitutes aural for visual perception. We hear the appropriate noises instead of seeing the action. The setting is in the Irish countryside and the road to and fro from a railway station. No blazing desert this time, but a seemingly normal setting.

Maddy Rooney, who describes herself as a horrible old woman, "...a hysterical old hag...destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness...",[4] is on her way to the railway station where she is going to meet her husband, Dan Rooney, who has been ill most of his life:

> "The day you met me I should have been in bed. The day you proposed to me the doctors gave me up. You

> knew that, did you not? The night you married me they came for me with an ambulance."5

On the way to the station, Maddy meets three people and their respective means of locomotion: Christy, the carter, and his hinny; Mr. Tyler, the retired bill-broker, and his bicycle; Mr. Slocum, the Clerk of the Racecourse, and his car. In turn, they help her to reach the station. Once there, she manages to climb its steps with the help of a bigot, Miss Fitt. The train arrives fifteen minutes late on a thirty minute run because of a mysterious delay. Mr. Rooney descends and, on the arm of his adoring wife, he proceeds to head for home. Their progress is slow, painful, and often interrupted by their complaints. Maddy would like to learn from Dan the cause of the delay, but Dan evades her questions. At this point Jerry, a young boy who sometimes assists Dan (Mr. Rooney is blind) catches up with them to return a small ball-like object that Dan had left behind. Prompted by Maddy, Jerry reveals the cause of the delay: a child had fallen off the train and under the wheels. The play ends as the Rooneys continue their slow, painful shuffle home under the rain.

At first hearing, the play may seem to have a lighter touch than Beckett's previous works. The normal country setting, the sound track suggesting intense animal life (dogs, birds, poultry, sheep), the numerous cast, are all quite unusual for Beckett's theatre. Yet the superficial gaiety is

eroded by an undertone of darkness. The play is not so much about the miseries of old age as it is about a whole world which has become sterile and dead, the world of man. The presence of sterility and death undermines the whole play: we hear strains of Death and the Maiden both at the beginning and end of the play, coming from a ruinous old house in which the maiden has become an old woman. References to death, severe illness, or sterility and sterilization are numerous: Christy's wife and daughter are both ill; he drives a hinny, a sterile hybrid; Mr. Tyler's daughter has had a hysterectomy ("They removed everything, you know, the whole... er...bag of tricks."6); Mr. Slocum's mother is very ill, as is Miss Fitt's; and Jerry is an orphan. Mrs. Tully, whose cries we hear at the end of the play, is constantly beaten by her husband who is in perpetual pain. Mrs. Rooney mourns desperately for her daughter Minnie who died when still a child, and she imagines her undergoing natural sterilization (the menopause) had she lived:

> "In her forties now she'd be, I don't know, fifty, girding up her lovely little loins, getting ready for the change..."7

Mr. Slocum squashes a hen on the road and Maddy broods on its death as well, in a manner which echoes Pozzo's and Vladimir's statements on fleeting life:

> "One minute picking happy at the dung, on the road, in the sun, with now and then a dust bath, and then - bang! - all her troubles over. (Pause.) All the

> laying and the hatching. (Pause.) Just one great squawk and then...peace."[8]

The troubles and agitations of life are quickly ended in death which may or may not bring peace.

Maddy and Dan themselves are characters of death. Maddy seems to radiate paralysis and malfunctioning: Christy's hinny refuses to move when near Maddy, Mr. Tyler's bicycle suffers a flat tire when approaching her, and Mr. Slocum's car refuses to start once Maddy enters it as a passenger. But what is more, Maddy is a vague personality, dominated by a death wish. She does not exist, she says so herself:

> "I am not half alive nor anything approaching it."

and again,

> "I do not exist. The fact is well known."[9]

She is not surprised when Miss Fitt, a bigot intent on her faith alone, sees her only as a large pale blur. Maddy's case is similar to that of the young girl of whom she speaks towards the end of the play, a girl with whom specialists could find nothing wrong, except for the fact that she was dying, coming to the conclusion that she "...had never been really born...".[10] The girl died. Maddy is like a living corpse, "...two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat...",[11] according to Dan, and her wish is that of a person who no longer wants to live:

> "Oh let me just flop down on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel."

and again,

> "Would I were lying stretched out in my comfortable bed...just wasting slowly painlessly away...in the end you wouldn't see me under the blankets any more than a board..."12

Her wish is echoed by her husband's who finds himself happy in the isolation caused by his blindness, and whose ideal is doing nothing, staying at home, immobile, all day.

The Rooneys seem to generalize decay and death. Maddy broods on death, near her animals and machines cease to function, vegetation rots and dies, and the landscape seems to vanish. Dan is haunted by the desire to kill a child, thus putting an end to the misery of life at its start and "Nip some young doom in the bud."[13] For Dan, the unnatural act would be an act of mercy. There are various pointers besides this which lead us to suspect Dan of having pushed the child off the train: he admits to Maddy of having been tempted to kill Jerry, he refuses to discuss the train delay and, when Maddy insists, he becomes violent. Nevertheless, the important fact is not who killed the child, but the fact that the child's death was violent, arbitrary, and irrational. It is part of an absurd universe which is bent on destruction and death, yet dragging on, like the Rooneys, on the threshold of non-existence.[14]

Suffering, impotence, and solitude are also heightened by the fact that God too is dead and associated with sterility. The fact that Christ rode into Jerusalem on a hinny, the

sterile offspring of a stallion and a female donkey, worries Maddy, and Miss Fitt, an ardent bigot, is a spinster, the epitome of dried-up fertility. But most of all God is impotent, with the result that the Psalm "The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all that be bowed down." causes the Rooneys to burst into wild laughter at the irony of its promises which ring false, after the misery, illness, and death they have experienced themselves or encountered in others. This, and their death wish echo those of Hamm and Clov, who hurriedly thought of killing the last traces of life (the flea, the rat, the boy), lest in the course of evolution they begin again to procreate mankind.

With Krapp's Last Tape[15] we are again presented with a claustrophobic play (a dark room, few props, few details) and an imperfect couple, that of man and machine. There is no dialogue between human beings, only a monologue and a commentary on a recorded passage. Krapp finds morbid pleasure in reviewing and exploring his past with the aid of a recorder. He explores two different periods of his past, youth and middle-age. At 69 (K69), Krapp listens to a tape recorded thirty years earlier by a middle-aged Krapp (K39), who com--ments on a tape recorded ten or twelve years earlier, when he was 29 or 27 (K29-27). We therefore have three Krapps at play, K69, K39, and K29-27. K69 exhumes and ridicules two past periods

of his life, those of K39 and K29-27; K39 exhumes and ridicules one period of his past life, that of K29-27. For us, the audience, there is the confrontation of three isolated and irreconcilable periods of a man's life, youth, middle-age, and old age.

K69 is a human reject, disillusioned by his life of failure. He has long ceased to bother about appearances: his dress is negligent, and his purple nose betrays the alcoholic. His role on stage is reduced to a great extent to mime (the banana sequence, for example), for he says very little, and what little he says, in broken and confused sentences. F.J. Hoffman[16] calls him "...the clown turned meditative...".

Confined to the glow of his lamp, K69 listens to the voice of K39, and goes back to the turning point of his life, a night when he decided to sacrifice love in favour of his opus magnum to come, and thus obey the creative fire within him at the time. For K69, thirty years after the crucial night, it is not creativity but love which comes to the surface, at first unrecognized and later desperately but vainly reiterated. The K39 who says "I" is a total stranger to K69, just like K29-27 was to K39. K69's powerless memory has failed against the disintegrating forces of time. It is replaced by the tape-recorder, a mechanical memory, which does not complement what K69 is, but fixes a part of what he was, his past self, into his present consciousness. While listening, K69 occasionally

comments on the story, laughing appreciatively or sarcastically, yet most of the time he puzzles over lost meanings or obscure allusions. He often becomes impatient at K39's talkativeness and switches off: too many empty words for a lonely human reject.

As K69 begins to listen to his past as reconstituted by the tape, he finds himself inescapably confronted by a past himself, K39, an introspective, solitary man, serious and concerned with his mind's powers and his body's health. K39 disapproves of K29-27, the taped voice is scornful of "...that young whelp...", laughing at his aspirations concerning abstenance from drink and sex. K69, in turn, will disapprove of K39's literary aspirations, and will laugh at "...that stupid bastard...".[17] K69 becomes impatient with K39's commentaries on K29-27's last affairs, and switches off. After a few drinks, he resumes his listening to K39 speaking about his mother's death and his vigil outside in the cold; we hear that the period was one of spiritual gloom until a stormy night during which he came to establish a new outlook on his life in an incident similar in form, though not in content, to a religious ecstasy. We never learn the exact details of the incident because K69 impatiently switches off and winds the tape forward several times. K69 is no longer interested in his former ideals because he has discarded them as superfluous. He winds the tape forward and reaches a

passage in which K39 speaks about making love to a girl in a punt which drifts unattended down the stream to become stuck among the reeds. K69 broods, switches off, retires backstage for a few drinks, and returns to begin his K69 tape. He begins by recording his disgust for K39, but his thoughts wander back to the girl, and he trails off into silence. Realizing that he is recording silence, he switches off momentarily to begin again with his appraisal of his past year. Of it, he recalls very little:

> "Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool."18

It has been an empty, insignificant year, marked with unsuccess as a writer, and the sordid visits of an old prostitute. K69's thoughts wonder, and we gather that even the tape recordings no longer mean very much to him. After a long silence, he suddenly wrenches off his present tape and replaces it with the past tape to replay the love sequence. He listens to the only self-validating part of his life which his past self, in fear that his ego would be stifled, rejected in favour of an empty and illusory creative vision. As K69 broods in longing, the K39 tape runs on to its last words:

> "Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back."19

These words of K39 ring out ironically as K69 sits motionless, staring before him as if paralyzed with longing and nostalgia.

Nostalgia for that period of his life when he experienced what came close to a genuine relationship. For K69, the fire that was busily burning for K39 has long died out, and he desperately wants those early years back. His past rejection of a nearly genuine relationship with another human being for the sake of preserving his ego is the principal source of suffering for K69, who will die as he lived, alone.

In Krapp's life, the farewell to love episode is the turning point, marking before and after. Before was love, a chance of happiness, the boat ride; after was the beginning of what is now, drunkenness, physical and intellectual ruin, and literary failure.

The opus magnum, his choice to live alone and never stop telling his life story by recording every year, has resulted in failure, because the continuity of the self is a dream. K39 wanted to record all, allowing nothing to escape, but K69 finds that the past is for the most part ludicrous and unrecognizable. The tapes bear witness to the great discontinuities which separate his different pasts from his present. What to him seemed precious, now seems futile, and vice versa. Yet, by recording his tapes Krapp does avoid total defeat in the face of time. If he dies endlessly, he is also born endlessly at every recording, a new self at every recording. For K39, the death of love was the birth of artistic creativity, doomed to failure. Like the story in

Cascando, as we shall see, once the tale of the self is begun, there is no ending it. Krapp's may be a ludicrous activity, but it is one way of affirming one's existence.

Act Without Words II[20] is a mime for two players, once again based on the formula players = man, play = life. The players illustrate two possible ways of responding to the stimulus of time, yet their end result is the same.

On stage, there are two similar bags and a pile of clothes. The stimulus comes from the wings, prodding A's bag. A emerges, and in a few minutes mimes the activities of a day, then goes back inside his bag. The stimulus then prods B, who emerges and in turn mimes a day of his life, then returns to his bag. The stimulus again prods A, who emerges and repeats the same actions as before, and the curtain falls.

The personalities of A and B differ markedly: one is slow, absent, awkward; the other is quick, intent (he often consults his watch), precise. Yet both wear the same costumes and share a common shelter, the bags. They seem to be first cousins to the two couples in Godot, both sharing the same fate, yet coping with the problem differently, one choosing to wait, the other choosing to move on. The mime clearly comments on the monotony of daily routine and of existence in general, and at the same time on the inescapability of the temporal situation. To stay in the bag is impossible, the stimulus of time is there, prodding, forcing A and B (and all

of us) to make an effort to give life a meaning, since it is the only one we have.

Embers[21] is Beckett's second radio play. In it he exploits the qualities peculiar to radio sound, ambiguity and abstraction. The play is at times obscure and its value rests not so much on the content as on the impact of various sound effects. Again there is no visual aspect, Beckett portrays aurally an impossible monologue containing schizophrenic dialogues. The only character, Henry, is alone on a beach. He talks to himself, as he does habitually, to drown the sound of the waves, which simultaneously frightens and fascinates him. The sound fills the pauses of his monologue, and eventually sets its rhythm, so that in time thought and the rhythm of the waves become as one. Henry cannot keep away from the sea any more than he can put a stop to his monologue. The sea drowned his father, who despised him, just as he grew to despise his daughter Addie. In his monologue, Henry conjures up other people, his father (who will not answer), his wife Ada (who will answer), his daughter Addie, and two men, Bolton and Holloway. Henry must never cease talking, and he tries to make up a story in which the two men appear. Its continuity is difficult to establish. Bolton is a psychological 'case' (like Henry), and Holloway is his physician, growing tired of his patient. Scenes of a still recent past, that of Addie

taking piano and riding lessons, often interrupt Henry's story. The girl is taking lessons against her will but according to her mother's wishes, and both lessons end in wailing. Henry tells us that he found Ada's conversation intolerable, hell-like, and yet he desires her company. He invokes her, she answers; concerned about his habit of talking to himself, she urges him to consult his physician, Holloway. This identifies Henry with Bolton, and Holloway with the father, Ada, and possibly the Saviour. They represent the potential sources of comfort which have failed Henry. The story which he tells is probably about himself, a fictional situation reflecting his own plight.

Ada begins to tell the story of her meeting with Henry's father, but she stops and is never heard again. Left alone, Henry can continue to tell the story of Bolton and Holloway. The patient refuses to confide in the physician, and exchanges a long glance with him, "...looks Holloway full in the eye. ... Not a word, just the look, the old blue eye, very glassy, lids worn thin, lashes gone, whole thing swimming...".[22] The story is later interrupted by the appellations "Ada! ... Father! ... Christ!",[23] yet no one answers. Henry abandons the story before the invading sea and void.

As his story begins to falter, Henry associates words with waste, and gives his description of the end:

> "Nothing, all day nothing. ... All day all night nothing. ... Not a sound."[24]

Like Hamm, Henry feels a dripping inside his head, needs to tell a story, needs to have an audience:

> "Close your eyes and listen to it...A drip! A drip!...Again!...Stories, stories...the need came on me, for someone, to be with me, anyone...to talk to, imagine he hears me, years of that..."25

Like Krapp, Henry lives and survives by remembering and retelling his past. But in the play, all goes on inside his head, there is no tape recorder, he is alone, lost in his hallucinations. The human tape recorder has gone mad. Like other Beckett characters, Henry has a death wish: in his case it takes in the whole world:

> "A ten-ton mammoth back from the dead, shoe it with steel and have it tramp the world down!"26

He desires, once the destruction will have ended, a definitive calm, free from the last futile words, with only the sound of the sea left in spite of his efforts to flee from it. Paradoxically, the sea means to Henry both turmoil (it is the rhythm of the waves which forces him to tell his story) and calm (the sea and the void are as one in his death vision). His desire for silence is also often contradicted by his desire for words to fill the silence. He tells Ada that she must keep her story going, for "...every syllable is a second gained..." on the void, presumably.[27] Henry's struggle is left ambiguous and we cannot tell clearly whether he fears or desires the void. His need is ambivalent both for words and for silence, like Bolton's need for Holloway: Bolton's attempt to communicate with Holloway only results in an anguished look. Like Bolton, Henry is alone, his dialogue is broken,

and he is separated from his goal, comfort, just as he is separated from his father. The words he is compelled to speak are opposed to the silence he desires, and his story falters because of this. No longer having anyone to talk to, no longer coinciding with his existence, Henry sinks into madness, the madness which Clov experienced only temporarily because he had an actual dialogue to sustain.

Happy Days[28] is a two-act play in which the setting is perhaps the most barren of all Beckett's theatre: an expanse of scorched grass rising to a central low mound, in the background the unbroken plain receding to meet the sky in the far distance, the whole landscape bathed in a blazing light. Nothing is left around the characters, who are left to their own illusory resources, Winnie to incessant prattle, and Willie to near mutism. Any action in such a setting would appear vain, a non-sensical agitation against the passing of time and the invasion of the void.

The stage, then, shows an intensely lit desert space in the center of which a middle-aged woman, Winnie, is buried up to her waist (up to her neck in the second act) in a mound. Behind the mound, and out of sight for most of the play, dwells Willie, her husband, who is still painfully mobile. He inhabits a hole, reads his newspaper, speaks the odd mumbled word, at times even in response to Winnie's questions.

The play is in fact based on Winnie's monologue. Alone, and not wanting to face the silence, she talks to herself, talks to Willie and, as he does not answer as a rule, she also talks _for_ him.

When the curtain rises, Winnie is asleep in her mound, but she is soon awakened by a bell which rings erratically, forcing her to begin her day. The similarities with _Act Without Words I_ and _II_ are clear as far as the stimulus mechanism is concerned. Winnie cannot ignore the bell, which seems to be operated by a malevolent and observing power holding Winnie prisoner in its temporal span. The bell signals for her the beginning and end of each day, and she must awake when the bell rings in the morning, sleep when the bell rings at night:

> "Strange feeling. ...Strange feeling that someone is looking at me. I am clear, then dim, then gone, then dim again, then clear again, and so on, back and forth, in and out of someone's eye."
>
> "The bell. ...It hurts like a knife. ...One cannot ignore it. ...How often...I say how often I have said, Ignore it, Winnie, ignore the bell, pay no heed, just sleep and wake, sleep and wake, as you please...But no. ...Not now. ..No, no."29

Winnie begins her day with a short prayer, and then proceeds to fill the silence with her chatter, to kill time by performing habitual actions, to manipulate objects which she has in a bag beside her (a veritable bag of tricks, the contents of which betray her middle-class background). She

remembers distant events, shreds of literature, talks to her laconic wreck of a husband. She works desperately to produce the illusion of happiness until the bell rings to tell her the day is over. Only then can she sleep, and briefly escape from the consciousness of the desperate condition to which she is reduced.

Though her condition is desperate, Winnie is still happy to survive and, while going through her pitiful possessions, while talking about memories which float up into her consciousness, she never ceases to count her blessings. The least satisfaction is for her a motive for joy, she even manages to interpret as blessings what may seem to us terrible things, the barrenness of the plain ("What a blessing nothing grows, imagine if all this stuff were to start growing."[30]), her lack of mobility ("What a curse, mobility!"[31]), for example. Winnie is forever voicing her joy and happiness at the slightest things: shreds of past events she calls "Oh the happy memories!"; upon discovering the ordinary fact that her toothbrush is made of hog's setae, she rejoices in the fact that "...not a day goes by...without some addition to one's knowledge... provided one takes the pains..."; she is happy to know that a horrible end awaits her, that she can "...close the eyes... and wait for the day to come...the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many degrees..."; she is happy to have a memory which still partially functions to allow her to recall

parts of quotations: "That is what I find so wonderful, a part remains, of one's classics, to help one through the day. ...Oh yes, many mercies, many mercies."; but the greatest source of joy for her is to think that Willie is perhaps listening to her: "...just to know you are there within hearing and conceivably on the semi-alert is...paradise enow...", "...what a joy in any case to know you are there, as usual, and perhaps awake, and perhaps taking all this in, some of all this, what a happy day for me...it will have been."[32] Winnie has built around herself a system of self-defence which consists in interpreting practically anything with incurable optimism. She interprets even signs of her degeneration as fulfilling her every ideal. All this is heart-rending, given that the distance which separates the way in which Winnie interprets and sees things from the way we interpret and see things is immense.

Moreover, from time to time, Winnie's voice breaks, and she becomes acutely conscious of her impotence and her desperate condition. This happens even as she is bravely voicing her happiness:

> "That is what I find so wonderful, the way things...(voice breaks, head down)...things...so wonderful. (Long pause, head down)..."[33]

Winnie has many fears: she is afraid of running out of things to say, "...so little to say, so little to do, and the fear so great, certain days, of finding oneself...left, with hours

still to run, before the bell for sleep, and...nothing more to say, nothing more to do, that the days go by, certain days go by, quite by, the bell goes, and little or nothing said, little or nothing done..."; she is afraid of running out of words, "What would I do without them? ...What would I do without them, when words fail? ...Gaze before me, with compressed lips."; she is conscious of how pathetic her efforts are, "There is so little one <u>can</u> do. ...One does it all. ...All one can.", and again, "There is so little one can speak of. ...One speaks of it all. ...All one can."; she is afraid that Willie will leave her, "You <u>are</u> going, Willie, aren't you? ...You <u>will</u> be going soon, Willie, won't you? ...Willie!"[34]

And yet Winnie is quick to reassure herself: the bag will always be there, there is always her story to tell if she runs out of other things to say, and Willie is there, nearby, perhaps even listening, who knows. She revels in man's ability to adapt:

> "That is what I find so wonderful. ...The way man adapts himself. ...To changing conditions."[35]

The objects in the bag help her to kill time, but the bag also contains a revolver, which suggests that in her weaker moments Winnie may have contemplated suicide. In the first act, as she plunges her hand into the bag to pull out some treasure, she is very annoyed when she pulls out the revolver instead. She then asks Willie if he remembers that

he used to implore her to keep it from him to prevent him from doing himself harm. Both, then, like Vladimir and Estragon and the man in Act Without Words I, harboured suicidal tendencies. Nevertheless, Winnie decides to leave the revolver out of the bag, and it is conspicuous throughout the second act.

For Winnie the day ends as it started, with a prayer. In the second act, however, she no longer prays, she simply smiles, ironically, instead. Like Maddy and Hamm, she has lost all faith in God. When the curtain rises in the second act, (perhaps a day, perhaps a year has elapsed) Winnie has sunk deeper into the mound: now she is totally immobilized, only her head showing above the ground. Zeno's mound of time has been, and still is, progressively engulfing her. A sea of uniform days (bell - awake - speak - bell - sleep) has been and still is washing endlessly over her, "...no better, no worse...no change...", "It is no hotter today than yesterday, it will be no hotter tomorrow than today, how could it, and so on back into the far past, forward into the far future.", "Never any change."[36] Yet this does not prevent her from manifesting her happiness. Of course she can no longer manipulate objects, but she can still talk and pretend that Willie is listening (she calls for him but he does not answer, he has not answered for some time, in fact).

Winnie's life is the epitome of conventionality and

sentimentality, her speech is full of clichés. Yet her empty assertions of happiness give her some comfort in her despair. Her relationship with Willie is especially crucial: their love is long dead ("...I worship you Winnie be mine and then nothing from that day forth..."[37]) yet Winnie needs her husband to act as the listener, the object of her words. She needs him to give a semblance of meaning to her empty words. As long as there is a listener, a reflecting surface for her speech, she can chatter on contentedly. She literally survives by speaking to him. Her need for him is so crucial that, when in the second act he fails to answer her, she no longer worries: he may have disappeared, but for Winnie he is still there because she is talking. To be talking to no one would be such an atrocious thing that it is inconceivable. The word is so important that its utterance implies the presence of the listener:

> "I used to think...I say I used to think that I would learn to talk alone. ...By that I mean to myself, the wilderness. ...But no. ...No,no. ...Ergo you are there. ...Oh no doubt you are dead, like the others, no doubt you have died, or gone away and left me, like the others, it doesn't matter, you are there."[38]

Willie, though free to move, seems to be further advanced along disintegration than his wife, since he no longer speaks. He does make the odd effort, though: he manipulates his hat, fans himself with the paper, quotes the want-ads, and at the end dons a formal suit which, under the circumstances, is the high point of absurdity. As he approaches Winnie

at the end of the play, she tries to cheer him on at first, but something in his aspect frightens her: is he approaching to kiss her, or to grab the revolver? To shoot himself or to shoot Winnie? As he collapses before reaching her, we will never know. As for Winnie, she is once again overwhelmed with joy to hear Willie groaning the first syllable of her name, Win. And so she goes on winning, singing and smiling before the curtain falls. Though Willie is of no immediate help to her, he is there, and that is all she needs. She needs to know that an ear is present and perhaps even listening. This suffices to allow her to spend happy days until the end.

In a desert which is progressively devouring her, Winnie does not cease to struggle, first with gestures and words, then only with words. She knows that words are beginning to fail her, along with her memory, but she clings to what little is left to her. Remnants of an elegant youth, songs, words, and most of all Willie, who by merely being there gives her the courage to face non-existence, making of her monologue a potential dialogue, if not an actual one. Perhaps the best illustration of Winnie's incurable optimism is how she interprets her relationship with Willie. She calls his presence a joy, and seems to think it is voluntary, even though we know that Willie remains because he is unable to move properly. From his presence she draws the strength

to go on. Like Vladimir and Estragon, like Henry, she knows the importance of a witness to one's existence, she is an expert at finding something to give herself the impression that she exists.

Winnie too is caught in the endgame: time is passing, but increasingly more slowly, and as a result she has lost her sense of time. Nothing seems to happen any more: when her parasol bursts into flames in the first act, perhaps because of spontaneous combustion, her reaction is odd, if we do not regard it in the light of the fact that for her time has lost dimensionality: she thinks this has happened before, though she cannot recall when, but she is certain that the parasol will reappear beside her intact:

> "I presume this has occurred before, though I cannot recall it. ...Yes, what ever occurred that did not occur before and yet... ...Yes, something seems to have occurred, something has seemed to occur, and nothing has occurred, nothing at all...The sunshade will be there again tomorrow, beside me on this mound, to help me through the day."39

To prove this, she breaks her mirror, confident that it will again be in the bag the following day. And indeed, both the parasol and the mirror are present in act two, quite intact.

In her situation, Winnie finds it difficult to face the riddle of time. She no longer understands the meaning of <u>then</u> and <u>now</u>. Her past and her present selves, her past and her present, which she tries to reconcile, are elusive:

> "Then...now...what difficulties here, for the mind. ...To have always been what I am - and so changed from what I was. ...I am the one, I say

> the one, then the other. ...Now the one, then the other. ...There is so little one can say, one says it all. ...no truth in it anywhere..."40

She tries to reach some awareness of her own self, of her physical features, but what she cannot feel and see herself seems unreal:

> "My arms. ...My breasts. ...What arms? ...What breasts? ...And now? ...The face...The nose...I can see it...(squinting down)...the tip...the nostrils..."41

Her only comforts are the bag, Willie and, to a certain extent, the revolver: reminders of the past, the witness, and a potential yet useless means of escape for the time when words will fail her completely.

In this play we are then presented with a symbolical situation which shows irreversible peripheral changes as opposed to no changes in the characters. There is no build-up to a climax, no character conflict, no significant action or dénouement. Only the enduring of an unbearable condition. Winnie is of great human value: she is an assertion, human and warm, facing the silent and sterile world which surrounds her. Fighting against despair, she confronts the harshness and the uncertainty to assert her will and her spirit. Within its own realm, the mind is omnipotent. Objects are a means of protection against solitude, serving to extend the body and to guarantee identity. Since relationships with people are nearly impossible, Winnie finds that the company of objects is very important. As her body, like the bodies of

most Beckett characters, loses its strength and mobility, the task of maintaining the self becomes increasingly difficult. We know and the characters know that the end and eternal self-possession are distant and so, in the meanwhile, the manipulation of objects is one way of dealing with the temporal dungeon.

Words and Music[42] is Beckett's third radio play. It has three elements, since we can no longer use the term characters: Croak (an old man), Words, and Music. These correspond to the Opener, Words, and Music in Cascando, as we shall see.

From the beginning, when we hear Music tuning up and words protesting this, we learn that thought and emotion are hostile to each other, though both serve Croak, the self, in evoking themes, memories, at his request.

Croak enters late because he has seen a face "...on the stairs...in the tower..." of his mind: old faces, old memories haunt him endlessly and are the source of his suffering, rising out of a dead past to flounder in a hopeless present. Like Krapp, Croak learns that memory and language may bring temporary relief, yet in the long run can only intensify suffering and despair. The Words speak in turn of sloth, love, passion, and old age, in a style which is very reminiscent of Lucky's speech, and frequently interrupted by Music.

At the end, Croak finds himself unable to tolerate the nostalgia, and he shuffles away on his slippered feet. Leaving is a temporary solution until the next time when he will find himself compelled to exhume old memories, to attempt to make them live again in order to avoid being swallowed up by the silence and the void. Like the Opener of the next radio play, Croak will begin his story over and over again, in attempting to gain possession of his elusive self. Of course he fails: only the Music lingers on at the end, repeating the love theme while the Words, no longer able to formulate thought, heave a great sigh. In the end, emotion overwhelms thought and leaves it powerless.

Cascando[43] is another radio play, again with three elements at work: the Opener (the self-conscious self), the Voice (the intellectual element), and the Music (the emotional element). The Opener's duty is to open and close, to control the sources of the Voice and the Music, which complement each other in the telling of a story. The story will explain and therefore will terminate existence upon its completion. The Voice tells the story and the Music holds its own dramatic role in the dialogue, being more than just accompaniment. For the Opener, the function of controlling and directing the Voice and the Music constitutes his whole existence:

"They say, It's in his head.

> It's not. I open. ...
> They say, That is not his life, he does not live on that. ...
> I have lived on it...pretty long."44

In fact, he has lived on it long enough, and he is anxious to finish the story and terminate existence. Once again, as in Endgame, we have the theme of impending yet unattainable termination. The story is nearly finished, yet it is impossible to finish it. It tells of a man named Woburn (perhaps woe-burn, suggesting hell-like suffering is intended by Beckett) and describes his slowly drawing near to the sea and an island. The progression from his cabin to the goal is painfully interrupted by frequent falls.

The Opener tries to fix memories and counts on their function in the story. Yet the Voice hesitates more and more, becomes entangled in its story, recovers, but becomes increasingly exhausted and falters into silence, as the play ends. As in Malone Dies, The Unnamable, Endgame, and Happy Days, the Voice struggles to tell a story, the right one for once, in order to be able to reach an end that will bring peace and restful oblivion. Failure to tell the story results in suffering, since the language falters into unsatisfactory silence. The story can never be finished because the subject is endlessly changing, as is the object. Failure is the fate of the storyteller, for the story renews itself at every instant.

Beckett's next play is called Play.[45] We have already mentioned how the conventional theatre, whose plots are frequently based on adultery, is for Beckett an impossible theatre. For him its pseudo-psychology, its self-explaining characters and intrigues, seemingly different yet based on the same stereotypes, are unsatisfactory and miss the essential, which for Beckett is the self and the word. What Durozoi calls "...ascetisme scénique..."[46] is in Play pushed to its extreme. The emptiness of the stage is complete: Winnie and Willie at least had names, clothes, possessions - the husband (M), the wife (W1), and the mistress (W2), have nothing, no names, no clothes (they are enclosed in funerary urns up to their necks), no possessions, save their words. Their faces are ageless, and in texture similar to the urns, petrified. Their voices are without passion, even though they speak of the passions of their lives. The elements which in traditional theatre serve to convey meaning (tone of voice, visual expression, movement, costumes, dialogue) are suppressed in Play. There is no dialogue, only three parallel monologues which are incomplete and falter at the end. The plot is not narrated in a linear fashion and its lack of meaning is pointed out by the characters themselves:

> "M: ...no sense in this...", "W1: There is no sense in this...either, none whatsoever.", "W2: ...Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?"47

Their situation is pointless because it is not even expiation:

> "W1: Penitence, yes, at a pinch, atonement, one was resigned, but no, that does not seem to be the point either."48

And so the trio waits for the end, darkness, and silence.

Is Play a play? There are no characters, for they are stereotypes, there is no plot, for it too is stereotype. The drama rests in the words, which fill the hellish half-light of the stage, filling the gap from light to darkness, from sound to silence, and the action rests on the movement of the spotlight. What matters is not so much what is said as the fact that it is being said. The meaning of what is said is quickly exhausted, and yet the saying goes on. The words uttered serve both as deliverance and torture, interminably.

We hear three versions of the triangle, one from each angle. As a spotlight lights the faces of the characters, simultaneously or in turn, the words are forced from their mouths. They wish for silence, but the light extorts the words from them. The light is like the bell which forced Winnie to speak. All is played out from the beginning, yet the characters are compelled to speak on. Their story is an old one, which makes them suffer, but silence is impossible: the lines will be repeated endlessly, and more or less intelligibly, yet progressively losing meaning, since the content will not change. This is why at the end the characters, caught between their obligation to speak and their wish for silence, find

themselves compelled to begin again and again the same story. The proliferation of words seems to accuse itself of inaccuracy by its very excess: perhaps this is why the spotlight is so insistent, because the words tell a false story. With truth, perhaps, the spotlight would go off and the story would end:

> "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?"[49]

After a confused opening chorus lasting only a few seconds, the spotlight is turned on full, and the trio starts to talk, all at once. The babbling is stopped almost immediately by a blackout, lasting a few seconds, then the spotlight proceeds to illuminate each face in turn. As each face is lit up, it wakes to consciousness and speaks. The light could be interpreted as that of consciousness, involving thought, its formulation into words, and ultimately their utterance. When the characters speak of their condition, the endlessness of it becomes very clear:

M reflects on how he had at first supposed that all pain and worry would be over and the past would be obliterated. Like the characters in Endgame, he clings to the idea that total oblivion will come eventually. At the same time he fully realizes the futility and uncertainty of his past:

> "I know now, all that was just...play."[50]

and that of his present:

> "When will all this - ...All this, when will all this have been...just play?"[51]

The wife, W1, is very agitated and shouts at the spot-

light to keep away. She is much more desperate than M, she implores mercy, and feels there must be something she has to do, something more (perhaps weep, or bite off her tongue) to placate the spotlight. She is very conscious of how her mind refuses to stop, and she concludes that she must be content with the brief intervals that the light allows her.

The mistress, W2, is calmer, but disappointed with her condition, for she finds it less restful than she had anticipated. Yet she prefers the situation to her former state.

> "To say I am not disappointed, no, I am. I had anticipated something better. More restful. ...At the same time I prefer this to...the other thing. Definitely. There are endurable moments."52

She hopes the light will stop waking her to consciousness, but she fears it will drive her out of her wits if she challenges it.

The repetition of the whole play re-establishes the circular treadmill-like motion we spoke of in Godot as suggesting timelessness. The audience is privileged, for it is free to leave; the actors, like the characters, are tortured because they are held prisoners by the words. The situation is unspecified, but has been going on endlessly. The tone of their voices is that of a person talking to himself in spite of himself, forced to do so by his consciousness. Words have lost all their meaning through endless repetition, and fall from their mouths like rocks. The repetition

emphasizes the reiterative nature of the threshold existence. Martin Esslin[53] interprets Play as the illustration of the impossibility of the extinction of consciousness through death. The individual cannot become aware of his own cessation, so that his final moment of consciousness remains suspended in time, recurring through all eternity. This interpretation could also be applied to Godot and Endgame, yet there is very little in these plays to indicate that the characters are dead, and it is more likely that they are in fact slowly approaching death. This is what makes their existence a kind of non-existence, a purgatorial life which resembles death, taking place in the half-light which precedes the night that will never fall.

Come and Go[54] is a very short dramaticule in which three women of undeterminable age, very similar in appearance except for the colour of their dresses, meet and attempt to re-live the only valid portion of their lives. It is that of adolescence, when as schoolgirls they used to sit in the playground, holding hands, dreaming of the love which was never to come. They are also almost certainly spinsters, for they epitomize gossip. Their voices are feeble, at the limit of audibility, but we hear enough to recognize the repetition of a similar pattern: when one departs, the other two take the opportunity to exchange secrets concerning her. After the pattern is repeated thrice, the women are united as they join hands - their attitude seems to indicate the

brevity of life, a series of lost memories, resonances of a dead past which can only come to the surface as whispered words. Dead memories cannot be clearly formulated in the present.

Eh Joe[55] is Beckett's first television play. The only character, Joe, never speaks but merely registers his intentness as an internal female voice, that of one of his past loves, speaks on implacably, recalling his past to torture him. As the inner voice which he cannot squeeze from his consciousness goes on to reproach him, the silent actor mimes his reactions to a past which he has tried to suppress.

Like Krapp and Croak, Joe is an old man. He locks himself in his room and verifies his solitude, much like the man in Film of whom we spoke in the first section. It is at the point when Joe closes his eyes that the camera closes in and the voice begins to recall his past. Joe's apprehension increases as the camera grows nearer in nine stages which are marked by pauses of the voice. The words seem to gouge Joe's face, and we become accomplices with the camera and the voice, instruments of torture.

The voice begins by suggesting sardonically that Joe switch off the light, for a louse might be watching. Then it goes on to recall memories of Joe's father, mother, and various loves, whose affection Joe always failed to return. The

voice is that of a woman whose love Joe also failed to return. She was, however, fortunate enough to find another and better love. Joe managed to squeeze his father's voice and his mother's from his consciousness, but he cannot suppress this particular one, which speaks on defiantly,

"That's right, Joe, squeeze away..."56

It goes on to remind him of another love who, less fortunate, killed herself when Joe left her. Joe could never love in return and, like the middle-aged Krapp (K39), he backed away from any deep commitment.

Trying to reach oblivion, Joe is frustrated in his attempts. He may have thought it possible to shut out the world, to eliminate certain memories and to reach restful silence, but his memory makes this impossible. Solitude is not oblivion and emptiness, but ultimate self-perception, torture, and not vacuity. At the point where the self thinks it has cut itself from all things, it comes face to face with itself, self-perception and the word remain to continue the torture with the help of memories from the past, in that "...penny-farthing hell..." which is the human mind.

Words without acts and acts without words, the plays that we have considered in this section are but sketches, brief illustrations of the complete vision which Beckett portrayed more fully in Godot and in Endgame. Though brief

and repetitive, they help to give a fully rounded picture of the conflicts present in the being-in-time situation. Time exerts a constant pressure on the characters of these short plays, providing an excellent illustration of the dramatic use that Beckett can make of time as a concept within his theatre. In a world where time passes relentlessly while nothing happens, we are shown the motives for inaction (Act Without Words I), the essence of the death wish which dominates all (All That Fall); we are shown how memory can be a tool for time's torture (Words and Music, Eh Joe), as it brings to the surface resonances of a dead past (Come and Go); how the self can become a stranger to itself in the confrontation of the past with the present (Krapp's Last Tape), and how the story of the self is constantly changing (Cascando, Play). The void and the silence of isolation are both feared and desired (Embers), yet the end is the same for all, whether they choose to ignore time or to fear it (Act Without Words II). Nevertheless, survival in the temporal dungeon is possible, and the answer lies in the human attitude of facing the harshness and the sterility of the situation with dignified impotence (Happy Days).

PART III: FOOTNOTES

[1] The play was written in 1956 and set to music by Samuel Beckett's cousin, John Beckett.

[2] Gérard Durozoi, Beckett (Paris-Montréal: Bordas, 1972), p. 96.

[3] 1956.

[4] Samuel Beckett, All That Fall (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1957), p. 5.

[5] Beckett, All That Fall, p. 43.

[6] Beckett, All That Fall, p. 6.

[7] Beckett, All That Fall, p. 10.

[8] Beckett, All That Fall, p. 16.

[9] Beckett, All That Fall, pp. 9, 16.

[10] Beckett, All That Fall, p. 52.

[11] Beckett, All That Fall, p. 41.

[12] Beckett, All That Fall, pp. 5, 19.

[13] Beckett, All That Fall, p. 42.

[14] This condition, as we shall see in the next section, also pervades the language.

[15] The play was written in 1958 for Irish actor Patrick Magee, and it inspired an opera, composed by Marcel Mihalovici in 1959-1960.

[16] F.J. Hoffman, Samuel Beckett: The Language of the Self, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p. 156.

[17] Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1959), pp. 12, 16.

[18] Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, p. 17.

[19] Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, p. 19.

[20] 1959.

[21] 1959.

[22] Samuel Beckett, Embers (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1959), p. 35.

[23] Beckett, Embers, p. 36.

[24] Beckett, Embers, p. 36.

[25] Beckett, Embers, p. 23.

[26] Beckett, Embers, p. 21.

[27] Beckett, Embers, p. 33.

[28] 1960-1961.

[29] Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1961), pp. 40, 54.

[30] Beckett, Happy Days, p. 34.

[31] Beckett, Happy Days, p. 46.

[32] Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 16, 18 (bis), 58, 31-32, 34.

[33] Beckett, Happy Days, p. 39.

[34] Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 35, 53, 22, 50, 27-28.

[35] Beckett, Happy Days, p. 35.

[36] Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 9, 38, 45.

[37] Beckett, Happy Days, p. 62.

[38] Beckett, Happy Days, p. 50.

[39] Beckett, Happy Days, 37 (bis), 39.

[40] Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 50-51.

[41] Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 51-52.

[42] 1962.

[43] 1963. This play was written at the suggestion of Marcel Mihalovici, whose music for it is Opus 86.

[44] Samuel Beckett, Cascando and other short dramatic pieces (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1970), pp. 12, 13.

[45] 1963.

[46] Durozoi, Beckett, p. 117.

[47] Beckett, Cascando, pp. 46, 56, 55.

[48] Beckett, Cascando, pp. 58, 59.

[49] Beckett, Cascando, p. 54.

[50] Beckett, Cascando, p. 54.

[51] Beckett, Cascando, p. 54.

[52] Beckett, Cascando, pp. 52, 53.

[53] Esslin, Beckett, p. 9.

[54] 1965.

[55] This play was written in 1965 for Irish actor Jack Mc Gowran.

[56] Beckett, Cascando, p. 40.

IV. THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHARACTERS AND TIME

Beckett turned to the literary medium of drama after nearly twenty years of poetry and fiction. His vehicle of expression changed, yet his deeper concerns did not: like his earlier works of poetry and fiction, his later drama deals with man's condition in the universe. Though highly reduced, Beckett's world of the stage nevertheless deals concretely with its themes, and is physically present before its audience. Unlike poetry or fiction, the theatre allows its author to actually shape a period of time, re-enact a time experience fully. The theme of time is thus not merely described but in fact lived, and acquires in this way a metaphysical reality. The dramatic situation enables Beckett to present his modes of being and time directly: on stage, the meeting of character and audience is immediate, taking place at the moment when the lines are spoken. The same meeting is very roundabout, however, when we deal with prose or poetry.

It was inevitable for Beckett to gravitate towards the theatre, since the idiom is so well suited to what he has to say. The instantaneous contact of audience and character in the theatre enables the former to coincide with the latter's experience as it unfolds on the stage. This immediacy

is all-important. To facilitate the merging, Beckett hides himself as much as possible, making his presence felt only by beginning and ending a play, and that inevitably. Even this minimal presence of the author is muffled if we consider that the plays as a whole differ greatly from conventional theatre in that they have no clearly marked beginning or end, but seem to be sections isolated from a continuous process. Beckett's plays can hardly be said to begin or end, they continue. His presence is therefore felt but slightly, as he isolates his plays from a uniform stream, since he avoids beginning or ending cumulative action.

His plays, as we noted in the last section, reiterate the same fundamental situation, illustrating the temporal dungeon. In their uniformity they are removed from conventional theatre. Conventional theatricality usually involves a series of scenes having varying degrees of intensity (strong scenes played against weak scenes) arranged so as to produce and convey the meaning or the message hidden in the given incident they relate. Amongst the scenes, there is the climax scene which will juxtapose itself to the others, more theatrical against less theatrical. In Beckett's theatre, however, there exists no such gradation, for it is almost completely pervaded by the non-theatrical. Nothing really happens, nothing occurs, things continue to be, and man continues to endure. Often, a

given situation is repeated again and again, with the result that it goes beyond the limits of the play to affirm itself as universal. Through this process, it usually loses all theatricality, all interest as intrigue. Play, for example, comes close to conventional theatre because of its plot, based on adultery, yet its total repetition guarantees complete loss of the dramatic impact of this theme, with the result that we are left with merely the skeleton of conventional intrigue. The conflict, the anecdotal aspect of the theatre is impossible in Beckett's works for the stage.

Nevertheless, if we read more closely, we come to discover that Beckett's plays are not devoid of conflict. They present us with an unconventional type of drama, granted, but an extremely intense one, the drama of language. The conflict lies in the language, in its limitations, which manifest themselves when the tool of temporality (language as we know it) is used to describe the atemporal. By describing the threshold zone of his plays, Beckett conveys to us a feeling of the timelessness of the self. However, by doing so, he becomes lost, and the language he uses becomes lost, in ambiguity. The better he conveys to us a sense of the timelessness of the self, the essence, the better he describes the impossibility of reaching that essence, the better he describes existence tending towards but never reaching that goal. The threshold world is similar to a dungeon, a place

of exile, wherein the self and the non-self, timelessness and temporality, endlessly co-exist in conflict.

The language of the outer world, our world of time and space, cannot satisfactorily express the inner world, the world of timelessness and spacelessness; it is because of this that Beckett feels impotent. Doomed to failure, art and language constitute, for those who choose to practice them, a form of punishment, which implies of course guilt and a crime, perhaps the crime of having been born.

Among the characters of Beckett's theatre there exists a problem, a conflict of language which Ross Chambers has helped us to investigate. The characters are out of time to the extent that the dimensionality of time, the sequence of past, present, and future, and the dimensionality of their selves, the sequence of remote, more recent, and present selves, has for them lost almost all meaning. The result of time losing its dimensionality is that one has the sensation of time expanding and contracting at the same instance: expanding towards endlessness, and decelerating as it does so; and contracting towards simultaneity, and accelerating as it does so. In Endgame, Beckett has created the physical experience of the endgame, of time decelerating endlessly towards an impossible stop. In Godot, he has done much the same thing, but he works moreover with various superimposed

time-scales, as we shall see, which result in the breaking down in our minds of the categories of past, present, and future, normally occurring in our lives and in our language. Godot is an attempt to abolish past and future to restore an endless present, the exclusion of was and will be in favour of is.

The meeting and cancelling out of the double movement towards endlessness and simultaneity would, if it were possible, result in a single, permanent instant of endless simultaneity or simultaneous endlessness, occurring outside time, in an atemporal dimension. This is the Paradise to which Beckett's characters aspire, a realm of eternal self-possession, a combination of endlessness and simultaneity, that is eternity. We are reminded of T.S. Eliot's "...still point...":

> "At the still point of the turning world.
> Neither flesh nor fleshless;
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there
> the dance is,
> But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it
> fixity,
> Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement
> from nor towards,
> Neither ascent nor decline...
> ...
> The inner freedom from the practical desire,
> The release from action and suffering, release from
> the inner
> And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
> By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving..."[1]

Depending on how far advanced the characters are into the deceleration or acceleration process of time, the problems

of language, and especially of tense, become for them very critical. In the threshold world time loses both direction and proportion, past and present crowd together, and the events of a lifetime become for all intents and purposes simultaneous. But let us look closely at Godot to examine the conflict which exists among the languages of the different time-scales:

For Vladimir and Estragon time seems to have stopped, and yet it has not stopped, it is in fact expanding towards infinity, and decelerating as it does so. The nearly identical acts convey a sense of endlessness, and we feel that a third or a tenth act would be little different from the two which Beckett has already shown us. The play occupies an infinite expansion in time. In it, action is impossible, only waiting for the last moment is possible and, in the meantime, the days are so similar and uniform that the time-sequence has lost all importance; all time is the same for Estragon and, even though his life seems to stretch back an eternity, he has problems placing the events of his past in chronological and proper order. For him terms like yesterday or the names of days and months mean little or nothing, because his past is an eternity of yesterdays, all seemingly identical:

> "Estragon: ...But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? ...Or Monday? Or Friday?
> ...
> Or Thursday?
> ...
> If he came here yesterday and we weren't here you may

be sure he won't come again today.
Vladimir: But you say we were here yesterday.
Estragon: I may be mistaken..."2

Estragon cannot even remember seeing Lucky the previous day:

"...I remember a lunatic who kicked the shins off me. ...I remember that. But when was it?"3

Although Vladimir and Estragon are in the time-scale of expansion, this does not mean that they are not aware of or do not envy other time-scales, such as the one that Christ inhabited, in a land where "...they crucified quick...".[4] Another source of confusion and suffering for Vladimir and Estragon is that they meet with signs of time-scales not their own: overnight, the tree bursts into leaf, and Pozzo becomes a helpless shadow of his former tyrannical self. This tells us not only that time has decelerated for them, but also that it has accelerated for Pozzo and Lucky. Let us not forget a third time-scale, two hours, or thereabouts, spent at the theatre or reading. To undergo such a radical change in such a brief period of time Pozzo and Lucky must inhabit a time-scale in which time is accelerating. The basic difference between the two couples is first pointed out explicitly in a short exchange of the first act:

"Vladimir: Time has stopped.
Pozzo: ...Don't you believe it, Sir, don't you believe it. ...Whatever you like, but not that."5

Yet, by the second act, Pozzo, once so precise, is reduced to asking questions about time. He has lost all sense of time. Vladimir and Estragon can answer his questions only with

extreme caution, yet they can still come to Pozzo's aid. Pozzo now seems to be closer to timelessness than Vladimir and Estragon and, since his sense of the dimensionality of time has failed, he seems to be approaching that point much faster than the hoboes. For Vladimir and Estragon time hardly moves at all because it has expanded and is expanding to approach infinity; for Pozzo and Lucky time is moving so rapidly that it hardly seems to move at all, contracting towards a moment of simultaneity. Yet the point of absolute simultaneity is as unattainable as the point of absolute endlessness, neither couple will be able to reach the point of stillness.

Before Pozzo leaves for the second time, he has reached the stage where the kinds of questions that he was asking a few moments before now antagonize him: when Vladimir asks him <u>when</u> he went blind and <u>when</u> Lucky went dumb, Pozzo is angered:

> "Pozzo: (<u>suddenly furious</u>). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? ...They give birth astride a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (<u>He jerks on the rope</u>.) On!"6

Since they no longer speak the same language with regards to time, one time-scale fails to communicate with the other. That is how rapidly Pozzo has moved towards endless simultaneity. He is not yet there, but he is far enough advanced to have

experienced the intuition of life as a moment of simultaneity. Life as we know it, according to Beckett, is like a birth astride a tomb: real life lies outside time, beyond it, but the birth is a difficult one, and we have time to age and suffer as we fall from the womb into the grave. Life is at one and the same instance outside time (a birth astride a tomb), and within time (the birth is a difficult one).

In the brink zone, in the threshold time-world, we watch time at once expanding towards endlessness and contracting towards simultaneity. We are given a glimpse of the timeless, unattainable world which lies beyond the brink, the world of infinity. It is important to note, however, that Beckett's plays are concerned with the threshold life, with life within time, and not with infinity. The threshold seems uncrossable: we are left with Pozzo's and Lucky's time still accelerating towards infinity, with Vladimir's and Estragon's time still decelerating towards that same infinity. The threshold people are still desperately temporal, even though they are drawing ever closer to atemporality. Their life is over, yet it still goes on as time slows down and expands or speeds up and contracts. It is because of this that their lives are nearly over but still going on, and that with the loss of dimensionality events of the past are still occurring practically simultaneously with the present. This desperate situation of endlessly approaching but never attaining

infinity seems to be proof that an infinite of time does actually exist. It is proof ex absentia, "Infinity is not reachable, efforts to reach it do not cease, therefore infinity exists." If it weren't for the possibility of reaching infinity, the character's lives would have ended, once and for all. But they are in the same situation as Tantalus: their interminable temporal existence is at the same time terribly far and incredibly close to life in eternity, and their situation of endless temporality is indeed desperate; yet to some of the characters it seems possible to cross the threshold, to pass from the endlessness of existence to the endlessness of eternity. The life of the self in eternity, beyond time, seems very possible to Clov, who feels that trying harder, suffering more might do the trick of transforming his existence into essence:

> "Clov: ...sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you - one day. ...sometimes, Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go - one day."7

He has a vision of eternity:

> "...A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust."8

Hamm too has a vision of the self, a particle in the dark of absolute freedom, autonomous, separate, yet part of the void:

> "Hamm: ...You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever...Infinite emptiness will be around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe."9

The self is a consciousness outside space and time, dimensionless and completely free, by definition unattainable in our world. Life as the pursuit of the self is doomed to failure:

> "...the endless, hopeless task of pursuing an infinitely receding something which - resisting definition and being inseparable from what surrounds it - has the characteristics of nothing. In this way, Beckett points up the inescapable absurdity of the ineradicable human belief in a principle of inner life - call it what you will: essence, self, personality or soul - for whose autonomous existence there is no shred of evidence beyond our belief in it, while at the same time establishing a basic image of life as endless exile from and pursuit of an infinitely unattainable self."10

So the characters are faced with, and we too are faced with, the struggle between the language of temporality (that of the non-self) and the language of atemporality (that of the self). For the characters, finding a language capable of adequately describing their plight, "...a language that will, in describing interminable waiting, speak of true endlessness, in describing near-simultaneity convey true simultaneity, and thus turn the exclusion of the non-self on the brink of timelessness into eternal self-possession outside of time...",[11] would mean crossing the threshold into silence, the silence of Godot, the silence of the void. But what tense could accurately describe the sensation of the threshold? What tense could describe the feeling of imminent timelessness? Beckett and his characters seem to know that such a tense does not exist, and that a writer is doomed to irreparable failure.

It is for the above reasons that for Beckett the language of temporality is in a state of crisis and shows signs of decomposition. It is no longer the admirable tool that it was in classical theatre, nor the mechanical toy that it was in conventional twentieth century theatre, in Beckett's theatre its situation is far worse, it has become a disaster area. A concern with language is present to varying degrees amongst all of Beckett's characters. In almost all the plays, they struggle with words and worry, revealing the modern thinker's sense of the inadequacy of language. The problem of language results not only in a breakdown of social communication (person to person), but also in a breakdown of intimate communication (individual within him/herself). Values lose their meaning because they are represented by empty, over-used words:

> "Words: ...Is love the word? ...Is soul the word? ...Do we mean love, when we say love? ...Soul, when we say soul?"12

Empty words frequently seem foreign, bizarre, as they seem to Maddy Rooney:

> "I use none but the simplest words...and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very...bizarre."13

Maddy has to make efforts to express herself, efforts which make Dan feel that she is struggling with a dead language. Words fail to express what they represent, and the language falters. Winnie is acutely aware of this:

> "Winnie: That day. ...What day? ...Words

> fail, there are times when even they fail. ...I speak of temperate times and torrid times, they are empty words."14

There are various ways in which language is undermined in Beckett's theatre, and these often manifest themselves in patterns repeated throughout.

Two ways in which language is undermined are the pratfall and the self-conscious commentaries on the plays by the characters.

All tendencies towards high-falutinness are deflated from the start by the pratfall, which constitutes a form of reductive satire. Noble sentiments are brought low or destroyed to maintain a total effect of grim reality. Sentimental expectations are brought low by comical or vulgar reality:

> "Estragon: ...Forgive me. ...Come, Didi. ... Give me your hand. ...Embrace me! ...(Vladimir softens. They embrace. Estragon recoils.) You stink of garlic!
> Vladimir: It's for the kidneys. ..."

> "Lucky weeps.
> Estragon: He's crying!
> Pozzo: ...Wipe away his tears, he'll feel less forsaken.
> Estragon hesitates.
> ...
> (Estragon approaches Lucky and makes to wipe his eyes. Lucky kicks him violently in the shins.)"

> "Vladimir: We're coming!
> He tries to pull Pozzo to his feet, fails, tries again, stumbles, falls, tries to get up, fails.
> ...
> Vladimir: Pull!
> Estragon pulls, stumbles, falls. Long silence.
> Pozzo: Help!

Vladimir: We'we arrived.
Pozzo: Who are you?
Vladimir: We are men.
...
Estragon: What about a little snooze?"15

Human affection is implicitly undermined by disgusting breath, compassion receives a kick in the shins, and two rescuers, feeling noble and needed, not only fail to rescue, but fall in a miserable heap beside their no longer potential rescuees. Any pretense of a simple human statement is destroyed so that the play's tone is set very low, devoid of all high-flown rhetoric and hopes of idealism. At times, in a dialogue, a word from the first speaker's sentence is repeated as an exclamation by the second speaker. The effect is a parody of sentimental evocation, manifesting scepticism, contempt, and sadness on the part of the second speaker. The repetition questions the assumption made by the first speaker, and deflates all emotional content, all bid for compassion:

"Hamm: You loved me once.
Clov: Once!"

"Clov: I look at the wall.
Hamm: The wall! And what do you see on your wall? Mene, mene? Naked bodies?
Clov: I see my light dying.
Hamm: Your light dying! Listen to that!"16

Also, the frequent usage of the conditional by the characters to express a desire implies the pattern of impotence, "I would if I could, but I can't.":

"Hamm: ...If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods...I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me."

"Clov: If I could kill him I'd die happy."

"Hamm: ...If I could drag myself down to the sea!"17

Theatrical self-consciousness pervades much of Beckett's theatre, and serves to keep the tone low whenever it risks becoming too metaphysical. Conventional theatre represents life which is theatrical, but all theatrical life is inauthentic; so, to represent life, Beckett writes anti-theatrical plays. In his theatre there is no attempt at making the spectators believe that what is going on is more than mere representation. The plays do not pretend to be any more than exaggerated illustrations of the human condition as seen by Beckett, and we are constantly reminded of this by the characters. We are watching a mere play, and not the real thing. It is for this reason that in Words and Music the play's themes are announced as themes, that in Cascando the Voice pauses to reflect on an image used, that in Godot and in Endgame the characters repeatedly speak of the play as play:

"Vladimir: Charming evening we're having.
Estragon: Unforgettable.
...
Estragon: It's awful.
Vladimir: Worse than the pantomime.
Estragon: The circus.
Vladimir: The music-hall.
Estragon: The circus."

"Pozzo: How did you find me? ...Good? Fair? Middling? Positively bad?
Vladimir: ...Oh very good, very very good."

"Vladimir: I begin to weary of this motif."18

"Hamm: Me...to play."

"Hamm: This is slow work."

"Hamm: We're getting on."

"Hamm: This is deadly."

"Clov: Things are livening up."

"Hamm: We're not beginning to...to...mean Something?

Clov: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (Brief laugh.) Ah that's a good one!"

"Hamm: ...Nicely put, that. ...A bit feeble, that. ...That should do it. ...I'll soon have finished with this story. ...Unless I bring in other characters."

"Hamm: ...An aside, ape! Did you ever hear of an aside before? ...I'm warming up for my last soliloquy."

"Clov: This is what we call making an exit."[19]

Another way in which language is undermined is by action, reminiscent of the pratfall, an effect which is more insidious on stage than in print. An attitude will undercut what a character is saying to affirm the profundity of his condition. For Hamm, it is an irresistible yawn,

"Can there be misery - (he yawns) - loftier than mine? No doubt. Formerly. But now? ...No, all is a- (he yawns) -bsolute, (proudly) the bigger a man is the fuller he is. ...And the emptier."[20]

The gravity of the rhetorical question is undermined by the yawns, and by the subsequent ambiguous answer.

For Winnie it is Willie's violent nose-blowing:

"Winnie: ...What then? ...What is the alternative? (Pause.) What is the al- (Willie blows nose loud and long, head and hands invisible. ...Pause.

Hand reappears with handkercheif, spreads it on skull, disappears. ...) ..."[21]

For Vladimir, Estragon, Hamm, Clov, Nagg, and Nell, it is the recurring pattern of an assertion followed by inaction:

"Estragon: Well, shall we go?
Vladimir: Yes, let's go.
They do not move."

"Vladimir: Well, shall we go?
Estragon: Yes, let's go.
They do not move."

"Hamm: ...it's time it ended...(Pause.) And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to...to end."

"Clov: I'll leave you." (repeated many times.)

"Nell: ...Then I'll leave you.
Nagg: ...I thought you were going to leave me.
Nell: I am going to leave you." (still does not leave.)[22]

But most of all, language is undermined by doubt, and proves inadequate to describe the condition in which the characters find themselves:

"Winnie: ...life has taught me that...too. (Pause.) Yes, life I suppose, there is no other word."[23]

This doubt often concerns the coordinates of time and space:

"Winnie: ...The sunshade you gave me...that day... (pause) ...that day...the lake...the reeds. ...What day? (pause) What reeds?"

"Hamm: Go and get the oil can.
Clov: What for?
Hamm: To oil the castors.
Clov: I oiled them yesterday.
Hamm: Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!
Clov: (violently). That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent."[24]

Winnie is puzzled, and Hamm, a generation closer to timelessness than Clov, disapproves of the latter's usage of the word yesterday. For Hamm, yesterday has lost all meaning, simply because in decelerating time yesterday is not much different from a year ago or today. To treat it as past is objectionable for Hamm. What he needs is a tense, between past and present, which will express a more recent sort of past than the word yesterday means to Clov, a more recent past but still not simultaneous with today. Ordinary language cannot do this adequately, and as a result the dialogue is disrupted. Often it is adjectives which lack adequacy,

> "Clov: What all is? In a word? Is that what you want to know? Just a moment. ...Corpsed."

> "Hamm: Is it night already, then?
> Clov: (looking). No.
> Hamm: Then what is it?
> Clov: (looking). Grey. ...Grey! ...GRREY!"25

sometimes nouns,

> "Hamm: Do you think this has gone on long enough?
> Clov: Yes! (Pause.) What?
> Hamm: This...this...thing."26

sometimes all the sentence components necessary to the description of the situation,

> "Hamm: What's happening?
> Clov: Something is taking its course."27

A dialogue is empty because its constituent words are empty:

> "Clov: ...I ask the words that remain - sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say."28

What is worse, a character will become estranged from the language he/she is accustomed to speaking. In Winnie's case it is a question of faulty pronoun usage and forgotten vocabulary:

> "Winnie: ...I shall simply brush and comb them... (Pause. Puzzled.) Them? (Pause.) Or it? (Pause.) Brush and comb it? (Pause.) Sounds improper somehow. ...What would you say, Willie? ...speaking of your hair, them or it? ...The hair on your head, Willie, what would you say speaking of the hair on your head, them or it?
> Long pause.
> Willie: It."

> "Winnie: ...What is a hog, exactly? ...What exactly is a hog, Willie, do you know, I can't remember. ...What is a hog, Willie, please!
> Pause.
> Willie: Castrated male swine. ...reared for slaughter."29

For Krapp it is a problem of alienation from words through time. The words which came easily to him thirty years earlier now seem foreign:

> "Krapp: ...(...peers at ledger...)...Hm. ... Memorable...what? (He peers closer.) Equinox, memorable equinox. (He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.) Memorable equinox? ...(Pause. He shrugs his shoulders...)..."

> "Tape: ...after her long viduity, and the -
> Krapp switches off, raises his head, stares blankly before him. His lips move in the syllables of 'viduity'. No sound. He gets up, goes backstage into darkness, comes back with an enormous dictionary, lays it on table, sits down and looks up the word.
> Krapp: (reading from dictionary). State - or condition - of being - or remaining - a widow - or widower. (Looks up. Puzzled.) Being - or remaining?..."30

In Cascando the story is never completed because the words are insufficient, and in Words and Music the words

fail, overwhelmed by emotion. In Embers, the story is also never completed for lack of sufficient words. The number of words itself is drastically reduced in Beckett's theatre. There is an astounding stinginess in the number of words which Beckett allows himself in Endgame, for example: the same words are repeated, again and again, issuing from different mouths. By limiting the words, Beckett charges them with an enormous burden which results in a breakdown of meaning. Clov describes many aspects of the surroundings as "...grey...zero..."; yesterday, the time, and the weather are all "...the same as usual..."; several times Clov says to Hamm, and Nell says to Nagg, "I'll leave you."; several times the reply "Something is taking its course." is used by both Hamm and Clov; even the stage directions are repetitive, "Pause.", "As before.", virtually summarizing the action of the whole play. Often dialogues are built on a handful of very simple words:

> "Clov: So you all want me to leave you.
> Hamm: Naturally.
> Clov: Then I'll leave you.
> Hamm: You can't leave us.
> ...
> Hamm: Why don't you finish us? ...
> Clov: I couldn't finish you.
> Hamm: Then you shan't finish me.
> ...
> Clov: I'll leave you, I have things to do."[31]

We already noted how in Godot the repetitions set the cyclic rhythm. In Play, the effect is much the same, with the addition that by the identical repetition of the play, its words lose

all their congruity and become devoid of meaning, object-like, falling from the mouths which utter them. The same few words are repeated in Cascando, by the Voice; the Words in Words and Music are also very repetitive, saying the same things for each theme in the same pseudo-learned style which is reminiscent of Lucky's speech; and, in Come and Go, the same scene is repeated thrice, once for each of the three women.

Especially in Happy Days, words are actually running short, like Winnie's toothpaste. Perhaps that is why she uses stale clichés (can't be cured, nothing like it, that's what I find so wonderful, heavenly day, poor dear, can't complain, what does it matter), and worn-out poetic words ('tis, beseech, enow, God grant, damask cheek, dire need), or frequent quotations from the classics. Not having the actual necessary words herself, she tends to borrow them. Maddy Rooney also quotes a great deal, and the Voice in Cascando, the trio in Play, and old Krapp, all lapse into clichés. A good half of Krapp's Last Tape, moreover, is composed of second-hand words, not spoken directly in the present, but borrowed, exhumed, from the past. Because of this time lapse, they lose meaning, as we mentioned for equinox and viduity. Also through repetition, as Krapp mouths certain words lovingly, they take on a certain incongruity, as does any word when examined too long. Repetition paradoxically results in silence. In the extreme cases, the mimes, action suffices to

describe and indicate stereotypes. Repetitious language is superfluous and inadequate to describe repetition, and is replaced by action and silence.

Perhaps the most dramatic sign of conflict on the level of the language in Beckett's theatre is seen in the syntax. As the language degenerates, paragraph and sentence structure give way to mere thematic organization. Topics are still developed, but their unfolding is frequently impeded by the periodic recurrence of a number of leitmotifs, overlappings, and interruptions. This is perhaps best seen and modeled in Lucky's speech, whose central message, quite short and straightforward,

> "Given the existence...of a personal God... outside time...who...loves us dearly...and suffers... with those who...are plunged in torment...it is established...that man...in spite of the strides of alimentation and defecation...of physical culture... fades away...alas..."32

is hidden amongst nearly three pages of repetitions and leitmotifs which make it practically unrecognizable.

Proliferation of words in our world does not necessarily imply communication, in fact it usually means degeneration of communication. From actual dialogues in Godot, All That Fall, and Endgame, the language degenerates into false dialogues, in which the characters only seem to share communication, but are in fact talking brokenly, or past each other. This begins to show in Endgame, where the dialogues

follow an illogical sequence, jumping from one topic to another, or simply degenerate into two parallel monologues, since the speakers do not actually communicate:

> "Hamm: ...my eyes...One of these days I'll show them to you. (Pause.) It seems they've gone all white. (Pause.) What time is it?
> Clov: The same as usual.
> Hamm: (gesture towards window right). Have you looked?
> Clov: Yes.
> Hamm: Well?
> Clov: Zero.
> Hamm: It'd need to rain.
> Clov: It won't rain.
> Pause.
> Hamm: Apart from that how do you feel?"

Only the pauses serve to link this very disjointed dialogue, which relates Hamm's eyes to time, to weather, to Clov's health. Nagg and Nell often talk past each other, each lost in his/her own thoughts:

> "Nagg: You were in such fits we capsized. By rights we should have been drowned.
> Nell: It was because I felt happy.
> Nagg: (indignant). It was not, it was not, it was my story and nothing else. Happy. Don't you laugh at it still? Every time I tell it. Happy!
> Nell: It was deep, deep. And you could see down to the bottom. So white. So clean.
> Nagg: Let me tell it again."33

From dialogue, then, we degenerate to monologue, external in Krapp's Last Tape, Happy Days, and internal in Embers and Eh Joe. The monologues inevitably break down into silence as the syntax becomes increasingly weak. Winnie is often incapable of completing her sentences, Krapp falters into brooding silence. Language has become empty and is used by

the characters as a filler to pass the time away. On occasion, they are lucidly and painfully aware of this:

> "Clov: ...All life long the same questions, the same answers."
>
> "Nell: Why this farce, day after day?" (also Clov).
>
> "Clov: (wearily). ...You've asked me these questions millions of times."
>
> "Clov: ...All life long the same inanities."[34]

Frederick J. Hoffman,[35] points out an important difference between Beckett's novels and plays, that the torrent of words is drastically reduced from the fiction to the drama, where it may actually cease altogether. As language proves futile and falters, silence closes in from all sides, as pauses begin to invade the plays very noticeably. Silence plays a dramatic role in Beckett's theatre. It is not usually a silence which conveys meaning, it is pure silence, that of the void. The pauses are like packets of emptiness marking the plays. These are play, a game of words, in which the elements are overused, leading to meaninglessness and silence. The visions which the characters share of the end almost always include the element of silence:

> "Hamm: ...It's finished, we're finished. (Pause.) Nearly finished. (Pause.) There'll be no more speech."
>
> "Clov: ...It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust."

> "Hamm: ...It will be the end and there I'll be, wondering what can have...why it was so long coming. ...There I'll be...alone against the silence and...the stillness."36

If the language is failing, where lies the drama? It lies in the fact that, although the language is inadequate, it is nevertheless vital for the characters who cling to it desperately. They share the fundamental need to speak and be heard. When all else fails, when the dialogue fails, they desperately resort to story-telling: Pozzo, Hamm, Nagg, Winnie, the Voice, and Henry all tell a story, demanding simply to be heard and to be recognized as speaking beings. Even speaking empty words becomes for them an indication that they exist. A speaker exists because of what he/she says, because of the words sent out and because of the echo which may bounce back, if the speaker is fortunate, from the listener.

The characters speak because they are compelled to do so in order to fill the void, in order to pass the time, hoping to reach in the end an impossible truth. They speak, and this implies the existence of another, whether it be another person, or the perceiving self of the speaker. The couples of speaker/listener can be the sure couples of Godot or Endgame, or the faltering couples of the more barren plays, victims of restricted motion and space, reduced to a head and a mouth, the couples of Happy Days or Play. The listener becomes problematic, uncertain: Winnie cannot be certain that

Willie is listening, the characters in Play cannot even turn their head to see each other, yet they all wonder if someone is listening:

> "W2: Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?"
>
> "Winnie: ...just to know that in theory you can hear me even though in fact you don't is all I need, just to feel you there within earshot and conceivably on the qui vive is all I ask..."37

The solitude of the characters of these later plays comes very close to that of the hoboes and characters of Beckett's prose, where the reassuring couple of speaker and listener is practically non-existent except in its lowest schizoid form, hardly reassuring, of perceiving and perceived self within the speaker. In these cases, the solitary speaker has to double as listener. He can do this thanks to the language, a shaky bridge, granted, but the only one possible and valuable, under the circumstances.

By this essential activity, the characters are reduced to the present, and are devoid of a future. By existing through speaking, they live only in the present, more so in Beckett's theatre than in his prose. The words, pronounced on stage before us, are uttered during a time-period which coincides with that of the spectator. For Beckett, only the present counts. Even in Krapp's Last Tape, where the past plays an important role, it is not shown because it has been a cause for the present, not because it explains the present,

but because its introduction best shows its remoteness from the present, which solely constitutes the center of the play.

Ionesco speaks of the disarticulation of language: Beckett seems to show its destruction. The tension between the desire to abolish language and the impossibility of satisfying this desire, the tension between the refusal and the need of language, is the key to Beckett's drama. This tension is tragic in essence, for "...l'agonie du langage traduit l'agonie de l'être...".[38] Beckett willfully strips language of its rhetorical and technical frills, and uses it with increasing difficulty to illustrate his vision, at whose base is the assumption that to be an artist and writer is to fail, irrevocably. In his theatre, "...existential reality is revealed with the help of words, in spite of words, and beyond words...".[39]

Beyond words to an impasse which is silence, the characters' and Beckett's as well. He has come close to the language of eternity and timelessness, and that is perhaps why he has been silent for so long. He has stepped over his own threshold as an artist and writer into silence.

PART IV: FOOTNOTES

[1] The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1969). The quotation is taken from the first of the Four Quartets, Burnt Norton, stanza II, vv. 16-20, 24-27.

[2] Beckett, Godot, p. 11a.

[3] Beckett, Godot, p. 39b.

[4] Beckett, Godot, p. 34b.

[5] Beckett, Godot, p. 24b.

[6] Beckett, Godot, p. 57b.

[7] Beckett, Endgame, p. 51.

[8] Beckett, Endgame, p. 39.

[9] Beckett, Endgame, p. 28.

[10] Chambers, "Beckett's Brinkmanship", p. 154.

[11] Chambers, "Beckett's Brinkmanship", p. 166.

[12] Beckett, Cascando, p. 25.

[13] Beckett, All That Fall, p. 3.

[14] Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 24, 38.

[15] Beckett, Godot, pp. 12a, 21b, 52a-52b-53a.

[16] Beckett, Endgame, pp. 14, 17.

[17] Beckett, Endgame, pp. 19, 24, 41.

[18] Beckett, Godot, pp. 23a-23b, 25b, 53b.

[19] Beckett, Endgame, pp. 12, 16, 18, 25, 27, 36-37, 49, 51.

[20] Beckett, Endgame, p. 12.

[21] Beckett, Happy Days, p. 20.

[22] Beckett, Godot, pp. 35b, 60b; Endgame, pp. 12, 17, 19, 20.

[23] Beckett, Happy Days, p. 28.

[24] Beckett, Happy Days, p. 53; Endgame, p. 32.

[25] Beckett, Endgame, pp. 25, 26.

[26] Beckett, Endgame, p. 33.

[27] Beckett, Endgame, p. 26.

[28] Beckett, Endgame, p. 51.

[29] Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 22-23, 47.

[30] Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, pp. 11, 13.

[31] Beckett, Endgame, p. 29.

[32] Beckett, Godot, pp. 28b, 29a-29b.

[33] Beckett, Endgame, pp. 13, 21.

[34] Beckett, Endgame, pp. 13, 18 (also 26), 29, 33.

[35] Hoffman, Beckett, p. 155.

[36] Beckett, Endgame, pp. 35, 39, 45.

[37] Beckett, Cascando, p. 55; Happy Days, p. 27.

[38] Domenach, p. 277.

[39] R. Champigny, "Waiting for Godot: Myth, Words, Wait", Casebook on Waiting for Godot, Ruby Cohn editor, (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1967), p. 322.

CONCLUSION

Beckett's social and existential outcasts are concerned with the old problems of time and eternity, of human suffering during that period between birth and death they call life (for lack of a better term), of the purpose and nature of the self. They represent contemporary man searching for a new human answer, accepting neither old religious solutions nor new scientific ones. As a writer, Beckett does not provide a solution to these problems, but limits himself to presenting them under a new light, thus encouraging our awareness and directing us towards a deeper insight of them.

The theme of time which we have tried to elucidate in the four sections of this dissertation occupies a central role in Beckett's theatre, and can be summarized as chronometric time versus existential time. Man is shown doomed to exist both in existential and chronometric time, one seemingly static, the other wearing on relentlessly. None of the comforts of eternity is permitted him, and only habit enables him to <u>suffer</u> time. His situation can be interpreted geometrically:

> "Beckett has, again and again, bent apparently linear time into the static form of the circle... Against the monotony of the circle is set the fearful descending line that ends in the grave."1

Man's life continues without much change in circular monotonous repetitions; his expectations of change and friendship are usually disappointed, yet the lines of time's descent (and of entropy's ascent) into death are irreversible. Though existential time may seem to stop out of sheer monotony of life, chronometric time never ceases to flow on.

It is important to note that Beckett's characters are what they are not because of what they have responsibly made of themselves, for they are impotent, and their impotence is deep-rooted. Sartrean dramatic emphasis does not apply to them, they cannot be described as being en situation.[2] They may have been so in the past, but when we see them they are much too removed from society and its problems to qualify for Sartre's standards. Asocial and living in a non-social world, they do not choose to play a role, neither in good faith nor in bad. They cannot be committed, engagés, for nothing is left for them to choose or to reject. They can no longer dominate their existence, and be masters and creators of their own essence as men. They are without property, and most of all without authority and will-power. Consequently, they cannot choose the course of their lives, but can only follow it. They are following it because they find themselves in it, and not because they freely chose it.

Beckett's characters are thus led towards death by the passing of time, in a movement which is beyond their

control and makes them essentially impotent. The only choice left them, and a choice not frequently exercised, concerns what is to be done within time's passing. Clearly the choice is a false one, for whatever it be, the end result never changes. The characters only seem to choose. They resort to various strategies to give time significance, or rather, to make it pass unnoticed. Story-telling, manipulation of objects, games, torturing each other, are all such strategies. Nevertheless, the Beckett hero is beset mostly by boredom and suffering, depending on how lucid he is, whenever the strategies or the defence mechanisms fail to operate.

Paradoxically enough, Beckett's characters reach a certain stature at their lowest point, when they are utterly alone, all defence mechanisms having failed, enduring the world for what it is, awaiting the end, and the hope of change it holds for them. The fundamental change they await is both a death of divided consciousness and a birth into total self-possession, even if it is to be the experience of nothingness. They wait for an end of that endless self-consciousness which is never self=possession and perfect freedom. Yet the emphasis is on being, the phenomenon of the elusive and divided self, developed by Beckett as the crucial esthetic and metaphysical problem underlying his theatre. At all times, the void remains remote.

Beckett's writings are thus half-way between literature

and philosophy: in them, both occupy an important place, though Beckett does not declare himself in favour of one or the other:

> "Beckett a choisi de ne pas s'expliquer, de ne pas se justifier. Il propose ses textes: c'est à nous de nous placer au niveau de leur rigueur et de leur solitude. A nous de réapprendre à lire."3

Beckett's interpretative silence tends then to give his work more independence and value by allowing it to stand on its own. There exists of course a fertile link between the author's refusal to explain his work and the proliferation of critical work it has inspired. All this because of Beckett and in spite of him. Beckett's attitude is negative towards those critics who calmly proceed to organize his work into neatly packaged messages, as if life could be explained simply. For Beckett, the fact that his work and his characters exist is quite sufficient. Preferring to work with concrete elements, he has no need to extract from his writings abstract messages or meanings. This he clearly shows in Endgame:

> "Hamm: We're not beginning to...to...mean something?
> Clov: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (Brief laugh.) Ah that's a good one!"4

To Hamm's question (of the two characters, Hamm is the more theatrical, his personality combines the traits of the writer with those of the critic) Clov answers with a sarcastic and intellectual laugh, the laugh of him who derides what is false.

There is no protective and reassuring meaningfulness

for Beckett. Alone, he faces the menacing reality of human existence and the nearly impossible task of communicating its experience. While attempting to do this, Beckett does not resort to any means of alleviating its harshness, any consolations that might confuse his faculties of perception. He does not cling to a hope of meaningfulness: he faces the void, empty space and silently flowing time, without any hope of escape or salvation. With much dignity, he attempts to fulfill the obligation to express man's suffering, that of being and perceiving. As is the case for Winnie, the act of confronting the void and of persisting to do it is fundamentally an assertion. To attempt to accomplish the impossible, to attempt to articulate the anguish of existence, and to end only in failure (for to be an artist is to fail), to have failed constitute a more substantial victory than the kind which comes from the accomplishment of a simpler task. To an easy victory, Beckett prefers a difficult defeat. The variety and the quality of the critical work done on and around Beckett surely point to the intensity and richness of his work. And at the heart of all is being in time:

> "...man, a creature blind, impotent, shaken back and forth by a terrier destiny, emitting the squeaks of an ineffectual art."5

CONCLUSION: FOOTNOTES

[1] Lawrence E. Harvey, "Art and the Existential in Waiting for Godot", Casebook on Waiting for Godot, Ruby Cohn editor, p. 148.

[2] This point is made by Edith Kern in "Drama Stripped for Inaction: Beckett's Godot", Yale French Studies (No. 14, Winter 1954-1955). 47.

[3] Durozoi, Beckett, p. 11.

[4] Beckett, Endgame, p. 27.

[5] Lawrence E. Harvey, Samuel Beckett Poet and Critic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 441. The suffering of being is perhaps best portrayed in a short prose work by Beckett, entitled Lessness, that is, endlessness without end, and only lessness, a progressive reduction of all faculties before the void:

> "All sides endlessness earth sky as one no sound no stir
> ...
> Scattered ruins same grey as the sand ash grey true refuge
> ...
> He will curse God again as in the blessed days face to the open sky the passing deluge
> ...
> Little body ash grey locked rigid heart beating face to endlessness."

Samuel Beckett, Lessness (London: Calder and Boyars, 1969), pp. 7, 8.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Our bibliography includes only material which we ourselves have read or consulted, and it is organized in five sections as follows:

A) Bibliographies consulted.

B) Works by Beckett which we have read or consulted.

C) Books on Beckett which we have read or consulted.

D) Articles on Beckett which we have read or consulted.

E) Other books related to this dissertation.

A) Bibliographies consulted:

Bryer, Jackson R. Samuel Beckett: A Checklist of Criticism. In samuel beckett now, Friedman, Melvin J. ed., Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970, pp. 219-259.

Cohn, Ruby. "A Checklist of Beckett Criticism", Perspective, XI (Autumn 1959), 193-196.

_____. Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962, pp. 328-338.

_____. The Impact of Beckett's Modern Classics: Reviews, Reflections, and Interpretations. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1967, pp. 188-192.

Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. New York: Doubleday, 1961, pp. 317-318.

Federman, R. and Fletcher, J. Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970.

Fletcher, J. The Novels of Samuel Beckett. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964, pp. 234-251.

Hoffman, F.J. Samuel Beckett: The Language of the Self. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962, pp. 170-172.

Jacobsen, J. and Mueller, W.R. The Testament of Samuel Beckett: A Study. New York: Hill and Wong, 1964, pp. 175, 177-178.

PMLA. 1963-1971.

Tanner, James T.F. and Don Vann, J. Samuel Beckett, A Checklist of Criticism. Denton: Kent State University Press, 1969, pp. 1-71.

B) Works by Beckett read or consulted:

Beckett, Samuel. Watt. Paris: Olympia Press, 1953.

_____. Waiting for Godot. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1954.

_____. All That Fall. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1957.

_____. Murphy. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1957.

_____. Endgame. London: Grove Press Inc., 1958.

_____. From an Abandoned Work. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1958.

_____. Nouvelles et textes pour rien. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1958.

_____. Krapp's Last Tape and Embers. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1959.

_____. Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1959.

_____, Duthuit, G. and Putman, J. Bram Van Velde. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1960.

_____. Comment c'est. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1961.

_____. "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce", Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress, London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1961.

_____. Happy Days. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1961.

_____. Proust. London: John Calder, 1965.

_____. Three Dialogues. London: John Calder, 1965.

Beckett, Samuel. Imagination Dead Imagine. London: Calder and Boyars, 1966.

_____. Lessness. London: Calder and Boyars, 1969.

_____. Cascando and Other Short Dramatic Pieces. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1970. (Also includes Play, Words and Music, Eh Joe, Film, Come and Go.

_____. Le dépeupleur. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1970.

C) Books on Beckett read or consulted:

Barnard, G.C. Samuel Beckett: A New Approach. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1970.

Calder, John, ed. Beckett at Sixty: A Festschrift. London: Calder and Boyars, 1967.

Chevigny, Bell G., ed. Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969.

Coe, Richard. Samuel Beckett. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1964.

Cohn, Ruby. Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962.

_____, ed. Casebook on Waiting for Godot. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1967.

Durozoi, G. Beckett. Paris-Montréal: Bordas, 1972.

Esslin, Martin, ed. Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Federman, Raymond. Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965.

Fletcher, John. The Novels of Samuel Beckett. London: Chatto and Windus, 1964.

_____. Samuel Beckett's Art. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967.

Friedman, Melvin J., ed. samuel beckett now. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970.

Harvey, L.E. Samuel Beckett, Poet and Critic. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

Hassan, Ihab H. The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett. New York: Knopf, 1968.

Hoffman, F.J. Samuel Beckett: The Language of the Self. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962.

Jacobsen, J. and Mueller, W.R. The Testament of Samuel Beckett: A Study. New York: Hill and Wong, 1964.

Janvier, Ludovic. Pour Samuel Beckett. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1966.

_____. Samuel Beckett par lui-même. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969.

Kenner, Hugh. Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1962.

_____. Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians. London: W.H. Allen, 1966.

Knowlson, J., ed. Samuel Beckett: An Exhibition. Kensington Church Walk: Turret Books, 1971.

Melèse, Pierre. Samuel Beckett. Paris: Seghers, 1966.

Perche, Louis. Beckett, ou l'enfer à notre portée. Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1969.

Schulz, Hans-Joachim. This Hell of Stories: A Hegelian Approach to the Novels of Samuel Beckett. The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1973.

Sen, Supti. Samuel Beckett: His Mind and Art. Calcutta: University Press, 1970.

Tindall, W.Y. Samuel Beckett. London: Columbia University Press, 1964.

Webb, E. Samuel Beckett: A Study of his Novels. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971.

D) Articles on Beckett read or consulted:

Anders, Gunther. "Being without Time: On Beckett's Play Waiting for Godot", Neue Schweizer Rundschau (January 1954), pp. 140-151.

Blau, Herbert. "Meanwhile Follow the Bright Angels", Tulane Drama Review, V (March 1961), 119-151.

Bonczek, Jane C. "Being and Waiting: A Sign of Our Times", Literature, no. 5 (1964), 6-10.

Brown, Robert McAfee. "The Theme of Waiting in Modern Literature", Ramparts, III (Summer 1964), 68-75.

Cavanagh, Maura. "Waiting for God: Parody", Audience, V (Summer 1958), 94-114.

Chadwick, C. "Waiting for Godot: A Logical Approach", Symposium, XIV (Winter 1960), 252-257.

Chambers, Ross. "Beckett's Brinkmanship", Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association, no. 19 (May 1963), 57-75.

Coe, Richard N. "Le Dieu de Samuel Beckett", Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud - Jean-Louis Barrault, no. 44 (1963), 6-36.

Cohn, Ruby. "Comedy of Samuel Beckett: Something Old, Something New...", Yale French Studies, no. 23 (1959), 11-17.

_____. "Waiting is All", Modern Drama, III (September 1960), 162-167.

_____. "Play and Player in the Plays of Samuel Beckett", Yale French Studies, no. 29 (1962), 43-48.

_____. "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett", Criticism, VI (1964), 33-43.

Driver, Tom F. "Beckett by the Madeleine", Columbia University Forum, no. 4 (Summer 1961), 21-25.

Federman, Raymond. "Beckett's Belacqua and the Inferno of Society", Arizona Quaterly, XX (Autumn 1964), 231-241.

_____. "Le bonheur chez Samuel Beckett", Esprit, CCCLXII (1967), 90-96.

_____. "Samuel Beckett ou le bonheur en enfer", Symposium, XXI (1967), 14-21.

Fletcher, John. "Beckett et Proust", Caliban, no. 1 (1964), 89-100.

_____. "Samuel Beckett and the Philosophers", Comparative Literature, XVII (1965), 42-56.

_____. "Samuel Beckett as Critic", Listener, LXXIV (November 1965), 862-863.

_____. "Beckett's debt to Dante", Nottingham French Studies, IV (1965), 41-52.

_____. "Action and Play in Beckett's Theatre", Modern Drama, IX (1966), 242-250.

Friedman, Melvin J. "Novels of Samuel Beckett: An Amalgam of Joyce and Proust", Comparative Literature, XII (Winter 1960), 82-89.

_____. "Critic!", Modern Drama, IX (1966), 300-308.

Frye, Northrop. "The Nightmare Life in Death", Hudson Review, XIII (Autumn 1960), 442-449.

Hamilton, Kenneth. "Negative Salvation in Samuel Beckett", Queen's Quarterly, LXIX (Spring 1962), 102-111.

Harvey, Lawrence E. "Samuel Beckett on Life, Art, and Criticism", Modern Language Notes, LXXX (1965), 545-562.

Hoffman, F.J. "L'Insaisissable moi: Les 'M' de Samuel Beckett", La Revue des Lettres Modernes, no. 100 (1964), 23-53.

Hubert, Renée Riese. "The Couple and the Performance in Samuel Beckett's Plays", L'Esprit Créateur, II (Winter 1962), 175-180.

Kenner, Hugh. "The Beckett Landscape", Spectrum, II (Winter 1958), 8-24.

_____. "The Cartesian Centaur", Perspective, XI (Autumn 1959), 132-141.

_____. "Samuel Beckett: The Rational Domain", Forum, III (Summer 1960), 39-47.

Kern, Edith. "Drama Stripped for Inaction: Beckett's Godot", Yale French Studies, no. 14 (1954-1955), 41-47.

_____. "Beckett's Knight of Infinite Resignation", Yale French Studies, no. 29 (1962), 49-56.

_____. "Structure in Beckett's Theatre", Yale French Studies, no. 46 (1971), 17-27.

Klawitter, R.L. "Being and Time in Samuel Beckett's Novels", Dissertation Abstracts, XXVI (1966), 7320.

Marissel, André. "L'Univers de Samuel Beckett: Un Noeud de Complexes", Esprit, XXXI (September 1963), 240-255.

Modern Drama, special Beckett issue, December 1966.

Morse, J.M. "Contemplative Life According to Samuel Beckett", Hudson Review, XV (Winter 1962-1963), 512-524.

Noon, William T. "Modern Literature and the Sense of Time", Thought, XXXIII (Winter 1958-1959), 571-604.

Oberg, A.K. "Krapp's Last Tape and the Proustian Vision", Modern Drama, IX (1966), 333-338.

Radke, J.J. "The Theatre of Samuel Beckett: 'Une durée à animer'", Yale French Studies, no. 29 (1962), 57-64.

Schechner, R. "There's Lots of Time in Godot", Modern Drama, IX (1966), 268-276.

Schneider, Alan. "Waiting for Beckett - A Personal Chronicle", Chelsea Review, no. 2 (Autumn 1958), 3-20.

Strauss, W.A. "Dante's Belacqua and Beckett's Tramps", Comparative Literature, XI (Summer 1959), 250-261.

Tindall, W.Y. "Beckett's Bums", Critique, II (Spring-Summer 1959), 3-15.

Todd, Robert E. "Proust and Redemption in Waiting for Godot", Modern Drama, X (1967), 175-181.

Torrance, R.M. "Modes of Being and Time in the World of Godot", Modern Language Quarterly, XXVIII (March 1967), 77-95.

Wolf, D. and Francher, E. eds., "Beckett's Letters on Endgame: Extracts from his Correspondence with Director Alan Schneider", The Village Voice Reader, 1962, pp. 67-84, 180-186.

E) Other related books read or consulted:

Bentley, Eric. The Life of the Drama. New York: Atheneum, 1964.

Blau, Herbert. The Impossible Theatre. New York: Macmillan, 1964.

Brion, Marcel. "The Idea of Time in the Work of James Joyce", Our Exagmination, London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1961.

Capone, Giovanna. Drammi per Voci: Dylan Thomas, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter. Bologna: Patron, 1967.

Corvin, Michel. Le Théâtre nouveau en France. Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1963.

Domenach, J.M. Le retour du tragique. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967.

Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. New York: Doubleday, 1961.

Federman, Raymond. On Contemporary Literature. New York: Avon, 1964.

Glasser, Richard. Time in French Life and Thought. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972.

Grossvogel, David. Four Playwrights and a Postscript. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962.

Meyerhoff, Hans. Time in Literature. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955.

Pronko, L.C. Avant-Garde: The Experimental Theatre in France. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962.

Stynan, J.L. The Dark Comedy. Cambridge: The University Press, 1962.

Virmaux, Alain. Antonin Artaud et le Théâtre. Paris: Seghers, 1970.